

## NEWS

# UK refuses visa to top Sri Lankan officials

TO the ire of Sri Lankan government, the British High Commission in Colombo has refused to issue visas to two top officials, according to media sources.

Outgoing Foreign Secretary and Sri Lanka's new permanent representative to the United Nations, Palitha Kohona and former Deputy Tourism Minister and ruling party parliamentarian Arjuna Ranatunge had submitted their passports to the British High Commission for visa to London but to their surprise the passports were returned without any valid reason for turning down their visa applications, according to Daily Mirror.

Foreign Ministry's Chief of Protocol, through whom Dr. Kohona's passport was forwarded to the British High Commission, later sought an explanation for returning the passport but a High Commission official had reportedly told the Foreign Office that the Foreign Secretary should be personally present at the High Commission to obtain the visa.

Foreign Ministry, however, had insisted that Dr. Kohona had no reason to be personally present at the High Commission to obtain the visa as he was the Foreign Secretary of the Country.

Foreign Ministry had later

again sought a visa to London for the Foreign Secretary, but the second attempt too was rejected by the High Commission saying there was not enough time to process the visa.

Foreign Ministry officials, who insisted that the application was given with 24 hours notice, had made several attempts to contact the British High Commissioner and his Deputy to seek their intervention but they could not be contacted over the telephone, the government sources said.

The government is of the view that the British High Commission had violated diplomatic protocols by rejecting a visa for the Foreign Secretary and parliamentarian Arjuna Ranatunge and felt this had further strained relations between Britain and Sri Lanka.

Government sources said Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama was expected to summon the British High Commissioner Dr. Peter Hayes to seek an explanation over the visa rejection, particularly to the Foreign Secretary.

The British High Commission in Sri Lanka responding through a press statement said whilst it expedite visa applications for senior political and official figures from Sri Lanka and other countries they do this in accor-



Palitha Kohona, Sri Lanka's new ambassador to the United Nations, has been refused a British visa

dance with UK immigration rules and this means, for example, that they cannot issue free visas for personal visits.

Acting High Commissioner Mark Gooding was quoted as saying: "The suggestion that there is any political bias in our visa application process is completely unfounded. We never comment on individual visa applications, but many of the details of the various cases reported are incorrect."

"In all cases of VIP visits, the High Commission works closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to try to ensure a smooth service, and we look forward to continuing this co-operation," the British Commission said.

Earlier Attorney General Mohan Peiris was also inconvenienced by the British High Commission which asked him to appear in person for an interview to grant a visa.

## Sri Lanka recalls Japan envoy after PM finger printed at airport

SRI LANKA has recalled its envoy to Japan after Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake was finger printed, made to wait for approximately half an hour and processed through normal passenger channel instead of the VIP lounge at Narita airport in Japan. Wickramanayake, had visited Japan at the invitation of the head monk of a well-known Buddhist temple in Kobe to the chief guest at a religious ceremony.

According to a source at the Prime Minister's office, the officials who went to receive Wickramanayake had apparently slipped-up by waiting outside instead of going into receive the Premier, as he entered the airport terminal after landing. As a result Wickramanayake and the entourage had been cleared only through the normal passenger channel and not

through the VIP lounge.

Japan had begun fingerprinting foreigners about a year ago as a security measure, but VIPs are exempted if embassy officials coordinate with the immigration to ensure quick clearance.

Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama has recalled Jayantha Palipane, Sri Lanka's ambassador to Japan over the incident and directed the Sri Lankan Embassy in Japan to conduct a probe, according to Foreign Ministry sources. The decision to recall Palipane was not based merely on the incident involving the Sri Lankan premier but on some past incidents as well, the sources said.

Whilst Colombo has tried to portray that the Sri Lankan embassy in Japan was at least partially responsible for the ordeal of the Prime Minister, reports citing diplomatic circles in Colombo

claim that the visa issued to Wickramanayake by Japan was a temporary visa normally issued to ordinary visitors.

Some media reports in Colombo claim the recall of Palipane is Colombo's the latest 'panicked restructuring' of its foreign service. Recalling of the ambassador may look as a response to an incident at the Narita airport involving the prime minister of Sri Lanka, but it is only a pretext, according to the sources.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa used career diplomats and academics to paint a deceptive picture of his government before and during the war. But now the government, either not trusting its own diplomats or considering them a spent force, is replacing them with military and political appointments in the style of some totalitarian regimes, they said.

## Canada's silence unacceptable says opposition

THE Canadian government is ignoring its international obligations by failing to engage the United Nations and friendly nations on ways to help the people of Sri Lanka, according to Canada's Liberal Party Foreign Affairs Critic Bob Rae.

"There are still hundreds of thousands in camps, which have been made even more unliveable after heavy rain," said Rae.

The Canadian Tamils believe the Conservative government in Canada led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper could do more to protest Canada's opposition to the mistreatment of Tamils by the Sri Lankan state directly and work with other international actors in multilateral forums like the United Nations to bring pressure on the island state to adhere to humanitarian laws.

"Our foreign policy has to be based on a principled engagement with our partners and friends in attempting to deal with a government like Sri Lanka, which is ignoring humanitarian law and the rights of its citizens. The Harper government has dropped

the ball in this regard."

Referring to the recent sentencing of Sri Lankan journalist J.S. Tissanayagam, Rae said the conviction of Tissanayagam is particularly disturbing as he has received the maximum penalty of twenty years in prison under the Prevention of Terrorism Act simply for being a journalist with an editorial view.

"The arrest of well known journalists, the threats against members of the NGO community, the repression of dissent - these are all signs of a government sinking into authoritarianism," Rae added.

"Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are crucial tenets of democracy around the world, principles which Canada holds dear, and Mr. Tissanayagam's conviction demonstrates a perversion of those democratic principles in Sri Lanka today."

"The Harper government's silence on these matters is simply unacceptable. We can do better as a world leader. I urge the Conservatives to take action," he said.

## Venerable Thera refused Canadian visa

THE Canadian embassy in Colombo has refused visa to a Buddhist monk due to the applicant's passport displaying the titles Venerable and Thera, according to media reports. Ven Haype Somananda Thera, the chief incumbent of Sri Maha Vihara,

Pamankada who had been invited by a Buddhist monk in Canada to attend a religious function there was asked by the Canadian embassy officials to remove the titles Venerable and Thera from his passport if he wanted a visa to enter Canada.