
Myanmar, Sri Lanka celebrate 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties

Monday, 08 June 2009

Last Updated Monday, 08 June 2009

by Feng Yingqiu YANGON, June 7 (Xinhua) -- Top leaders of Myanmar and Sri Lanka exchanged messages Sunday on the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Senior-General Than Shwe, Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, said in his message to Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, that the existing friendly relations between the two countries are firmly based on the close religious and cultural affinities which originated thousands of years ago and friendship, mutual understanding and interaction between the two peoples have consolidated in the past 60 years.

He expressed belief that the activities commemorating the anniversary will add a new momentum to further strengthening of their bilateral ties. In return, the Sri Lankan President said the Theravada Buddhist traditions existing between Sri Lanka and Myanmar have always been the pinnacle in the bilateral ties between the two countries, adding that the two countries share common platforms at many regional and international forums. He expects that his planned visit to Myanmar later this month and the numerous other activities to take place in the two countries as part of the 60th anniversary celebrations will further consolidate their bilateral relations. On the same occasion, Myanmar Prime Minister General Thein Sein and his Sri Lankan counterpart Ratnasiri Wickramanayaka also exchanged similar messages. In August 2007, Thein Sein visited Colombo in exchange for the one to Nay Pyi Taw by Ratnasiri Wickramanayaka in December 2006. During Thein Sein's Sri Lanka visit, both of the two leaders stressed in their discussions the need to promote bilateral cooperation mainly in trade, tourism, agriculture, forestry, religious and cultural sectors. Their discussions also covered continued implementation of the resolution passed by the two countries' joint commission, mutual understanding on regional and international issues and creating new opportunities on bilateral economic cooperation. On that occasion, two memorandums of understanding and one agreement were signed between the two countries respectively on cooperation in intelligence exchange, Buddhist literature studies and cultural exchange. Sri Lanka has so far injected one million U.S. dollars' investment in Myanmar since 1988, Myanmar statistics show. In November last year, Myanmar agreed with Sri Lanka to establish direct air and sea links to effectively boost bilateral trade ties between the two countries as proposed by Sri Lanka. Currently, trade between Myanmar and Sri Lanka is transacted through Singapore. Recently, the two countries have formed a business relation group, aimed at enhancing bilateral trade between the two countries. The 34-member business group will seek import of more agricultural and marine products from Myanmar and export of new items to the country. Sri Lanka mainly imports from Myanmar various beans and pulses, hardwood, cane product, rubber and wood log, while exporting to Myanmar coffee, coco, dye, flavoring and packing paper. The two countries set up the Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation in 1996. Myanmar and Sri Lanka, which established diplomatic relations on June 7, 1949, have enjoyed cultural and religious ties since the 11th century. Both Myanmar and Sri Lanka are now members of the sub-regional grouping of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which also comprises Bangladesh, India and Thailand. The BIMSTEC was originally formed with Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand in June 1997 and later joined by Myanmar in August the same year. The grouping expanded its membership to include Nepal and Bhutan at the first BIMST-EC summit in Bangkok in July 2004. Myanmar remains as an observer of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Courtesy: xinhuanet.com