

# **Sri Lanka: Foreign Minister and reaction to Canadian PM**

Thursday 25 May 2023, by [Daily FT](#) (Date first published: 23 May 2023).

**The Foreign Ministry threw another hissy fit over comments made by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in his statement commemorating the 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the civil conflict in Sri Lanka. Trudeau noted that tens of thousands of Tamil civilians were killed in the last phase of the war. “Our thoughts are with the victims, survivors, and their loved ones, who continue to live with the pain caused by this senseless violence,” his statement read.**

“The stories of Tamil-Canadians affected by the conflict – including many I have met over the years in communities across the country – serve as an enduring reminder that human rights, peace, and democracy cannot be taken for granted. “That’s why Parliament last year unanimously adopted the motion to make May 18 Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day. Canada will not stop advocating for the rights of the victims and survivors of this conflict, as well as for all in Sri Lanka who continue to face hardship.”

Foreign Minister Ali Sabry is reported to have summoned the High Commissioner of Canada to Colombo to lodge his protest. A statement from the Ministry read: “Such irresponsible and polarising pronouncements by the leader of a nation breeds disharmony and hatred both in Canada and Sri Lanka, instead of promoting peace and reconciliation.”

The Ministry goes on to say that Sri Lanka vehemently rejects the “unsubstantiated narrative of ‘genocide’ which has been deliberately constructed by politically motivated anti-Sri Lanka elements whose so-called recognition in Canada depends on spreading misinformation and a false narrative of hatred.”

The bombastic rhetoric lacking in substance, argument and coherence is emblematic of the problems faced in Sri Lanka’s international relations under Foreign Minister Sabry. Allegations against the Sri Lankan military and its political leadership, especially regarding mass atrocities in the final phase of the conflict is nothing new. The only way such allegations would be quelled is if they are credibly investigated and if there are grounds for prosecution for alleged crimes then those perpetrators held accountable. Instead of doing even the bare minimum to demonstrate that the Sri Lankan Government and its judiciary can handle such serious allegations all that Sabry’s foreign ministry does is publish what is now a standard response, high on antagonistic rhetoric.

Ali Sabry was the personal lawyer to one of the worst, alleged perpetrators of international crimes, including war crimes and killings of journalists. His client and political master Gotabaya Rajapaksa was placed under sanction by the Canadian Government in January this year through the Special Economic Measures Act.

It could be argued that appointing Sabry as the foreign minister of Sri Lanka, the current administration has eroded even the little credibility it could have gained through last year’s political

change. It was an opportunity for President Ranil Wickremesinghe to demonstrate a break from the ultra-nationalist and manifestly disastrous foreign policy of his predecessor. A credible foreign minister who could be trusted by international interlocutors with a degree of experience and finesse in handling international relations may have offered an opening to change the trajectory of Sri Lanka's relations with the world. That opportunity has clearly been lost.

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