

Northern Political Development and India: A Study on India-Sri Lanka Relationship

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ABSTRACT

In the history of Independent Sri Lanka there has been a conflicting relationship between India and Sri Lanka. Initially Sri Lanka maintained relationship with western countries, such as Britain and US and distanced itself from India. At present it has established relationship with China and has conflicting relationship with India. During the Sri Lankan President's visit a number of agreements were reached and contracts signed, relating to Northern reconstruction activities specially railways, and cooperation in various sectors of the economy with India. Concessionary credit lines were extended by India for some projects. There will be infrastructure improvements for Sri Lanka, while Indian companies will benefit from the contracts.

Key Words: Relationship, Geo-politics, Infrastructure-Development, Peace Building

1. INTRODUCTION

The capacity of India to engage actively in peace-building in Sri Lanka is limited. Yet, it wants to maintain some leverage over the political process in order to ensure that Tamil politics remain pluralistic, that the government offers a political package of devolution to the Tamils, and more importantly to attempt to check the influence of China and Pakistan on the country. Hence, India's interests in Sri Lanka stem predominantly from geo-political concerns and security needs. Economic and business interests are also important and create the need to maintain regional peace and stability. To that end, India has worked in favour of maintaining a strong bilateral relationship with Sri Lanka and in a majority of instances opposed multilateral initiatives. While this is driven partly by India's motivation to deflect any internationalization of its own internal conflicts in Kashmir, the north-east, and the Naxal affected states, it is also influenced by its

desire to maintain autonomy, and to a degree control, over its relationship with its neighbours. Tamil Nadu politics and the close political, social and economic relationship between Tamils in Sri Lanka and India, have contributed to India's analysis that the relationship is best conducted through bilateral forums.

Since the defeat of the LTTE, India has offered significant humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka. This has included loans for infrastructural development and developmental projects in the north-east, as well as active support to the Tamil National Alliance and the Rajapaksa government to encourage a process leading to power sharing and political devolution. In parallel, the Indian establishment's patience with Sri Lanka has been wearing thin. Sri Lanka's deepening economic and political relationship with China, its defence relationship with Pakistan and its government's disregard of India's public and private pressure to promote political devolution have contributed to the general sense of unease between the two neighbours. In this context, the fact that Tamil Nadu former Chief minister Jayalalitha Jayaram has become the first mainstream Indian politician to advocate the internationalization of the Tamil issue in Sri Lanka, has provided India with a politically palatable justification for changing its position on international accountability. In recent months, she has urged the Indian government to press the UN to declare those responsible for the killings of Tamil civilians as 'war criminals'[3]

For now, India's public statements on Sri Lanka convey some dissatisfaction with the manner its neighbour has handled issues relating to reconciliation and devolution, and private messages are understood to have become terser.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Rehabilitation and resettlement was one part of the

story; the other and more important was finding a political solution to the ethnic problem within the framework of a united Sri Lanka, which would meet the legitimate interest and aspirations of all sections of the population that caused the conflict and the attendant ruin all round. Revival of such a political process and an inclusive dialogue would help bring the minority communities into the political mainstream and offer a dignified life to all. India continued to emphasise to the Sri Lankan Government to put forward a meaningful devolution package that would not go beyond the 1987.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Dahiya and Behuria [1]. considers India's neighborhoods and its importance over past decades. According to them, India is attempting to take a close look at her foreign and defense policies and therefore the key factor of the geo-political situation in the neighborhood is likely to change and increasing reliance of external factors in regional politics. They note further that there is continuing anti-India sentiments in some of the South Asian countries and there are also signs of greater desire for economic integration, strengthening of democratic institutions and regional cooperation. While India may face increasing security challenges as viewed due to instability in certain South Asian countries, there will be an opportunity for integrating its political, economic, and military interests in the region.

Asia Report [2] New Delhi's relations with Sri Lanka in the two years since the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have had four main priorities: providing humanitarian assistance to displaced Tamils in the north and east; supporting major development projects, primarily in the north, with concessionary loans; pressing the Sri Lankan government and the main Sri Lankan Tamil political alliance, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), to work towards a negotiated settlement of ethnic conflict through the devolution of power to Tamil-majority areas in the north and east; and encouraging greater economic integration between the two economies.

4. ANALYSIS

Economic Assistance

The Government is also taking steps to develop infrastructure and rail network that will feed the process of industrialisation, boosting its economy. Connectivity is bound to fuel economic growth in Sri Lanka and several infrastructure projects are also proposed. An Indian company IRCON—is building the Madu-Talaimannar and Medawachchiya-Madu railway lines

and reconstructing the Omanthai-Pallai segment and Pallai-KKS railway line. India has pledged a credit line of \$800 million for these projects and signed a credit agreement for \$416.39 million for the Northern Railway construction project. It is also building Palaly Airport and Kankesanthurai Harbour [4].

Significant humanitarian assistance for the resettlement of the roughly 300,000 Tamils in the Northern Province, who were initially interned at the end of the war, including the construction of 50,000 new houses, has been made.

After the war, the Indo – Sri Lanka relations showed an approach of co-operation. Nevertheless, Tamil Nadu was bent on breaking this relationship. New Delhi caught up in this internal politics was compelled to formulate its foreign policy accordingly. Inwardly New Delhi wanted to have friendly ties with Sri Lanka. Notably, after 19th May 2009, in fields of trade and investment New Delhi followed a policy of close economic co-operation with Sri Lanka. To renovate and refurbish the Palali airport, India gave US\$108 million In 2012, [5]. to establish telecommunication services to the North, a private company from India has signed a deal to invest US\$200 million Company [6]. Cairn India has invested US\$400 million for oil exploration and companies such as NTPC, Aditya Birla Group, Mahindra Group, HCL, and TATA, on behalf of New Delhi, have invested large sums of money in Sri Lanka In terms of investment, in 2010 India deployed US\$110 million.

The government of India has granted Rs.365 million for two major development projects in Northern Province. The Indian government granted Rs. 145million to renovate the Duraiappah Stadium in Jaffna and another Rs .220 million to set up the Atchuvvely Industrial Estate in Jaffna [7].

Political Support

It was a year of peace in Sri Lanka marked by stronger ties with India. To reach out to the people across the island, India opened two new Consulates General in Jaffna in the North and Hambantota in the South of the country. India already has a consulate in Kandy in Central Sri Lanka. The exchange of visits of service chiefs was a sign of wise step by the Indian government, in this context. Sri Lanka has no more any qualms about strengthening linkages in various fields and levels.

1. Former Foreign minister S M Krishna visited Sri Lanka in 2010 November to open consulates office in Jaffna and send a message indicating India's expanding presence in the island nation [8].

2. Holding the long-delayed election for the Northern Provincial Council.
3. India should insist on working through the newly elected local governments and, eventually, with the Northern Provincial Council[9].
4. India while expressing its readiness to work with the Government of Sri Lanka in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process of Northern Sri Lanka and in restoring normalcy offered an assistance of Rs. 1000 corer More immediate concern is India's signature project to build or repair 50,000 houses ,mostly in the north. In November 2010,pilot project for 1000 houses in Ariyalai in Jaffna was launched in North and East Sri Lanka but construction of these houses has been slow.
5. The sixty member emergency field hospital set up by India in March 2009 operated for six months till September and treated more than 50,000 patients, many of them serious cases requiring surgery. Two consignments of medical supplies were also gifted
6. To facilitate speedy resettlement of IDPs, India extended much needed de-mining assistance. To ensure that returning IDPs had a roof over their heads, India donated initially 2,600 tonnes of shelter material. An additional 2,600 tonnes of shelter material was again provided [1].

India should establish close economic co-operation with Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries. The present trade co-operation with Sri Lanka is only 13percent.Nevertheless it is maintaining a 22 percent trade relationship with the European Union. India, for its strength and its total population can become a first partner. If this position is extended to economic investments in Sri Lanka then its relations with Sri Lanka will strengthen. Researchers argue that when the CEPA agreement is signed the economic relations should strengthen.Further, when development happens in areas such as marine production, education, infrastructure, business facilities, and coir production (Both countries have a production capacity of 80 percent) and when there is a peaceful settlement of the Sri Lankan Tamils issue it is believed that the relationship between the two countries will improve

It is necessary that Sri Lanka be mindful of its geo-political strategic location to formulate its policy. It may be profitable for the present regime to have relationship with anti-Indian countries and anti-US countries such as China, Pakistan, Russia, and Iran. Sri Lanka is an Island. It

is situated at the center of Indian Ocean sea transport route. It has harbours that can assist it to develop as a prosperous trading center. Therefore by having positive relationship with the entire world, it could avoid economic hardships, and negate military-political contradictions. If Sri Lanka can formulate a policy which can enable it to relate to the nations of the world at equal distance and resolve its internal political conflicts, then Sri Lanka can be assured of guaranteed International security.

5. CONCLUSION

India's approach to Sri Lanka has so far failed to achieve its stated aims. Given Colombo's stiff resistance and its willingness and ability to play China off against India and Western powers, India must shift its strategy to achieve its policy objectives [2] Since Sri Lanka joined the anti-Indian camp, the India – Sri Lanka relations have suffered a setback. Rather than India or Sri Lanka taking steps to rectify this position, diplomatic initiatives are made and paradoxically this has increased the enmity between the two countries. This has only widened the contradictions between the two countries.

The visit of President Rajapaksa to New Delhi in June 2010 was joint Statement issued on the occasion that underlined the two countries commitment "to substantially enhance the range and depth" of their ties including "through greater economic integration, enhancing connectivity and other linkages and closer developmental cooperation". Recognizing the need of the hour, all the projects that India committed were located in the North and this in itself underlined the Indian commitment to the welfare of the Tamils.

Progress in these projects would generate jobs and employment besides the much needed economic activity, ensuring long-term goal of rehabilitation of the IDPs. Resumption of ferry services between Tuticorin and Colombo and Rameswaram and Talaimannar would enable greater people to people movement and contacts. Already the largest number of transnational flights between India and Sri Lanka ensure heavy tourist traffic between the two countries. When the re-development of the Palali air port and Kankasanthurai port are completed it would further boost island's air and sea connectivity with southern states of India in a big way. The proposal for an energy grid will be the second of its kind after Bangladesh. After the success of the FTA in promoting two way trade, a more comprehensive framework of economic cooperation is in the offing. Already Bharti Airtel, the leading Indian telecom company is involved in Sri Lanka telecom sector and public sector NTPC in power

generation. IRCON another public sector consultancy company is involved in railways.

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