

MEDIA RELEASE

President Maithripala Sirisena's State Visit to Qatar

At the invitation of the Emir of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, President Maithripala Sirisena undertook a two-day State visit to the State of Qatar, on 25-26 October 2017.

President Sirisena was received at the Emiri Diwan by Emir Hamad Al Thani, followed by a ceremonial guard of honour, and bilateral discussions. Both leaders recalled the long-standing friendly relations between the two countries, and their own meetings in 2015 during Emir Al Thani's visit to Sri Lanka, and at other international fora, which have contributed to the further consolidation of bilateral relations. They highlighted the importance of the exchange of visits, and expressed confidence that the State Visit of President Sirisena would enhance bilateral political, economic and trade ties.

Emir Hamad Al Thani appreciated the contribution made by over 150,000 Sri Lankans who live and work in Qatar. While thanking the Qatari Government for providing employment opportunities for Sri Lankans, President Sirisena conveyed that he was extremely pleased to see the Sri Lankans in Qatar living very happily, and expressed hope that there would be more employment opportunities in the skilled and professional categories for Sri Lankans in the State of Qatar.

Emir Hamad Al Thani emphasized the need for harnessing interaction between the businessmen of the two countries and highlighted Qatar's interest in investing in Sri Lanka, especially in the agriculture sector and in maritime and aviation infrastructure projects. Strategic promotion of tourism, business in gem and jewellery industry, and cooperation in the fields of energy, in particular LNG, as well as technology and fisheries, were also discussed.

President Sirisena expressed gratitude for the donation of US \$500,000 (five hundred thousand) from the Qatar Fund for Development, to the people in the drought affected areas of Sri Lanka. With a view to further strengthening Qatar's close bonds of friendship and solidarity, Emir Hamad Al Thani stated that he looks forward to further development cooperation in Sri Lanka through the Qatar Fund for Development.

Discussing current developments in their two countries, the Emir Hamad Al Thani briefed President Sirisena on the latest developments in the State of Qatar, while President Sirisena briefed Emir Hamad Al Thani on peace and reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka. Both leaders reiterated strong commitment to greater cooperation for mutual benefit, and to establish a committee to coordinate and take forward the dialogue initiated during the visit.

Seven (7) Memoranda of Understanding/ Agreements were concluded and signed during the visit in the fields of diplomatic training and research; visa exemption for diplomatic, special and official passports; waste water management; health and medical science; energy sector; exchange of financial intelligence; and the donation of US \$500,000 by Qatar Development Foundation.

Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Abdullah Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa Al Thani, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani paid courtesy calls on President Sirisena.

In conjunction with the State Visit, a Business and Investment Meeting was convened on 25 October. The participating business leaders of both countries agreed to take appropriate measures to increase bilateral trade and investment volumes. The Meeting involved participation by over 300 representatives of business, travel trade, entrepreneurs, and media. The Qatari side was represented as guest of honour, by the Minister of Economy and Commerce, Sheik Ahmed Bin Jassim Al Thani, and the event was co-hosted by the Qatar Chamber of Commerce, the premier business support organization of the country. At the conclusion of the formal session, twenty-two (22) private sector enterprises representing the niche export sectors in the country had business-to-business (B2B) meetings with their Qatari counterparts in networking for further partnerships. In giving further impetus to these efforts, the Sri Lanka - Qatar Joint Economic Commission will take place on 30-31 October 2017.

President Sirisena invited Emir Hamad Al Thani, the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Khalifa Al Thani, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jassim Al-Thani to visit Sri Lanka.

Other engagements included visits by the President to the Stafford Sri Lankan School where he met with Sri Lankan children and staff; and to the Islamic Museum in Qatar. The President also met the Sri Lankan community during the visit.

Sri Lanka and Qatar enjoy close and friendly relations since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1976. This was the first State Visit by a Head of State from Sri Lanka.

The Delegation headed by Emir Hamad Al Thani included, Deputy Emir Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, Chairman, Diwan Emiri Sheikh Khalid Bin Khalifa Bin Abdul Azeez Al Thani, Minister of Economic and Trade Sheikh Ahmed Bin Jasim Bin Mohamed Al Thani, Minister of Public Health Dr. Hanan Mohamed Al Kuwari and Qatar Ambassador to Sri Lanka Rashid Bin Shafee Al Marri.

The Sri Lanka delegation included the Minister of Health, Nutrition & Indigenous Medicine Rajitha Senaratne, Minister of Industry & Commerce Rishad Bathiudeen, Minister of City Planning & Water Supply Rauff Hakeem, Minister of Provincial Council and Local Government Faiszer Musthapha, State Minister of Foreign Affairs Vasantha Senanayake, Deputy Minister of Power & Renewable Energy Ajith P. Perera, Mujibur Rahman, M.P., K. Kader Masthan M.P. and Sri Lanka Ambassador to Qatar A.S.P. Liyanage.

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