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Prime Minister's Media Statement during visit to Sri Lanka

March 13, 2015

Your Excellency Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, President of Sri Lanka,
Members of the media,

I am delighted to be in Sri Lanka, in this beautiful city of Colombo.

I have eagerly looked forward to visiting one of our closest neighbours and a nation with which we share so much.

I am truly honoured by your warm welcome and friendship.

I am conscious of the significance of this visit. It is the first standalone bilateral visit to Sri Lanka by an Indian Prime Minister since 1987.

Last month, President Sirisena honoured us by making India his first foreign visit as President. I am glad to be here so soon.

This is how it should be between neighbours. We should meet regularly.

It helps us understand each other better; find solutions to mutual concerns; and, move our relationship forward.

That is what we achieved in my meetings with President Sirisena today.

Economic ties are a key pillar of our relationship.

The progress we have made reflects our shared commitment to stronger economic cooperation.

Our trade has seen impressive growth over the past decade. I am aware of your concerns about trade with India. As I said in Delhi, we will try and address them.

The agreement today on cooperation between our customs authorities is a step in that direction. It will simplify trade and reduce non-tariff barriers on both sides.

We are not just looking at addressing problems. We are also focusing on new opportunities.

Today, Lanka IOC and Ceylon Petroleum Corporation have agreed to jointly develop the Upper Tank Farm of the China Bay Installation in Trincomalee on mutually agreed terms.

A Joint Task Force will be constituted soon to work out the modalities. India stands ready to help Trincomalee become a regional petroleum hub.

I also look forward to early commencement of work on the ground in the Sampur Coal Power Project. This landmark project would meet Sri Lanka's energy needs.

The ocean economy is a new frontier that holds enormous promise for both of us. It is a priority for our two countries. Our decision to set up a Joint Task Force on Ocean Economy is a significant step, especially because of our proximity.

People are at the heart of our relations. We have taken a number of decisions to encourage people to people contacts, improve connectivity, and increase tourism.

We will extend the facility of "Tourist Visa on Arrival - Electronic Travel Authorization" Scheme to Sri Lankan citizens from the Sinhala and Tamil New Year on 14 April 2015.

Air India will soon start direct flights between New Delhi and Colombo.

We will cooperate in developing a Ramayana Trail in Sri Lanka and a Buddhist Circuit in India.

We will organize a Festival of India in Sri Lanka later this year. Sri Lanka is where Buddhism has truly flourished. We will be organizing an exhibition showcasing our Buddhist heritage as part of this festival.

The Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in youth affairs is an important long term investment in our relationship.

India is privileged/ to be a development partner for Sri Lanka.

We will provide a fresh Line of Credit of up to US\$ 318 million for the railways sector. This will be used to procure rolling stock, and to restore and upgrade existing railway track.

We are pleased to provide assistance for the construction of the Rabindranath Tagore auditorium at Ruhuna University in Matara.

Tomorrow, I will visit, some of the projects, being financed by India, including the housing project. I am pleased that more than 27,000 houses have already been built.

The Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka have agreed to enter into a Currency Swap Agreement of US\$ 1.5 billion. This will help keep the Sri Lankan rupee stable.

We discussed the fishermen's issue. This complex issue involves livelihood and humanitarian concerns on

both sides. We should handle it from this perspective. At the same time, we need to find a long term solution to this issue.

It is also important that fishermen's associations of India and Sri Lanka meet at the earliest to find a mutually acceptable arrangement. It can then be taken forward by both governments.

I also took this opportunity to convey our admiration for President Srinisena's efforts to build an inclusive future for Sri Lanka.

I conveyed our sincere support and good wishes for Sri Lanka's new journey of peace, reconciliation and progress.

We stand with you in your efforts to build a future that accommodates the aspirations of all sections of society, including the Sri Lankan Tamil community, for a life of equality, justice, peace and dignity in a united Sri Lanka.

We believe that early and full implementation of the 13th Amendment and going beyond it would contribute to this process.

I also conveyed India's commitment to further strengthening our partnership in advancing peace and prosperity in our region, including our common maritime neighbourhood.

I would like to once again thank President Sirisena for the warm welcome and hospitality.

The meeting today has been very productive. It gives me great confidence and optimism about the future of our relations.

Thank you.



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