SRI LANKA: Turning to China, Iran for Funds

By Feizal Samath
(INTER PRESS SERVICE)

Sri Lanka's government, under pressure over human rights violations, is abandoning support from traditional but rights-sensitive partners like the United States and Europe and turning to countries like China and Iran to finance its infrastructure projects.

Relations between the country's traditional partners and the government turned frosty in recent months as the U.S., the EU and international human rights groups raise concern over growing rights violations, including the harassment of journalists.

Recently World Bank officials were told by a senior functionary of the treasury: "We don't need your money (with all those strings)."

Foreign affairs analysts and economists say President Mahinda Rajapakse nationalist government is relying on 'outside' support because foreign aid in the form of grants and concessional loans comes with strings attached -- which the government does not want to accept.

Last year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) pulled out of Sri Lanka and has no programmes in this country while the Bank recently completed a series of consultations with civil society groups, including farmers and journalists, seeking input for a new three-year country strategy. The real reason however, according to a civil society activist, was to "use us to put pressure on the government because the authorities don't listen to the World Bank any more''.

Analysts like Nanda Godage, a retired diplomat and commentator, says there appears to be a 'clumsy' policy in relation to foreign affairs. "Normally the foreign ministry should have a (well researched) paper assessing relationships and the economic and political fallout (of sidelining countries like the U.S., the EU). This is missing… we need to diplomatically tackle institutions like the Bank and the IMF instead of being blunt with them."

Godage said Sri Lanka is better off not antagonising the Bank and the IMF which are controlled by them (the U.S. and the EU)," he said. ''We are making enemies out of friends."

Sri Lanka's foreign minister Rohitha Bogollagama and his foreign secretary Palitha Kohona are known to be at loggerheads over various issues, while Rajapakse has also independently taken decisions on foreign policy.

Another sore point in foreign policy will come to the fore this week when Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visits Sri Lanka on Apr. 28 on the first stop of his first ever Asia tour. When Rajapakse visited Iran last year, Washington voiced concerns.

'The Sunday Leader' newspaper said this week that Israel is unlikely to respond to a Sri Lankan request for arms sales because of this country's increasing ties with Iran. The paper said these concerns were communicated to Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake during a recent visit there.

Financial support from the U.S., the EU and the multilaterals has dwindled since Rajapakse won the presidential poll two years ago and ended a shaky ceasefire with Tamil rebels and ordered the troops to wipe out the rebels from their northern and eastern lairs. Security forces have been successful in the east where the rebels have retreated into the jungle and residents are facing a provincial poll next month.

But fierce fighting is on in the north amidst widespread allegations against the government of human rights abuses through abductions and harassment of the private media. The government denies all charges but is unable to dispute mounting evidence -- particularly on abductions.

Analysts say with western aid tied to governance, transparency and spending discipline, conditions the government has rejected, Rajapakse has been compelled to woo 'friendly' countries to help the many infrastructure projects like super highways, railways, ports and airports. China and Iran have come to the country's aid rescue with loans, albeit at commercial rates of interest.

China is funding a coal power plant and a harbour with more than 700 million US dollars, while negotiations are underway for another 450-million-dollar loan for two highways.

Iran, on the other hand, is granting 450 million dollars for a hydropower project and investing one billion dollars in an oil refinery. It recently provided a seven-month credit facility so that Sri Lanka's entire crude oil requirement could be sourced from there.

All this is in addition to other support these two countries have been providing to Sri Lanka. Rajapakse has visited China twice in the past two years, the latest being two weeks ago. He is yet to pay official visits to the U.S. or to any of its European allies.

Jehan Perera, director of the National Peace Council and a newspaper commentator on the peace process, says that countries like Sri Lanka need to maintain good relations with larger and more influential countries. "Shutting out one section of the international community is not helpful especially when that section has had long standing relations with us," he said.

Most analysts agree that the current government's foreign policy may, in the short term, find solutions to immediate needs but is disastrous in the long term. Sirimal Abeyeratne, an economist at the University of Colombo, says spending discipline (conditions on loans) is necessary for countries like Sri Lanka where spending is wayward and used for projects other than the intended purpose.

Ravi Karunanayake, a former trade minister and now frontline opposition politician, believes the country is falling ever deeper into debt as the government resorts to costly commercial borrowings as against soft loans and grant aid. "We'll be paying through our noses for generations to settle this debt," he said.

Targeted Killing of Rev. M.X.Karunaratnam is a War Crime

ITF

The International Federation of Tamils, along with other Tamil diaspora organizations, condemns the targeted killing of Rev. Father M X Karunaratnam, by the Sri Lanka Armed Forces on 20 April 2008. The assassination was carried out by the Deep Penetration Unit (DPU) of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces (SLAF) inside the Vanni region.

This is the second high profile Tamil civilian assassination by Sri Lanka Armed Forces after Sri Lanka unilaterally abrogated the Norwegian sponsored ceasefire on 8 January this year. On 6 March 2008, the Tamil parliamentarian, Mr.K.Sivanesan, was assassinated by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces.

Rev. Father M X Karunaratnam was the chairman of the NorthEast Secretariat on Human Rights (NESoHR), and a prominent social and human rights activist. In the years of the economic embargo and the genocidal war against the Tamil people in the 1990s and subsequent years, Rev. Father Karunaratnam lived and worked amongst the affected population. He led the consortium of NGOs engaged in humanitarian work in the Vanni region.

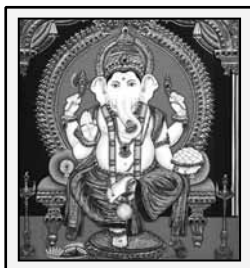
The NorthEast Secretariat of Human Rights (NESoHR) which Rev. Father Karunaratnam led is one of the landmark initiatives of the period of the Norwegian-backed peace process. NESoHR was constituted on 9 July 2004 and functioned as an independent human rights institution. Under the able leadership of Rev. Father Karunaratnam, NESoHR released a number of well researched reports on the human rights situation in the NorthEast of the island. Rev. Father Karunaratnam visited many Western governments and impressed upon them the urgent need to address the humanitarian crisis in the NorthEast caused by Sri Lanka's genocidal war on the Tamil people.

The targeted killing of Rev. Father Karunaratnam by Sri Lanka is a war crime. It is the latest in a series of targeted assassinations by Sri Lanka which include the killing of Tamil Parliamentarians such as Joseph Pararajasingham, Chandra Nehru, Raviraj, and K.Sivanesan. The assassinations reveal system, method and planning. And the absolute impunity afforded to the perpetrators proves the culpability of those in the highest echelons of power in the Sri Lankan state for the crimes committed by those under their command.

Here, we observe that the international community was quick to label the LTTE as a terrorist organisation although the LTTE is engaged in what many regard as a lawful and just armed struggle to free the people of Tamil Eelam from decades of oppressive alien Sri Lankan rule. But, we observe that the same international community has refrained from intervening to prevent the systematic slaughter of Tamil political, social, religious leaders, by the Sri Lanka Armed Forces although the international community had the power to do so by imposing punitive sanctions on the Sri Lankan state.

It should not surprise the international community if the Tamil people regard its attitude as one that amounts to incitement to crime or, at best, criminal negligence, and must be judged as severely as the crimes actively committed by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and its Commander in Chief. Neither should it surprise the international community if the Tamil people are compelled to conclude that Tamil lives are being sacrificed in the altar of the strategic interests of the international community in the Indian Ocean region.

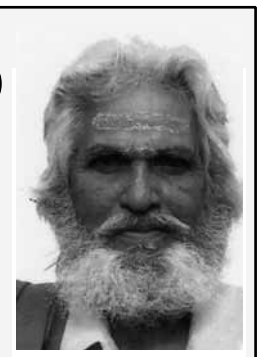
The International Federation of Tamils and the Tamil diaspora salute Rev.Fr.Karunaratnam and honour the selfless services that he rendered to the people of Tamil Eelam in the face of many obstacles and hardships. We share the pain of his loss and together with NESoHR and the people of Tamil Eelam we re-dedicate ourselves to the cause for which he gave his life



ஸ்ரீ கணபதி ஜோதிட நிலையம்

இந்தியாவில் இருந்து வருகை தந்துள்ள பிரபல ஜோதிட நட்சத்திரம் **அர்ஜூனா ராஜூ குருஜி ஜெங்கம்மா**

கைரேகை, சாமுத்திரிகா இலக்கணம், சாதகம், பிறப்பியல், நாம நட்சத்திரம் ஆகியவற்றைக் கொண்டு உங்களின் கடந்தகாலம், நிகழ்காலம், எதிர்காலம் ஆகியவற்றை மிகவும் துல்லியமாகக் கணித்து வழங்குவார். இவரை ஒரு முறை சந்தித்துப் பாருங்கள். பெயர் வசிகம், தொழில் வசிகம், கையெழுத்து வசிகம், காதல் வசிகம், கணவன் மனைவி பிரச்சனை தீர, திருமணப் பிரச்சினை தீர, தொழில் முடக்கம், வியாபார வசிகம், உத்தியோகத்து தடை நீங்க, குழந்தை பாக்கியம் இல்லாமை, தாம்பத்தியக் கோளாறு, அனைத்து விதமான தோசங்களுக்கும் பரிகாரம் வழங்கப்படும். ஆயுர் வேத மருந்துகள் சகல விதமான வியாதிகளுக்கும் நாடி பார்த்து மருந்து தரப்படும்.



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