

Sri Lanka – Viet Nam pledge greater bilateral investments

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The Second Meeting of the Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation between Sri Lanka and Viet Nam was held in Colombo today (10th August 2009), preceded by the Senior Officials Meeting (SoM). Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama led the Sri Lanka delegation and the Viet Nam delegation was led by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, Dao Viet Trung.

At the opening Session, Minister Bogollagama, while welcoming the Viet Nameese Deputy Foreign Minister and his Delegation expressed pleasure in hosting the Second Meeting of the Joint Commission and highlighted the significance of having the second Joint Commission as a prelude to the State visit of President Mahinda Rajapaksa to Viet Nam this year in October. He also expressed confidence that the Joint Commission Meeting would lay a solid foundation for a substantive outcome at the Heads of State level interaction. Minister Bogollagama was of the View that meetings at regular intervals of the Joint Commission between the two countries would provide a platform for further enhancement of bilateral relations between the two countries. The visiting Deputy Foreign Minister responded by expressing his appreciation to the Government of Sri Lanka for hosting the Joint Commission and acknowledged and welcomed the broadening of traditional friendship between the two countries where relations have expanded into a number of new areas of cooperation including in Agriculture, Fisheries and Security Cooperation, while moving towards a closer economic partnership between the two countries. Deputy Foreign Minister also stressed the need for closer cooperation in multilateral fora including the UN, NAM and other regional fora. Sri Lanka & Viet Nam relations are nurtured through the solidarity that Sri Lanka demonstrated during Viet Nam's struggle against colonialism. Subsequently in the struggle for the reunification of Viet Nam, Sri Lanka firmly backed the cause and also recognized the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Viet Nam. Sri Lanka was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam following the reunification. The formal diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1970. Viet Nam established a resident mission in Colombo from 1971 to 1982. Sri Lanka opened its resident Mission in Hanoi in 2003. Minister Bogollagama welcomed the desire by the Government of Viet Nam to re-open a resident mission in Sri Lanka in the near future expressed hope that it would add more impetus for the expansion of relations between the two countries. Minister Bogollagama also expressed his appreciation for the invitation extended by Viet Nam's President His Excellency Nguyen Minh Triet to His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka to undertake a State Visit to Viet Nam. Both sides agreed that the visit will mark a new chapter in Sri Lanka-Viet Nam relations as it is the first State Visit by a Sri Lankan Head of State to Viet Nam since diplomatic relations were established. Viet Nam's Deputy Foreign Minister welcomed the defeat of terrorism in Sri Lanka and congratulated President Mahinda Rajapaksa for his courageous leadership to defeat terrorism and freeing the country from the menace of terrorism. Minister Bogollagama appreciated the staunch support extended by Viet Nam for Sri Lanka especially during the last stages of the battle against the LTTE. The unwavering support extended by Viet Nam, particularly in multilateral fora such as the United Nations Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council was acknowledged and appreciated by the Sri Lanka side. Both Ministers acknowledged the significant progress that has been made in the area of security cooperation to prevent and combat crime, following the visit by Sri Lanka's Defence Secretary to Viet Nam in April 2008. The two sides reaffirmed their policy of not allowing any group or individual to use each others territory for hostile acts against any other country. Minister Bogollagama also expressed the fullest support to Viet Nam who will be the Chair of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 2010 and recalled with gratitude the valuable support extended to Sri Lanka to become the twenty seventh member of the ARF. Minister Bogollagama as the current Chair of Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) invited Viet Nam to attend the Eighth Ministerial Meeting of the ACD which is scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka on 15th and 16th October 2009. The Viet Nam side expressed its full support to the Chairmanship of Sri Lanka in the ACD. Minister Bogollagama also highlighted that bilateral trade between the two countries have seen a significant growth during the recent years which had reached US \$ 60.9 million by the end of 2008 from US\$ 16.5 million in 2003. The two Ministers also welcomed the increase registered in 2008 despite the global economic downturn. While acknowledging the need for a comprehensive programme to improve the level of bilateral trade, both sides agreed that the current state of trade is far below the potential and agreed to work together to reach a target of US\$ 100 million by 2012. Both Ministers also agreed that it is vital for the business communities of the two countries to meet regularly. Measures such as signing of MOUs between prominent Trade Chambers, establishment of Business Councils, undertaking business promotional visits and encouraging participation in trade fairs and exhibitions in each other countries were noted as useful steps towards that end. Minister Bogollagama highlighted the significance of greater people-to-people contact for understanding of each other's culture and heritage. The Minister also highlighted that the potential to enhance tourism between the two countries has not been adequately exploited. Sri Lanka with the recent defeat of terrorism would be an attractive destination for increasing the number of Vietnamese travelling abroad. Due to the shared religious and cultural heritage of the two countries, there remains an enormous potential to develop "pilgrim tourism". The two sides agreed to assist travel agents of the respective countries to enhance their business links and also to explore the possibilities of projecting the images of the two countries in a favourable manner to the public through mass media. Both Ministers agreed to explore the possibility of increasing the two way air traffic in order to make direct air links a viable option with particular attention to tap the Sri Lankan and Vietnamese migrant workers in the gulf region. The two sides welcomed and encouraged the two countries' airlines to consider appropriate forms of cooperation. Both Ministers acknowledged the need for an early finalization of the "Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement"; the two states to pave the way for greater bilateral investments. It was also agreed to conclude the "Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement"; during the State visit by HE the President to Viet Nam.

Minister Bogollagama invited Viet Nam investors to exploit the attractive investment opportunities available in Sri Lanka. With the defeat of terrorism and the ensuring stability, Sri Lanka now has the potential for rapid economic growth. Both Ministers agreed that there is potential for greater cooperation in the agricultural and fisheries fields. It was further agreed to fully harness the benefits of the Memorandum of Understanding on Agriculture Development Co-operation that was signed between the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka and the Ministry of Agricultural Development on behalf of the Government of Viet Nam in November 2006 and the Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Cooperation in the fields of Fisheries and Aquaculture between the Ministry of Fisheries of Viet Nam and the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of the Sri Lanka that was signed in March 2005. It was agreed to explore the opportunities presented through the MoU for professional training, market development, export and trade promotion and such areas of mutual interest in the field of agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture. The two Ministers also agreed to consider the possibility of the signing of the Agreement on Sea Transportation and the Agreement/MOU on Education Cooperation between the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training and the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education. Minister Bogollagama invited Viet Nam to establish a Buddhist Centre in the International Buddhist Zone which is being constructed at Piliyandala Colombo stating that such links would help reflect the rich Buddhist heritage architecture of Viet Nam. The two Ministers agreed to further implement the Agreement on Culture and Educational Cooperation signed in 1999. The Sri Lanka side agreed to draw up a plan of action for the implementation of the MOU. The two sides also agreed to enhance cooperation in the fields of sport and health care. The next Meeting of the Joint Commission is scheduled to be held in 2011 in Viet Nam. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Colombo 11 August 2009