
Statement by the Ministry of External Affairs

Monday, 08 April 2013

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Contact and interaction between Sri Lanka and India has continued since time immemorial. Civilisational ties and cultural links between all parts of India and Sri Lanka have been substantial. Since Independence, both nations have followed an unbroken tradition of democracy. The Governments of India and Sri Lanka have worked closely to combat terrorism and extremism, safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and the right of all Sri Lankans to live in peace with dignity and justice. For nearly 30 years, Sri Lanka suffered as a result of the violent campaign conducted by the LTTE whose objective was to create a mono-ethnic, mono-linguistic separate State in Sri Lanka. Since the comprehensive defeat of the LTTE, Sri Lankans of all communities enjoy peace and tranquillity throughout the Island. Following the conclusion of the conflict, the Government appointed the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) with a view to providing equity and justice for all Sri Lankans, in particular for those living in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Its comprehensive set of recommendations is now being implemented, step by step, in a structured and methodical manner. In this context, it is regrettable that sections of Tamil communities living abroad have resorted to sustained protests and calls for unfriendly measures against Sri Lanka, ostensibly to obtain political rights for Tamils in Sri Lanka. These groups and parties have recommended solutions and demands that have no relevance to the ground realities in Sri Lanka but can militate against the efforts taken by the Government of Sri Lanka to provide justice and to arrive at arrangements for reconciliation.

Strident demands to stop calling Sri Lanka a friendly country by some are disturbing and do not relate at all to the continuing friendship and cooperation between India and Sri Lanka that has stood the test of time and finds expression today in a multifaceted relationship encompassing all regions of India and all aspects of modern life including substantive economic interaction. Descriptions of the military conflict with the LTTE and its concluding phase in an emotive and unrealistic manner and demands for international intervention in Sri Lanka are devoid of merit and smack of prejudice. Allegations levelled against the Sri Lankan State, its leaders and Security Forces are based on hearsay, misinformation, misperceptions and ethno-nationalistic ideologies. They have not taken into account that Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country with communities well spread out in all parts of the country, at present living peacefully throughout the Island and that efforts are being made to enable all communities and citizens to exercise political power in their own geographical regions and at the centre as well. There is no room for demands for ethno-nationalism in Sri Lanka and the aim of every citizen is to live in harmony throughout the country. Efforts by interested parties to create communal discord will not succeed, despite their potential to vitiate the atmosphere that is currently required to conclude efforts at reconciliation. The Government of Sri Lanka is willing to conduct inquiries into any allegations, if duly presented to authorities in Sri Lanka, through the judiciary and military tribunals, in line with practice followed by all other democratic nations. The persistent allegations against the Sri Lanka Navy with regard to alleged killing and harassment of Indian fishermen are erroneous and without any factual basis. The Sri Lanka Navy is under strict orders to treat all Tamil Nadu fishermen, who cross regularly into Sri Lanka waters, in a humane manner. At the same time Sri Lanka has continually and emphatically impressed upon Indian authorities the compelling need to take appropriate action regarding the very large number of fishing boats daily entering Sri Lanka's territorial waters and exploiting fisheries resources, causing grave damage to the livelihoods of fishing communities in the North of Sri Lanka. The Government of Sri Lanka is keen to move forward with its efforts at equity and justice, notwithstanding the innumerable crimes and acts of terrorism committed by the LTTE, mostly against Tamil Sri Lankans. Sri Lanka needs time and space to move forward on the course already charted in order to provide justice and dignity for all Sri Lankans. The Government would like to invite all those who make unfounded and exaggerated allegations as well as unrealistic demands as solutions to Sri Lanka's future to visit Sri Lanka and ascertain the progress on the ground in terms of rebuilding the country and resettling displaced persons and reintegrating misguided youth as well as the efforts at providing support for the disadvantaged, particularly those who were affected by the conflict. Ministry of External Affairs Colombo 8 April 2013