



## 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.

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## 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 [13<sup>th</sup> Amendment](#).
- The **13<sup>th</sup> 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 3 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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