

Brief on India - Sri Lanka Relations

India and Sri Lanka have a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic interaction and the relationship between two countries is more than 2500 years old. Trade and investment have grown and there is cooperation in the fields of development, education, culture and defence. Both countries share a broad understanding on major issues of international interest. In recent years, significant progress in implementation of developmental assistance projects for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and disadvantaged sections of the population in Sri Lanka has helped further cement the bonds of friendship.

The nearly three-decade long armed conflict between Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE came to an end in May 2009. During the course of the conflict, India supported the right of the Government of Sri Lanka to act against terrorist forces. At the same time, it conveyed its deep concern at the plight of the civilian population, emphasizing that their rights and welfare should not get enmeshed in hostilities against the LTTE.

The need for national reconciliation through a political settlement of the ethnic issue has been reiterated by India at the highest levels. India is in favor of a negotiated political settlement, which is acceptable to all communities within the framework of a united Sri Lanka and which is consistent with democracy, pluralism and respect for human rights.

Political Relations

Political relations between the two countries have been marked by high-level exchanges of visits at regular intervals.

Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi hosted a Virtual Bilateral Summit (VBS) with Sri Lankan Prime Minister H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa on 26 September 2020, also attended by senior Ministers/officials from both sides. This was the first such engagement by Prime Minister H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa after the Parliamentary elections of August 2020 and also the first VBS held by Indian Prime Minister with a neighboring country. A USD 15 million grant from India for promotion of bilateral Buddhist ties and an inaugural international flight carrying Sri Lankan pilgrims to the sacred city of Kushinagar, after Kushinagar's recent designation as international airport, were announced at the VBS. A joint statement covering all areas of bilateral cooperation, titled '*MitratvaMaga*' was issued following the Virtual Summit.

Sri Lankan President H.E. Gotabaya Rajapaksa visited India from 28-30 November 2019 in the first overseas trip as President and held bilateral discussions with Hon'ble Rashtrapati, Prime Minister, External Affairs Minister

and NSA. Prime Minister H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa paid a State Visit to India from 7 – 11 February 2020 as his first overseas trip after assumption of Office.

External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Sri Lanka from 5-7 January 2021. This was the first foreign visit by EAM in 2021. During the visit, EAM called on President of Sri Lanka H.E. Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa. He also met Foreign Minister H.E. Dinesh Gunawardena, Fisheries Minister H.E. Douglas Devananda, Leader of Opposition H.E. Sajith Premadasa, prominent Tamil leaders and captains of business and industry.

EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Sri Lanka on 19 November 2019 and held bilateral talks with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, former Prime Minister H.E. Ranil Wickremesinghe, and then Leader of Opposition Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Sri Lankan Foreign Relations Minister H.E. Dinesh Gunawardena undertook his first official visit overseas since assuming the office, to India from 9- 10 January 2020. All the three Foreign Ministers of Sri Lanka appointed during the former Government's tenure visited India as their first overseas destination after assuming charge (H.E. Mr. Tilak Marapana - September 2017; H.E. Mr. Ravi Karunanayake - June 2017; H.E. Mr. Mangala Samaraweera - January 2015).

Indian National Security Advisor (NSA) Shri. Ajit Doval visited Sri Lanka on 18 January 2020 and held discussions with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. NSA also visited Sri Lanka in November 2020 to attend the fourth maritime dialogue under the 'India- Sri Lanka-Maldives' trilateral mechanism.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited Sri Lanka on 13-14 March, 2015. He travelled to Anuradhapura, Talaimannar, and Jaffna. Prime Minister again visited Sri Lanka on 11-12 May 2017 as the Chief Guest to attend the International Day of Vesak celebrations in Sri Lanka. During the visit, he dedicated Dickoya hospital, addressed a gathering in Norwood's ground and took blessings at Sri Dalada Maligawa temple in Kandy. Prime Minister on 9 June 2019 arrived in Sri Lanka for a short visit to express solidarity with people of Sri Lanka after Easter Sunday attacks. During his visit, Prime Minister paid tributes to the victims of Easter attacks at St. Anthony's Church, Kochchikade and held discussions with former President Maithripala Sirisena, former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, opposition leader Mahinda Rajapaksa and TNA leader R. Sampanthan.

Former President H.E. Maithripala Sirisena and former Prime Minister H.E. Ranil Wickremesinghe chose India for their first official overseas visit after assuming charge (in February 2015 and September 2015 respectively). Besides the above, former President H.E. Maithripala Sirisena made five visits (May

2016 – to attend the valedictory session of the SimhasthaKumbhMela in Ujjain, visited Sanchi, unveiled a statue of Anagarika Dharmapala; October 2016 - BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in Goa; November 2016 - WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; March 2018 – Founding Conference of International Solar Alliance) and on 30th May 2019- to attend the swearing in ceremony of Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi.

Former Prime Minister H.E. Ranil Wickremesinghe made four visits to India as outlined: October 2016 – to attend the India Economic Summit; April 2017 – Working Visit, MoU on Cooperation in Economic Projects signed; November 2017– to attend Global Conference on Cyber Space and October 2018- official visit.

Former President and Leader of Opposition and current Prime Minister H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa visited New Delhi from 10-13 September 2018 to address a private event and called on Prime Minister. He again visited Bangalore from 8-13 February 2019 to deliver a speech at the event organized by The Hindu newspaper. There are regular Ministerial visits from Sri Lanka to India.

Smt. Sumithra Mahajan, former Speaker of Lok Sabha visited Colombo from 02-07 October 2017 to attend a special parliamentary Session in celebration of 70th Anniversary of the establishment of Parliament of Sri Lanka on 03 October 2017 and to attend 8th Conference of the Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians.

Former Speaker H.E. Karu Jayasuriya led a multi-party Parliamentary delegation to India in September 2018.

Former EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj led an inter-ministerial delegation to Colombo from 5-6 February 2016 for the 9th Session of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Commission. Earlier, Former EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj was in Colombo on 6-7 March 2015 to prepare for Prime Minister's visit. Former EAM visited Sri Lanka from 31 August-01 September 2017 to attend the second Indian Ocean Conference organized in Colombo.

Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad, Minister of Law and Justice and Electronics & Information Technology visited Sri Lanka from 14-17 January, 2018. A MoU for Cooperation in IT & Electronics was signed. Sri Lanka also joined the National Knowledge Network (NKN), being the first SAARC country to do so. A pilot program on E-Office, developed by NIC was also launched, wherein the first eGov documentation was digitally signed for the first time in Sri Lankan public sector. He again visited Sri Lanka from 5-7 November 2019 to attend the Commonwealth Law Ministers meeting held in Colombo. During the visit, he called on former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Former Commerce and Industry Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman visited Sri Lanka on 26-27 September 2016. Former Minister of State for External Affairs Gen. V. K. Singh (Retd) visited Colombo on August 2016 to participate in the fifth Ministerial Meeting of the Colombo Process

On 05 May 2017, Former President H.E. Maitripala Sirisena joined other leaders from South Asian countries through video conferencing after the launch of South Asia satellite, which is gifted by India to South Asian countries.

Commercial Relations

India and Sri Lanka enjoy a vibrant and growing economic and commercial partnership, which has witnessed considerable expansion over the years. The entry into force of the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) in 2000 contributed significantly towards the expansion of trade between the two countries. Economic ties between the two nations also include a flourishing development partnership that encompasses areas such as infrastructure, connectivity, transportation, housing, health, livelihood and rehabilitation, education, and industrial development

India has traditionally been among Sri Lanka's largest trade partners and Sri Lanka remains among the largest trade partners of India in the SAARC. In 2020, India was Sri Lanka's 2nd largest trading partner with the bilateral merchandise trade amounting to about USD \$ 3.6 billion. Sri Lankan exports to India have increased substantially since 2000 when ISLFTA came into force and more than 60% of Sri Lanka's total exports to India over the past few years have used the ISFTA benefits. Interestingly, only about 5% of India's total exports to Sri Lanka in the past few years have used the ISFTA provisions, thereby indicating their overall competitiveness in the Sri Lankan market.

In addition to being Sri Lanka's largest trade partner, India is also one of the largest contributors to Foreign Direct Investment in Sri Lanka. A number of leading companies from India have invested and established their presence in Sri Lanka. According to BoI, FDI from India amounted to about US\$ 1.7 billion during the period 2005 to 2019. The main investments from India are in the areas of petroleum retail, tourism & hotel, manufacturing, real estate, telecommunication, banking and financial services. Similarly, investments by Sri Lankan companies in India are also surging and taking advantage of India's dynamic economy and wider market. Significant examples include Brandix (about USD 1 billion to set up a garment city in Visakhapatnam), MAS holdings, Damro, LTL Holdings, and other investments in the freight servicing and logistics sector.

Development Cooperation:

Sri Lanka is one of India's major development partners and this partnership has been an important pillar of bilateral ties between the two countries over the years. With grants alone amounting to around USD 570 million, the overall commitment by GOI is to the tune of more than USD 3.5 billion. Demand-driven and people-centric nature of India's development partnership with Sri Lanka have been the cornerstone of this relationship. Grant projects cut across sectors such as education, health, livelihood, housing, industrial development etc.

The Indian Housing Project, with an initial commitment to build 50,000 houses in war affected areas and estate workers in the plantation areas, is Government of India (GoI)'s flagship grant project in Sri Lanka. Overall commitment of INR 1372 crores makes it also one of the largest projects undertaken by GoI abroad. As on date, close to 49,300 houses spread across different provinces such as Northern, Eastern, Central etc have already been completed. During the visit of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to Sri Lanka in May 2017, he announced that an additional 10,000 houses would be constructed in plantation areas at a total cost of INR 453 crore. There are also four smaller housing programmes for constructing 2400 houses across Sri Lanka. Overall, India has so far committed to construct close to 62,500 houses in Sri Lanka.

The country-wide 1990 Emergency Ambulance Service is another flagship project. The Service which was initially launched in July 2016 in Western and Southern Provinces of Sri Lanka was later expanded to all the Provinces in the next phase. Launch of the second phase was held on 21 July 2018 in Jaffna wherein Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined the then Prime of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe virtually from New Delhi. At a total cost of more than USD 22.5 million, close to 300 ambulances were provided by GOI under this project.

Some of other notable grant projects which have been completed are the 150-bed Dickoya hospital, livelihood assistance to nearly 70,000 people from fishing and farming community in Hambantota, supply of medical equipment to Vavuniya Hospital and 150 Boats and Fishing gear for Mullaithivu fishermen. A modern 1500 - seat auditorium named after Rabindranath Tagore in Ruhuna University, Matara, is the largest in any University in Sri Lanka.

There are another 20 ongoing grant projects across diverse spheres. This includes the iconic Jaffna Cultural Center, construction of 153 houses and infrastructure facilities in ShobithaThero Village in Anuradhapura; Upgradation of Saraswathy Central College in Pusselawa, Kandy; Construction of 600 houses under Model Village Housing Project in 25 districts of Sri Lanka; 5000 MT temperature-controlled warehouse in Dambulla; Kandian Dancing

School at Pallekelle/DaladaMaligawa Cultural Heritage project, Kandy; 144 transit housing units in Madhu Shrine, Mannar etc.

Projects under Lines of Credit

11 Lines of credit (LOC) have been extended to Sri Lanka by the Export Import Bank of India in the last 15 years. Important sectors in which Projects have been executed/ are under execution, under these LOCs include: Railway, transport, connectivity, defence, solar. Some important Projects completed are: supply of defence equipments; upgradation of railway line from Colombo to Matara; track laying by IRCON on Omanthai-Pallai sector, Madhu Church-Tallaimannar, Madawachchiya-Madhu Railway line; reconstruction of the Pallai-Kankesanthurai Railway line; signalling and telecommunication system; supply of engine kits for buses, diesel locomotives railways, DMUs, Carrier and fuel tank wagons etc.

Under the LOC of USD 318 million, various projects for procurement of rolling stocks for Sri Lankan Railways, upgradation of railway tracks, setting up of railway workshop etc are at different stages of implementation. A project for rehabilitation of the Kanakesanthuraiharbour is being executed under a LOC of USD 45.27 million. Once complete, this project will bring immense economic benefits to the Northern region of Sri Lanka.

A US\$ 100 million LoC for undertaking solar projects in Sri Lanka has been signed between the Government of Sri Lanka and EXIM Bank on June 16, 2021. This LOC was announced during the Founding Conference of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) held on 11 March 2018, attended by former President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena participated. Projects under this LOC will include- rooftop solar units for Government buildings, rooftop solar units for low income families and a floating solar power plant.

During President H.E Gotabaya Rajapaksa's visit in November 2019, a LOC of USD 400 million for development and infrastructure projects and USD 50 million for security and counter terrorism were announced. These LOC Agreements are currently under discussion between the two sides.

Cultural relations:

India and Sri Lanka have a shared legacy of historical, cultural, religious, spiritual and linguistic ties that is more than 2,500 years old. In contemporary times, the Cultural Cooperation Agreement signed by the Government of India and the Government of Sri Lanka on 29 November, 1977 at New Delhi forms the basis for periodic Cultural Exchange Programmes between the two countries.

People-to-people ties

Buddhism is one of the strongest pillars connecting the two nations and civilizations from the time when the Great Indian Emperor Ashoka sent his children ArhatMahinda and TheriSangamitta to spread the teachings of Lord Buddha at the request of King DevanampiyaTissa of Sri Lanka.

Underlining the deep people-to-people connect and shared Buddhist heritage between India and Sri Lanka, the venerated relics of Lord Buddha from Kapilawasthu discovered in 1970 in India have been exhibited two times in Sri Lanka. The first time was in 1978 when they were brought to Sri Lanka and drew crowds of nearly 10 million people. In 2012, at the request of the then Sri Lankan President, H.E MahindaRajapaska, the relics once again travelled from India to Sri Lanka to commemorate the 2600th anniversary of the Enlightenment of the Buddha. The venerated relics from the WaskaduweVihara have also been exhibited in India in October 2015 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Dr Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution, embracing Buddhism along with 500,00 followers, where over 8 million people came to see the relics and paid homage.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during the Virtual Bilateral Summit held between India and Sri Lanka on 26 September 2020, announced a USD 15 million grant assistance for protection and promotion of Buddhist ties between India and Sri Lanka. This is a first of its kind grant announcement by India which may be utilised for construction/renovation of Buddhist monasteries, education of young monks, strengthening engagement of Buddhist scholars and clergy, development of Buddhist heritage museums, cultural exchanges, archaeological cooperation, and reciprocal exposition of The Buddha's relics.

In July 2020, the Government of India declared the Kushinagar Airport in India, the place of Lord Buddha's Mahaparinibbana, as an international airport, to allow Buddhist pilgrims from around the world to visit the revered site associated with Lord Buddha with ease. Given the pre-eminence of India Sri Lanka Buddhist ties, both countries have agreed that the first inaugural flight to this airport will be from Sri Lanka. The decision to declare Kushinagar airport as an International airport, will provide Buddhist pilgrims, historians and cultural enthusiasts the opportunity to comfortably explore not only Kushinagar, but also other historically significant locations such as Lumbini, Kapilavastu and Sravasti, which are in close proximity.

To further strengthen people-to-people ties, the first ever pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya for Sri Lankan Armed Forces personnel and their families was organized from 24-26 June 2018. A special Indian Air Force C-17 aircraft was deployed to Colombo to transport 160 Armed Forces personnel and their families to Bodh Gaya and back. The second pilgrimage visit to Bodh Gaya was organized by India on June 2019 for Sri Lankan Armed forces and their families and for the

first time Indian contingent arrived in Sri Lanka to visit Sri Lankan sites. A 55 - member delegation from Mahabodhi Society of India visited prominent Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka during the last week of June 2018. During Prime Minister's visit to Colombo on 12 May 2017, he announced that Air India will operate direct flights between Varanasi and Colombo and inaugural flight was flagged off on 4 August 2017. On 17 October 2019, Jaffna International Airport (JIA) was inaugurated by former President Maithripala Sirisena and the inaugural flight from Chennai operated by Alliance Air landed in JIA to mark the occasion. On 11 November 2019 Alliance Air started regular service between Jaffna and Chennai.

Special prayers across Sri Lanka for the well-being of people of India in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic

In May-June 2021, a series of special prayers and ceremonies were held by people of different faiths across Sri Lanka for the well-being of people of India in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. A multi-religious, country-wide 'VishwaAshirwadaHorawa' was organized by Ministry of Buddhasasana, Cultural and Religious Affairs, headed by Prime Minister H.E Mahinda Rajapaksa. The sacred Rathna Sutra and JwaraPirith were recited on the occasions.

Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre (SVCC)

The Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre (SVCC), the cultural arm of the High Commission of India, Colombo, has been playing a key role in strengthening these ties and promoting people-to-people contacts between India and Sri Lanka since its inception in 1998. SVCC actively promotes awareness of Indian culture by offering classes in Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Hindustani and Carnatic vocal, Violin, Sitar, Tabla, Hindi and Yoga.

Special outreach programs have been also initiated to reach out to Buddhist Educational institutions, such as Pirivenas and universities, as well as the Clergy and scholars. 'India Corner' was opened at the Nagananda International Institute for Buddhist Studies in collaboration with the High Commission of India. Hindi and Yoga classes were also launched at ParamDhammaChetiyaPirivena in Ratmalana. Every month to commemorate Poya Days, SVCC also undertakes various activities, such as Dhamma Yatras to villages and temples, Dhamma Discourses in Sinhala and English, webinars between Buddhist scholars from Sri Lanka and India, workshop for children, and art exhibition by Sri Lankan artists on the walls of the High Commission of India premises.

SVCC has been also organizing major cultural events in Sri Lanka strengthening cultural ties between the countries. A musical evening was

organized on 26th January, 2020, in which performances were given by Grammy winner Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Grammy nominated Pandit Subhen Chatterjee. The occasion was graced by high dignitaries including Prime Minister H.E Mahinda Rajapaksa. The same evening at BMICH, Prime Minister H.E Mahinda Rajapaksa also inaugurated an exhibition titled “Traditional Arts of India” showcasing the unity in diversity through traditional arts, particularly the folk arts, from different States of India. The paintings in the exhibition were made by the artists of Sri Lanka and India together, thereby representing the true spirit of India – Sri Lanka ties.

In another event, on 11th December 2020, High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, Shri Gopal Baglay, and Hon’ble Prof. G.L Peiris, Minister of Education, Government of Sri Lanka, launched Greeting Cards based on paintings made by children from care homes all over Sri Lanka. The competition received 4375 Paintings from 369 Orphanages all over Sri Lanka.

Since 2015, every year, the High Commission of India celebrates the International Day of Yoga (IDY) in Sri Lanka with great fervour, with the participation of the Sri Lankan leadership and public. The High Commission of India and the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre, Colombo joined hands with the Sri Lankan Armed Forces to celebrate the 7th ‘International Yoga Day’ on 21st June, 2021 at a special Yoga session, organized in the virtual mode. The Secretary of Defence of Sri Lanka, General (Retd) Kamal Gunaratne was the Chief Guest at event, which was also attended by the Chief of Defence Staff & Commander of Army, General Shavendra Silva and around 500 defence personnel from about 150 defence establishments across Sri Lanka, including the Kotelawala Defence University, Training schools, defence academies, ships etc. In the run up to the IDY, a number of free online Yoga sessions were organized by SVCC, in May-June 2021. These sessions focused on wellness and therapeutic Yoga, in line with the theme for this year’s IDY. On June 20, 2021, a special Yoga session was organized at the ParamDhamma Chetiya Pirivena in Ratmalana, at which a special message from the High Commissioner, in Sinhala language, was shared with the participants. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID pandemic, close to around 7000 participants attended various online events that were organized this year for the 7th International Day of Yoga.

As a part of Commencement of 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi in Sri Lanka, following events were organized on 2nd October, 2018:

- A special Video created by Mission “Vaishnav Jana To”, bhajan sung by popular Sri Lankan artists – Bathia, Santhush and Umaria was launched by President of Sri Lanka.
- Release of Special commemorative postal stamps on Gandhiji by the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.

- Launch by former Speaker of Sri Lanka Parliament KaruJayasuriya of a well-researched book in Sinhala on Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Sri Lanka, written by veteran journalist Mr. Sampath Bandara.
- A special musical performance "Symphony One" by the Violin Maestro Dr. L. Subramaniam and the National Leipaja Latvian Philharmonic Orchestra.
- Iconic Colombo Municipal Town Hall was lit with special LED lights to showcase Gandhiji's images.

On 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi following events were organized in 2019-

- On 1 October a special floral tribute programme was held at Presidential Secretariat where former President Maithripala Sirisena and High Commissioner graced the occasion.
- On 2 October former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and High Commissioner unveiled a bronze bust of Gandhiji at Temple Trees (official residence of Sri Lankan Prime Minister). During the occasion two commemorative postal stamps on Mahatma Gandhi issued by Sri Lankan Post were also released by former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and High Commissioner.
- A Mahatma Gandhi Oration titled "Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi in Contemporary Times" by Sri Lanka Supreme Court Justice S Thurairaja was held at BCIS, Colombo with Speaker KaruJayasuriya as the chief guest.

550th Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev was celebrated on 9 November 2019 at Swami Vivekananda Cultural Center. During the event there was a document screening and a Kirtan by Gyanji from Guru Nanak DarbarGuruduware, Colombo.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, in 2020, 551st Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev was celebrated via virtual mode. A Kirtan by Gyanji from Guru Nanak DarbarGuruduware, Colombo, was organized and webcast live on the social media site of SVCC.

India-Sri Lanka Foundation

The India-Sri Lanka Foundation, set up in December 1998 as an intergovernmental initiative, also aims towards enhancement of scientific, technical, educational and cultural cooperation through civil society exchanges and enhancing contact between the younger generations of the two countries.

Tourism:

Tourism also forms an important link between India and Sri Lanka. Government of India formally launched the e-Tourist Visa (eTV) scheme for Sri Lankan tourists on 14 April 2015. Subsequently, in a goodwill gesture, the visa fee for eTV was sharply reduced. In 2019, out of the total 1.91 million tourists, 355,000 tourists arrived from India. Sri Lankan tourists too are among the top ten sources for the Indian tourism market. The tourism sector of Sri Lanka which was severely hit by Easter Sunday attacks received a boost by the arrival of Indian tourists. On 24 July 2019 Sri Lanka included India in the free visa on arrival scheme and commenced the scheme on 1 August 2019.

Human resource development:

India now offers about 710 scholarship slots annually to Sri Lankan students. In addition, under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Program, India offers 402 fully-funded slots every year to officials in various Ministries of Government of Sri Lanka and also to other eligible citizens for short term training programs in a wide variety of technical and professional disciplines to enhance skill sets. Indian institutes under 'Study in India' Program provide technical expertise across a diverse range of courses, and include programs in niche disciplines such as Ayurveda, Yoga, and Buddhist Studies. From the academic session 2017-18, Sri Lankan students can also appear for National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) in centers in India for MBBS/BDS admissions. IIT JEE (Advanced) entrance examinations have commenced in Sri Lanka from 2017.

Fishermen issue

Given the proximity of the territorial waters of both countries, especially in the Palk Straits and the Gulf of Mannar, incidents of straying of fishermen are common. Both countries have agreed on certain practical arrangements to deal with the issue of bona fide fishermen of either side inadvertently crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line. Through these arrangements, it has been possible to deal with the issue of detention of fishermen in a humane manner. India and Sri Lanka have agreed to set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries between the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare of India and Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development of Sri Lanka as the mechanism to help find a permanent solution to the fishermen issue.

So far two meetings at Ministerial level (January 2017 in Colombo & October 2017 in New Delhi) and three rounds of JWG meetings (December 31, 2016 in

New Delhi; April 7, 2017 in Colombo, October 2017 in New Delhi; 30 December 2020 in virtual mode) have been held. The delegation from both sides deliberated on the fisheries issue including co-operation on patrolling, setting up of a Hotline between two Coast Guards, introduction of effective tracking systems for fishing vessels, release of Indian boats in Sri Lankan custody, SOPs for release and handing over of arrested fishermen and measures to phase out bottom trawling in Palk Bay. Another instrument to encourage an amicable solution has been fishermen association level talks, overseen by both Governments. Three rounds of meetings were held in 2014-15. During the visit of Sri Lankan President H.E Gotabaya Rajapaksa to India in November 2019, it was announced that Sri Lanka would release all the fishing boats under their custody.

Indian Community

The People of Indian Origin (PIOs) comprise Sindhis, Borahs, Gujaratis, Memons, Parsis, Malayalis and Telugu speaking persons who have settled down in Sri Lanka (most of them after partition) and are engaged in various business ventures. Though their numbers (10,000 approximately) are lesser compared to Indian Origin Tamils (IOTs), they are economically prosperous and are well placed. Each of these communities have their organization which organizes festivals and cultural events. According to unofficial statistics, it is estimated that around 14,000 Indian expatriates are living in Sri Lanka.

The IOTs are mostly employed in either tea or rubber plantations in Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provinces though during the last decade, the younger generation have been migrating to Colombo in search of employment. A fair number of IOTs living in Colombo are engaged in business. According to Government census figures (2011), the population of IOTs is about 1.6 million.

July 1, 2021
