



Strengthening Ties between India and Srilanka

For Prelims: [India-Sri Lanka Relations](#), [Unified Payments Interface \(UPI\)](#), [Buddhism](#), [Renewable energy](#), [Indian Ocean](#), [13th Amendment](#), [The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam \(LTTE\)](#)

For Mains: India Sri Lanka Relations, Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News

Recently, the **External Affairs Minister** S. Jaishankar met with **Sri Lanka's newly elected President** Anura Kumara Dissanayake in Colombo, during which he pledged India's full support for the country's **economic recovery and growth**.

- Additionally, this meeting marked Jaishankar as the **first high-level foreign dignitary** to meet with him after the election.



What are the Key Highlights of the Meeting Between India and Sri Lanka?

- **Economic Support:**
 - During the meeting, India emphasised India's commitment to sectors such as [tourism](#), [energy](#), and [dairy](#), while discussing boosting Indian **tourist inflow** to support Sri Lanka's economy.
 - India also recognized Sri Lanka's gratitude for its assistance during the financial crisis.
- **Fishermen and Security Concerns:**
 - India and Sri Lanka acknowledged the issue of **detained Indian fishermen**, emphasizing the need for their release, a review of fines, and addressing the seizure of assets **such as boats**.
- **Support for Tamil Rights:**

- India reiterated its support for the aspirations of all communities in Sri Lanka, emphasizing the need for political solutions for Tamils and the implementation of the [13th Amendment](#).
- The **13th Amendment** established Provincial Councils, ensuring a power-sharing framework that allows **all nine provinces**, including those with a **Sinhala majority**, to exercise self-governance.

What is the Historical Context of India-Sri Lanka Relations?

- In the **3rd century BCE**, **Mahinda**, the son of Emperor Ashoka, introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka, forging a strong cultural and religious connection between the two nations.
- During the **10th century CE**, the [Chola dynasty](#) from **South India** invaded Sri Lanka several times, leaving a lasting cultural impact that shaped Sri Lankan art, architecture, and language.
- Both **India and Sri Lanka** achieved independence from British colonial rule in 1947 and 1948, respectively, with India playing a vital role in helping Sri Lanka develop its democratic institutions.
- [The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam \(LTTE\)](#) (a terrorist organisation) were formed in **1976** and engaged in armed conflict with the Sri Lankan government from **1983 to 2009**.
- In response to the conflict, India and Sri Lanka signed the **1987 India-Sri Lanka Agreement**, which led to the implementation of the 13th Amendment and the deployment of the **Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)** to Sri Lanka.
- The Sri Lankan Civil War came to an end in 2009 following a military offensive.

What are the Major Areas of Cooperation Between India and Sri Lanka?

- **Development Cooperation:** India is a significant provider of **development aid** to Sri Lanka, committing nearly **USD 4 billion**, including around **USD 560 million in grants**.
 - Notable initiatives include the **Indian Housing Project, which aims to build 50,000 homes for war-affected communities**. Additional support includes electricity projects, railway development, and various community development initiatives.
 - In 2022, India agreed to set up [hybrid power projects](#) in northern Sri Lanka and initiated development projects at [Kankesanthurai and Trincomalee ports](#).
- **Economic Cooperation:** India and Sri Lanka have strengthened economic ties through the [India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement \(ISFTA\)](#), with India being Sri Lanka's **third-largest export** destination and **over 60%** of exports benefiting from the agreement.
 - They are also exploring an [Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement \(ETCA\)](#) to further strengthen their economies.
 - Sri Lanka's adoption of India's [Unified Payments Interface \(UPI\)](#) has improved fintech connections, and using the rupee for trade supports its economy.
- **Cultural Relations:** The **1977 Cultural Cooperation Agreement** has enabled cultural exchanges, while the **Indian Cultural Centre** in Colombo promotes Indian arts and organizes [International Yoga Day](#).
 - Additionally, the India-Sri Lanka Foundation, established in 1998, strengthens scientific and cultural collaboration
- **Defence and Security Cooperation:** Since 2012, India has been involved in the **Indo-Sri Lankan Defence Dialogue**, focusing on security partnerships. Both nations conduct [joint military \(Mitra Shakti\) and naval \(SLINEX\)](#) exercises to enhance their defence collaboration.
 - India is providing support through a **free-floating dock facility**, a Dornier reconnaissance aircraft, and a training team, all aimed at bolstering security in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:** Both countries actively participate in regional organisations such as [BIMSTEC \(Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation\)](#) and [SAARC](#) as well as international bodies like the United Nations and the [World Trade Organization](#).

What are the Challenges in India-Sri Lanka Relations?

- **Political Instability:** Sri Lanka has faced political turbulence in recent years, characterised by

frequent government changes, which has impeded its ability to engage with India and pursue cooperative economic initiatives.

- **Geographical Concerns:** India recognises Sri Lanka's sovereignty over [Katchatheevu under the 1974](#) agreement, but political commentary over the island and the authenticity of the agreement raise diplomatic concerns between the countries.
- **Strategic Concerns:** China's establishment of the **Colombo and Hambantota ports** under its [Maritime Silk Route initiative](#) poses strategic challenges for India. Moreover, China has partnered with **Sri Lanka's Supreme SAT** for **satellite launch operations**.
- **Fishermen's Issue:** Sri Lanka has consistently voiced concerns over illegal fishing by Indian fishermen in its waters, resulting in regular arrests for violating the **International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL)**.
- **Tamilian Interests:** India seeks to fulfil the Tamil community's aspirations for **equality, justice, and peace**, promoting the devolution of powers as outlined in the 13th Amendment. However, Colombo has yet to demonstrate a firm commitment in this regard.
- **Border Security Concern:** The porous maritime border between India and Sri Lanka has resulted in challenges related to border security, including the smuggling of goods, narcotics, and illegal immigrants.

Way Forward

- **Enhanced Maritime Security:** India and Sri Lanka can strengthen maritime security collaboration through joint patrols in the Indian Ocean and by offering training programs for Sri Lankan coast guard personnel.
- **Cultural Exchange:** Cultural exchange initiatives, people-to-people connections and tourism can be promoted to deepen relationships between the citizens of both nations.
 - Initiatives such as student exchange programs and skill development can be established to provide scholarships for Sri Lankan students and to collaborate on skill development programs.
- **Developmental Projects:** India can invest in infrastructure development in Sri Lanka, ensuring that projects transition smoothly from planning to execution.
- **Trade Facilitation:** Both countries can aim for a prompt and efficient implementation of **the Economic and Technology Co-operation Agreement (ETCA)** to lower trade barriers and enhance bilateral trade.
- **Truth and Reconciliation Commission:** India could help set up a truth and reconciliation commission in Sri Lanka, **similar to South Africa's**, to address the legacy of the civil war and promote healing within the Tamil community.

Drishti Mains Question:

What are the key highlights of India-Sri Lanka relations, the challenges they face, and how can both countries collaborate to overcome these issues?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q1. 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. '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)**

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

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