



BINDING BHARAT

BINDING BHARAT

Kanupriya Jaju (Founder and Chairperson)

Binding Bharat is a collective youth network founded to identify and meet the challenges that nation-states are facing all over the world today. Binding Bharat is based on a single premise that young people have the potential and willingness to bring about momentous changes, and therefore they must be provided with opportunities to play a significant role in creating better lives for themselves, their communities, and society. We strongly believe that as we continue to work, in our ways, in our respective communities, there is great value to be gained through the exchange of experiences, information, and ideas, and by supporting one another at a global level. This network is, therefore, our tool through which we can become more familiar with the realities of young people in our regions and elsewhere, and can express freely our expectations, hopes, and concerns. At a time when information is becoming more and more accessible through new technological advancements, we have a greater awareness than ever before of the world outside our own. Each day we see the devastating effects of conflict, poverty, injustice, homelessness, crime, environmental degradation, inequality, drug abuse, and disease. We can, as individuals, feel overwhelmed or frozen by a sense of helplessness in the face of such tremendous problems.

For a better tomorrow, the world needs to form common grounds & who else better to voice it than the youth. We talk about winning hearts, we talk about reaching out to each other, about hearing each other out, about lending support, about understanding each other's sensitivities. We talk of binding hearts. We, at Binding Bharat, believe that the only sustainable way of moving in today's world is with respect for territorial integrity & reverence for global rules for global commons. Exclusion & exclusivity are colonial notions. We appreciate the difference of opinions, for the fact that to differ is to think. We dream of a world where ideas flourish regardless of borders.

It is not only a question of proposals but also of actions!

INDO-SRI LANKA BILATERAL SETU

Introduction/ Background.....	3
Webinar Details and Participation.....	4
Webinar Record	5
Speech summary of the Participants.....	10
Outcomes and Suggestions.....	12

Introduction/ Background

India-Sri Lanka relations are defined by the close historical, civilizational and cultural links between the two countries island of Sri Lanka find its mention in the Indian Epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana. The people of India were versed with the existence of this Island nation, south of India long before the discovery of modern-day sea route or the advent of modern modes of transportation. Even the diplomatic relations of India with our neighbouring island nation can be traced back to the days of King Ashoka more than 2000 years ago, when King Ashoka sent his emissaries to Sri Lanka. Both countries also share a history of colonisation followed by independence from the British rule.

In the recent times, India- Sri Lanka relations have transcended beyond the mere historical and cultural links and descended into the domain of strategic, commercial and economic cooperation between the nations. In recent years, these countries have been encouraging local and foreign business investments and regulatory reforms to stimulate economic growth. There are sectors with high potential for co-operation between India and its maritime neighbour such as climate change and Sustainable energies, tourism, economic and technological infrastructure, Information technology to name a few. Further ever since gaining freedom from their common colonial masters, both countries have shared collective respect for international laws and principles.

In the past decade Indian government's foreign policy towards Sri Lanka has assumed utmost significance due to increasing activity in the Indian Ocean region. The two countries share a symbiotic relation, and it was well articulated by the statement of Foreign Secretary Colombage given in an interview to a newspaper which stated "As far as strategic security is concerned, Sri Lanka will always have an India-first approach. That means Sri Lanka will not do anything harmful to India's strategic security interests."

Webinar Details and Participation

Date and Time: 16th August, 2020 and 6:00 PM (IST)

Topic of Discussion: Youth for Sovereignty, Human rights & Democracy

Sri Lanka	India
Chief Guest & Key-note Speakers	
<u>Hon'ble Ranil Wickremesinghe</u> <u>Former Prime Minister</u>	<u>Hon'ble Suresh Prabhu</u> <u>India's Sherpa to G-20 & Former Cabinet Minister</u>
Panellists	
Prof. Maneesha Wanasinghe-Pasqual. (HoD) International Relations Colombo University	Prof. N K Kakkar. Former Director General Maharaja Agrasen Institute
Mr. George Cooke. Dy. Director, Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies	Prof. Simrit Kahlon. (Head of Dept.) Department of Geography, Panjab University
Ms. Mahisha Balraj. Hashtag Generation	Asst. Prof. Dr. V S Negi. Geography, Delhi University
Asst. Prof. Shakthi De Silva. Colombo University	Asst. Prof. CA Anurag Sharma. Commerce, Delhi University
Mr. Ashok Kumar Kainath. Chief Ramayan research team Sri Lanka	Kanupriya Jaju. Founder & Chairperson, Binding Bharat

Webinar Record

Time (IST)	Participant	Event Summary
6:08 PM	Mr. Prasanjeet Rathore	The session started with Mr. Prasanjeet Rathore giving an introduction about the Binding Bharat initiative and setting the background with a brief about the India-Sri Lanka relations
6:09 PM		Mr. Prasanjeet Rathore welcomed the esteemed chief-guests and introduced the panellists
6:14 PM		Mr. Prasanjeet Rathore invited Kanupriya Jaju, founder of Binding Bharat to give the welcome speech.
6:15pm	Ms. Kanupriya Jaju	She began by expressing her heartfelt gratitude towards Former Prime minister of Sri Lanka, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe Mr Suresh Prabhu (a Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha) and other esteemed panellists for being part of this session.
		Spoke of pride and regret in relation to our independence. Pride on account of us successfully defending our sovereignty and the regret of still not being able to over come the social stigma of poverty along with other threats such as terrorism.
		Gave the idea whole world is one family derived from ancient Sanskrit saying “Vasudev Kutumbakam” and need for binding individuals and hearts across border through this initiative.
		Discussed the vision of Binding Bharat and a need for connecting youth across the countries. Pitched for a great legacy of peace, harmony and cooperation for future generations.
6:19pm	Mr. Prasanjeet Rathore	Mr. Prasanjeet Rathore invited Mr Suresh Prabhu (a Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha) to address the august gathering with his words and welcome Honourable Former Prime minister of Sri Lanka, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe.
6:20pm	Mr. Suresh Prabhu	He lauded the effort made by Binding Bharat of bringing people together, irrespective of their nationalities, faith, beliefs, backgrounds and trying to work together to build a common prosperous better future for all of us.

		<p>He admired Sri Lanka's human developments on account various social indicators in spite of the internal challenges the country faced in the past decades.</p> <p>He remarked that both countries are now looking forward towards economic progress and will need each other co-operation in this interconnected world to create vibrant economies. He cited the example of Sri Lanka can leverage it's wind energy potential and sell it to countries like India which can mutually benefit both countries.</p> <p>He concluded by saying that the Binding Bharat initiative is finding solution to tomorrow's world. The pandemic situation is challenging today but there isn't just a silver lining but also a golden lining. He said he was honoured by the presence of the great leader Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe and invited him to address the virtual gathering.</p>
6:29pm	Mr. Prasanjeet Rathore	Mr. Prasanjeet Rathore thanked Mr Suresh Prabhu (a Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha) for enlightening speech and invited former Prime minister of Sri Lanka, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe to address the virtual gathering.
6:30 PM	Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe	<p>He began by thanking the Binding Bharat initiative for looking at the future in which we will have a globalized system. He also expressed his gratitude towards Mr Suresh for having put great efforts to bolster relations between two countries. He specially mentioned Honourable Pranab Mukherjee's contribution and thanked PM Modi for how they worked together.</p> <p>He remarked how Sri Lanka and India complement each other in terms of their economic interests and how Sri Lanka looks forward to India's constructive leadership as an Asian superpower. Being culturally similar he remarked it is easier for the two countries to work together. He cited example of the increasing number of Sri Lankan students in India. He remarked India and Sri Lanka not only share a common culture but also common respect for human rights and democracy.</p> <p>He concluded by saying that we not only have to cooperate bilaterally but also take this bilateral understanding to the regional and global level.</p>
6.35 PM	Mr. Harmonjot Singh Gill	Vote of thanks.

6:39 PM	Mr. N.K Kakkar	<p>He started by reminiscing his affection towards Radio Ceylon. He then spoke of the Indo-Sri Lanka cricketing ties bind the two nations together and mentioned the popularity of Lasith Malinga and other Sri Lankan players in India.</p> <p>Moving beyond cricket and culture he remarked how the two countries share a vibrant democracy. Democracy is something on which the two countries can take laurels specially when India's other neighbours lack a strong democracy. He wished the democracies of the of two countries a prosperous future and hoped that the binding bharat initiative binds the two countries just like the Ram setu.</p>
6:56pm	Mr. George Cooke	<p>He began by remarking the strength of the Indo-Lankan ties has been tested by various political and strategic decision but remains strong due to our religious, cultural and geographic connections. Irrespective of the political party or the personality in power in Sri Lanka, its foreign policy formulations always consider India as indispensable.</p> <p>He enumerated the bigger picture as how a diverse country like India posses market, opportunities and progress for Sri Lanka. There is so much the two countries can achieve together in the Indian ocean region and also South Asia. Both countries have a south Asian identity which can be highlighted on a global level. He applauded the virtual summit proposed by PM Modi on the preparedness of the SAARC countries in fighting the Covid pandemic.</p> <p>He reminded India how Sri Lanka under then Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike mediated between India and its arch rival china at the height of their war in 1962. He also mentioned how India and Sri Lanka can work together and in words of PM Modi change cynicism into optimism in the region. He concluded by emphasising how the synergy between the two nations dating back to before common era has the potential of flowering peace in South Asia.</p>
7:23 PM	Mrs. Simrit Kalhon	<p>She spoke of building bridges in the post-covid world. She spoke of the changing world order where traditional powers like China and USA are going to loose power and there can be a temporary collapse of globalisation. PM Modi had this foresight and called for Atamnirbhar Bharat.</p> <p>She remarked that we are all prisoners of geography and if there is a collapse of globalization, we will have to rely on our immediate geographical neighbours. India and Sri Lanka must</p>

		<p>take pre-eminence in the Indian ocean region with competing interests.</p> <p>Apart from the obvious commonalities in history, culture and religion she pointed out an astonishing fact that in spite of the geographical distance between India's north and Sri Lankan mainland, Sri Lanka's language Sinhalese is from the Indo-aryan family of languages. She remembered the partnership between Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe and Atal Bihari Vajpayee during their tenures as PMs of the respective countries.</p> <p>She concluded with the need for cooperation in fields such as terrorism that has hit both the countries the hardest, along with other fields such as education and economies.</p>
7:31 PM	Mr. VS Negi	<p>He started by lauding the binding bharat initiative as in a world torn apart by its differences the initiative focussed on binding people and focussing on commonalities.</p> <p>He spoke about terrorism and a collaboration between the two countries that includes a common task force to tackle terrorism as terrorism knows no boundaries.</p> <p>He concluded by quoting from PM Modi's independence day speech that neighbours are not decided geographies but meeting of hearts.</p>
7:38 PM	Mr. Ashok Kumar	<p>He spoke of historical mentions of the Ram Setu in Hindu religious epics of Ramayana and Mahabhrata and also in Buddhism in Lord Buddha's memoirs. His research shows that even Guru Nanak ji visited the Ram Setu location.</p> <p>He spoke of the scientific research going on the Ram Setu site also known as Adam's bridge. He emphasised the importance of Ram Setu for both nations and avenues in tourism that arise due to it.</p>
7:40 PM	Mr. Anurag Sharma	<p>He focussed on the Indo-Sri Lankan ties from the perspective of volume of trade and free trade agreements. He gave examples as to how India is big market for Sri Lanka to encash upon.</p> <p>She also reiterated that India and Sri Lanka will stand side by side for socio-economic growth. The cultural integration between the nations is immune from the aggressive attacks of the Chinese in the post covid era.</p>

		<p>Although the relations between the two countries are cordial, still there is a lot of scope yet to be exercised in the field of maritime co-operation for securing the Indian ocean region, tourism etc. He concluded by saying that the initiatives like binding bharat help in realising upon the full potential of the bilateral ties.</p>
7:50 PM	Mr. Shakthi De Silva	<p>He spoke of the foreign policy formulation of the current regime in Sri Lanka. He said that the current government in explicitly outlining the betterment of bilateral ties with regional powers in the BIMSTEC and SAARC.</p>
		<p>The government is following a Asia centric policy in foreign policy. He spoke of the need to dispel the misconceptions surrounding the Hambantota port deal with china.</p>
		<p>He commended the RBI's decision to enter into a currency swapping agreement with central bank of Sri Lanka in the backdrop of the pandemic and declining economic situation. He concluded that to achieve efficacious goals in its bilateral ties with India, the Sri Lankan government must not only involve academia but also youth.</p>

Speech summary of the Participants

All the panellists have acknowledged the strength of the Indo-Lankan ties owing to the strong cultural, religious and historical integration. Further both countries share a vibrant democratic system that respects human rights and respect for international laws and principles. These commonalities are the bedrock of the bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka and there is a need to build upon this strong foundation.

What was evident from the panel discussion was that most panellists see huge avenues of mutual coordination in field of trade, investment, education, tourism along with a collective response to the threats arising in the Indian Ocean Region. There was also a hint that the full potential of these avenues has not been fully explored and a lot can be done in this regard. Both countries can have a synergistic bond as India is a huge market for resource rich Sri Lanka. Honourable Mr. Suresh Prabhu gave an interesting example in this regard: “Sri Lanka’s geographical location, Sri Lanka’s wind velocity makes it an attractive destination for generating the cleanest form of energy in the world -wind electricity. Plant load factor for a wind project in Sri Lanka would be double of India’s. We can make 40% PLF for a wind project in Sri Lanka, while in India we normally have it less than 20%. Just imagine, with same investment of capex you can have double the power generation, so you can imagine the advantage.” An example of how Sri Lanka could solve India’s clean energy woes while also strengthening its economy making it a win-win situation for both countries.

Another aspect that found pre-eminence amongst the panellist was the need for regional cooperation with our geographical neighbours in the post-covid era. While panellists from India brought out this point in context of an aggressive china, panellists from Sri Lanka focussed on this point in the backdrop of the pandemic and the stuttering global supply chain. There is inward shrinking and an imminent temporary decline of globalisation. According to the Indian panellists keeping this foresight PM Modi called for regional cooperation between the SAARC nations on tackling the covid virus and also gave a call for Atmanirbhar Bharat. This is one of the reasons why the Sri Lankan foreign policy formulation also give pre-eminence to its

bilateral ties with its regional neighbours as stated by one of our esteemed panellists. Panellists specially from Sri Lanka went on to remark that both countries not only have to cooperate bilaterally but also take this bilateral understanding to the regional and global level.

In terms of the size of our population, India is the largest country having economic interests in the Indian Ocean Region. Panellist have also agreed on a need for shared resources-based platform to address the challenges of maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region. Both India and Sri Lanka have been victims of terrorism. A co-ordinated response to terrorism also featured in the talks, with one panellist proposing a common task force between India and Sri Lanka. Other topics of interest included anecdotes from the cricketing ties between the nations, collaboration between the Indian and Sri Lankan universities, collaborative effort from the two nations to promote tourism along with a discussion on Ram Setu etc.

Outcomes and Suggestions

In the post-covid era which is characterised by an aggressive Chinese wolf warrior policy, India needs to keep its neighbours close, if it wants to be Atamnirbhar. Peace and Prosperity in the Indian Ocean Region is a pre-requisite for our economy to recover from the Covid debacle and prosper again. Sri Lanka is a strategically placed country in the Indian Ocean region. This gives it a leveraging power over China. It is no secret that Chinese have made an ingress into Sri Lanka for commercial contracts. Although it is a strategic flashpoint for India but we need to acknowledge and respect the economic ambitions of the local government as well. It is evident that Sri Lanka will try to balance the interests of both India and China. It was evident from the statement of Foreign Secretary Colombage given in an interview to a newspaper which stated “As far as strategic security is concerned; Sri Lanka will always have an India-first approach. That means Sri Lanka will not do anything harmful to India’s strategic security interests.” Chinese may possess the economic prowess to win the investments, but they can never harm the cultural, religious, and historical integration between the citizens of India and Sri Lanka. However, the time is ripe to build upon this integration.

There is a dearth of university collaboration between Indian and Sri Lankan universities. An Indian Panellist during the discussion expressed her concern over the dwindling number of Sri Lankan students in Indian Universities. As per the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India offers only 290 scholarship slots annually to Sri Lankan students. In addition, under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Scheme and the Colombo Plan, India offers 370 slots annually to Sri Lankan nationals. There is no formal collaboration or incentive to collaborate between the Indian and Sri Lankan universities. The intergovernmental initiative India-Sri Lanka Foundation set up in December with an aim towards enhancement of scientific, technical, educational and cultural cooperation through civil society exchanges and contact between the younger generations of the two countries need to be more pro-active. There are so many avenues of combined research between the nations in every field. Ram Setu or Adam bridge just is one of them. This whole area can be developed by both nations combined to boost tourism in both

countries. The global economy has stuttered in the post Covid era and we must remember that tourism and hospitality sector have been hit the hardest. Indian tourists accounted for a large chunk of foreign tourists on the Sri Lankan soil. It will need a co-operative effort for both countries to revive link in the post Covid era.

The volume of trade between the two nations grew particularly rapidly after the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement was enforced in March 2000. The last few years have also witnessed an increasing trend of Sri Lankan investments into India. As pointed out by Mr. Suresh Prabhu India can also look to Sri Lanka to solve its renewable energy woes. India can provide Sri Lanka with information technology, financial services, metallurgical industries and manufacturing that aid in infrastructure development. It will be win-win situation for both countries.

One area where both countries can and must collaborate is climate change and environmental conservation. Both countries share an extensive coastline that is vulnerable to natural disasters and sensitive to ecological changes. The catastrophic Tsunami of 2004 hit both countries hard. It is with great satisfaction today, we can admit that India's disaster prediction, response and management has improved by leaps and bounds since then. India was the first country that rushed relief materials and deployed rescue personnel in Sri Lanka in 2017, when the country faced its worst floods since 2003. Today India possesses the requisite infrastructure that can millions of lives in event of a tropical cyclone or a Tsunami. This is something Sri Lanka and India can collaborate on.

Sri Lanka was ranked as the 4th most affected country by climate change in 2016. Sri Lanka's vast majority of natural disasters are a result of climate variations. India has played a leading role in articulating the views of the developing countries on global climate change forums and has been forthcoming on its policies and initiatives on climate change. A rise of water level in the Indian ocean region threatens Sri Lanka as much as it affects India. Both countries hence can collaborate to build environmentally friendly guideline for the SAARC region. On the other hand, China's complete disregard for Ocean and environmental laws is well known. Its refusal to accept South China Sea decision by a arbitration tribunal constituted under

Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has unmasked its greedy intentions. China's blatant disregard for international environment law is always maliciously disguised in its investment incentives. Sri Lanka is an environmentally sensitive country threatened the most rising seas levels and climate change must remember that it cannot afford investment at the expense of environmental degradation. All the panellists mentioned the need for Indo-Sri Lankan military co-operation to tackle the menace of terrorism. One panellist even suggested a taskforce for the same. In fact, not only terrorism India must take lead to tackle the maritime security threats. All maritime security threats arising in the Indian Ocean Region will have huge repercussions in India.

Let us not deny that there is a slight mistrust and antipathy towards India after our messy involvement in the Sri Lankan civil war. However, our roots are strong dating back to thousands of years. As one of the panellists said we are all prisoners of our geography. In the post covid era this becomes even more relevant. Both India and Sri Lanka share a symbiotic relationship. As for India we must not be complacent and merely do lip service to a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious, and linguistic interaction. We must build upon it and take the contact to all levels relevant in the modern era.

- Report by Nivedita Jha

(Member Binding Bharat and Intellectual Property attorney).