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Title- THE GEO-STRATEGIC POSITION AND IMPORTANCE OF SRI LANKA

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Abstracts:

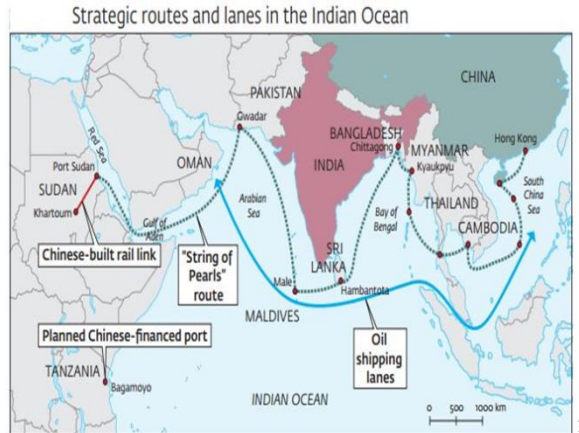
India and Sri Lanka are very close neighbours. Sri Lanka is a very small nation in terms of the area of India. But its position on Earth is at a very important strategic place. As Sri Lanka's strategic location is in the south of India and at the top of the Indian Ocean, international transport routes have been developed in the Indian Ocean near Sri Lanka. Today every nation is building its dominance on this transport route. India also needs to work on how to enhance its strategic security by participating in Sri Lanka's strategy. Sri Lanka's geopolitics has a huge impact on India's security. Sri Lanka's geopolitics is important from India's security point of view. The elements of a geostrategic relationship are always mutually exclusive. In a geostrategic environment, relations with our neighbours are naturally very important. The situation in the neighbouring country affects the country. Sri Lanka controls the three continents of the Indian Ocean, Asia, Africa, and Australia. Sri Lanka is a major waterway hub with important ports such as Colombo, Galle, Trincomalee, and Hambantota. During the Cold War, after the entry of the superpowers into the Indian Ocean, a situation of constant conflict has emerged. Today, a superpower like China is interfering in Sri Lanka for economic development and dominating Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean should not become an area of conflict due to the rise of superpowers. For this, India needs to help Sri Lanka to maintain its strategic security.

Keywords: India, China, Sri Lanka, Indian Ocean, ports, strategy,

Introduction

Due to Sri Lanka's geopolitical position in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka is today dominated by many foreign nations investing financially in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has a very important strategic position in the Indian Ocean compared to other South Asian countries. Sri Lanka is in an enviable location. The busiest east-west shipping route is only 6 to 10 nautical miles from the island of Sri Lanka. Every year more than 60,000 ships, 2/3 of the world's oil, and 50% of all containers pass through this route. Along with Sri

Lanka, India's market is also gaining momentum.¹



Sri Lanka is a major base for military bases and maritime security in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka is a very important place to establish a naval base to monitor the Indian Ocean and the increasingly busy shipping lanes. No other country in the South Asian region can match the geographical location of Sri Lanka. Countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives have their geographical and strategic importance. But from a naval strategic point of view, Sri Lanka is reaping more benefits, including the protection of Sri Lanka's strategic qualities, coastline, and maritime traffic. In the 1990s, the port of Trincomalee in Sri Lanka was allowed to be used by the US Navy for rest. It was rumored at the time that the US was going to develop its naval base at Trincomalee.³

Sri Lanka's geographical location can play an important role in maintaining India's security. Sri Lanka is located at the center of maritime trade routes in West and East Asia, as well as in the middle of Africa, the Arab, and Eastern worlds. Merchant ships sailing from the ports of Kolkata and Yangon [Rangoon] to the Suez Canal use the best ports in Sri Lanka, Colombo, and Trincomalee. The island of Sri Lanka is a major hub for communications, trade, and naval movement in the Indian Ocean region. Trincomalee serves as the main naval base. The entry into Sri Lanka could allow outside regional powers to dominate the sea route. This could hamper India's Waterway shipping. Waterways in the Indian Ocean have become important for India's global trade expansion. Indian oil was transported in large quantities through the Indian Ocean. It is essential to meet India's ever-increasing energy needs. India sees Sri Lanka as a security guard for its security in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka is India's southernmost security nation. That is why before independence, the British had recognized the strategic importance of an island nation like Sri Lanka. That is why the concept of "strategic unity" between India and Sri Lanka has long been considered essential for India's security.⁴

As an island nation, Sri Lanka is strategically located in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Since Sri Lanka is close to India, it is important to consider how it deals with other regional powers. Sri Lanka has the advantage of having excellent relations between India and China. Control over the three continents of the Indian Ocean Islands, Asia, Africa, and Australia, major waterway centers, 1204 km long coastline, the ports of Colombo and Trincomalee in Sri Lanka is the most valuable strategic assets in Sri Lanka.⁵ Sri Lanka is not connected to any country by land. The Sri Lankan government can seal the entire country's border with the joint use of naval forces and the army.⁶

¹ Area Studies South Asia 2017, Foreign policy Research centre New Delhi P - 133

² <https://www.fiaa.fi/julkaisu/indias-look-east-act-east-policy?read>

³ U.S.Naval Basing in Sri Lanka? Small wars Journal <https://smallwarsjournal.com/rn//art/us-naval-basing-in-sri-lanka>

⁴ Kodikara, S.U. (1982). Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka, Delhi: Chanakya Publications P - 21

⁵ Area Studies South Asia 2017, Foreign policy Research centre New Delhi P - 133

⁶ Bigul new Paper 11/03/2017

Ports in Sri Lanka⁷

The three major commercial ports in Sri Lanka are Colombo, Galle, and Trincomalee. In addition, the port of Hambantota in the south of Sri Lanka has been developed by China. This has developed into a commercial port. The port of Oluvil on the east coast of Sri Lanka is also being developed as a major commercial and fishing vessel. Perhaps in the next two decades, Sri Lanka will emerge as one of the world's major maritime trade centres. The government is taking initiatives to develop infrastructure and a railway network. This will drive the process of industrialization, the economy. Connectivity is essential to boost Sri Lanka's economic growth, and Sri Lanka has approved many infrastructure projects.⁸

Today, various countries such as Japan, China, India, France, Iran, Russia, and the United States have invested in development projects in Sri Lanka. In line with the 'Mahindra Chintana' vision announced by the President during the 2010 election campaign, Sri Lanka is working to develop the country for air and sea transport, trade, energy, and knowledge-based services by increasing per capita production and making the country a 'wonder of Asia.'⁹ Sri Lanka's geographical location in the Indian Ocean is such that it is very important for all oil-thirsty countries in East Asia, not just India. Sri Lanka is like a beacon of unique significance in the world's sea lines of communication. Crude oil, which travels from the Arab world to almost all countries by sea, passes through the seas of Sri Lanka. The geopolitical and strategic importance of Sri Lanka is evident from this single point.¹⁰ For this reason, Sri Lanka's geostrategic location has gained a great deal of importance. Sri Lanka's geo-strategic location in the Indian Ocean, four of the following ports are making significant contributions to Sri Lanka's development.

1. Port of Trincomalee

The port of Trincomalee is the second-best natural harbour in the world. The water and land area are ten times larger than the port of Colombo. Sri Lanka's Ports Authority is currently in the process of redeveloping Trincomalee as a metropolitan development center. Against the backdrop of modern strategic policy, the port of Trincomalee is extremely suitable for nuclear and nuclear-powered submarines. Due to the wide area of Trincomalee port, submarines can hide from radar or sonar observations by hitting the tune when the time comes. As a result, the importance of Trincomalee Port will continue to grow.¹¹ According to a report by the Sri Lanka Ports Authority, the company has posted a net profit of Rs 11 billion

⁷ <http://www.mackinnonshipping.com/>

⁸ Smruti S Pattanaik [2012] Sri Lanka Challenges and Opportunities for India, [Editors] Rumel Dahiya, Ashok K Behuria - India's Neighbourhood: Challenges in the Next Two Decades, Idsa New Delhi, Published by PENTAGON SECURITY INTERNATIONAL P 191

⁹ Ibid P 192

¹⁰ Anushka Wijesinha - Can Sri Lanka Leverage Its Location as Indian Ocean Hub? Tha Diplomat 20/06/2016 <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/can-sri-lanka-leverage-its-location-as-indian-ocean-hub/>

¹¹ www.slpalk/porttrikolali

in 2016 and revenue of Rs 44 billion. The port of Trincomalee was a major military base for the British Air Force and the Royal Navy during World War II. Thus, Sri Lanka's location serves both commercial and industrial purposes and can also be used as a military base.¹²

2. Port of Colombo

The port of Colombo is the fastest-growing seaport in the South Asian region. Freight ships from the port of Colombo to Europe, East, and South Asia, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa are easily and efficiently connected. The port of Colombo is primarily a container port. The original area of Colombo Port was 184 hectares. The southern area of the port (285 hectares) has been developed in 2008. As a result, the port is being used for many large ships and submarines. In addition to the container terminals in the main port area, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority plans to develop 3 terminals (each with a capacity of 2.4 million TEVs) in the southern port.¹³ Sri Lanka's state-of-the-art strategic port is on the list of busiest sea routes in international transport. According to Lloyds' list, the port of Colombo in Sri Lanka is one of the 25 busiest port ports in the world.¹⁴

3. Hambantota port

The port of Hambantota is located on the southern coast of Sri Lanka. The port is very close to the major international East-West waterway. The port is strategically located on India's maritime access route. The construction of Hambantota Port is one of the major development projects in Sri Lanka and is being carried out by the Sri Lanka Port Authority in collaboration with China.¹⁵ The port of Hambantota is given to China today for development. Also, Sri Lanka has leased the port to China for 1.1 billion on a 99-year lease, as it cannot afford the financial burden. The port of Hambantota is an important part of China's String of Pulse policy in the Indian Ocean.¹⁶

4. Port of Galle

Galle is a natural port on the southwest coast of Sri Lanka. Galle Port is currently the most active regional port in Sri Lanka. Galle is the only port in Sri Lanka that facilitates transportation. The Port of Galle has been recognized by the International Shipping Community as one of the world's most attractive destinations for shipping. Galle Port was one of the major ports of the country in the pre-independence period. Which was also used in the Christian era? But after the 12th century, this port gained importance. Until the 14th century, the port of Galle was the most important in Sri Lanka. The importance of the port of Galle remained until the construction of an artificial port at Colombo in 1873. For more than 200 years after the completion of the Galle Fort in the 17th century; the port of Galle was a major port in the Indian Ocean. This was an important port for shipping between Europe and Asia. After the creation of the port of Colombo, international shipping from the port of Galle was diverted to the port of Colombo. Galle is then the second largest port. Even today, the port is used extensively for shipping and boating. For the economic development of the country, many transport facilities have been created in the port of Galle.¹⁷

China's strategic interest in Sri Lanka

Especially due to Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean; China has been the focus in recent times. Initially, China was more focused on the Northeast and Southeast Asian regions in line with

¹² Can Sri Lanka capitalize out of its strategic location in the Indian Ocean region?, The Landan School of Economic and Political science 06/08/2018

¹³ www.slpalk/port-colombo

¹⁴ Ibid p 2

¹⁵ www.slpalk/port-colombo/hip

¹⁶ SL sings deal on Hambantota port with china, Lankan new paper, July 30. 2017 www.lankanewpaper.com/2017/30/sl-sing-deal-on-hambantota-port-with-china/

¹⁷ www.slpalk/port-colombo/about-galle

China's Asian policy. But in recent times, South Asia has also gained prominence in China's foreign policy. Moreover, after India started looking east, China started looking south against India. In this context, Sri Lanka is important for China's strategic interests. Five key factors shape China's policy in Sri Lanka. They are as follows.

1. Sri Lanka's position is strategically important. The oil-rich Middle East and Southeast Asia is the central route. This gives direct access to the international sea route in the Indian Ocean of China. This will increase the security of its trade.
2. Sri Lanka is rich in natural resources such as coal, iron, hydrocarbons, natural gas, and oil. Some of it is still not fully utilized. Due to the growing economy and population of millions in the region, there is a huge potential for trade and a large market for Chinese goods.
3. China has a lot of opportunities in the Indian Ocean region and poses serious security threats such as piracy, terrorism, drugs, arms smuggling, and weapons of mass destruction. In this context, China can act as a buffer nation against the Sri Lankan threat.
4. Apart from this, Sri Lanka will play a very important role in China's 'Sea Silk Road' (MSR) project. (Sri Lanka was the first country to support the proposal.) Under this ambitious plan, China has a road construction plan. China will redevelop the ancient Silk Road connecting Central Asia and Europe with the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor. The purpose is to connect the various ports in the area to expand the Silk Road trade. Thus, the project will be beneficial not only for China and Sri Lanka but also for the South Asian region.
5. Most importantly, China's policy in South Asia is mainly focused on India. In the last few years, India has emerged as a regional military power with economic power, nuclear power, and missile capability. This is challenging the growth and interests of this region of China. At the same time, India's growing strategic partnership with the United States and Japan is a major concern for China's security. Thus, as the Chinese say, "one mountain cannot accommodate two tigers." Therefore, China is hindering India's economic development. This is emerging as a competitor in the future Asia and beyond. China has always supported anti-India political movements and insurgencies in India and its neighbouring countries. Weapons are supplied to act against India. In this regard, China has been somewhat successful in increasing its influence in Sri Lanka. This has raised concerns about India's security. According to Beijing's policy is to increase China's influence in Colombo and reduce India's influence. It is also making an overall effort to increase its influence in Sri Lanka to control the capabilities of potential adversaries like the US and Japan to threaten the Indian Ocean and China's interests in the region.¹⁸

Development of Hambantota Port

China is engaged in expanding its orbit. Aspiring to support the US, China is expanding its empire around the world. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, China began to expand its influence in the South Asian region as well. China has grown closer to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and even Nepal. The port of Hambantota is in the southern part of Sri Lanka. The port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka will be developed as part of China's important project to build a modern "Silk Road". However, China has warned that the investment will not be possible unless the "political and legal" issues with the scheme are resolved.¹⁹

¹⁸ S.Y. Surendra Kumar - *China's Strategic Engagement with Sri Lanka: Implications for India*, Bangalore University, India. Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal (Dec. 2017) pp - 1111-12

¹⁹ [Shihar anez - exclusive: china 'silk road' project in sri lanka delayed as beijing toughens stance](https://fr.reuters.com/article/us-china-silkroad-sri-lanka-exclusive-iduskbn15u2vm), Reuters (16 Feb 2017) available at: { <https://fr.reuters.com/article/us-china-silkroad-sri-lanka-exclusive-iduskbn15u2vm> } accessed 22 June 2020



An agreement was reached between Sri Lanka and China on the strategically important port of Hambantota. The deal is worth 1.12 billion (approximately Rs 72 billion). Under the new agreement, China Merchant Port Holdings, China's national port development company, will get a 70 percent stake in the port, while the Sri Lanka Ports Authority will get a 30 percent stake. Companies such as Hambantota International Port Services and Hambantota International Port Group have been set up for port management. The conversion of Chinese loans into equity will allow 15,000 acres of land reserved for a special economic zone in the port area to be used by China on a 99-year lease. News of the resettlement of 10,000 Chinese families in the special economic zone has sparked outrage among Sri Lankans, who have been protesting the project. Pollution from harmful chemical industries in the port as well as in the economic sector has created a climate of fear among local fishermen and farmers. The Hambantota port development project has been embroiled in controversy since its inception.²¹ The 99-year agreement to give the strategically important port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka to China was finalized on July 25. Although the port was commissioned in November 2011, it has been commercially unprofitable. By the end of December 2016, the deficit was 30 million. China's strategic intention is to pay a high price for this port, which has not been profitable by economic standards.

India and the United States had expressed concern that the deep-sea port of the Indian Ocean would be taken over by China. While Sri Lanka is a sovereign state, other countries cannot directly oppose the transfer of Hambantota, but China's aggressive sanctity should not create tension in the Indian Ocean, following the South China Sea. Given the expectations of India and the United States, Sri Lanka has made two changes to the final agreement, preventing China from using the port as a military or naval base. Such a provision has been made. According to these two provisions, the port dock and other properties can be used only for port-related work. Out-of-port activities such as bringing submarines and warships into the port, storing them, storing military equipment, and building transport systems are prohibited. But there is a loophole. All this can be done if the Sri Lankan government allows it. In short, the Sri Lankan government can allow or deny China.²² Sri Lanka allowed China to develop a naval port at Hambantota, south of Sri Lanka. It poses a threat to India as part of its 'String of Pearls' strategy to encircle India by developing ports

²⁰ Aashish - *China's "String of Pearls": The encirclement of India & how to break the chakravyuh?* Strategic Frontier Research Foundation, 23 December 2017 pp - 8

available at: { <https://www.strategicfront.org/chinas-string-pearls-encirclement-india-break-chakravyuh/> } accessed 30 August 2020

²¹ Smruti S. Pattanaik, *New Hambantota Port Deal: China Consolidates its Stakes in Sri Lanka*, IDSA Comment, August 14, 2017 pp-1 available at: { https://idsa.in/idsacomments/new-hambantota-port-deal-china-consolidates-its-stakes-in-sri-lanka_sspattanaik_140817/ } accessed 26 July 2019

²² Vijay Salunke - *Hambantota Port - China's New Trap*, Sakal Paper 8/8/2017 available at: <https://www.esakal.com/sampadakiya/china-srilanka-hambantota-port-65153> accessed 28 July 2019

in the Indian Ocean.²³

The fall of Hambantota, strategically located on the world's busiest maritime route, will further strengthen China's ambitions to increase naval readiness in the Indian Ocean region, a matter of concern for countries including India, the US, Japan, Korea, and Australia. During the civil war in Sri Lanka, in 2003 and 2005, Sri Lanka rejected India's demand to develop the port of Hambantota and to supply arms. Taking advantage of this opportunity, China took Sri Lanka close to it. The development project created a foothold in strategically important places in Sri Lanka.²⁴ Despite the opportunity to build and develop the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka, India missed out on this opportunity due to delays in the decision-making process. China won.²⁵ No country's military base will be allowed on the strategically important port of Hambantota. India has been assured that the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and Navy can protect the port. I would also like to assure you that we will not be allowed to take any action that would endanger India's security in our ports or waters," said Admiral Ravindra Wijegunaratne has assured India. He was speaking at the India Pacific Regional Dialogue 2018.²⁶

China's investment in Sri Lanka

After the end of the Sri Lankan civil war, the Rajapaksa government set the East China policy for the development of Sri Lanka and China has increased its influence by making significant investments in Sri Lanka. China's assistance to Sri Lanka has been steadily increasing since 2014 to accelerate the construction of China's 'Sea Silk Road'. Many projects are being funded at a discounted rate, with many projects being received as gifts from the Chinese government. Many Chinese companies have started investing heavily in local companies, hotels, and construction businesses. Between 1971 and 2004 China provided a total of 362 million to Sri Lanka over a period of 30 years. In contrast, between 2005 and 2013, in just eight years, Sri Lanka received Rs 5,664 million for development. Sri Lanka received 94 per cent of the total aid from China. Between 2005 and 2012, China provided 8 4.8 billion in aid to Sri Lanka. Of that, 2 percent was grants and 98 percent were loans. Reliable financial support to the Sri Lankan government was mainly from the ExxonMobil of China. In addition, financial assistance is provided by the China Development Bank (CDB) and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC). As of 2013, 26 per cent of Chinese investment in Sri Lanka was in the ports sector. All this shows that there is a huge burden on China for the development of Sri Lanka.²⁷

Colombo Air Base Project

In the 'Port City Project' in Colombo, China will get about 108 hectares of land on a 99-year lease. So, they have invested 134 million in the project. About 70 per cent of the sea freight through the port of Colombo is connected to India. Therefore, the project is a matter of concern for India's economic and geopolitical interests. Sri Lanka is central to China's strategy for dominance in the Indian Ocean region through the Maritime Silk Route.²⁸

China's Sting of pearls Policy (String of pearls policy)

On July 12, 2017, China sent a warship to Djibouti in Africa to build its first foreign military base.

²³ available at: <http://www.sahityasanskriti.com/content> accessed 28 July 2019

²⁴ Anya Joglekar, *Ramsetu connecting Sri Lanka*, 20 Dec 2017 available at: { <https://www.mahantb.com/Encyc/2017/12/20/Article-on-Ramsetu-joining-Sri-Lanka-by-anay-joglekar.html> } accessed 20 August 2020

²⁵ NAYANIMA BASU, *Sri Lanka 'assures' India on Colombo Port project despite opposition pressure ahead of polls*, the Print, 9 July, 2020 available at: { <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/sri-lanka-assures-india-on-colombo-port-project-despite-opposition-pressure-ahead-of-polls/457484/> } accessed 20 August 2020

²⁶ Hambantota port will not be used as military base: CDS, Daily Mirror, 27 February 2018 available at: { <http://www.dailymirror.lk/146514/Hambantota-port-will-not-be-used-as-military-base-CDS> } accessed 20 August 2020

²⁷ kahandawaarachchi, *Politics of ports china's investment in Pakistan*, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, pp -35,36

²⁸ Aniket Bhavthankar, *Sri Lanka after the change of power*, Loksatta News Paper 20/03/2015 P- 2

It is understood from China's initiative that China is planning to encircle India by sea by setting up military bases in neighbouring countries. China's various military bases have been dubbed the 'Sting of Pulse Policy' project. The Sting of Pulse Policy was mentioned in a secret report by the Pentagon in 2005, entitled The Future of Energy in Asia. The Pentagon's report details China's Sting of pearls policy at sea. These are not pearls found in the sea, but will be made in strategic places (ports, runways, observations, etc.) from the South Sea to the Strait of Malacca, the Bay of Bengal, and the Arabian Sea (across the Indian Ocean).²⁹ Also in the 2004 Buzz Alan Hamilton report, Chinese ports in the Indian Ocean are referred to as "pearl necklaces". China has invested heavily in ports and terminals in neighbouring India. It would be a big mistake for a country like India to ignore China's investment in port-related infrastructure around the world.

China has invested not only in many ports and terminals around India, but also in Seattle and Los Angeles in the US and Chittagong in Bangladesh. In addition, China has invested in ports in South American countries such as Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Suriname, and Venezuela. On the African continent, China has built ports in Cameroon, Djibouti, Guinea, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Togo with loans. In 2014, China bought the Australian port of Newcastle for coal exports. Also, China has made a very successful investment in the port of Piraeus in Greece.

China's Sting of pearls Policy in the Indian Ocean³⁰



This shows that China's investment in ports is increasing its global trade by investing in ports not only in India but all over the world.³¹ According to the String of Pulsars policy, China has developed the ports of Gwadar in Baluchistan, Coco Island in Myanmar, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and Chittagong in Bangladesh to safeguard its interests.

²⁹ Hemant Singh, 'How china's 'String of pearls Project,' would affect India's security?

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Conclusion

This shows how important Sri Lanka's geopolitical position is to India's strategic security. In short, the security of South India depends on Sri Lanka. As the Indian Ocean becomes more important for international energy and trade growth in the future, control of waterway safety will depend on Sri Lanka, so today China, the US, Japan, etc. Similar superpowers are building their dominance in the Indian Ocean by entering Sri Lanka for economic investment and development. The growing influence of foreign powers in Sri Lanka is a threat to India's strategic security.

Sri Lanka's geo Strategic location in the Indian Ocean and Sri Lanka's Colombo, Trincomalee, Hambantota, and Galle. The creation of ports has given importance to Sri Lanka's strategic position. In the future too, Sri Lanka will gain importance due to the international water transport route in the Indian Ocean. Because today every nation is trying to build its dominance by participating in Sri Lanka's development projects by providing huge financial assistance to Sri Lanka to increase its trade and remove natural and artificial barriers to trade. Due to the geopolitical situation and importance of Sri Lanka, the interference of foreign powers in Sri Lanka is increasing. It is affecting India's national security.

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