

January 31, 2011

The Foreign Secretary of India, Mrs. Nirupama Rao, visited Sri Lanka on 30-31 January 2011. During her visit, she called on His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Hon'ble Minister of External Affairs, Prof. G.L. Peiris, on 31st January 2011. She also met Secretary to the President Mr. Lalith Weeratunga, Defence Secretary Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa and External Affairs Secretary Mr. C.R. Jayasinghe.

During the discussions, Foreign Secretary Rao expressed the deep concern of the Government of India at the recent violent incidents in the waters between India and Sri Lanka, which had resulted in the tragic death of two Indian fishermen. She stressed that these incidents should be fully investigated and all steps taken to prevent their recurrence in future. The Sri Lanka authorities emphasized in this regard that it is the consistent policy of Sri Lanka to treat in a humanitarian manner all fishermen, including those from the Indian fishing community, who cross into Sri Lanka waters. Given the very close bilateral relationship between the two countries, any development which impacts on the wellbeing of the Indian fishing community pursuing their livelihoods in the waters between the two countries, is of the utmost concern to Sri Lanka. The Government of Sri Lanka is therefore committed to ascertaining the facts behind the incidents. While continuing with further inquiries, the Sri Lankan authorities have requested that additional information be made available by the Indian side. Both sides agreed that the use of force cannot be justified under any circumstances.

The two sides noted that the Joint Statement on Fishing Arrangements of 26th October 2008, which had put in place practical arrangements to deal with bona fide fishermen crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), had led to a decrease in incidents. They agreed on the need to discuss arrangements based on the current situation so as to strengthen the safety and security of the fishermen. Accordingly, it was decided that the next meeting of the Joint Working Group on Fishing would be convened at an early date, which would, inter-alia, address various issues relating to fishing by the two sides. The Joint Working Group would also address the proposed Memorandum of Understanding on development and cooperation in the field of fisheries. It was decided as well to enhance and promote contacts between the fishermen's associations on both sides, since such contacts have proved to be mutually beneficial.

Colombo

31st January 2011