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Visit of External Affairs Minister to Sri Lanka (February 5-6, 2016)

February 06, 2016

1. Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of India, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, led an inter-ministerial delegation to Colombo from February 5-6, 2016 for the 9th Session of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Commission. She co-chaired the Joint Commission meeting on February 5, 2016 with Hon'ble Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, Mr. Mangala Samaraweera. The Joint Commission meeting, which was held after a gap of three years, reviewed the progress and developments in bilateral relations since the 8th Session held on January 22, 2013.
2. Minister Swaraj's visit continued the momentum of high level visits in 2015, including the visit of H. E. Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, President of Sri Lanka to India in February 2015, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi's visit to Sri Lanka in March 2015 and the visit of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, to India in September 2015. Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka visited India in January 2015 while Minister Swaraj visited Sri Lanka in March 2015 prior to the visit of the Prime Minister of India.
3. The Joint Commission acknowledged the depth, intensity and uniqueness of the multifaceted India-Sri Lanka relations encompassing all spheres and founded upon civilizational and close people-to-people linkages.
4. Discussions took stock of the preparations underway on both sides to begin negotiations on the Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement. Preliminary discussions had been held during the 4th Commerce Secretary level talks in New Delhi on December 21, 2015. India will be holding a workshop in early March in Colombo on Non-Tariff Barriers (NTB) and Phytosanitary Barriers (PTB) regulations and procedures. Cognizance was taken of the reconstitution of the CEOs Forum on either side and the proposals from the Export Promotion Board of Sri Lanka for increasing trade linkages.
5. The Joint Commission discussed ways to further collaboration in various projects that have been under discussion, including the upgradation of Palali Airport, infrastructure development at Kankasanturai Port, Sampur power plant and a Special Economic Zone in Trincomalee, etc.
6. In the sector of tourism, the second meeting of the Joint Working Group on Tourism will be held in mid 2016 to take forward the collaboration on establishing the Ramayana Trail in Sri Lanka and the Buddhist Circuit in South Asia.

7. The Joint Commission urged early signing of the revised Air Services Agreement that has been pending since September 2013. Both sides agreed to enhance cooperation in the aviation sector, including in areas of aeronautical search and rescue, capacity building and training and use of the Indian satellite system GAGAN.
8. Sri Lanka is to propose dates for the meeting to take forward cooperation on the Oil Tank Farms in Trincomalee. Sri Lanka also invited a delegation from ONGC Videsh and Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas of India.
9. Renewable energy cooperation was identified as a promising area for further cooperation. A delegation from the Indian Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is expected to visit Sri Lanka in the coming months. India thanked Sri Lanka for having endorsed the "Solar Alliance".
10. It was agreed that the Indian Minister for Railways would undertake a visit to further enhance the excellent cooperation already underway in the railway sector through Lines of Credit extended by India.
11. The Joint Commission discussions included a detailed assessment of the development cooperation projects between the two countries. The Indian housing project for construction and repair of 50,000 houses was reviewed. The Joint Commission expressed satisfaction over the completion of 44,000 houses and noted that construction is expected to commence shortly for construction of the remaining 4,000 houses in Uva and Central Provinces.
12. The Joint Commission felt that the Small Development Projects (SDP) scheme had been an excellent model for the development partnership between India and Sri Lanka, and noted that the bilateral MoU in this regard had been renewed in September 2015. Projects under the SDP model include establishment of Civil and Mechanical Engineering Complex in Kilinochchi Campus of University of Jaffna; Skill Development Centre of the Faculty of Agriculture in Kilinochchi Campus of University of Jaffna; construction of Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Auditorium at the University of Ruhuna; construction of Mahatma Gandhi International Centre in Matale; establishment of English Language Labs in all the nine provinces of Sri Lanka; renovation of Duraipah Stadium in Jaffna; and renovation of Child Development Centres in the plantation areas. The Joint Commission also reviewed prominent non-SDP projects such as the construction of the Jaffna Cultural Centre on grant basis and the water supply projects amounting to nearly US\$ 475 million to be undertaken by Indian companies under the Buyers' Credit Scheme of EXIM Bank of India. The Sri Lankan side requested the Government of India to undertake more projects under the SDP model. Following the conclusion of the talks, two new SDP MoUs were signed on renovation of infrastructure in 27 prioritized schools in the Northern Province and the construction of a surgical unit and supply of medical equipment at the teaching hospital in Batticaloa.
13. The Programme on Cultural Cooperation for 2015-18 was reviewed. The Joint Commission also took stock of the Festival of India "Sangam" as a celebration of the shared civilizational heritage between the two countries.
14. Cooperation in the sector of education was assessed, including the scholarships available to Sri Lankan students to pursue under-graduate, masters, Ph.d degrees in Indian universities, ITEC scholarships, Sri Lankan requirements for additional courses and seats and the potential to set up campuses in Sri Lanka by Indian institutions of excellence.

15. The Joint Commission encouraged early convening of the Joint Committee for Science and Technology related cooperation and the extension of the Programme of Cooperation which had expired in 2014.
16. Sri Lanka is part of the Agreement on Orbital Coordination of Satellite for SAARC region. Both sides stressed the importance of institutional linkages in the important area of space technology applications. It was agreed that a delegation from ISRO would meet its counterpart in Sri Lanka to identify specific areas of cooperation.
17. Both countries agreed to encourage and facilitate collaboration and interaction in the agriculture sector and expedite implementation of the Work Plan agreed to under the MoU entered into in 2015.
18. Defence cooperation has been a key area of long standing cooperation between India and Sri Lanka. The Joint Commission encouraged further intensification of cooperation through the several defence related mechanisms already in place.
19. The Joint Commission acknowledged the importance of cooperation in counter terrorism and agreed on the need for the two countries to work together.
20. Sri Lanka appreciated Indian development assistance for construction of state-of-the-art 150 bed hospital in Dickoya, Hatton, construction of 200 bed ward complex and supply of medical equipment to District Hospital, Vavuniya, supply of medical equipment to District Hospitals of Jaffna, Killinochchi and Mullaithivu. The two sides noted with satisfaction the successful implementation and review of the projects and the progress of ongoing projects in the health sector.
21. The Indian Government's grant assistance for setting up and operation of the emergency ambulance services in the Western and Southern Provinces of Sri Lanka was also appreciated. The two sides further discussed areas of cooperation in the health sector: private sector investments, traditional medicine, training opportunities, etc.
22. The Joint Commission acknowledged the ancient and well-established systems of traditional medicine in India and Sri Lanka, and encouraged collaboration in this area.
23. The Joint Commission emphasized the importance of close links between the elected representatives of both countries. In this context, Sri Lanka welcomed the invitation from the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training for a ten member delegation from the Sri Lankan Parliament to visit India in end March 2016.
24. Both sides agreed to find a permanent solution to the fishermen issue. In this regard, the Sri Lankan Fisheries Minister was invited to visit India. The invitation was accepted.
25. Altogether, a calendar of over a dozen meetings over the next few months was discussed. 2016 was seen as the year of implementation of the potential identified during 2015.
26. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka and the External Affairs Minister of India agreed to schedule the 10th Joint Commission meeting in February 2017 in India.
27. On February 6, 2016, Minister Swaraj inaugurated the exhibition "Rise of Digital India" at the BMICH, which showcases advances made by India in the information technology and the digital revolution over the years.

28. During her visit, Minister Swaraj called on H.E. Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, President of Sri Lanka; Hon'ble Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, and H.E. Ms. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, former President of Sri Lanka. She also met Hon'ble Leader of Opposition, Mr. R. Sampanthan, as well as representatives of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress and Indian Origin Tamil parties.

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