

ELECTIONS IN SOUTH ASIA AND IN INDONESIA

Abstract

Elections are of utmost importance in any democratic country and give the power to the people and enable them to choose their leaders. The Presidential election of 2015 mark a historic milestone in Sri Lanka's maturing democracy since the civil war ended almost five years ago. In addition this paper presents a brief description about the two regional powers, India and China, and the role of USA, in Sri Lanka's pre and post Presidential Elections. The Sri Lanka's Presidential Election efforts taken by the new leadership in Sri Lanka to improve the overall relations with regional and global superpowers Democracy comes in different shapes and sizes .Good governance , anti-corruption campaign, image of credibility, integrity were campaign slogans during elections in Sri Lanka , Indonesia and in Assembly elections in the Indian city of Delhi. President of Sri Lanka Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, President of Indonesia, Mr. Joko Widodo and Indian Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal, promoted a common man's image in the election campaigns. The paper reflects on stunning victories of these leaders and assesses the some similarities between President of Indonesia Mr. Joko Widodo and Indian Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal.

Key words

Sri Lanka, Presidential Election 2015, India, China, Asian regional power.

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SRI LANKA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION-2015

In late November 2014 Sri Lanka's War winning president Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa called a snap elections appearing confident of winning a record. The tables were turned hurriedly when a senior Minister Mr. Maithripala Sirisena defected government, after serving as health minister, along with some 20 members of the Sri Lankan Parliament, Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, the common candidate fielded by the New Democratic Front(NDF), a grouping of some 20 members from the governing party.

The Opposition common candidate was fielded by parties such as United National Party (UNP) led by Opposition Leader Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, former Army Commander Sarath Fonseka of the Democratic Party (DP), Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Former Sri Lankan President Mrs .Chandrika Kumaratunga galvanized the joint opposition securing enough political mileage to inflict a shock defeat on former President Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa. The January 8th, 2015 presidential election, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) Marxist party played a pivotal role in getting votes in support of Mr. Maithripala Sirisena's campaign to establish good governance and democracy. Certainly politics in Sri Lanka is often reduced to a coalition of communities, rhetoric and personalities. The Sri Lankan people who overwhelmingly voted for former President Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa with 6,015, 934 of the votes, (57.88 percent) at 2010 Presidential elections had rejected Mr. Rajapaksa in 2015 presidential elections. "*Good Governance*" (rendered as *Yahapalanaya* in Sinhalese) and 100-day reform program was Mr. Maithripala Sirisena's slogan during the presidential campaign. The New Democratic Front (NDF), opposition coalition led by Mr. Sirisena, certainly added a dose of morality into public affairs, accountability and politics during the presidential campaign. Mr. Maithripala Sirisena's manifesto drew a vision of foreign policy that revolved around stronger relationships with Sri Lanka's Asian neighbors with India.

At the January 8th presidential elections more than 12 million Sri Lankans voters out of the 21 million populations who were eligible to vote, turned out to vote. The election saw a high voter turnout with more than 70 percent of voters peacefully submitting their ballots. Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, the leader of the opposition coalition, won 6, 217, 162 (51.28 percent) of the votes, with 5,768,090 (47.58 percent) going to Former President Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa. In the January election Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims who together have played a very vital role in the victory of Mr. Maithripala Sirisena. Tamil majority in the North and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka gave around 70 percent of the voter turnout to the common candidate fielded by the New Democratic Front (NDF). Former President Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa drew his support mainly from the rural Sinhalese electorates. The presidential election of 2015 was a democratic milestone and marks a new dawn for the Indian Ocean Island nation for choosing Mr. Maithripala Sirisena as the new president, following a victory in the tightest ever presidential race in post-Independent history of Sri Lanka.

THE NEWLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA



The newly-elected President of Sri Lanka Mr. Maithripala Sirisena (l) and Prime Minister Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe (r) taking oaths of office in Colombo's Independence Square on 9th January 2015. (Source of Image: Foreign Exchange Diplomatic Society)

The newly-elected President of Sri Lanka Mr. Maithripala Sirisena and his new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe both took the oaths of office in Colombo's Independence Square on 9th January 2015. This is Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe's third stint as Prime Minister, having held the post earlier in 1993-94 and in 2001-04. After being sworn in as the President. Newly elected President Mr. Sirisena said, "We will have a foreign policy that will mend our ties with the international community and all international organizations in order that we derive maximum benefit for our people. We will work with friendship, brotherhood and cooperation with all states."

On January 12, 2015, Sri Lanka's new President Mr. Maithripala Sirisena unveiled his 27-member cabinet that included members from a cross-section of parties. Among the new cabinet members Mr. Mangala Samaraweera has been appointed as the External Affairs Minister of Sri Lanka.



President Mr. Maithripala Sirisena held talks with Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi in New Delhi (Source of Image: Foreign Exchange Diplomatic Society)

On 15th February 2015 in his maiden foreign trip after assuming the Presidential post, the newly-elected President arrived India on a four-day state visit. President Mr. Sirisena held talks with Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi in New Delhi and the two sides inked four agreements, including one on civil nuclear cooperation. The nuclear pact between India and Sri Lanka would facilitate cooperation in transfer and exchange of knowledge and expertise between the two countries.

President Mr. Sirisena expressed happiness over the outcome of the talks and said “friendship between the two countries was not only important to each other but was a significant step for the region as well”.

Indian Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi's had bilateral talk with President Mr. Sirisena comes at a key moment. He is expected to visit Sri Lanka in mid-March this year. During his visit to Sri Lanka he is expected to visit the Tamil-majority Northern Province.

Greeting the President Mr. Sirisena and the First Lady the Indian Prime Minister Modi said *“We are honored that you have chosen India as your first overseas destination. Let me congratulate you on behalf of the people of India for your historic victory. The election reflects the strength of democracy in Sri Lanka. Your mandate carries the collective voice of Sri Lanka. It represents the aspirations of your people for a united, inclusive peaceful and prosperous nation. India is Sri Lanka`s closest neighbor and friend. The goodwill and support of the people of India will always be with you.”*

INDIA, CHINA, AND THE ROLE OF USA IN SRI LANKA’S PRE AND POST LANKAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION PERIOD

Sri Lanka traditionally follows a non-alignment foreign policy .However the Indian Ocean Island nation has been seeking closer relations with United States of America (USA), since December 1977 . Sri Lanka recognized India, China, Pakistan, Russia, Iran, Japan and Malaysia as strategic partners. The last decade has witnessed a dramatic transformation of India’s foreign and economic policies. India aspires to be a major Asian power and is pursuing a hedging strategy against China and its small neighbors. The relations between India are the most important to Sri Lanka because India is the only neighbors of Sri Lanka with maritime borders. Sri Lanka’s bilateral relationship with India is deeply linked to Sri Lanka’s domestic issue of reconciliation with the Tamil minority. India has also been pressing Sri Lanka for implementation of the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution envisaged the devolution of powers to the North and Eastern Provinces of the country where most of the minorities live.



Hon. Sushma Swaraj, Minister of External Affairs of India, warmly welcomes Hon. Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka on 18th January 2015 at Nehru Bhawan in New Delhi (Source of Image : Foreign Exchange Diplomatic Society)

The Newly appointed External Affairs Minister of Sri Lanka, Mr Mangala Samaraweera, was in New Delhi on January 18, for his first foreign tour after assuming office. The Sri Lankan Minister of External Affairs paid a courtesy call on Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi at the Official residence of the Prime Minister. Prime Minister Modi congratulated President Mr. Sirisena and Prime Minister Mr. Wickremesinghe for the impressive victory, which was a vote for unity and change in Sri Lanka. Prime Minister Mr. Modi expressed hope that President Mr. Sirisena's victory will advance peace, reconciliation and development in Sri Lanka, and peace and progress in the region.

China's rapid economic growth and the growing economic ties with Asian countries have created the most important source of China's increasing influence on Asia. China's regional strategy develops in part from its global grand strategy. The United States of America (US) has developed an extensive network of Non –Governmental (NGO) connections established many decades under the US influence in Asia. Even though the US image in South Asia has declined in the recent years, the US foreign Policy continues to be widely criticized. However US ability and willingness to serve as Asia's security guarantor and its vital economic partner appears strong. In the past Pakistan has been a major ally of Sri Lanka in supplying high tech military equipment to Sri Lanka. The United States of America was concerned about the growing Chinese influence including military ties with Sri Lanka. A major diplomatic rift emerged between the United States and Sri Lanka over human rights records. Despite India's abstaining from the United States (US) sponsored resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva which seeks to authorize body to be set up an independent international inquiry in Sri Lanka to probe into human rights violations during Sri Lanka's civil war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was passed on 27th March 2014. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted a resolution titled *Promoting Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka* requesting the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights to undertake a full investigation into alleged violations and abuses of human rights related crimes by parties concerned .During the period covered by the *Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC)* which

examined the final year of the Sri Lankan conflict. Chinese support has also been invaluable for Sri Lanka to confront U.S.-backed resolution. Sri Lanka's diplomatic relations with the United States and Europe were extremely bad during the former President Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa's tenure. However the 2015 Presidential election builds the opportunity for a reconsideration of U.S. and European policies with Sri Lanka's political change widely seen as reflecting popular voter support for "new" or "clean" leaders rather than the "old" style of politics in Indonesia

US Secretary of State Mr. John Kerry congratulated Sri Lanka after the January 9th Presidential elections and said *"I commend President Rajapakse for accepting the results of the election in the proud tradition of peaceful and orderly transfers of power in Sri Lanka"*.

On February 17th, 2015 the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has delayed the release of a report into alleged war crimes committed during the Sri Lanka's civil war by six months following a request made by the newly elected Government of Sri Lanka (Go SL) The Report was earlier scheduled to be released on 25th March during the 28th session of the UNCHR council. However it will be out in September this year.

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN DELHI-2015



Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister of Delhi, India

Democracy comes in different shapes and sizes. Indeed democracy requires accountability of decision makers. Mr. Arvind Kejriwal, was a little-known tax inspector-turned-activist just three years ago. The anti-corruption crusader turned Politician Mr. Arvind Kejriwal's election victory in Delhi is a signoff India's vibrant democracy .Kejriwal has been the organizational force driving the anti-corruption movement. The two-year-old Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) or Common Mans party's landslide victory in the Delhi assembly elections will prove a test for both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government as well as for the Congress party. The anti-corruption party led by Mr. Arvind Kejriwal won 67 out of the assembly's 70 seats, while Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party won three seats in the Delhi

assembly elections. The Congress party — India's oldest party, which ruled Delhi between 1998 and 2013 did not win a single seat, Gandhian activist Anna Hazare's chief aide during the latter's anti-corruption campaign in 2011 greeted Mr. Arvind Kejriwal and said " *Those who will run the government, now I have full faith that they will make Delhi a corruption free city and a model city which will later form an example for the entire nation* ". Mr. Kejriwal the leader of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) a former civil servant often known as a " Man in a hurry " was elected on the back of a grassroots campaign run largely by 40,000 volunteers to run the 20 million national capital for the second time. AAP chief Mr Arvind Kejriwal himself won easily from New Delhi constituency, defeating Nupur Sharma of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) by over 30,000 votes. India's first woman Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Ms Kiran Bedi, a former colleague of Mr. Arvind Kejriwal in Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement, was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s chief ministerial candidate in Delhi and the face of the party in the crucial Delhi elections. Ms Bedi , lost from Krishna Nagar constituency. On Tuesday February 10 2015 Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi called up AAP Chief Mr Arvind Kejriwal, congratulating him on his party's landslide wins in Delhi. "Congratulations on the victory, we will work together," the Indian Prime Minister also said "We all want Delhi's development." During Kejriwal's first term as Chief Minister the anti-corruption crusader and the leader of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) resigned as Chief Minister of Delhi after a 49-day s after his government failed to table the Jan Lokpal Bill also referred to as the Citizen's Ombudsman Bill. The 49-day government of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) changed the lives of many as water and electricity bills were reduced, corruption came down and people stretched their arms to give the party another chance. The Jan Lokpal Bill (Citizen's ombudsman Bill) is a draft anti-corruption bill drawn up by prominent civil society activists seeking the appointment of a Jan Lokpal, an independent body that would investigate corruption cases, complete the investigation within a year and envisages trial in the case getting over in the next one year. Mr. Anna Hazare, anti-corruption crusader, went on a fast-unto-death in April, demanding that this Bill, drafted by the civil society, be adopted. Four days into his fast, the government agreed to set up a joint committee with an equal number of members from the government and civil society side to draft the Lokpal Bill together. Mr. Kejriwal is similar to Mr. Joko Widodo of Indonesia's president who confronts many challenges as an aspiring national politician and advocates bottom-up governance and both have sought to represent the interests of the grassroots populations of their respective countries. Mr. Arvind Kejriwal promised to make Delhi India's first corruption-free state and end what he called its "VIP culture". Mr. Arvind Kejriwal, for example, when he was elected as the Chief Minister of Delhi, briefly became the model for the Mr. Joko Widodo campaign which was based on a similar platform of clean and accountable Government which would fight corruption and bureaucratic red tape. Indonesia's newly elected President Mr. Joko Widodo was a Governor of Indonesia's capital city Jakarta. President Mr. Widodo Indonesian President was the first not to come from the ranks of the country's established political, business and military elite. Elections in India and Indonesia look set to feature a political transition in the form of Mr. Arvind Kejriwal in India, and Mr. Joko Widodo in Indonesia.

INDONESIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2014

Indonesia is a sprawling archipelago of about 17,000 islands is the biggest economy in Southeast Asia, and about 90 per cent of its 250 million people are Muslims, more than any other nation. On July 9, 2014 nearly 135 million Indonesians went to some 480,000 polling stations and picked a new president. Voter turnout was 71 per cent, down slightly from the 2009 presidential election, when it was 72 per cent. Former governor of Jakarta Mr. Joko Widodo of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) and former lieutenant general in Indonesia's Special Forces Mr. Prabowo Subianto of the Great Indonesia Movement Party fought a tight election race and finally concluded with the remarkable victory of Joko Widodo known to all as Jokowi, with his common man image was officially declared the winner in a long and complex electoral process. On 22nd July 2014 the General Election Committee (Komisi Pemilihan Umum or KPU) officially announced that Mr. Joko Widodo won the election received just under 71 million votes, with 53.15 percent against Mr. Prabowo Subianto receiving 62.6 million votes, or 46.85 percent. After the results were announced Mr. Joko Widodo, said "This is a victory for all the Indonesian people," "I hope this people's victory will pave the way to an Indonesia that is politically independent, stands on its own feet economically and preserves its culture". The Indonesian rupiah had risen to 2-month high after Mr. Widodo won the Indonesia election and while stocks edged 0.9 per cent higher to 47.306. Mr. Joko Widodo, and vice-president, Jusuf Kalla, rode through central Jakarta to the presidential palace in an open horse-drawn carriage, their wives following along behind. They were cheered through the streets following his inauguration by tens of thousands of ordinary Indonesians in a reminder to the opposition-controlled parliament of the strong grass-roots support that swept him to power. Reform-minded the charismatic former Jakarta governor Joko Widodo with his common touch was sworn in as Indonesia's seventh president on 20th October 2014. Mr. Widodo took the oath of office in a ceremony at Parliament in Jakarta, attended by foreign dignitaries, including US Secretary of State Mr. John Kerry and Australian Prime Minister Mr. Tony Abbott. Mr. Joko Widodo, who did not to come from the ranks of the Indonesia's established political, business and military elite, was wildly popular politician.



Indonesian President Mr Joko Widodo

Mr Joko Widodo rise was sudden, but he didn't turn into a presidential contender overnight. In 2005, the furniture businessman successfully ran to become mayor of Surakarta, a city of about 500,000 in central Java. During his tenure as mayor of Surakarta in central Java by employing care and compassion he sought to preserve and promote Surakarta's historic attributes without discouraging modernization. In 2012, Mr Widodo was elected the governor of Jakarta, the Indonesian capital, home to 9.6 million people. Two years later, Mr Widodo "Mr. Clean" image and appeal to young voters was elected as Indonesian President. Indonesian President Mr Joko Widodo known for being corruption-free, direct and down-to-earth as governor of Jakarta took office three months ago. Little more than 100 days ago into Indonesia's presidency, Mr Widodo has been facing a host of major challenges inherited from earlier governments, ranging from fighting the Indonesia's prevalent corruption and increasing inequality, to revitalizing the sluggish economy and improving the infrastructure. Widodo, a former furniture-maker, has endeared himself to the Indonesian public through his self-made image and pro-poor policies. A champion of promoting small and micro industries, Mr. Widodo is seen as a leader from the masses. The fact that he doesn't belong to Indonesia's traditional political and military elite gave him an edge over his rival Subianto. Similar to Indian anti-corruption party leader Mr. Arvind Kejriwal emphasis on development politics, Widodo campaigned on a platform of 'mindset revolution' against corruption, favoritism and intolerance. Mr Kejriwal's lessons are effective practical governance must start right with Mr Widodo example. Comparable to Mr. Jokowi, Mr Kejriwal has a tremendous advantage in his non-political background. There's no denying the similarity between Mr. Widodo's modest upbringing and Mr Kejriwal the Chief Minister of Indian state of Delhi Minister's background. Both leaders are seen to be in tune with the masses. Are "men of the people" has raised the expectations of the ordinary Indonesians whose support swept him into office .President Mr Joko Widodo, Maithripala Sirisena and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, are "men of the people".

CONCLUSION

Sri Lanka's new president Mr. Maithripala Sirisena seeks warmer ties with India .Small states such as Sri Lanka are helpless in International Politics .The big powers such as India, China ,US and the European countries find their interest at stake tempting countries such as Sri Lanka into the alliance system by economic and military programmes where Intervention is a continuing occurrence which differ in strength and affect small countries such as Sri Lanka which depend on the internal and international circumstances at a particular moment. Vying for power of the regional powers India, China and the USA, maintained contact and played a key role in Sri Lanka's pre and post Presidential election period.

The international community could also play a positive role in Sri Lanka's progress towards reconciliation. The Presidential elections of 2015 undoubtedly open a window of opportunity for Sri Lanka. Looking to the future, Sri Lanka need to keep government accountable and enforce state stability and maintenance of peace, justice, security, economic modernization, strengthening national capacities and development as the country moves towards a decision

on its future political status. Global and regional super-powers such as US, China and India and European countries, should provide assistance almost un questionable to the newly elected Sri Lankan government to overcome internal and external obstacles to achieve peace and prosperity for all people in Sri Lanka.

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