



Prime Minister's Office

Translation of Press Statement by Prime Minister during the State Visit of Prime Minister of Sri Lanka to India

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Your Excellency,
Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ayubovan!
Vanakkam!
Namaskar!

First of all, I heartily congratulate my friend Mahinda Rajapaksa for becoming the Prime Minister. Immediately after assuming office he accepted my invitation and chose India for his first foreign tour. I am thankful to him for this. A few days ago, Sri Lanka celebrated its seventieth anniversary of independence. For this, I congratulate Prime Minister Rajapaksa and all the people of Sri Lanka.

Friends,

India and Sri Lanka are neighbors since time immemorial, and also close friends. The history of our relationship has been woven with countless colorful threads like culture, religion, spirituality, art and language. Whether it is security or economy or social progress, our past and our future are connected to each other in every region. Stability, security and prosperity in Sri Lanka are not only in interest of India, but also in the interest of the entire Indian Ocean region and therefore, our close cooperation is valuable for peace and prosperity even in the Indo-Pacific region. In line with our Government's "Neighborhood First" policy and "Sagar" doctrine, we attach special priority to relations with Sri Lanka. We welcome the Sri Lankan government's resolve to work with India for regional security and development.

Friends,

Today Prime Minister Rajapaksa and I discussed in detail all aspects of our bilateral relations and international issues of mutual interest. Terrorism is a major danger in our region. We both countries have fought this problem firmly. There were painful and barbaric terrorist attacks on "Easter Day" in Sri Lanka in April last year. These attacks were not only a blow to Sri Lanka, but also to humanity. And so, in our conversation today, we discussed furthering our cooperation against terrorism. I am happy that Sri Lankan police officers have started participating in anti-terrorism courses in India's premier training institutes. We are

also committed to further strengthening the contacts and cooperation between the agencies of the two countries.

Friends,

In today's conversation we discussed Joint Economic Projects in Sri Lanka, and also on enhancing economic, business, and investment relations. We also discussed increasing our People-to-People connectivity, promoting tourism, and improving connectivity.

The recent direct flight between Chennai and Jaffna is part of our efforts in this direction. This direct flight will increase connectivity options for the Tamil population of the northern region of Sri Lanka and it will also be beneficial for the economic and social development of the region. The good response received to this flight is a matter of happiness for both of us. We also discussed efforts to further enhance and improve our relationship.

Friends,

India has been a trusted partner in Sri Lanka's development efforts. The new Lines of Credit announced last year will give more strength to our development cooperation. We are happy that the Indian Housing Project for the construction of more than 48,000 houses for internally displaced people in the northern and eastern region of Sri Lanka has been completed. Apart from this, the construction of several thousand houses for Tamil people of Indian origin is also progressing in the up-country region. Prime Minister Rajapaksa and I also discussed the humanitarian issue of fishermen. This theme directly affects the livelihood of the people of both countries. And therefore, we agree to continue Constructive and Humanitarian Approach on this issue.

Friends,

In Sri Lanka, we spoke openly on issues related to reconciliation. I am confident that the Government of Sri Lanka will realize the expectations of the Tamil people for equality, justice, peace, and respect within a united Sri Lanka. For this, it will be necessary to carry forward the process of reconciliation with the implementation of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka.

Friends,

I once again warmly welcome Prime Minister Rajapaksa to India. I am confident that his visit will strengthen the friendship and multi-dimensional cooperation of India and Sri Lanka. At the same time, cooperation between the two countries for regional peace and stability will also increase.

Bohoma Sthuti,
Nandri,
Thank you.

VRRK/AK

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