

Sri Lanka Turmoil

By Lt Gen V A Bhat

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Ceylon as the island was known before it was named SRI LANKA was a British Colony, became independent in 1948 shortly after India achieved it. The English people had taken a large number of Tamils as labour to work on the Tea Estates. These Emigrants settled in the Northern parts of Sri Lanka Jaffna Trincomalee and became Sri Lankan citizens. Right from its birth the ethnic Sinhala dominated people treated the Tamilians as second-class citizens. Matters came to a head when the Sri Lankan government officially took away the status of the Tamil Language. Nearly 50/60 years ago the ethnic Tamilians held a peaceful protest on the green next to the sea in Colombo to ask the Government to restore the status of the Tamil Language. This peaceful demonstration was viciously attacked by violent mobs armed with sticks and other instruments to drive away the protesters. The security agencies looked it with their Eyes Wide Shut. This led to the bloodiest insurgency in the emerald island and the arming of the LTTE (Liberation of Tamil Tigers Elam). It is at the same site that the citizens of Lanka are protesting and asking the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his elder brother Mahinda Rajapaksa to resign holding them accountable for the dire state they now find themselves. The clock has indeed turned a full circle.

Sri Lanka is facing an economic meltdown. The COVID-19 pandemic hurt many low- and middle-income countries, but the island nation of 22 million people stand out as the hardest hit.

There are no dollars no access to international markets. Sri Lanka is experiencing the worst economic downturn of its history, grappling with staggering levels of government debt, spiralling inflation, and a foreign exchange crisis that has led to the scarcity of many essential goods. Long lines outside gas pumps.

There are power cuts out frequently. Shops are running out of medicines and other necessities. In April, the government defaulted on its external debt, paving the way for a loan program from the International Monetary Fund. Today there is no fuel in the country schools have been closed and people have been asked to restrain themselves.

The Mahinda's rise to power began in 2004 when he was appointed the PM by the then President Smt Chandrika K Bandaranaike (CKB). CKB after wards commented that this was her biggest mistake. Mahinda Rajapaksa did not look back. He became President in 2005 and decided to finish the LTTE once for all. His younger brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa was the Defence Secretary and in 2009 the LTTE which had already been weakened lost. The stock of the Rajapaksa Family grew in stature in the eyes of the Sinhala Buddhist south. The Family grip on tightened and Mahinda Rajapaksa was able to win a second term as President of Sri Lanka. His brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa continued as Defence Secretary and he became a parallel power centre. Under him a large of citizens who were criticising the Government were abducted and some were never seen again. The editor of The Sunday Leader Wickremasinghe was killed in 2009.

Prageeth a Cartoonist missing in 2010 and was never found. Anti-Muslim violence grew in the Island Nation. It is said that the Rajapaksa Government gave a silent nod to some extreme Buddhist elements to perpetuate this violence. During this time Mahinda Rajapaksa amended the Sri Lankan constitution which barred a candidate from becoming President for a third time. Family members were given key portfolios in the government and the Rajapaksa's ruled with an iron grip. In response to the degrading democracy in the country, the United National Party (UNP), along with several other parties and civil organisations, signed a Memorandum of Understanding and decided to field the then Secretary General of Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), Maithripala Sirisena, as the Common Candidate for the 2015 Presidential Election. Sirisena, a former health minister under Rajapaksa, pledged to appoint UNP Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe as the Prime Minister if he were to win the election. Sirisena won the January 2015 election and became the 7th President of Sri Lanka and appointed Wickremesinghe as the Prime Minister as promised. The presidential election was followed by a General Parliamentary Elections, held on 17 August 2015, in which the UNP-led coalition gained 106 seats in the Parliament and formed a National Government with several other parties. Wickremesinghe and the UNP came to power promising accountability for alleged atrocities committed during the Sri Lanka civil war and during the Rajapaksa presidency. (The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government had been struggling to repay the debts incurred during the Rajapaksa Presidency.) The Magampura Mahinda Rajapaksa Port, built with Chinese money, was handed over to Beijing in a 99-year lease in 2017 as a form of payment. Sri Lanka also recorded just 3.1% economic growth rate, the lowest for 16 years in 2017. By 2018, following Mahinda Rajapaksa's proxy Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna winning a landslide victory in the 2018 local authority elections, disputes among the members of the National Government began to surface and a major rift between the President and Prime Minister appeared. Sirisena claimed Wickremesinghe to have led to the loss of 11 billion Sri Lankan rupees (\$65 million; £50 million) in the controversial Central Bank bond sale, and also alleged that a cabinet minister was involved in a plot to kill him and that police had obstructed an investigation. In 2017 opinion poll conducted by the Centre for Policy Alternatives revealed Fifty-six per cent of respondents are unhappy with the coalition government. The rift between the President and the Prime Minister. In October 2018 the President Sirisena announced Mahinda Rajapaksa as the PM, had lost his majority in Parliament following withdrawal of support by some political Parties. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe refused to accept this dismissal and at this stage Sri Lanka had two PMs. The President Sirisena had to reappoint Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe as PM again, much against his wishes. Mr Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and formed his own Party. In the 2109 Presidential Election Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa younger brother of Mahala was elected President of Sri Lanka. Mr Gotabaya gave up his US citizenship to contest this election. He projected himself as a strong leader who as the former Defence Secretary played a key role in the annihilation of the LTTE and was capable of tackling other forms of Terrorism seen in the backdrop of the Easter Bombings in 2019. Mr Gotabaya won the election as President and appointed Mr Mahila Rajapaksa as his PM. The Rajapaksa's were back at the helm of affairs in Sri Lanka. During the two terms of Mr Mahila Rajapaksa as President, there was a massive investment in Infrastructure with the help of China in his home such as the Hambantota port and Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport which turned out to be poor investment choices, as they struggled to generate foreign exchange earnings. The Chinese loan has become a big issue.

The Government of Sri Lanka under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa made large tax cuts that affected government revenue (as promised in their manifesto) and fiscal policies, causing budget deficits to soar (as promised in their manifesto). These cuts included increased tax-free thresholds that resulted in a 33.5% decline in registered taxpayers, reducing VAT to 8%, reducing corporate tax from 28% to 24%, the abolishment of the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) tax and the 2% "nation-building tax" which financed infrastructure development. In addition, in a surprise decision fertiliser import was banned and organic farming was the catch word. This resulted in the yield being much less and the food grain reserves fell drastically.

Though this decision was rolled back in 2021 it was too late to help the agriculture yield to grow which aggravated the availability of food grains. The Rajapaksa's also ignored early warning to seek IMF assistance to overcome the economic crisis. The crisis now has ballooned and there is a shortfall of essential items and no money to import food stock or fuel. The citizens are now accusing the Rajapaksa family of corruption and are out on the streets asking the President to resign. This agitation has been on for the last two months. Mahila Rajapaksa has resigned as PM but not his younger brother Gotabaya the President. Mr Ranil Wickeremane has been reappointed as PM and has now his own cabinet of ministers. Latest news is that India has extended a \$ 55mn credit for fertilizers as requested by the Sri Lankan Government for importation of 65000 MT of Urea fertiliser to be utilised in the current sowing season from June 2022. Two new ministries to handle the economic crisis have been created. One is Ministry of Women Child Affairs and Social Empowerment and the second is Ministry of Technology and Investment Promotion. Fuel Crisis is worsening as the last shipment of Petrol and Diesel from India expected to complete by 22 June. India has already provided support worth \$3.5 Billion in this year already to help ease the situation. Sri Lanka is now looking at Russia for additional Fuel supplies even as the war in Europe continues. The Government of Sri Lanka anticipates the shortage of food to continue till 2024. China has announced an assistance of \$74 million for supply of essential goods. But China is silent on the request to defer the loan repayment in addition to a \$ 2.5 Billion loan. UN has agreed to about \$ 47 million assistance from June to September 22.

The road ahead for Sri Lanka is very tough and the citizens will have to bear a lot of hard ship for some more time to come. They must trust the present Government led by the Mr Ranil Wickeremane to bring back its country back on rail.

China's Chequered Games: Are Xi Jinping's Days of Glory Over or Will He Prevail?

By Srikanth Kondapalli

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As the 20th communist party congress of China is round the corner this November, the continuation or otherwise of its leader Xi Jinping has been debated extensively. There is also his tumultuous legacy since coming to power in 2012.

Last one decade had seen meteoric rise of Xi—with the dramatic arrest of his political rivals Bo Xilai and Zhou Yongkang and to his political consolidation.

His anti-corruption drive nearly decimated the base of his political rivals like Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Xi soon acquired the sobriquet of “Chairman of everything” by centralising all levers of power. At the last count, Xi was holding 13 crucial positions of the party, state and the armed forces.

Xi Jinping's Military Might Against the World

Although there is a decline in economy growth rates from over 10 percent before 2010 to 2.4 percent in 2020, Xi's period coincided with massive military modernisation and breakthroughs in science and technology. This further wetted Xi's “accomplishing something” philosophy and to his grandiose plans for “socialist modernisation” by 2050.

Xi's assertiveness also brought gains to China in South China Sea and other areas, although this led to an estrangement in relations with the neighbours. Xi's identification of red lines with Taiwan has raised nationalist rhetoric. Xi decimated Hong Kong opposition through national security law.

Instead of Deng Xiaoping's restraint policies, Xi not only grabbed disputed reefs in South China Sea but also refurbished them with military assets. Xi also crafted a policy of occupying disputed lands with India, despite his rhetoric of "developmental partnership".

Xi also alienated Japan with aggressive transgressions in Senkaku islands administered by Japan.

How Strong is Xi Jinping on Home Ground?

At home, Xi rebooted the political spectrum by first filling crucial party-state posts with his "new Zhijiang Army" cadres and his home province Shaanxi leaders. Xi also ushered in a "new era" with ideological and political firmness. Everything seemed to be going Xi's way.

However, since early this year, clear political signalling is visible to Xi's relative decline, although in the intensive cesspool of Chinese politics and its opaqueness, it is hard to predict the outcome of the 20th party congress.

Let's read the tea leaves for portents.

Even though the 6th plenary meeting of the central committee in November last year at its third "historical resolution" glorified Xi, putting him at par with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping and thereby downgrading his predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, the 5 May party meeting this year skipped mentioning Xi as the "core of the leadership" – an ominous signal for Xi's decline. Besides, Xi's selective extension of his Presidential term at the March 2018 parliament session had alerted his detractors in the party.

What Might Trouble Xi Jinping?

Firstly, Xi's pet Belt and Road Initiative project is under stress from several quarters: decline in investments and interest, with debts of several nations increasing and their assets seized such as Hambantota port in Sri Lanka and challenged by the United States-led Build Back Better World and others for lack of transparency, violation of sovereignty principles and environmental disasters.

Secondly, Xi's "dynamic zero Covid" policy is under attack given the massive impact on the welfare of the people, their livelihood, economic decline and the overall inconvenience to an estimate 400 million people in lockdown. China's concerted narrative that its pandemic policies have been transparent and effective ignores the all-round debilitating effect these have had on the public. These were compounded by Xi's "common prosperity" policies of curbing big businesses.

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Quad Needs U.S. Tech To Secure Indo-Pacific

By Jeff Goldberg

Author is director of regulatory policy at NDIA.

President Joe Biden in May embarked on one of the most high-profile and consequential diplomatic trips of his administration.

Set against the backdrop of escalating global tensions — most notably Russia's invasion of Ukraine — the president journeyed to Asia with the strategic goal of bolstering historic relationships within the Indo-Pacific region. He met with several heads of state and provided greater context, and reassurance, on America's vision for a free and stable Pacific.

Despite an ambitious and wide-ranging agenda, arguably the most significant development that occurred during this trip was the reaffirmation of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue by its founding members. This geopolitically relevant quartet of partners, consisting of the United States, Australia, India and Japan, was originally constituted to serve as, what former Japanese Prime

Minister Shinzo Abe called, “the Asian Arc of Democracy.” It would be a strategic dialogue, bolstered by increased diplomatic and military cooperation, with the purpose of ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific.

However, this partnership, which was originally founded during the later years of the George W. Bush administration, did not always enjoy the same level of cooperation that it currently does. In fact, it has encountered numerous obstacles in its short history. Despite a promising start, competing priorities soon scuttled the Quad, as member nations, most notably Australia, sought to foster closer relations with the Chinese government.

In the interceding years, several key geopolitical developments emerged that necessitated a reconsideration of the suspended dialogue. For instance, under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China began instituting a far more aggressive Indo-Pacific foreign policy than it had previously embraced. China began claiming wide swaths of territory in the South China Sea with the infamous “nine-dash line” and militarized islands throughout the region.

These concerning actions, coinciding with the U.S. “pivot” towards Asia, laid the groundwork for the revival of the Quad.

Unsurprisingly, the re-emergence of this arrangement has antagonized regional adversaries, most notably Beijing. Despite initially dismissing the strategic partnership as fleeting, or akin to “sea foam in the Pacific,” Chinese attitudes have recently taken a more hostile tone. The Chinese government has accused the Quad of harboring NATO-like aspirations, with its foreign minister stating that it is merely “stoking geopolitical rivalries.”

Despite the protests from China, the momentum behind the Quad is accelerating. Cooperation has increased, and there are talks surrounding the expansion of this arrangement to include other regional powers. What does such cooperation mean for the United States and its defense industrial base?

Following the recent Quad meeting, the White House released a statement addressing key areas of future cooperation. “Critical and Emerging Technologies” were specifically highlighted and the following topics were addressed.

It was announced that the “Quad will cooperate on technical exchanges and testbed activity to advance interoperability and telecommunications cybersecurity.”

[Read complete article on website nationaldefensemagazine.org](https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org)

Ilhan Omar’s Pakistan Trip Raises Questions of Foreign Islamist Influence in the US

By Isabella Meibauer

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In May, former US Ambassador to Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates Richard Olson pleaded guilty to violating lobbying laws. He had received monthly payments of \$20,000 from a Pakistani American businessman and “political fixer,” Imaad Zuberi, within one year of leaving his post. Zuberi was operating on behalf of Qatar and paid Olson to lobby for the Gulf state’s interests in a 2017 dispute with its neighbors.

The courts sentenced Zuberi to 12 years in prison and ordered him to pay \$16 million in restitution and \$2 million in fines for illegally sending millions of dollars from foreign sources to whichever political campaigns they believed would benefit them. In addition to Qatar, Zuberi’s

clients included “the governments of Libya, Sri Lanka, Bahrain, Turkey, and a Ukrainian oligarch close to Vladimir Putin,” according to the Daily Mail.

The considerable power that foreign agents with such connections can easily exert is troubling, and connections between these agents and elected officials warrant deeper investigation.

One such relationship of interest is that between Representative Ilhan Omar and Tahir Javed, a Pakistani-American businessman, influential Democratic Party donor, and a liaison for Pakistan-US relations who was instrumental in the creation of the Pakistan Congressional Caucus.

Javed accompanied Omar on her recent controversial trip to Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied but Indian-claimed Azad Kashmir, a flashpoint territory that religious extremists rule.

His presence alongside the congresswoman indicates the continued growth of Pakistani influence operations and Islamist networks in the US. Similarly, Javed’s political connections lead to questions about his own agenda and influence, given the strict laws concerning foreign-sponsored lobbying in the United States.

Javed has long been regarded as a spokesperson for Islamabad. After President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris won the 2020 election, Javed conveyed then-Prime Minister Imran Khan’s congratulatory message to Harris and her husband. Javed also appears to have had a role in arranging a meeting between Khan and Senators Chris van Hollen and Maggie Hassan in 2019.

In March 2021, President of Pakistan Arif Alvi awarded Javed with the Tamgha-e-Imtiaz, a medal commending civilians or servicemembers for their service to Pakistan. A few months later, Javed hosted an event for the Pakistani governor of Punjab in Houston.

A self-described business magnate, Javed runs multiple companies in the US, including a healthcare conglomerate and a wholesale company.

Federal Election Commission data reveals the scope of Tahir Javed’s donations to the Democratic National Convention, of which he is the deputy national finance chair, as well as to other Democrat candidates, including Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, co-chair of the Congressional Pakistan Caucus Foundation (CPCF), and Ilhan Omar.

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Indian Democracy’s New Normal

By Sanjay Sahay

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There are any number of indicators of the health of Indian democracy and every single time we find a sharp decline qualitatively, in each of these indicators. It can start from the quality of debates in our legislatures, mere attendance being a big thing, time taken for passage of bills, violence happening in its precincts, the language being used in the public domain inclusive of the electronic media, wash out of legislative sessions, the list can be endless. On the other hand, we find political violence, defections, horse trading, some governments in no way based on the mandate, resort politics, a variety of ways of doling favour, commitments and promises which never come into the public domain. If all this is known to the world, the safe presumption is that the real operational democracy is being played from behind the scenes.

The effort is to give a hunky-dory impression of democracy, as it serves every stakeholder's interest. You will barely find any of these talking about what ails our democratic system. They are fully satisfied. Everyone who conveniently gets into the power structure, exploits it to its fullest, without having any expertise, inclination to deliver governance and without having to make any effort, has no reasons to crib. The people of this country have become accustomed to this model of democracy; that they have to live within the limitations created by the politicians, the political class and a robust self-serving political ecosystem. Parties may come and go but this remains permanent, improving upon the return on investment every time. With every human being represented in this country, there would be a large part of the population, which wouldn't have met an elected representative ever in their life.

Even after accepting this dismal performance, they don't fail to surprise. The recent one is Maharashtra's ongoing tussle with democracy. While the model is the same, the depths to which it has gone is just unimaginable. Democracy has been brought down to a level of a fracas. There are no sane views in the public domain criticizing it. Everyone seems to be involved as if Indian democracy is an illegal T20 match to be won for a huge prize money. Personal convenience / inconvenience runs supreme, the super inflated egos have to be massaged indefinitely. An electoral victory can take your life from the real to the surreal. The value of an MLA in Indian democracy has catapulted immensely in the last two decades or so. He has become the shining star of Indian democracy. Even better days ahead for him, it seems.

It is Maharashtra's tryst with its elected representatives. It has already gone through a midnight government formation and its fall too. All those who have played havoc with the state, talk of Maharashtra's pride. Now we have the most cadre-based party going helter-skelter. They are on the verge of a street war. It's like an ongoing hostage crisis. It is also being reported in that manner. A hijack which changes its location. Operations run from different locations. An unbroken supply chain. Maharashtra is hijacked. The voters are a forgotten lot by now, they have to fend for themselves, while chartered aircrafts fly at their representatives' whims and fancies. Nobody knows the legal locus standi of the Deputy Speaker. The disqualification saga reaches the Supreme Court. The country's top legal eagles fight it out for them. They are heard, there is no judicial delay. Justice to the people from those who have proven being unjust to their electors; morality and credibility ripped apart, is never going to happen. They have learned the art of navigating through the Indian constitutional battlefield with ease. The search for the real Shiv Sena is turning out to be a mirage. Money is a non-issue in these battles. This is turning out to be Indian democracy's New Normal.

CAN WE EVER RETURN TO THE LETTER AND SPIRIT OF THE CONSTITUTION?

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Nation is Indebted to:

Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu First Tribal Freedom Fighters



After the nomination of Smt Draupadi Murmu as Presidential candidate, a but natural curiosity is there in people of India away from states of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh about Santhal tribe community. If one flips through the Indian history, it is seen Santhal's have fought bravely against the oppressor Britishers and corrupt Zamindar's.

One such resistance against Britishers was led by two Santhal brothers ie Sidhu Murmu and Kanhu Murmu in Damin-i-Koh region. (Damin-i-koh was the name given to the forested hilly areas of Rajmahal hills broadly in the area of present Sahebganj, Pakur and Godda districts in the Indian state of Jharkhand.)

Sidhu Murmu and Kanhu Murmu were the leaders of the Santhal rebellion (1855–1856), Santals lived in and depended on forests. In 1832, the British demarcated the Damin-i-koh region in present-day Jharkhand and invited Santhals to settle in the region. Due to promises of land and economic amenities a large numbers of Santhals came to settle from Cuttack, Dhalbhum, Manbhum, Hazaribagh, Midnapore etc. Soon, mahajans and zamindars as tax-collecting intermediaries deployed by British dominated the economy. Many Santals became victims of corrupt money lending practices. They were lent money at exorbitant rates when they never could repay then their lands were forcibly taken, they were forced into bonded labour. This sparked the Santal rebellion.

On 30 June 1855, two Santhal rebel leaders, Sidhu Murmu and Kanhu Murmu (related as brother) along with Chand and Bairab, mobilized about 10,000 Santals and declared a rebellion against British colonists. The Santals initially gained some success but soon the British found out a new way to tackle these rebels. Instead, they forced them to come out of the forest. In a conclusive battle which followed, the British, equipped with modern firearms and war elephants, stationed themselves at the foot of the hill. When the battle began, the British officer ordered his troops to fire without loading bullets. The Santals, who did not suspect this trap set by the British war strategy, charged with full potential. This step proved to be disastrous for them. As soon as they neared the foot of the hill, the British army attacked with full power and this time they were using bullets. Although the revolution was suppressed, it marked a great change in the colonial rule and policy.

Sido Kanhu Murmu University, established in January 1992 at Dumka, is named upon them. Indian post also issued a stamp in 2002 honouring them. There is also a Sidhu Kanhu Memorial Park in Ranchi, named in their honour.

Every year, 30 June is celebrated among the Santal community to pay respect to Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu's for their great deeds of standing against the oppressive British Raj and corrupt Zamindars.

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