



Ministry of External Affairs

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Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the Dinner hosted by Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka in Colombo

March 06, 2015

Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka and my dear friend Mr. Mangala Samaraweera,
Hon'ble Governor of Eastern Province
Hon'ble Members of Council of Minister
Hon'ble Members of Parliament
Distinguished Guests

I am pleased to be in Sri Lanka. This is my first visit as External Affairs Minister of India. But Sri Lanka is not new to me. I have been here many times. I visited this beautiful country last in April 2012 as Leader of the Opposition leading an all-party Parliamentary delegation.

At the outset, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Sri Lanka and Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka for the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation.

Today is Holi. As you know Holi is the Festival of Colors and celebrated in India with joyous abandon. The festival symbolizes the advent of spring, and is harbinger of joy, hope and fulfillment - a reflection of the current state of our bilateral relations. Holi also reflects the diversity and multi-cultural heritage of India.

The past year has been remarkable in the history of both our countries. People in both the countries have voted for change. This has brought new momentum to the bilateral relationship.

Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera was kind enough to accept my invitation to visit India within a week after the new government was sworn-in. We had a very useful interaction in New Delhi on January 18.

His Excellency President Maithripala Sirisena visited India from February 15 to 18. It was a successful visit. Our countries signed four agreements and MoUs. Prime Minister announced a reduction of entry fees for Sri Lankan citizens visiting the National Museum to pay homage to the Kapilvastu relics. He also accepted President Sirisena's invitation to visit Sri Lanka.

My visit to Sri Lanka is part of the high-level engagement with the new Government of Sri Lanka. It also gives us an opportunity to close the gaps prior to the visit of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. He is

scheduled to visit Sri Lanka on March 13 and 14. As you are aware, the visit is the first bilateral visit of a Prime Minister of India since 1987.

Friends, India and Sri Lanka are bound by ties of history, geography and culture. Our partnership must therefore, progress in the spirit of being the closest of neighbors and friends, whose destinies are intertwined.

Let me raise a toast for India-Sri Lanka friendship and the well being and prosperity of the peoples of the two countries.

Thank you.



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