

Can Sri Lanka use Singapore as a model?

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By John Richardson

Introductory Remarks and Acknowledgements

Before turning to the question the title of this “conversation” poses, I want to express my appreciation for the privilege it is to be living in Singapore, and affiliated with the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, the Global Asia Institute and the National University of Singapore. Professor K.E. Seetharam, especially, has made this possible. This occasion provides me with an opportunity to both acknowledge the inspiration his leadership has provided and to thank him publically.

The other participant in this conversation, Ambassador Dayan Jayatilleka, whom I have known for more than 20 years, also deserves recognition. Anyone who studies Singapore’s development success-story well knows, as Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew has emphasised, that human intelligence and productivity are its most important resource. Sri Lanka, too, has an exceptional cadre of highly educated citizens whose productivity and intelligence could produce development successes equal to or greater than Singapore’s. But sadly, mostly of those top performers are contributing their talents to Canada, the United States, Australia, Singapore and other nations. They migrated because their energy, talent, resources and connections provided opportunities to do so and because they saw no opportunities for themselves or their children in the country they love. Only a few of Sri Lanka’s very best and brightest have chosen to remain in their country devoting their talents, often at considerable personal risk, to creating a better future for all Sri Lankans. One of them is Ambassador Jayatilleka and I welcome this opportunity to publically acknowledge his contributions.

Are reconciliation and development possible?

My presentation today is about prospects for that better future, which virtually all Sri Lankans hope for, with varying degrees of optimism and pessimism. Confounding predictions of self-appointed experts, including myself, Sri Lanka’s armed forces achieved a total military victory over the LTTE. President Mahinda Rajapaksa then won a decisive mandate in a relatively free and fair election, contested by a strong opponent. An even more decisive victory by the United People’s Freedom Alliance party, in Parliamentary elections concluded just nine days ago, has consolidated his power.

In an ambitious pre-election manifesto, the Mahinda Chintana, President Rajapaksa outlined very specific and concrete goals touching on many aspects of Sri Lanka’s political economy and



society – subjects included “a land of plenty,” “a disciplined and law-abiding society,” “clean water as Sri Lanka’s heritage,” “houses for all,” “electricity for everybody,” “a clean, green environment” and much more (p. 6). states in the Mahinda Chintana, “is to break the fundamentalist concepts of a traditional homeland and a separate state and empower the citizens of this country to arrive at a peaceful political solution which would devolve power to all its citizens.”(p. 52) “For every failure we found a solution” – Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa devolving some power to the Sri Lankan Tamil community, within the context of a unitary state deeply imbued with the symbolism Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese monarchy, is a challenge that President Rajapaksa’s predecessors as President and Prime Minister have faced and been unable to resolve. How might this be accomplished?

Perhaps a clue to the government’s strategy may be found in a recent interview for the Indian defence review, entitled “Nine Key Decisions that Helped Lanka Beat the LTTE,” given by Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Rajapaksa emphasised that as the first key decision, “The government took a careful review of all previous war operations and drew conclusions from them. For every failure we found a solution.”

Given this experience, it would not at all surprise me to learn that Sri Lanka’s new government, perhaps lead by Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Economic Development Minister Basil Rajapaksa are reviewing previous failed attempts to simultaneously achieve three overarching goals spelled out in the Mahinda Chintana: first a strong unitary state “according Buddhism primacy of place as the state religion”, second a state that empowers “entrepreneurs with strength to conquer the world” and third a state that empowers Sri Lanka’s citizens “to arrive at a peaceful political solution which would devolve power to all of its citizens”.

It is in this spirit of drawing lessons from previous failures and finding solutions, emphasised so strongly by Defence Secretary Rajapaksa as key to the military victory, that I offer observations on possible lessons of relevance from Sri Lanka’s post independence history and from Singapore’s development experience.

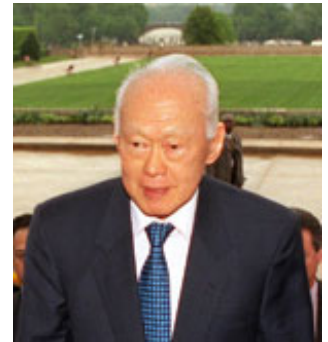
Missed opportunities for reconciliation in Sri Lanka’s post-independence history
In my view, the period after 1985 has few useful lessons about achieving national unity, reconciliation and development to offer. During this period, it was the misfortune of successive Sri Lankan governments to have faced a militant group that was both extraordinarily well lead and, through the ebb and flow of violent conflict and negotiations, unwaveringly single-minded in its objectives. Repeatedly, Velupillai Prabhakaran’s unwillingness to accept political solutions, other than an independent Eelam, scuttled the initiatives of the two Sri Lankan Presidents and a Prime Minister who were willing to accept the substantial political risks that negotiation and peace-building seemed to require. Rather it will be useful to seek lessons from periods when Sri Lankan political leaders, like President Mahinda Rajapaksa, had such overwhelming political support that they were in a position, if they chose, to expend political capital by taking concrete steps toward communal reconciliation that would have involved, at a minimum, a degree of regional power sharing as well as greater creativity and flexibility in the implementation of official

language policies.

The three elections prior to the escalation of protracted conflict when a new government was swept into power with overwhelming political support will be well known to many in this audience. These were the Parliamentary elections of 5-10 April 1956, 27 May 1970 and 21 July 1977. In each, the party previously in opposition gained decisive power on a platform that promised fundamental change. The 1970 and 1977 general elections were followed by new constitutions. After each election, there were missed opportunities for initiatives that could have addressed many concerns of the Tamil community members, while simultaneously respecting the concerns of all but the most radical Sinhalese nationalists. In each instance, however, Sri Lanka's political leaders chose not to expend their political capital in this way but instead, to accede to the demands of the radicals.

Post 1956 – “reasonable use of Tamil” and the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact

Choices made by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who came to power at a time of relative communal comity, when Sri Lanka was viewed as perhaps the most promising among newly independent nations, may have been the most tragic. Though Bandaranaike had promised to make Sinhala the official language within 24 hours, the draft of the Official Language Act for which Bandaranaike won support from his



parliamentary group provided for “reasonable use of Tamil.” Bandaranaike backed down in the face of strident demands and demonstrations from communal nationalists, including some Buddhist priests.

This evoked violent demonstrations and counter demonstrations, which were made worse by Bandaranaike's orders to Sri Lanka's mostly unarmed police forces to exercise “maximum restraint” in restoring order. Threats of “direct action” by the Federal Party – it was not yet called the “Tamil United Liberation front” – led to the ill-fated Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact. Once again Bandaranaike backed away from a negotiated compromise agreement, a decision, which is still cited by Tamils among their litany of Sinhalese betrayals.

This marked the beginning of what James Manor has called a “poisonous” cycle in Sri Lankan politics that has damaged relations between Tamil and Sinhalese communities ever since (1989, p. 269). When in power, leaders of both parties have often called for reasonable concessions on devolution issues to maintain national unity. But when in opposition many of the very same leaders have become uncompromising advocates of Buddhist-Sinhalese nationalism as a tactic to gain political support.

Post 1970 – The ‘Republican Constitution’

Limited time mandates that I gloss over many parallels between circumstances faced by the post- 1970 United Front Government and those presently facing Sri Lanka's top leaders. Interestingly, the Mahinda Chintana seems to imply that this period was a golden age characterised by high levels of government integrity and public well-being. In 1977, however, an overwhelming number of Sri Lankan voters rejected Mrs. Bandaranaike's bid for a second term in office.

For the poses of this discussion, suffice it to say that the Prime Minister did have options other than the communally divisive policies the “Republican Constitution” codified and her government subsequently implemented. Memories of the 1971 JVP rebellion often highlight the actions of loyal Tamil officers in helping to restore order. Many members of the United Front Coalition, including a principal architect of the constitution, Colvin R. de Silva were only reluctant supporters of communalist policies or not supporters at all. Moreover restrictive import policies benefited Jaffna’s economy. Mrs. Bandaranaike’s government provided funds that supported the founding of the University of Jaffna. In contrast to 1960, when she began her first term as Prime Minister, Mrs. Bandaranaike had become a courageous, tough-minded political leader, who functioned very differently than her late husband. She was willing to take risks, act decisively face down opposition and stick with unpopular decisions.

My own view, detailed more fully in *Paradise Poisoned*, is that issues impacting communal relations in Sri Lanka simply did not command her full attention. In my appraisal of her second term I wrote this: (pp. 308-309). “In international settings, Mrs. Bandaranaike could speak movingly of oppression and its costs and of the feelings of oppressed people. “Our self-respect demands that when we speak of



self-reliance, we [in developing nations] should not have to address appeals to other nations for succour and sustenance,” she told assembled UN delegates. These words were not so different from those of Tamil leaders expressing their aspirations for political freedom. Had Mrs. Bandaranaike brought the brilliance and energy to domestic communal problems that she brought to international affairs, I believe relations between Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese and Tamil communities might have followed a very different path.”

Post 1977 – Strengthened Presidential power under a “Gaullist” constitution

Let me next turn to the last Sri Lankan President, before President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who had sufficient discretionary power to reverse the trend of deteriorating communal relations in Sri Lanka. I refer, of course, to President J.R. Jayewardene. In 1991, it was my good fortune to spend a number of hours with President Jayewardene, discussing Sri Lanka’s post independence history and his Presidency.

Like President Rajapaksa, J.R. Jayewardene gained office with an overwhelming mandate. His avowed commitment to communal reconciliation and at least modest efforts to devolve power through “District Development Councils” appears to have been genuine. He believed that communal reconciliation was an important, although not the most important, element in an economic development programme that was to be modelled in many respects on the economic development that had begun to successfully transform Singapore from “third world” to “first world” status. He believed that rapid economic growth, with benefits widely shared among all Sri Lankans, would dampen communal tensions. He recognised the importance of good governance and promised righteous leadership based on Buddhist moral precepts. “The ideal man,” Jayewardene had written, earlier in his career, “is the man who is not addicted to wealth or possessions, to power and to the object of his desires.

He serves others rather than himself. The ideal state „must be composed of ideal men; men without greed, hatred or ignorance.”(1982, pp. 66-67)

President Jayewardene was, however, a many faceted leader. He campaigned on an inspiring vision of an economically developed Sri Lanka. But in his climb “up the greasy pole” (to use K.M. de Silva’s phrasing) he had perfected, he believed, the ability to make realistic political calculations necessary to achieve visionary goals. Like many political leaders, he believed that relatively unfettered personal political power was prerequisite to realising his vision of an economically developed Sri Lanka. When he was sworn in as Sri Lanka’s first Executive President, in February 1978, it appeared that he could do almost as he pleased.

The tragedies of communal relations under an administration that began with such promise are well documented and need not be discussed in detail. President Jayewardene saw himself as the quintessential political realist. He did not grasp that events in Jaffna, the seat of Tamil Militancy, could be more than a troublesome sideshow. He knew that only three percent of Sri Lanka’ voters lived in the Jaffna District and only two percent more in Batticaloa District, where there was also strong opposition to his government. He viewed most Tamils as law-abiding citizens who opposed violence and were ambivalent about separatism. He did not grasp the reality that security force detachments that were ill equipped, ill trained and almost entirely Sinhalese were more likely to stoke the fires of communalism, in both the north and the south, than to quell them. For him, as for his predecessors, the political main event continued to be in the South. His principal political adversaries continue to be Mrs. Bandaranaike and her allies. His political priority was to keep them demoralised, while his programmes transformed Sri Lanka economically. How could such an able political leader have miscalculated so badly? In a televised press conference, following the Indo-Lanka accord signing, President Jayewardene’s self-appraisal was candid. Responding to a reporter’s query about why he had not earlier reached agreement with Tamil political leaders, his self appraisal was candid: “It is a lack of courage on my part, a lack of intelligence on my part, a lack of foresight, on my part.” (De Silva and Wriggins, 1994, p. 645).

Does Sri Lanka’s history offer lessons that might be applicable to present circumstances? It might seem premature to draw parallels between circumstances of the three political leaders I have highlighted and those facing President Mahinda Rajapaksa, but I believe it is realistic. Consider these parallels:

President Rajapaksa has an overwhelming mandate. The opposition is likely to remain splintered and ineffective for the foreseeable future. Also, it seems, despite Sri Lanka’s complex proportional representation system, that President Rajapaksa’s United People’s Freedom Alliance will be able to command the 2/3 parliamentary majority necessary to pass constitutional amendments. How the government might use this opportunity to consolidate and perpetuate its power, in order to accelerate development, is an open topic of discussion.

There is also a real possibility that overwhelming presidential and parliamentary election wins, might represent the zenith of a UPFA government’s popularity. While there is

optimism about Sri Lanka's economic future, there are also vulnerabilities, most notably high government deficits, high inflation, the burdens of heavy defence expenditures and the possibility of international sanctions against Sri Lanka, affecting trade, foreign investment and the flow of funds from international donors. There are questions about how the government might deal with rising discontent produced by deteriorating economic conditions. This was a challenge that President Jayewardene's government faced in 1982. Many believe it provoked the decision to hold a flawed referendum extending the life of Parliament (with its overwhelming UNP majority) for an additional term.

Facing these circumstances, the question becomes "how might President Rajapaksa escape the pitfalls to which predecessors fell prey?" How might he, in contrast to President Jayewardene's self-acknowledged shortcomings, exercise "courage," "foresight" and "intelligence" during his second term? In offering my reflections, I recognise for quite understandable reasons, there has been little receptivity on the part of Sri Lanka's top leadership circle to recommendations from western scholars what should be done. I acknowledge that my views about the likelihood that Sri Lanka's army could defeat the LTTE were wrong. Nonetheless, I believe my views on development and reconciliation in Sri Lanka, based on more than two decades of study, may yet have something to offer. I have spent considerable time studying the Mahinda Chintana, which I see as a forward-looking, even visionary document. It provides a detailed, comprehensive cataloguing of the challenges Sri Lanka faces as well as concrete, specific goals. It recognises that details must be fleshed in, over time and in consultation with various stakeholders in Sri Lankan society. What priorities should be emphasised in moving forward on this ambitious agenda?

Reconciliation should be acknowledged as a requisite of economic development.

First, I believe President Rajapaksa should continue his public acknowledgement that for Sri Lanka's economic development to reach its full potential, communal reconciliation is essential. The greater the success in reconciling Sri Lanka's majority Sinhalese and minority Sri Lanka Tamil communities the greater the probability that policies intended to develop Sri Lanka will succeed. Sri Lanka must, indeed, become "a united motherland – one nation with one vision." To me this sounds very much like the agenda Lee Kuan Yew's People's Action Party proposed to Singapore's diverse peoples as the new nation faced the challenges of survival, post independence.

At three previous junctures cited in this talk, Sri Lankan political leaders made political calculations that acceding to or encouraging communally divisive voices would best serve Sri Lanka. The temptation to use communalism as a basis for political mobilisation, in order to secure or retain power, is always present. A quarter-century of protracted conflict, due in large part to decisions of leaders who could have chosen otherwise, should provide enough evidence that the short term political gains such tactics provide do not justify the long term, invariably damaging, consequences. To acknowledge this reality is not, for a single moment, to excuse or justify terrorism. Like many Sri Lankans, I have lost friends and mentors to the bullets and bombs of LTTE assassins.

There may be no developing country that, for its size, has a greater reservoir of professional talent among its Diaspora communities, both Sinhalese and Tamil. I believe Sri

Lankans would return home, in large numbers, if they believed that economic opportunities in a secure, inclusive society focused on clear development goals awaited them. President Rajapaksa can provide leadership that creates such opportunities. For evidence, one need only consider China and India's experience, where books such as Kishore Mahbubani's *The New Asian Hemisphere* (2008) document the degree to which bright young men and women are returning home to fuel economic development.

Sustainable development should be Sri Lanka's overriding national priority

Second, I believe President Rajapaksa, should, indeed, make sustainable development Sri Lanka's overriding national priority, as the Mahinda Chintana pledges to do. In pursuing this goal Sri Lanka's leaders should be should be mandated by the President to emulate Defence Secretary Rajapaksa's model for winning the war. They should learn from past failures and for every failure find a solution, drawing in part from the successful development experiences of others, especially in Asia. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was little consensus about the path to successful development. Experts from whom Sri Lankan leaders sought advice and academics, who trained them, especially at the London School of Economics, differed widely.

But now, there are success stories to be learned from. One of these is Singapore. In his succinct and lucidly argued 2007 volume, *Singapore's Success*, development economist Henri Ghesquiere highlights three of the most important lessons that he gleaned from studying Singapore's post-independence development trajectory. "First, Singapore followed an integrated approach to development. Outcomes, policies, institutions, social and cultural values and the political dynamics of implementation reinforced one another." [By pursuing an integrated approach to development, across a broad spectrum of policy areas] "...health, fiscal and monetary policy, education, transportation and the like,"... "the government created an intricate network of mutually reinforcing linkages producing a powerful outcome." (pp. 167-168).

"A second theme...was the distinction between basic principles or core functions... and their specific application in the context of a given country... Good institutions can take a variety of forms. Each country must fashion the specifics of its policies and institutions to its own geographical and historical conditions, while keeping to general principles that have proved to be robust over time and across countries." (p. 169)

"Third, leadership is imperative for effective governance... Singapore succeeded because its leadership was assiduous, highly intelligent in a practical way, determined to achieve shared prosperity and committed to act with integrity." "Leading with vision and fortitude is possible," Ghesquiere concludes, "Its benefits can be invaluable. That is Singapore's ultimate lesson."

None of these broad principles are inconsistent with the central messages of the Mahinda Chintana. Indeed, the Mahinda Chintana affirms them, while adapting them and highlighting their relevance to Sri Lanka's distinctive spiritual, cultural, historical and context.

How might these lessons, and others, best be put to use? In the second volume of his remarkable autobiographical testament (2000) Singapore's "Minister Mentor," Lee Kuan

Yew, described two key factors helping to shape his policies that seem particularly relevant to President Rajapaksa's circumstances. Certainly no one would characterise Lee Kuan Yew as a pliant, uncritical emulator of Western developed-world practices, but he was open to learning about political economies of western nations in order to see what lessons could be appropriately be put to use for Singapore's benefit.

In this learning process Minister Mentor acknowledges the "crucial" role played by Dutch Economic Advisor, Dr. Albert Winsemius. Dr. Winsemius served Singapore on a pro-bono basis for 23 years, working closely not only with the Prime minister but with the architects of Singapore's economy, Goh Keng Swee and Hong Sui Sen.

Is there a highly respected, disinterested advisor who could provide a similar window of experience and knowledge to supplement the backgrounds of President Rajapaksa and his close advisors, especially his brothers Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Economic Development Minister Basil Rajapaksa? In fact there is an individual with a background similar in many respects to that of Dr. Winsemius, deeply knowledgeable about the economic foundations of Singapore's success as well as the global economic context in which success has been achieved. I refer to my Lee Kuan Yew School Colleague and the author of *Singapore's Success*, Henri Ghesquiere. He is with us here today. Of course I cannot say President Rajapaksa could – or should – be prevailed upon to request his services. Nor can I say whether Dr. Ghesquiere would agree to play a role Sri Lanka similar to the role Dr. Winsemius played in Singapore. But these possibilities should not be ruled out.

Let me follow the parallels between President Rajapaksa's circumstances in Sri Lanka and Lee Kuan Yew's early years of leadership a bit further.

In 1968, not long after a decisive PAP election victory, Prime Minister Lee took a short sabbatical at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. He writes, "I had been in 8 office nine years, he and needed to recharge my batteries." The lessons he learned from conversations at Harvard deepened his knowledge of American Society and international political economy. In particular, they provided "a valuable lesson on the ever changing nature of technology, industry and markets and how costs, especially wages in labour intensive industries, determined profits." (2000, pp. 73-75).

Could there be a lesson here for President Rajapaksa, a highly gifted, visionary, political leader, but a product of Sri Lanka's Sinhalese heartland whose international political economic experience has been limited? If Sri Lanka is to become a home for "Entrepreneurs with strength to conquer the world," perhaps a sabbatical in which Sri Lanka's President seeks to deepen his understanding of the world Sri Lankan entrepreneurs are setting out to conquer might be invaluable. Sri Lanka's present circumstances are probably more propitious than those Singapore faced in 1968, when Prime Minister Lee temporarily turned over the reins of government to his deputy, Goh Keng Swee.

Where might such a sabbatical be taken? In this era of the new Asian hemisphere, the National University of Singapore and, more specifically, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, might be the ideal setting. But probably I am venturing too far into the realm of

speculation.

Towards a bright future for Sri Lanka: Buddhism as a reconciling force

But how are the divisive fissures in Sri Lankan society that have hitherto poisoned promising development agendas to be overcome? The experiences of S.W.R.D.

Bandaranaike, Sirimavo Bandaranaike and J.R. Jayewardene might suggest that the obstacles created by these divisive fissures are insurmountable. I disagree. I believe that a gifted, powerful political leader such as President Rajapaksa can create a discourse in Sri Lanka through which Buddhism becomes a reconciling, rather than a divisive force. How might this be done?

The story in the 25th chapter of the Mahavamsa, describing how Sinhalese King Dutthagamini united Lanka under one rule, by defeating Tamil King Elara, is known to virtually all Sinhalese schoolchildren. The chronicle tells how, after winning his great victory, Dutthagamini experienced remorse. Speaking to Buddhist monks who had come to attend him, he queried “how shall there be any comfort for me, O venerable sirs, since by me was caused the slaughter of a great host numbering millions?”

The monks are said to have replied. “From this deed arises no hindrance in thy way to heaven. Only one and a half human beings have been slain by here by thee, oh lord of men. The one had come unto the three refuges; the other had taken on himself the five precepts. Unbelievers and evil men were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts.”

However another warrior king, the great Emperor Asoka is also revered by Sri Lankans. Some sources describe him as the greatest propagator of the Buddhist faith next the Lord Buddha himself. We know more of Asoka than most leaders of his time because of the unique method he chose to chronicle his philosophy and instruct his subjects, through edicts that were etched on rocks and pillars throughout his realm.

There are parallels between the legend of King Dutthagamini and the ruler, who early in his reign was known as Asoka the Fierce but later as Dharma Asoka, Asoka the Righteous. His transformation is chronicled in perhaps the most widely quoted of the “Rock Edicts”, the 13th. Like Dutthagamini, Asoka won a great military victory. It was over the rival Kalingas. Several hundred thousand enemy soldiers were slain and Kalinga civilians experienced severe privation. It is written in the 13th Rock Edict that following the victory, “There was remorse of His Sacred Majesty having conquered the Kalingas. For where an independent country is forcibly reduced, that there are slaughter, death and deportations of people has been considered very painful and deplorable by His Sacred Majesty.”

Following the victory, the edict describes how “became intense His Sacred Majesty’s observance of Dharma, love of Dharma and his preaching of Dharma.” Missionary work throughout his realm and beyond became Asoka’s mode of conquest, “the conquest that by this (the Dharma) is won everywhere, that conquest, again, everywhere is productive of a feeling of love.” Asoka advises his descendents to forgo military conquests, however, “if a conquest is theirs (or pleases them) they should relish forbearance and mildness of punishment and that they should consider that only as conquest which is moral conquest...” Asoka’s missionary efforts directed towards “the beautiful isle of Lanka” are chronicled in Chapters 13 through 19 of the Mahavamsa including the story of how the great Bodhi tree

at Anuradhapura came to be planted. The agent of conversion is described as a beautiful boy, Asoka's son, who became "the great Thera, Mahinda, of lofty wisdom." I am assuming, though I can't say for sure, that most Sri Lankans know that their President is named after the monk who, according to legend, converted Sri Lanka to Buddhism, the son of Asoka the Righteous.

Is it beyond the realm of possibility, that President Mahinda Rajapaksa, architect of perhaps the greatest military victory in Sri Lankan history since that of Dutthagamani over Elara, could choose Asoka the righteous as a role model? It is possible that he could commit himself to a vision that was mooted by J.R. Jayewardene in his 1977 campaign but, sadly, became little more than a sound bite, the Dharmista Society? I refuse to dismiss this as impossible. Buddhist traditions and practices offer much in the way of guidance for reconciliation and for humane, sustainable development. As we know, there are countervailing Buddhist traditions and practices that have been influential as well. It is a matter of choosing.

Does this sound impossible? So did the military defeat of the LTTE not long ago
Restoring Sri Lanka to its place as a development success-story for the world
My first contact with Sri Lanka was as a young scholar when I became personally acquainted with Morris W. Morris and with his classic, *Measuring the Condition of the World's Poor* (1979). This path-breaking work was the first to highlight Sri Lanka as a unique development success-story: a country that, while achieving relatively modest levels of economic development, had successfully met the needs of virtually all its people for an acceptable physical quality of life. Later, in my co-authored book, *Ending Hunger: An Idea Whose Time Has Come*, I wrote about Sri Lanka's rice ration programme (later decried by development economists as unsustainable), which sought to make the principle of food sufficiency as a basic human right a matter of public policy.

Though we knew relatively little about the country, Sri Lanka was a beacon light for idealistic young development scholar-practitioners, such as myself. It has the human resources, natural resources and spiritual resources to play this role once again. Its contribution could be unique. It could bring to its development process lessons that success stories like Singapore have to offer. But the context in which those lessons are applied could be uniquely Sri Lankan; uniquely Buddhist. It could be a context that is humane, inclusive, forgiving and affirming; freed from anger and recrimination. These are themes that appear, again and again, throughout the Lord Buddha's teachings. Exactly how such a context might take shape is not for me to say. This must be a task for Sri Lankans, not a foreigner. But I believe a very useful starting point could be the precepts and example of Asoka the Righteous. (Courtesy: Groundviews.org)

John Richardson is author of *Paradise Poisoned: Learning about Conflict, Terrorism and Development from Sri Lanka's Civil Wars* (2005). He is Professor of International Development, School of International Service, American University, Washington, D.C.; Visiting Professor, Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy, and Global Asia Institute, National University of Singapore.

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