

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