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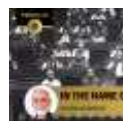
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How political drama let Constitution debate down

Written by [Shubhajit Roy](#) [Follow](#)

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6 min read





Modi said the two leaders had discussed “reconciliation and reconstruction” in Sri Lanka, and hoped that the Sri Lankan government would “fully implement the Constitution and fulfil its commitment to hold provincial council elections”.

The visit of Sri Lanka’s President Anura Kumara Disana to India this week — his first trip overseas since becoming leader of his country — saw some classic diplomatic deal-making, with give and take on both sides.

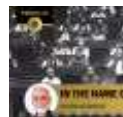
Win some, lose some

AKD, as he is popularly known, committed to not allowing the use of Sri Lankan territory for any anti-Indian activities.

“I have given an assurance to the Prime Minister...that we will not have our land... used in...a manner that is detrimental to the interest of India,” Disana said after bilateral talks with Prime Minister [Narendra](#)

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The joint statement said “President Disanayake reiterated Sri Lanka’s stated position of not permitting its territory to be used in any manner inimical to the security of India as well as towards regional stability.”

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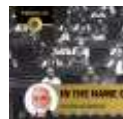
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Exes Shahid and Kareena sat next to each other at kids' annual day function

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This was a signal to China — whose “research ves and are seen with suspicion in New Delhi. The fac as being pro-China, has clearly articulated this po

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On the issue of Tamil minorities, however, AKD did not yield to the formulation preferred by New Delhi. There was no explicit mention of the implementation of

Tamil minority — a long-standing demand of the Indian government. AKD does not support the implementation of the amendment, and has opposed any investigation into alleged war crimes during the last phase of the civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan military.

Modi said the two leaders had discussed “reconciliation and reconstruction” in Sri Lanka, and hoped that the Sri Lankan government would “fully implement the Constitution and fulfil its commitment to hold provincial council elections”.

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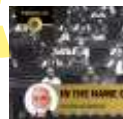
AKD, on his part, mentioned unity, social protection, and sustainable development. “Diversity”, he said, is the “cornerstone of democracy”.

Confident President

The joint statement suggested that the new establishment in Sri Lanka had got its way in its framing.

About two months ago, after External Affairs Minister G Jaishankar met AKD in Colombo, the Indian statement had said that Jaishankar had expressed support for the aspirations of all communities, including Tamils, for peace, while maintaining the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

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“The full and effective implementation of the 13th Amendment...and the early holding of Provincial Council elections would facilitate these objectives,” it had said.

majority in the November election — is much more confident in his dealings with big powers such as India and China.

This confidence has been visible in the President's actions at home as well, where he has appeared determined to abide by the anti-corruption principles of the "Clean Sri Lanka" campaign that propelled him to power.

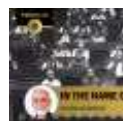
A case in point was the controversy, days before the President travelled to India, about the academic qualifications of his close political ally, Speaker Asoka Ranwala. The senior member of AKD's Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) was forced to step down after AKD made a thinly-veiled reference to the party's intolerance for even the appearance of impropriety.

Focus on mutual benefits

The message from the Ranwala incident was that the President wanted no distractions as he went about his difficult and ambitious agenda to rebuild Sri Lanka after the social and economic crises of recent years. That focus was visible in the India-Sri Lanka joint statement, "Fostering Partnerships for a Shared Future".

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On bilateral development cooperation, the joint statement acknowledged the "positive and impactful role of India's development assistance to Sri Lanka that has significantly contributed to its socioeconomic growth".

The countries agreed to work together for the timely completion of ongoing projects such as Phase III & IV of Indian Housing Project, the three islands' Hybrid

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The elements of cooperation range from digital connectivity — the [Aadhaar](#) project and UPI — to energy cooperation. The countries are discussing the supply of LNG to Sri Lanka, the development of Trincomalee as a regional energy and industrial hub, high-capacity [power grid](#) interconnection, and the development of offshore wind power in the Palk Strait.

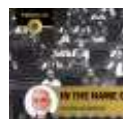
On physical connectivity, apart from the resumption of the passenger ferry service between Nagapattinam and Kankesanthurai, the two leaders agreed that officials should work towards the early recommencement of the passenger ferry service between Rameswaram and Talaimannar. They will also explore the possibility of working on the rehabilitation of Sri Lanka's Kankesanthurai port.

It was also agreed to “explore the possibility of concluding a framework Agreement on Defence Cooperation”, provision of “defence platforms and assets to augment Sri Lanka's defence capabilities”, and intensify collaboration through joint exercises, maritime surveillance, and defence dialogue and exchanges, according to the joint statement.

PM Modi flagged the importance of maritime security, cyber security and counter-terrorism among the issues to be discussed through the Colombo Security Conclave mechanism.

All of this suggests that even though India is now traditional set of interlocutors who have dominated priorities and interests have not fundamentally changed in Colombo.

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AKD is looking at a consequential five years in power, while India, which has deep strategic stakes in Sri Lanka’s success and stability, is keen on a “mutually beneficial” partnership.

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Shubhajit Roy

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Shubhajit Roy, Diplomatic Editor at The Indian Express, has been a journalist for more than 25 years now. Roy joined The Indian Express in October 2003 and has been [... Read More](#)

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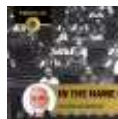
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