

Sie verlangen unmögliche Dinge. (...) Glauben Sie, dass ich von diesen Leuten verhaftet werden möchte (indem ich den Tamilen Polizeikräfte zugestehe)? +++ They demand impossible things. (...) Do you think I want to get arrested by these people (by giving the Tamils a police force)?

Sri Lankas Präsident Mahinda Rajapaksa im Gespräch mit dem indischen Journalisten R. Bhagwan Singh, Deccan Chronicle, <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/>, 28. Dezember 2011



M. Rajapaksa in seinem Amtssitz, bei der Lektüre des LLRC-Reports, Photo überlassen von Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka (JDS), www.jdslanka.org

The Western countries are demanding a probe into “war crimes” in Sri Lanka. How are you going to deal with this issue?

The LTTE remnants in these Western countries are bringing pressure on political leaders there to raise baseless issues against Sri Lanka. Western countries talk about Kashmir and Sri Lanka in their Parliaments, but keep mum about what they did in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and so on.

After the 1880 uprising in Ceylon’s Uva (in the south), the British rulers killed every male aged above 14, and destroyed all water reservoirs to force the people into starvation. They took away land. They did that in India, too. And they talk of human rights now. The West wants me to be their lackey and I refuse to be that.

There is a feeling in India that you are leaning towards China, and that could hurt India’s geo-political position in this part of the Indian Ocean.

For me, India is first, and others come only after India. As soon as I came to power, I went to India and got their support; after that, I did not have to bother about the UN, UK, US, and so on. In fact, we got help from the US by way of vital information about LTTE ships which

made it possible to destroy them at sea.

As for China coming here with major infrastructure projects, I must tell you that every project that we gave the Chinese we first offered to India, including the big port project in Hambantota, but there was no response. Even the Colombo port expansion was advertised but only the Chinese came.

The war ended more than two and a half years ago. The LTTE has been eliminated but the Tamils' demand for autonomy still seems strong as the victory of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) in the last parliamentary election shows. How do you intend addressing Tamil concerns? The Jaffna Chamber of Commerce (JCC) has said that the Tamil diaspora will not invest in the country until there is a political settlement.

These elections were held under the proportional representation system. There was also a substantial number that voted against the TNA. You must note that 54 per cent of Tamils live outside the north and the east. The JCC is free to have its opinion, but there are Sri Lankan Tamils abroad who have shown interest in investing in the north. We are keen on a sustainable political settlement. But it must have wide acceptance, especially in the context of the post-conflict situation.

Regional autonomy was a slogan used by the terrorists and their apologists. The need is for strong unity in diversity, for which regional autonomy is not the only way. A better approach would be equality of opportunity, and the spread of democratic freedom and rights, together with speedy economic development of the north, in tandem with other regions of the country.

How do you propose to address the question of devolution?

As for devolution, we have already elected provincial councils in all provinces other than the north. It will be established there, too. There must be discussions on how the provincial administrations could be strengthened and improved, with greater economic and development activity devolved. This is a process of democratic expansion in which all communities and political groups, as well as the key economic players, should participate.

Many say that the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) you have proposed will not be useful because there have been many such committees before, but the political problem has remained the same.

The PSC is a good approach to what has been a vexed problem because in a democracy it is Parliament that will ultimately have to agree to any solution. Unfortunately, the TNA has not named its representatives to the PSC. They (TNA) have the same attitude as the LTTE.

They demand impossible things — merger of the north and the east, land policy and police. See what happened in your country when Rahul Gandhi was travelling in Uttar Pradesh. Chief minister Mayawati tried to get him arrested. Do you think I want to get arrested by these people (by giving the Tamils a police force)?

The TNA seems to be driven by the Tamil diaspora, which does not want peace and political settlement, as they fear that their host countries might then send them back home. The TNA cannot represent the same separatist agenda of the LTTE, which will not find acceptance with the majority population. I want to work towards a solution but the TNA is not cooperating.

The local body and Parliament elections have been held in the north even during the conflict. So why does the government not hold provincial council election there now?

Elections will certainly be held in the near future. But one must realise the importance of the elections to a provincial council, which gives genuine opportunity to the people to participate. It is no secret that in the parliamentary elections that were held during the conflict, the people of the north were not allowed to exercise their franchise.

The LTTE acted against such democratic expression. Another fact is that the voting was on an old and outdated register, which makes the TNA's success not as big as it seems. The LTTE prevented the conduct of a census in the north. Once proper electoral registers are prepared, we can hold election to the northern provincial council.

The Tamils are complaining that the north remains highly militarised even now. There are over 100,000 troops policing about 300,000 people. It is said that the Army's permission is required even to hold a library association meeting or a school function. When do you propose to bring down Army's involvement in the civil administration there?

There are more than 300,000 Tamils in the north. The military presence is not worked out in proportion to the population but the security needs of the region. The presence of the military in an area that has seen brutal armed conflict for nearly three decades does not amount to militarisation.

The military is playing a significant role in building infrastructure as the locals lack skills. Also, large sections of the north are yet to be de-mined. It is not true that school functions or library meetings and such activities require the permission of the military. But there could be cautious surveillance, knowing the nature of the defeated enemy. We are still getting hidden arms caches of the LTTE. The presence of the military will be phased out in keeping with security needs.

The Tamils suspect that their lands are being taken over to set up new Army camps or to be given to Sinhalese businessmen.

It is the LTTE rump which spreads these canards. The armed forces and their camps are present throughout our country. This is necessary to ensure Sri Lanka's territorial integrity and to protect its sovereignty.

In Jaffna, there were many Muslims and Sinhalese before the LTTE chased them away, committing the first ethnic cleansing. Whether it is the Sinhalese, Tamils or Muslims, anyone who has been chased out of their traditional homes must be given their lands back. The majority status enjoyed by the Tamils in the Northern Province will not be changed by any actions of the government.