

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

May 2022



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother

Year 13

Issue 2

The Resurgent India English monthly published and printed by Smt. Suman Sharma on behalf of The Resurgent India Trust Published at C/o J. N. Socketed Cement Pipes Pvt. Ltd., Village Bhamraula Post Bagwara, Kichha Road, Rudrapur (U.S Nagar)
email: sadlecjnn@gmail.com, info@resurgentindia.org, URL : www.resurgentindia.org

Printed at : Priyanka Printing Press, Hotel Krish Building, Janta Inter College Road, Udham Nagar, Rudrapur, Uttarakhand

Editor : Ms. Garima Sharma, B-45, Batra Colony, Village Bharatpur, P.O. Kaushal Ganj, Bilaspur Distt. Rampur (U.P)

THE RESURGENT INDIA

A Monthly National Review

May 2022



SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year 13

Issue 2

CONTENTS

Sri Lankan Economic Crisis: A Saga of Predicted Self-Defeat	5
Perpetual State of Economic Trouble	6
Present Crisis – A Continuation of Past Trends	8
A Self-Defeating Cycle	16
India Steps Up	17
Conclusion.....	19
Bibliography	21
HIGHLIGHTS	23
Developments in Russia-Ukraine War.	23
Gyanvapi Mosque Dispute.....	25
<i>Legal Dispute:.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Results of the Survey Report:.....</i>	<i>30</i>
Disturbance in Punjab	31
Bibliography	33

SRI LANKAN ECONOMIC CRISIS: A SAGA OF PREDICTED SELF-DEFEAT

“This erring race of human beings dreams always of perfecting their environment by the machinery of government and society; but it is only by the perfection of the soul within that the outer environment can be perfected. What thou art within, that outside thee thou shalt enjoy; no machinery can rescue thee from the law of thy being.”

– Sri Aurobindo (CWSA 12, 468)

At present, we have reached a juncture in human advancement where the world has been undergoing multiple hidden and apparent economic crises for some time now. These crises invariably become exposed the moment we receive any external, unaccounted-for shocks, such as wars, pandemics, general instability etc. While we may artificially engineer ways to camouflage and manage the precarity of our economic systems, yet occasionally, their flaws become all too apparent, despite the fact that all economic logics would have usually been followed.

This is what is visible presently in the case of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is presently amid an unprecedented economic crisis. This is the first time that the country has defaulted on its nearly \$50 billion foreign debt since it gained independence in 1948. The economic crisis has led to a political, social and livelihood crisis across the country, marked by severe shortages of food and fuel, the collapse of basic services and supply chains and immense psychological suffering and political

instability.

PERPETUAL STATE OF ECONOMIC TROUBLE

The reasons for the Sri Lankan economic crisis are not unique. No country has a perfect Balance of Payments accounts and most of the countries run high debt-to-GDP ratios. However, Sri Lanka has been afflicted by a combination of economic mismanagement and a series of unforeseen setbacks in the form of changes unleashed by the COVID19 pandemic. The same setbacks have struck many more countries, but Sri Lanka's low state capacity and the non-resilience of the economy to respond to these setbacks enabled the sinking of the country's already precarious ship.

The roots of the country's economic precarity can be traced to the time the country became independent of British rule in 1948. After its Independence, Sri Lanka was amongst the most promising and favourably positioned Asian economies. Its location as a part of the Indian Ocean Region made it a thriving trade centre since times immemorial. From its British colonizers, the country had inherited a stable economy and a prosperous export industry. Its export-driven plantation sector was dominated by cash crops like tea, rubber and coconut, which brought in around 90% of its foreign earnings. It also had advanced socio-economic indicators in terms of education, health and overall human development and a decent per capita income.

The bulk of the earnings from the country's foreign exchange was used for importing food, and taxation of the plantation sector exports helped run the welfare state in Sri Lanka. Rice – which Sri Lanka used to import in part, but in

which it had, over time, gained self-sufficiency – was also used for the government’s subsidy programme. To date, Sri Lanka’s economic fortunes have continued to be tied to the export of primary commodities such as tea and rubber, and garments. It mobilizes foreign exchange reserves through primary commodity exports, tourism and remittances, and uses it to import essential consumption items including food (Ramakumar 2022).

Whenever there was a decline in exports, the country – instead of preferring devaluation or expenditure reduction – used to go in for short-term import curbs. Over time, this ended up protecting particular industries and firms, leading to incapacity and non-competitiveness in the economy.

The government also could not successfully convert export earnings into investment in other sectors of the economy, and much of it went into consumption (Kelegama 2000). *The country’s dependence on a few primary commodities meant that every time exports would come under pressure, the economy would face a renewed foreign exchange and balance of payment crisis.* Thus, after the 1960s, the economy was not able to maintain a robust momentum and increasingly began to face frequent crises.

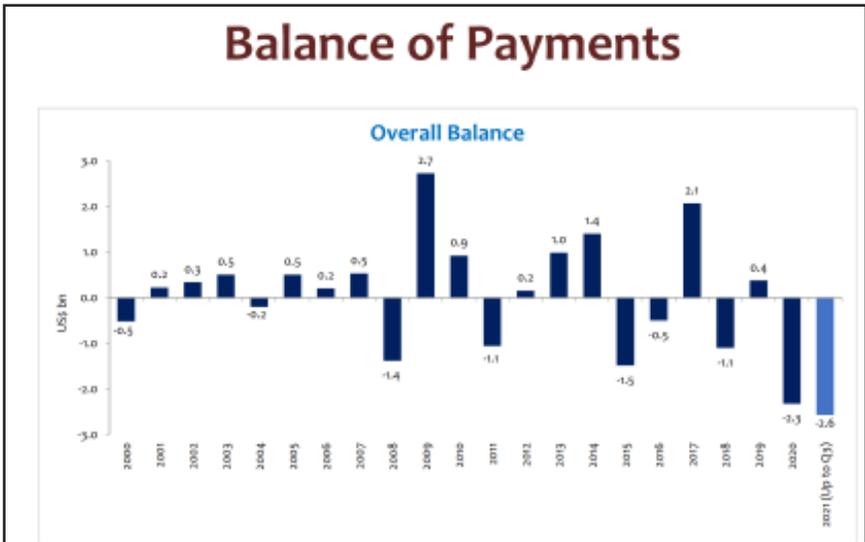
After 1956, the country faced one of its initial major crises of worsening of foreign exchange reserves. Thereafter, throughout this period till the mid-1960s, the government went in for heavy state control of the economy, leading to economic isolation from external markets, nationalization and import substitution-based industrial system. This led to constraints on imports, thereby leading to a crisis in developing a means of earning, as the export industry and import substitution

industries continued to be heavily dependent on imported intermediate goods.

During 1965-70, the government went for partial liberalization of the economy, which eased some pressure on earnings and domestic food consumption demands, and also increased the rate of economic growth from 3.6% (1960-65) to 5.2% (1966-70). However, this did not enhance export earnings much to bring the economy out of the balance of payments crisis. As a result, it again returned to the path of import substitution in agriculture and advanced protectionist measures under the Leftist government, which perceived liberal policies as being wasteful and again curtailed imports. In 1977, the country – after securing a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – went in for liberalization of the economy.

PRESENT CRISIS – A CONTINUATION OF PAST TRENDS

Thus, after 1965, the country has repeatedly faced a balance of payments crises. *Since 1965, the country has obtained 16 loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).* These loans were usually accompanied by the conditions that the country would reduce its budget deficit, maintain a tight monetary policy, cut government subsidies for food, and depreciate the currency to make exports more competitive (Ramakumar 2022). However, during periods of economic downturn, the country had to spend more, especially to sustain domestic consumption, and it kept soaking up more and more external debt from IMF and other sources. *The last IMF loan to Sri Lanka was in 2016, at USD 1.5 billion for three years from 2016 to 2019* (Ramakumar



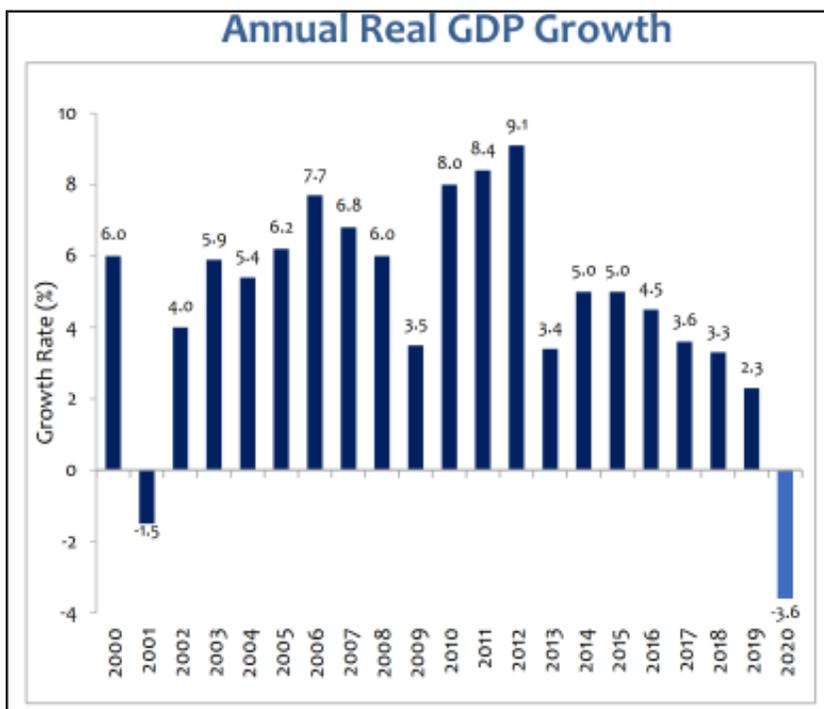
2022).

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka

Since 2005 – and especially after 2009 – the country has followed a policy of developing the war-ravaged economy by investing in domestic production rather than focusing on exports. In 2009, the country had just secured a \$2.6 billion IMF loan. Further, due to pent-up demand in the aftermath of the civil war, the Sri Lankan economy recorded high growth rates averaging 8-9% per annum between 2009 and 2012.

However, the economy began to undergo a downturn after 2013 and the growth rate almost halved, due to a fall in global commodity prices, exports slow-down and a rise in imports. The country approached IMF for another loan of \$1.5 billion in 2016 for a three-year period till 2019.

As former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, W.A. Wijewardena, points out, there was a “decline of exports relative to the growth in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Accordingly, exports which had accounted for 26 per cent of GDP in 2005 fell to 15 per cent by 2010 and further to 13 per cent in 2015. This ratio remained at this level since then and in 2020 it amounted to 12 per cent. Meanwhile, since the domestic economy could not create the demand that could stimulate growth, the real economic growth began to fall from 9 per cent in 2012 to 2.3 per cent in 2019. In 2020, hit by the

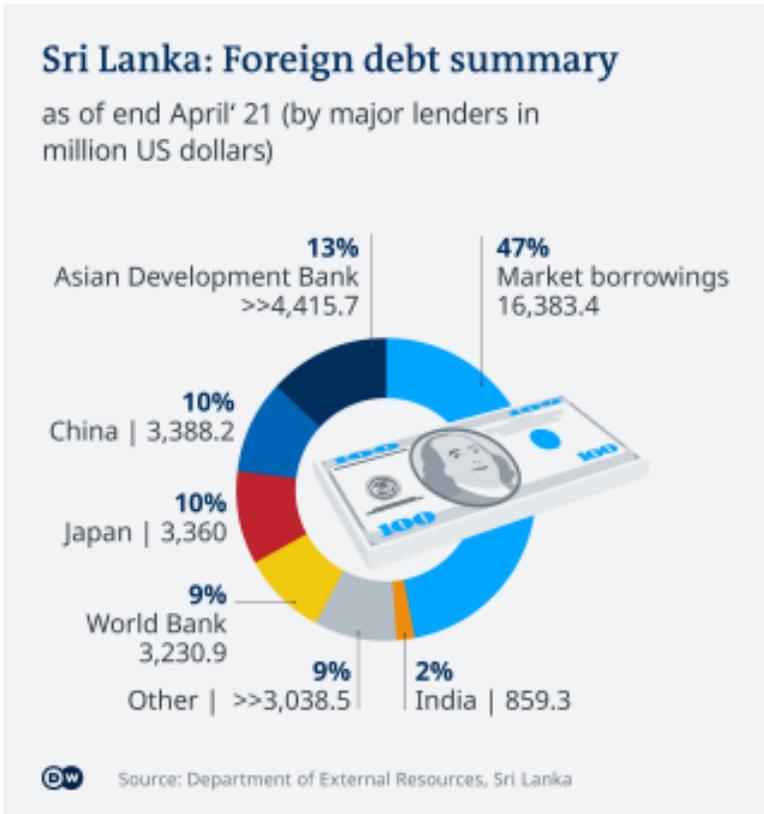


Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka

Covid-19 pandemic, the economy contracted by 3.6 per

cent” (Wijewardena 2022).

Thus, the post-2016 period was a period when the country faced another economic downturn, with a fall in growth, investments, savings and revenues. Many are blaming a part of the crisis on the ‘debt-trap’ owing to China’s projects in the



country. However, loans from China accounted for only about 10% of Sri Lanka’s total foreign debt in 2020. ***Although here it must be mentioned that this ‘10%’ figure covers only loans and no other forms of myriad Chinese investments in Sri Lanka***

which have been substantial and also largely non-performing.

They have been made in exchange for ‘political kickbacks’ and have suffered from a lack of transparency. They have also failed to generate the kind of local employment or revenue expected of them to justify the debt, often compelling the Sri Lankan government to default and thereby surrender strategically located townships and ports to China or lease substantial amounts of land to China, thereby giving the latter powerful control over its territory in exchange for ‘investments’ (Chowdhury 2022).

However, if we only look at loans, then the largest portion of loans owed by Sri Lanka can be attributed to international sovereign bonds and private international market borrowings. Since the 2000s, Sri Lanka has increasingly been borrowing from private international capital markets through the issuance of international sovereign bonds.

These borrowings are marked by high interest rates and a short duration of repayments (Narayanan 2022). This has also seriously contributed to a precarious balance of payments account.

This situation was further exacerbated by a series of unforeseen events – Easter bombings and the COVID19 pandemic – and by deliberate policy decisions gone wrong.

In 2019, the Easter bombings in the country led to a sharp fall in tourism – by almost 70-80% – thereby further adversely impacting the economy (Business Insider 2019). The pandemic caused tourism revenues to fall from \$7.5 billion in 2019 to \$2.8 billion in 2021 (Subramanian 2022). It could have recovered after the government began lifting vaccine-related COVID19

restrictions on foreign travel, but then the Russia-Ukraine war happened, which was another damage to tourism, as nearly 25% of tourists in Sri Lanka are from these two countries and Belarus (Gupta 2022).^{*} Furthermore, the war has had other impacts on Sri Lanka as well, as the country imports 45% of its wheat, more than half of its soybeans, sunflower oil, peas and asbestos from Russia and Ukraine, while these two countries are major importers of Sri Lankan tea (Subramanian 2022).

The new government of the Rajapaksas that came to power after the Easter bombings further exacerbated the economic conditions with a series of policy decisions that did not bode well, especially in the context of the COVID19 pandemic which in itself was another major shock to the economic health of Sri Lanka, costing about 4% of the country GDP (Wijewardena 2022).

These decisions were as follows:

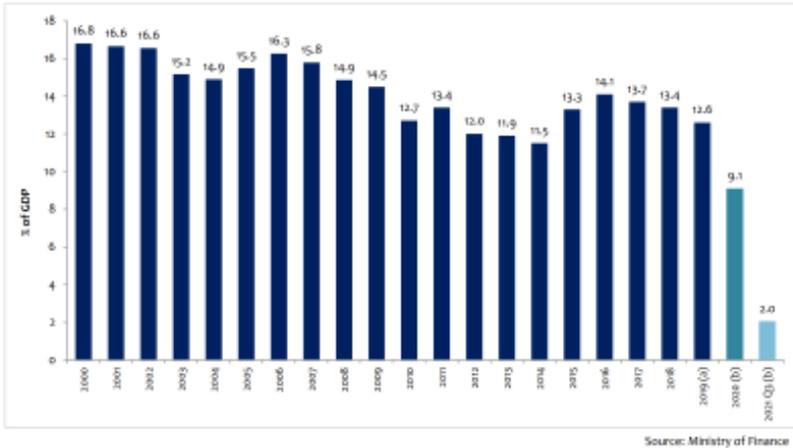
First, one of the major misplaced steps of the government was to reduce taxes, thereby leading to a sharp fall in government revenues. Value-added tax rates were cut from 15% to 8%. Other indirect taxes such as the nation-building tax, the pay-as-you-earn tax and economic service charges were abolished. Corporate tax rates were reduced from 28% to 24%. About 2% of the gross domestic product was lost in revenues because of these tax cuts (Ramakumar 2022). The tax cuts

^{*} However, tourism factor cannot be over-emphasized, as tourism brings about a gross income of \$4 billion annually adding a domestic value amounting to about 20-30%. Hence, its contribution to real GDP stands at about 1.5% (Wijewardena 2022)

reduced the number of registered taxpayers in the country by 35%, leading to credit rating downgrades (Subramanian 2022).

All this was based on the backfired assumption that lower

Government Revenue



tax rates would lead to more economic activity and consumer expenditure. However, the COVID19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns completely disrupted this process. The massive tax cuts resulted in a loss of revenue of about 4% of the GDP annually.

Second, after the COVID19 pandemic and already dwindling forex earnings in the wake of the 2019 bombings, the Rajapaksa government – in order to prevent the further drain of foreign exchange – attempted to control imports. This was done by completely banning imports of chemical fertilizers and announcing a sudden shift towards organic farming, declaring Sri Lanka a 100% organic farming nation. This step dealt a

severe blow to food production in the country. It led to lower agricultural yields and the exports of agricultural products – such as tea and rubber – became unviable due to their lower yields. Tea – a major export commodity – used to contribute 16.5% of the total export income. After the shift to organic farming, this was no longer the case.

The step necessitated further imports in order to meet the impending food shortage, but due to lower export income, there was a shortage of funds to meet the imports, thus worsening the food shortage and leading to food inflation (whose rate has presently touched 30%).

Thus, instead of preventing the outflow of foreign exchange – as the government had intended – banning imports and shifting to organic farming led to the opposite result. As a result, in November 2021, the government had to reverse this policy decision. By that time, the country had lost nearly 50% of its agricultural capacity (Subramanian 2022).

It must be mentioned here that while the shift towards organic farming is, in itself, a commendable and much-needed goal, the manner in which this was implemented and the strained conditions under which this was undertaken, proved to be too costly for the country's already precarious economic situation. Instead of implementing it over a time period, the sudden unplanned shift greatly cost the economy. Lower yields in the agricultural production of tea and other commodities cost the economy USD 425 million (Gupta 2022). The result was so bad that the country – which had become self-reliant in rice production – ended up importing even rice within six months.

Other areas of import ban – to save forex reserves – also cost the country and had the opposite effect. Besides exporting

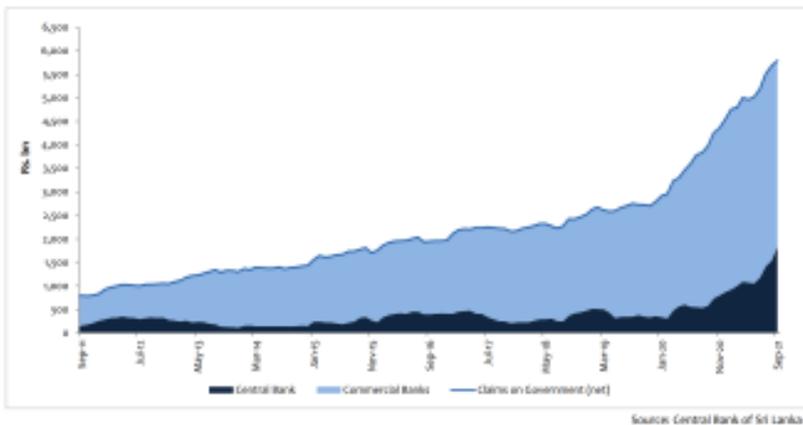
tea, coconut and other products, Sri Lanka has also become a garment manufacturer and exporter in recent decades. Banning imports that affected apparel manufacturing led to an adverse impact on manufacturing industries as well, as the country imports even the most basic items like buttons for garments.

Thus, in various sectors, the inability to import raw materials has cost the country its export industry as well, besides precipitating the food crisis.

A SELF-DEFEATING CYCLE

These policy backfires resulting from the government's

Net Credit to the Government

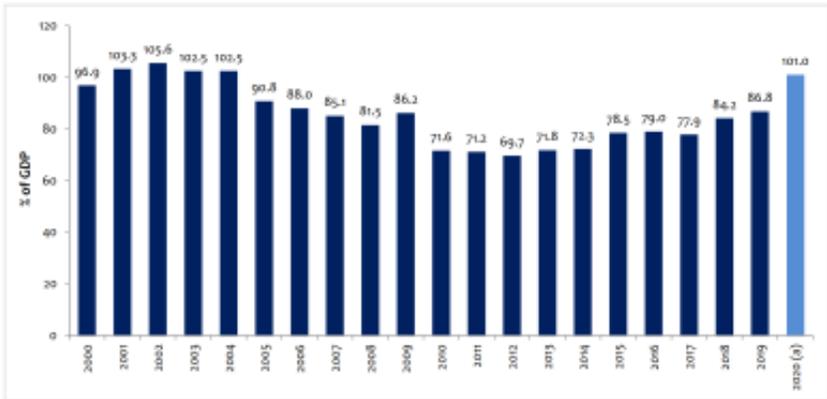


calculations – however well-intentioned – led to a rise in government borrowings from the Central Bank and the commercial banks in unprecedented amounts. Such borrowings shot up dramatically by Rs 4.2 trillion or 173% between December 2019 to December 2021. The result was the increase in the money stock – due to the printing of money – by Rs 3

trillion or 40%.

This caused, both, a fall in foreign exchange reserves and a rapid rise in inflation. Reserves fell from USD 7.6 billion in December 2019 to USD 2.3 billion at end-February 2022. Of this USD 2.3 billion, when illiquid balances and a currency swap facility (in Yuan) from China (amounting to \$1.6 billion) are removed, the usable foreign exchange balances are reduced to only USD 400 million (Wijewardena 2022).

Central Government Debt



Source: Ministry of Finance
Central Bank of Sri Lanka

The government debt is also at an all-time high, reaching 101% of the GDP by 2020. Presently, it is estimated to be 119% of the GDP.

INDIA STEPS UP

Throughout the Sri Lankan economic crisis, India has played an active role in providing help to Sri Lanka. India could not simply let its neighbour collapse into poverty and hunger. India has provided \$2 billion and may lend an additional \$1.5 billion

for imports. It has also sent 65,000 tonnes of fertilizer and 400,000 tonnes of fuel, with fuel shipments continuing throughout May 2022. India has also sent constant medical supplies to Sri Lanka.

The continuous Indian help to the country – along with the resignation of the pro-China Rajapaksa Prime Minister – has helped to gradually create an atmosphere of goodwill for India amongst the people of Sri Lanka. For many decades, due to the civil war and later due to China’s involvement in Lankan affairs, there was a tendency in Lankan political circles to view India suspiciously as a villain. The majority Sinhalese population – including spiritual preceptors like monks – have always resisted any signs of ‘Indian influence’. But the pro-active Indian role in the present crisis has considerably changed this perception.

The crisis has also – due to political backlash against the Rajapaksa regime – helped to dilute the Sinhala-Tamil hostility and unite people, even if briefly, in this hour of common national suffering.

Furthermore, the Indian aid has, in the atmosphere of trust created, helped secure India some of its economic interests in Sri Lanka. Thus, India has secured an agreement which allows the Indian Oil Corporation to share ownership of the British-built Trincomalee oil tank farm. This has been pending for almost the last 35 years, since the Rajiv Gandhi government.

India also aims to develop a 100MW power plant near Trincomalee. This will give India further access to one of the best such facilities in the world. In the past year, India’s Adani group has been given a license to develop and operate a port terminal in Colombo. This will be the first Indian-owned-and-

operated terminal within the Colombo port complex and will be South Asia's largest.

Furthermore, in recent times, under Indian pressure, Sri Lanka cancelled a Chinese company's license to build a micro electricity grid close to India. Another critical recent development was the agreement between India and Sri Lanka to establish a joint Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC), which will strengthen Sri Lanka's disaster management capability, besides deepening the cooperation between the two countries' navies and security apparatuses.

In contrast to Indian help, China has failed to offer fresh loans or any significant aid to Sri Lanka in this hour of economic crisis. With its engagement with China, Japan and even IMF now limited, Sri Lanka is now left with only India as a full-fledged ally (Wijewardene and Fernando 2022).

All these developments leading to securing India's economic foothold and military interests by maintaining good relations with Sri Lanka is vital to India's emerging role as a power in the Indo-Pacific region and is an important part of its profile as a member of the Quad grouping.

CONCLUSION

The Sri Lankan economic crisis has mainly been a product of historical economic disadvantage, natural adverse factors, and misguided governmental policies. The inability and incapacity of the economy to respond adequately to these challenges has resulted in the precipitation of this crisis.

The crisis exposes the defects in the machinery that governs the modern economy. This machinery is based on superficial

technical prescriptions about managing supply and demand or even giving market forces a free hand – both of which often fail to account for the imperfections and selfishness of human nature and the disasters it creates. Economists might dismiss these factors as externalities, but increasingly, under the unfolding conditions of the world, they have begun to play a major role.

In its initial years after Independence, Sri Lanka was hailed by all as a modern, successful economy in line with the liberalization consensus forged by the Western economic institutions. It toed the line of Western liberal thought of free trade and liberal assumptions of comparative advantage. Its subsequent failure to develop its domestic economic capabilities has left the economic system stranded and highly dependent on external factors.

The Sri Lankan case shows that sound economic management cannot be based on textbook prescriptions or cause-and-effect logic. Logic has a limited role in the movement of the Time Spirit. All such logic fails when massive world changes take place – as is happening at present – and the economy is but a small cog in the wheel of such changes. The majority of these changes are happening due to the crumbling effects of the utilitarian system – disguised under liberalism – that has governed the world since the 19th century. This utilitarian spirit has worked like a canker which leaves the outside appearance of a fruit practically unscathed even while eating the core – and its effects are now becoming visible and palpable even to the masses.

These can be seen in the form of rising wars, global pandemics and general all-round precarity. As far as the

economy is concerned – were the precarious foundations of speculative financial consensus to collapse tomorrow, the economies of other big countries might fare little better than Sri Lanka’s.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Business Insider. 2019. *Business Insider*. May 16. Accessed May 20, 2022. <https://www.businessinsider.com/lonely-planets-top-destination-suffers-a-blow-after-blasts-2019-5#>

Chowdhury, Akash. 2022. *Observer Research Foundation*. June 1. Accessed June 2, 2022. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-sri-lanka-economic-crisis-indias-response/>.

Gupta, Ravi Kumar. 2022. *The Pioneer*. April 12. Accessed May 18, 2022. <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2022/columnists/causes-of-sri-lankan-economic-crisis.html>.

Kelegama, Saman. 2000. “Development in Independent Sri Lanka: What Went Wrong?” *Economic and Political Weekly* 1477-90.

Narayanan, K. 2022. *DW*. April 14. Accessed May 20, 2022. <https://www.dw.com/en/sri-lankas-foreign-debt-default-why-the-island-nation-went-under/a-61475596>.

Ramakumar, R. 2022. *The Conversation*. April 13. Accessed May 17, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/whats-happening-in-sri-lanka-and-how-did-the-economic-crisis-start-181060>.

—. 2022. *The Hindu*. March 31. Accessed May 21, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/explaining-sri-lankas-economic-crisis/article65275579.ece>.

Subramanian, Lakshmi. 2022. *The Week*. March 27. Accessed May 10, 2022. <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/cover/2022/03/24/sri-lanka-on-the-brink-of-bankruptcy-after-worst-economic-crisis-in-history.amp.html>.

Wijewardena, W.A. 2022. *Deccan Herald*. March 27. Accessed May 12, 2022. <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/sri-lanka-economic-crisis-the-way-out-wont-be-painless-1095042.html>.

Wijewardene, R., and Y. Fernando. 2022. *Quartz India*. May 16. Accessed June 1, 2022. <https://qz.com/india/2165951/india-helps-crisis-hit-sri-lanka-and-gains-much/>.

HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

The Russia-Ukraine war has now crossed 100 days, without any signs of abatement. As things stand at present, the Russian assault continues steadily, despite heavy losses faced by Russia. The key change from the earlier two months is that Russia has changed its haphazard strategy of attacking Ukraine from all sides to exclusively concentrating on the eastern region of

Russia's invasion of the Donbas



- Russian-backed separatist-held areas
- Russian military control
- ▨ Russian advances
- Held or regained by Ukraine
- Russia annexed Crimea in 2014

Source: BBC research, Institute for Study of War (21:00 GMT, 31 May)



Ukraine viz. the Donbas region. The region was already home to the anti-Ukraine insurgency movement fueled by the majority Russian-speaking people.

This change of strategy has given Russia a temporary advantage in the war. It has made advances in the eastern region. It is one or two cities short of controlling Luhansk. It has also escalated attacks and attempts to control eastern cities like Bakhmut and Sievierodonetsk.

In southern Ukraine, Russia controls key cities like Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk and the port city of Mariupol. In these cities, it has installed local administrators and offered residents Russian passports and documents to consolidate its control. However, it is facing growing local resistance and partisan activities in these cities. As a result of this resistance, Ukraine has also been able to make breakthroughs in facing the Russian forces in the southern region where Russia had initially made some gains.

Thus, despite Russian advances in the east and the south, it is still being withheld and repelled by Ukrainian counter-attacks and has still not been able to control critical Ukrainian cities, thereby maintaining the balance of the war in favour of Ukraine, even as the latter continues to be supplied with heavy and advanced weapons systems from the West.

There is also a significant de-modernization of Russian force structures with legacy weapon systems being reintroduced and vintage armaments being recovered. The Russian Air Force can neither establish control over the airspace nor provide effective ground support, so it is artillery that dominates. Here also Russian advantage is temporary as Ukraine receives accelerated delivery of various Western artillery systems.

Meanwhile, another factor that is weakening Russia is the internal conflict and resistance to war within the country. A series of internal conflicts have been reported in recent weeks. Some of these include:

First, the ethnic conflict and clashes that broke out within the Russian army between Buryats and Chechens. There was a gun battle between Russian troops from the Siberian republic of Buryatia and Chechen fighters loyal to Chechnya's leader, Ramzan Kadyrov in the occupied Ukrainian territory of Kherson Oblast, which drew in over 100 soldiers. The reason for the conflict was the reluctance of the Buryats to go on the offensive and the 'inequality' of their circumstances compared to those of the Chechens.

Second, as a resistance against the war, Russians are waging covert struggles against the Putin regime in Russia. Sections of Russian media are calling this the new underground dimension of resistance against Putin. This is marked by incidents such as fires at military bases, increased train accidents inside Russia, setting aflame of military draft offices, increasing of draft resistance, a rise in cases in which soldiers in uniform are refusing to obey orders to deploy to Ukraine, increase in the frequency of telephone bomb threats, and hackers posting anti-war messages on Kremlin propaganda sites.

GYANVAPI MOSQUE DISPUTE

'Gyanvapi' is a peculiar name for a mosque. The term derives from the Sanskrit word 'jnana' (knowledge) and 'vapi' (well), thereby signifying 'well of knowledge.' It is also an apt symbolism for the Shiva lingam recently discovered in a local court-ordained survey inside the mosque.

The survey was ordered this year by the local court in Varanasi on the basis of a petition filed by five Hindu women in early 2021. The petition asked for access for women to pray at a Hindu shrine behind the western wall of the Gyanvapi Mosque complex in Varanasi. Presently, devotees are allowed to worship Shringar Gauri only on the fourth day of Chaitra Navratra. The women also want permission to pray to other “visible and invisible deities within the old temple complex”.

Legal Dispute:

The dispute goes back to 1936. Prior to that, also during the British times, there were Hindu-Muslim riots over the site in the early 19th century. In 1936, one Deen Mohammad had filed a complaint before a Varanasi Court seeking a determination that the land around the disputed Gyanvapi structure belonged to Waqf. The Varanasi court noted that the mosque was built on the site of a Hindu temple that was demolished by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in the seventeenth century. Following the dismissal, Deen Mohammad approached the Allahabad High Court in 1937.

While the Allahabad High Court had agreed with the civil judge that the mosque itself is Waqf’s property, it also said the area around the mosque where the namazis (the faithful) would “spill over” during prayers on the last Friday of Ramzan could not be claimed as Waqf’s property. The 1942 Allahabad High Court ruling had further noted: “The learned Civil Judge has gone into the history of this mosque and has come to the conclusion that it was built on the site of a Hindu temple which was demolished by Emperor Aurangzeb in the seventeenth century. I do not think that it is necessary to go

into the question of the origin of the mosque. It is sufficient to go back to the year 1809 when there was a serious riot between Hindus and Musalmans in that part of Benares where the mosque is situated.”

This ruling is presently being quoted by, both, Hindu and Muslim sides to support their respective claims. For the Muslim side, the ruling contained an acknowledgement that the mosque is Waqf property, and, for the Hindu side, the valuable portions of the ruling lay in the use of some witness statements in the 1937 ruling regarding the images of various Hindu deities within the complex.

After Independence, the original suit in 1991 was filed by the devotees in the name of the deity ‘Swayambhu Lord Vishweshwar’, stating that the Gyanvapi mosque was built at the site of a 2500-year-old temple – built by King Vikramaditya – that was demolished in 1669 on the orders of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. They, therefore, demanded that they should be allowed to “renovate and reconstruct their temple.” Besides this, several other petitions were also filed in 1991 by local priests asking to worship at Gyanvapi.

In 1996, the first attempted survey of the mosque was carried out. Immediately prior to that, another attempted survey in 1996 was stopped by a mob of 500 people who gathered at the mosque. The eventual 1996 survey found that materials on the walls of parts of the mosque indicated the presence of an ancient temple. However, the surveyors were not able to carry out the probe in the structure’s cellars, as the authorities had not given them the keys to the basement. *Interestingly, the Nandi and Gaurishankar Maheshwar wells are located in front of the gate leading to the basement, signifying the invisible*

presence of Mahadeva.

The mosque's management in 1998 filed a counter-application, demanding the rejection of the suit on the ground that it is barred by provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. As per the Places of Worship Act, 1991, all places of worship shall be maintained as they existed on 15 August 1947, and no legal proceeding can be filed on the conversion of the religious character of any place of worship existing on that date.

According to Section 4 of the Act, all pending cases related to claims over places of worship would come to an end, and no further proceedings could be filed. However, certain sites were exempted from the purview of this section. These include ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains that are covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. It would also not apply to any suit that was settled before the 1991 Act came into force.

According to the language of the Article 4 (3) of the Act, “Nothing contained in sub-section (1) and sub-section (2) shall apply to, —

(a) any place of worship referred to in the said sub-sections which is an ancient and historical monument or an archaeological site or remains covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (24 of 1958) or any other law for the time being in force;

(b) any suit, appeal or other proceedings, with respect to any matter referred to in sub-section (2), finally decided, settled or disposed of by a court, tribunal or other authority before

the commencement of this Act;

(c) any dispute with respect to any such matter settled by the parties amongst themselves before such commencement;

(d) any conversion of any such place effected before such commencement by acquiescence;

(e) any conversion of any such place effected before such commencement which is not liable to be challenged in any court, tribunal or other authority being barred by limitation under any law for the time being in force.”

At present, it is not immediately clear whether the exceptions in this Act are applicable to Gyanvapi and how. However, the Act itself is facing legal challenges for being arbitrary and discriminatory and for not being conducive to seeking remedial justice for historical wrongs. It can also be questioned in the context of the 1937 and 1942 court rulings regarding the construction of a mosque over a demolished temple, depending on if and how the rulings are interpreted and applied.

After 1998, the dispute was raised again after a hiatus of 21 years. Immediately after the Supreme Court judgement in the Ramjanmabhoomi case in 2019, a fresh petition was filed a month later in a local Varanasi court. The petition sought a survey of the Gyanvapi Mosque complex by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI). At that time the Allahabad High Court came down heavily on the local court.

In April 2021, the Varanasi court directed the ASI to survey the Gyanvapi Mosque compound adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple to find out whether it was a “superimposition, alteration or addition or there is structural overlapping of any kind, with or over, any other religious

structure.” This survey could not be carried out due to an interim stay by the Allahabad High Court.

In 2022, at the direction of the Varanasi court, a fresh survey was ordered to ascertain the site where Maa Shringar Gauri was located, with the report to be submitted by early May 10th. This initial survey was interrupted at the behest of the mosque management committee which alleged the bias of a surveyor team member. However, the court rejected the mosque committee’s demand to replace the team member and additionally also gave its consent for videography inside the Gyanvapi mosque premises and asked the final report to be submitted by May 17th.

On the mosque committee’s objection that there was no need for videography inside the mosque since Maa Shringar Gauri site is ‘outside’ the western wall of the mosque as claimed by the petitioner, the court said the report will clarify the exact location of the Shringar Gauri. The court said, “If anyone creates any hindrance, like if there are locks at some places, then the district administration will have the full right to get the locks opened or broken for the commission’s action.” The court was clear that the process of inspection will not be stopped under any condition whether any of the parties cooperate or not.

After the Supreme Court refused to issue a stay on proceedings, the court-mandated survey continued at the Gyanvapi Masjid complex. Three court-appointed advocate commissioners, five lawyers each from the two sides, an assistant and a videography team participated in the survey.

Results of the Survey Report:

Even though the survey report was submitted confidentially to the court, yet it somehow was leaked to the media which claimed to be in possession of several of its key contents including some photographs and videographic evidence. The following were the contents of the leaked report:

◆ Much before the final leaked report, the discovery of a 2.5 feet long black Shiva Lingam was already made beneath the ‘Wazu Khana’ – place where people wash hands and feet – of the mosque. The petitioners argued for sealing that part of the mosque, which the court accepted. The Muslim side objected that the discovered structure was not a Shiva Lingam but a part of the fountain.

◆ The survey uncovered symbols of a trident, lotus engravings, damru, swastik, betel leaves, elephant’s trunk and Hindi carvings in the mosque complex.

◆ A conical structure was found beneath the central dome of the mosque and a stone was found with lotus engravings.

After these discoveries, various Hindu organizations have instructed Hindus to begin worshipping the ‘Shivling’ found from wherever they are. The trajectory of the case will now mainly depend on the legal recourse followed, with the next hearing slated for July this year.

DISTURBANCE IN PUNJAB

Punjab’s situation has rapidly deteriorated since the rule of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) began in the state. There were already popular apprehensions regarding AAP’s links with Khalistani separatists and its dubious sources of foreign funding, with its links to terrorist elements being apparent on several

occasions (Pokharna, 2022). With the party's recent ascendancy to power in Punjab, the situation on the ground is rapidly turning volatile.

The party began its rule in the state with its usual theatrics, demanding that Chandigarh be given exclusively to Punjab. This was followed by demands for hefty funding from the Centre, the launch of populist welfare schemes and the usual theatrical mode of politics which has become the marker of the party – such as high-profile crackdowns on corruption, withdrawal of VIP security covers etc. In other words, everything that could encourage high-profile drama and media attention was undertaken. This was the typical Delhi model. It is also well-known that effectively Delhi's AAP leadership is running Punjab.

However, the party had miscalculated. Punjab is not a small, urbanized city-centre like Delhi. It is a sensitive border state, is large and is marked by economic, social, cultural and political complexity and diversity. AAP's misrule and theatrical mode of politics shows that it has not been able to grapple with the challenges of Punjab.

Radicalization – which was already increasing since before the rise of the Farm Protests of 2020 – has increased even more. Incidents like the Patiala clashes and attack on Kali Devi temple, followed by various other clashes have gone up. Intelligence headquarters of Police in Mohali was attacked using a Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) and a huge cache of drugs and explosives have been recovered from the state. Pakistan's ISI and a Khalistan group have been responsible for it.

In recent times, the murder of singer Sidhu Moosewala by

assassins sitting in Canada happened despite intelligence inputs received by the Punjab police. This murder has further been followed up by various other instances of large, daylight murders in college campuses and other public places due to inter-gang wars which have suddenly broken out. Openly pro-Khalistan signalling in public places, such as the Golden Temple, has gone up.

The entire Opposition in the state and the major Sikh groups have united to condemn the AAP's misgovernance and inability to manage law and order in the state. Even the farmers of the state have turned against the AAP and had briefly staged a protest against the Punjab government (Deccan Herald, 2022). In response, the AAP government has clearly backtracked and is now in touch with the Centre regarding the sensitive situation in the state. If the situation in the state continues to free fall, the likelihood of breakdown of law and order machinery cannot be ruled out.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CWSA 25. (1997). *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

Deccan Herald. (2022, May 18). *Deccan Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/why-are-punjab-farmers-protesting-against-aap-govt-1110319.html>

Mirovalev, M. (2022, April 18). *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/18/why-white-collar-russians-flee-two>

Pokharna, Y. (2022, May 12). *News18*. Retrieved from

News18: <https://www.news18.com/news/opinion/opinion-arvind-kejriwals-flirtation-with-the-idea-of-khalistan-risks-punjab-security-5158921.html>

Staten, A. (2022, May 6). *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-spending-estimated-900-million-day-ukraine-war-1704383>

Necessity of an Inner Change

“The evolution of mind working upon life has developed an organisation of the activity of mind and use of Matter which can no longer be supported by human capacity without an inner change.” (CWSA 22: 1092)

An inner change can be brought about only by the development of that “... which society has most neglected, the spiritual element, the soul in man which is his true being. Even to have a healthy body, a strong vitality and an active and clarified mind and a field for their action and enjoyment, carries man no more than a certain distance; afterwards he flags and tires for want of a real self-finding, a satisfying aim for his action and progress. These three things do not make the sum of a complete manhood; they are means to an ulterior end and cannot be made for ever an aim in themselves. Add a rich emotional life governed by a wellordered ethical standard, and still there is the savour of something left out, some supreme good which these things mean, but do not in themselves arrive at, do not discover till they go beyond themselves. Add a religious system and a widespread spirit of belief and piety, and still you have not found the means of social salvation. All these things human society has developed, but none of them has saved it from disillusionment, weariness and decay. The ancient intellectual cultures of Europe ended in disruptive doubt and sceptical impotence, the pieties of Asia in stagnation and decline.” (CWSA 25: 224)