

SRI LANKA FIRMLY COMMITTED TO ONE CHINA POLICY: RANIL

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Thursday affirmed the island nation's commitment to the 'One China Policy' and asked countries to "refrain from provocations", in a message apparently directed to the U.S., days after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's controversial visit to Taiwan.

In a series of tweets, Mr. Wickremesinghe said: "During a meeting with H.E. Qi Zhenghong, Ambassador of China, I reiterated Sri Lanka's firm commitment to the one-China policy, as well as to the UN Charter principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations. Countries must refrain from provocations which further escalate the current global tensions. Mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of countries are important foundations for peaceful cooperation and non-confrontation."

The Chinese Ambassador "discussed the manner in which the bilateral relations could be further strengthened," the President's office later said in a statement, of their meeting held Wednesday afternoon, hours after Mr. Wickremesinghe delivered his inaugural address following his election as President.

On July 20, a majority of lawmakers backed the six-time Prime Minister and senior politician for Presidency after the top office fell vacant after mass citizens' protests ousted former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in the wake of a severe economic downturn. Ambassador Qi met Mr. Wickremesinghe on July 22 to convey a congratulatory message from Chinese President Xi Jinping, among the first world leaders to reach out to Mr. Wickremesinghe.

Mr. Wickremesinghe, in his maiden speech as President on Wednesday, highlighted Indian assistance during Sri Lanka's economic crisis, thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and regretted that traditional Sri Lanka-Japan ties had been adversely affected by the [Rajapaksa] government's opposition to Japanese projects. Notably, China found no mention in the address. He quoted a visiting Tibetan monk who had said the crisis could be solved only through unity.

Chinese vessel

The developments come even as Sri Lanka braves a deepening economic crisis and awaits International Monetary Fund (IMF) assistance for relief. The IMF has assured Sri Lanka of support, based on its success in restructuring its foreign debt with its creditors. The government has also sought bridge financing assistance from India and China to tide over the next few months, but neither partner has responded positively yet.

Meanwhile, Colombo appears to be walking a tight rope as the competing geostrategic interests of India and China come to the fore again. Earlier this week, New Delhi raised concern with President Wickremesinghe over the scheduled arrival of Yuan Wang 5 — a Chinese vessel involved in space and satellite tracking — at the southern Hambantota Port on August 11.

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