HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

SPEECH

Monday, 17 November 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (15:49): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and all the ancient custodians of our continent whose ancestors bartered with Macassan trepangers supplying Chinese markets hundreds of years ago.

President Xi and Madam Peng, you honour us with your presence, and it is my pleasure on behalf of the opposition to welcome you to our parliament. Mr President, I know that you are fond of the Chinese proverb, ‘a good neighbour is not to be traded for gold’—for millennia, Australia and China have been neighbours; for decades, we have been partners; and today again we confirm that we are firm friends.

As opposition leader and then as Prime Minister, it was the late great Gough Whitlam who first reached out to China diplomatically. He ended a generation of lost contact and began a thriving partnership, now in its fifth decade. Before Whitlam, two-way trade between our countries was less than $100 million. There was not a single student from the People’s Republic of China at an Australian university—not one. When I visited China 40 years later, as part of Prime Minister Gillard’s delegation, our trading relationship was worth more than $100 billion. Today, more than 90,000 Chinese students study at Australian campuses. Every generation of Chinese and Australian leadership owns a share of that success. Our world economy is more interconnected and more interdependent, and ours is a relationship of diverse and shared prosperity—in tourism, agriculture, energy, services, mining and education. And today, Labor welcomes the prospect of a trade agreement between our two countries. A decade of hard work has gone into creating this opportunity for Australia, from Prime Minister Howard to Prime Ministers Rudd and Gillard, and now Prime Minister Abbott. We look forward to examining the detail of the final agreement. We believe in open markets and liberalised trade—driving economic growth, creating jobs, expanding the middle class, raising living standards and eradicating poverty. We believe in bilateral agreements. We believe also in subregional and multilateral trade agreements, and we believe that multilateral processes should always be open to each other, not opposed. We commend the important progress in last week’s very successful APEC summit in Beijing. But of course, our relationship runs deeper than trade. We need to keep nourishing the people-to-people links, and to make life easier for students and tourists, from the flexibility of visas to the time it takes to obtain and process them.

My first visit to China was in 1992 as a student backpacker. I saw firsthand the earlier stages of the powerful and remarkable transformation that we celebrate today. Your journey has been a journey from poverty to prosperity; from inwardly-focused, agrarian economy to global economic superpower—to international leadership; and a journey that has lifted and liberated more than half a billion of your people from poverty, and changed our world for the better. And we all take heart from the fact that decades of economic growth and trade liberalisation have encouraged the real and important advancement of human rights, political freedoms, and the rule of law—long may they continue!

On some IMF estimates, in early October this year—the Year of the Horse—China quietly reclaimed its place as the world’s largest economy. China’s leadership of the new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and increased engagement with other multilateral institutions is an unambiguously good thing for the world. The same leadership has driven your work on counter-terrorism and combating corruption, and the generous and timely contribution you have made to the fight against Ebola in West Africa, lending vital assistance since April including providing 500 trained staff. And on Wednesday, 12 November, you stood side by side with the President of the United States to affirm your commitment to ambitious new international action on climate change—one of the defining environmental, economic and security issues of our age. We congratulate you on your vision and your ambition, and we look forward to building a clean energy future with China.

Mr President, I can assure you that I and Labor are committed to building an international relationship of mutual trust—a partnership pursuing harmony. We do not see diplomacy as a zero sum game. We do not seek to rank one friendship at the expense of another. Mr President, Madam Peng, 70 years ago soldiers from our two countries fought together for our national survival. We will never forget the courage and kindness of Chinese locals who
risked so much to provide desperately needed medicine and supplies to Australian prisoners of war on Hainan Island and elsewhere. They, along with generations of Chinese visitors and migrants, have a special place in the Australian story—not just legendary Anzacs like Billy Sing or pioneering surgeons like Victor Chang, but the more than 300,000 Chinese Australians who make our nation a smarter, richer, more diverse and more interesting destination. Many of them started their lives in Australia working long hours and late shifts; now they are small-business owners and corporate leaders. They enrich our communities and their children star at school prize-givings and in our universities.

Ours has always been a relationship of beneficial exchange. It was Chinese gold-diggers who took back the seeds of the gum trees that you see from the train between Hong Kong and Guangzhou; 19th century miners who saw department stores in Melbourne and Sydney and created major new businesses in Shanghai and Guangzhou; engineering graduates who have built China’s world-leading solar industry; and economics graduates who are playing major roles in the discussion of your economic future reforms. We thank you for your visit and we hope, most of all, that you take home fond memories of our nation. You are most welcome here; you always will be.

Honourable senators and members: Hear, hear!

The SPEAKER: Mr President, it gives me great pleasure to invite you to address the House.