

**Remarks by
Hon. Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, MP.,
Prime Minister of Sri Lanka**

**Civic Reception hosted by the India Foundation
3 p.m., 18 October, ITC Maurya, New Delhi**

Hon. Shri Ramnath Kovind
Former President of India

Hon. Shri Hardeep Puri
Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas of the Government of India

Dr. Ram Madhav
President of the India Foundation

Shri Jayanth Sinha,

Honourable Members of the Governing Council

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear Friends of Sri Lanka

Ayubowan (which in Sri Lanka means May You Live Long)
Vanakkam
Namaskar

It is a great pleasure and honour to be here this afternoon at this Civic Reception organised by the India Foundation, an institution that is respected for its thoughtful contributions to policy discourse and fostering dialogue on a range of issues of contemporary relevance. The Foundation's commitment to building bridges of understanding and cooperation across nations, peoples, and continents, is admirable.

I am grateful to the India Foundation and its leadership, in particular Shri Suresh Prabhu and Dr. Ram Madhav-ji for hosting me, and for their persistent dedication to strengthening India – Sri Lanka relations and understanding at all levels.

I want to convey my special appreciation to Shri Hardeep Puri and Shri Ramnath Kovind for taking the time to be here today. Thank you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The relationship between India and Sri Lanka is not one that can be measured merely in diplomatic terms or trade statistics. Ours is a relationship that stretches back over two millennia, rooted in shared civilizational values, cultural heritage, and spiritual traditions.

When Emperor Ashoka sent his son and daughter to Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE, they brought with them not just the Teachings of the Buddha, but also a sapling of the sacred Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. It remains even today as a living symbol of the eternal connection between our two countries and our peoples across millennia. The sacred tree in Anuradhapura, which Prime Minister Modi-ji visited and venerated twice during his visits to Sri Lanka is a testament to the depth and continuity of our bonds.

Our languages, our literature, our art, our architecture – all bear witness to centuries of continuous exchange and mutual enrichment. From the ancient ports of the Indian Ocean to the philosophical debates in our monastic universities, our histories have been intertwined in profound and meaningful ways.

While we draw strength from our civilizational heritage, our relationship today is equally defined by cooperation in areas of contemporary relevance and shared aspirations for the future. India and Sri Lanka are not just neighbours separated by a narrow ocean strait. We are partners invested in each other's prosperity, security, and well-being.

I believe that my visit to Delhi and this gathering today comes at a time when India – Sri Lanka relations are at its best.

President Anura Kumara Disanayaka's visit to India in December 2024 was his first visit overseas since being elected President. The discussions during that visit led to the adoption of the Joint Statement titled “**Fostering Partnerships for a Shared Future**” – a forward-looking blueprint that sets out multifaceted cooperation incorporating energy, digital, economic, and people-to-people connectivity under a shared vision.

In April this year, **Prime Minister Modi visited Sri Lanka**. He was the first Foreign Head of Government to be received by President Disanayaka. The visit advanced the blueprint from principle to practice – inaugurating solar power initiatives, advancing energy grid interconnection, and defence cooperation, and reinforcing our shared commitment to peace and stability in the Indian Ocean Region.

The visit was also an opportunity for us to confer Sri Lanka's highest honour on a foreign leader – **Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana** – on Prime Minister Modi. This was a demonstration on our part of our gratitude to Prime Minister Modi and the people of India for sustained friendship and partnership including the assistance extended to us during times of difficulty.

Today, India is Sri Lanka's **largest trading partner, largest source of tourism, and a significant investor**. India is a crucial partner in our economic recovery and development.

The India-Sri Lanka **Free Trade Agreement** signed in 1998, which was the first for both our countries, has created significant opportunities for both our economies. We are committed to **deepening our economic partnership** through negotiations on the Economic and Technological Cooperation Agreement which we are hopeful of recommencing soon.

It would be to our **mutual benefit** to explore how Sri Lanka can integrate into India's manufacturing and service sector **value chains**.

As India seeks to position itself as a global manufacturing hub under “**Viksit Bharat**”, perhaps Sri Lanka could serve as a complementary production base, including for industries like textiles, electronics, and food processing.

In an era of rapid **technological change**, we also see immense **potential for cooperation** in the digital economy, renewable energy, healthcare, education, and innovation. India's achievements in these domains are inspiring, and we look forward to learning from and partnering with India in our own developmental journey.

Sri Lanka seeks to develop as a **maritime hub** for the Indian Ocean Region, and Sri Lanka can be a **natural cost-efficient hub for India's export and import trade with the world, using Sri Lanka's deep-water and efficient Ports located in the East-West shipping lanes. Our Ports can continue to be developed further as gateways to India's trade. Being India's closest maritime neighbour, Sri Lanka can be a natural complement and partner to India achieving “Viksit Bharat”**. Enhanced trade routes, and port development can benefit both nations' economic growth objectives.

Indian Ocean Security is something that concerns both our countries, compelling us to continue to collaborate on maritime security, drug trafficking, piracy, regional maritime cooperation, and energy security, particularly renewable energy development for mutual benefit. Common challenges require collective responses.

The India Foundation's work on Indian Ocean issues, including the **Indian Ocean Conference**, reflects an understanding that our region's future depends on collaboration, mutual respect, and adherence to international law. Sri Lanka firmly believes in a free, open, **and inclusive Indian Ocean Region and beyond** where all nations can pursue their legitimate interests in peace and prosperity.

The deep historical and cultural connections between our two countries create opportunities for **enhanced tourism cooperation** and **people-to-people exchanges** supporting economic development on both sides. The **tourism sector in Sri Lanka offers opportunities** from hospitality to infrastructure to creating new and exciting experiences for visitors from around the world.

It is very important that India-Sri Lanka relations, especially in trade and investment must not be seen as a **zero-sum**. It is to the advantage of both countries that the business communities on both sides of the Palk Strait begins to focus on the long-term view, treating Sri Lanka as part of the Indian subcontinent and a common space when it comes to trade and investment.

I want to take this opportunity to extend an **invitation to all of you** to visit and rediscover Sri Lanka.

No bilateral relationship is without its challenges, and ours is no exception. Issues such as the Indian fishermen fishing in Sri Lankan waters and engaging in harmful practices like bottom-trawling is of deep concern to the fishermen in northern Sri Lanka who are regaining their livelihoods after years of conflict. This is a matter that requires sensitive handling and sustainable solutions.

What gives me confidence is that both our governments are committed to addressing these matters through dialogue, with empathy and respect for the livelihoods of our people.

The **mark of a mature relationship** is not the absence of differences, but the ability to manage them constructively. I believe our relationship has achieved that maturity, and our two countries are able to resolve any and all issues in a spirit of friendship and mutual accommodation.

As most of you are aware, my visit to Delhi is also a personal homecoming.

Between 1991 and 1994, I was a student of Sociology at Hindu College, supported by an ICCR scholarship. The classrooms in Delhi taught me as much about society as the city itself through its diversity, its debates, and its deep sense of history.

Something that didn't strike me as deeply then as it does now is India's sense of generosity in choosing to invest in the education of students from different countries including Sri Lanka. India continues to invest in the education of a large number of Sri Lankan students every year including training our civil servants, and military personnel. By educating and empowering our youth and through capacity building, India helps us to strengthen understanding between our peoples and strengthen our institutions which is important for shared growth, peace, and prosperity.

As I stand here today, I am filled with a sense of optimism about the future of Sri Lanka-India relations. Our partnership is built on solid foundations—shared history, cultural affinity, geographical proximity, and converging strategic interests. It is also sustained by the goodwill and warmth of our peoples, who see each other as **friends and relatives rather than mere neighbours**.

As we move forward, we see ourselves as active partners in building a peaceful and prosperous Indian Ocean Region.

This event organised by the India Foundation marks my **final official engagement in India** before returning to Colombo this evening. Over the past three days, I have had the opportunity of engaging with Prime Minister Modi, External Affairs Minister Jaishankar, leaders, thinkers, officials, the diplomatic community, business persons and students. My return to Hindu College, meetings at NITI Aayog, IIT Delhi, and with business chambers and media all reaffirmed that the relationship between India and Sri Lanka is not defined by transactions, but by trust, by people, by ideas, a shared sense of purpose, and the sustained commitment of both India and Sri Lanka to democracy, standing as beacons for South Asia.

So, I leave India, not with a sense of conclusion, but with a sense of beginning. A renewed conviction that our two nations can, and must, shape together, the future we both aspire to.

I express my appreciation once again to the India Foundation for organising this Reception. Think tanks like yours play a vital role in shaping informed public discourse and in strengthening the intellectual foundations of international cooperation.

I also wish to thank the diplomatic community, the media, civil society representatives, political personalities, officials, and all the distinguished guests present here this evening. Your interest and support for Sri Lanka-India relations is deeply valued.

From ancient Anuradhapura – Sri Lanka's first Kingdom and a thriving metropolis in ancient Asia – to modern economic cooperation; from the sacred Bodhi tree to cutting-edge technology partnerships; our relationship continues to evolve, deepen, and flourish. I am confident that the bonds between our nations will grow even stronger in the years to come, contributing not only to the prosperity of our own peoples but also to peace and stability in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond.

Thank you.
Bohoma Sthuthi.
Dhanyavaad.