

EDITORIAL AND OPINION

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Aiding Repression

Sanctions compel people to change their government's conduct.

Sanctions are a diplomatic tool for the international community to peaceably compel recalcitrant governments into conforming with accepted international norms. This is the basis on which a variety of sanctions have in the past been successfully applied to regimes in Libya, Zimbabwe and Apartheid South Africa amongst many others. The logic of sanctions is simple: economic isolation of a state compels its discomfited people to pressure their leadership to change its behaviour and adhere to sought after international principles.

Thus, it is especially on ultra-nationalist leaderships that rely on popular support, like President Mahinda Rajapakse's government in Sri Lanka or former President Slobodan Milosevic's in Serbia, that sanctions can be most effective. Moreover, irrespective of questions of efficacy, as exemplified by the cases of Serbia and Saddam's Iraq, sanctions are the only means, short of the use of armed force, to compel states to adhere to internationally accepted codes of conduct.

Amid Sri Lanka's unabashed defiance of international human rights and governance norms, the European Union, press reports this month suggest, is considering withdrawing the GSP+ subsidy for firms that import from there. This, according to Sri Lanka's supporters, should not happen as it will "hurt" 250,000 'Sri Lankans'. But that, surely, is the logic of sanctions. It is only when the majority Sinhalese who support President Rajapakse's ultra-nationalist regime are compelled by economic hardship into bringing internal pressure to bear on it that international demands over human rights and political reconciliation, for example, will even draw lip service from it.

There are two related factors inherent to economics in Sri Lanka. Firstly, the vast majority of people involved in the export-manufacture sector make up the Sinhala vote bank on which President Rajapakse's political fortunes, short of him imposing a militarized dictatorship, depend. Secondly, manufacturing is non-existent in the Tamil-speaking Northeast, which has been ravaged repeatedly by the thirty years of war. In other words, under these conditions, further foreign investment or subsidies in the southern (Sinhala-dominated) economy will not only further secure the Rajapakse regime and entrench the rampant chauvinism that has swept the country in the past three

years it will fuel the ethnic polarization.

Since 1977, foreign subsidies and investment have benefit the Sinhala only while structurally excluding the Tamils. This is as true of the major infrastructure projects supported by donors, as the majority of their 'poverty-alleviation' efforts. As forthcoming research from the University of London reveals, this is no outlandish claim, but self-evident from where - and how - donors have undertaken their efforts for thirty years.

That most wealth is concentrated in Sri Lanka's Western province does not mean the rest of the Sinhala south and Tamil-speaking Northeast have been equally 'excluded'. On the one hand, there is the militarized repression under which Tamils have lived since liberalization began in 1977, the devastating firepower unleashed against Tamil towns and villages during the war and the proclivity of donors to simply ignore the Northeast whilst waiting for the government to win the war. On the other hand, there is the Sinhala dominance of the state, the flow of massive infrastructure development in Sinhala areas (for example Hambantota port), the political patron-client networks and the military remittances that have ensured the Sinhalese has been far better protected against economic hardship than the Tamils for the past few decades.

This year, Sri Lanka has massacred tens of thousands of Tamils; 20,000 in the last weeks of the war against the Liberation Tigers. It continues, despite near daily international protest, to incarcerate hundreds of thousands of people, precisely because they are Tamils, while blocking international humanitarian and media access. For years, President Rajapakse's regime has murdered, 'disappeared', and tortured with complete impunity. Indeed, it has thumbed its nose at the international community, daring it to do its worst.

Conversely, international inaction has allowed the regime to project itself internally as successfully standing up to the international community. Popular support, thus bolstered, has in turn fuelled chauvinism and repression. The international community can thus support the Sinhala state and hope for lasting peace or it can act to constrain Sinhala chauvinism and bring about one. Meanwhile, as more than one international observer has realized, Sri Lanka is in inexorable transition - between one war and another.

Appeals for accountability over missing, detainees

THE Civil Monitoring Mission in an appeal made after convening a conference on the "Disappeared and the Detained" appealed to the Sri Lanka Government to account of all detainees in prison.

Full text of the press statement follows:

We have gathered here today to collectively mourn and express our grief at the disappearance and detentions of our loved ones. We consider that no one, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, social status deserves to be "disappeared" and held in prisons and detentions centers for longer periods without proper judicial process.

Today the war has come to an end. The government had made the relevant announcement. We thought after the dark past a positive beginning would dawn upon us. We thought our dear ones who had gone missing will come home. We thought our dear ones who are held in prisons and detention centers would be given a decent consideration.

But nothing had changed. The end of war has not brought any end to our agonies and miseries. We feel more vulnerable today than in the past. National reconciliation and national unity have been reduced to mere rhetoric statements. Instead of bringing change towards constructive hope, the ending of war has brought new miseries to our people. We are today witnessing over two hundred and fifty thousand of our people languishing in military guarded camps. Their freedoms of movements are curbed with barbed wire fences where even the elected parliamentarians of this country are forbidden. We today express our solidarity with them and share their continued grief.

We are angry that the government has chosen to ignore the issues of Disappearances and Detentions of our loved ones as something that is not worthy of local and international attention. We are angry at the adamant refusal of the government to adequately investigate the complaints of disappearances with the constructive support of the United Nations. We are angry to note the discriminative principles practiced by the government to grant amnesty to selected few segments of the society. We are angry to note the politically motivated standards practiced by the government to grant judicial bail through the attorney general's

department to selected few while our dear ones suffer in prisons and detentions centers for longer periods, some are even up to 16 years. We are angry that detainees are not subjected to judicial procedures within reasonable time frames due to the inactions of the police and attorney general's departments and also that they are not considered for the inclusion in rehabilitation programs. We are angry to note the irresponsibility and complete lack of transparency and accountability on the side of the government. We angrily refer all these as the state terrorism of the government of Sri Lanka.

As family members of the victims of Enforced Disappearances and Detainees

○ We want to find our loved ones

○ We want to know what happened to them

We call on the government to:

○ Provide account for all extra judicial killings and abductions since January 2006

○ Provide complete details of all detainees kept in all Prisons and state sponsored Detentions centers

○ Dismantle all illegal Para military detention centers and allow all those detained to go home

○ Grant amnesty or Judicial bail to Prisoners and Detainees linked to political violence

○ Incorporate convicted prisoners linked to political violence in the rehabilitation programs

○ Provide democratic space with legal assurance to human rights organizations to monitor and evaluate the violations and represent the victims

On behalf of the family members of the victims who are present here and also of those who have not present here due to logistical reasons, We as Convener and Chairman of the Civil Monitoring Commission (CMC) of Sri Lanka bring this Appeal to the notices of the President His Excellency Mahinda Rajapakse's government, Sri Lanka Parliament's Leader of Opposition Hon. Ranil Wickramasinghe, all the Political Leaders and all sections of International Community including United Nations.

Mano Ganesan MP - Convener - Civil Monitoring Commission - Sri Lanka
 Siritunga Jayasooriya - Chairman - Civil Monitoring Commission - Sri Lanka