

Contemporary Indo-Lanka Relations

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Indo-Sri Lanka relations stand out as a unique example of the manner in which two neighbouring countries have succeeded, over the years, in resolving disputes and problems, some of which appeared at times to be intractable, by recourse to discussion, negotiated settlement and diplomacy, carried out in a mutually operative friendly spirit of give and take. The relationship is unique, from India's point of view, in the context of her protracted problem of adjustment with Pakistan, her uneasy relationship with China, and the ambivalence of India's other small neighbour, Nepal, towards her. India's recent incorporation of Sikkim into the Indian Union leaves Bhutan as the only protectorate of India on her borders, and it would seem that the demands of Indian security may determine that Bhutan's relationship with India may become even closer than is presently the case.¹ Happily for Sri Lanka, no Indian irredentist aspirations have marred the relationship with Sri Lanka so far in recent years. The concept popularised by K. M. Panikkar² during the approach of independence, and in the years immediately following, of the Indian Ocean as *Mare Nostrum*, justifying an extended security sphere in the Indian Ocean area and of other Indian spokesmen advocating a more integrated relationship between the two countries at a political level, is no longer viable.³ At least one Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Sir John Kotelawela, publicly expressed fears in 1954 that Panikkar was preaching an Indian version of the Monroe Doctrine with

1. The King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wanchuk, has paid two visits to India since the assumption of office by the Janatha Party government in March 1977. India has in principle accepted Bhutanese sovereignty, but the 1949 Treaty of Friendship between the two countries gives India responsibility to advise Bhutan in preserving its territorial integrity and conducting its foreign relations. Though India's advice in regard to the conduct of foreign relations does not impose a mandatory obligation on Bhutan, in practice Bhutan has, in the past, abided by such advice on all occasions. Speaking at a banquet in honour of the King in New Delhi in March 1978, the Indian President Sanjiva Reddy declared that "there was ample scope for further consolidation of Indo-Bhutanese relations". See *The Hindu*, 27 March 1978.
2. K. M. Panikkar, (1945) *India and the Indian Ocean*, London, pp. 7, 84.
3. See e.g. K. B. Vaidya, (1949) *The Naval Defence of India*, Bombay, pp. 101-02. This question is discussed in some detail in S. U. Kodikara, (1965) *Indo-Ceylon Relations Since Independence*, Colombo, pp. 21-42.

the blessings of Pandit Nehru himself;⁴ but these fears proved to be unfounded. Indo-Lanka relations are now firmly based on the mutual acceptance by both countries of the tenets of non-alignment.

It remains true, however that the factors of geopolitics and the tradition of history continue to impart important influences on the bilateral relationship. From a geopolitical point of view, two influences stand out as important; the locational factor and the disparity in size and population. Sri Lanka's location at the southern tip of the Indian peninsula, separated from India by a narrow stretch of water, the Palk Strait, which is hardly 20 miles wide in certain places, has continued to exert a determining influence on the course of Sri Lanka's history. Also important from the locational point of view, is the existence of a strategic harbour at Trincomalee, facing the Bay of Bengal on the island's east coast. In and after the 16th century, western imperialisms had made sea-power the basis of their expansion in Asia and Africa. A concept of the strategic unity of India and Sri Lanka had emerged during this period and, especially under the British, possession of Sri Lanka came to be regarded as a prerequisite to the defence and security of India.⁵ The British therefore made Trincomalee an important bastion of their defence network in the East. Trincomalee no longer plays a role as a naval base. But its strategic location still makes it an object of great international concern, especially to India. One instance of this concern was the Maritime Agreement entered into by China and Sri Lanka in July 1963, giving most favoured nation status to the contracting parties in respect of commercial vessels engaged in cargo and passenger services to and from the two countries or from a third country. The agreement, which required six months notice of termination, did not clearly specify that the vessels covered by it were mercantile vessels only. This might be interpreted either as an inadvertent, or deliberate, oversight. In either case, it is difficult to see how it could make a significant difference, for warships are not accorded, in normal international practice, the privilege implied by the term most favoured nation status; nor is it customary for warships to be engaged in cargo and passenger services between countries. However that may be, qualms were entertained and misgivings expressed in Indian quarters on the subject of this agreement and later, after the Indo-

4. See House of Representatives Debates, 7.9.1954, Vol. 20, coll. 51-52.

5. Referring to the strategic value of Ceylon in relation to India, the Younger Pitt told Parliament in 1802 that its acquisition was "to us the most valuable colonial possession on the globe giving to our Indian empire a security which it had not enjoyed from its first establishment". Quoted in Colvin R. de Silva, (1941) *Ceylon Under the British Occupation, 1795-1833*, Colombo, 3rd ed., 1: 20

Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1971 had materialised, Soviet commentators even alleged that the Chinese were attempting to build a Chinese bridge-head in Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean⁶.

It is not an unnatural concomitant of India's own perception of her regional security interests that she should evince interest and concern over Sri Lanka's international relations. But the theory of increasing Chinese influence over Sri Lanka, which found currency in certain Indian quarters, was patently a misreading of the true import of the Sino-Lanka relationship, which is based on one side by the continuity and generosity of Chinese trade terms and assistance, and on the other by a genuine appreciation of the island's independent foreign policy. When the Sino-Indian war broke out in October 1962, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike resisted pressure from elements within the government party as well as from the Opposition, to brand China the aggressor and, in an effort to prevent the continuation of hostilities between two countries with both of whom Sri Lanka had close economic and political ties, took the initiative in summoning the Colombo conference of six non-aligned nations with a view to exploring ways and means of bringing India and China to the conference table and settling the boundary dispute. This attitude was characterised by one Indian commentator as "a suspension of Ceylon's moral judgement on Chinese aggression"⁷ despite the fact that the proposals which emanated from the conference, together with their clarifications had been personally explained by Mrs. Bandaranaike and other non-aligned representatives both in Peking and New Delhi in January 1963, and despite the fact that these proposals had been accepted *in toto* by the Indian government.⁸

The same Indian sensitivity is discernible as regards Sri Lanka's friendly ties with Pakistan. India has fought three wars with Pakistan since the Partition and countries friendly to Pakistan are apt to be regarded with some suspicion by India. There is no evidence to assert that Sri Lanka-Pakistani ties are governed by the Kautilyan dictum that the state which is adjacent to your immediate neighbour is your natural ally. Sri Lanka's relationship with Pakistan appears to be determined by no other maxim than that which is central to the non-aligned policy; namely, that of maintaining friendly relations with *all* countries. However, the feeling seems to persist in Indian circles that Sri Lanka must support India *vis a vis*

6. See *The Sun*, 28 August 1973, which reports on the comments of E. Astapenko in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*.

7. Urmila Phandis, (1963) "Ceylon and the Sino-Indian Border Conflict", in *Asian Survey*, 3:195.

8. S. U. Kodikara, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-58.

Pakistan in international forums and when, on occasion, this does not happen, feelings become strained on the Indian side. The East Bengal crisis of 1971, and the emergence of Bangla Desh proved to be one of the testing times of Indo-Lanka relations. Sri Lanka could certainly not look askance at the breakup of a country neighbouring India under the aegis of India's armed forces, and had always regarded the integrity of Pakistan and the preservation of the existing balance of power in South Asia as a cardinal element of her foreign policy. In such a context, the granting of air transit facilities through Colombo from West to East Pakistan after overflights through India had been stopped caused considerable misgivings in Indian and even East Bengali circles, where it was believed that Pakistani troops disguised as civilians were being transported through Colombo on Pakistan International Airlines Flights to Dacca. This could be construed as being an anti-Indian act, although the Sri Lanka government made it quite clear that it had allowed these transit facilities strictly on the understanding that Pakistan would not transport troops and equipment through Colombo. In the event, the war proved to be of short duration, and there is nothing to indicate that the Indian government officially protested against Sri Lanka's policy in this regard.

The second geopolitical factor which has a bearing on Indo-Lanka relations is the enormous disparity in the size and population of the two countries. India has an area of 1,261,597 sq. miles, which is 50 times larger than Sri Lanka's area of 25,332 sq. miles, and India's presently estimated population of 600 million is 43 times larger than Sri Lanka's population of 14 million. Implicit in this disparity in size and population is a fear psychosis on the part of Sri Lanka's decision-makers, a tendency to question the *bona fides* and intentions of India towards her and on India's own part a tendency to regard Sri Lanka as a legitimate object of India's interest and concern as a country lying within its security sphere and concomitantly, a tendency also to assume that Sri Lanka's policies must be prescribed by the demands of Indian national interests. Earlier Prime Ministers of Sri Lanka placed much emphasis on the connection with the Commonwealth of Nations precisely because it was considered as an instrument which equalised the relationship between Sri Lanka and India, a counterpoise which balanced the disparities between them. This conception of the Commonwealth was discarded by Sri Lanka after 1956, and for the most part since then, personal diplomacy based largely on friendship and personal relations between the Nehrus and Bandaranaiques kept the bi-lateral relationship on an even keel, and both families found common ground in their support of non-alignment as policy and movement.

Indian Ocean Peace Zone Proposal

In such a political context, Indira Gandhi and Sirimavo Bandaranaike were in complete agreement on the Indian Ocean Peace Zone proposal, originally a product of Mrs. Bandaranaike's own initiative, and to which special attention was given from the time of the Lusaka Summit of non-aligned nations in September 1970. The two Prime Ministers were associated with the three non-aligned summit conferences held during the period 1970-77, at Lusaka in 1970, at Algiers in 1973, and at Colombo in August 1976. Mrs. Gandhi's third visit to Sri Lanka as Prime Minister of India was on the latter occasion, as Head of the Indian delegation to the conference, and the conference Chairman was Mrs. Bandaranaike herself. Apart from common participation at these conferences, and a shared community of outlook as regards the principles of non-alignment which was implied in such participation, India and Sri Lanka were much concerned to preserve the Indian Ocean as an area of peace in the context of the escalation of Great Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean from the late sixties onwards. Both countries had an important status as littoral states in the Indian Ocean area, and saw the increasing naval activity of outside Powers as a threat to the peace and integrity of littoral and hinterland states in the area. As the Political Declaration of the Colombo Summit put it:

The Conference condemned the establishment, maintenance and expansion of foreign and imperialist military bases and installations, such as Diego Garcia, by the great Powers in the pursuit of their strategic interests as well as the continuing escalation of great Power military rivalry and tension in the Indian Ocean as they constitute a direct threat to the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and political development of States of the region⁹.

The Indian Prime Minister's unreserved endorsement of Sri Lanka's original proposal, and its subsequent adoption as an UN General Assembly resolution, has widened the narrow context in which Indo-Lanka relations were customarily conducted in the past. Sri Lanka's current role as Chairman of the non-aligned group of nations, too, has given an added dimension to the bilateral relationship, redressing at least on the diplomatic front, the continuing disparities between them in size and power.

Issues of Domestic Politics

Issues of domestic politics also impinge on the bi-lateral relationship and add a new dimension to mutually entertained uncertainties. Since the DMK government assumed office in Tamilnadu after the 1967 elections, a

9. *Non-Aligned Conferences: Basic Documents 1976. Addendum to Basic Documents 1961-1975* (1976) Colombo, Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies, p. 49

situation existed where Tamil elements in both countries were preaching a philosophy of dissent based upon the unity of the Tamil race and culture, and the necessity of organising Tamilians within the framework of a separate state. The spiritual forerunner of the DMK, the Dravida Kazhagam was frankly and openly secessionist in its programme. The DMK overtly toned down the secessionist plank on its platform since secession was made in the Nchru era itself a treasonable offence. However, the DMK commitment to a separate state for Tamils was covertly retained in the guise of a demand for greater state autonomy and in fact, the imposition of Presidential rule in Tamilnadu on 31 January 1976 was in part intended to preempt an anticipated open avowal of separatism at public meetings scheduled for early February.¹⁰ In Sri Lanka, the earlier Federal Party demand for accommodation of Sri Lanka Tamils within a Federal state gave way to the demand for a separate state under the influence of the DMK ideology. The impact of the rout of the DMK at the March 1977 general elections in India has had no appreciable effect on Sri Lanka politics. The Tamil United Liberation Front to which the Federal Party belongs, was led for sometime by Mr. S. Thondaman of the Ceylon Workers Congress, which had disavowed the separatist policy.

Thondaman's CWC now functions independently, though still committed to the cause of Tamil unity.¹¹ However the party which succeeded the DMK in power in Tamilnadu is The Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK) an offshoot of the former no less committed than the DMK to the Tamilian ideology.

On the Sri Lanka side, contemporary tensions in regard to the Tamil question are aggravated, both at a national and international level, by historical memories of past South Indian invasions of the island, and of their cultural concomitants. The influence of historical tradition is therefore a basic factor in Indo-Lanka relations, and this influence works both ways: to revive traditions of past conflicts as well as to promote better understanding and good will. In the latter sense, the cultural affinities between the two countries play a great part. There are, first, the linguistic affinities connecting Sinhala to the main North Indian vernaculars, and Tamil to its South Indian counterpart; second, the ethnic affinities, binding people coming from a common stock, and the majority of whom have emigrated during the course of history from the subcontinent to the island; third, the religious affinity, both Buddhism and Hinduism having come to Sri Lanka from India. The annual incidence of pilgrimages between the

10. *The Hindu*, 1, 2 February 1976.

11. *Sunday Times*, 6 November 1978.

two countries is also of a high order, despite travel restrictions which have been reciprocally determined. It remains an irony of history, however, that Sri Lanka Buddhists should travel in their thousands from Sri Lanka, for centuries the major centre of Buddhism in South Asia, to pay homage to the Buddha in the land of his birth, while equally, Hindu Indians in their thousands should make pilgrimage to South Sri Lanka to worship at the temple of Muruga in Kataragama.

The most recent historical landmark in the cultural ties between the two countries is the bringing to Sri Lanka for exposition from India, of part of the corporeal relics of the Buddha. Recently discovered and excavated in Kapilavastu (Piprahwa), the paternal ancestral home of the Buddha, the sacred relics were loaned to Sri Lanka by India in April 1978 under the terms of the Indo-Lanka Cultural Agreement concluded between the two countries in 1977. They arrived in Sri Lanka on 22 April 1978, Bak Full Moon day, which is traditionally associated with Buddha's second visit to Sri Lanka, in the fifth year of his enlightenment. For the first time in the island's religious history, too, the four highest prelates of the Buddhist sangha in Sri Lanka, the Maha Nayakes of the Malwatte and Asgiriya Chapters, and of the Amarapura and Ramanna Nikayas were associated with the cultural mission which went to India to bring back the relics.¹²

Maritime Boundary Agreements

It is in the light of this general background that the solid achievements in the sphere of Indo-Lanka relations in the recent past must be assessed. Of these, a notable success was the agreement between India and Sri Lanka demarcating their international maritime boundary in Palk Strait up to Adams Bridge, signed on June 26, and which came into operation on July 8th, 1974. The agreement demarcated a boundary in the sea from a point about 18 nautical miles northwest of Point Pedro in Palk Strait to Adams Bridge, a distance of approximately 86 nautical miles. The agreement gave each country sovereignty and exclusive jurisdiction over the land and waters on its side of the boundary line. The vessels of each country were to enjoy in each other's waters the rights of navigation as they had traditionally enjoyed, while each country was to be free to explore and exploit all petroleum and mineral resources falling on its side of the boundary. Provision was made for the two countries to agree on the method of most effective exploration, where the petroleum or mineral deposits were found to extend from one side of the boundary to the other. The most significant aspect of the agreement, from Sri Lanka's point of view, was that it

12. *Ceylon Daily News*, 24 April 1978.

resolved, once and for all, the vexed question of sovereignty over the island of Kachcha Thivu, which had been a matter of dispute between the two countries for over two decades. The agreement did not refer specifically to Kachcha Thivu, but under it this island fell on the Sri Lanka side of the boundary. This agreement related to the international boundary between India and Sri Lanka in their historic waters in Palk Strait and Palk Bay, and resolved the question of overlap created by the extension by both countries of the limits of their territorial seas from six to twelve nautical miles in 1967.

A further Maritime Boundary Agreement of 1976 extended this boundary in the Gulf of Mannar and the Bay of Bengal, and gave each party sovereign rights and exclusive jurisdiction over the continental shelf and the exclusive economic zones, as well as over their resources, whether living or non-living, falling on its side of the boundary. Under this agreement, each party was also required to respect rights of navigation through its territorial sea and exclusive economic zone in accordance with its laws and regulations and the rules of international law.

In respect of the marine area between India and Sri Lanka in the Gulf of Mannar, the agreement defined, by latitudes and longitudes, 13 points which were equidistant from the coasts of the two countries. Under the agreement, the lines connecting these points constituted the maritime boundary in the area. It was further provided that the extension of this boundary beyond Point 13 M would be considered.

The agreement further stipulated that if any single geological, petroleum or natural gas structure or field existing on one side of the boundary was exploited on the other side of the boundary, the two countries should reach agreement as to the manner in which the structure or field shall be most effectively exploited, and the manner in which the proceeds deriving therefrom, shall be apportioned. The Agreement was dated 23rd March 1976, and ratified on 6th July, 1976.¹³

Practical effect to this agreement has been given by the Maritime Zones Law of 1976¹⁴ and the Presidential Proclamation gazetted on 15th January 1977 which provide as follows:

- (1) The territorial sea of Sri Lanka shall extend to a distance of 12 nautical miles from baselines measured from the low water mark of ordinary spring tides along the coast of the mainland and along the seaward side of islands;

13. *The Statesman*, 23 November 1976.

14. Sri Lanka Government, *Maritime Zones Law No. 22 of 1976*

- (2) The continuous zone of Sri Lanka shall extend 24 nautical miles seaward from the baselines from which the territorial sea is measured;
- (3) The exclusive economic zone of Sri Lanka shall extend to the sea to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the territorial sea is measured;
- (4) The pollution prevention zone shall extend to the sea to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the territorial sea is measured.

The proclamation also defined the historic waters of Sri Lanka in the Palk Strait, Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar and declared that (a) the historic waters in the Palk Strait and Palk Bay shall form part of the internal waters of Sri Lanka and (b) that the historic waters in the Gulf of Mannar shall form part of the territorial sea of Sri Lanka.

The Continental Shelf of Sri Lanka had already been defined in the Maritime Zones Law of 1976 as the natural prolongation of the land boundary of Sri Lanka into the sea up to the outer edge of the Continental Margin or up to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the coast, whichever is more. The delimitation of the international boundary must be regarded as a historic landmark in Indo-Lanka relations, and the culmination of many years of hard negotiating between the two countries. India herself made a simultaneous Proclamation defining the extent and legal status of the historic waters between the two countries in the Palk Strait, Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar. A Supplemental Agreement dated 22nd November 1976 between India and Sri Lanka determines the extension of their maritime boundary in the Gulf of Mannar from position 13 m to the Trijunction point between Sri Lanka, India and Maldives, while these three countries entered into a further agreement determining the Trijunction point itself in July 1976.

The most notable diplomatic achievement of Sri Lanka's relations with India, however, was the signing of the Indo-Ceylon Agreement of October 1964, relating to the question of persons of recent Indian origin in Sri Lanka. This question, a carry-over from the colonial period, had become a controversial issue in Sri Lanka politics as early as the 1930s, and had become the subject of Indo-Lanka negotiations from this time onwards. With the approach of independence in Sri Lanka and, particularly after the Donoughmore constitution of 1931 had conferred on Sri Lanka a semi-responsible government, a conflict of economic and political interest

between persons of Indian origin and indigenous elements of the population had come to be highlighted. Even before independence, the Senanayake-Bajpai talks in 1940-41 and the protracted correspondence between Mr. D. S. Senanayake and Pandit Nehru in 1947-48, had attempted to provide some agreed basis for a solution to this question.

In the post-independence period, Mr. Dudley Senanayake's talks with Pandit Nehru on this question in 1953, and the agreements entered into between Sir John Kotelawela and Pandit Nehru in January and October 1954, proved in conclusive and abortive. The Indo-Ceylon Agreement of October 1964 (also referred to as the Sirima-Shastri agreement) was therefore preceded by a long history of negotiation between the two countries, and its immediate background, on the Sri Lanka side was a determined effort on the part of the Sirima Bandaranaike government in the early sixties to find solutions to the problem and, on the Indian side, an earnest desire on the part of the Lal Bahadur Shastri government to improve India's relations with neighbouring countries and foster a spirit of mutual trust and friendship among them in the wake of the Sino-Indian war.

Under the 1964 agreement, Sri Lanka agreed to grant citizenship to 300,000 of an estimated 975,000 persons of Indian origin in the island. India agreed to grant Indian citizenship and repatriate to India 525,000 such persons, the period of the validity of the agreement being 15 years. Natural increases in the stipulated numbers for repatriation to India and grant of Sri Lankan citizenship, respectively were also covered by the agreement, which provided for transfer of assets of repatriates up to a specified limit. The 150,000 persons not covered by this agreement were to be the subject of further negotiation. In January 1974, Mrs. Bandaranaike and Mrs. Indira Gandhi agreed to take equal responsibility for them, i.e., 75,000 persons of this number would be given Sri Lankan citizenship, in addition to the 300,000 earlier agreed upon, and the remaining 75,000 would be repatriated to India, in addition to the 525,000 earlier agreed upon. By further agreement the period of validity of the Agreements was extended, at first to 1981, and later to 1983.

Implementation of the agreements have been beset with numerous political and administrative difficulties, and up to the end of 1977, only 219,202 plus a natural increase in this number of 58,029, making up a total of 277,231 persons had been granted Indian citizenship and repatriated to India; while the number granted Sri Lankan citizenship was 125,250 plus a natural increase in this number of 32,325, making up a total of 157,575

persons.¹⁵ Divergent interpretations relating to the 1964 agreement between the two countries, and delay on Sri Lanka's part in framing enabling legislation to put the agreement into operation, were among the main political problems which slowed down the implementation of the 1964 agreement. Administrative difficulties of implementation related among other things, to delays on the Sri Lanka side, of payment of gratuities and exchange control permits to would-be repatriates, the Indian High Commission's own tardiness in disposal of applications for repatriation, and its persistent reluctance to furnish a list of persons who had applied for Indian nationality and repatriation to India. Since the agreement stipulates reciprocity in the grant of Sri Lankan citizenship and repatriation in the ratio of 4:7, slowing down of one process inevitably involves slowing down of the other. A major outstanding problem connected with the implementation of the agreements is the fact that when the lists were closed for application for Sri Lankan citizenship or repatriation to India, respectively, on 30 April 1970, it was found that approximately 625,000 stateless persons of Indian origin had applied for Sri Lankan citizenship, while only 400,000 persons had applied for repatriation to India. In other words, India had a shortfall of 125,000 to fulfil its targets under the 1964 agreement, while the number who had applied for Sri Lankan citizenship was more than twice the number envisaged under the agreement.

Sri Lanka's contention all along has been that it was India's responsibility to fulfil its obligation under the agreement, and that the Indian High Commission should extend its date for accepting applications in order to make up for the shortfall of 125,000 persons required to be repatriated to India. While not agreeing to this, Indian authorities have contended that they will informally take on additional persons to their lists for repatriation. During the course of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's goodwill visit to Sri Lanka in April 1973, it was mutually agreed that the pace of repatriation to India under the terms of the agreement would be accelerated such that there would be a ten per cent increase in repatriation over and above the targets stipulated in the agreement. This would have involved a ten per cent increase over 35,000 repatriates, which is the annual target figure necessary to implement the agreement within the stipulated time period. Leaving out the natural increase, however, the target of 35,000 was exceeded only once from 1964 to the present, i. e. in the year 1974, when the number of repatriates to India was 35,141. The average annual repatriation to India under the terms of the agreement has been 15,657 (natural increase

15. Statistics from Department of Immigration and Emigration, Government of Sri Lanka

excluded) during the period 1964 to 1977 inclusive. Implementation of the agreement is therefore not so smooth as would be expected from the cordiality of the bi-lateral relationship in other respects.

1977 Postscript

From the perspective of Indo-Lanka political relations, the period after 1977 has a unity of its own in as much as the personal equation which had been a factor in the bilateral relationship during 1970-77 ceased to exist with the electoral defeats of Indira Gandhi and Sirimavo Bandaranaike in March and July 1977, respectively. At the same time, awareness of the common experience of the UNP and Janatha party in having forged spectacular electoral victories against governments which had had a relatively long tenure of power has provided a new bond between the governments of Morarji Desai and J.R. Jayawardene, which has replaced the old personal equation with a new one. Commenting on this, A. B. Vajpayee, Indian Foreign Minister declared at a state banquet in New Delhi to his visiting Sri Lanka counterpart A. C. S. Hameed:

“The year 1977 is a landmark in the history of both India and Sri Lanka. There were many similarities in the way the people of the two countries asserted their right to choose their representatives. They rejected the party in power and entrusted the business of government to the opposition, with a fresh mandate to take the nation forward to new frontiers of freedom and progress.”¹⁶

Tracing the ancient historical bonds between the two countries, Mr. Vajpayee had declared earlier in the same speech that “uninformed foreigners often fail to distinguish between a son of India and a son of Sri Lanka”.

Added to this common experience was the fact that the personalities of Morarji Desai and J. R. Jayawardene bore a striking resemblance to each other in respect of their ascetic tastes and spartan living, and in their resolve to bring about a ‘*dharmishta*’ society free of corruption, intemperance, and nepotism. When Mr. J. R. Jayawardene amended the constitution to become the first executive President of Sri Lanka, the Indian Prime Minister sent a personal envoy, his ranking cabinet colleague, Home Minister Charan Singh for the inauguration ceremonies on 4th February 1978.

With the resolution of Sri Lanka’s problem areas with India as regards territorial waters, ownership of Kachcha Thivu, maritime boundaries and economic zones, implementation of the Indo-Ceylon agreements of 1964 and 1974 remains as the one outstanding issue in Indo-Lanka relations. Present indications suggest that the new Sri Lanka government is as

16. Ceylon Daily News, 11 April 1978.

equally committed as the last one to implement these agreements as expeditiously and effectively as possible. On the Indian side, the commitment to the agreements may not be so deep-seated. Elements constituting the Janatha party had been among the critics of the 1964 agreement, and since the implementation process is closely related to rehabilitation arrangements in the southern states of India, for which Union government funds must be provided, much will depend on the Desai government's posture towards the quantum and pace of repatriation from Sri Lanka to India whether the agreements will be successfully implemented during the time-span that is left for them. Whether or not the existence of governments politically different from the Union government in the southern states would be a complicating factor still remains to be seen. But certainly, the first year of existence of the Janatha government has been marked by a significant decline in the number of repatriates arriving in India. However this may be, Mr. Vajpayee struck an optimistic note in the speech referred to above:

“Washed by the same waters and enriched by the same mainsprings of culture and civilisation, Sri Lanka and India can conceive of no possible relationship except one of friendship and good neighbourliness, based on mutual respect for each other's national identity and national interests. This is the only way we can fulfil the aspirations of our people and meet their legitimate expectations.”