

Remarks by Minister S.M. Krishna at Inauguration of CGI Jaffna

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 30 November 2010 10:31

November 27, 2010

Hon'ble Minister of External Affairs of Sri Lanka,
Hon'ble Governor of the Northern Province
Distinguished Ministers and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to you all for being present here today for the opening of the Consulate General of India in Jaffna.

India's relations with Sri Lanka would be incomplete without highlighting the special relationship that exists between the people of the Northern Province in general, the Jaffna Peninsula in particular and those of southern India.

Over centuries, Jaffna has always stood at the crossroads of history, culture and religion, kings and kingdoms, trade and commerce, and arts, dance and literature. Jaffna port was on the main sea route of its times. One of the great epics of Tamil literature – Manimekalai - has reference to Jaffna. Jaffna's Tamil equivalent – Yaalpanam – itself refers to the mythical harp player from Kanchipuram receiving the land as a royal gift. Tamil intellectuals and scholars from Jaffna like Arumuga Navalar and C.W.Thamodaram Pillai have enriched Tamil literature by their deep understanding and study of ancient Tamil literature. It is, therefore, natural that when India decided to establish a Consulate General, Jaffna was a logical, almost inevitable, place for such a presence.

There must be several in this audience who would have seen the days when there was a direct flight from Palaly to Trichy and a ferry service from Talaimannar to Rameswaram. It is possible that some among you may even have gone off to Chennai – Madras as it was called – only to catch a movie. It's time to revive those links.

Friends,

Sri Lanka has recently come through probably the most difficult period in its history. While the armed conflict that ended last year impacted on all sections of the population of this country, it did so disproportionately on the civilian population of the Northern Province, as innocent men, women and children were caught up in the cross-fire not of their own making. Several thousands of Internally Displaced Persons – held as human shields – came out of the zone of conflict. The challenge before Sri Lanka is to resettle the Internally Displaced Persons and take up the task of rehabilitating and reconstruction of Northern Sri Lanka.

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India has tried to contribute whatever it can to alleviate the miseries and difficulties the people in Northern Province underwent. Initially we rushed food, clothing, medicines and other daily-use articles to the camps. Our emergency field hospital, first in Pulmoddai and later in Menik Farm, which treated more than fifty thousand patients and where Indian doctors carried out more than three thousand surgeries, was a symbol of our solidarity with those who had suffered the worst in the closing stages of the conflict. In recent months, we have extended a helping hand to those who are being resettled in their former places of habitation by providing roofing sheets and cement to help them build transitional shelters and agricultural toolkits to start minimal gardening activities.

We are now looking at the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Northern Province and supplement the efforts of the Sri Lankan Government. Later today, I hope to flag-off, in a ground-breaking ceremony, the Pilot Project for the Government of India-aided housing project under which fifty thousand houses will be built in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka. Earlier this month, India has also begun the process of donating seeds as well as five hundred tractors, with their associated tools and implements, for distribution to agrarian service centres in the Northern Province. We will stay engaged to revive the livelihood of those in the Northern Province and help people rebuild their lives.

Even as we focus on the immediate tasks of relief and rehabilitation, longer term reconstruction is equally important. India will remain committed to this task as well. Later today, I will inaugurate the work to be carried out by an Indian company, IRCON, on the reconstruction of the Northern Railway from Medawachchiya to Madhu. Work will also begin simultaneously on the Madhu-Talaimannar and Omanthai-Pallai railway lines.

As this region returns to peace and normalcy, one of the priorities of the governments of India and Sri Lanka is to resume the old ties and linkages of connectivity that existed between our two countries. With this in view, we have recently completed negotiations on a Memorandum of Understanding on resuming ferry services, both from Colombo to Tuticorin and Talaimannar to Rameswaram. At Talaimannar, the old pier will also be rebuilt. We have started the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Kankesanthurai harbor and restore it as the hub of Jaffna's commercial lifeline. After all, Point Calimere is only forty nautical miles from KKS. We hope the Government of Sri Lanka will develop Palaly as a civil airport and restore its connectivity with India and within Sri Lanka. I am confident that the resumption, in the years to come, of these multiple linkages will not only restore people-to-people contact, but will also give a tremendous fillip to the local economies in our two countries.

To ensure that the cultural heights of Jaffna are indeed revived, the Consulate General of India will assist in setting up the Jaffna Cultural Centre and restore the Duriappa stadium. We are undertaking the restoration of the Thiruketeeswaram temple in Mannar.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The end of armed conflict in Sri Lanka in May 2009 provides Sri Lanka with an unparalleled opportunity to address all outstanding issues in a spirit of understanding and mutual accommodation and to work towards genuine national reconciliation. We are convinced that a meaningful devolution package, building upon the 13th Amendment, would create the necessary conditions for a lasting political settlement. We hope that this process of dialogue and discussion would start soon with the participation of all communities. The ultimate goal is to live in dignity and peace.

Before I conclude, I would like to place on record my deep appreciation for the cooperation extended in the task of the opening of this Consulate General by the Sri Lankan Ministry of External Affairs under the leadership of Prof. Pieris. I would also like to thank the offices of the Governor of the Northern Province and the Government Agent of Jaffna for their facilitation in setting up this post, which, I hope, will continue to receive their cooperation and assistance. I have no doubt that this development holds rich promise for the further flowering of the relations between our two countries.

Thank you.

Jaffna
November 27, 2010