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Norwegian Foreign Relations Growing Stronger with India and its Southern neighbours

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Norway's foreign relations with India and its Southern neighbours like Sri Lanka and Maldives goes way back beyond the official formal diplomatic relations in the 1940s. It was in this positive atmosphere that Norwegian diplomatic ties with India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have increased steadily over the past several decades. The foreign policies of Norway have in recent years been motivated by the drive to play an important role in development and peacemaking. Norway has realised the emergence of South Asia with countries such as India and Sri Lanka which are showing impressive economic growth. The focus of Norway in its relations with the South Asian nations has been trade and

industry.

Photo: Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

India-Norway ties growing stronger

The political and economic relations of Norway and India have been strong for years now. India and Norway have cooperated in many fields such as defence, cultural exchanges, and scientific research to name a few. The continuing importance of the Indian market to the Norwegians is confirmed by new investments.

Norwegian investment in India is worth over 14 billion USD (Royal Norwegian Embassy in India 2018), the former providing assistance worth 143.6 million Kroner's (NOK) (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation). In 2015-2016 India's total bilateral trade stood at US\$ 1127 million (Ministry of Commerce, Government of India).

India is also a beneficiary of Norwegian development assistance, for instance, out of the total Norwegian Agency assistance received for development cooperation about 148.3 million in 2016, 63 million Kroner's (NOK) was to be allocated for healthcare and social services which is especially essential for rural India where there are no proper health facilities as compared to the urban areas. The focus was put on maternal and child healthcare (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation or NORAD 2017). The child mortality in India has improved considerably with a decrease of 46 percent since 1990. For instance India has benefited from 'Make in India' initiative and over 20 000 people have been employed by Norwegian companies in India. The two countries have collaborated in the fields of energy, where sustainable development has been focused upon

India also believes in understanding the renewable energy system in Norway better. Statkraft, a Norwegian company has invested in Bharat Light and Power which could prove useful in the solar energy sector and will help in cost efficiency and also increase in the use of solar power. Norway has extended its hand to India in many ways such as the latter getting a permanent seat at the Security Council plus entry into the Nuclear Suppliers group

Norwegian -Sri Lanka Diplomatic Ties



The year 2016 proved to be a fruitful year for Sri Lanka and Norway bilateral ties. The highlight was the visit of Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg to Sri Lanka. During Solberg's visit to the Indian Ocean island nation to deliver the Lakshman Kadirgamar memorial Lecture on the theme 'Sustainable Development Goals: Working together for our Common Good'. During the Norwegian Prime Minister's visit she praised the progress made by Sri Lanka in advancing political and economic reforms and advancing reconciliation since January 2015.

Sri Lanka was given credit for the role of opening the economy to make the country investor friendly. Sri Lanka meanwhile, proves to be a successful economic hub, due to its strategic location and ports. Many foreign investors have been attracted by the state's growth.

According to the latest figures there are about 100 joint venture companies which Sri Lanka and Norway have founded. Speaking at a forum on bilateral trade between Sri Lanka and Norway held by the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (NCCSL), Norway's Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Thorbourn Gaustadsaether said "the balance of trade is in Sri Lanka's favour. Sri Lanka exports US\$ 20 million worth of goods to Norway and imports goods worth US\$ 12million from Norway. Norwegians have also contributed development aid to Sri Lanka during the past fifty years. The Norwegian assistance agreement in developing a fishery policy and fish stock assessment of the island nation's coast is an important milestone in the diplomatic ties that is shifting in a new direction.

On the peace front Norway played an important role during the Sri Lankan peace process. In 2002 after nearly two decades of fighting and failed attempts on peace talks the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) entered into a peace process with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) through a Norwegian brokered ceasefire agreement. There were six peace talk sessions conducted under the facilitation of Norway from 2002 to 2003 in Thailand. Article 1.1 of the ceasefire agreement stated "Neither Party shall engage in any offensive military operation. Two years after the civil war ended in Sri Lanka Erik Solhaim, the former Norwegian Peace broker for the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) made a valuable statement in 2011. He said, "We gained experience from the peace process in Sri Lanka that we can use in other places".

Norway - Maldives Relations

Maldives and Norway have closely cooperated with each other and established strong diplomatic relations as early as the 1980s. The bilateral ties between Oslo and Maldives are maintained by the Norwegian embassy in Colombo. However, with deepening of relations between Norway and Maldives, Norway has



taken an active front in promoting peace and democracy in the Indian Ocean Island nation over the years. Maldives is also a tourist hotspot, receiving many tourists from the European Union (EU) as well as from Norway. Maldives is also an upcoming market for investment in other industries.

The relationship between Norway and India and its southern neighbors is mainly characterized by political and economic aspects. South Asia also has potential for stable economic conditions. India already has superb relations with Norway while Sri Lanka and Maldives aren't far behind. Norwegians can play an important role in the political and economic framework of India and its southern neighbors like Sri Lanka and by boosting the region's democracy and exchanging their experiences in diverse areas.

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