

High Commissioner of India, H.E. Gopal Baglay's Message on the occasion of 72nd Republic Day of India

I extend warm greetings to the friendly people of Sri Lanka and all Indians residing in this beautiful country on the occasion of the 72nd Republic Day of India. It was on 26 January 1950 that the world's largest written Constitution entered into force into a newly independent India and transformed the young nation into a Republic. As a fellow South Asian democracy and our closest maritime neighbour, Sri Lanka has been a consistent partner of the Indian people and society. Our common heritage, of which Buddhism is a core element, reflects our cultural similarities and millennia old people-to-people ties.

Today, we are fortunate to have strong leaders guiding our destinies. As a result, I feel extremely positive about the prospects for our bilateral relationship. Ever since my arrival in Colombo on 8 May 2020, carrying 12.5 tonnes of medical supplies, I have worked with the Sri Lankan side including the Government and its people with a sense of purpose to take our bilateral engagement forward. I am happy to share with you that despite the challenges of the COVID 19, our two Governments have been able to maintain the momentum of high-level exchanges including through the Virtual Bilateral Summit between Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on 26 September 2020 and the numerous telephone conversations between Prime Minister Modi and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The National Security Adviser of India visited Colombo in November for the 4th Trilateral Meeting with his counterparts from Sri Lanka and Maldives. Most recently, in early January this year, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar undertook an official visit during which he had very productive conversations with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa besides bilateral talks with Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena and separate meetings with the prominent

political leaders of Sri Lanka, setting the tone for expanded bilateral cooperation in the year 2021.

India and Sri Lanka have supported each other in dealing with the challenges posed by the COVID 19 and the leaderships have resolved to enhance this engagement in the weeks and months to come including through early supply of vaccines. A central element would be the continued commitment of the Government of India to development cooperation throughout the island with special focus on areas such as water, sanitation, vocational training, education etc. On the defence and security side, we intend to deepen our ties in the sphere of training, equipment, intelligence sharing, countering terrorism and drug trafficking amongst others. We remain committed to assisting Sri Lanka with increased foreign investment and cooperation in infrastructure projects like ports, airports, energy including renewable such as solar and wind. I am confident that working together, India and Sri Lanka will be able to successfully overcome the contemporary economic and other challenges.

Let the friendship between our countries and its people grow from strength to strength! I also use this opportunity to extend my greetings to you for the forthcoming Sri Lankan Independence Day!

Namaskar, Ayubhowan, Vanakkam!

Gopal Baglay