

India does not favour unitary system in Sri Lanka

India has told a group of Tamil politicians from Sri Lanka that it hopes Colombo will not go for a unitary system of governance when it unveils a power sharing formula to end the ethnic conflict.

National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan told the delegation here Thursday that India had repeatedly told Sri Lankan leaders that it was vital to grant substantial autonomy to the island's Tamil areas, informed sources told IANS.

Narayanan conveyed the Indian government views to V. Anandasangaree, D. Sitharthan and T. Sritharan just before they ended a six-day visit to [New Delhi](#) where they met senior officials and opinion makers.

Anandasangaree heads the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Sitharthan the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and Sritharan is from the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF-Varada group).

Among the others the three met included Finance Minister P. Chidambaram and Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon.

Amid a costly war that rages between the military and the Tamil Tigers, Sri Lanka has been battling within over how much autonomy it must grant to Tamils as well as Muslims to give them a sense of power sharing.

While most people among the minorities and sections of the Sinhalese majority are for a federal system of governance, influential groups in the government and in allied groups insist that Sri Lanka's unitary system must stay.

Some in Sri Lanka fear that federalism or substantial autonomy may trigger separatist tendencies one day. India does not share this view.

At their 40-minute meeting, Anandasangaree, Sitharthan and Sritharan gave a detailed assessment of the military and political situation in Sri Lanka, where government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) appear to be headed towards a decisive showdown in the island's rebel-held north.

Violence raging since late 2005, primarily in the country's northeast, has killed thousands and left many more homeless.

According to the sources, the Tamil leaders urged Narayanan to pressure Sri Lanka's badly divided political establishment to come to a consensus on issues of governance. Without this, they argued, there could be no peace.

The delegation also emphasised that there was an urgent need to spread the values of pluralism in the LTTE-controlled region which the group rules supreme.

They urged New Delhi to play a more active and direct role to provide help to the thousands forced to quit their homes in the eastern province because of fighting.

According to the delegation, while the Sri Lankan government was doing its bit for the displaced Tamils, particularly in Batticaloa, a lot more had to be done.

Other Indian officials also told the delegation that New Delhi continued to favour a merger of Tamil-majority areas in Sri Lanka's north and east to form a single administrative unit.

There seemed to be differences in perception among Anandasangaree, Sitharthan and Sritharan on what can be achieved by the All Party Representative Committee (APRC), which the government wants to come up with a nationally accepted devolution package.

The understanding in official circles here is that India will wait for the APRC report before taking up the issue with Sri Lankan authorities. But New Delhi is clear that without genuine autonomy to the Tamil-speaking minorities, prospects of peace in Sri Lanka will be dim.

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