

**High Commissioner's remarks at the**  
**Annual Research Symposium of the University of Colombo, 2015**

Professor Lakshman Dissanayake, Vice Chancellor, University of Colombo

Dr. Sampath Seneviratne, Chairman, Annual Research Symposium 2015

Professor Anthony Anghie, Professor of Law at the University of Utah

Professors and Students of University of Colombo,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be present today at the Annual Research Symposium-2015 of the University of Colombo. Knowledge creation based on empirical research and critical analysis is the hallmark of any knowledge-based society. Hence, encouraging research and enquiry is incumbent on every institution of higher learning and excellence.

**2.** You would agree that in recent years, innovation has moved to the centre stage as the main driver of economic growth. Research statistics are an important policy planning tool for industrialized countries, emerging economies and developing countries alike. Unfortunately, the availability of these statistics for developing countries is still uneven. Earlier, research activities used to be largely funded by the Government but now new sources of funding are available. Foundations, scientific associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an important role. In addition, the contribution of private enterprise is becoming more important and gaining traction in a number of developing countries.

**3.** Keeping in view these trends, this symposium hosted by the University of Colombo is significant since it encourages research and enquiry in Sri Lanka. This forum provides an opportunity for academic interaction, to exchange ideas, debate hypotheses and broaden our knowledge base. The salience of the eight broad disciplines of education, fine arts, humanities, law, management, medicine, sciences and graduate studies, subjects for this symposium, cannot be over-emphasized.

4. In India, while there are various institutes of excellence in diverse fields that encourage a spirit of enquiry and empirical research, the Government has taken several steps to promote the R&D sector. A National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog has been established to enhance involvement of entrepreneurs and researchers to foster scientific innovation. With the Government's support, the R&D sector in India is all set to witness robust growth in the coming years.

5. According to a study by a management consulting firm, *Zinnov*, the engineering R&D market in India is estimated to grow at 14 per cent to reach US\$ 42 billion by 2020. Most of the global MNCs are transferring their R & D units to India. India is also expected to witness strong growth in the agriculture and pharmaceutical sectors as the Government is investing large sums to set up dedicated R&D centres for these sectors. The Indian IT industry is also expected to add to the development of the R&D sector.

6. India, as Sri Lanka's closest neighbor and partner is ready to collaborate in research. During the 4<sup>th</sup> Advisory Board Meeting of the Centre for Contemporary Indian Studies of University of Colombo last month (September 2015), I had proposed that the University could partner with leading IT companies in India for training the trainers, who in turn can impart skills to the wider student community in Sri Lanka. The academia in Sri Lanka should avail of various short term courses offered under the Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) to further enhance the resource base in Sri Lanka.

7. During his visit to India last month, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe proposed concluding a bilateral Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement by next year. While we commence negotiations for such a landmark agreement, the stress laid by the Prime Minister in boosting cooperation in technology reflects the importance Sri Lanka attaches to harness the fruits of state of the art technologies and the constantly expanding frontiers of research and development.

8. There are various fields where collaboration between India and Sri Lanka to promote research and expansion of the knowledge base can take place. Our knowledge about our civilisational ties, which pre-date recorded history, provides a fascinating arena of cooperation. The advent of Buddhism in Sri Lanka almost 2,300 years ago, followed the convening of the Third Buddhist Council, under Moggaliputta-Tissa the senior. Emperor

Ashoka sent two great Ambassadors, his own children, Mahinda and Sanghamitta to Sri Lanka to spread the timeless and powerful message of Lord Buddha. Pataliputra (present day Patna), the imperial capital of Emperor Ashoka and from where we believe both Arahata Mahinda and Theri Sanghamitta sailed down the Ganges to Sri Lanka witnessed momentous developments. Till today there exists a big jetty or pier on the Ganga in Patna called "*Mahendru Ghat*" named after Prince Mahendra or Arahata Mahinda. Perhaps historians and archaeologists in both countries could collaborate and unravel the mysteries of the past through careful research and examination of all available source materials.

**9.** In the disciplines of fine arts, languages and education, robust and vibrant collaboration exists between India and Sri Lanka. The renowned Sri Lankan artist, George Keyt's multi-faceted works drawing on themes from Mahabharata, Khajuraho, Konark and *Krishna-Lila* are evocative and undermine the symbiotic links that bind us. One of his notable works was the translation of the epic, *Geet Govinda* by Jayadeva. George Keyt's work, influenced as it was by Indian art forms, including painting, sculpture, and literature, bridges our cultures and further research on such links would enrich our understanding of each other.

**10.** A number of Sri Lankan students studied in Shantiniketan, which was established by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and in numerous institutions of higher learning in India. Events like Kala Pola and the Galle Literary Festival provide opportunities for Indian artists and authors to participate and further our rich legacy of artistic interaction, just as the Jaipur Literary Festival is attended by many well known Sri Lankan writers. Next month we plan to hold the inaugural event of the Festival of India in Sri Lanka which will showcase the diverse and rich cultural heritage of India.

**11.** Research on greater connectivity, both virtual and physical, between our two countries, could be mutually beneficial. Both countries are working for resumption of ferry services between Colombo and Tuticorin and between Talaimannar and Rameshwaram, which will make travel easier. Already India and Sri Lanka enjoy close connectivity by air with 150 flights a week from Colombo to eight destinations in India. I look forward to a time when a passenger can board a train in Kataragama in southern Sri Lanka and travel to Srinagar, a city founded by Emperor Ashoka, in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir by train and ferry. Digital connectivity is another area which has immense potential. Prime Minister Shri Narendra

Modi recently launched an initiative called “*Digital India*”. Sri Lanka could be a partner in this effort and gain from advances made in the digital world.

**12.** Research and collaboration on law, especially since our legal systems have so much in common could also be mutually enriching.

**13.** There exist a number of bilateral initiatives, which encourage research and collaboration. In this context, let me mention the India-Sri Lanka Foundation (ISLF), set up under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of India and Sri Lanka. The mandate of the ISLF is to foster India - Sri Lanka relations through the enhancement of research in economic, scientific, technical and cultural fields. To ensure this, the Foundation, every year, invites project proposals for funding support. Proposals are considered for research projects and other educational activities at recognised institutions of learning located in India and in Sri Lanka, visits and exchanges involving students, scholars, academics, and publication of research works on India-Sri Lanka relations in various fields.

**14.** Many of you would be aware that, under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on July 12, 2011, a Centre for Contemporary Indian Studies (CCIS) was established at the University of Colombo in February 2012. The Centre has the potential to emerge as a premier resource centre and academic hub for studies on contemporary India, which will benefit Sri Lankan policy makers, businessmen, academics and students. Establishment of the Centre is an important initiative that contributes to fostering a greater understanding of modern India. The academic community in Sri Lanka should take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Centre to promote greater research and understanding as well as mutually rewarding partnerships.

**15.** I understand that a draft MOU between the South Asian University in New Delhi and University of Colombo is in the process of obtaining requisite approvals from both sides. This MoU will further strengthen R & D links between our two countries.

**16.** I would like to conclude by extending my best wishes to the organizers of the symposium, including its Chairman, Dr. Sampath Seneviratne and the participants. I wish the Annual Research Symposium 2015 of the University of Colombo all success.

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