



India-Sri Lanka Relations

For Prelims: [India-Sri Lanka Relations](#), Tamil National Alliance, [Sri Lankan Tamils](#), [Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987](#), [Buddhism](#), Indian Ocean.

For Mains: India-Sri Lanka Relations.

Source: TH

Why in News?

Recently, the **Tamil National Alliance (TNA)**, the largest parliamentary grouping of Tamil parties in Sri Lanka has rejected the Sri Lankan President's offer to implement the **13th Amendment of the Sri Lankan Constitution without police powers**.

- This rejection by the TNA assumes significance before the President's scheduled visit to India, as India has consistently emphasized the **"full implementation" of this legislation**, which is vital for addressing the **historic demand of Sri Lankan Tamils** for self-determination.



What is the Background?

▪ About:

- The **13th Amendment** was enacted after the [Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987](#), and it remains the **only legislative guarantee** of power devolution to the provinces.
 - Indo-Lanka Accord 1987 was signed by the **then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and President J.R. Jayawardene**, to resolve Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict that had aggravated into a **full-fledged civil war, between the armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam**, which led the struggle for Tamils' self-determination and sought a separate state.
- The 13th Amendment, which led to the creation of **Provincial Councils**, assured a **power sharing arrangement** to enable all nine provinces in the country, including Sinhala majority areas, to self-govern.
- Subjects such as **education, health, agriculture, housing, land and police** are devolved to the provincial administrations, but because of restrictions on financial powers and overriding powers given to the President, the provincial administrations have not made much headway.
- However, successive governments in **Sri Lanka have refused to grant land and police powers** to the provinces, leading to **unresolved issues since the civil war ended 14 years ago**.

▪ President's Proposal and TNA's Response:

- The Sri Lankan President presented a **comprehensive dossier to Tamil political parties**, outlining plans for truth-seeking, reconciliation, accountability, development, and power devolution.
 - The proposal included implementing **the 13th Amendment, except for police powers**, and empowering provincial councils through various Bills.
- However, the TNA rejected the proposal, calling it a **"hollow promise," citing a lack of political will** to genuinely devolve power, as provincial councils have been defuncting for five years without elections.
- The Tamil National People's Front and civil society leaders expressed **concerns to the Indian Prime Minister**, urging a federal solution due to limitations of the 13th Amendment under a unitary constitution.

How are India's Relations with Sri Lanka?

▪ About:

- India and Sri Lanka are two South Asian nations situated in the [Indian Ocean](#) region. Geographically, Sri Lanka is located just off the southern coast of India, separated by the [Palk Strait](#).
- This proximity has **played a significant role in shaping the relationship** between the two countries.
- The Indian Ocean is a **strategically important waterway** for trade and military operations, and Sri Lanka's location at the crossroads of major shipping lanes makes it a critical point of control for India.

▪ Relations:

- **Historical Ties:** India and Sri Lanka have a long history of cultural, religious, and trade ties dating back to ancient times.
 - There are strong cultural ties between the two countries, with many Sri Lankans tracing their heritage to India. [Buddhism](#), which originated in India, is also an important religion in Sri Lanka.
- **Economic ties:** India is **Sri Lanka's third largest export destination**, after the US and UK. More than 60% of Sri Lanka's exports enjoy the benefits of the [India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement](#). India is also a major investor in Sri Lanka.
 - Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from India amounted to around USD 1.7 billion over the years from 2005 to 2019.
- **Defence:** India and Sri Lanka conduct **joint Military ([Mitra Shakti](#)) and Naval exercise ([SLINEX](#))**.
- **Participation in Groupings:** Sri Lanka is also a member of groupings like [BIMSTEC \(Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation\)](#) and [SAARC](#) in which India plays a leading role.

▪ Issues in India-Sri Lanka Relations:

- **Killing of Fishermen:** Killing of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy is a lingering issue between these two nations.
 - In 2019 and 2020, a total of 284 Indian fishermen were arrested and a total of 53 Indian boats were confiscated by the Sri Lankan authorities.
- **Influence of China:** [China's rapidly growing economic footprint](#) (and political clout as a corollary) in Sri Lanka is straining India-Sri Lanka relations.
 - China is already the largest investor in Sri Lanka, accounting for 23.6% of the total [Foreign Direct Investment \(FDI\)](#) during 2010-2019 as against 10.4% from India.

Way Forward

- The rejection of the President's proposal by the Tamil National Alliance and the growing concerns among Tamil political parties and civil society members underscore the ongoing challenges in implementing the **13th Amendment and devolving power in Sri Lanka**.
- India's emphasis on "full implementation" and the push for a federal solution are crucial aspects to watch as President Wickremesinghe's visit to India approaches.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Elephant Pass, sometimes seen in the news, is mentioned in the context of the affairs of which one of the following? (2009)

- (a) Bangladesh
- (b) India
- (c) Nepal
- (d) Sri Lanka

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. In respect of India-Sri Lanka relations, discuss how domestic factors influence foreign policy. (2013)

Q. 'India is an age-old friend of Sri Lanka.' Discuss India's role in the recent crisis in Sri Lanka in the light of the preceding statement. (2022)