
Thailand to help combat terrorism

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Sri Lanka's call for measures to counter terrorism that might spill over to the region and beyond following the military defeat of the LTTE in Sri Lanka received strong support from Thailand on 26.03.2009.

Thailand's Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said that he appreciated Sri Lanka's concerns about attempts by terrorists to operate in the region and reaffirmed that Thailand will not allow anybody to use the country to destabilise friends among whom Sri Lanka was viewed as a close friend with long-standing cultural and religious ties. Prime Minister Abhisit said that it was in "all our interests" to end terrorism. He struck a positive note saying that Sri Lanka's interests in this regard will be reciprocated. The Thai prime minister's response came during a half hour meeting with Sri Lanka Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama who spelt out the dangers to the region and internationally from the LTTE trying to establish itself in new sanctuaries and continuing to engage in criminal activities such as arms smuggling, the narcotics trade, human trafficking and money laundering. He said that terrorism in all its forms must be rooted out. Minister Bogollagama was on a one-day bilateral visit during which he called on Prime Minister Vejjajiva in Parliament and met with his Thai counterpart Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya and Defence Minister Gen. Prawit Wongsuwon. Minister Bogollagama's concerns that scattered remnants of the LTTE would not only try to re-establish themselves in new locations, join hands with other terrorist groups and even turn into mercenaries offering their skills and expertise in terrorism found a resonance in the high echelons of the Thai government. Prime Minister Vejjajiva asked Sri Lanka to provide information to the Thai authorities about such activities. Defence Minister Gen Prawit Wongsuwon reiterated the message of his prime minister when he assured Sri Lanka that Thailand will not allow the country to be used as a launching pad for LTTE terrorism. The prime minister said he was pleased to hear that Sri Lanka had achieved substantial political stability. Earlier Minister Bogollagama pointed out the steps being taken to expand political pluralism, especially in the north, which it had been long denied and said that President Mahinda Rajapaksa was meeting with Tamil political parties towards achieving this end. Sri Lanka Foreign Minister said that the government had a public mandate to end terrorism in the country. But while internally the government might end terrorism, he sought support from the region and outside it because the LTTE could mushroom elsewhere and there is a need to guard against it in the long term. Minister Bogollagama told the Thai prime minister that this was a good time to discuss the expansion of trade relations between the two countries. He said there were many areas where they could cooperate. Prime Minister Vejjajiva agreed that a lot more could be done to enhance trade between them and pointed out that they should identify areas for investment. He said that tourism could be expanded especially because of the strong Buddhist ties that link the two countries. Minister Bogollagama pointed out that there is a Sri Lanka -Thai Joint Commission which should be reactivated and said Sri Lanka would like to host the next meeting. In his meeting with Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya too, the Sri Lankan minister underscored the need to revive the Joint Commission so that it could play a decisive role in enhancing bilateral relations. During the talks with the Thai Foreign Minister, Mr Piromya said he was heartened by Sri Lanka's success in fighting terrorism so far and said that there was already cooperation between them in the field of intelligence gathering and exchange. The Thai prime minister showed considerable interest in Sri Lanka's idea of setting up an International Buddhist Centre where different countries that have Buddhist links and followers would create their own representative structures of temples, religious symbols, libraries or places of learning which would reflect their respective values. The Prime Minister of Bangkok said he would certainly ask the relevant Thai department to look into it. Minister Bogollagama said that in the field of culture there are wider areas to be explored. He also asked for Thailand's support to become a sectoral partner of Asean as a prelude to becoming a dialogue partner.

Sri Lanka Embassy

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