

Sri Lanka clears revised deal for Hambantota port

File photo: Sri Lankan Buddhist monks march in a protest against an industrial zone project at Mirijjawila village in Ambalantota, Sri Lanka. The banner reads "peaceful protest against selling of Hambantota port and land grabbing." | Photo Credit: [AP](#)

Sri Lanka's Cabinet on Tuesday cleared a revised deal for the Chinese-built port in Hambantota, the government said. The modified agreement, the government added, was more profitable to Sri Lanka and also addressed security concerns raised by other countries.

Speaking to reporters here, Ports Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said the Cabinet gave final approval to sell 70% stake in the southern port to the state-run China Merchants Port Holdings for \$1.12 billion. "Some [diplomatic] missions here were worried that the port would be used as a military naval base. As per the revised agreement Sri Lanka will manage the port security," he said.

While the Chinese would manage port operations, "no naval ship, including Chinese ones, can call at Hambantota without our permission", Mr. Samarasinghe said.

Wary of the Chinese

India's apprehensions about the apparently growing Chinese presence in the island are well known, given the two countries' competing strategic interests in the island. The Hambantota port is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Beijing's stake in the port and its plan to acquire 15,000 acres of adjoining land to help Colombo set up an industrial zone have strengthened fears of those wary of China's growth in the region. "Our foreign policy today is reaching out to everyone and not giving special treatment to anyone," Mr. Samarasinghe said, responding to accusations that the current government is as close to Beijing as Mahinda Rajapaksa's administration was.

The Hambantota port was built with Chinese loans in 2010 during Mr. Rajapaksa's term. Deeming the project a "white elephant", the Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe government decided in late 2016 to sell 80% stake in the port to the Chinese company in order to tackle the \$8 billion debt Sri Lanka owes China. Under the agreement, Colombo was to receive \$1.12 billion for a 99-year lease.

The deal would be tabled in Parliament on Friday, and is likely to be signed on Saturday, the Ports Minister said.

A Bangladeshi auto-rickshaw driver is suing for damages after his phone number was used in a movie, leading to a barrage of calls from female fans

Nuclear disarmament campaign group ICAN won the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday for its efforts to consign the atomic bomb to history, firing off a

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© Zuccess App by crackIAS.com