

Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, paid an official visit to India on August 25-26, 2005 , at the invitation of the External Affairs Minister of India, Shri K. Natwar Singh.

This is the first visit abroad by Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, after assuming the office of Foreign Minister on 22nd August. The fact that Foreign Minister Bandaranakike chose India as his first destination, bears ample testimony to the value attached by India and by Sri Lanka to their bilateral relationship.

In New Delhi, Foreign Minister Bandaranaike met Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh. He also called on Smt. Sonia Gandhi, Chairperson, UPA. During these meetings broad ranging and useful discussions were held about bilateral links and other issues of bilateral and mutual concern.

Both sides expressed satisfaction at the excellent state of their bilateral relationship which is characterized by frequent high level contacts and chose understanding at the political level; growing trade and commerce; expanding infrastructural linkages; and increasing people-to-people contacts. The determination of the two countries to expand and strengthen their multi-faceted relationship and cooperation was reiterated.

Particular satisfaction was expressed concerning the economic dynamism of the relationship, with bilateral trade now close to US\$ 2 billion annually. It was noted there this is good progress in the technical level talks to deepen and widen the India – Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement into a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement.

Apart from a review of bilateral relations, the Indian leadership was also briefed on the latest developments in the peace process in Sri Lanka. India maintains an abiding interest in the security of Sri Lanka and remains committed to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. India would welcome a resolution of the current impediments in the peace process and an early resumption of negotiations leading to a final settlement, which is within the framework of the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, while respecting the democratic freedoms and fundamental rights of all her citizens.

The brutal assassination of former Sri Lanka Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar was condemned in the strongest possible terms. It is hoped that the perpetrators of this terrorist act will be brought to justice as such violations of the ceasefire undermine the prospects for peace.

As two of the oldest democracies in Asia, both sides expressed the view that the electoral process scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka later this year should be conducted in an atmosphere free from violence and terror.

The discussions also reaffirmed the convergence of views between the two countries on a range of international issues including the fight against the terrorism. The two sides reaffirmed their commitments to working together for early conclusion of a comprehensive convention against international terrorism at the United Nations.

New Delhi

26 August 2005