

Written by Administrator

Monday, 29 November 2010 10:20

Hon'ble Prof. G.L. Peiris, Minister of External Affairs Distinguished Members of the two delegations Ladies & Gentlemen of the Media Friends I have just concluded very useful and productive discussions with Hon'ble Minister Peiris on the various items on the agenda of the seventh session of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Commission. Let me, at the very outset, express my sincere gratitude to Minister Peiris and his government for the warmth and gracious hospitality that has been extended to me and to my colleagues and the excellent arrangements made for my visit.

The Joint Commission discussions covered all areas of bilateral relevance, including trade, services and investment, development cooperation, science and technology, culture and education. The sheer breadth of our engagement today, as is reflected in the Joint Commission discussions, is testimony to the fact that our relations have greatly diversified with the passage of time. The visits of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in 2008 and His Excellency President Rajapaksa in June and October this year have undoubtedly given our relations a fillip. Our relations are poised to develop further in an all round manner.

Earlier this morning, I was honoured to meet His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa. We witnessed the signing of the credit agreement for \$416.39 million for the Northern Railway construction project. I am also happy to announce that work on the Northern Railway Line will commence soon with the inauguration scheduled for tomorrow

Prof. Peiris and I have also just witnessed the exchange of Instruments of Ratification of the Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners and of the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty. This brings into effect these two important agreements between our two countries.

To build on the vibrant and multi-faceted partnership between our two countries, it is important that we leverage our common strategic interests, further enhance connectivity and economic engagement, and promote people-to-people contacts. The opening of our Consulates in Hambantota and Jaffna, which will take place over today and tomorrow, is a significant milestone in this quest. In this connection, we also expect to resume ferry services between Colombo and Tuticorin and Talaimannar and Rameswaram soon, an agreement on which has been finalized.

The project for the construction of 50,000 houses for IDPs in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and also for estate workers in the Central Provinces will be an enduring symbol of India-Sri Lanka partnership. This morning, we witnessed an Exchange of Letters on the pilot phase of this project, which also took place in the presence of His Excellency President Rajapaksa. Tomorrow, through a ground-breaking ceremony in Jaffna, we will be signalling the commencement of this project.

Remarks by Minister S.M. Krishna to the media after the Signing of Agreed Minutes of the Joint Commission

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The cessation of hostilities in Sri Lanka in May last year provides a historic opportunity to address all outstanding issues related to rehabilitation as well as a political settlement in a spirit of understanding and mutual accommodation. It is our hope that a structured dialogue mechanism to work towards this end will be launched soon. We have been assured that it is the intention of the Sri Lankan Government to resettle the Internally Displaced Persons by the end of this year.

I also took this opportunity to emphasise on the need to adhere to the October 2008 understanding on fishing arrangements arrived at between the two countries, which has had a salutary effect on the incidence of fishermen's arrests and on their safety. We agreed that the joint Working Group on Fishing should meet soon.

With the tone that has been set in my discussions today, I have no doubt that India-Sri Lanka relations are poised to fully take advantage of the opportunities open before us. I have told Minister Peiris that I look forward to receiving him in New Delhi at his convenience to take forward our bilateral discussions.

Thank you.