

Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama visited New Delhi from 18th to 20th March. During his visit, the Minister called on former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, Defence Minister A.K. Antony and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, L.K. Advani.

In the discussions with Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Mr. Bogollagama highlighted Sri Lanka's commitment to working for a successful SAARC Summit next month, under the Chairmanship of India. The Sri Lanka Foreign Minister emphasized that a successful response to terrorism required a collective effort, effectively addressing it in all its forms and associated manifestations. The importance of effective regional trade liberalization in keeping with the commitments undertaken by the Member States was underlined. Mr. Bogollagama stressed the need for SAARC to overcome impediments and move forward.

Mr. Bogollagama also used the opportunity provided by the meeting to brief Minister Mukherjee on the current developments in the peace process and their manifest potential to contributing to a negotiated and political solution to the national issue which is equitable to all communities, within an undivided Sri Lanka. In the sphere of bilateral economic relations, the two Ministers were in agreement that a timely conclusion of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations with an outcome that is mutually beneficial to both sides, would augment even further the opportunities for commerce and trade.

Foreign Minister Bogollagama apprised his Indian counterpart that rigorous inquiries had been conducted in response to the recent reports alleging the involvement of the Sri Lanka Navy in incidents affecting Indian fishermen. The outcome of this process had established that the reports were totally unfounded. At the same time, it was likely that parties with a vested interest would attempt to instigate in the future too such motivated reports. The Sri Lanka authorities therefore believe that the time is opportune for both Governments to intensify effective measures in the best interest of the fisheries communities on both sides of the Palk Straits/Bay.

In the discussion with Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, Sri Lanka's request for sanction as per accepted quarantine procedures for the export of varieties of fruit to India, was further advanced. It was noted that out of 11 varieties under reference, procedures for clearing 2 species of fruit had already been completed. The scientific procedures pertaining to the balance 9 would similarly be expeditiously progressed.

In his conversations with former Prime Minister Vajpayee and Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani, Minister Bogollagama expressed Sri Lanka's appreciation for the strong contribution they had made while in office, towards strengthening Indo-Lanka relations.

Minister Bogollagama's call on Mr. A.K. Antony, was his first meeting since assuming his current portfolio, with the Indian Defence Minister. Mr. Bogollagama therefore made it a point to thank the Indian Government for the valuable training that continues to be imparted to members

of the Sri Lanka Armed Forces.

On the second day of his visit, the Foreign Minister met with 15 of the European Union envoys who are concurrently accredited to Sri Lanka with residence in New Delhi. The Minister briefed the envoys of the current developments and the ongoing APC process wherein the Government is resolutely endeavouring to develop a consensus for a negotiated solution based on the values of pluralism, democracy and human rights. He stressed in this regard the contribution that the international community could make by effectively curbing the LTTE's illicit fundraising and by urging that organization to make positive use of the window for peace, kept open by the Government. The envoys appreciated the Minister's commitment for further developing EU-Sri Lanka relations and his initiative of commencing a dialogue with them.

The delegation accompanying the Minister to his meetings in New Delhi included the Foreign Secretary Dr. Palitha Kohona and the High Commissioner in New Delhi, C.R. Jayasinghe.

On the evening of 19th March, the Minister took time off to attend a reception hosted by the High Commissioner to mark the 59th year of Independence where he met many Indian personalities and members of the Delhi based diplomatic corps.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Colombo.

20 March 2007