

Indo-Sri Lankan Ties: A Long View

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Indo-Sri Lankan relations during the last five decades and a half have remained topsy-turvy. As a matter of fact, both the nations share a common cultural heritage because of their close proximity and a historical bondage. Both political systems have drawn inspiration from the Westminster model and liberal democracy. And yet the ruling elites in both countries have adopted different development strategies from time to time.

Besides, both nations have articulated their global and regional interests in different ways. While India in its first three decades concentrated on self-reliance, Sri Lanka took early steps towards liberalization of its economy resulting in a much faster rate of growth in the South Asian region.

The paper will highlight the major irritants in Indo-Sri Lankan relations and will examine as to how the ruling elites in both countries have addressed them one by one. For instance, the issue of maritime boundary demarcation, providing citizenship to Indian Tamils and the contentious Indian involvement on Tamil militancy in the island and the subsequent demand of LTTE for a Tamil Eelam. The last demand has complicated New Delhi's involvement in the ongoing civil war in Sri Lanka. Even Norway's offer of facilitation of peace dialogues has motivated India to keep a safe distance from both sides. As regards the emerging trends in Indo-Sri Lankan relations, both of them have accorded MFN status leading to a quantum jump in bilateral trade. Both have stepped up cooperation in defence, high tech, tourism and in marine research. Both of them have a stake in safeguarding the integrity of their nations. Perhaps, a proactive policy by New Delhi may ultimately help in the resolution of the ethnic conflict in the strife-torn island.

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