

A Free Nation Rises Again

Story of the Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena





Sri Lanka

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Peaceful Revolution of a Common Man
Story of the Sri Lankan President
Maithripala Sirisena



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THE MAITHRIPALA SIRISENA PRESIDENCY

Two Years Later

One late afternoon he was on the airwaves, unexpectedly announcing that he will run for office of the President of Sri Lanka. The advent of Maithripala Sirisena, the longest serving General-Secretary of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) as the common presidential candidate of the people, was a surprising and daring idea.

It was not to be the “Arab Spring” of Sri Lanka with people taking to the streets. It was to be a political and intellectual “coup de grace”. The people of one of the oldest and most sophisticated democracy in Asia had openly begun to literally and metaphorically oust a formidable Rajapaksa Presidency and his administration, which had publicly proclaimed that it cannot be changed for the next quarter century.

Health Minister Sirisena led the challenge from within its own ranks. The drama that unfolded for the rolling cameras of a Colombo Press Conference on 21 November 2014 showed Sirisena flanked by a former SLFP President Chandrika Kumaratunga and several political stalwarts. He was saying that two of the country’s main rival political parties, the SLFP and the United National Party, (UNP) had closed ranks to support him as the common presidential candidate. The Marxist JVP, the Tamil National Alliance and the Muslim political parties had pledged they were behind Sirisena. Post war Sri Lanka was thirsting for democratic freedom, not military type regimentation.

CIVIL SOCIETY led by a fearless Buddhist monk, the late Venerable Madoluwawe Sobhita Thero had changed the public opinion. They had looked for a man who they could relate to, and who could lead the Nation. They had looked for an honest unspoilt man with political commitment, to serve the people and the Republic. When it looked as if their search was futile and they faced ridicule for their idealism, they found Maithripala Sirisena.

Maithripala Sirisena's father was a World War II veteran and his mother was a school teacher. His parents were pioneers of the farming fraternity of Independent Ceylon. He had been raised in a farming colony in Polonnaruwa, and spoke authentic Sinhalese and quoted from Buddhist teachings with a natural flair, the language and religion of most Sri Lankans. He had a gentle upbringing, playing the violin and the piano accordion, and had sung the lyrics of classical Sinhala music maestro Amaradeva's "Rathnadeepa Janmabhoomi". It was the song that depicted our ancestors, who were the gems encrusted on the soil of our Motherland, and the air they breathed was that which swayed the golden pods of grain in the fields. Sirisena's nationalism and patriotism was not one limited to rhetoric, but that of the heart for which he had sought and found aesthetic expression.



Sirisena's earliest political influence came from Nagalingam Shanmugathan, a Cambridge educated anti-imperialist Tamil

Communist Party (China Wing) leader. An SLFP political activist from the age of seventeen, he gained admission to the Agriculture School at Kundasale and he was a follower of Communist politics particularly in Russia and Cuba. During a youth uprising in 1971 after being falsely accused of being a rebel, fortunately escaping from a firing squad, he was jailed in the Batticaloa Prison. Later in life, politically he was to survive in one of the most challenging and difficult posts, as General-Secretary of the SLFP. During the Tamil separatist conflict period, he survived six political assassination attempts by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). With such tested political credentials, and an impeccable political record of honesty and commitment to principles, he stood tall among those who ran for the Presidency.



The dawn of January 9th 2015 was full of speculation that the Rajapaksa Government was refusing to quit in preference to a military takeover, though Sirisena had been elected President. That evening when he was sworn in at the Independence Square, he had refused to take oaths before the incumbent Chief Justice, a Rajapaksa appointee who was involved in the controversial impeachment of the previous Sri Lanka's first woman Chief Justice. In defiance, Sirisena chose to be sworn in as Sri Lanka's Seventh Elected Executive President before the most senior Supreme Court Judge K.Sripavan, a Tamil.

Within six months he led the grand coalition of democratic forces and defeated Rajapaksa twice, at the Presidential Election of January 2015 and the General Election of August 2015 , bringing him and the coalition he led firmly to established victory.

STRUGGLE TO RETURN TO DEMOCRACY

President Sirisena inherited a post-war Sri Lanka in which military regimentation was virtually sealed with the 18th Amendment to the Constitution. The President and the government administration had been constitutionally sealed in authoritarianism. Culture of impunity was the order of the day. Military type regimentation spread from school principals being trained as Army Colonels to discipline schools; to University students trained in Army Camps prior to academic orientation. As a free world watched with sarcasm, disbelief and anger, Sri Lanka was labelled an authoritarian state at international fora, and became unacceptable to the dominant Western economic powers led by the United States.

19th Amendment to the Constitution & Constitutional Reform

The 19th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka was passed by the 225-member Parliament with 215 voting in favour on April 28th 2015. The Amendment diluted many powers of the Executive Presidency, which had been in force since 1978. It is the most revolutionary reform ever made to the Constitution of Sri Lanka since the ascendancy of J.R.Jayawardena as the first Executive President of Sri Lanka in 1978.

In January 2016 President Sirisena asked the Parliament for a new governing document for the country to address the root causes of the conflict, and to



guarantee Sri Lanka does not revert to a future conflict. In March 2016, the Parliament unanimously resolved to convert itself into a Constitutional Assembly, tasked to draft an inclusive and democratic Constitution.

President Sirisena announced that the Statute would be put to a nationwide referendum. In January 2016 the government introduced a Parliamentary resolution to convert Parliament to a Constitutional Assembly, tasked to draft a new Constitution. In July 2016, Constitutional Assembly Steering Committee members reported that the reform process was on track. Public consultations were

concluded, and Constitutional Assembly Sub-Committees have met with Local Government officials, Professional Organizations, and Non- Governmental Organizations (NGO) representatives to ensure inclusivity. Six of these Sub-Committees released their proposals later.

Improvement of economic conditions and fiscal reform.

In February 2015 a Vote on Account was introduced in Parliament to implement special measures to reduce the rising cost of living. Salaries were enhanced and direct and indirect taxes on essential goods and services were reduced.



The National Drugs Policy was passed by Parliament on February 19th 2015. It led to the price reduction of 48 essential medical drugs up to 85% to include those used in the treatment of major non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and different antibiotics.



- In September 2015 a competitive monetary policy was adopted by floating the Sri Lankan rupee, and a Ministry of Public Enterprise was created to consolidate state owned enterprises.
- In November 2015 the Prime Minister introduced a Medium Term Economic Strategy with economic goals.
- In April 2016 the Value Added Tax (VAT) was increased from 11% to 15%, with some exclusions, to address revenue collection and sort out budget issues.
- On May 31st 2016 Sri Lanka ratified the Trade Facilitation Agreement at the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- On November 11th 2016 the Budget for 2017 proposed further fiscal consolidation and increasing clarity and consistency to the government's tax proposals. In December 2016 the new 2017 Budget was passed aimed at wide-scale reforms and increasing revenue.

Accelerated Development Program

The Moragahakanda-Kaluganga dam completes the fifth and last of the major reservoirs envisaged under the Accelerated Mahaweli Scheme, after building the four gigantic dams Victoria, Randenigala, Rantembe, and Kotmale projects in the 1980's.

By 2018 the 100 Billion Rupee project will irrigate over 87,000 hectares in the Kurunegala, Matale, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Trincomalee Districts, and provide drinking water to 300,000 people



Moragahakanda - Kaluganga Dam

in Jaffna and 50,000 people in Kilinochchi. It will add 25 megawatts to the national electricity grid and inland fishing will rise by another 4,500 metric tons.

It will also be a personal dream come true for President Maithripala Sirisena who was associated with it since its feasibility study in 1994. The origins of the Moragahakanda Reservoir dates back to the irrigation works of King Wasabha in 111 AD.



Moragahakanda and Kaluganga reservoirs together will provide a volume of water; six times that of the twelfth century Parakrama Samudraya, the irrigation wonder of ancient Sri Lanka in Polonnaruwa, the President's home town.

Foreign Development Assistance and Foreign Direct Investment.

President Sirisena-led government has been making tactical overtures towards China and India since 2015 through diplomatic visits and signing of infrastructure agreements. Sri Lanka has sought to craft its policies in the region to attract goodwill and funds from both Asian giants. China has emerged as the leading source of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for Sri Lanka, the total outlay being \$14.75 billion. Most Chinese ODA assistance comes in the form of loans and grants presently at \$12 billion, primarily in the energy, infrastructure and services sectors.

Colombo International Financial City



The \$1.4 billion Colombo International Financial City (CIFIC) project is a special financial zone that is expected to become an offshore financial center where the Port City was planned. Built on reclaimed land adjacent to the Galle Face Green the city will use construction

resources from the Colombo Harbour Expansion Project, currently under construction near the site of this proposed city.

Hambantota Port & Industrial Zone



The Hambantota Port Development amounts to \$1 Billion in addition to developing a 15,000-acre Industrial Zone. The Chinese government expects to invest about \$5 billion to develop the area within 3-5 years.

Sri Lanka in 'One Belt, One Road' global economy of the new Silk Route

With Chinese investments in such large infrastructure projects, Sri Lanka will take its place in the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Project under the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative of China, projected to change the dynamics of the global economy. In May 2017 China offered credit facilities for \$ 24 billion for infrastructure development within the next 4-5 years in addition to its current credit of \$ 8 billion, totalling to assistance worth \$ 32 billion. In addition to mainland China's strategic investments, those from Hong Kong are now large enough to match the flows from Beijing.

Development of Oil Tank Farm in Trincomalee.

In August 2017 India and Sri Lanka agreed in principle to jointly operate the World War II era oil storage facility in Trincomalee, the strategically advantaged port town located in the East Coast of the island. At present Indian Oil Corporation subsidiary of Lanka



IOC, is engaged in bunkering operations, run 15 tanks (each with a capacity of 12,250 kilolitres) out of the 99 storage tanks in the lower oil tank farm in Trincomalee. The proposed joint venture pertains to the remaining 84 tanks in the upper farm, but Sri Lanka would retain 10 of those for use by the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. During his visit to Sri Lanka in March 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the project to develop the Upper Tank Farm in Trincomalee would help the coastal town become a regional petroleum hub.

Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA)

The Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA), that takes the current India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISLFTA) to the next level for better market access to the Indian market is being negotiated for finalization. India is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner. Overall bilateral trade between the two countries exceeded \$ 4.5 billion. India is the largest source of imports to Sri Lanka and the third largest destination for Sri Lankan exports. It is among the first five largest investors in Sri Lanka and the bulk of Sri Lankan FDI overseas is located in India.

Motorway network infrastructure



A 99 kilometre Central Expressway between Colombo and Kandy and a 72 kilometre Ruwanpura Expressway off the Southern Expressway from Kahathuduwa to Pelmadulla is expected to be completed by 2019. Work on the extension of the Southern Expressway from Matara to Hambantota is nearing completion, while the extension of the expressways to the north and east are being planned to connect the entire country by a network of modern motorways.

Airbus A380 lands at Colombo airport

The Airbus A380 the largest passenger transport aircraft currently in operation throughout the world, landed at the Katunayake International Airport in



August 2017, on the modernized runway of the Colombo Airport. It was after a lapse of 30 years that modernization of the runway of the airport was completed.

European Generalized System of Preference (GSP+) regained

In May 2017 the European Union (EU) granted GSP tariff concession to Sri Lanka allowing Sri Lanka to export its products tax-free to the European market. The 751-member European Parliament's vote followed after withdrawing it in 2010 consequential to the poor human rights record of the country. The EU is Sri Lanka's biggest export market accounting for nearly one-third of Sri Lanka's global exports.

In 2015, total bilateral trade amounted to Euro 4.7 Billion. EU imports from Sri Lanka amounted to Euro 2.6 billion, and consisted mainly of textiles, fish as well as rubber products and machinery.



Sri Lanka a world tourist hot spot - New York Times

The island's new found international reputation of returning to its democratic ideals saw Sri Lanka becoming one of the world's much sought after tourist hot spots named by "The New York Times", as a destination with some of the world's finest beaches and natural reserves, to sites of worldwide cultural significance. From an all-time high 1.8 million tourist arrivals in 2016, the growth in arrivals indicate exceeding the 2.5 million target in 2017.



Post War Reform and Re-Construction of the North & East.



Today less than one percent of the total land in the Northern Province is held by the military. 4,700 acres of private land held by the military in the Northern and Eastern Provinces has been returned to their owners since January 2015. The process of

re-considering what other lands could be returned, subject to strategic military needs is continuing.

Transitional Justice and the Reconciliation Process.

Transitional Justice efforts commenced with consultations with civil society and stakeholders to decide on timelines of the reform process. In November 2016 The Consultation Task Force submitted its report, and presented it on January 3rd 2017 to former President and head of



the Office on National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, who accepted it on behalf of President Sirisena.

In April 2016 ONUR convened a “Women for Reconciliation”

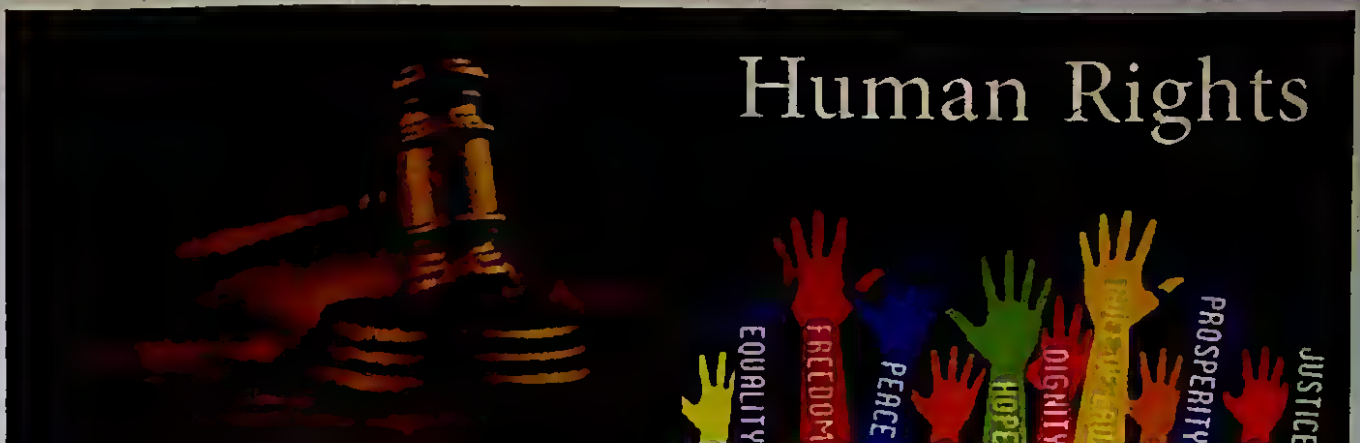
Stakeholder Meeting: More than 50 stakeholders came together to formulate a comprehensive action plan with both immediate and short term activities which addresses three thematic areas: (1) personal security issues in the post-conflict context, (2) social security issues, and (3) psycho-social support.

A team from the British Prime Minister's Office visited Sri Lanka in February 2016 and is preparing recommendations to improve the effectiveness of government strategic communications. The UN is in close contact with the government and has coordinated between its various agencies to mobilize support. They provided the government with proposed short, medium, and long term transitional justice steps and goals. During meetings in Geneva in June 2016 the government informed Geneva that they had planned to publicize their own Transitional Justice Plan. A working group has been working on the concept and design for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Following the advice of international experts, the government is considering establishment of a repatriation mechanism as consequential action after the TRC. Initial discussions and statements of an accountability mechanism are discussed in the public domain.

Renewed Commitment to Protecting Human Rights.

- In January 2015 a free environment was created and Journalists who fled the country during the previous government were invited to return to Sri Lanka with promise of safety, web sites unblocked, and the Cabinet Spokesman publicly stated the media can criticize the government, and that no phones will be tapped.

- Government also ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol), supplementing the United Nations 2000 Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.
- Foreign Employment Bureau officially inaugurated a new unit focused on anti-human trafficking efforts within Sri Lanka on April 7, 2016. In February 2016 Cabinet approved the five-year National Strategic Plan to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking (2015-2019).
- In June 2015 the government endorsed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.
- A visit by UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances team took place in November 2015.
- In December 2015 the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances was signed, which was followed by the signing of the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in January 2016.
- Assistance to Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act was passed in February 2015.
- A National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crimes and Witnesses was launched in January 2016.
- April 2016 landmark ruling by Supreme Court prohibiting the discrimination of people living with Human Immunodeficiency



Virus (HIV) was the first ruling of its kind in South Asia.

- Cabinet approved the appointment of an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights to formulate a National Action Plan for 2016-2021
- In 2016 the government issued instructions to all branches of the Security Forces that violations of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law, including those involving torture, rape and sexual violence, are prohibited and that those responsible will be investigated and punished.
- Government ratified the UN Convention on Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances on May 25th 2016.
- Government issued a circular banning the practice of not issuing passports to Sri Lankan citizen's resident abroad who left the country due to political persecution, on June 1st 2016.
- Sri Lanka made its first submission in fifteen years to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination in October 2015.

- Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe offered amnesty to returning asylum seekers on February 15th 2017.



The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has welcomed the positive engagement between the Government of Sri Lanka and the High Commissioner and the Office of Human Rights since January 2015, and encourages the continuation of the engagement in

the promotion and protection of human rights and in exploring appropriate forms of international support and participation in the Sri Lankan processes for seeking truth and justice. It has also welcomed the commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka to sign and ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances without delay, to criminalize enforced disappearances and to begin to issue Certificates of Absence to the families of missing persons as an interim measure of relief.

- The Cabinet approved the Right to Information (RTI) and National Audit Bills in April 2015. The RTI Act certified on April 4th 2016 was operationalized on February 3rd 2017.
- On July 5th 2016 Cabinet approved Amendments to Criminal Procedures Code and Witness Protection Law and other key criminal legislations. The amendments would ensure access to free

legal representation for suspects who cannot afford it, and would allow overseas witnesses to testify remotely.

- Government published draft legislation for an Enforced Disappearances Bill, which would criminalize future state-sponsored disappearances, if any.
- The NGO Secretariat was moved out from the Ministry of Defence and brought within the Ministry of National Dialogue.
- Chiefs of Missions were given the authority to approve visas in foreign capitals without delay, replacing an often lengthy process where all visas had to be vetted for political acceptability in Colombo. UN representatives noted in 2015 that visa requests had been promptly approved, in contrast to the previous government's frequent refusals or extended issuance delays.
- The Department of Immigration and Emigration moved out from the Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in January 2015.
- In a move to professionalize the diplomatic corps the Foreign Ministry recalled 27 of Sri Lanka's total of 66 foreign Heads of Missions to reduce the number of politically appointed envoys to no more than 19 in January 2015.
- Cabinet Committee Against Corruption was established with an Anti-Corruption Secretariat as its operational arm in March 2015.
- A Constitutional Council was established in July 2015 and includes respected civil society members.

- Independent Commissions were established to further reduce the powers of Executive Presidency in October-November 2015. This was consequential to the passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution on May 15th 2015
- Sri Lanka Police established the new “Assistance and Protection Division” to assist and protect victims of crime and witnesses under the ‘Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act in November 2016.
- On January 26th 2017 a new Regional Consular Office of Foreign Ministry was opened in Jaffna to certify vital documents, a service previously available only in Colombo.
- In January 2015 resumption of investigations into high-profile disappearances launched into the disappearance of journalist Prageeth Ekneligoda and the killing of Lasantha Wickrematunga, editor of the Sunday Leader newspaper.
- Public Security Ordinance was allowed to lapse in February 2015. This Ordinance was used by the previous administration to deploy the Armed Forces to carry out Police duties and functions.
- Travel ban on foreign passport holders traveling to conflict affected zones was lifted in January 2015.
- Consultation Task Force concluded zonal public consultations on reconciliation mechanisms in September 2016.
- Speaker assents the Office of Missing Persons (OMP) Bill into law on August 23rd 2016. The operationalizing of the OMP commences from September 15th 2017.

- Parliament passes legislation on August 25th 2016 authorizing issuance of Certificates of Absence to families of missing persons, to allow them to obtain benefits and services.

Ethnic Harmony & Reconciliation

- Government nominates Supreme Court Judge K. Sripavan, the most senior judge on the Bench and a Tamil, as the new Chief Justice in January 2015.
- Former ex-military Governors of Eastern and Northern Provinces replaced with civil servants, in January-February 2015.
- Creation of the ONUR led by former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga in March 2015.
- Last checkpoint in the North, Omanthai checkpoint, closed on August 29th 2015.
- A moderate Tamil political leader Hon.R. Sampanthan sworn-in as Leader of the Opposition on September 3 2015.
- Domestic consultations on reconciliation commenced in October 2015 which included All-Party Talks, Interfaith Dialogue and Civil Society Consultations.
- Granted bail to first tranche of Tamil prisoners held under Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the government announced a rehabilitation program for many other long-held Tamil prisoners in November 2015. All persons in custody are to face Court

proceedings. Government has published the names, place where held in custody, Court case number and the reason for being kept in custody for public information.

- In November 2015, the government removed a ban on eight Tamil Diaspora organizations and 267 individuals previously on the “terrorism watch list”. In November 2016, it removed an additional 69 individuals from the list. Eight organizations and 86 individuals remain in the list.
- President pardons in January 2016 a LTTE member who attempted to assassinate him when he was a Minister in 2006.
- President Sirisena ends the Rajapaksa government unofficial ban against the singing the National Anthem in Tamil, and on February 4th 2016 the National Anthem is sung in both Sinhala and Tamil at the Independence Day Celebration, for the first time since 1949.



- Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera officially launched national consultations on Sri Lanka’s reconciliation processes at the District Secretariat in Jaffna on February 13th 2016. Launch was attended by TNA, Eastern Province Governor, Officials of the Ministry of Defence, Security Forces Commanders in the Northern Province, Chief of Defence Staff the ONUR, and the public.

- Creation of Secretariat for Coordination of Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM). Two UN Consultants are working directly with SCRM, providing advice on implementation of reconciliation mechanisms and possible areas for increased capacity and efficiency.
- ✓ SCRM received dedicated funding in the 2017 Budget.

Repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA)

- Draft legislation to replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) has been prepared. Review and repeal of the PTA was a key commitment at the UNHRC in September 2015 and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe again committed to it in January 2016. The government plans to replace it with new law enforcement for counter-terrorism. The Committee tasked with drafting the new Bill, chaired by the Minister of Law and Order Hon. Sagala Ratnayake, also worked with UN officials to prepare a draft, which was being reviewed by domestic and international partners for its conformity to international standards, prior to its submission to Parliament.
- The government has implemented a moratorium on arrests made under the current PTA.
- In May 2016 the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) issued a directive on proper procedures for arrests made under the PTA, including proper identification, stated reason for arrest, travel in official vehicles, use authorized place of detention, provide access to lawyers, and follow safeguards to prevent sexual abuse.

- The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) encouraged executive level government officials to echo its Commitment to Human Rights. On June 19, 2016, President Sirisena issued a circular setting procedures for arrests made under the PTA, by ensuring detainees have access to legal counsel and requiring detainees families be informed of their arrests.

Anti-Corruption Measures.

- The government's Anti-Corruption Committee establishes an operational arm, the Anti-Corruption Secretariat (ACS). Four other coordinators were appointed as Deputy Directors, representing the Attorney General's office, the Police, the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC), and one other representative.
- A Financial Crimes Investigation Division (FCID) was created under a Deputy Inspector General of Police, to investigate financial fraud.
- In May 2015 a Presidential Commission on Fraud & Corruption was created to investigate reports of corruption and the Commission has handed over several reports after inquiries.



New Directions in Foreign Policy

In May 2016 Heads of State of the world's seven leading industrialized nations, controlling over 60% of the global economy were gathering in Japan and among those invited to be present at the G7 Summit was President Maithripala Sirisena of Sri Lanka.

It was the first time a Sri Lankan Head of State was invited to a G7 Summit, in its forty two years of existence.



It was an important recognition of the domestic political transformation within the first one and a half years of governance in Sri Lanka. They acknowledged his efforts to inculcate democracy and good governance in the island nation, once known to them as the Pearl of the Orient.



Sri Lanka was on the cross roads of rising Asia, strategically located between major political, economic and security interests. Sri Lanka was of vital interest to the US led Western world, competing for control of the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific. She has maintained uncommitted non-alignment in dealing with such conflicts of interests.



From January 2015 Sri Lanka had begun to restructure its foreign relations portfolio. Sri Lanka began to review its relations with time tested friendly nations in the Western world. Many of these relationships had drifted apart during the previous regime and there was a need to re-think post conflict Sri Lanka's future on new terms, which were primarily driven by the benefits that could be derived from a globalized economy and imerging international political fabric.



Now, Sri Lanka is viewed as setting an example for many other troubled states facing post-conflict adverse scenarios, for reconciliation and good governance, proven recognition extended by the leadership of the G7 nations, which included US President Barrack Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime-Minister David Cameron and the Japanese Prime-Minister Shinzo Abe.

It was acknowledged that Sri Lanka had achieved this domestically by its two main rival political parties headed by President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime-Minister Ranil Wickramasighe combining to establish a National Government.

The praise the President received from the world leaders stemmed from action to regain democracy. This was a promising situation for Sri Lanka to reap political, economic and technological benefits in the future.

The transformation of Sri Lanka's foreign relations began when President Maithripala Sirisena chose India for his first state visit after being elected President.



Soon after, Prime-Minister Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to make a bilateral visit to Sri Lanka after 28 years.



Prime-Minister Modi's landmark visit to Sri Lanka in February 2015 has to be viewed in the context of India's new maritime policy seen in its cooperation with the United States in the regional maritime domain.

Sri Lanka treaded cautiously in the complex international political scenarios. She maintained a balanced approach being friendly with competing international political and economic interests that emerged, especially between India, China and the US.



Sri Lanka's close relationship with China has developed to new dimensions with the Chinese String of Pearls initiative which includes its interests in the ports of Hambantota, Colombo and the emerging Port City of Colombo, the latter being to date the single largest FDI in the island.

President Sirisena's in his 2016 Independence Day address in Colombo had already emphasized Sri Lanka's growing maritime interests.



The President addressed how Sri Lanka utilized marine resources and maritime location during the past 68 years. In comparison with the developed countries in the world the country has not utilized even one percent of our marine resources. In this highly technological world, as an island nation, Sri Lanka has great opportunity to develop the economy and the knowledge of technology by utilizing marine resources and the strategic location of the country, he said.



The Sri Lanka leader's second state visit to India in seventeen months underscored the island nation's delicate efforts to balance relations with regional superpowers India and China, while maintaining Sri Lanka's new close relationship with the US.



His visit came a month after Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe travelled to China and consented to resume work that had been suspended on a \$1.5 Billion Chinese-funded Port City, a project that had made some uneasy. However, the effort and will of the Sri Lankan political leadership resulted in those questioning the project to view the emerging Port City in Colombo as a potential even for Indian investment.



The foreign policy initiative of the Sirisena-Wickramasinghe Government will remain crucial to post-conflict recovery in Sri Lanka. How Sri Lanka will be perceived as a global player by the international community, will be crucial to her future. She is



much dedicated and committed to such a cause under the leadership of President Maithripala Sirisena. Therefore, she looks forward to cooperation from the international community, and considers that the first steps kept should be reinforced by the international community, not only on reconciliatory acts, but with making Sri Lanka an economic hub to direct Sri Lanka's marked prosperity, which will lay the foundation for a peaceful, developed country where sustainability will be assured in the long term.

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REFERENCE





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