

OBOR: Revisiting the Bandaranaike-Chou Vision Six Decades Later

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Establishing diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1957 marked a milestone in Sri Lanka's foreign policy. From China's perspective, efforts had been made to enhance bilateral relations ever since the country was recognized by then Ceylon in 1950 and the Rubber-Rice pact had been signed in 1952. The forthright manner in which Ceylon revised its earlier policy venturing into hitherto uncharted territory was one of the most prudent steps undertaken by Prime Minister Bandaranaike.

1957 ushered in a new era. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and Chou en Lai were responsible for strengthening ties between the two countries. Lai's visit to Colombo in February 1957 consolidated a bond of friendship that extended far beyond the two individuals, and laid the foundation for future diplomatic relations between the two countries.

As leaders they anticipated much potential in their respective countries which had emerged as players on the international stage less than a decade ago. Their visionary outlook included an essence of cooperation with mutual benefits.

Sixty years later, China has embarked once more, through President Xi's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, to reconnect globally. The revival of the ancient trade route enables countries to join together, thus providing a platform for China to share experience, enterprise and resources. The success of the initiative has already borne results as China rises not only in Asia but as a global giant.

This paper reflects on the impact of the OBOR initiative on Sri Lanka and argues that it is a testimony to the visionary leadership of two leaders

who sought to reach out to each other and undertake a journey together. Today it can be hailed as a vibrant example of diplomacy and bilateralism between nations.

Key words: diplomacy, bilateralism, China, Sri Lanka, OBOR

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