

The demise of Democracy in Sri Lanka: A study of the political and economic crisis in Sri Lanka (Based on the incident of the Rambukkana shooting)

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ABSTRACT

This article intends to examine the economic and political crisis in Sri Lanka, especially considering the incident of Rambukkana. The first part of this article describes the background of the economic and political crisis in Sri Lanka, the commencement of protests throughout the country, and further discussed, why ordinary masses came on the street? And what are the reasons behind this situation? Secondly, this article examines the incident of the ‘Rambukkana’ shooting which happened on 19th April 2022. The end of this article indicates the debt trap and failed policies of the current government.

Keywords: *Economic crisis, Political crisis, Incident of the Rambukkana, National Security, Debt-trap, Public Policy*

Introduction

At the beginning of this April 2022 masses of Sri Lanka came out of their homes due to the failure of the governing process in Sri Lanka. Now at a significant level, Sri Lankan people are facing various kinds of deprivation. Their daily lives are collapsing. People's deprivations were exposed since the country's foreign currency reserves were nearly exhausted. Sri Lanka had \$7.6 billion in foreign currency reserves at the end of 2019. However, by March 2020, it had exhausted its reserves to just \$1.93 billion. Otherwise, no medicine for patients, half of the day people are struggling with the power cut, and the government cannot supply sufficient gas for daily needs. In 2019, former president Mahinda Rajapaksha and their alliance convinced the people, that the incident of the Easter attack happened due to the failure of the policies of the ‘Yahapanala government’, and the current president Gotabaya Rajapaksha used the religious policies for winning this presidential election. They started their election campaign

from the temple yard. People thought they would provide national security for Sri Lankans, but he failed not only the national security but also at everything. Three years have passed. Even the government of Sri Lanka could not find out the criminals who were in charge of this attack. People are also irritated because the expense of living has risen to unbearable levels. People in Sri Lanka are spending up to 40% more on food than they were a year ago. Fuel shortages have resulted in huge queues at gas stations, and the problem has also impacted public transportation. As a result of this circumstance, the people of Sri Lanka began to oppose the corrupted administration. This protest started in 'Mirihana' where the president of Sri Lanka lives. On April 1st, President Gotabhaya Rajapaksha declared a state of emergency and banned social media throughout the country. Henceforth, people of the country came to the streets and gathered in the main cities for blowing their helplessness and fury.

Indeed April is not just a month for Sri Lankans. Most of the Sinhala and Tamil people celebrate their New Year in April, but this year most of the people of Sri Lanka commemorate the New Year at Galle-face in Colombo, the capital, in front of the Presidential Secretariat office. Since 9th April 2022, Sri Lankan people are cold-shoulder the current government and they are using slogans such as, "*Gota Go Home, Give Us Our Stolen Money, Power to the People, Abolish the 20th Amendment to the Constitution*".

The incident of the Rambukkana shooting

Amid these unfortunate situations people are compelled to the current government especially, the President Gotabhaya Rajapaksha, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksha who became a President in Sri Lanka twice, Former financial minister Basil Rajapaksha, former Youth and Sports minister Namal Rajapaksha, Parliament member Chamal Rajapaksha and Nipuna Ranawaka, people strictly expect their resignations. Before the 19th of April, protests in the country secured compassion, love, and affection, humanity among the people without any boundaries. Indeed, there is a salient thing that is at today we don't have any problems or issues related to the doctorate, race, or faith. Every citizen of the country stood up with their relatives for only one purpose that is ousting the current government.

On the 19th of April, the government increased the fuel price once again. The increase in fuel price affected the price of wheat flour. There were protests in several areas (*Theldeniya, Gampola, Baddegama, Higurakgoda, Rathnapura, Digana, Rambukkana, Panadura, and Colombo*).

'The Rambukkana protesters had been protesting for approximately 15 hours, demanding fuel. Thousands of enraged vehicles and drivers were also burning tires and blocking the neighboring route that connects Colombo and Kandy. Sri Lankan cops fired live shots at protesters to mark the end of democracy. When police used live bullets, one Sri Lankan man was murdered, and 24 others were injured, with two people being treated for critical injuries. A police curfew was imposed in Rambukkana in the aftermath of the shooting, which was lifted Thursday (21) Morning (BAR Association of Sri Lanka, 2022)'.

This incident reminds us of "The Rathupawala Shooting" in 2013. That protesters were waiting for water. Brigadier 'Anura Deshapriya Gunawardhana' who was the Commanding Officer of the contingent fired shots at protesters in Rathupaswala. The shooting incident resulted in the death of three youths 'Akila Dinesh, Ramila Ravishanand, and Nilantha Pushpakumara.' That period was also governed by the Rajapaksha family (2005-2015). Considering the incident of the Rambukkana police spokesman 'Nihal Thaldewa' said, "*Police*

had to fire to control the protesters. They set fire to some tires too. So, police had to fire to disperse them". Sri

Lanka's newly appointed Public Security minister 'Prasanna Ranathunga' has defended the Police shooting claiming that the protestors had attempted to set a bowser carrying 30,000 liters of fuel on the fire, shooting the protesters had saved 300 lives, he claimed (BAR Association of Sri Lanka, 2022). The authorities in Sri Lanka have stated that the mob throws stones and other items at the police. Although a few of them were injured, the question remains: **why was live gunfire used on unarmed civilians?**

Later, Inspector General of Police 'C.D. Wickramaratne' stated that police engaged to prevent a group of protestors from burning down a vehicle carrying 30,000 liters of fuel. Protesters have disputed this, and many have pointed out on social media that the footage of the incident indicates no such danger to the vehicle.

Another noteworthy detail is that police claimed they used "little force" to disperse demonstrators following the event. Therefore, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and envoys of the US and EU have condemned this situation due to the authority of Sri Lanka also bounds the protection of people's sovereignty. For securing the rule of law the 'BAR Association of Sri Lanka (BASL)' requests an independent investigation into Rambukkana shooting incident.

Conclusion

Above mentioned all the incidents happened because of the unbearable debt trap and running dry of the foreign reserves. Already, Sri Lanka has been recognized as one of the higher inflation countries in the world. Sri Lanka gained independence from Britain in 1948. In the past, Sri Lanka's economy was heavily based on labor-intensive agriculture. In 1960, agriculture comprises 32% of the Sri Lankan GDP. The Country is rich in mineral sources, such as clay, gems, graphite, limestone, mineral sands, and phosphate rock. At present Sri Lanka's main export earning industry are textiles and clothing. A few years ago, Sri Lanka was an upper-middle-income developing nation.

When comes to the question, of why Sri Lanka failed? there are sufficient factors that should address. During the period of the former president, J.R. Jayawardene introduced the policy of open economy and the Executive presidential system to the country. That presidential system is making greedy leaders for power. Now we are struggling with that policies. Apart from that, during the period of Sirimavo Bandaranaike who was the world's first prime minister and the wife of a previous Sri Lankan prime minister, Solomon Bandaranaike. For the very first time, she acquainted with socialist economic policies to run the country. That policy was also blended with the nationalist policies implemented by her husband. In 1973, Sri Lanka faced an oil crisis. In that situation, the government had no access to foreign aid, and then her socialist policies were subjected to criticism. Sri Lanka has a significant history of the development of economic policies. During the period of the former president, Mahinda Rajapaksa had been daydreaming about Sri Lanka. Now, his concept of 'Wonder of Asia' has broken down.

In 2019, the former president Mahinda Rajapaksha became the prime minister of Sri Lanka and in the past decade, people were worshiping him because he created his image as one of the greatest kings in Sri Lanka. Most people including erudite society had said, 'he is the reincarnation of king 'Dutugamunu'.

Although after the presidential election in 2019, the current government had been failing all the levels of the governing process. According to the current deprivation of the mass, the running dry of foreign currency reserves is the reason for collapsing their daily life. Considerably, this fact is hit the daily life of people. The government does not have adequate foreign reserves to pay for the import of goods and fuel. Also, two bad situations shocked the economy of Sri Lanka. 'First, in April 2019, there were a series of bomb bombings in churches and luxury hotels in Colombo. The explosions caused a sharp drop in visitor arrivals and depleted the country's foreign exchange reserves. Second, President Gotabhaya Rajapaksha's new government lowered taxes unreasonably. The rate of value-added tax was reduced from 15% to 8%. Other indirect taxes were eliminated, including the nation-building tax, the pay-as-you-earn tax, and economic service charges. Corporate tax rates have been lowered from 28% to 24% (Ramakumar, R., 2022)'.

Furthermore, Sri Lanka's relationship with China has become a crucial factor in the country's debt trap. The United States has coined the term "debt-trap diplomacy" to describe this occurrence. After international financial markets, the Asian Development Bank, and Japan, China is Sri Lanka's fourth-largest lender. China has provided the country with billions of dollars in low-interest loans. The massive crane 'Hambanthota harbor' was erected with Chinese financing in 2010 and, unfortunately, is currently operated on a 99-year lease by China merchant port holdings. The economy of the country was damaged not just by the Hambathota Habor, but also by the Maththala International Airport and the Nelum Kuluna Tower.

In addition to that, since 2019 we have been facing a pandemic situation and the Easter Sunday attack also became a drive of this crisis. These incident has been affecting tourism in the country. Meanwhile, the current government turned to organic farming. That is also a peril to the country. The government implemented the organic policy for agriculture in one night. Besides, the government has increased the price of fertilizers.

On behalf of that situation, Sri Lankan leaders have to restructure the debt and ask for help from the International Monetary Fund. After all these situations, we obtained the 16th loan from the IMF and now we are trying to get the 17th one. The government of Sri Lanka has also requested help from China and India. And also Sri Lanka has taken on loans from countries including Japan and Bangladesh.

Finally, due to all of these degrees, the thousands of protesters on the street blow out their grievances. The most unfortunate situation is that the carnage has started. The ordinary people of Sri Lanka, just need a peaceful and prosperous country. And fulfill the ordinary mass's dreams are the duty of people in power. Today we need urgently the government economic plan prepared by knowledgeable and experienced professionals to restructure the economy, and now need Sri Lankan experts technocrats, professionals, and managers with proven experience who are out of politically appointed

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