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ஜனாதிபதி ஊடகப் பிரிவு, ஜனாதிபதி அலுவலகம், கொழும்பு 01
President's Media Division, President's Office, Colombo 01

China pledges continuous development cooperation to President

- Relations with SL, a key priority of President Xi
- China will stand with Sri Lanka at international fora
- Port City will be completed expeditiously

My objective is to achieve development similar to that of China – President Rajapaksa

- Assist us to reduce trade deficit

The head of the high-level delegation from the People's Republic of China, who is currently visiting Sri Lanka assures President Gotabaya Rajapaksa China's continued assistance to Sri Lanka for the success of the country's development drive.

The present status of bilateral relations between China and Sri Lanka is highly satisfactory. Maintaining and promoting this friendship is a key priority of President Xi Jinping. The head of the delegation said that China will firmly stand with Sri Lanka extend to protect the country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity at international fora including United Nations Human Rights Council.

The 7- member delegation led by Yang Jiechi, Politburo member of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee called on President Rajapaksa at the Presidential Secretariat this morning (9).

Holding several high-level positions at China's Foreign Ministry Mr. Jiechi served as Chinese Ambassador to the United States of America from 2001-2005 and Foreign Minister of China from 2007-2013. His current position in the Chinese administrations is equivalent to Vice Premier level.

Extending President Xi's congratulations to President Rajapaksa over landslide victories at recent elections, Mr. Yang recalled that he visited Sri Lanka 35 years ago as an interpreter assisting a visiting Chinese delegation. He noted that Sri Lanka is the first country in his four-nation tour of Asia adding that the President of China gives high priority to the enhancement of bilateral relations with Sri Lanka.

President Rajapaksa commenced the discussion by expressing satisfaction over the current state of Sino-Sri Lanka relations and said China has been long-standing friend who supported Sri Lanka irrespective of the government in power. China extensively supported us to defeat terrorism. Bilateral relations reached a higher level following the end of the armed conflict. He especially recalled the contribution of China for the development of country's infrastructure facilities.

"China had contributed to a number of large-scale infrastructure development projects. Hambantota Port, the Port City project, Southern Expressway are some of them. Constructing a port in Hambantota is an idea of Sri Lanka and not China's. We were convinced that it would be a project with a vast potential for generating income and employment opportunities. China offered to fund it. Many geo-political analysis interprets this project as 'debt trap' set up by China to gain control over Sri Lankan affairs. I want to prove that it is not the case and that this large-scale project will help improve the living standards of the people. Assist us in this endeavour," President told the Chinese delegation.

President said that he had toured China 13 times prior to the assumption of Presidency and said he had seen first-hand the development progress that China had achieved. "I have seen massive development especially in rural areas. My target is to bring about similar development especially in rural areas in Sri Lanka and to raise the living conditions of the people in this country, especially that of the poor. I look forward to seeing a visible progress in the Port City project over the next four years", President stressed.

President Rajapaksa pointed out that Sri Lanka's trade deficit with China is high and called on the leader of the delegation to increase the volume of goods purchased from Sri Lanka to bring it down.

"Sri Lanka has a strong private sector. They manufacture various products. Open the Chinese market for these items. Encourage Chinese investors to invest in Sri Lanka. Promote Chinese people to visit Sri Lanka. If China can participate in the Sri Lanka's tea auction, it will be a major boost to economic stability", President remarked. Explaining the limited tertiary educational opportunities available to Sri Lanka youth who pass GCE Advanced Level, President said establishing a University of Technology for them will be an area where China can invest in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Jiechi said that China's assistance will not be just lip service but concrete action to achieve the development goals contained in "Saubhagyaye Dekma" policy statement.

China has identified several areas conducive for the development of bilateral relations with Sri Lanka. In addition to completing large-scale projects already underway, these include agriculture, education, tourism, water supply, healthcare, medical supplies, modern technology, digital economy, Blue Economy and labour training. Plans afoot to recommence discussions on China - Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement and to complete the Hambantota Industrial Scheme expeditiously.

We are eagerly waiting for President Rajapaksa to undertake an official visit to China, once the COVID - 19 pandemic successfully contained globally, Mr. Jiechi said.

Chairman of the China International Development Cooperation Agency Mr. Wang Xiaotao, Assistant Foreign Minister of China Mr. Deng Lee, Hu Wei, Chargé d'affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka, Chen Song, Deputy Director General of Department of Asian Affairs at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardene, Secretary to th President P. B. Jayasundera, Principal Advisor to the President Lalith Weeratunga, Foreign Secretary Admiral Jayanath Colombage and Sri Lanka's Ambassador Designate to China Dr. Palitha Kohona were also present at the discussion.

President's Media Division

09.10.2020