
Sri Lanka - Hungary strengthen bilateral relations

Saturday, 17 November 2012

On an invitation extended by Hon. Prof. G.L. Peiris, Minister of External Affairs, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Hungary, Hon. Dr. Janos Martonyi was on a visit to Sri Lanka, with the two Ministers holding bilateral talks at the External Affairs Ministry in Colombo. The discussion between the Ministers served to underline the robust nature of the bilateral relations and the opportunities for promoting economic co-operation between the countries, as well as exchange views on the relations with the EU.

Prof. Peiris appreciated the assistance rendered by the Hungarian Government for the Labugama and Kalatuwawa water treatment plant. Emphasizing the importance of water in daily life, he recalled the manner in which the LTTE sought to deprive the farming population in the country's Eastern region, which led to the Government having to embark on a humanitarian operation to secure and open the sluice gates in Mawilaru. The Minister highlighted avenues for investment cooperation including in housing, infrastructure development, particularly for tourism, irrigation development and dairy farming, health and pharmaceutical sectors. He pointed out that the Northern and the Eastern provinces are in a new era of development and economic resurgence, following the end of the protracted terrorist conflict. Prof. Peiris called on his counterpart to further enhance contacts between the respective Chambers of Commerce and the vibrant private sectors of the two countries, as well as to organize an investment promotion seminar and road shows, with a view to improving trade between Sri Lanka and Hungary. He highlighted Ayurvedic care, which is already receiving much attention in Europe, as an area where Sri Lankan institutions dealing with indigenous medicine can establish treatment centers in Hungary. He outlined that tourism packages for Ayurvedic treatment are extremely popular and have a large European clientele. The Minister emphasized the aspect of value addition in the development of trade ties, and the availability of preferential trading arrangements between Sri Lanka and the countries in the South Asian region. Prof. Peiris also briefed his counterpart on the steady progress made by Sri Lanka in the context of regional cooperation both bilaterally and multilaterally, within the SAARC framework as well as BIMSTEC. Minister Martonyi explained that Hungary's foreign policy framework has recently accorded much importance to their relations with Asia, and that Sri Lanka is a country within that ambit, and this visit is an opportunity to continue to build on Minister Peiris's visit to Budapest earlier this year. The visiting Foreign Minister commended Sri Lanka on the successful achievements in reconciliation and noted that it was necessary to acknowledge these positive steps after the end of such a long period of conflict. He observed that it is not an easy task to overcome the challenges in the aftermath of such a conflict and encouraged that the work be continued in the manner the Government of Sri Lanka has been doing, to ensure sustained reconciliation. Having experience in handling minority issues the Minister said that Hungary could positively contribute by sharing their knowledge in this regard. He was emphatic that Hungary does not seek to teach or advise Sri Lanka on the related issues but merely share its experience if required. The Hungarian Foreign Minister observed that Sri Lanka having overcome challenges and hardship, has emerged as a country with significant potential to move forward and enhance its economic ties with the rest of the world, in particular, with Central Europe. He reiterated his country's total commitment to further strengthening political and economic relations with Sri Lanka. Both Foreign Ministers agreed that there is a political will within the two countries to conclude bilateral arrangements in the areas such as double taxation, air services, higher education, visa facilitation for official purposes and science & technology. The Ministers agreed that contacts at the highest levels of their Governments must be vigorously pursued and agreed to also work towards this objective. Ministry of External Affairs Colombo