

CURRENT ISSUES AND THE INTERESTS OF INDIA IN SRI LANKA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

The post independence period saw both countries adopting inward looking economic strategies hindering increased trade between neighbours.¹ Also, the one language policy adopted in the years of Sri Lankan independence and the repeated promises and failures to adhere to them estranged the Tamil population culminating in a bloody conflict that is spanned over three decades. With close affinity to the Tamil of Southern India the internal issue of Sri Lanka took International dimensions with first covert and later overt support by India's regional political parties. Political parties in Tamilnadu owed allegiance to the formation of a separate state or Eelam until The Fall of LTTE and non veg forget it on me for that angles under the Sri Lankan constitution the Tamilnadu constituency varies directly from the central government few and variety of issues including Fishermen's problem, kachativu issue, implementation of 13 amendment alleged human rights violations during the closing stages of the Civil War. Perhaps the Sri Lankan Tamil issue determined the overall health of the Indo Sri Lanka relations for sometime other areas of interaction including trade suffered. Only after the economic reforms of 1990s and the 1998 agreement of free trade (ISLFTA) the trade is firmed up.

THE INCEPTION

During the 1980s the relationship between India and Sri Lanka were not normal. The Indian government plan to send IPKF to Sri Lanka only proved counter-productive because it does not produce any positive result the problem became serious one with the withdrawal of the IPKF and the Rajiv Gandhi assassination that saw a lull in India's involvement in Sri Lankan affairs.² With the end of the civil war, there are now efforts to improve ties between India and Sri Lanka. However, this has been punctuated by several constraints brought about by differing perceptions of the various stakeholders on a variety of issues.

REHABILITATION

All political parties primarily focus on the Sri Lanka Tamil issue in a variety of ways. While some emphasized on nurturing the secessionist claim there were others who demand greater autonomy for the Tamil majority areas. The post-war relief and rehabilitation of displaced Tamils is another issue of concern. The Indian government from time to time impressed the Sri Lankan establishment that relief and rehabilitation must be taken up more vigorously. In fact, in the increased budgetary allocation of Rs 500 crores in recent years to Sri Lanka mean the main concentration is on the development of 50,000 houses for internally displaced persons¹⁰. There has also been a raise in aid for Sri Lanka from Rs 290 crores in 2012-13.

13TH AMENDMENT

The 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution seeks to offer greater autonomy to Tamils of the north, the centre and the Tamil Nadu state and other constituency span the gamut from insistence to opposition. The Indian Prime Minister Modi has emphasized that the 13th Amendment must form the basis of a political solution carved out when all stakeholders “engage constructively, in a spirit of partnership and mutual accommodation”³. A fall out of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, the 13th amendment enacted in 1987 sought to devolve more powers to the provinces¹². However, some Tamil hardliners even in Sri Lanka feel that the pitch for stronger autonomy within the Sri Lankan constitutional framework would not fulfill the dream of separate homeland for the Tamils namely, Tamil Eelam.

ISSUES OF FISHING AND FISHERMAN IN THE WATERS

The festering issue in Indo-Sri Lankan relations is of fishing and fisherman that have been a serious as there are violation of rules relating to International Maritime Boundary line (IMBL) and the result is the confiscation of their boats. Reports are there of hundreds of fisherman from the southern districts of Tamil Nadu regularly entering in the international waters in search of “catch” everyday. During the ethnic crisis, the Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen were barred from fishing. Now they can't fish as the Indian boats come very close to the Sri Lankan shores to fish. Also some Indian fisherman using bottom trawling technique severely affects marine resources and damages the nets of the Sri Lankan brothers⁴. From the External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj's recent message urging Indian fisherman not to cross the IMBL it is clear where the blame lies. Not only are the Indian fisherman accused of crossing maritime boundaries, Sri Lankan fishermen cross Maldives waters to net the tuna that are available in abundance there.

The Tamil political parties are up in arms over alleged mistreatment of fisher folk arrested by Sri Lankan Navy personnel. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu has regularly written to the Prime Minister requesting his intervention in the release of imprisoned fishermen totaling 744 this year alone. Another problem is the impounding of trawlers by the Sri Lankan authorities. Some are also damaged forcing the fishermen to seek compensation too. In the case of five fishermen who received death sentence on charges of drug trafficking, it was the efforts of the Prime Minister Modi and diplomatic means that culminated in President Rajapaksa's use of executive powers to commute the punishment⁵. This may be seen as an example of convergence of Tamil Nadu political parties and the Central government on an Indo-Sri Lankan issue.

QUARRELSOME DISAGREEMENT IN BETWEEN?

However, there have also been other instances of the central government acting against the wishes of the Tamil political groups. For example, in the case of a US-sponsored resolution on human rights at the United Nations to begin an international investigation into alleged war crimes in March 2014, India abstained from voting in favour of the resolution. Tamil political parties launched protests against this and other union government actions like invitation to President Mahinda Rajapaksa to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi¹⁸. Earlier, the Tamil Nadu members of parliament also refused to be a part of a delegation of MPs from various political parties that visited the island country in April 2012 to oversee development projects and emphasize on the need for a political solution to the Tamil issue⁶.

Termed the IV Eelam War, the final conflict between the Sri Lankan government and LTTE ended with the complete annihilation of the leadership and cadres in a brutal and bloody massive assault. There were fears of blatant human rights violation with the killing of thousands of innocent civilians. The international media has periodically released gruesome pictures of torture and ill treatment that has created a stir and even a European Union backed resolution on alleged war crimes of Sri Lankan government. The island nation has successfully warded off international pressure seeking independent investigation over such violations. The visit of the UNHCR chief, Navi Pillay in 2013, courted controversy when the UN official stated that the country was heading in an authoritarian direction. The rejection of the UNCHR's recommendation of an investigative panel by Sri Lanka proved further proof of the government's reluctance to submit itself to international investigation citing reasons of sovereignty⁷. Significantly countries including India, China have supported Sri Lanka's contention on international investigation. The state of Tamil Nadu differs from the Central government's stand in seeking to declare President Rajapaksa, a war criminal and strong opposition to India's decision to abstain from voting against Sri Lanka on the issue.

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCES CHAIN

Several events have affected Indo-Sri Lankan relations seriously after the end of the ethnic conflict in 2009 with intense reactions over Sri Lankan omissions on Tamil related issues. In 2012 Sri Lankan pilgrims visiting Tamil Nadu were mobbed and harassed, Buddhist monks visiting Gaya were attacked and a series of protest were made over the presence of Sri Lankan football teams, Air Force and Army personnel who were training at DSSC (Defence Services Staff College, Wellington) and Tambaram Air Force Station.⁸ In 2013, a memorial was inaugurated to remember the sacrifices made by Tamils including the Mullivaikkal tragedy during the ethnic conflict⁹. Some of these actions pressured the Indian government to transfer the defence personnel elsewhere to complete their training and even sending back the football team.

SRI LANKA-CHINA RELATION

Not only are there domestic constraints in Indo-Sri Lankan relations but there is an international angle as well. This is specifically regarding the rise in Chinese influence and presence in Sri Lanka in the name of developmental projects and the like. The warming of relations between the two countries has extended from economy, trade, infrastructure development, and defence to political support in the international arena. China is now Sri Lanka's biggest foreign investor. Nearly 24% of all foreign investment is Chinese¹⁰. The free Trade Agreement between the two nations comes into effect in 2015. China has been involved in major port and road development projects like the \$500 million Colombo Port International Container Terminal that would sever as a hub between Singapore and Dubai and join a select league of mega ports. In the case of Hambantota, the port development work was initially offered to India who did not take it up. Chinese have built the port and there are plans to expand it further. China has also completed the laying of the island's first ever four-lane expressway linking Colombo with Katunayake with a length of about 25.8 km with major funding by Exim Bank of China. The new national theatre called the Lotus Pond has also been built with massive 80% Chinese capital.

Other than this there are other areas that are raising the hackles for India²⁸. China is also growing strategically closer to Sri Lanka with the smaller power expressing willingness to join the Maritime Silk Road. This is a Chinese initiative proposed in 2013 by President Xi Jinping to establish a sea-based infrastructure corridor¹¹. The docking of nuclear submarines at Colombo port and frequent visits by other Chinese ships like an amphibious landing ship and a frigate are looked at in India with some concern as being steps to increase the Asian power's presence in the Indian Ocean. There are also reports of China setting up an Aircraft Maintenance Centre in Trincomalee to cater to 44 Chinese aircraft used by the Sri Lankan Air Force¹¹. In 2013 the two countries sought to "upgrade their relations to a strategic cooperative partnership"¹².

Apart from overt military assistance, the establishment of telecommunications network and a GPS service providing telecommunications centre in Kandy could increase fears of eavesdropping on Indian systems. During the last years of the ethnic war, China had provided Sri Lanka with guided missiles, rocket launchers and shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles. China also sold artillery armour mortars, security equipment, tanks, jets, naval vessels, radars, communication equipment to the Sri Lanka military¹³. China thus continues to be one of Sri Lanka's largest arms suppliers. In contrast to India which offered aid for rehabilitation, China helped in building army training camps in the North and East of Sri Lanka with \$100 million aid³⁵.

INDIAN ATTEMPTS

India's engagement in Sri Lanka's infrastructure development cannot be underestimated. While some have been completed many have been bogged down by delays. In 2012 India cleared the Kankesanthurai harbour which lies in the Jaffna peninsula in the northern part of Sri Lanka of ship wrecks and worked towards dredging which was accomplished in 2013 and breakwater rehabilitation. India has also restored the Pallai-Kankesanthurai rail line at a cost of about \$149 million⁴². Indian assistance was sought to develop the Pallali airstrip in Jaffna into an international airport. The foundation for renovating the Jaffna Duraiappa stadium was laid by Minister for Economic Development Basil Rajapaksa, taken up with a 145 million rupee grant from the India government. Yet another instance of Indian assistance to bring industrial development to Jaffna peninsula is the opening of the Achchuvely Industrial Estate on August 27, 2014¹⁴. It seeks to provide a platform for industrial infrastructure in the Northern Province focussing on textiles, plastic and leather products, food processing units, and agro-based industries. It is expected to initially create 2000 jobs directly and 10000 indirectly. India has given 270 million Sri Lankan Rupees for the project. Restoration of the Thiruketheeswaram Temple in Mannar has been taken up by the Department of Archaeology of Sri Lanka with assistance from Archaeological Survey of India and the College of Architecture and sculpture, Mamallapuram. In the Central province India has undertaken the building of a 150-bed hospital in Dickoya at a cost of Rs 50 crores. India is also setting up a \$512 million coal power plant in Sampur in joint partnership. India is also planning to construct a new Cultural Centre in roughly half of China's current line of credit which stands at roughly USD \$3.4 billion.

In March 2015 the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Sri Lanka and said that the Sri Lankan Parliament is one of the most vibrant in Asia. Modi expressed his delight to have got believing Sri Lanka to be an inspiration for human development; he assumed it to be home for existence, skill and extraordinary intellectual heritage. He expressed closest neighbours. The Prime Minister stated his vision of an ideal neighbourhood where

trade, investments, technology, Ideas and people flow easily across borders. He assured India's full commitment and support in development partnership with Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, the Indian Prime Minister stated that India's economic growth had picked up with the world looking towards India as "the new frontier of economic opportunity". Sri Lanka has the potential to be our strongest economic partner and will work to boost trade and make it more balanced. He said the pact between customs authorities of the two countries "will simplify trade and reduce non-tariff barriers on both sides." He announced a new line of credit of \$218 million for Sri Lankan railways¹⁵.

In another important step, The Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka have agreed to enter into a currency swap agreement of \$1.5 billion – a move to keep the Sri Lankan rupee stable. The Pact assumes time. Despite attempts made by the central bank, the currency has been losing rupees is equivalent to 2.12 Sri Lankan rupees. In the area of energy cooperation, Indian Oil Corp Ltd's Sri Lankan subsidiary, Lanka IOC Plc. And Ceylon Petroleum Corp. have agreed to jointly develop the upper tank farm of the China Bay installation in Trincomalee on mutually agreed terms. Modi further said that a joint task force would be constituted "soon" to work out modalities. Modi said that India is ready to help Trincomalee to become a "regional petroleum hub". This is a departure from the Rajapakse government's position of threatening to take back 99 oil storage tanks leased by Lanka IOC more than a year ago. The China Bay Tank farm has 99 storage tanks worth a capacity of 12,000 kilometres each. Only 15 of these tanks are operational¹⁶.

CONCLUSION

India and Sri Lanka have a deep and inter-related curious relationship. While commonality of nation, languages and religion can be identified, there are now vast differences among the perceptions, expectations and actions of the constituencies, namely the Tamil political parties in India, the Tamil Nadu Government and the Union government of India. At times, the central Indian government succumbed to the pressures of the sympathisers of the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka and reacted to topical events. Here states were seen to be more powerful than federal system. The Union government in several occasions were on conflict with the Southern state's sentiments. The result was protests, resolutions and even violence. Thus, livelihood for the Tamils of Northern Sri Lanka suffered because of the support for the separatist movement was no longer welcome and leaders of Tamil outfits were repeatedly arrested or condemned for pro-LTTE stance. The end of the ethnic war brought glaring differences in the individual state of Tamil Nadu and the country-level response.

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