

Interaction with Representatives of the Chambers of Commerce
2.30 p.m., 16 October 2025

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for arranging this meeting.

As you all know, I carry with me both the responsibility and opportunity of serving as the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education, Higher Education & Vocational Education of Sri Lanka. So, I was keen to use the opportunity of visiting New Delhi to meet representatives dealing with Education Technology, Skilling, AI, and Innovation.

It is our government's firm belief that no nation can advance sustainability without investing in its people – their knowledge, skills, and creativity, to empower and enable them to contribute meaningfully to society and the sustainable development of our country.

For long years since Independence, Sri Lanka has provided education free of charge for all students right up to the completion of their undergraduate studies. Mainly as a result of investments in education and health (we provide free healthcare), Sri Lanka is ranked high in the UNDP's Human Development Index, and ranks highest in South Asia.

However, to sustain our gains and ensure that our students and all citizens acquire skills in keeping with the times, there are areas to be reformed in the education system.

I want to share very briefly, some of the steps that we have taken and intend to take.

- We are tackling inequality within the entire education system in Sri Lanka which is a foundational priority. We believe every child, regardless of geography or background, deserves access to high-quality learning. In order to minimise the disparities existing in the schools, we are modernising infrastructure equitably, digitalising classrooms, revising teacher assignments or workloads and reducing class sizes: primary classes capped at 35 students, secondary at 40. We are shifting the narrative from “prestige by school name” to “quality of learning for every child.”
- We are also reworking on teacher professionalism and capacity. The last curriculum for teacher trainers had stood unchanged for over a decade. We are embarking on an overhaul of teacher education, retraining, continuous professional development especially in the domains of digital pedagogy, AI, STEAM, and competency-based approaches.
- In curriculum and content, we are embedding digital literacy, coding, AI, robotics and climate science into early grades. This will not be as peripheral electives but as foundational literacy. We have inaugurated the National AI Expo and Conference 2025, placed AI at the heart of national strategy, and we are linking education, innovation, cybersecurity, and PPP models under a unified digital agenda. Alongside, we have set ambitious targets: by 2030, to expand Sri Lanka's digital economy to USD 15 billion, with digital exports of USD 5 billion and a skilled workforce of 200,000 professionals.

- We are repositioning skills and vocational training not as fall-back options but as choice pathways. We are building modalities so that from grade 9 onward, students can choose vocational or hybrid tracks aligned with industry demand. We also make the point that this is not reform related to one ministry or one leader but a national mission, demanding collective ownership across provinces, districts, communities, and the private sector.

The aspiration is for Sri Lanka to become a laboratory of inclusive digital transformation powered by human capital, innovation, and partnerships.

We envision:

- A generation of students who see themselves not just as learners but as creators, coders, makers, and problem solvers.
- A bridging of the “school-to-work gap” so that graduates are not forced to chase jobs but are invited into careers and entrepreneurship.
- A national innovation ecosystem: AI hubs, incubators, research partnerships, start-ups solving local problems with global reach.
- A possible India – Sri Lanka model of cooperation: shared platforms, cross-border exchanges, talent mobility, and joint investments in education and tech.

To realise this kind of vision, we need the agility, creativity and capital of industry, especially in India, whose EdTech, skilling, AI and start-up ecosystems are admired and recognised around the world.

So just to share a few thoughts today, I want to ask that you consider exploring the possibility of the following ideas:

1. Indian EdTech firms to co-design and pilot blended learning solutions in Sri Lankan schools particularly in underserved or rural districts. Together, we could possibly localise and scale technology-enhanced curricula in multiple languages.
2. Consider joint vocational and industry-linked programmes, where Indian companies partner with Sri Lankan training centres/universities to develop curriculum, provide internships/ apprenticeships, mentorship and job placements. Create “India – Sri Lanka Skill Camps” and exchange models.
3. Consider collaboration to establish AI & Innovation Hubs across Sri Lanka as nodes for student exposure, mini R&D, project-based learning, incubation and mentorship. Whether Indian firms or institutions could anchor one or more hubs, connect them to your research networks, and run hackathons / exchange programmes.
4. Invest in Sri Lankan start-ups (especially in EdTech, learning analytics, AI for social good). Whether Indian incubators, accelerator programmes and venture funds can partner with Sri Lanka’s new innovation ecosystem to support founders, cross-list, and scale across markets.

If any of these ideas, perhaps, are possibilities, we could consider specifics of what Sri Lanka needs to offer in terms of policy, access, regulations, and other areas.

We must design education and innovation that serve our societies, uplift our citizens, and leave no one behind. We want to consider new ideas and creative partnerships.

I look forward to hearing your ideas.

Thank you very much.