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Q9

India is an age-old friend of Sri Lanka.' Discuss India's role in the recent crisis in Sri Lanka in the light of the preceding statement.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · GS II · 10 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Core demand of the question

- India is an age-old friend of Sri Lanka. Discuss India's role in the recent crisis in Sri Lanka
- Keep to the 2022 economic crisis, credit lines, fuel and food support, and **Neighbourhood First**, without invented tonnage figures

Revision summary

Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis produced default, fuel and medicine shortages, and political change.

India responded first with credit lines and humanitarian supplies for essentials, including fuel, under **Neighbourhood First**.

The aim was neighbourhood stability, Tamil Nadu and IOR security, not only goodwill.

IMF restructuring and other creditors remained the medium-term track.

Friendship does not erase fishermen and strategic disagreements.

Tonnage and tranche detail belong to official statements, not to invented figures.

Introduction

India and Sri Lanka share geography, the Palk Strait, and a long diplomatic relationship that has survived civil war, fishermen disputes, and extra-regional influence. In 2022, when Sri Lanka entered a sovereign default and a collapse of foreign exchange, fuel and medicines, India used **Neighbourhood First** to act as the first large responder rather than as a distant commentator.

Body**The 2022 crisis India was responding to**

- Sri Lanka's 2022 crisis combined depleted reserves, inability to pay for essential imports, shortages of fuel, food and medicines, and a political rupture that forced a change of presidency and government in Colombo.
- **The island's default and street unrest were a neighbourhood stability problem for India:** refugee pressure in Tamil Nadu, sea-lane security in the Indian Ocean, and the risk of a vacuum filled only by one extra-regional creditor.

What India actually did

- New Delhi extended emergency economic support through currency-related arrangements, credit lines for food, medicines and essential commodities, and facilities that allowed Colombo to keep importing fuel when commercial suppliers demanded hard currency.
- India sent humanitarian consignments of medicines and essential supplies, and Indian oil-sector entities helped keep pumps and power plants running under government-to-government arrangements rather than leaving the island to spot markets it could not pay.
- Assistance was framed as **Neighbourhood First** and **SAGAR** (Security and Growth for All in the Region): a solvent, stable Sri Lanka is an Indian interest, not a favour to a party in Colombo.
- India also used existing mechanisms - development projects, housing in the north and east, and people-to-people links - so that 2022 was an intensification of a relationship, not a first meeting.

How the role should be read

- **India's role was that of a proximate stabilizer:** fast, politically visible, and tied to essential imports, while the **IMF programme** and other creditors shaped the medium-term restructuring.
- Friendship did not erase disagreements on fishermen, on minority rights, or on extra-regional bases and ports; crisis diplomacy sat beside those files rather than deleting them.
- Compared with distant partners, India could move diesel, drugs, and credit faster because of distance, Tamil Nadu logistics, and resident **High Commission** capacity.

Limits and cautions

- Exact tonnes and every tranche should be taken from official MEA and **High Commission** statements, not from round numbers invented in an answer; the public record is that support was multi-billion-dollar in scale and front-loaded in 2022.
- Over-claiming that India "solved" the crisis would ignore domestic Sri Lankan politics, the IMF, and other lenders.
- A sustainable role after the emergency is debt transparency, energy cooperation, and avoiding a patronage contest that Sri Lankan democracy itself rejects.

Flow diagram

Sri Lanka 2022 forex collapse -> India Neighbourhood First
India Neighbourhood First -> Credit lines fuel food medicines
India Neighbourhood First -> Humanitarian supplies
Credit lines fuel food medicines -> Short-term stabilisation
Humanitarian supplies -> Short-term stabilisation

Conclusion

- **In 2022 India acted as Sri Lanka's nearest large friend:** credit lines, fuel and humanitarian supply under **Neighbourhood First**, while Colombo negotiated a longer IMF path. That role fits an age-old relationship and still leaves fishermen, minorities, and extra-regional projects on the table.

Facts & figures

Sri Lanka 2022 default

Sri Lanka faced a severe balance-of-payments crisis in 2022, with shortages of fuel, food and medicines and a sovereign default.

Neighbourhood First

Indian foreign-policy priority of treating immediate neighbours as the first circle of diplomacy and assistance.

SAGAR

Security and Growth for All in the Region; India's stated Indian Ocean approach, relevant to Sri Lanka's maritime neighbourhood.

Credit lines and essential imports

India extended credit and financing arrangements in 2022 so Sri Lanka could import food, medicines and fuel when reserves had collapsed.

IMF programme

Sri Lanka's medium-term recovery was tied to an IMF-supported adjustment; Indian emergency support was complementary, not a substitute for that programme.

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