

SRI LANKA TO SET UP SPECIAL NORTH-EAST FUND

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

Addressing concerns: Gotabaya Rajapaksa with the delegation of the TNA in Colombo on Friday. Special Arrangement

The Sri Lankan government will set up a 'North-East Development Fund' to increase investments in the war-affected areas, while probing cases of enforced disappearances and land grabs that remain chief concerns of the Tamil people 13 years after the war ended.

The announcement came on Friday, after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa met a delegation of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the largest grouping of parliamentarians representing districts in the north and east. It was Mr. Rajapaksa's first meeting with the country's Tamil political leadership since his election to office in November 2019. The meeting took place for over two hours at the Presidential Secretariat, with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, his older brother and Irrigation Minister Chamal Rajapaksa, also present. The TNA has been demanding that the government deliver the long-pending political solution to Sri Lanka's national question, through a new constitutional settlement. The demand was the thrust of TNA leader and veteran Tamil politician R. Sampanthan's letter to President Rajapaksa ahead of the meeting, twice postponed before it was held on Friday. But the government sought to postpone the discussion on the political solution, as an experts' committee report on constitutional proposals is expected to be made public within two months' time, according to TNA spokesman and Jaffna legislator M.A. Sumanthiran.

The President meanwhile agreed to focus on four key areas, including possibly releasing long-term detainees under the country's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act — which the government recently amended but critics want repealed — and suspects held without being charged; ending the incessant land grabs in the north and east by different state agencies to allegedly change the demographics of the region; inquiring into cases of enforced disappearances and establishing a special development fund for the north and east, he said.

Demanding truth

Families of disappeared persons, mainly women, have been protesting for years now, demanding the truth about their loved ones who went missing, or surrendered to the military during the civil war years or soon after. Mr. Gotabaya, who was Secretary to the Ministry of Defence during those years, has denied there were enforced disappearances then.

At Friday's discussion, the President told the TNA that his government was working on "a number of issues", including the release of suspects held in long-term detention, and those who have not been charged or prosecuted, the launch of "a truth-finding" mechanism, the amendment of the PTA and resolving "issues related to missing persons", a statement from his office said.

President Gotabaya has in the past emphasised development over devolution, as the most important need for the war-affected areas. The initiative to set up a development fund exclusively for the war-affected areas comes nearly three years after his election, amid widespread joblessness, indebtedness, and poverty in the region that the pandemic and Sri Lanka's current economic crisis have only aggravated.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com