
Ties with India unique: Bogollagama

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Ananth Krishnan BEIJING: Mindful of New Delhi's concerns about Beijing's increasingly close strategic relationship with Colombo, Sri Lanka Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama on Thursday stressed that Sri Lanka's growing ties with China had no bearing on the country's "unique" relationship with India. He described Sri Lanka's relationship with the two countries as "two tracks on a railway-line running independently".

On a four-day visit to Beijing to discuss furthering bilateral ties, Mr. Bogollagama has called for China to expand its already fast-growing strategic relationship with Sri Lanka, but he has also been careful to stress Colombo's closeness with New Delhi. His visit to China comes at a time when the relationship between the two countries has expanded rapidly in both strategic and economic spheres, and has also raised concerns in New Delhi. China provided significant assistance to Colombo, both financial and material, in the government's fight against the LTTE, and has also invested around \$1 billion in developing a strategically significant port in Hambantota on Sri Lanka's south-eastern coast. India concerned While Beijing has described the venture as being purely commercial, Indian and United States officials say the port would likely be used by the Chinese navy as a docking facility. Referring to the country's increasingly close ties with Colombo, Home Minister P. Chidambaram said in April China was "fishing in troubled waters" and "acting with a clear agenda". Addressing the influential Chinese Institute for International Studies (CIIS), a government-sponsored think-tank, Mr. Bogollagama on Thursday took pains to stress that Colombo's close ties with Beijing would have no bearing on the country's relationship with India. He said relations between the three countries were "very positive" and "like two tracks in a railway line running independently". In the last three years, economic ties between Sri Lanka and China have also grown considerably closer. China has become Sri Lanka's biggest donor, giving around \$1 billion in aid in 2008. Mr. Bogollagama said Sri Lanka valued China's support "in times of need" which had been "extended in the form of harbours, power stations and other areas of infrastructure development". Call to invest He also called on both China and India to step up economic investment to help develop the war-torn northern regions of the country. "In a post-conflict scenario, infrastructure development is the main area where we would like both countries to make investments," he said. "India has already come in to some parts of the north and shown interest. We would like to see similar interest from all other countries, and obviously Chinese industries should take advantage of this new development." Courtesy: hindu.com