# Sri lankan minister warns on 'hired tigers'

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By Don Pathan, Supalak Ganjanakhundee The Nation  Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama warned yesterday that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could transform themselves into hired hands for international criminal elements, including terrorist organisations, and urged countries in the region to take extra precautions. Speaking to a group of reporters after his one-day stopover in Bangkok, Rohitha said while the conflict with the LTTE may be in its last phase, there is concern that the Tigers, with their know-how and expertise, could be problematic for the international community.  Rohitha said his talks in Bangkok covered a wide range of issues, including security cooperation, investment and cultural exchanges between the two Buddhist countries. He described the outcome as "encouraging."

During the visit, Rohitha met with Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya and Defence Minister Prawit Wongsuwan.  Meanwhile the Foreign Ministry's deputy spokesman, Thani Thongpakdi, said Rohitha urged Kasit to keep a close watch on possible LTTE activities in the country and not to let the group use the Kingdom as a launching PAD against Colombo.  The Sri Lankan minister did not give specific targets for the surveillance but said Thailand was pleased to help.  The Tiger rebels have been fighting since 1983 for an independent state for the Tamil minority. Thai authorities found the group has shipped in weapons from Phuket for their activities.  Beside the Tigers issue, the two ministers also discussed plans for a new meeting of their joint commission, which has not met since 2003 due to political difficulties in both countries, Thani said.  Sri Lanka wants to cooperate with Thailand in many areas, notably economic ones, he said. Colombo has housing construction projects that need Thai skills, he said.  The LTTE controlled about a third of Sri Lanka prior to the collapse of a Norwegian brokered ceasefire in January 2008. But as the Tigers appear to be on their last legs in this ongoing military offensive, Sri Lanka has come under international criticism, with human rights organisations accusing government troops of shelling civilian areas and neglecting collateral damage.  Colombo has disputed these claims, including the UN assertion that there have been more than 2,600 deaths and more than 7,000 injuries since January. The government accuses the LTTE of using civilians as shields, but continue to deny permission to independent observers and journalists to visit the battlefield, citing security concerns.  United Nations human rights chief Navi Pillay said earlier this month that she feared both sides could be guilty of war crimes.  There are attempts led by the US to have the Sri Lankan issue discussed at the UN Security Council. Sri Lanka, with the backing of Russia and China, objects to the move, saying the conflict is an internal matter.Courtesy: nationmultimedia.com