

**High Commissioner's Message
on the occasion of 74th Independence Day of India**

On the occasion of the 73rd Anniversary of India's independence, I warmly greet fellow Indians in Sri Lanka and the friendly people of Sri Lanka.

I also extend congratulations from the people of India to the people of Sri Lanka on the successful conduct of the recent General Elections, overcoming the constraints of COVID-19 pandemic.

India and Sri Lanka are democracies blessed with diversity and depth of civilisation. The two close friends share strong spiritual and cultural bonds. From the message of Lord Buddha to the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and the works of Gurudev Tagore, the ethos of India and Sri Lanka resonate in uniquely similar idioms. No wonder their affinity and affection for each other today find numerous expressions, cricket, cuisine, Bollywood, Buddhism and Ramayana tourism among them.

These age-old ties are today infused with the strength of the partnership between the people of the two countries in their common pursuit for progress and peace, and their shared interest in security of

their lands and of the waters that have connected them to the world from time immemorial.

The strong commitment and the highest priority to this relationship accorded by the leaders of the two countries are embodied in regular exchange of visits and frequent interaction between them. Their guidance has ensured that India is not merely a leading trade, investment and development partner of Sri Lanka but also the first responding friend in times of need.

Most recently, medical consignments from India as well as online interaction between experts and senior policy makers of the two countries have helped mitigate COVID-19 challenges. I was privileged to arrive in Sri Lanka as High Commissioner with a consignment of medicines during the auspicious Vesak week.

The recent conclusion of USD 400 million currency swap between the Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka is another example of India's commitment to economic recovery and progress of Sri Lanka.

Every challenge is also an opportunity. India's resilience in the fight against COVID 19 has seen monumental initiatives such as '*Atmanirbhar Bharat*' (Self-reliant India) and a large package for economic revitalisation. The return of almost one million Indians to India from all corners of the world was facilitated by Indian authorities in the past three months. The message emanating from India is of resolve, of looking to future with hope and of straining every nerve to build capacities.

Like always, efforts of India are intended to benefit all friends and partners. Her 'Neighbourhood First' policy will ensure that all boats are lifted with the rising tide. Growing India-Sri Lanka cooperation in areas as diverse as IT and tourism, science and spiritualism, education and sports, health and security will contribute to greater peace and prosperity of the peoples of India and Sri Lanka alike, as also in the region.

This Independence Day, therefore, we rededicate ourselves to realising the ideal of '*Sarve bhavantu sukhinah*' or '*Sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta*'.