

# Indian PM's visit to Sri Lanka boosts economic and military ties

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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Sri Lanka from April 4 to 6 marks a significant shift in the economic and strategic relations between the two South Asian countries.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake assured Modi of his Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government's full cooperation with New Delhi, a key strategic partner of the US as it ramps up its economic and military confrontation with China.

Modi is the first foreign leader to visit Sri Lanka since Dissanayake assumed office in September. In December, the Sri Lankan president made New Delhi the destination of his first foreign trip.

The right-wing Hindu chauvinist Modi was given a grand welcome in Sri Lanka. He received red-carpet treatment with a 21-gun salute and a ceremonial guard of honour by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces at the Independence Square. Dissanayake conferred the *Mithra Vibhushan* on Modi, Sri Lanka's highest civilian honor for foreign dignitaries.

The top-level Indian delegation included External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, and Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri.

Seven main agreements were signed to strengthen ties in defense, energy, digital infrastructure, health, and trade. Other Memoranda of Understanding focused on Indian assistance for the island's digital transformation, funds for the development of Sri Lanka's Eastern Province and collaboration on health.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has been mired in anti-Indian chauvinism since its establishment in 1966. Its documents branded the hundreds of thousands of Tamil-speaking plantation workers as agents of "Indian expansionism."

In the 1980s, JVP backed the Colombo government's

communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to the hilt. It denounced the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord that introduced Indian peacekeeping troops into the island's North to disarm the LTTE as a betrayal that divided the nation and waged a fascistic campaign against it, killing political opponents, workers and youth who defied its orders.

During the last three decades, the JVP has evolved as a party of the bourgeois establishment amid significant international changes—globalization and the dissolution of Soviet Union. It has developed close relations with the US and other imperialist powers. The JVP/NPP came to power last year pledging big business and international capital to implement the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) savage austerity program.

Speaking in the welcoming ceremony, Dissanayake applauded India's rise as a "world power," not just a regional power. "I have reiterated our position to Prime Minister Modi that Sri Lankan territory will not be allowed to be used by anyone to undermine India's security," he stated.

Modi responded enthusiastically, declaring: "We believe that our security interests are aligned... Our security is interdependent and interconnected." He thanked Dissanayake for his sensitivity towards India's national interests.

Dissanayake is continuing the foreign policy of his predecessor, the discredited US lackey Ranil Wickremesinghe, who visited India in July 2023 and signed a "Joint Vision" agreement, strengthening economic and strategic ties.

In a significant move, Modi and Dissanayake finalized a defense cooperation pact aimed at enhancing maritime security and counterterrorism efforts. The agreement, which is aimed at blocking China's influence in the Indian Ocean, includes joint exercises,

intelligence sharing, training, capacity-building initiatives and high-level exchanges.

The five-year defense cooperation deal can be extended for another three years. The agreement was signed on Saturday after high-level discussions between Modi and Dissanayake. It is the first formal defence pact between the two countries and goes far further than the 1987 Accord.

Both countries agreed to work together on the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) and security cooperation in the Indian Ocean. The CSC was launched in August 2024, during the visit of Indian Security Advisor Ajit Doval to Colombo. Signatories to the agreement are India, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and the Maldives.

Another key agreement involves the building of a 285-km, high-voltage connection between New Madurai in southern India and Mannar in Sri Lanka, which will facilitate trading in power. The link includes 50 km of submarine cables under the Palk Strait and is due to be completed by 2030 at a cost of \$US340–430 million.

New Delhi and Colombo agreed to further enhance energy cooperation. The Sampur Solar Power Project, a joint venture between India's National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) and Sri Lanka's Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), was inaugurated by Modi and Dissanayake.

India, Sri Lanka, and the UAE signed another agreement to develop an energy hub in Trincomalee, a strategic port city in eastern Sri Lanka. The project includes constructing a multi-product pipeline and may use a World War II-era oil tank farm, partly operated by Indian Oil Corporation.

Originally constructed by the British in the early 20th century for strategic purposes, the oil farm sits adjacent to the Trincomalee port—the world's second-deepest natural harbour and regarded as an important geo-strategic asset.

The deal will enhance the Indian presence in Trincomalee and the surrounding area, which is to be developed as an industrial hub with port and logistical facilities. Other port facilities will be constructed at Kankasanthurai in the north.

Modi, who is well aware of the deep economic crisis facing the Dissanayake government, made several token gestures with the aim of building relations with

the Colombo political establishment. He announced the conversion of more than \$100 million in Sri Lankan debt to India into grants as part of the debt restructuring program of Sri Lanka with foreign lenders.

Modi also paid homage to the sacred Sri Maha Bodhi in Anuradhapura, a revered place of worship for Sri Lankan Buddhists. He also announced the supply of solar rooftop systems to 5,000 religious institutions across the island's nine provinces and 25 districts.

Modi's visit took place as US President Trump announced sweeping "reciprocal" tariffs on every country, including a huge 44 percent on Sri Lanka and 27 percent on India, triggering a trade war with China in particular. While he paused the tariffs on most countries for 90 days this week, Trump has dramatically escalated the tariff war with China to 125 percent, making clear that China is the central target of his administration's economic war and advanced preparations for military conflict into which India and Sri Lanka are being drawn.



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