

# India - Sri Lanka Joint Press Statement

Thursday, 31 January 2013

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The Eighth meeting of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Commission was held on 22 January 2013 in New Delhi. It was co-chaired by Shri Salman Khurshid, Minister of External Affairs of India and Prof. G.L. Peiris, Minister of External Affairs of Sri Lanka. The Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) was preceded by the Senior Officials Meeting at the level of the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries on 21 January 2013.

The JCM discussions were held in a cordial atmosphere and marked by a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. Both sides comprehensively reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations, including trade, investment, development cooperation, science and technology, power, agriculture, health, people to people contacts, connectivity, culture and education, and expressed satisfaction at the substantive developments in bilateral relations since the 7th session of the Joint Commission held at Colombo on 26 November 2010. The External Affairs Ministers of India and Sri Lanka signed the following Agreements:

(i) Agreement on Combating International Terrorism and Illicit Drug Trafficking; and (ii) Revised Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement.

Recognising the need to build a special economic partnership framework to achieve the shared goals of poverty alleviation, job creation and economic development for the people of the two countries, the two sides decided to take several steps to further deepen trade, tourism and investment relations. In this regard, it was agreed to encourage closer economic and trade linkages between all stakeholders with a view to doubling bilateral trade to US \$ 10 billion in the next three years. In this context it was also agreed to initiate a dialogue between the Commerce Secretary of India and the Secretary of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development of Sri Lanka at an early date to evolve a framework for a special economic partnership between the two countries.

It was acknowledged that the substantial development assistance provided by the Government of India towards relief, resettlement and rehabilitation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and livelihood generation and reconstruction efforts in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka has had a positive impact on the ground. In this context, both sides welcomed the successful completion of the pilot project for construction of 1,000 houses for IDPs in the Northern Province in August 2012 and the launch of the next phase for construction/repair of remaining 49,000 houses on 2 October 2012. It was noted with satisfaction that substantial progress has been made in implementation of the projects like repair and construction of hospital and schools; setting up of Vocational Training Centres; organization of artificial limb refitment camps; provision of fishing equipment, tractors, bicycles, trishaws, agricultural equipment and seeds; restoration of the Northern Railway lines and the Southern Railway Corridor; rehabilitation of the Kankesanthurai Harbour; rehabilitation of the Palaly Airport; among others.

Both sides noted the impressive growth of tourism traffic between the two countries both ways. India currently contributed the largest number of tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka and over 250,000 Sri Lankans visited India in 2011-2012. It was agreed that with a view to enhance connectivity, people to people exchanges and movement of goods and services, the two sides would meet at the earliest to explore the possibility of finalizing and signing a revised Air Services Agreement; work towards the resumption of ferry services between Talaimannar and Rameswaram for which the Joint Committee on Ferry Services would meet at the earliest; and hold the meeting of the Joint Working Group on Tourism in the first quarter to 2013 to identify potential areas of cooperation, including marketing and capacity-building.

The two sides described the Sampur Power Project as a landmark initiative and directed the officials concerned on both sides to work towards its implementation so that the project goes on-stream by 2016, and to expeditiously complete the joint study on establishing power inter-grid connectivity. Both sides agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation in the areas of New and Renewable energy, and in this context agreed to conclude a MoU on Cooperation in New and Renewable Energy; to cooperate in establishing three power plants of aggregate capacity of 15 MW using biomass fuel; and enhance cooperation in wind and solar energy sectors. It was also agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation in the fields of oil and gas; civil nuclear energy; science and technology; and space technology.

The Joint Commission noted that both sides are committed to decrease incidents pertaining to fishing on the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). Both countries agreed that the use of force could not be justified under any circumstances and reiterated in this regard the importance of continuing to extend humane treatment to all fishermen. Both sides welcomed the decisions arrived at the two meetings of the Joint Working Group on Fishing held in March 2011 and January 2012 respectively, and encouraged senior officials to meet regularly to continue the dialogue to strengthen cooperation on fishing related issues.

The Joint Commission took note of the collaborative initiatives in the field of Information & Communication Technology; education; human resources development, training and capacity building, among others. In this context, both sides agreed to encourage the finalisation of the MoU between the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and the Department of Open Distance Learning in Sri Lanka; organisation of more 'Education Fairs' in Sri Lanka; setting up Provincial Centres for English Language Training; and finalisation of the MoU for cooperation in connection with the "Ten Year Presidential Initiative to Steer Sri Lanka towards a Trilingual Society by 2020".

Expressing satisfaction at cooperation in the field of culture, both sides reviewed and positively assessed the progress of work for restoration of Thiruketheeswaram temple at Mannar; renovation of the Duraiappah Stadium; and Jaffna Culture Centre. Both sides agreed to jointly celebrate the 150th birth anniversaries of Swami Vivekananda (in 2013-14) and of Anagarika Dharmapala (in 2014-15). Both sides commended the role being played by the India-Sri Lanka Foundation in forging deeper links between civil society actors in the two countries.

Both sides agreed to enhance cooperation in the energy sector and to promote dialogue on security and defence issues of relevance to the bilateral relationship. The Joint Commission noted that the trilateral cooperation mechanism between

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India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives was an important initiative to promote maritime security in the region.

During his visit to India, the External Affairs Minister of Sri Lanka called on the Prime Minister of India and had a separate meeting with the External Affairs Minister of India.

The External Affairs Minister of India accepted the invitation extended by the Sri Lankan External Affairs Minister to visit Sri Lanka in the first half of 2013 and suggested that mutually convenient dates be worked out through diplomatic channels.

It was agreed that the next session of the Joint Commission would be held in Sri Lanka in the first half of 2014 on a date to be mutually agreed upon between the two sides.

22 January 2013 New Delhi