

INDIA ABSTAINS ON SRI LANKA VOTE AT UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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Ali Sabry Jason DeCrow

India on Thursday abstained from voting on a resolution on Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council, while observing that Sri Lanka's progress in implementing commitments on the 13th Amendment, meaningful devolution and early provincial elections remains "inadequate".

"Achieving prosperity for all Sri Lankans and realising the legitimate aspirations of Tamils of Sri Lanka for prosperity, dignity and peace are two sides of the same coin," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Indra Mani Pande said. As an immediate neighbour, India has "substantively contributed" to the relief, rehabilitation, resettlement and reconstruction process in Sri Lanka after 2009 and more recently provided "unprecedented assistance" to the people of Sri Lanka to face the challenges of the recent economic crisis, he said. India had abstained last year, too.

Further, India has "taken note" of the Sri Lankan government's commitments on the implementation of commitments "in the spirit of the 13th Constitutional Amendment", meaningful devolution and the early conduct of provincial elections, Mr. Pande said, underscoring India's long-standing concern over power devolution in Sri Lanka, an issue that also found mention in the resolution.

Inadequate progress

"We believe that the progress towards the same remains inadequate. Accordingly, we urge the Government of Sri Lanka to work meaningfully towards early implementation of these commitments," the Indian diplomat said.

The resolution titled 'Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka' was adopted by the Council after 20 of its 47 members voted in its favour. While 20 countries abstained, seven—including China and Pakistan—voted against it, effectively backing the Sri Lankan government. Prior to the vote, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Ali Sabry told the Council that the government "categorically rejects" the "manifestly unhelpful" resolution. He had earlier said the Council was "polarised", and that its resolutions were "all geopolitics".

The government, he said on Thursday, especially opposed the resolution reinforcing the Office of the High Commissioner's capacity to "collect, consolidate, analyse, and preserve" information and evidence pertaining to rights violations, and to "support relevant judicial and other proceedings, including in Member States, with competent jurisdiction".

Impartial investigation

The resolution called upon the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure the prompt, thorough and impartial investigation and, if warranted, prosecution of all alleged crimes relating to human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including for long-standing emblematic cases, with the full participation of victims and their representatives. It also urged the government to address the ongoing economic crisis, including "by investigating and, where warranted, prosecuting corruption, including where committed by public and former public

officials".Mr. Sabry accused the Core Group of nations that tabled the resolution of going beyond its mandate by including economic issues.

Sri Lanka's largest Tamil grouping in Parliament, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), thanked the Core Group for keeping Sri Lanka's rights record on the Human rights Council's agenda for a decade. "It has helped maintain international oversight on accountability and reconciliation. Although we would like to see more decisive action [on the ground], we know this is the intervention that is possible for the Council," TNA spokesman M.A. Sumanthiran told *The Hindu* .

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