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OCI Card Expanded to 6th Generation — India-Sri Lanka Bilateral

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OCI Card Expanded to 6th Generation — India-Sri Lanka Bilateral

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WHY IN NEWS

Vice-President **C. P. Radhakrishnan** announced during his state visit to Sri Lanka that India is extending **Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card eligibility** from the **fourth to the sixth generation** of Indian-origin persons in Sri Lanka. The announcement was accompanied by discussions on energy, trade, fisheries, education, and housing cooperation, and a bilateral **\$450 million package** for cyclone recovery assistance.

THE OCI SCHEME — BACKGROUND

What Is OCI?

The **Overseas Citizen of India (OCI)** card is a type of **long-term multipurpose visa** issued to foreign nationals of Indian origin. It was introduced through an amendment to the **Citizenship Act, 1955** in **2005** under the then-PM Manmohan Singh government.

OCI is NOT dual citizenship — the Indian Constitution (Article 9) prohibits dual citizenship. OCI is a special status that grants:

- **Lifelong, multiple-entry visa** to India
- **Parity with NRIs** in economic, financial, and educational fields
- Right to work and study in India without separate work/student visa
- Right to own property (except agricultural land and plantation property)

What OCI Does NOT Grant

- **Voting rights** in Indian elections
- Right to hold **constitutional offices** (President, VP, PM, etc.)
- Right to work in **government services**
- Right to **purchase agricultural land** or plantation property
- **Indian passport** (OCI holders travel on their foreign passport)

THE PIO-OCI MERGER (2015)

Before 2015, India had two schemes for the diaspora:

- 1 **PIO (Person of Indian Origin) card** — for those up to 4th generation with Indian ancestry
- 2 **OCI card** — for those up to 2nd generation (or with closer family ties)

In **2015**, the **PIO scheme was merged with OCI**, simplifying the framework. The merged OCI scheme extended eligibility to a broader group of the diaspora.

INDIA-SRI LANKA DIASPORA CONTEXT

Sri Lanka has a significant population of **Indian-origin Tamils** — descendants of labourers brought by the British to work on tea plantations in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This community has a complex history:

| PERIOD | DEVELOPMENT |
|-------------------------|--|
| 19th–early 20th century | Indian-Tamil labourers brought to Ceylon for tea plantations |
| 1964 | Sirima-Shastri Pact: India and Sri Lanka agreed on citizenship for ~975,000 stateless plantation Tamils |
| 1974 | Sirima-Gandhi Supplementary Agreement: remaining stateless persons' issue |
| Post-independence | Many Sri Lankan Tamils remain without full citizenship rights; some repatriated to India |
| 2005-present | OCI scheme partially addresses diaspora connection for those with Indian origin |

The **6th generation expansion** recognises that Indian-origin Sri Lankan Tamil families have been in Sri Lanka for 5-6 generations and their Indian-origin connection is now remote under the existing 4th-generation limit. The expansion ensures they retain a formal connection to India through OCI benefits.

INDIA-SRI LANKA BILATERAL RELATIONS

Overview

India is Sri Lanka's **closest neighbour** and largest trading partner. The bilateral relationship is guided by **“Neighbourhood First” policy** and India's broader goal of maintaining strategic influence in the Indian Ocean Region.

| DIMENSION | STATUS |
|------------------------|---|
| Trade | India is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner; ~\$5 billion bilateral trade |
| FTA | India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) since 2000 |
| Development assistance | India provided \$4 billion+ credit lines during the 2022 economic crisis |
| Connectivity | Proposed Colombo-Trincomalee rail link; ferry services |
| Energy | Trincomalee oil tank farm development; electricity grid connectivity proposed |
| Security | Maritime security cooperation; India monitors Palk Strait |
| Fisheries | Fishermen disputes (Indian fishermen crossing into Sri Lankan waters) |

The 2022 Economic Crisis — India's Role

Sri Lanka's **worst economic crisis since independence** (2022) — caused by forex reserve depletion, import restrictions, and debt — triggered a political revolution (PM Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned; President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled). India provided:

- **\$4 billion emergency credit line** (largest ever to Sri Lanka)
- Medical supplies, fuel, and food shipments
- IMF support lobbying (India backed Sri Lanka's IMF programme)

This deepened India's strategic leverage in Sri Lanka and helped counter Chinese influence (Sri Lanka had taken large Chinese infrastructure loans, including for Hambantota Port).

The Cyclone Recovery Package

The **\$450 million package** announced during VP Radhakrishnan's visit is for recovery from recent cyclone damage to Sri Lanka's coastal infrastructure. This continues India's pattern of rapid disaster response to neighbours as a **soft power tool** and a practical demonstration of "**Neighbourhood First**" in action.

UPSC RELEVANCE

| PAPER | ANGLE |
|-------------------|---|
| GS2 — Polity | OCI, citizenship, Article 9, Citizenship Act 1955 |
| GS2 — IR | India-Sri Lanka bilateral, Neighbourhood First, Indian Ocean security |
| GS1 — Society | Indian diaspora, plantation Tamils, PIO-OCI merger |
| Mains Keywords | OCI, PIO, Citizenship Act, Sirima-Shastri Pact, Neighbourhood First, Hambantota, India-Sri Lanka economic crisis 2022 |

FACTS CORNER

- **OCI introduced:** 2005 (Citizenship Act amendment)
- **PIO-OCI merger:** 2015 (PIO scheme subsumed into OCI)
- **OCI eligibility (new):** Up to 6th generation of Indian-origin Sri Lankans (from 4th)
- **OCI does NOT grant:** Voting rights, agricultural land purchase rights, or Indian passport
- **Sirima-Shastri Pact (1964):** India-Sri Lanka agreement on citizenship for ~975,000 stateless plantation Tamils
- **India's 2022 credit line to Sri Lanka:** ~\$4 billion — largest bilateral credit line India has ever extended
- **Hambantota Port:** Sri Lanka leased to China for 99 years (2017) after debt default — a key example of “debt-trap diplomacy” concern
- **India-Sri Lanka trade:** ~\$5 billion annually; India is Sri Lanka’s largest trading partner
- **ISFTA:** India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement since 2000 — oldest India FTA in force
- **OCI holders:** Cannot hold constitutional offices or purchase agricultural land in India

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