

'SRI LANKA WON'T ACCEPT EXTERNAL PROCESSES ON WAR ACCOUNTABILITY'

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Ahead of the UN Human Rights Chief's latest report on Sri Lanka, and a likely resolution at the coming session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, the Sri Lankan government reiterated that it would not accept any external mechanism on war-time accountability.

Addressing a media conference in Colombo on Monday, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Sabry said Sri Lanka "needs all partners" for its economic recovery, days after the government formalised an IMF staff-level agreement for a provisional \$ 2.9 billion programme.

However, rejecting any external mechanism — as the former Rajapaksa administration too did — for accountability and justice in regard to alleged war crimes, Mr. Sabry vowed to strengthen domestic processes "within Sri Lanka's constitutional framework." "We are not interested in confrontation, we want to work towards consensus with all partners," he said, adding the government would set up a new "truth-seeking" mechanism and a secretariat to coordinate with Sri Lankan diaspora. "But external mechanism, we are not agreeable... because our Constitution does not allow that," the Minister said, without elaborating on the constitutional provisions that prohibit it.

Tamils call for justice

For over 13 years since Sri Lanka's civil war ended, concerns over grave human rights violations have lingered among Tamils. Last month, hundreds of Tamil mothers marched on the streets of the northern Kilinochchi district, marking 2,000 days of their agitation, seeking truth and justice for their loved ones who disappeared during and after the civil war.

Further, in recent years, rights advocates within Sri Lanka as well as UN experts have drawn attention to targeted attacks on the island nation's Muslim community, arrests under anti-terrorism laws to "stifle" dissent, persisting militarisation, and a shrinking space for human rights and democratic freedoms.

As part of its efforts to address long-pending concerns, the government is likely to pass an amendment Bill to trim the President's executive powers soon, the Minister said, even as critics accuse the ruling administration of pushing a "watered down" version of an old law. "Sri Lanka must use this crisis as an opportunity to reset the country... economically, socially and constitutionally," he said.

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