

British Tamils Forum United Kingdom

03 February 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sri Lanka's Independence Day 75 years of missed opportunity and the way forward

An Overview of Sri Lanka's 75 Years History

Whilst enveloped in deep socio-economic crises caused by the successive inept and divisive political leadership in power, since the island country gained its independence from the British colonial rule, in February 1948, the preparations are afoot to celebrate the diamond jubilee of the existence of the country, as a free nation.

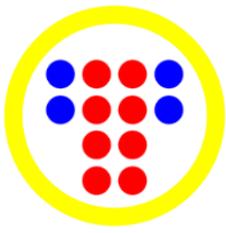
At the time Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon, was granted independence with the dominion status, it was a prosperous country with a comparatively strong economy. The country was regarded as one destined to be a model amongst the nations gaining their freedom from the colonial masters, after the second world war. The trend was to decolonize the nations from the yoke of centuries of colonial rule of the European powers, some benign and some not so benign.

The grant of independence to Sri Lanka was hurried and ill-thought through. The governance of the independent Ceylon as envisaged was nothing but a change from the colonial rule to the neo-colonial rule of the Sinhala nation with a hardened Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism.

The Soulbury constitution which was the framework for the governance of Ceylon was most inappropriate as it failed to recognize the existence of the two distinct nations – the Sinhala nation and Tamil nation. It created a situation where the nations were reduced to the majority and minority communities. The Tamil nation was left at the mercy of the Sinhala nation who were handed over the gift of a perpetual supremacy simply on the basis of numbers. Even basic safeguards to protect the interest of the Tamil nation were not written into the constitution except for a confused clause preventing “the majority community” enjoying privileges which were not extended to the “minority communities”.

The Soulbury constitution which was largely a replica of the unwritten Westminster styled constitution totally distorted the socio-political realities of Ceylon. Soon after the independence the Sinhala Buddhist government of the day took steps to ensure that a well pronounced section of the Tamil nation, who were the backbone of the then economy of Ceylon lost their citizenship. This was aimed to reduce the representation of the Tamil nation in the governance of the newly independent nation.

This was the first step in their long journey to deprive the Tamil nation of their rightful place in the economy education, employment and the political life of the country. The introduction of the constitutions in 1972 and 1978 further marginalized the Tamil nation from the body politic of the Sinhala led unitary state. These took away even the basic safeguards provided by the Soulbury constitution. The current socio



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political crises of the nation is a result of these deeply sectarian approach of the Sinhala Buddhist led governments.

The Tamil nation reacted to this initially by entering into political dialogue. On realizing that the democratic concepts hardly had an impact on the thought process of the Sinhala nation, by then, well intoxicated with the political power gained over the decades, took to arms as the last resort to prevent the decimation of the Tamil nation. The sixth amendment to the 1978 constitution took away even the breathing space for the Tamil nation to express its political will. The main justification for the armed struggle is the sixth amendment. If the parliament ceases to be forum where else the long oppressed Tamil nation can voice its political expression?

The international community is well aware of the brutal reaction of the Sinhala nation to the legitimate expression of the political will of the people of the Tamil nation for us to repeat those here. Suffice is it to say that every armed struggle is not an act of terrorism.

The post war oppression continues unabated. The state aided colonization continues to distort the demography of the traditional Tamil homeland and the heavy presence of the armed forces takes away even the semblance of the life without fear.

The planned lopsided economic development over the decades has left the peoples of the Tamil nation the “poor cousins” of the Sinhala nation.

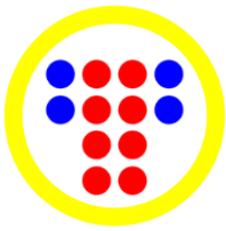
The war reparation, restoration of the civil society, and the accountability from the war crimes are foreign concepts to the Sri Lankan government.

Even the attempt to implement the watered-down Indo Sri Lanka accord in the form of the “13th Amendment” is now being vociferously objected to by the Buddhist clergy. Sadly, this is not a new phenomenon.

In nutshell, the democracy is practiced in Sri Lanka only in the breach and any hope of a internally evolved solution to the political crises in the island of Sri Lanka is fast disappearing, if not its has already disappeared.

The international community must not allow itself to be misled by the Sinhala nation any longer. The history of the island of Sri Lanka is too dire to be ignored by the civilized nations of the world.

The international community must realise that continuing to support Sri Lanka in its current form will not bring prosperity to the country. For the Sinhala nation the current crisis is socio economic but for the Tamil nation, it is an existential crisis.



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Unwarranted Defence Expenditure – A Main cause to Sri Lanka’s Current Crisis

Among the several causes of Sri Lanka’s failure to secure its economic stability, the defence expenditure remains a major factor.

The cycles of violence culminated in anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983 and then the genocidal war of three decades, the effect of which will not be easily erased from Tamil peoples’ memory for several generation to come.

Continued and the concerted military occupation of traditional Tamil homeland in the North & East make the return to normalcy impossible.

While the international community gallops to save Sri Lanka from its current crisis, it must take note of the following and lay stern conditions.

The historical data produced by reputable organizations prove that Sri Lanka’s defence spending has been in the increase. Macro Trends report provides that, Sri Lanka’s Budget Expenditure on Defence since 1960 have been as follows:

Period	Total US\$ Billion	Average/ year US\$ Billion
1960 to 1982	0.52	0.024
1983 to 2009	14.92	0.553
2010 to 2019 (Post war)	17.28	1.728
Total	32.72	

The World bank reports provide that Sri Lanka has spent USD\$ 34.3 billion on its defence up to 2020. This implies that Sri Lanka had spent USD\$ 1.58 billion on defence in 2020 alone. The defence budget covering the **post war period** (US\$ 17.28 Billion) is higher than that of **civil war period** (US\$14.92 Billion).

It is also noteworthy to consider India’s former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon’s statement that Sri Lanka’s internal war which ended in May 2009 had cost the country around US\$ 200 billion. This US\$ 200 billion is enormous and appeared to have gone unaccounted from the Sri Lanka’s records.



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Sri Lanka's Military Sizes have been as follows:

Year	Total
1985	21,600
2009 (End of war)	223,000
2018	317,000

From the foregoing details, it is unequivocally evident that Sri Lanka has been spending significant amount of its budget in increasing the military presence in the island even after the end of the war in 2009.

The military size increase by 94,000; from 223,000 to 317,000; after the war ended in 2009 signifies the increased deployment of military personnel in Tamil homeland of North and East of the island. We consider that the economic crisis of USD\$ 50.7 billion foreign debts could have been mitigated to a large extent if only Sri Lanka had not wasted its resources on defence expenditure.

It should also be noted that Sri Lanka has more military personnel than the United Kingdom. Does Sri Lanka need that numbers of military personnel, while it has no external or internal threats when compared to the UK, which obviously has more security concerns.

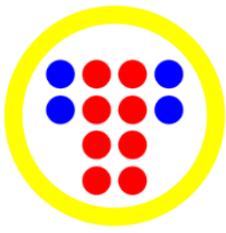
In the interim, we would urge the international community to take preliminary actions to compel Sri Lanka to end the heavy militarization of North and East of the island and also to demobilize the military as a step towards mitigating the surging national expenditure.

Will the international community impose strict conditions before it takes ad-hoc measures to save Sri Lanka?

Resettlement of Tamil People

If the country were to prosper, the Tamil people ought to be allowed to live in their own land with their legitimate political rights acknowledged.

The state aided colonization, depriving equitable socio economic development, the war and the embargos have forced Tamil people to flee to other destinations. An estimate of over 200,000 such Tamil people, who should be living in their own homes in the North and East, are internally displaced.



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Additionally, the civil war has caused over a million of Tamil people to seek shelter in foreign countries and about 100,000 who fled to India, are still living as stateless people.

It is imperative that all these people have the freedom of returning to their own homes to live in peace and dignity.

The Way Forward

Having mentioned the foregoing facts and figures, the British Tamils Forum urges the following as the way forward to not only make Sri Lanka a conflict free region and a prosperous country.

- Demilitarise the North East and demobilise the security forces in the island.
- As the united voice of the elected Tamil representatives in the North East calling for a political solution based on the federal principles and the right to self-determination, we request an international arbitration process led by India, USA and a core group of countries to find a long term political settlement.
- The “culture of impunity” must cease, and the perpetrators of atrocity crimes must be brought to justice under the international criminal prosecution mechanism.
- Apply all available leverages including further sanctions, travel ban, asset freeze, etc. on civilian and military perpetrators.

Contact: S Sangeeth Tel: +44 (0) 7412435697

Email: news@britishtamilsforum.org

Notes to Editors:

British Tamils Forum exists to harness the skills and the knowledge of the members of the forum, well-wishers and significant others including mainstream decision makers in the UK with the aim of alleviating the sufferings of the Tamils community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self-determination within a democratic frame work under pinned by international law, its covenants and conventions. For more information info@britishtamilsforum.org and/or visit: www.britishtamilsforum.org