

PM Modi's Landmark Visit to Sri Lanka - Strengthening Strategic, Economic & Cultural Ties

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India - Sri Lanka Ties Latest News

- PM Narendra Modi, **on a 3-day state visit to Sri Lanka**, held high-level talks with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and oversaw the **signing of 7 MoUs across key sectors**, further strengthening **India - Sri**

Lanka ties.

- The visit also marked a **significant diplomatic gesture** as Sri Lanka conferred the prestigious **Mithra Vibhushana** medal on PM Modi – the highest such honour for a foreign leader.

High-Level Engagements between India and Sri Lanka

- **Delegation-level talks in Colombo:** Reviewed progress under the “Joint Vision for a Shared Future” (from Dissanayake’s previous visit to India).
- **Defence and strategic cooperation:**
 - Landmark **India-Sri Lanka Defence Pact** signed to bolster strategic and maritime cooperation.
 - Sri Lanka **reassured India** that its **territory won’t be used against India’s security interests**.
 - **PM Modi welcomed this assurance as a testament to the deep trust and strategic alignment between the two neighbours.**
 - Seen as a **counterbalance** to Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Energy, digital, trade and development cooperation:**
 - **Energy:** Development of Trincomalee as an energy hub.
 - **Clean energy:** Sampur Solar Power Project inaugurated virtually.
 - **Digital infrastructure**, healthcare, trade facilitation, and regional development were focus areas.
 - **Eastern province framework** for Indian grant assistance signed.
- **Economic support and regional stability:**
 - **India’s crisis-time support acknowledged:** India provided **\$4.5 billion** assistance during Sri Lanka’s economic crisis. Support included **credit lines, food and fuel aid**.
 - Discussions included **debt restructuring and a proposed currency swap agreement** for macroeconomic stability.
- **Tech support:**
 - India provided ₹300 crore grant to support **Sri Lanka’s Digital Identity Project**.
 - Focus on **collaboration in digitalization across multiple domains** including governance, services, and financial inclusion.

Symbolism in India-Sri Lanka Engagement

- **First visits:** Dissanayake’s first foreign visit was to India, and now Modi is his first foreign guest in Sri Lanka.
- **Symbolic diplomacy:**
 - **Historic welcome at Independence Square:** First foreign leader to receive a ceremonial reception at Colombo’s Independence Square.
 - PM Modi received Sri Lanka’s highest honour for a foreign leader (22nd international award for PM Modi).
 - **Reflects commitment** to regional cooperation, Buddhist heritage, cultural revival, and spiritual diplomacy.
- **Symbolic visits – Anuradhapura visit and IPKF memorial:**
 - Modi to inaugurate India-funded development projects in Anuradhapura.
 - Scheduled to lay a wreath at the IPKF Memorial, honouring Indian peacekeepers from the 1980s.

China's Expanding Footprint - A Strategic Concern

- **Chinese investments and influence in Sri Lanka:** Sri Lanka has received \$3.7 billion from China to develop infrastructure, including:
 - A new oil refinery in Hambantota.
 - Expansion of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects.
- **Hambantota port - A security flashpoint:**
 - **Leased to China for 99 years** after loan defaults.
 - **Used by Chinese surveillance vessels** like Yuan Wang 5, raising India's maritime security concerns.
 - Sri Lanka continues to allow Chinese vessels to dock under "replenishment" claims.

India-Sri Lanka Ties - A Strategic Recalibration Amidst China's Growing Influence

- **A reset in military ties:**
 - **For the first time**, India and Sri Lanka signed an umbrella Defence MoU.
 - It will **structure and expand existing defence initiatives** across maritime security, intelligence sharing, and strategic collaboration.
 - **It marks a strategic reset after decades of cautious ties post-IPKF withdrawal (late 1980s).**
 - Seen as a response to **China's rising influence in the Indian Ocean** region.
- **Support for continental shelf claim:**
 - President Dissanayake requested India's technical support for presenting Sri Lanka's claim to the **UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS)**.
 - This involves **extending maritime boundaries** beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Conclusion

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2025 visit to Sri Lanka **marks a watershed moment** in India-Sri Lanka relations, reflecting a strategic recalibration amidst evolving regional geopolitics.
- The conferment of the Mithra Vibhushana medal on PM Modi **symbolizes the cultural and diplomatic warmth** between the two nations.
- At a time when China's influence in the Indian Ocean is expanding, **India's proactive outreach** reasserts its **Neighbourhood First policy and the SAGAR** (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine.

India - Sri Lanka Ties FAQs

Q1. What is the strategic significance of the Defence MoU signed between India and Sri Lanka in 2025?

Ans. The 2025 Defence MoU institutionalizes bilateral security cooperation, marking a significant step in countering Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean region.

Q2. How does Sri Lanka's assurance regarding its territory relate to India's security concerns?

Ans. Sri Lanka's assurance that its territory and surrounding waters will not be used against India's interests directly addresses New Delhi's apprehensions over Chinese maritime activities, especially near the Hambantota Port.

Q3. Explain the relevance of PM Modi being conferred the 'Mithra Vibhushana' medal by Sri Lanka.

Ans. The 'Mithra Vibhushana' medal, Sri Lanka's highest honour for a foreign leader, symbolizes deep bilateral trust and acknowledges India's consistent support and cultural affinity.

Q4. Discuss how PM Modi's visit to Sri Lanka reflects India's Neighbourhood First and SAGAR doctrines.

Ans. The visit exemplifies India's commitment to regional stability and maritime security under the Neighbourhood First and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policies.

Q5. Why is China's role in Sri Lanka viewed with concern by India?

Ans. China's control of strategic infrastructure like the Hambantota Port and increased military-linked activities near India's southern coast pose sovereignty and security challenges for India.

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