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TODAY'S ANALYSIS

(08 April 2025)

TOPICS TO BE COVERED

- PM MODI'S VISIT TO SL
- CAMBODIA'S NAVAL BASE RENOVATED BY CHINA
- MCQs



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PM MODI'S VISIT TO SRI LANKA

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in **Colombo, Sri Lanka** on the night of **April 4, 2025**, for a 2 -day visit.
- This visit came shortly after PM Modi's participation in the **BIMSTEC Summit** in **Thailand**, marking it as part of a broader regional diplomatic engagement.
- **Theme of the Visit: "Friendship of Centuries – Commitment to a Prosperous Future"**



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- The visit focused on strengthening the bilateral relationship between India and Sri Lanka, addressing key strategic, economic, and cultural issues, and signing several significant agreements.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- Modi's visit came after Sri Lanka experienced a major political shift in **2024**, with the rise of **President Anura Kumara Dissanayake** from the **National People's Power (NPP)** alliance.
- PM Modi is the **first foreign leader** to visit Sri Lanka since **President Anura Kumara Dissanayake** took office in **September 2024**.
- **December 2024** saw Dissanayake's first official visit to **India**, where both nations laid out a roadmap for future cooperation in a **joint statement**.

KEY UPDATES

- **PM Modi's Arrival and Welcoming Ceremony :**
 - **Prime Minister Modi** was warmly welcomed at **Bandaranaike International Airport** by five top **Sri Lankan ministers**, including **Foreign Minister Vijitha**

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Herath, Health Minister Nalinda Jayatissa, and Fisheries Minister Ramalingam Chandrasekar.

- PM Modi was also given a **guard of honor** at **Independence Square** in **Colombo**.
- It is marking his **4th visit** to Sri Lanka in the last decade.
- Additionally, The ceremonial welcome was a reflection of the **strong and deep-rooted** ties between India and Sri Lanka, with both nations celebrating shared **cultural, historical, and spiritual heritage**.

BILATERAL TALKS: ADDRESSING KEY ISSUES

- PM Modi held extensive **delegation-level talks** with President **Anura Kumara Dissanayake**. Their discussions included several key areas:
 - A significant **defence cooperation agreement** was signed.
 - It is marking a moment in the relationship, particularly given the **35-year history** since India withdrew its **Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)** from Sri Lanka.
 - This agreement is expected to enhance both countries' **security and defence collaboration**.

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- **Economic Support:** PM Modi reaffirmed India's commitment to Sri Lanka's economic recovery, especially in light of the **2019 economic crisis** and **Sri Lanka's financial distress** in **2022**.
- India had previously extended **\$4.5 billion** in financial aid during the crisis.
- One of the major highlights of the visit was the signing of **debt restructuring** agreements.
- Over the past 6 months, India has converted over **\$100 million** in loans into **grants**, helping Sri Lanka recover.
- India has also agreed to **reduce interest rates** to provide financial relief.
- **Currency Swap Agreement:** A separate **currency swap agreement** was finalized to **stabilize Sri Lanka's foreign reserves**.
- It is a crucial aspect of their ongoing economic recovery.

INAUGURATED PROJECTS

- **Several significant projects were launched:**
 - 5000 solar rooftop units installed at religious places across Sri Lanka.
 - A temperature-controlled warehousing facility at Dambulla.

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- The **120 MW Sampur Solar Power Project** was also inaugurated by PM Modi and President Dissanayake.
- Both nations signed an agreement to develop **Thirukoneswaram temple (Trincomalee)**. It is located in the east of Sri Lanka, as an **energy hub**.
 - **Sacred City (Anuradhapura), and the Sita Eliya temple complex (Nuwara Eliya) will receive Indian support for development.**
- PM Modi also announced a comprehensive training program, supporting 700 Sri Lankan citizens annually in various skill development initiatives.
- This project is expected to boost Sri Lanka's energy sector and create long-term economic opportunities.
- India also pledged **multi-sectoral grant assistance** for the **eastern region** of Sri Lanka, including support for **infrastructure development** and **humanitarian aid**.

CULTURAL & DIGITAL COOPERATION

- **Cultural Cooperation:**

- In alignment with the shared Buddhist heritage, PM Modi announced the **Holy Relics of Lord Buddha from Gujarat would be sent to Sri Lanka** for the **International Vesak Day celebrations in May 2025**.

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- **Digital Cooperation:**

- Another **MoU** was signed to strengthen collaboration in the **digital** domain.
- This pact will focus on enhancing Sri Lanka's **digital infrastructure** and increasing **cybersecurity** cooperation between the two countries.

ADDRESSING THE FISHERMEN ISSUE

- The longstanding issue of **Indian fishermen** being detained by Sri Lankan authorities was discussed.
- **Foreign Secretary of India** explained that the issue originated in **1974** when the **international maritime boundary line** was drawn.
- And escalated with the **Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act of 1996** and subsequent amendments in **2018** and **2023**, which imposed **stricter penalties** on fishermen violating Sri Lanka's territorial waters.
- **PM Modi** and **President Dissanayake** agreed on the need for a **humanitarian approach** to resolve the matter with further discussions expected to take place between the 2 governments to ensure the **release** of detained fishermen.

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ADDITIONAL DIPLOMATIC EVENTS

- President Dissanayake requested PM Modi's intervention to facilitate **technical discussions** regarding Sri Lanka's claim to extend the **continental shelf** beyond its **exclusive economic zone**.
- Sri Lanka is seeking to assert its maritime boundaries in the **United Nations**.
- PM Modi also paid a visit to the **Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) memorial**, honoring the Indian soldiers who sacrificed their lives during the peacekeeping operations in Sri Lanka in the 1980s.
- PM Modi emphasized **Sri Lanka's importance** in India's **Neighbourhood First Policy** and **Vision MAHASAGAR**.

MITRA VIBHUSHAN

- **Award: Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana**, Sri Lanka's highest civilian honour
- **Awarded to PM Modi:**
- **Awarded by: Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake**

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- **Reason:** Recognized for his **exceptional contributions** to strengthening **India-Sri Lanka relations** and his role in promoting **friendship and solidarity** between the two nations.



SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AWARD

- **Mitra Vibhushana** is **Sri Lanka's highest civilian honour for foreign dignitaries** who have shown deep **friendship** and **solidarity** with Sri Lanka.
- It is the foremost award granted to foreigners, **ranking higher** than other national honours like the **Sri Lanka Ratna** (equivalent to Bharat Ratna in India).

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AWARD DETAILS

a. Medal Composition:

- **Silver medal** studded with **Navarathna** (nine Sri Lankan gems).
- **Globe** surrounded by **lotus petals**, symbolizing global unity and harmony.
- **Punkalasa** (ceremonial pot with rice sheaves), symbolizing **prosperity and renewal**.
- **Symbols of the Sun and Moon**, representing the **timeless nature** of the relationship.
- **Dharma Chakra** at the center, signifying the shared **Buddhist heritage** of both nations.



b. **Ribbon:** Worn around the neck with a **6.5 cm wide ribbon**.

HISTORY: Instituted: In **2008** by then-President **Mahinda Rajapaksa**.

PAST DETAILS

- a. **2008:** The inaugural recipient was **Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom**, recognized for his efforts in **enhancing bilateral relations** and regional cooperation.
- b. **2014:** The award was given to **Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas** and **former President Yasser Arafat** (posthumously) for their contributions to international peace and cooperation.

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CAMBODIA'S NAVAL BASE RENOVATED BY CHINA

- On **April 5, 2025**, **Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Manet** inaugurated the **Ream Naval Base** following renovations funded by **China**.
- The event comes after growing concerns raised by **the United States** regarding China's strategic involvement in the base.
- It is located along Cambodia's southern coastline in the **Gulf of Thailand**.
- Cambodia's leadership has repeatedly denied that the base is being built for exclusive Chinese use, emphasizing its openness to joint exercises and international cooperation.



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BACKGROUND & STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

- The **Ream Naval Base**, situated near the **disputed South China Sea**, has been a point of contention due to its potential to provide **China** with a key **strategic position** in the region.
- The **South China Sea** is a critical waterway with overlapping territorial claims by multiple countries, including **China**, **Vietnam**, and the **Philippines**.

Location of Ream naval base in Cambodia



Infographic: Rafa Estrada



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CHINA'S ROLE IN RENOVATION

- Since **2022**, China has been contributing to the **revamping** of the base, which was originally **partly funded by the United States**.
- The base now features a **363-meter pier** and facilities designed for hosting **military operations**, including **joint military exercises**.

US CONCERNS

- The **United States** has expressed concerns that the base could be used by the **Chinese navy**, potentially expanding China's **military footprint** in Southeast Asia.
- These concerns stem from a **2019 report** suggesting a **secret agreement** for China to use the base for **warships**.
- further intensifying suspicions about the region's military balance.

THE GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

Cambodia's growing alliance with **China** has become a significant part of its foreign policy in recent years. As a longstanding ally of **China** in **Southeast Asia**, Cambodia has:

- **Bilateral Investments:**
 - China has invested billions in **Cambodian infrastructure** under the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, strengthening **economic ties** between the two nations.

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- This has led to **increased Chinese influence** over Phnom Penh, especially as **Washington's relationship with Cambodia** has become more strained in recent years.

- **US-Cambodia Relations:**

- The **US-Cambodia** relationship has declined in recent years, particularly after a **2019 Wall Street Journal report** that raised concerns over a secret deal that would allow **China** to station **warships** at the **Ream base**.
- This has led to further **US military visits** to Cambodia in recent years, including the docking of a **US warship** at **Sihanoukville** in **December 2023**.

- **Japan-Cambodia Cooperation:**

- In contrast, **Japan** has also strengthened its ties with **Cambodia**, and recently, a **Japanese warship** became the first to dock at the **Ream Naval Base**.
- It is signaling **Japan's strategic interest** in the region.

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CAMBODIA'S DEFENCE MODERNISATION

The **Ream Naval Base** is part of Cambodia's broader **defense modernization** efforts, which include:

- **Warship Donations from China:**

- China has pledged to **donate two warships** to Cambodia boosting the country's naval defense capabilities.

- **Strengthened Defense Relations with Other Nations:**

- Cambodia has also **expanded defense ties** with other powers like the **United States** and **Japan** to balance its relations with **China** and ensure regional stability.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA & THE INDO PACIFIC

- **Concerns for India:**

- The expansion of the Ream Naval Base has significant consequences for India, particularly **in relation to its maritime interests in the Indo-Pacific region.**

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- The base's location near vital sea lanes frequently used by the **Indian Navy** **raises alarms about the potential for strategic encirclement.**

- If the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) establishes a presence there, it could hinder India's operations in the region, especially during regional conflicts.

- **Impact on Maritime Security:**

- An increased Chinese presence at Ream would enhance its naval capabilities in Southeast Asia, potentially challenging India's interests in both the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean Region.
- As a result, India may need to bolster its naval presence in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to more effectively monitor and counter Chinese activities in these key waters.

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MCQs

1. Which of these is known as the Sacred City of Sri Lanka?

- (A) Dambulla
- (B) Anuradhapura
- (C) Colombo
- (D) Galle

Ans. (B)

2. Consider the following statements wrt Mitra Vibhushan and mark the correct one:

- 1. It is Sri Lanka's highest civilian honour given to foreigners only.
- 2. It is higher than Sri Lanka Ratna in stature.

- (A) Only 1
- (B) Only 2
- (C) Both 1 & 2
- (D) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (C)

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3. Which of these countries share a boundary with Cambodia?

1. Thailand

2. Vietnam

3. Laos

(A) Only 1

(B) Only 2

(C) Only 2 & 3

(D) All of the above



Ans. (D)

4. Which country partly contributed in building Ream naval base in Cambodia?

(A) USA

(B) China

(C) Japan

(D) Russia

Ans. (A)

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