

Joint Communique
On the State Visit of H. E. Mahinda Rajapaksa,
Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
to the People's Republic of Bangladesh on 19 – 20 March 2021

1. At the invitation of H. E. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, H. E. Mahinda Rajapaksa, Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka paid a State Visit to Bangladesh on 19 – 20 March 2021 to participate in the celebration marking the Birth Centenary of Bangladesh's Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Golden Jubilee of Bangladesh's independence.
2. The State visit signifies the fact that this is the first overseas visit undertaken by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa after assuming the premiership in August 2020.
3. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa was accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising Minister of Education, State Minister for Regional Cooperation, State Minister of Money and Capital Market and State Enterprise Reforms, State Minister of Batik, Handloom Fabric and Local Apparel Products and State Minister of Rural Housing and Construction and Building Material Industries, Secretary to the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and senior government officials of Sri Lanka.
4. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa was received by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka. Prime Minister of Bangladesh hosted a State Banquet in honour of Prime Minister Rajapaksa on 19 March.
5. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa paid homage at the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar, Bangladesh in memory of the martyrs of the 1971 War of Liberation. He planted a sapling at the National Martyrs' Memorial premises. He paid rich tribute to the memory of the Father of the Nation of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum, Dhaka.
6. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa paid a courtesy call on H.E. Md. Abdul Hamid, President of Bangladesh and held bilateral talks with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 20 March. Hon. Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, MP, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Rajapaksa.
7. In the presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa delivered the Bangabandhu Memorial Lecture at the Special Programme at the National Parade Ground, Dhaka on 19 March as the 'Guest of Honour'. In his address, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa paid rich tribute to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his visionary leadership that led to the emergence of a sovereign and independent Bangladesh. He also lauded Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for successfully carrying forward Bangabandhu's rich legacy in realizing his dream of a '*Sonar Bangla*', the 'Prosperous Golden Bengal'.
8. In her address, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina thanked Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa for gracing the occasion despite the pandemic and for the expression of his solidarity towards Bangladesh and its people.

9. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa held bilateral talks on 20 March 2021 which was marked by great warmth and cordiality reflecting the excellent bilateral relations and friendship that exist between the two countries. The two leaders discussed all aspects of Bangladesh-Sri Lanka relations and also discussed contemporary international and regional issues of common interest. They recalled the shared bonds of history, tradition, culture and multitude of other commonalities between the two countries. They reiterated their firm conviction to further strengthen the bilateral relations with a pragmatic and mature approach based on sovereignty, equality, friendship, trust and understanding for the mutual benefit of the people of the two countries.
10. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa appreciated the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the effective handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. He thanked for her government's support of Covid-19 related medical accessories to Sri Lanka under the 'SAARC Covid-19 Emergency Fund'. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also lauded Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa for his exemplary leadership in successfully dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka. Both the leaders appreciated the consular and repatriation services extended to each other's nationals during the pandemic.
11. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina appreciated Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's pro-people leadership, initiatives to develop infrastructure and the vision to accomplish equitable socio-economic development of Sri Lanka. She also appreciated his government's efforts towards national unity, reconciliation and development. Both the leaders appreciated the institutionalization of democracy in their respective countries.
12. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa commended the tremendous socio-economic development in Bangladesh over the last decade and Bangladesh's accomplishments in food self-sufficiency, poverty eradication, energy generation, agriculture, rural development, industrialization, service sector, ICT, digitalization, disaster management, women empowerment, climate change adaptation, infrastructure development, education, etc. under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. He also commended Bangladesh's impressive economic growth even amid the Covid-19 pandemic. He recognized Bangladesh's global leadership in development and contribution to promoting peace, security and stability in the world. He also congratulated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for leading the country towards graduation from LDC to a developing economy despite the challenges of the global pandemic.
13. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Government of Bangladesh for their steadfast support in combating terrorism in Sri Lanka, and in this context, for extending support to Sri Lanka at international fora, including the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and other United Nations bodies and international organizations. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa expressed the hope that Bangladesh will continue to stand in solidarity with Sri Lanka at the ongoing 46th Session of the UNHRC in Geneva.
14. Prime Minister of Sri Lanka appreciated Prime Minister of Bangladesh for her generosity in sheltering and providing humanitarian assistance to the 1.1 million forcibly displaced Rohingyas from the Rakhine State. Both Prime Ministers reiterated the importance of the voluntary, safe, speedy, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingyas to their homeland. While Sri Lanka provides home for displaced people in neighboring countries, Sri Lanka is committed to work in cooperation with UNHCR to address issues of concerns at all times,

while abiding by all the approved legal frameworks and prescribed procedures. Bangladesh Prime Minister requested the Sri Lankan Prime Minister to support Bangladesh in resolving the Rohingya crisis.

15. Recognizing the threats to pluralistic societies arising from terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization, the two leaders pledged to work together to counteract such challenges in both countries, the region and beyond. To facilitate bilateral cooperation in addressing these complex, shared security challenges, they agreed to work towards setting up a joint institutional mechanism. Bangladesh Prime Minister offered to share Bangladesh's experience in countering terrorism and violent extremism through a 'whole-of-society' approach.
16. The two Prime Ministers emphasized the need for enhanced interaction and increased high-level exchanges including at the level of parliamentarians. Referring to the formation of the Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Parliamentary Friendship Association, the two leaders agreed to revive the Association with newly elected MPs and encouraged the legislators to play catalytic role in deepening relations between the two countries.
17. Both the leaders emphasized on reinvigorating the existing institutional mechanisms between the two countries including the Foreign Office Consultations (FoC), Joint Economic Commission (JEC), sectoral Joint Working Groups (JWGs), Joint Programmes / Work Plans as an important catalyst for further enhancing the overall bilateral relations. In this context, the two leaders agreed to establish a Joint Consultative Commission for Comprehensive Cooperation to be headed by the Foreign Ministers of the two countries with a view to regularly overview the bilateral relations between the two countries. Bangladesh side would forward a draft of an MoU in this regard at the earliest.
18. Referring to the MoU on Economic Partnership signed between the two countries in moving towards a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the two leaders reiterated their commitment for an early conclusion of FTA for harnessing the available synergies of bilateral trade which is far below the potential and not commensurate with the political relations. To this effect, the two leaders agreed to immediately complete the joint feasibility study on FTA. Meanwhile, as the first step towards FTA they agreed to work for a bilateral Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) beginning with a short list of products which could open up opportunities for an expanded trade, investments and tourism in future. Both sides agreed to hold the next meeting of the JWG on Trade at an early date.
19. Both sides agreed to undertake measures for trade facilitation including identification and removal of non-tariff barriers and simplification and harmonization of mutually recognized standards. Both sides also agreed to diversify the basket of tradable goods and look for innovative ways to add fresh impetus to trade and commercial relations. In this context, both sides underscored the need to reduce further the number of items under SAFTA from each other's negative lists. In this context, emphasis was given on implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and the Sri Lanka Standards Institution (SLSI) on Technical Cooperation at an early date.
20. Noting the potential of mutually beneficial collaboration in Pharmaceutical sector, both Prime Ministers agreed to procure quality pharmaceutical products in greater quantities from Bangladesh and to facilitate, simplify and expedite the registration process for Bangladeshi pharmaceutical products.

21. The two leaders underlined shipping as one of the key areas with potential for mutually beneficial cooperation which should result in improved connectivity and open up further opportunities for bilateral trade between the two countries and beyond. Observing that negotiations on the draft Coastal Shipping Agreement and the draft Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on the Feeder Services between Chattogram and Colombo are at an advanced stage, they agreed to conclude these early. They also instructed for holding the next meetings of the JWG on Shipping and Shipping Secretary level talks at an early date to iron out the pending issues.
22. Both sides noted with satisfaction that a number of Sri Lankan business entities have invested in Bangladesh to the mutual benefit of both parties. Bangladesh welcomed more Sri Lankan investment in sectors such as textiles, knitwear, linen, leather, pharmaceuticals, agro-based industries and steel & engineering, IT, education, health and hospitality etc. Sri Lanka Prime Minister invited the Bangladesh business sector to seek out new opportunities available in Sri Lanka in the sectors of pharmaceutical, value added apparel, food processing, logistics, tourism and IT enable services. Both leaders encouraged for early conclusion of the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement.
23. The two leaders recognized the potential for collaborative partnership between the private sectors of the two countries, particularly in high-end apparel and textiles, information and communication technology and related knowledge industry, jute and jute products, religious and eco-tourism, gems and jewelry and precious metal, agriculture and agro-processing, fisheries–livestock–dairy–horticulture, health management, infrastructure development and construction, pharmaceuticals, energy and power. They underlined that investments from both countries could benefit through increased joint ventures, public-private partnerships. They encouraged sectoral industries, industry associations, chambers, etc. of the two countries for greater dialogue towards beneficial and result-oriented collaboration, including in investments.
24. Given both the countries' experiences in apparel industries, the two leaders stressed on the follow up on the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between Chattogram BGMEA Institute of Fashion and Technology and Sri Lanka Institute of Textile and Apparel.
25. Sri Lankan Prime Minister thanked Bangladesh for hosting a sizable presence of Sri Lankan workers and professionals across manufacturing and service sectors making it one of the largest such presence of Sri Lankan professionals in the region. The two leaders agreed to work towards facilitating easy movement for the nationals of both countries.
26. In order to reap the benefits of wider economic partnership, the leaders also directed the respective concerned authorities for early conclusion of the agreement on customs cooperation between the two countries.
27. Both sides agreed to facilitate mutually beneficial investments in respective Special Economic Zones, Industrial Parks, Hi-Tech Parks, etc. by utilizing the Memorandum of Understanding between the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) and the Board of Investment (BoI), Sri Lanka.
28. Two leaders agreed to request their respective Central Banks and other financial institutions to cooperate closely in investments, SWAPs and technical issues.

29. Referring to the accomplishment of the two countries as top IT services outsourcing destinations in the world, the two leaders agreed to encourage the industries of the two countries to use the respective competitive advantages and expertise in the field to further expand market competitiveness. It was also agreed to hold the meeting of the JWG on ICT and related industry to facilitate greater collaboration and partnership between the relevant stakeholders of both countries.
30. The two sides noted with satisfaction the ongoing cooperation in the area of defense through exchange of training and goodwill visits of Navy ships of both the countries.
31. Recognizing the potential of collaboration in higher education, the two leaders emphasized on the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the University Grants Commissions of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Building on that, both sides agreed to facilitate closer cooperation between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh higher educational institutions.
32. Sri Lanka appreciated the scholarships offered and facilities extended by Bangladesh to Sri Lankan students in pursuing higher studies, including medical and dental studies in the Government Medical and Dental Colleges. Both the leaders directed relevant officials to expeditiously address the issue of recognition of the medical and dental colleges so that Sri Lankan students may utilize their academic qualifications in Sri Lanka. Bangladesh appreciated Sri Lanka's support in training Bangladeshi nurses and other health professionals.
33. Recognizing the demographic profile and patterns of the two economies, both sides agreed to collaborate on development of skills and human resources and encourage innovative partnerships. In this context, they welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries on Cooperation for Strengthening Youth Development.
34. Recognizing the potential for cooperation in maritime affairs and blue economy between the two countries, the two leaders agreed to work together to explore new areas and innovative means to tap opportunities in developing the Bay of Bengal into a region of peace, growth and prosperity. Bangladesh side expressed interest in obtaining support from Sri Lanka in deep sea fishing. Bangladesh Prime Minister appreciated Sri Lanka's leadership role in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Sri Lankan Prime Minister congratulated Bangladesh for taking over the Chairmanship of IORA for the term 2021-2023.
35. Recognizing the importance of enhanced air connectivity to promote people-to-people contact, tourism and trade, both sides agreed to initiate flight operation by Bangladesh carriers to Colombo at an early date to meet the growing demand of air traffic between the two countries.
36. Sri Lankan Prime Minister complemented Bangladesh's advancement in agriculture sector and fresh-water fisheries and expressed interest to benefit from Bangladesh's experience. They stressed on the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding to foster comprehensive cooperation in agriculture through collaboration in agro-processing, agro-business, technological innovation, supply chain development involving private sector of the two countries in beneficial manner. Bangladesh offered to host delegations from Sri Lanka for exposure visit to/training in agriculture extension,

practices, innovation in rice farming and fresh-water fisheries in Bangladesh. Both sides emphasized on following up on the implementation of the Work Plan signed in 2011 between Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) and Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research and Policy (SLCARP). Both sides also welcomed the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between BARC and SLCARP and agreed for its expeditious implementation and follow up.

37. Sri Lanka Prime Minister appreciated Bangladesh's leadership role in addressing the challenges of climate change as the Chair of the Climate Vulnerable Nations' Forum (CVF) and invited Bangladesh to join the Colombo Declaration on Sustainable Nitrogen Management which was finalized in October 2019 in Colombo. The two leaders agreed to work together at the CVF for addressing the common challenges of climate vulnerabilities of both the countries. Bangladesh offered to share her knowledge, expertise and experience in disaster management and climate change adaptation capabilities with Sri Lanka.
38. Acknowledging growing interaction among the peoples of the two countries, the two leaders agreed to deepen people-to-people contact and cultural exchange particularly by utilizing the Cultural Exchange Programme.
39. Noting the significant potential in tourism particularly regional tourism, the two leaders agreed to work for concluding an MoU on Cooperation in Tourism involving tour operators and other related hospitality sector stakeholders of the two countries and with special focus on joint investment in tourism, marketing and promotional activities, Buddhist circuit and private sectors. In this context, Bangladesh proposed for signing of an MoU on Coastal Cruise Shipping for Tourism between the two countries.
40. Reiterating their commitment to multilateralism, the two sides acknowledged increased interaction and cooperation between the two countries on contemporary multilateral issues like climate change, disaster management, migration, health, peacekeeping, human trafficking etc. at the UN and other regional and international platforms. They further agreed to share respective knowledge, ideas, innovation to effectively realize the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development and the SDGs.
41. The two leaders underlined the need for a prosperous, peaceful, stable, inclusive and sustainable South Asian region. They agreed to deepen cooperation in various sub-regional and regional cooperation mechanisms; and to work towards focused and result-oriented regional economic cooperation in BIMSTEC, SAARC and IORA.
42. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa conveyed Sri Lanka's support to the candidate from Bangladesh for the position of Regional Director of the WHO SEARO.
43. The two leaders expressed their deep satisfaction at the signing / renewal of the following bilateral instruments:
 - a. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on Cooperation for Strengthening Youth Development.
 - b. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy and Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.

- c. Memorandum of Understanding between the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Directorate of Technical Education (DTE), Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on Exchange of Documentation on Vocational Qualification.
 - d. Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for Co-operation of Training of Bangladesh Nurses and Healthcare Workers in Sri Lanka.
 - e. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Cooperation between Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies and Bangladesh Institute of International & Strategic Studies.
 - f. Cultural Exchange Programme between the Government of the People Republic of Bangladesh and the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for the Years 2021-2025.
44. The two leaders also directed the relevant offices of both sides to take immediate steps for due implementation and follow up on all bilateral instruments signed between the two countries.
45. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa appreciated the warm hospitality and courtesies extended to him and his delegation by the government and the people of Bangladesh during the visit.
46. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa extended an invitation to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to undertake a state visit to Sri Lanka in 2022 to coincide with the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina accepted the invitation and expressed her willingness to join the celebration if situation permits.

Dhaka
20 March 2021
