
LTTE blocks evacuation of civilians from uncleared area in the Mullaitivu district

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The LTTE poses the most serious obstacle preventing the evacuation of civilians, who are confined to the safe zone in the narrow coastal strip in the Mullaitivu district. Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama, referring to the dialogue with India and the US in this regard, explained that the Government of Sri Lanka is at present unable to avail itself of the offers of assistance to evacuate the civilians, made by these countries due to the LTTE's fierce resistance in releasing the people, since the civilians have been forcibly held against their will as human shields to protect key LTTE terrorist leaders and their families. The Foreign Minister explained the Government position to the British Shadow Defence Secretary, Dr. Liam Fox who called on him yesterday (12 March 2009) in Colombo. Dr. Fox is currently on a brief visit to Sri Lanka, during which he is scheduled to hold talks with key Government leaders including President Mahinda Rajapaksa, as well as meet leaders of political parties.

Responding to a query by the British Shadow Defence Secretary on the status of the implementation of the 17th Amendment to the Constitution, the Foreign Minister pointed out that this issue is before the Supreme Court, where additional submissions have to be filed by May 2009. Dr. Fox opined that reaching cross party agreement in democracy could be extremely difficult and therefore the Sri Lanka Government should endeavour to explore other ways and means of overcoming this impasse. He observed that with the complete clearing of the North from the clutches of the terrorists emerging, a political framework for that region would need to be put in place within the next three months. Minister Bogollagama explained that the envisaged political process is moving positively leading to the implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. The Minister stated that both Local Government and Provincial Council elections would be held in the North as soon as the terrorists have been fully cleared from that region. Referring to reports of an impending humanitarian disaster in the North, Dr. Fox was given a presentation with the aid of a map on the conduct of the ongoing military operations, the movement of civilians out of the conflict area, the LTTE's withdrawal from their earlier positions using civilians as human shields and the designation of safe zones. He was also briefed on the steps taken by the Government to move the civilians from the conflict zone and ensure an uninterrupted supply of essential goods and services, as well as humanitarian assistance to the people in this area. Foreign Minister Bogollagama and the British Shadow Defence Secretary, Dr. Liam Fox further discussed a range of issues pertaining to bilateral relations between the UK and Sri Lanka. They also shared their views on developments in the region. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Colombo 13 March 2009