

## THE TAMIL ISSUE IN THE 50 YEARS OF SRI LANKAN GOVERNANCE

Thangamuthu Jayasingam<sup>1</sup>

Sri Lanka has been rated as the 25th member of the failed states index prepared by Washington based Fund for Peace, and placed between Rwanda above and Ethiopia below. While there may be varied opinions on the classification and its validity, it has been appreciated by many. Also, it is recognised that the continuing resilience of the economy, whether it is from borrowed or donor funds, has kept the state from becoming a collapsed state.

The 'State' itself is an abstraction. The reality is governance that fails or succeeds. Therefore the issue of governance needs to be looked at more closely. The State has a responsibility of guaranteeing security, well being and basic political and economic rights to all its citizens and governance is the procedural mechanism of implementing that by legislation, executive and judicial actions.

The author also emphasises that indices are often averages and may not represent the true picture of country-wide realities. For example higher GDP does not mean that the wealth is shared equitably among persons, and needs to be analysed with care related to the situation at hand and the stakeholders concerned.

The Tamil minority of 20% in the country had been fighting for rights and equity since independence which had been denied by the ruling majority Sinhala government. The Government first divided the country in 1956 with the 'Sinhala only' legislation, which destroyed the equality notion to the Tamils in the country, and the majority have failed to rectify the consequences of it even after 50 years.

The aspirations of the Tamils which were demonstrated in a democratic manner were crushed by brutality of the State machinery which led to an armed conflict. Constitutional reforms from which the Tamils were effectively excluded removed the protection to the minority vide clause 29 and criminalised the right to self determination. The Tamils and North-East in particular was discriminated in education, health, development etc. which deepened the conflict.

The proposed solution of a provincial council system on the basis of the 13th amendment never devolved power from the central government, to meaningfully address the Tamil issues. Failure to hold elections for local government and the North-East region kept the rule at the centre in without providing for representation of the Tamil people in governance of their own areas.

The recent times has seen a large number of abductions and targeted killings of the Tamil civilians not only in the North-East but also in the Capital including Tamil Parliamentarians, making individual security non-existent. The Failure of the State to implement Rule of law and accountability makes the entire governance a question mark? The humanitarian crisis involving the displaced populations and the failure to provide them adequate food supplies, irrespective of other concerns, makes the governance of the state in question, particularly in the North-East.

The Tamil issue has been a decisive issue at all elections for the major political parties for decades, but none had provided them with the equitable Protection, Rights, Values and the opportunity bestowed by any state on all individuals, which it deems to govern. The author argues that the Sri Lankan state, whether or not it is a 'failed state' or a successful one according to different indices, has 'failed in governance' in respect of the Tamils in the country and particularly the people of the North-East.

---

<sup>1</sup>Department of Botany, Eastern University, Vantharumoolai, Chenkalady, Sri Lanka