

DELHI-COLOMBO TIES ARE ON THE RIGHT PATH

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Sri Lanka

Feb 10, 2020-Monday

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Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa sent out a message by choosing India as the destination for his first trip abroad after assuming office, and also struck the right notes in New Delhi by saying the changes made by the Indian government in Jammu and Kashmir last year were the country's internal affair. Mr Rajapaksa also discussed cooperation in counterterrorism with his Indian counterpart, Mr Narendra Modi, and ways to take forward the use of two lines of credit totalling \$450 million offered by India last year. However, Mr Rajapaksa sought to strike a balance between Sri Lanka's ties with India, and those with other regional players, such as China and Pakistan, describing India as a "relation" and the others as friends. He also noted Pakistan's help in the war with the Tamil Tiger rebels and China's help in rebuilding Sri Lanka after the war, which ended when the Sri Lankan Army launched a massive offensive under Mr Rajapaksa's leadership.

Mr Modi used Mr Rajapaksa's visit to raise India's concerns about the incomplete process of reconciliation and the devolution of powers to Sri Lanka's Tamil minority, saying the government in Colombo must rise to the occasion to meet the Tamil people's expectations for equality, justice, peace and respect by implementing the 13th amendment to the constitution, which envisages giving more powers to Tamil-inhabited areas of the island nation. Mr Rajapaksa and his brother, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, however, have shied away from committing to the full implementation of the 13th amendment. The Sri Lankan president has even said there couldn't be full devolution of powers against the wishes of the Sinhala majority and Mr Rajapaksa, while speaking to a section of the Indian media, too, ruled out any resolution in the Tamil-inhabited areas that isn't acceptable to Sri Lanka's majority community. Clearly, both sides will have to do some manoeuvring to ensure they reach common ground on this touchy issue.

END

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