Strengthening economic ties in Asia and Africa : Professor G L Peiris

Wednesday, 26 September 2012
Last Updated Monday, 12 November 2012

Acknowledging a firm foundation in Sri Lanka’s relations with China, External Affairs Minister Professor G.L. Peiris assured the strong resolve to expand the contours of this relationship, during his meeting yesterday with Yang JiechiForeign Minister of China on the margins of the ongoing United Nations General Assembly Session in New York. Elaborating Professor Peiris observed that the ties between the two countries have stood the test of time and are rich and multi-faceted.

Minister Peiris appreciated China’s contribution to Sri Lanka’s infrastructure development including the harbour, power and energy sector, and economic and social progress of the country. He also noted that the recent high level visits of dignitaries from China including Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congressand Liang Guanglie, Defence Minister have provided a new impetus and dynamism to the longstanding relationship between the two countries. The Minister referred to the importance of people to people contact and enhancement of cultural links which have been concretized by the provisionof the NelumPokunaMahindaRajapaksa Theatre by the Chinese Government, which he said has also served to encourage artistes in their fields of performance. Noting the well-established business relationship between the entrepreneurs of the two countries, Minister Peiris emphasized the need for further consolidation of these ties and broadening the scope of economic cooperation with greater engagement between the Chambers of Commerce. In this context, he proposed that business delegations from Sri Lanka should visit China to establish closer cooperation in cities additional to Beijing. He observed that this would be in keeping with seeking airline connectivity to those cities.

The Chinese Foreign Minister pointing out that it is 55 years since bilateral diplomatic relations were established and the Rubber – Rice pact was signed 60 years ago with Sri Lanka,said that much progress had been achieved this year. He observed that China is ready to elevate this cooperation to greater heights, and welcomed the recent conclusion of a number of Agreements during the high level visits to Sri Lanka. He expressed China’s support for Sri Lanka’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and stated that they would oppose interference in its internal affairs by external forces. The Chinese Minister recognizing the importance of people to people contact, underscored the importance of cultural exchanges and promotion of tourism cooperation. He also stated that China will seek to increase the number of scholarships and establish a programme to teach the Chinese language to Sri Lankan students.

Minister Peiris on this occasion met his Mauritanian counterpart HamadyOuldHamady and referred to the available economic potential in Sri Lanka following the eradication of terrorism. He outlined that this juncture is the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Sri Lanka and therefore wished to reach out to Africa in terms of enhancing trade and investment. The Foreign Minister of Mauritania stated that his country is interested in ascertaining the opportunities in the trade sector in the South Asian region and would undertake a visit to Sri Lanka in this regard.

Muhammad Mumuni, Foreign Minister of Ghana also called on Minister Peirisyesterday. They recalled the historical ties between Sri Lanka and Ghana, particularly their role in the establishment of the Non Aligned Movement. The Ministers agreed on the need to have a fresh focus on the bilateral relations especially in the context of Sri Lanka’s re-orientation of further strengthening links with Africa. Minister Peiris stated that Sri Lanka wishes to have expanded and invigorated relations with Ghana. The Ghanian Minister stated that the relations with Sri Lanka had been founded on shared values and both are Commonwealth members. He said that Ghana is well disposed towards up scaling the bilateral relations and seeks ways and means of integrating the two economies through enhanced trade and investment. He paid tribute to the resilience, hard work and discipline of the Government and people of Sri Lanka in moving the country forward in a brief period since the end of the terrorist conflict, which demonstrates that institutions are working.

DipuMoni, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh who also met with Minister Peiris, had discussions on issues relating to the region and the Commonwealth, in addition to matters of bilateral importance. It was noted that the Joint Economic Commission had been successfully concluded, resulting in diversification of trade and cooperation into areas such as health and pharmaceuticals.

Ministry of External Affairs26th September 2012