

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: IT'S TRUSTWORTHINESS AT STAKE

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Two major events took place in Sri Lanka during the last week of November 2005.

Sri Lanka President's Policy Statement

Mahinda Rajapakse, elected the fifth Executive President of the country, made his first policy statement to the Parliament on 25 November, defining, inter alia, his intended proposals to solve the national conflict, based on his election manifesto. In his statement, the new President unequivocally rejects the Tamil demand for the right to self-determination, nationhood and concept of the Tamil traditional homeland, they have been clamouring for, during a period of over fifty years since independence. He has also declared his intent to sweep away the existing Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA), forged at the end of a bloody war over thirty years, replacing it with a new one including his own priorities. The P-TOMS Agreement is also going to be nullified and replaced with Jaya Lanka Tsunami Reconstruction Programme, details of which, he is yet to announce.



LTTE Leader: Heroes' Day Declaration

The second major event was the Heroes' Day Speech delivered by Velupillai Pirapakaran, from his de facto State in the Vanni on 27 November, declaring his intention to stand by the will of his people as reflected in the recent Tamil Resurgence Conventions convened throughout the length and breadth of the North-East drawing the attention of the International Community to recognise their right to self-determination, nationhood and the concept of the Tamil traditional homeland. Pointing out that his "people have lost patience, hope and reached the brink of utter frustration," Pirapakaran has made an "urgent and final appeal" to the new government to "come forward soon with a reasonable political framework that will satisfy the political aspirations of the Tamil people."



Proposed Abrogation of CFA and P-TOMS

The President's unilateral decision to revoke the CFA and the P-TOMS with complete disregard for the opinion and acquiescence of the parties involved, questions the efficacy and the bona fide of any understanding or agreement the Tamils may be asked to forge with any future Sri Lankan government. History has already taught Tamils a bitter lesson where, agreements made with past Sinhala governments during times of crises have been thrown overboard once tension eased. Mahinda has proudly identified his presidency a return to Bandaranayake era, a period during which the first ever pact made between Bandaranayake on the government side and Chelvanayagam on the Tamil side was torn off subsequently by the government, at the threat issued by the extreme religious Sinhala chauvinists.

Distinction between Bi-Partisan and Tri-Partisan Agreements

Pacts and agreements signed between the two nations in the island until recently, were bi-partisan, with no international guarantee or foreign mediation involved. But the CFA of 2002 and the P-TOMS of 2005 which were tri-partisan, had gained international mediation and recognition. These were agreements forged between a government - the Sri Lankan government - and a nation - the Tamil nation, facilitated by an international third party - Norway - with the tacit approval of the co-chairs including the US, EU and Japan, thus receiving an international status. It is these agreements Mahinda Rajapakse has now declared to unilaterally abrogate.

The question is whether Mahinda can abrogate tri-partisan pacts at will, just as his Sinhala predecessors did in the case of bi-partisan ones in the past. And this time it is not a mere political party, but LTTE, a struggle-hardened de facto government with proven military might that signed the CFA and P-TOMS on behalf of the Tamils. Now, knowing the capabilities of the LTTE, could Mahinda abrogate the pacts at will, without either the facilitator or the other party to the pact acquiescing, is the question.

Future Mediation

The question also arises as to whether the compliance to the abrogation of these pacts already approved explicitly by the International Community, especially Co-Chairs of the Tokyo Donor Conference, would not erode into the credibility of the Community in similar activities in future. Mahinda has already expressed eschewed enthusiasm at the continuance of the present facilitator and Co-Chairs, wishing active participation of India from the South Asia region and China from the Far East region in future peace-talk exercises instead. Will the LTTE agree to toe Mahinda's line of approach and will it concede to skip agreements so far reached in the six rounds of talks, is doubtful again.

Perhaps the lackadaisical attitude maintained by the International Community during the Presidential election propaganda period is partly to blame for the deterioration of the situation it is today. When Mahinda, bolstered by the extremist nationalists and the Buddhist chauvinists daunted from platform to platform vowing to throw overboard the CFA and P-TOMS as soon as he was in power, it was time for the international community to step in

and bring some moderation in electioneering. But, with its continued silence, the international Community not only rendered Mahinda vicarious support, but also pampered him further, with a stricture on LTTE travel to member countries of the European Community.

Tamil Resolute

Angered by the war-cry of the Sinhala chauvinists and the silent compliance of the International Community, Tamil civilians convened Resurgent Conventions in every nook and corner of the North-East, to express their impatience and reiterate their resolve. They demanded recognition of their right to self-determination, nationhood and traditional homeland. They appealed to the LTTE to lead them in their democratic struggle. This was bolstered up by the clarion call of the Tamil Students appealing to Tamil voters to express 'Tamil will' by non-compliance at voting in the Presidential election.

The European Election Monitoring Commission, having failed to make a preliminary field-study of the moods of the two nations, and been made to face the unexpected "Tamil-absentia" slap on the election-day, found a comfortable scapegoat in the LTTE, as culprits blocking Tamil vote. Smarting under the 'vote-smack,' the Head of the Monitoring Commission vowed, to the delight of the Sinhala nationalist press in Colombo, to continue with shadow boxing, perhaps recommend another EU stricture, against the LTTE on return to Europe.

International Community's Duty

The International Community does not need a political pundit to point out the way the votes went to each candidate in the Presidential election. If a dissertation of the way the

votes of the Sinhalese people went is conducted, one could clearly see that they voted en masse for Mahinda with his hard line election manifesto. The statistics reveal that Ranil Wickremasinghe's score would have been more disastrous had not the Tamil and Muslim voters in the Western Province and Up-Country, voted en masse for him. The vote is a revelation of the true mind-set of the Sinhala majority and its extremist stance in the country. The appropriate measure for the International Community would be to create among the Sinhalese, a climate of political transformation and spirit of co-existence.

The International Community should also realise that an act of retribution against the LTTE would definitely neutralise the trust the Tamil people, both at home as well as abroad, have in the Western Community. This must be very pleasing to Mahinda Rajapakse who has expressed wishes for elimination of Western Community and inclusion of India and the Asian leadership in any peace talks convened to find a solution to the national problem in the country. This may delay an early solution. Therefore, it is high time the International Community woke up to its responsibility and quickly created a suitable climate in which both parties could recommence talks with ease. The Community needs to persuade the Sri Lankan government to implement first the decisions made at the six rounds of peace talks held so far, and then resume further talks at the earliest.

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