

Iran's Raisi says West doesn't monopolize knowledge, technology

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Online Desk: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said his country has proven the West doesn't have a monopoly on technology while inaugurating a hydropower and irrigation project in Sri Lanka on Wednesday.

Raisi is the first Iranian leader to visit Sri Lanka since former President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad visited the country in 2008.

"The Western countries tried to convince all others that knowledge and technology is exclusive to those countries," Raisi said, addressing Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe and other top officials. He added that the "idea" was rooted in "colonialism and arrogance" and that Iran was now able to share its knowledge with others, currently having projects in 20 countries.

The Uma Oya project, in the central Badulla district, was constructed with Iranian technical assistance. Valued at \$514 million, it was started in 2010 by Iran's FARAB engineering group and Iran initially provided \$50 million. But in 2013, funding could not be continued because of international sanctions against Iran. The Sri Lankan government then decided to complete the project with its own funds using the same Iranian contractor.

The project was scheduled for completion in 2015 but was delayed by international sanctions against Iran, technical issues and the COVID-19 pandemic, the government said in a statement ahead of Raisi's visit.

The project will add 290 GWh of electricity annually to the national grid and irrigate 4,500 hectares (11,100 acres) of new land and 1,500 hectares (3,700 acres) of existing agricultural land.

"Our enemies did not want Iran to develop and progress ... so the will and determination of the Iranian people were realized and our enemies were disappointed," Raisi said.

Raisi and Wickremesinghe are to witness the signing of five memoranda of understanding and are scheduled to issue a joint statement.

Raisi arrived in Sri Lanka from Pakistan, where the two countries agreed to strengthen economic and security cooperation.

The Indian Ocean island nation declared bankruptcy in April 2022 with more than \$83 billion in debt — more than half of it to foreign creditors. Wickremesinghe's government secured an IMF four-year bailout package to rescue the country from its worst economic crisis.

Despite improving economic indicators, Wickremesinghe — who came to power in 2022 — faces public backlash over heavy taxes and the high cost of living.