

It is nearly 2500 years since India and Sri Lanka have shared a friendly relationship which has consistently evolved over time. Historical and traditional ties have transformed into diplomatic and political ties with shared principles of democracy, freedom and an independent constitution. Even after independence, the sister countries remained incredibly close and enjoyed a strong-cherishing relationship. But later on, India and Sri Lanka have sporadically faced tensions in their bilateral relationship due to differences in the geopolitical interests of both countries and rising political and social conflicts. But in spite of these fallbacks, a sense of a deeper connection still prevails. The lookout for rejuvenating that bond from the shackles of a disputed past has been activated quite actively since the Modi Government came to power. Yet again, on the 6th of August, a telephonic conversation between the Indian and the Sri Lankan Prime Minister makes the Indian effort to improve ties with Sri Lanka evident.

Thank you PM [@narendramodi](#) for your congratulatory phone call. With the strong support of the people of [#SriLanka](#), I look forward to working with you closely to further enhance the long-standing cooperation between our two countries. Sri Lanka & India are friends & relations. pic.twitter.com/9YPLAQuVIE

— Mahinda Rajapaksa (@PresRajapaksa) [August 6, 2020](#)

The call began on a congratulatory note with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi praising the Sri Lankan PM on successfully and democratically conduct the parliamentary elections. He also celebrated the robust democratic values that the two countries share and appreciated the efforts of both the Sri Lankan government and the citizens of Sri Lanka to make this possible even when the country faces the worst nightmares of the Covid-19 Pandemic. He was all praises for Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and his party Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party which according to the indicators gave an outstanding performance in the elections. The discussion also took to the new International airport built in the Buddhist Pilgrimage site of Kushinagar in India and how it awaited the Sri Lankan visitors to celebrate their faith in Buddhism.

Sri Lanka has been a very important partner for India and the parliamentary elections, that recently took place in Sri Lanka will have a significant impact on the bilateral relations between the two countries. India for a few years post-independence shared excellent ties with Sri Lanka with a booming trade relation, political partnerships and round-the-clock

assistance provided by each other. But somewhere around the 1980s, this close proximity turned into a form of interference and excuses were made on humanitarian grounds justifying the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka. On one hand, India claimed to have been helping the people at the receiving end of the atrocities by the majoritarian section of the population while Sri Lanka stressed that its territorial integrity was compromised by India who employed terrorist activities in Sri Lanka violating international norms. The battle of righteousness between the two powers has been existing since then, and lately have been majorly put to rest not by talks or reaching an understanding, but by tactically leaving it unaddressed.



Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi/
Image source: MEA India

India from an early stage has enjoyed the status of the most favoured economic partner of

Sri Lanka and has also been the largest trade partner to Sri Lanka. Being in a strategically important geographical belt in South Asia and the Indo-pacific region, Sri Lanka has been on the top list of many countries from Japan, US, Australia apart from the obvious challenger to the Indian power in the region, China, to build their trade partnerships. The favourite tag given to India by the Sri Lankans has to be maintained, now more than ever, given the fact that any compromise in this will immediately trigger the encouragement of other lucrative projects by countries which have a specific vested interest in Sri Lanka, mainly China. The proof of the Chinese influence has been witnessed recently when Sri Lanka was forced to give up a crucial Hambantota Port to China in order to cover up the excessive debt it owed to China. While India has repeatedly been quite cautious in taking a stand in the internal political turmoil of Sri Lanka by only stressing on the upholding of democratic values, China has been much more flamboyant in giving its support and taking sides.

The landslide victory of the SLPP has lit a new hope in the direction of better bilateral ties between the two countries, who could work conclusively toward important issues they face collectively. Lately, India had agreed to the request of aid by the Sri Lankan Prime Minister to face the challenges posed by COVID- 19 by allowing a currency swap facility worth 400 million dollars. Other forms of developmental aid are also being deliberated upon by the Indian side to be given to Sri Lanka which includes projects like Housing, school infrastructure and rainwater harvesting systems. To keep China away from swaying a country in which India has a lot at stake, India has drawn out a chalk plan of the list of various development projects, a lot of them being of a grant-based nature, to boost ties with Sri Lanka. With a stable government in the Parliament with a good majority, the projects that are taken up can be completed quickly and efficiently. The risk is at its optimum now. India has to look at its relationship with Sri Lanka, not with the lens of competition, but with the lens of cooperation. A mutually beneficial partnership, in the long run, will come to the service of both the countries to fight against the injustices of the world, the start of which should begin now.

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