

President Ranil Wickremesinghe Addresses G77 & China Summit in Cuba



Heads of State at the G77 and China Summit.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe delivered a compelling address at the Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the G77 & China in Havana, Cuba.

In his speech, President Ranil Wickremesinghe emphasized the crucial role of science, technology and innovation in overcoming the current development challenges faced by developing nations worldwide.

President Wickremesinghe began by commending Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez for convening the summit and acknowledging Cuba's historic role as a champion for the concerns and aspirations of developing nations within various multilateral forums.

He noted the unprecedented challenges confronting the global South, including the pandemic, climate change, food, fertilizer and energy crises, which threaten the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and exacerbate the global debt crisis.

President Wickremesinghe then delved into the historical perspective of technological development, highlighting how Europe's advancements in the 15th century, such as gunpowder, cannons and ocean-going ships, enabled it to conquer other parts of the world, resulting in the technological divide seen today.



President Ranil Wickremesinghe with other Heads of State.

He underscored that a new technological divide is emerging in the 21st century, necessitating the adoption of digitalization and new technologies, such as Big Data, IoT, AI, Blockchain, Biotechnology and Genome Sequencing, to bridge the gap.

He emphasised the importance of an educated manpower well equipped with knowledge and technological know-how essential for the smooth flow of the needed transformations which will lubricate the development and catching up process in developing nations. The President outlined his government's initiatives, including the evaluation of underperforming Science and Technology Research Institutes and the establishment of a Technology and Innovation Council and a Digital Transformation Agency. Additionally, Sri Lanka plans to create four new universities specializing in new technologies, with one being the result of technological cooperation between India and Sri Lanka. The International Climate University will be the fifth.

The President's address underscored the significance of science, technology and innovation in shaping the future of developing nations, making it a pivotal moment at the G77 and China Summit.

Addressing the digital divide, President Wickremesinghe cited challenges such as limited access to costly technology, insufficient digital skills and infrastructure, cultural and institutional barriers and financing constraints.

He called for effective cooperation mechanisms within the G77 and China, including the revitalization of the Consortium of Science & Technology & Innovation for the South (COSTIS) and the commitment of member countries to earmark 1% of their GDP for R&D over a decade.

President Wickremesinghe stressed the importance of collaboration between governments and the private sector and proposed creating technological platforms in fields like digitalization, health, medication, AI and renewable energy including green hydrogen, inspired by the European Union's Technology & Innovation Platforms.

The brain drain from the South to the North and the resulting loss of educated manpower is another threat to the development of Science Technology and Innovation of the South, President Wickremesinghe said, adding that China, India, Japan and South Korea have developed Science Technology and Innovation by nurturing their manpower. "Therefore we must ask for compensation from the North for the loss of our manpower," he added.

He also urged increased South-South cooperation and proposed a scheme akin to the Colombo Plan to enhance collaboration, exchange best practices and develop policies that harness the transformational potential of science, technology and innovation. In conclusion, President Wickremesinghe reaffirmed Sri Lanka's commitment to supporting the new Havana Declaration and called for the collective voice of G77 and China to be heard in international fora.

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President at the G77 and China Summit.



President Ranil Wickremesinghe addressing the attendees of the G77 and China Summit.