

## Rohitha in talks with US Ambassador over Gotabaya issue

By Dianne Silva



Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama is currently at a meeting with the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka Patricia Butenis, Foreign Ministry sources said adding that the meeting was believed to focus on the attempts by the US government to gather information against Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa.

**UPDATE:** Speaking to reporters following the meeting Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama said that the US envoy will take up the concerns raised by Sri Lanka with Washington.

He added "I have invited you to meet with me this afternoon, to emphasize in my capacity of Foreign Minister that the President and the Government of Sri Lanka stand firmly behind the Office of the Chief of Defence Staff of Sri Lanka. We will not allow that high post to be denigrated or made vulnerable.



The facts of the case as available to us are that the CDS General Sarath Fonseka who is at present in the United States, received a letter from the US Department of Homeland Security or DHS, calling him for an interview at 3.00 p.m. on Wednesday 4 November in Oklahoma City, in the State of Oklahoma. Moreover, he has also received a telephone call on 28 October during which a DHS Attorney had stated that the objective of the interview is to use him "as a source against human rights violations done by Secretary/Defence".

It had been clarified during the telephone conversation that the reference to "Secretary/Defence" relates to Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Secretary of the Ministry of Defence, Public Security, Law & Order of Sri Lanka.

It is pertinent to recall in this regard that Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa's duties as Secretary of that Ministry required his dealing with a situation of a grave onslaught that threatened the integrity of Sri Lanka and which was launched by the LTTE, an organization proscribed by several countries including the United States, for its terrorist activities. The allegations therefore leveled against the Sri Lankan Defence Secretary affect the vital interests of the Government of Sri Lanka and have occupied considerable time and attention of the respective Governments, at the highest levels. In fact, the US Ambassador in Colombo has already been briefed of the decision taken by the President of Sri Lanka to appoint a Panel to consider the matters raised in this Report. This decision by the President stems from Sri Lanka's unbroken commitment as a democratic nation to the Rule of Law, under which allegations are

first assessed as to whether they possess any substance meriting further inquiry.

The Chief of Defence Staff is a high level position within the Sri Lanka Government. He traveled to the United States on a diplomatic passport for pre-arranged appointments. Moreover, whatever General Fonseka may have become aware of during his service with the Government of Sri Lanka and in the course of his duties, has the status of privileged information. He has no authority to divulge or share this information with third parties, without the prior approval and consent of the Sri Lanka authorities.

I have accordingly met earlier this afternoon with H.E. Ms. Patricia Butenis, the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, to convey through Her Excellency the message that the Department of Homeland Security should forthwith desist from any endeavor to interview General Fonseka. Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the US Jaliya Wickramasuriya has also made similar representations to the State Department in Washington DC.

Let me reiterate that this position of the Government of Sri Lanka is based on the following two well founded principles.

Firstly, whatever information General Fonseka may have acquired in the exercise of his official duties is privileged by nature. Therefore, it cannot legally be shared with third parties without the prior approval and consent of the Sri Lanka authorities. The matter under reference has serious implications for the security and welfare of the people of Sri Lanka and the Government of Sri Lanka will under no circumstances, authorize such an illegal act.

Secondly, the action taken by the DHS is not needed, since any issues that may be of concern are already being addressed at the highest levels on the part of both the Government of Sri Lanka and that of the United States. You would recall that I have earlier in my remarks to you, already referred to the briefing given to the US Ambassador, concerning the appointment of a Panel by H.E. the President of Sri Lanka."