

President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Prime Minister of Thailand Srettha Thavisin Forge Historic Ties, Sign Landmark Trade Agreement

February 3, 2024.



President Ranil Wickremesinghe (right) and Prime Minister of Thailand Srettha Thavisin.

I am incredibly pleased to welcome Prime Minister Thavisin and the accompanying high-level delegation to Sri Lanka, including the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Commerce, and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I want to thank Prime Minister Thavisin for accepting my invitation to be the Guest of Honour at the celebration of the 76th anniversary of Sri Lanka’s independence.

The main focus of this visit is accelerating economic cooperation between Sri Lanka and Thailand. There is significant potential for expanding trade and investment ties between our two countries, which have remained largely untapped. The Prime Minister and I witnessed the signing of the Sri Lanka-Thailand Free Trade Agreement (SLTFTA) a short while ago. This is the second FTA; Sri Lanka is concluding with an ASEAN partner, the first with Singapore. The two sides worked expeditiously to conclude this agreement, highlighting the vital interest of both

Governments in this important endeavour.



Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena and delegates from Thailand.

This is a milestone in our economic partnership, and operationalizing the FTA will be a priority. The FTA is expected to boost trade and investment ties between the two countries.

Additionally, we have renewed the Air-Services Agreement to enhance connectivity between the two countries, and a MoU has been concluded between the Gems and Jewellery Research and Training Institute of Sri Lanka and the Gems and Jewellery Institute of Thailand. Both of these agreements will enhance economic, trade and tourism exchanges.

Today, we also had a very productive discussion on elevating Sri Lanka–Thai relations. During the bilateral discussion between our two delegations, which concluded a little while ago, we covered a wide range of areas of cooperation. There is considerable potential to develop tourism, trade and other areas of economic cooperation between Sri Lanka and Thailand. We see great potential for enhanced

investments from Thailand coming into Sri Lanka, and we discussed possible areas for collaboration. We also had a detailed exchange on cooperation in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, which both countries are keenly interested in pursuing.

In the area of Tourism, we have spoken in particular about promoting Buddhist and marine tourism routes. To facilitate travel between the two countries, we have agreed to consider agreeing to a visa-free travel arrangement on a reciprocal basis. Our officials will work towards finalizing this arrangement early.

I thank the Prime Minister and the Government of Thailand for the assistance extended by the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) over the years for capacity building, sharing of expertise, and training provided to Government officials in Sri Lanka by the Thai side in areas including fisheries, SMEs, tourism, climate change, public health, and agriculture.

We have also discussed cooperation in the defence area and intend to augment our defence sector cooperation in the future. In particular, sharing information and intelligence between the defence establishment of both countries to curb transnational organized crime, including human trafficking, drug smuggling, money laundering, and financing of terrorism, is essential.

> One of my principal economic growth and prosperity strategies is to enhance bilateral trade, particularly with the proven future potential of the East Asian and ASEAN regions, including Thailand. We are ready to engage with external partners and aim to ensure prosperity for our people.

We also discussed that Sri Lanka and Thailand have cooperated well in regional fora such as BIMSTEC, IORA, ACD and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). I congratulated Thailand on the initiatives undertaken during their Chairmanship of BIMSTEC, particularly the Bangkok Vision 2030, which aims to propel BIMSTEC towards a prosperous, resilient, and open region, fostering sustainable and balanced growth. As partners in the Indian Ocean region, we look forward to collaborating with Thailand and other IORA partners within IORA, which Sri Lanka is currently chairing.

The two countries have also worked well at various multilateral forums. I highlighted to the Prime Minister that much needs to be done by like-minded countries of the

Global South, such as Thailand and Sri Lanka, to create a practical impact in shaping the evolving new world order.

As you are aware, Sri Lanka has made significant progress in economic stabilization since the financial crisis of 2022. One of my principal economic growth and prosperity strategies is to enhance bilateral trade, particularly with the proven future potential of the East Asian and ASEAN regions, including Thailand. We are ready to engage with external partners and aim to ensure prosperity for our people.

With the advent of the Asian century, we believe there is an expanded scope for cooperation between Sri Lanka and Thailand, building on the traditional friendship we already share.

One of my government's foremost foreign policy tenets is deepening economic integration with the Southeast Asia region. We also wish to be part of the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), the world's most significant free trade pact encompassing 15 Asia-Pacific economies and covering about 30 per cent of the world's gross domestic product and population. As Sri Lanka begins to stabilize its economy and regain international confidence towards recovery and growth, we are looking at Thailand's support as Sri Lanka undertakes this significant journey of economic transformation and integration with Asia.

Following this briefing, our business communities will meet at the Sri Lanka-Thailand Business Forum. I am pleased to see that a high-level business delegation of 21 companies from Thailand is also in Sri Lanka representing, among other things, food and food processing, healthcare, energy, hospitality, tourism, fisheries, agriculture and manufacturing sectors during this visit, demonstrating the keen interest on building synergies with the Sri Lankan business community. This will be a beneficial opportunity for our companies to hear directly from the Prime Minister and me and understand the potential for trade and business. We will be creating many more such opportunities for our companies to interact more regularly in the future.

I want to thank you, Prime Minister Thavisin, and the accompanying high-level delegation for your visit to Sri Lanka, which has further cemented our existing historical and religious connections in the economic sphere. I look forward to working closely on our initiatives during this visit.

Meanwhile, in a demonstration of deep respect and gratitude, Thai Prime Minister

Srettha Thavisin expressed appreciation for the warm welcome from President Wickremesinghe and the Government of Sri Lanka. The leaders discussed a broad range of topics, emphasizing their shared historical and cultural ties, culminating in the signing of a pivotal Free Trade Agreement.

The Sri Lanka-Thailand Business Forum promises significant business opportunities, encouraging private sectors to explore two-way trade and investment. Two essential MOUs were signed, focusing on enhanced air services and gem and jewellery cooperation. Thailand's ambitious land bridge project connecting the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand aims to fortify connectivity, with collaborative efforts with Sri Lanka on the horizon. The leaders agreed to promote investments in fisheries, food processing, tourism, hospitality and green energy sectors.

In a significant announcement, Thai Airways International will resume daily flights between Bangkok and Colombo from March 31st, fostering closer ties. Thailand proposed a trilateral collaboration on cruise tourism, focusing on cultural and Buddhist tourism. Visa-free arrangements and a Memorandum of Understanding on visa exemption are under discussion, enhancing people-to-people connections post-FTA signing.

Thailand reiterated support for Sri Lankan human resource development, focusing on agriculture and fishery sectors. The joint initiative on elephant welfare and habitation is progressing, reflecting shared values.

The leaders intended to maximize shared values bilaterally and in multilateral fora, with Thailand hosting the sixth BIMSTEC Summit this year. As a candidate for ASEAN membership in the Human Rights Council, Thailand anticipates effective collaboration with Sri Lanka.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin extended warm felicitations on Sri Lanka's 76th independence anniversary, expressing sincere appreciation for the hospitality and arrangements.

> As Sri Lanka begins to stabilize its economy and regain international confidence towards recovery and growth, we are looking at Thailand's support as Sri Lanka undertakes this significant journey of economic transformation and integration with Asia.



Prime Minister of Thailand Srettha Thavisin signing the Sri Lanka-Thailand Free Trade Agreement in the presence of President Ranil Wickremesinghe.