In Hock to China, Sri Lanka Gave Up Territory

By MARIA ADOLFI

HAMBANTOTA, Sri Lanka — Every time President Xi Jinping steps on the country’s soil, a part of Sri Lanka leaves — literally.

President Xi arrived here on Sunday to inaugurate the Hambantota Port Development Project, a $1.4 billion financial bonanza that was the linchpin of China’s Belt and Road initiative, a vast network of roads, ports and railways that Beijing hopes to dominate.

Sri Lanka offered the port to China as part of a massive reform package in 2015, when the country was drowning in debt.

But today, the port needed to be rescued, too.

The Trump Administration's war of trade policy, which Mr. Trump launched in March to make American companies more competitive, has damaged the economy, the president and his allies have said.

And so the port became China’s domain.

The country gave China control of the island for over a century on the condition that it would build and operate a port.

But after years of decline, it shut down in 2016, seemingly consigned to a dusty past in the desert of desert cities.

Then the port became China’s.

Mr. Rajapaksa was seen in office in 2015, but Sri Lanka’s new government struggled to make investments in the facility. It was shut down for more than a year, and the Chinese government handed over the port and the $1.2 billion debt to the Chinese.

That’s why the port became China’s.

In December, the port became China-owned territory by mutual agreement, seemingly under the inattentive eye of the American administration.

The line is one of the most visible sights of national pride for Jordan.

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