

ORF OCCASIONAL PAPER #11

JULY 2009



POLITICS IN SRI LANKA: CHANGING TRENDS

Anjali Sharma

OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

**POLITICS IN SRI LANKA:
CHANGING TRENDS**

Anjali Sharma

Associate Fellow

**OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION
NEW DELHI**

© 2009 Observer Research Foundation. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from ORF.

POLITICS IN SRI LANKA: CHANGING TRENDS

In its 60 years as a sovereign nation, there was a time when Sri Lanka could afford to be somewhat proud of its image of being a model democracy. Today, the image stands demolished in the eyes of other South Asian countries that are themselves standing insecure on shaky, unpredictable political grounds with, perhaps, the sole exception of India. Since it unshackled itself from 130 years of the British yoke, Sri Lanka has enjoyed a healthy bi-party rule that allowed smaller political parties to flourish under a multi-party system. Estimates put the total number of registered political parties operating in Sri Lanka at 61¹, with 20 others waiting in the wings to register with the Election Commission. In Parliament, the trend has been a coalition headed by either of the two major parties, the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). In the more recent Presidential elections the pendulum has swung in favour of the SLFP, while the UNP had held the reins of power for three consecutive presidential terms, from 1978-1994.

In the political framework of Sri Lanka, a democratic republic, the President is the ultimate representative of the people, heading both the State and the government. The executive power is vested in the President and legislative powers are shared between him and Parliament. The judiciary is independent of the legislature and the executive, at least theoretically.

This Paper highlights some of the political trends peculiar to Sri Lanka, which make it a unique island nation on the sub-continent.

Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism

Sri Lanka is the only Buddhist country in the world where three-fourths of the population, about 73.8%, is Sinhalese Buddhist. The rest are Muslims, or the Moors (7.2%), Indian Tamils (4.6%) and Sri Lankan Tamils (3.9%)². The remaining around 10% are Burghers, Christians and tribal Veddahs, the original inhabitants of the island. Being the majority, the Sinhalese have managed to keep the minority communities in perpetual submission. The politicians have habitually exploited majoritarian sentiments for their own narrow gains, giving rise to the phenomena of political Buddhism, so much so that now politics overshadows religious values. Neil de Votta, Assistant Professor in Political Science at Hartwick College in New York, believes that Buddhists in Sri Lanka have given up basic tenets of tolerance and pacifism and have resorted to ethnocentrism and militarism. This is because they believe that Sri Lanka is the island of the Sinhalese, whose "sacred duty is to preserve and propagate Buddhism". They also presume that Sinhalese Buddhist are the 'chosen ones', divinely ordained to subjugate the other ethno-religious communities and make them feel that they can survive in Sri Lanka only by being subservient to the Sinhalese Buddhists³. It is this intolerant mish mash of politico-religious ideology forced upon the island's minorities that pushed the country into a civil war.

The most revered chronicle of Sri Lanka, *Mahavamsa*, gave place of pride to all the Sinhalese rulers, starting from King Vijaya, who is said to be 'the father of all Sinhalese' to the King Duttugamunu who ousted his rival Tamil king, Elara, thus uniting the whole island. *Mahavamsa* also prophesied the 5000-year rule of Buddhism over the island. It can be surmised that national identity, territorial integrity and 'religious duty' have for long been drummed up to become the all pervasive 'drivers' motivating modern Sinhalese politics⁴. Sri Lanka, thus, has its own national brand—political Buddhism.

Role of the Buddhist Bhikkus

The entry of the Buddhist clergy into politics, though not very much acceptable as Buddhism is known to be the religion of sacrifice and

renunciation of worldly desires, has of late made matters worse for Sri Lanka. Generally, these power-hungry opportunists zero in on issues relating to the primacy of Buddhist faith and territorial integrity. They become paranoid as soon as the Buddhist leaders voice concerns over 'their faith being under threat'⁵. Buddhism was made the state religion under the 1972 Constitution of Sri Lanka and, since then, politicians of the two main political parties fall over each other to receive the blessings of the *bhikkhus*. In fact, the ruling SLFP was founded on the plank of promoting and protecting Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism at the expense of the 'outsiders', the Tamils. Soon the UNP followed suit, finding it politically expedient to shed its old moderate and secular image.

Buddhist monks are a revered lot in Sri Lankan society and the historical relationship between Buddhism and the State sanctioned by the *Mahavamsa* ensures their perpetual hold over the State. There are three main Buddhist Sanghas (sects) ; the largest and the oldest, Siam Nikaya (divided into two main chapters, Malwatte and Asgiriya); the Amarapura Nikaya, founded in the 19th century with about 20 per cent of the monk population, and the Raama-n-na Nikaya, founded by the reformist members of the Siam sect⁶. The Mahanayake theras (high priests) of Malwatte and Asgiriya chapters exercise great influence over government policies and decisions⁷. The lack of a hierarchical structure in the *sanghas* gives those *bhikkhus* who consider interference important to reform society the opportunity to side with one or the other political party. In a significant development in 2004, nine monks were elected to the National Parliament. All of them belonged to the Sinhalese Buddhist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), or the Nationalist Heritage Party, which was formed just two months before the elections. The party pledged to preserve Sri Lanka's unitary status, force the Norwegian facilitators out of the country and to establish a *Dhammarajya* (righteous state)⁸. Its disdain for the Christian community further fuelled communal disharmony.

The *bhikkus* influx into politics strengthened the hand of the militantly anti-Tamil section of the Sinhalese population. It was mainly due to the opposition of *bhikkus* that the then Prime Minister, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, reneged on the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact of 1957⁹. This pact would have saved the nation from the resurgence of the violent ethnic movement that took nearly 70,000 lives.

Buddhist nationalism first manifested itself in the 1915 anti-Muslim riots. This was the beginning of the animosity among the various communities of Sri Lanka—an animosity that has, over long years of tension and violence, dug in deep roots.

An Elusive Southern Consensus

In the fierce and persistent competition between the UNP and SLFP, the ethnic sentiment is a handy tool for them to woo the majority community. Both the parties stand firm against including Tamils in governance and other vital processes of nation-building, though they do shed crocodile tears over the Tamils' plight and pay them lip service.

It cannot be said that the Sinhalese, despite being inveterate nationalists, have always and totally been opposed to a negotiated settlement with the Tamil minority. Their attitude and stance have shifted both ways in accordance with the interests and ideology of whichever party held power in Colombo. The destructive game of 'ethnic outbidding' between the UNP and the SLFP, each claiming to be the real representative of the majority, destroyed any attempt by them to neutralize smaller nationalist parties. This, in turn, prevented successive governments from working for a compromise with the LTTE, the Tamil nationalists¹⁰. The parties, militant as well as moderate, espousing the Tamil cause are also to be blamed, because their intransigent attitudes and incessant use of violence frustrated any attempt by the negotiators (Norwegians in the main) to bring about the “southern consensus”. In short, all major political players in Sri Lanka have been more interested in aggravating rather than preventing the ethnic crisis and other

related problems. In their greed to create a bigger vote bank, political leaders of all shades would appear to have cast to the way side any desire or aim to bring about a lasting solution to the ethnic crisis plaguing the nation. The failure of the Liam Fox agreement in 1997, which was intended to bring together then President Chandrika Kumaratunge and Opposition Chief Ranil Wickremasinghe and, in 2007, the failure of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by current President Mahinda Rajapaksa with the UNP leader belies any sincerity of purpose among the leaders to bring about the 'Southern Consensus'.

In fact, there is no consensus in Sri Lanka's polity on resolving conflicts in society but it always appears in unison while supporting certain controversial decisions that have driven a wedge between the two communities.

Patron-Client Relations

Politics in Sri Lanka is largely paternalistic and not egalitarian or inclusive, as it should be in a democracy. At all levels, class and caste hierarchies dominate Sri Lankan polity, a fallow ground for the growth of an elitist society, above popular challenge and unshackled by accountability: just the right mix for an enduring and oppressive society based on patron-client relationship. The voters, dependent as they are on party patronage, elect parliamentarians for their ability to redistribute resources, provide access to public sector goods and jobs, and develop infrastructure for them¹¹. The victorious party and its supporters corner all the prestigious jobs, resources, perks and incentives, while the loser loses all. Members of Parliament are under constant pressure from their supporters to obtain cabinet posts so as to access state resources. Failure to land a plum government posting would, for the MP, mean losing a substantial chunk of his support base to a rival who is able to appease the voters by giving them what they want¹².

This contagion of feudalistic patron-client culture in the democratic system is a major cause of political instability and self serving cynicism. It induces opportunistic opposition members to cross over to the victorious party for

lucre or a post. All in all, it leads to an utter disregard for broad fundamental national issues and nips in the bud the emergence of any ideological or issue-based movements. In truth, it is this flaw in the democratic system that is chiefly responsible for the political violence by groups that have despaired of their government ever giving them equal job opportunities and a just share of the resources. The unstoppable violence the country experienced since 1983, not just by the LTTE but also by the ultra-nationalist Sinhalese groups like Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) and Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), was not so much to do with ethnic rivalry as it was the outpouring of the people's pent up feelings against their elected government. In fact, every post-poll period has witnessed violence since the 1960s. The island witnessed major riots in 1977, 1981 and 1983. While most of them were against the Tamil minority, some targeted Muslims and Christians. No less important is the negative effect on the economy of this patron-client mentality: in the long run, it results in regional and ethnic uneven development¹³.

Sinhalese Nationalism of the Political Class

Till very recently, Sri Lankan polity was dominated by westernized elites who cared little about ethnic or national values. Many of them belonged to the ruling families of the Senanayakes and Bandaranaiques, more fluent in English than in Sinhalese, elites who sent their children to schools overseas and lived a lavish life. Theirs was an ivory tower life, untouched by the miserable existence of the poor masses, the great unwashed. Herein lies the one real cause for the ethnic conflict. Since independence, the successive elitist governments not only turned a blind eye to the general suffering but have also shown their unwillingness to address the problem of mass misery. Feudalistic elitism and a young democracy make unwilling bedfellows.

With Mahinda Rajapaksa, the big man from a small town, Hambantota, becoming the President, the previous governments' relatively soft posture has been shed for a more radicalised and localized approach to the problems plaguing the country. His popularity can be gauged from the survey conducted by the Sri Lanka's popular business magazine, *Lanka Monthly*

Digest and TNS Lanka in October 2007. More than 70% of those surveyed--Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims--supported him and his policies. Even his military approach was acceptable to them as long as it finally solved the crisis. The charismatic Rajapaksa is adept at touting nationalism as the most effective and the simplest way to mobilize the population in the south¹⁴. His nationalist arguments are a gauntlet thrown to the English-speaking elite who have lost touch with the people and with local traditions and values¹⁵.

Nevertheless, the popular endorsement of the nationalist policies of Rajapaksa, set out in his manifesto, "Mahinda Chintanaya", has gradually led to the Sinhalese of the political class, weakening the hold of the old anglicized elite over the major parties. The 2005 transfer of control of the SLFP from Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga to Rajapaksa, with his feet firmly planted on the ground of Sinhalese South, was symbolic of the slow but big shift in the polity of Sri Lanka¹⁶. No doubt there are whispers and stirrings in the UNP rank and file to replace the westernized Ranil Wickremasinghe with some grass root leader akin to Rajapaksa, considering that the opposition party, after repeated failures in the provincial and general elections, has become a mere shadow of its former self.

Civil-Military Relations

The Sri Lanka Government remains in full and effective control of the military, with the President being the Commander-in-Chief of all the three armed forces. The Defence Ministry holds the power of appointments, transfers and dismissals in the forces, but that in no way impinges on the power and the independence of the military top brass to manage, supervise and run the affairs of the forces. There is a close and implicit understanding between the political and military establishments, so much so that a blanket of secrecy is thrown over most of the "dirty war" crimes committed against innocent civilians. Indeed, the politically instigated war against the Tamil militants had widened the chasm between the two communities. During the initial years after independence, the military was relegated to more or less a ceremonial role because the government lost all trust in the Army and the

Navy following the two coup attempts in 1962. It was only after the advent of Tamil militancy that the armed forces regained a place of trust in the political establishment.

It is believed by many that the prolonged nature of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is more due to the personal interests of the politicians, military and paramilitary groups and less due to the centuries-old animosity between the two communities. After all, it was on political bidding that the military and the para military, among other things, severely curtailed the displaced people's freedom of movement and residence.

The anti-Tamil policies and the Sinhalisation of the armed forces, along with that of all the elite socio-political establishments, have had far-reaching consequences that became manifest immediately after the independence of the country. Deliberate exclusion from the privileged posts in what they considered as their own country was reason strong enough for Tamils to rise in revolt against the government.

Independence of the Judiciary

The judiciary in Sri Lanka has generally been open and impartial. Although, once in a while, it has been insinuated that it toes the political line, it has, more often than not, taken an independent stand. The ordinary people of this troubled island, physically violated by war and economically by corruption, are looking more and more to the Supreme Court as a last resort for deliverance from injustices meted out to them by the crass high-handedness of the people in power as also from a plethora of other, but very real, problems such as trying to get a child admitted to a nursery school.

Some of the cases the Supreme Court has settled in recent times have validated the trust the people have in it, such as the ruling against former President Chandrika Kumaratunga in the much publicized and high profile case of land acquisition. Various judges, led by the dynamic former Chief Justice, Sarath N. Silva, have delivered many judgments invalidating

executive actions, to the point that the disgruntled establishment has been fretting and fuming about 'judicial interference'. Even a *bhikku* was not spared when he failed to honour court summons. The message was clear: nobody was above the law.

The Supreme Court has been instrumental in securing the fundamental rights of the citizens, both Sinhalese and Tamils. When residents complained that their movement was being restricted by barricades and security cordons, the court ordered their removal. Again, it was the Supreme Court which stayed the forcible eviction and deportation of the Tamils from the lodges in Colombo to their troubled homelands in the North and the East, on the pretext of their being LTTE agents¹⁷. The court also stayed the execution of the amendment to the Emergency Regulations which, if passed, would have allowed the detention of the suspect/accused for one-and-half-years in police custody; the court ruled that the measure would undermine the individual's fundamental right of freedom and lead to arbitrary arrests and detentions. The court was also instrumental in the removal of some of the secretaries involved in a scam, not a bit perturbed by the fact that the bureaucrats were close to the President. These examples are enough to demonstrate the independence, impartiality and the vigilance of the higher judiciary, though the same cannot be said of its lower echelons. Nevertheless, the firm stance taken by the courts did create situations of confrontation between the executive and the judiciary : a healthy sign in a democracy.

Dynastic and Personality-based Politics

Sri Lanka is no exception to the feudalistic indulgence in dynastic successions, so common to South Asian polity. The trend started well before the country's independence and continues even today. The families of Senanayakes and Bandaranaiques have held the reins of power for most of the post-independence period, barring the exceptions of the non-dynastic J.R.Jayawardhene, R.Premadasa and a few others. But even those chosen from the families other than those mentioned above are in some way or the other related to politically active families. For instance, President Mahinda

Rajapaksa belongs to a politically-active family of Hambantota district in the South of Sri Lanka. His father, D A Rajapaksa, and his uncle, D M Rajapaksa, are well-known political figures at the district level. His three brothers hold important portfolios in the government and are responsible for some key portfolios of the administration: Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who is a Permanent Secretary to the Defence Ministry, led the operation against terrorism and succeeded in establishing political stability in Northeastern Sri Lanka; Basil Rajapaksa, a senior presidential advisor, spearheaded the development work in the Eastern Province and Chamal Rajapaksa not only oversaw the development of the southern province, but also in his capacity as the Irrigation Minister provided a boost to irrigation all over the island. With his brothers in key positions, it is not surprising that Mahinda Rajapaksa is often accused of filling the cabinet with family advisors.

If the President and his brothers are at the peak of their popularity today, the personality, or rather the ethnic image, of “Mahinda Chintana” has a lot to do with it. The days of 'Anglo flavoured' politicians are gone. Westernised leaders like Sir John Kotelawala and Dudley Senanayake would be archaic -- if not comic -- figures today. The flavour in favour among Sri Lankans is the home grown, down to earth politicians preferably from small towns or rural areas who do know English, but speak it, as do the masses, with a heavy Sinhalese accent. In short, the people want their leader to be like them, so that they genuinely understand them and their needs. Mahinda Rajapaksa fits this image impeccably. But image is never enough. It needs to be backed by the ability to think, plan and execute policies and measures. This ability Rajapaksa showed in full measure when, for the sake of the nation, he chided international consternation and took a tough stand to put an end to terrorism once and for all. It took all this to make the masses accept him as their leader. In total contrast stands Ranil Wickremesinghe, who can be considered the last leader of the 'British hangover' era. With his servile attitude to the British and his eagerness to appease the LTTE in fear for his own life, he was from the start doomed to political oblivion.

Existence of State and Non-State Actors

While the majority Sinhalese community is represented by the two main political parties operating in Sri Lanka, the United Nationalist Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, there is no such party of any worth for the ethnic minorities like the Muslims, Indian Tamils and Burghers. After the death of Prabhakaran following the defeat of his militant outfit Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam by the Sri Lankan Army, a leadership vacuum has emerged within the Tamil polity in a country where 12% percent of the 20-million population is Tamil. The cracks have started appearing within the ranks of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which is a grouping of moderate political parties, as well as in former militant groups like All Ceylon Tamil Congress, Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). Division is apparent within different sections of the Tamil polity, some are pro-government while others are protesting against the government. The now defunct LTTE is also in a process of reviving its fortunes abroad under the leadership of its chief arms procurer 'KP' or Kumaran Pathmanathan, by establishing a “transnational government” which, they still believe, would help in achieving the goal of a separate Tamil Eelam in the not so distant future. Therefore, the crux of the matter is that due to there divisions there is now nobody who can be a genuine representative of the grievances and aspirations of the second largest community in Sri Lanka.

Trade unions affiliated with the Ceylon Workers Congress generally side with the ruling party. Similar is the case of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, representing the interests of the Moors in the Eastern part of the country. The kingmaker leftist party, Janata Vimukti Peramuna, has been left with no political power after a segment of the party split to form the National Freedom Front. Though earlier these parties did carry a lot of weight in Parliament, they have now become a shadow of their former selves, like the Lanka Sama Samaj Party (LSSP), which once occupied the second position, next only to the UNP. Internal power struggles and populist politics are

chiefly to blame for their downfall.

Without any leader or party to unite and lead them, and with the ruling Sinhalese dominated parties hoarding all the resources and job opportunities for its own people, leaving next to nothing for the rest, the rift among the minority groups themselves, as also the tension between them and the majority community, was but a natural outcome of the state of affairs. In retrospect, it becomes clear that the formation of the LTTE and the long violent conflict that followed was a *fait accompli*. Unfortunately, the savants and the leaders of those days just did not have the foresight to see what was coming except, perhaps, LTTE strongman Prabhakaran, who fought till the end.

Impact on Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy

With a history of such turmoil, the island's political culture cannot remain unaffected. Though there have been no sudden changes, slowly but surely, the pervasive political sentiment of the people and the state has swung from western oriented liberalism and an open door acceptance of the world to near-jingoistic Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism—centralised and personality-based. This does not augur well for a country that has in the past suffered, as it were, a serial clash of titans. The hard core nationalism has led to rigidity in the government's approach towards the international community, as reflected in its foreign policy.

The non-conformist President Rajapaksa has given a definite direction to matters on the domestic as well as external front, amply made clear by his new policies. It was for the first time that the people wholeheartedly supported the war efforts, despite the hardships they had to undergo throughout. It was chiefly the overwhelming popular support to his aggressive war strategy against the LTTE that enabled Rajapaksa to ignore the international community's demand that his forces immediately halt the offensive against the cornered Tigers.

The President was also successful in his diplomatic war against the militants. He managed to convince the major powers of the threat from the vast, formidable international network of the Tamil Tigers to the extent that these powers came down heavily on the LTTE and its network. For instance, India extended the ban on the organisation for two years. Illegal activities of the LTTE in Canada and the US were considerably reduced following a massive crackdown on the hideouts and offices of the 'charitable' organizations affiliated to the Tamil guerrillas. The transmission lines of the LTTE propaganda channel were snapped by France, Italy and Israel. The European Union, despite casting aspersions on Sri Lanka's Human Rights record, extended the benefits accruing from Generalized System of Trade Preferences (GSP+) to the island for three years. Arms supplies from Pakistan and China reached new heights. In its capacity as the Chairman of SAARC, Sri Lanka effectively brought home former President Chandrika Kumaratunga's point that terrorism was the single-most important enemy of South Asia and needed to be stamped out without a moment's loss. In short, Colombo was highly successful in garnering overwhelming international support for its war against the 'Tigers', helped of course by the increasing intensity of terror attacks world-wide. Besides strengthening Rajapaksa's position at home, these factors also played a major role in the LTTE's defeat.

There is a new assertiveness and focus to Colombo's foreign policy. It now takes a firm stand on any issue and is undeterred by minor, diplomatic irritants. For instance, there was not the slightest softening in Sri Lanka's attitude towards or actions against the Tamil Tigers just because it lost its non-permanent seat in the Human Rights Council. India's decision not to send its External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee following the terrorist attacks in Mumbai was also in deference to Sri Lanka's no-nonsense stand against terrorism. The government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) categorically made it clear that it would take no more "lectures from the west".

Clearly, the Rajapaksa leadership in Colombo succeeded in convincing the

world governments that the LTTE was as dangerous as Al-Qaeda and that the influence of the pro-LTTE sections of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in their midst was not good for their own democracies¹⁸. The recent diplomatic victory secured by Sri Lanka in the United Nations Human Rights Council over the passage of a resolution which not only accepted the ethnic conflict as the “domestic matter” of the island nation but also consented to the guarded access by the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) to the refugee camps clearly showed the acceptance of the anti-LTTE stand taken by the Rajapaksa administration. The massive crackdown by the Canadian, United States and British Police on LTTE sympathizers also pointed towards the exemplary work done by Sri Lankan diplomats in making their host countries understand the realities of the ground situation in Sri Lanka. This is how Rajapaksa used his “unconventional wisdom” to play one world power against the other to sub-serve his national interests. That's why he was often seen playing Pakistan and China against India, and China and Iran against the US, all to win maximum political and military benefit for his nation¹⁹.

Looking to the Future

It is highly unlikely that a massive change in Sri Lanka's political set-up will occur in the near future. Though the next presidential election is due to take place in 2011, rumours are abuzz that Mahinda Rajapaksa government will call early presidential elections. Riding on the euphoria of victory, the Rajapaksa family is confident of a sure-shot win in the forthcoming elections without any outside support. At present, the Rajapaksa family is calling the shots. After becoming President of Sri Lanka on November 23, 2005, Mahinda Rajapaksa reshuffled the cabinet and took over the portfolios of Defence and Finance which he is running quite efficiently with the assistance of his brothers. His pro-active foreign policy can also be seen as leaving an indelible mark in the political history of the country. It is under his leadership that the highest number of foreign leaders have visited the island. He earned the praise of the international community and the entire South Asia region for his apt handling of the 15th SAARC Summit. In fact, he has been credited

with effectively show-casing Sri Lanka to the world, a presentation untainted by anything to do with the war and the LTTE.

The Rajapaksa-led United People's Freedom Alliance is expected to complete its full term with a comfortable majority even without the backing of the extremist and leftist elements. Neither of the two wings of the ultra-nationalist JVP is strong enough to contend for power. With only nine MPs in Parliament, the Sinhalese Buddhist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) is still in its infancy.

The fortunes of the second largest party, the UNP, do not look very bright either. Though Rajapaksa defeated Wickremasinghe by a mere 2% margin, that too mainly due to the poll boycott called by the LTTE in North-Eastern areas, the latter has lost much of his popularity and confidence. Talks are on within and outside the party to replace him with a more dynamic leader. UNP is proving to be the country's most ineffective opposition ever. In such a scenario, the people are readily accepting and are expected to continue accepting Rajapaksa's leadership.

However, the UPFA's accomplishments end here and the challenges begin. The armed forces no doubt did a highly efficient job to bring the LTTE to its knees, but the real test for the government comes now: the task of consolidating the recaptured Tamil majority areas in the North and the East, dousing the embers of war and, once for all, find ways to resolve the all too real problems of the Tamil populace. Otherwise peace, the fruit of victory, will be fleeting. It should become the mission and a commitment of the President and his men to integrate the Tamil population into the political life of the country, as it is the only key for durable peace in Sri Lanka. The military war having been won, the people will now judge the Rajapaksa government on its ability to find a concrete solution to the political conflict, thereby guaranteeing the sovereignty, integrity and security of the country.

Unfortunately, the Rajapaksa administration has, as yet, no clear and specific

formula on this all-important issue, nor has it as yet begun to give serious thought to many other problems. The minority communities see the majority community government's nationalistic overkill as a promotion of Sinhala chauvinism at the cost of the ethnic minority groups. There is mounting international pressure against the deteriorating human rights situation and media freedom. Judicial activism is evident only at the level of the apex court. Lower courts like the Court of Appeal and the High Courts which are also entrusted with the task of protecting the fundamental rights of the ordinary citizens are devoid of any such kind of independent assertions.

In sum, every thing that the government is doing or not doing indicates that the island nation is headed for a centrist rule in the name of nationalism. At the same time, it is important for the Rajapaksa regime to realise that even a unitary state has to allow devolution/delegation of powers, if not diffusion. Does LTTE losing the war mean that the Tamils should forget any hopes of a rightful share of economic and political power? Are the media and the judiciary going to be denied their basic professional right -- functional autonomy? Will Rajapaksa, with his “unconventional wisdom”, find a fair solution to these problems? The war may have ended, but the country faces an uncertain future. If corrective measures are not urgently taken, the possibility of violence recurring cannot be ruled out.

References

1. List of political parties, Department of Elections, Sri Lanka, December 2008
2. CIA-The World Factbook-Sri Lanka, 2009
3. Neil DeVotta, "*Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*", East West Centre, Washington, 2007, p.vii
4. Priyath Liyanage, "*Popular Buddhism, Politics and the Ethnic Problem*", Conciliation Resources, Sri Lanka, 1998
5. Ibid.
6. Bhikkhu Prayudh Puyotto, "*From Ceylonese to Sri Lankan Buddhism*", Buddhism Today, 2006
7. "Sri Lanka's Malwatte Mahanayake Thera passes away", TamilNet, 7 June, 2004
8. Neil DeVotta and Jason Stone, "*Jathika Hela Urumaya and ethno-religious politics in Sri Lanka*", Pacific Affairs, Vol. 81, No. 1, 22 March, 2008
9. Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact was signed in 1957 which put forward the following demands: (1) Federal Constitution, (2) Parity of status for Tamil and Sinhala languages, (3) Repeal of citizenship laws which had discriminated against Tamils of Indian descent, (4) Immediate halt to the colonization of the Tamil homeland. Direct action by non-violent means was threatened if the demands were not met within a year
10. "*Sri Lanka: Sinhala Nationalism and the Elusive Southern Consensus*", International Crisis Group, Asia Report No. 141, November 2007
11. Dilesh Jayanntha, "*Electoral Allegiance in Sri Lanka*", Cambridge South Asian Studies No.48, 1992
12. Janice Jiggins, "*Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese*", Cambridge University Press, 1979
13. "*Sri Lanka: Sinhala Nationalism and the Elusive Southern Consensus*", International Crisis Group, Asia Report No 141, 7 November, 2007
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Feizal Samath, "*Sri Lanka's Courts stand firm*", Asia Times Online, 30 October, 2008
18. N Sathiyamoorthy, "*Ethnic Issue: Contextualizing Change in Sri Lankan State Leadership*", (unpublished), 9 November, 2008
19. Ibid.

ORF PUBLICATIONS:

- India's Nuclear Diplomacy after Pokhran II, by Ajai K. Rai (ORF-Pearson Longman 2009)
- Revisiting the Sino-India-border dispute-Prospects for Resolution, by Mohan Guruswamy Zorawar Daulet Singh (ORF-Viva, 2009)
- ORF Seminar Series ; Implementation of Right to Information Act: Issues and Challenges, by Wajahat Habibullah (ORF 2009)
- Monograph: Renewable Energy Technologies, by Amitav Malik (ORF-Academic Foundation 2009)
- India and China: The Next Decade, edited by S. D. Muni and Suranjan Das (ORF-Rupa 2009)
- Food Security: Policy Options for Tamil Nadu, by Dr. A. M. Swaminathan (ORF-Academic Foundation 2009)
- Managed Chaos: The Fragility of the Chinese Miracle by Prem Shankar Jha (ORF-Sage 2009)
- Monograph: Reservation Policy and Its Implementation Across Domains in India:An Analytical Review by Niranjana Sahoo (ORF- Academic Foundation 2009)
- The New Asian Power Dynamic, edited by Maharajakrishna Rasgotra; (ORF- Sage 2007)
- Democracy in Muslim Societies : The Asian Experience (ORF-Studies in Contemporary Muslim Societies-IV), edited by Zoya Hasan (ORF-Sage 2007)
- India and Central Asia : Potential for Regional Co-operation, by Ajish P. Joy (ORF-Sanskriti 2007)
- The Naxal Challenge: Causes, Linkages and Policy Options, edited by P.V. Ramana (ORF-Pearson Longman 2007)
- Maritime Counter-Terrorism A Pan-Asian Perspective, Edited by Swati Parashar (ORF Pearson Longman 2007)
- Pakistan: Four Scenarios, by Wilson John (ORF-Pentagon Press 2007)
- ORF Policy Brief - Terrorism and Human rights, Wilson John and P.V. Ramana (2007)
- A Nation in Transition:Understanding the Indian Economy, by Jayshree Sengupta; (ORF-Academic Foundation 2007)
- The Politics of Power Sector Reform in India, by Niranjana Sahoo; (ORF-Pentagon Press 2007)
- Extremism and Opposition Movements on the Arabian Peninsula, by Joseph A. Kechichian (ORF 2006)

Observer Research Foundation is a public policy think-tank that aims to influence formulation of policies for building a strong and prosperous India. ORF pursues these goals by providing informed and productive inputs, in-depth research and stimulating discussions. The Foundation is supported in its mission by a cross-section of India's leading public figures, academics and business leaders.

Rs. 95/



Observer Research Foundation
20, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi-110 002
Email: orf@orfonline.org
Phone: +91-11-43520020 Fax: +91-11-43520003
www.orfonline.org