



**KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY**  
Only IAS Academy by Grandson of "Perunthalsivam Kamarajar"

# INDIA-SRILANKA RELATIONS

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## Introduction to INDIA-SRILANKA RELATIONS

India and Sri Lanka share a relationship rooted in geography, history, culture, religion, and economics. Their proximity across the Palk Strait has fostered centuries of interaction through trade, migration, Buddhism, and linguistic-cultural exchanges. Post-independence, both countries have developed close political, economic, and strategic ties, though the relationship has also witnessed periods of strain due to issues like the Tamil ethnic question, fishermen disputes, and geopolitical rivalries in the Indian Ocean.

In recent decades, India has emerged as one of Sri Lanka's largest trading partners, development assistance providers, and humanitarian supporters, particularly visible during the 2004 tsunami, the 2009 post-war reconstruction, and the 2022 economic crisis. At the same time, Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) makes it vital for India's "Neighbourhood First" policy and maritime security initiatives such as SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

## Importance of INDIA - SRILANKA RELATIONS

### nEconomic Lifeline & Crisis Support

India played an indispensable role in Sri Lanka's economic recovery post-2022 crisis—providing nearly USD 4 billion in aid, including lines of credit for food, fuel, and essential imports, as well as currency swaps and loan deferments.

### nStrategic Maritime & Security Partner

Sri Lanka's position along key Indian Ocean routes makes it critical to India's maritime security. Through joint naval exercises like SLINEX-25 (August 2025) and capacity-building initiatives (e.g., MRCC and surveillance aircraft), India ensures stability in the region.

### nAdvancing Energy Security & Infrastructure

The development of a 120 MW solar plant in Trincomalee, grid connectivity agreements, and a multi-product energy hub initiative involving India, UAE, and Sri Lanka, illustrate deepening cooperation in energy infrastructure.

### nConnectivity & People-to-People Bonds

The resumption of the Cheriyanpatti ferry service (since October 2023) between Nagapattinam and Kankesanthurai revitalizes people-to-people ties after decades.

### nCultural, Religious & Civilizational Ward

Shared roots—Buddhism, Hinduism—and initiatives such as temple restorations, exhibit of Buddha relics during Vesak, as well as housing and cultural centres, highlight deep civilizational bonds.

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## **nStrategic Counterbalance to Regional Influence**

India's proactive engagements—economic alongside defense cooperation—serve to balance growing Chinese influence (e.g., Hambantota port, Chinese investments), reinforcing regional strategic equilibrium.

## **nShared Regional Frameworks & Cooperation**

Both nations collaborate extensively in regional groupings—like BIMSTEC, SAARC, IORA, and through Colombo Security Conclave—to address shared challenges and foster regional integration

## **Challenges in INDIA-SRILANKA RELATIONS**

**IFishermen Disputes & Maritime Boundary Tensions:** The recurring arrests of Tamil Nadfishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy near the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) remain a persistent issue, with dozens detained and boats seized in recent months. Tamil Nadfishers continue their protests, including hunger strikes and “rail roko” actions, demanding their release and livelihood protection.

**Illegal Fishing & Fishery Resource Depletion:** Bottom trawling and other unsustainable fishing techniques by some Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan waters deplete marine stocks and aggravate bilateral tensions. Sri Lanka strictly enforces its bans and responds through naval action.

**IGeopolitical Competition & Chinese Influence:** China's lease of Hambantota Port and other strategic investments (e.g., oil refinery deals) have accelerated Sri Lanka's growing economic dependence on Beijing, creating unease in New Delhi over regional influence.

**IPolitical Realignment & Anti-India Sentiment:** Sri Lanka's newly elected President Anura Kumara Disanayake has indicated a shift away from India, reviewing previously signed projects—most notably the wind energy PPA with India's Adani Group—citing concerns over transparency and sovereignty.

**IDomestic Political Pressures & Regional Influences:** In India, Tamil Nadu's political concerns (especially regarding fishermen) heavily shape foreign policy. Conversely, Sri Lanka's leftist or nationalist factions often stir anti-India sentiment, complicating stable engagement.

**IRegional Maritime Strategy Frictions:** Concerns over foreign—particularly Chinese—research and naval vessel activity in Sri Lankan ports feed into regional strategic anxiety, limiting India's maritime security coordination and increasing suspicion.

## **Measures taken to improve relations between two countries**

### **IStrategic Energy Cooperation & Infrastructure Development**

An agreement among India, Sri Lanka, and the UAE to develop an energy hub in Trincomalee reflects deepening strategic collaboration. This includes a multi-product pipeline, bunkering facilities, and possible refinery development. Business-level talks are ongoing under a joint committee.

### **IRenewable Energy Projects & Debt Relief**

During Prime Minister Modi's state visit, India launched a 120 MW solar power plant in eastern Sri Lanka and a solar rooftop initiative across 5,000 religious sites. These were supported by USD 17 million in credit assistance.

### **IDefence Diplomacy & Security**

India and Sri Lanka signed a five-year Defence MoU, providing a framework for joint exercises, maritime surveillance, and defence industry collaboration. The SLINEX-25 naval exercise (August 14–18, 2025) was

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successfully conducted in Colombo, showcasing interoperability and maritime cooperation through joint operations involving special forces and naval assets.

### **ICultural & Civilizational Diplomacy**

The Jaffna Cultural Centre, inaugurated in February 2023, stands as a prominent symbol of India's cultural engagement—featuring an auditorium, digital library, amphitheater, and conference facilities. Additionally, India will send Buddha relics from Gujarat to Sri Lanka for display during Vesak Day 2025, underlining shared Buddhist heritage.

### **IConnectivity & People-to-People Links**

The HSC Cheriyanani ferry service (Nagapattinam–Kankesanthurai) resumed in October 2023 after 40 years, reinvigorating direct people-to-people contact and regional connectivity. It resumed operations again in August 2024 after a hiatus.

### **Way forward**

India–Sri Lanka relations embody a unique blend of geography, history, and strategic interdependence. While challenges like fishermen disputes, political sensitivities, and external influences persist, the trajectory remains positive with growing cooperation in energy, defence, connectivity, and cultural diplomacy. By reinforcing trust, transparency, and mutual respect, the partnership can evolve into a model of regional stability and prosperity, aligning with India's Neighbourhood First and SAGAR visions.