
Strengthening Lanka-Myanmar ties:

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President's Myanmar visit pays dividends President Mahinda Rajapaksa on a two-day state visit to Myanmar had discussions with senior leaders of Myanmar including State Peace and Development Council Chairman Senior General Than Shwe and Prime Minister General Thein Sein.

During the meeting President Rajapaksa recalled his previous visit to Myanmar as the then Prime Minister in 2004 to participate in the World Buddhist Conference in Yangon. Expressing satisfaction at being able to successfully conclude the humanitarian operations against LTTE terrorism, the President said that his visit to Myanmar is the first foreign visit after victory. The President also said that he was able to create a just society in which everybody could live in unity, harmony and dignity in accordance with Buddhist values. Myanmar State Peace and Development Council President Senior General Than Shwe explained to President Rajapaksa the socio-political development of Myanmar since independence. On the occasion of the visit of President Rajapaksa the Myanmar Government had donated US \$ 50, 000 for the welfare of the Internally Displaced Persons in the North of Sri Lanka. President Rajapaksa thanked Myanmar for the humanitarian gesture of providing relief to IDPs and also for the assistance rendered in preventing drug trafficking and arms smuggling in the region that adversely affected Sri Lanka. During the bilateral talks it was agreed to update the Air Services Agreement signed between the two countries in 1950. The Myanmar government also presented a tusk to Sri Lanka and promised to supply Sri Lanka with marble for the project to construct nine dagabas in the nine provinces of the country. The two delegations also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on promoting tourism between the two countries and agreed to ease visa restrictions. It was also decided to offer two Myanmar Security Forces officers an annual scholarship for training at the Kotelawala Defence University. The two countries also agreed to work with mutual understanding and close cooperation at international fora. President Rajapaksa also extended an invitation to Senior General Than Shwe to visit Sri Lanka. The invitation was accepted, Myanmar Foreign Minister will shortly visit Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, President Rajapaksa yesterday worshipped the Uppattathanit Pagoda at the administrative capital Nejjito a replica of the world famous Shwedagon Pagoda. Accompanying the President was First Lady Shirathi Rajapaksa. The President praised the authorities of the Pagoda for the devout religious rites being performed at this shrine. The President and the entourage thereafter visited the national herbarium at Nejjito and planted a star flower plant to mark his visit to Myanmar. He was received warmly by the Mayor of Nejjito Colonel Thein Nyunt and Lady Nyunt. The President next arrived at Yangon airport and was received by the Mayor of the capital city and participated in a banquet in his honour given by the Mayor and participated in the ceremony to open the Meththa housing scheme in the city. He handed over the keys of the houses to 10 beneficiaries and unveiled the plaque. Associated with the President were the Most Ven Inamaluwe Sri Sumangala Anunayaka Thera of the Malwatta Chapter and Aluthwewa Soratha Thera and the Kandevihara Buddhakkhitha Thera and the Chairman All Ceylon Buddhist Congress Jagath Sumathipala. The Meththa housing scheme was built for the benefit of the people affected by the recent cyclone that hit Myanmar at the instance of the Most Ven Bodagama Chandima Thera and comprised of 736 houses at the first phase to be followed by schools, children's playgrounds funded by the Theravadi Educational Society on a concept of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. The Sri Lanka Embassy had played a key role in implementing the project, Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama who accompanied President Rajapaksa said. Courtesy: Daily News Courtesy: defence.lk