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Peace Held Hostage in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) published its annual Global Peace Index (GPI) report in June 2012 which ranked 158 countries on their state of peacefulness. Sri Lanka was the largest mover on the index, ranking 103, up from 130 in the 2011 report. This paper situates this GPI ranking in the current socio-political environment in Sri Lanka, showing that the GPI ranking is not indicative of a sustainable trend and that 'peace' in itself is a problem for certain pockets in Sri Lanka.

'Unknown' Peace in the Time of Confusion

For many of Sri Lanka's 20.3[2] million people, the war between Sri Lanka's armed forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was almost a political norm, if not a normal state of social life. The insecurity and the curtailing of civic freedoms through mechanisms such as the Emergency Regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act contributed to an environment hardly conducive to healthy living. Many sought refuge overseas for personal security, economic well-being and social mobility; these masses comprise the diaspora, a

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[2] Population reported is at 20,277,597 at the recently concluded nationwide census 2012. Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 'Population of Sri Lanka by District, 20 April 2012. http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/Pages/sm/CPH%202011_R1.pdf Accessed on 27 July 2012

powerful factor and an essential element in Sri Lanka's post-war reality. The war in Sri Lanka was the commonly flouted excuse for the lack of resources, the lack of development and the lack of everything else; citizens who remained in Sri Lanka felt the brunt of the war through personnel, personal, and economic loss, while those who migrated were not far removed from the homeland's woes either; having left their families behind, economic aid to them and worry for their safety were compounded by the geographic miles in between.

In May 2009 the war ended, much to the relief of many, especially those in the island living in mortal fear and economic stagnation – leaving behind a war-battered, war-weary and vulnerable society, transcending land and ethnic boundaries within the country. The end of internal warfare brought peace that generations had not known but fervently hoped for but the peace that dawned is the type that knows no bombs and no war. This is an overarching 'negative' peace which by its nature limits its enjoyment. It is apparent that the politicians in Sri Lanka were the least prepared to welcome and nurture peace, having lost their muse popularly used by politicians to explain their policy deficiencies. Three years after that turning point in Sri Lanka's contemporary history, the country is yet to consciously prescribe its post-war identity; and importantly the country's progress to peace remains constrained and marred by the absence of clear government policy and by petty political bickering amongst the political elite. The same lack of direction and unilateral policy is present amongst the diaspora. It appears the question is asked: Now that there is peace in Sri Lanka, what is to be done with it and how?

Negative and Positive Peace

Yet, progress is not entirely stagnant in Sri Lanka, if the Global Peace Index (GPI) of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) is anything to go by. The post-war country was the biggest mover towards peacefulness in 2012, ranking 103 among the 158 countries surveyed, a considerable improvement compared to the country's ranking of 130 among 153 countries in 2011. The IEP conceptualises peace on the GPI scale (first published in 2007) as 'harmony achieved by the absence of war or conflict'[3] defined as 'negative' peace and measured by a composite index of 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators. The indicators are used to evaluate countries on three dimensions: ongoing domestic and international conflict (five indicators), societal safety and security (which measures the level of harmony in a country, 10 indicators), and the level of militarisation in a country (eight indicators). A low score on the composite GPI is indicative of a peaceful country[4].

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[3] Institute for Economics and Peace 'Global Peace Index 2012', p.10. http://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2012-Global-Peace-Index-Report.pdf.   Accessed on 20 July 2012
[4] For a comprehensive explanation of the methodology in weighting scores, refer to annexes A and B of the report.

The IEP differentiates between 'negative' and 'positive' peace where the latter is defined as the 'strength of attitudes, institutions, and structures'[5] within a country that would 'determine the capacity to create and maintain a peaceful society'[6]. The 2012 edition of the GPI report is the first instance in which IEP has measured positive peace. The Positive Peace Index (PPI) is based on a statistical framework utilising 'eight key pillars of peace'[7] which is a combination of economic, cultural and political factors that influence peace in a country. Each of these pillars has an average of three indicators[8] weighted on a 1-5 scale where one is most positively peaceful. The PPI, in comparison with the GPI, provides an insight into a country's propensity for future peace, identifying if a country has a peace surplus or deficit. A peace surplus is identified when a country's GPI ranking is higher (as a number) than that of the PPI ranking; the inverse in rankings depicts a peace deficit. A peace surplus tends to illustrate a country's ability to maintain and improve its peacefulness given the availability of appropriate attitudes, institutes and structures, while a peace deficit depicts the propensity for a regression in peacefulness. Table 1 depicts the peace surpluses or deficits in the region.

Table 1: Peace Deficit/Surplus for South Asian Countries

Country	2011 GPI Ranking	2012 PPI Ranking	Peace Surplus/Deficit
Bangladesh	83	99	Peace Deficit
India	136	87	Peace Surplus
Pakistan	145	105	Peace Surplus
Sri Lanka	130	81	Peace Surplus

 Source: Adapted from http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/

Sri Lanka is ranked 81 on the PPI based on 2010 data, for the comparative period, Sri Lanka ranks 130 among the 153 countries surveyed on the 2011 GPI. When the PPI ranking is compared to both the 2011 and 2012 (103/158) GPI rankings, Sri Lanka has a peace surplus. This paper analyses both the GPI and PPI rankings, paying specific attention to some indicators. The analysis begins with a brief discussion of the GPI results in South Asia.

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[5] Ibid, p.67

[6] Ibid.

[7] The eights pillars of peace composing the PPI are a well-functioning government, sound business environment, equitable distribution of resources, acceptance of the rights of others, good relations with neighbours, free flow of information, high levels of education, and low levels of corruption. Retrieved from the Global Peace Index 2012 report, p.72-73

[8] The Indicators utilise various recognised sources for their data such as the World Bank, the United Nations, Reporters Without Borders, Transparency International and other renowned.

Sri Lanka and Peace in South Asia

Figure 1 displays the GPI scores since 2006 for surveyed South Asian countries. Afghanistan and Pakistan are the least peaceful countries in South Asia, the ranking is likely reflective of the security conditions in these two countries. Bhutan's controlled environment and focus on happiness may be instrumental in placing the nation as the most peaceful in the region, while Nepal's ceasefire with the Maoist forces has played a significant role in improving peace in the country. Both India and Sri Lanka are sandwiched between the other South Asian countries, however while Sri Lanka is seen moving towards a more peaceful environment, India is moving in the opposite direction, according to the GPI rankings. The tense situation on India's western border involving Pakistan and Afghanistan and India's local troubled North-East region likely influences the ranking. As seen from the graph below, Sri Lanka's average is around the 2.5 mark with discernible progress since the war with the LTTE ended in 2009.

Figure 1: South Asian Countries Ranking on GPI 2007-2012
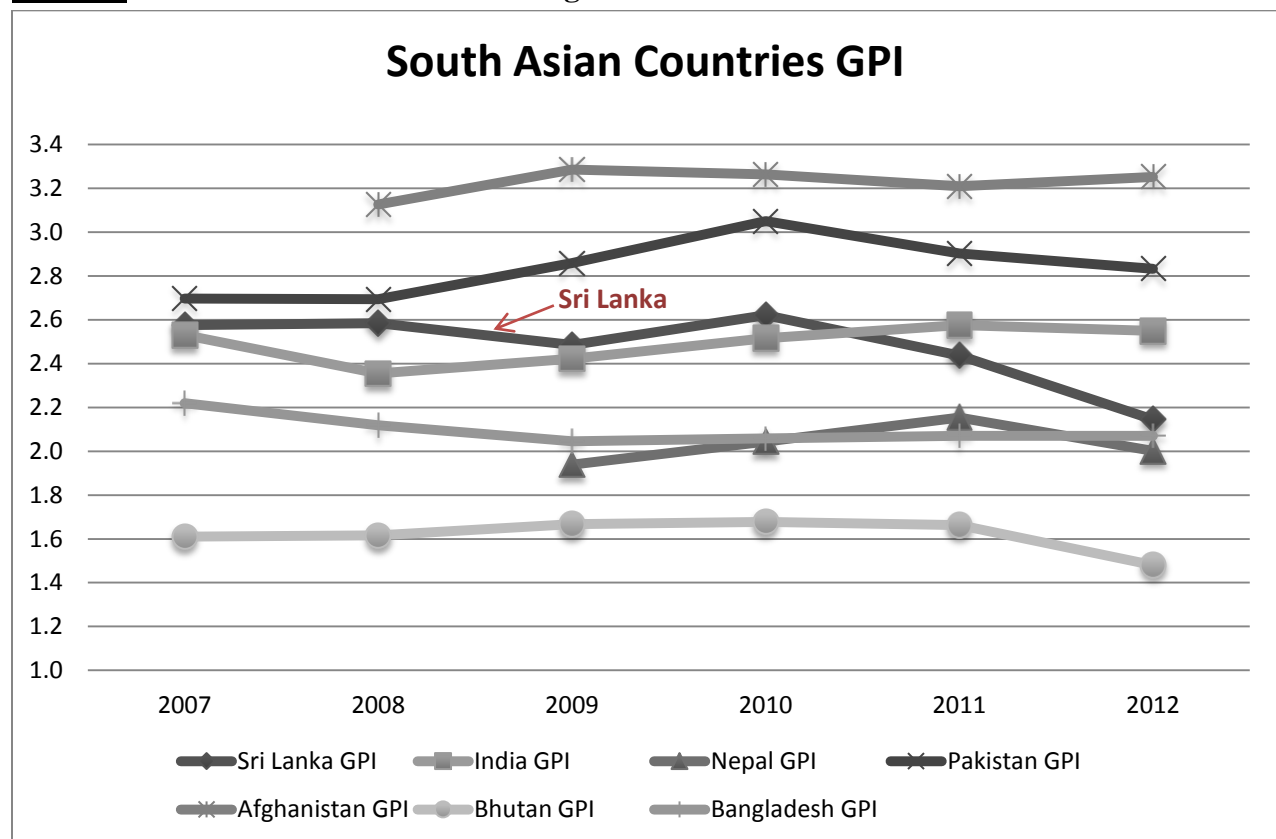
Table 2 provides Sri Lanka's scores on each of 23 indicators since 2007. The most notable change over the six-year period is in the indicator 'deaths from conflict (internal)' plunging from

an all-time high in 2010 and 2011 to an all-time low in 2012[9]. Considering the mid-yearly collection and analysis of data, the figure quoted in 2010 is accumulative of the final stages of the war between Sri Lanka's government forces and the LTTE in 2009. The score for deaths by internal conflict in 2011 is puzzling, given a full year would have elapsed since the end of the war with the LTTE. The figure is likely indicative of violence involving armed groups and other criminal elements. The drop from 2011 and 2012 is remarkable.

Table 2: Sri Lanka GPI Scores 2007-2012

GPI Indicators	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Dimension One: Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict						
Organised Conflict (Internal)	4.5	4.5	4.5	3	3	3
Neighbouring Country Relations	2	2	2	2	2	3
Deaths From Conflict (Internal)	2	3	4	5	5	1
Deaths From Conflict (External)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Conflicts Fought	3	3	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Dimension Two: Societal Safety and Security						
Perceived Criminality in Society	4	4	4	4	3	3
Violent Demonstrations	4	3	3	3	3	3
Political Instability	2.3	2.1	2	2	2	2.1
Political Terror	5	5	5	4.5	5	4.5
Displaced Persons	1.3	1.2	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Terrorist Acts	5	5	5	5	3.5	3
Homicide	3	3	3	3	3	2
Jailed Population	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Violent Crime	2	2	2	2	2	2
Security Officers and Police	2	2	2	2	2	2
Dimension Three: Militarisation						
Military Expenditure	1.9	2	1.5	2	1.9	1.7
Armed Services Personnel	1.9	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Heavy Weapons	1	1	1	1	1	1
Weapons Exports	1	1	1	1	1	1
Military Capability	2	2	2	2	3	3
UN Peacekeeping Funding	NA	NA	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Weapons Import	1	1	1	1	1	1
Access to Weapons	4	4	4	4	4	4

Source: Adapted from http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/

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[9] The IEP measures this indicator based on data made available by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Armed Conflict Database.

Nearly 300,000 civilians were internally displaced at the end of the war in 2009, adding to the existing displaced populace which includes those driven out of their homes by the LTTE two decades ago. Since 2009, government resettlement programmes have made inroads[10] and most displaced persons have been resettled in either their places of origin or with friends and family. However, there are displaced persons yet to be resettled. It was only in August 2012 that resettlement in the former LTTE strongholds of Puthukudyiruppu and Mullaitivu[11] began; it is in this context that the score for displaced persons on the GPI can be understood. Although the LTTE is no longer operational in Sri Lanka and there have been no reports of mass-casualty terrorist attacks since May 2009, the IEP has the indicator 'terrorist acts'[12] valued relatively high; this is likely indicative of politically motivated attacks using small arms such as grenades and automated weapons[13]. The score for 'military expenditure'[14] has remained relatively the same in Sri Lanka and is still significant; the government has claimed that the high expenditure on military is due to payments for heavy weaponry obtained during the war, a large troop base and post-war rehabilitation[15]. The score for 'violent demonstrations'[16] has remained high and constant. Street protests and demonstrations are common in Sri Lanka; in early 2012, street demonstrators protested against the rise in cost of living, and police brutality was reported in the town of Chilaw[17]. The GPI indicators picked for a more detailed analysis are marked in italics in Table 2. These indicators were picked as they are considered relevant to peace building in Sri Lanka in the current socio-political context. Prior to embarking on this discussion, a brief look at the PPI and the scores of the South Asian nations and Sri Lanka is necessary for a holistic discussion.

The inaugural PPI measured 108 countries. On this index the South Asian countries rank low, the highest rank is 81 (Sri Lanka) while the lowest is 105 (Pakistan). Table 3 illustrates the scores for each of the pillars of peace attributed to the South Asian countries.

Sri Lanka while having the highest overall ranking in terms of positive peace, scores the worst on the indicator for 'free flow of information' which measures internet usage and media

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[10] Sri Lanka Mirror, 'UN praises progress in Sri Lanka', 03 August 2012. Available at http://srilankamir ror.com/news/856-un-praises-progress-in-sri-lanka. Accessed on 4 August 2012.

[11] The Indian Express, 'Sri Lanka begins resettling in former LTTE nerve centre', 11 August 2012. Available at http://www.indianexpress.com/news/sri-lanka-begins-resettling-in-former-ltte-nerve-centre/987022/. Accessed on 12 August 2012

[12] The IEP measures this indicator based on data made available by the Global Terrorism Database, University of Maryland, and data collected by the Institute for Economics and Peace

[13] Ada Derana, 'Two Killed in Shooting at JVP Rally', 15 June 2012. Available at http://www.adaderan a.lk/news.php?nid=18468 Accessed on 21 July 2012

[14] The IEP measures this indicator based on data made available by the IISS, The Military Balance.

[15] Colombopage, 'Sri Lanka's defence expenditure as a percentage of GDP expected to decline', 31 May 2012. Available at: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_12/May31_1338486275CH.php. Accessed on 25 July 2012

[16] This is a qualitative assessment by the Economist Intelligence Unit

[17] D.B.S. Jeyaraj, 'One Killed and eight critically injured in crackdown on fisherfolk protesting fuel price increase in Chilaw', 16 February 2012. Available at: http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/4247. Accessed on 25 July 2012

freedom. Media freedom in Sri Lanka was severely regulated during the last stages of the conflict in Sri Lanka by relevant government authorities. The regulation of media, bordering on censure continues to this day in the guise of crackdowns, closure and high registration fees[18] for media organisations and through intimidation, the practice of self-censorship by once independent media organisations. There is no indication the environment for media in Sri Lanka would improve in the near future given the existing socio-political conditions including a 'fledgling' justice system and a culture of impunity.

Table 3: Pillars of Peace Scores for South Asian Countries

Pillars of Peace	Country				
	Sri Lanka	India	Bangladesh	Pakistan	World Average
Well Functioning Government	2.62	2.87	3.45	3.42	**2.59**
Sound Business Environment	3.41	3.89	3.91	3.67	**3.07**
Equitable Distribution of Resources	1.96	2.92	2.75	3.13	**2.11**
Acceptance of the Rights of Others	3.49	3.40	3.35	4.48	**2.57**
Good Relations with Neighbours	3.09	3.07	3.05	3.78	**2.52**
Free Flow of Information	3.93	3.03	3.53	3.65	**2.50**
High Levels of Education	2.06	3.30	3.62	3.80	**2.19**
Low Levels of Corruption	3.88	3.80	4.34	4.38	**3.28**

Source: Adapted from http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/

Post-war economic expectations are increasingly unmet. Not only has the Rupee devalued (and continues to float), the cost of living has surged driving throngs on to the streets to protest the price increases of various essential goods. The business environment has not been spared, reflected in the low ranking (90) in June 2012 compared to the February 2012 ranking of 141 on the LMD-Nielsen Business Confidence Index[19]. The June 2012[20] ranking is the lowest since the end of the war. Therefore, while Sri Lanka's score on the indicator 'sound business environment' on the PPI is better than those of its South Asian neighbours, internally the business environment has regressed significantly since February 2012. The deteriorating economic and business conditions in the country are a worrying sign not just for the populace, but for the government

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[18] United Press International, 'Criticism over Sri Lankan closure of news websites', 02 July 2012. Available at http://www.upiasia.com/Top-News/International/2012/07/02/Criticism-over-Sri-Lankan-closure-of-news-websites/CVB-1341262114716/. Accessed on 27 July 2012

[19] Lanka Monthly Digest (LMD), 'Index Plunges to Post-War Low', July 2012, pp 23-24.

[20] Ibid.

that had sold a prosperous economic dream to its vote base. The obstacles to overcome in delivering and sustaining economic development are steadfastly increasing under the current government's watch and unless these are mitigated and citizens' concerns are addressed, the current government would find its popularity has declined. The pillars indicated in italics in Table 3 will be analysed alongside the selected GPI indicators in latter sections.

Halt the Celebrations

Taken at face value, Sri Lanka's rankings on the GPI and PPI are encouraging, and while both qualitative and quantitative measures were utilised for the indices, it is worth delving into some of the indicators in an attempt to explore whether the positive peace surplus would aid in Sri Lanka's post-war recovery and if there, indeed, is a cause for celebration. Three themes will be analysed: governance, social harmony, and relations with neighbours. Table 4 depicts the themes as corresponded with GPI and PPI indicators.

Table 4: Themes and Indicators

Themes	Indicators	Index
Governance	Political Stability	GPI
	Political Terror	GPI
	Well functioning government	PPI
Social Harmony	Acceptance of the rights of others	PPI
	High Levels of Education	PPI
	Access to Weapons	GPI
Relations with neighbours	Good Relations with Neighbours	GPI and PPI

Governance: Victimising Peace

The indicators grouped in this theme measure government effectiveness, political culture, and rule of law on the PPI; the political stability and terror indicators are qualitative measures on the GPI. As such, the gamut of indicators combined provides a concise insight into the governance aspect of a selected country. Sri Lanka's scores for these indicators on the indices are similar, but vary for the indicator of political terror, in respect of which Sri Lanka scores low. Under the prism of PPI, regionally Sri Lanka is the best governed in South Asia, while locally the governance indicator is the third-best score. These scores are not reflective of current sentiments in Sri Lanka.

By all measures, Sri Lanka's government should be considered stable. There are no visible external threats to the government in power, in either a strong and viable political opposition or a militant organisation. The government enjoys a majority in parliament, through which new bills and amendments are casually passed; an example is the 18th Amendment to the Constitution[21], which many analysts, onlookers and citizens have considered as a death knell for democracy. Yet, the government is seemingly inundated by a stasis. The absence of a clear policy towards a political solution to the ethnic conflict, combined with non-committal verbosity on the implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution and on the ambiguous '13th 'plus'' and home-grown solution, has tainted the government's track record. In 2012, the economic dreams of many are beginning to crumble; consumer and business faith in the government's economic policies have shrunk considerably as evident in the LMD-Nielsen surveys discussed earlier. The government has put itself at square one where it needs to face two major issues simultaneously: a political solution to the ethnic conflict and mitigating economic hardships minus the euphoria of having ended a three-decade long war.

While the government will be pressured to solve the economic downturn domestically, the political solution to the ethnic conflict has the government facing international pressure too. Foremost in terms of international pressure is the impact of the United Nations (UN) vote on Sri Lanka. The March 2012 UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) session voted in favour of the implementation of the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). The UNHRC will monitor Sri Lanka's progress in implementing the recommendations; to this effect the government has produced a National Action Plan[22] that tackles 91 recommendations. The LLRC recommendations are mostly generic and applicable to all ethnic communities: the establishment of the rule of law, good governance, fundamental rights, administration of justice and an advocacy of strengthening democracy while highlighting the need to build public confidence in state systems, especially justice. The report does not delve in depth into the issue of alleged war crimes and human rights violations during the final stages of the conflict. This shortcoming of the report has been criticised by the Tamil National Alliance (TNA)[23], local civil society groups and NGOs. In a section of the report entitled 'issues relevant

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[21] The 18th Amendment to the Constitution removed presidential term limits, previously restricted to a maximum of two. More worrying, the amendment also gives the executive president increased powers and freedom over legislative, judiciary and electoral appointments through a new mechanism known as the Parliamentary Council replacing the Constitutional Council. The Parliamentary Council, unlike the Constitutional Council, can only consist of members of parliament. Through the amendment, the executive president can also attend and partake in parliamentary sessions.

[22] Perera, Jehan, 'LLRC Action Plan And Taking LLRC Report Seriously', Colombo Telegraph 30 July 2012. Available at: http://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/llrc-action-plan-and-taking-llrc-report-seriously/. Accessed on 2 August 2012

[23] The TNA released a report on the LLRC and its report, showing up the commission as biased and the processes involved as flawed, in a 70-page rebuttal of the LLRC report, titled 'Responses to the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission Report'. Accessed at: http://www.sangam.org/2012/01/TNA_LLRC_Response.pdf
The Tamil National Alliance is the main coalition Tamil political party in Sri Lanka

to addressing grievances and promoting reconciliation', the committee laments the delay in the full implementation of the recommendations[24] of the Interim Report[25] and emphasises that 'all allegations should be investigated and wrongdoers prosecuted and punished'[26]. At present the implementation of the report is tied to the National Action Plan whose contents have not been released to the public. International pressure is also exerted mainly by the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, directly and indirectly by lobbying international media hubs, government representatives and engaging the public. The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora's main thrust is the issue of war crimes and the lobbying for an international investigation into the same.

The current government's transition into a post-war, peace-time government has been remarkably slow, hindered by the alliances made with some allegedly unsavoury yet necessary individuals and groups as required during the war. This is now a cause for concern. Allegations are many that individuals and groups, party to the ruling coalition, are responsible for a variety of crimes including enforced disappearances and harassment.[27] In a strange twist, post-war Sri Lanka still suffers from a fear psychosis, enabled by the near-absence of impartial and independent state law enforcement authorities, but the government itself is a victim of this fear psychosis, except that its dilemma must be one of political survival. Political stability has not achieved much in Sri Lanka since the defeat of the LTTE; unbridled political power, insecure political elite and dysfunctional opposition political parties have made the political environment in Sri Lanka anything but well functioning. It is pertinent to wonder if 'peace' is a cause of this ruckus.

Social Harmony: Myths and Myth-busters

Scores for the three indicators grouped in the social harmony theme vary considerably. On the PPI, access to education is the second-best score, while acceptance of the rights of others is the third-worst, while there is no change in the access to weapons, although the war with the LTTE ended in 2009. The 'access to weapons' indicator was included in the social harmony theme

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[24] The interim report carried recommendations on language, persons held in detention for prolonged periods of time, law and order, and land issues. While the government has made overtures to address the language issue by introducing a tri-lingual policy, its implementation is left wanting, particularly due to the lack of resources. The interim report called specifically for the publication of a list of names of those detained, this is also being done in stops and starts.

[25] Chapter 8, Reconciliation, Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission Report, p. 302

[26] Ibid.

[27] Gunasekera, Tisaranee, 'Sri Lanka, Through The Bathiudeen-Mirror', The Sunday Leader, 29 July 2012. Available at http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2012/07/29/sri-lanka-through-the-bathiudeen-mirror/. Accessed on 3 August 2012. Edirisinghe, Dasun and Mudugamuwa, Maheesha, 'SLFP sacks four members accused of child abuse, rape', The Island, 19 July 2012. Available at http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=57201. Accessed on 25 July 2012

because it is regarded as an enabler of violence juxtaposed with the low acceptance of the rights of others.

Sri Lanka has maintained literacy rates in the upper 90 percentile cutting across gender, ethnicity and social class. However, where education suffers in Sri Lanka is at the tertiary level. To correct this, there have been initiatives to introduce private and international universities in Sri Lanka, which has met stiff opposition from current university students and some academicians. Regardless of the situation with tertiary education, there is no dearth in the ability to read and write, the issue lies with the access to information, for example, the LLRC report recommendations have not been sufficiently[28] translated into Sinhalese and Tamil and disseminated to the public. What is known of the recommendations is that which is communicated via media and other civil society groups, of which there is insufficient coverage due to a lack of resources.

The PPI's indicator—acceptance of the rights of others incorporates empowerment including gender-based empowerment and intergroup cohesion. Given the nature of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, which involved the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil ethnic groups, the acceptance of the rights of others is paramount for peaceful co-existence. In a survey questionnaire on the causes of the ethnic conflict[29], 61.9 per cent of the Sinhalese agreed with 'legitimate grievances held by minorities', while 61.4 per cent cited the 'lack of equal treatment for all citizens' and 44.4 per cent indicated 'lack of space for diverse ethnic/cultural identities' as reasons for the ethnic conflict. However, 59.2 per cent of the Sinhalese respondents also cited 'unreasonable demands made by minorities' and 90.1 per cent indicated 'terrorism' as reasons for the conflict. In the same list, over 90 per cent of all minorities[30] indicated the 'lack of equal treatment for all citizens' or 'legitimate grievances held by the minorities' as the reasons for the conflict. These statistics are indicative of a need to engage the majority community in a bid to propagate that the acceptance of another's rights is not tantamount to the curtailing of one's own rights. In Sri Lanka, it appears the responsibility of this falls on civic groups, educational hubs and media until the political parties and government in power can get their acts together. At present the political parties remain communal in outlook and ready to manipulate communal emotions. They suffer from a policy paralysis that has resulted in the invoking of ancient and modern history to galvanise primordial emotions among the Sri Lankan people.

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[28] Translations of the complete report in both Sinhala and Tamil languages are undertaken by civil society groups and only available on the Internet.

[29] The International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Sri Lanka, 'Seeking Space for State Reform', 2 January 2012. Available at: http://ices.lk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/20111207_PSRP_Booklet.pdf. Accessed on 15 July 2012

[30] Minorities include all other ethnic races in Sri Lanka excluding the Sinhala ethnicity

Relations with Neighbours: The India Factor

The PPI and GPI indices combine qualitative and quantitative techniques when measuring relations with neighbours. Sri Lanka's scores on these indices are relatively the same as those of the neighbouring nations, although the score on the GPI has changed negatively for Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's relations with its regional neighbours are overshadowed by its relationship with India, which since the defeat of the LTTE has taken some beating but remains cordial and friendly. The overall cordiality of relations between India and Sri Lanka is unlikely to change but the number of storms that will need weathering will increase. There are three reasons for the increased tension in relations between India and Sri Lanka.

Foremost is the apparent support for the formation of a separate state of 'Tamil Eelam' in the North and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, emanating from some Tamil Nadu politicians. These demands are hardly supported in Sri Lanka,[31] especially by the majority ethnic community which is not in favour of a federal system of government (78.4 per cent) as a solution to the ethnic conflict, let alone a separate state. Demands for Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka by Tamil Nadu politicians not only antagonise their counterparts in Sri Lanka but promote distrust in the Sri Lankan populace towards its largest neighbour. Because of the dark clouds of India's covert support for the LTTE in its formative years and the Indo-Lanka peace accord of 1987, India is increasingly gazed at with unmitigated suspicion in many circles in Sri Lanka. Secondly, India's vote against Sri Lanka at the 29th session of the UNHCR in March 2012 has further contributed to suspicion of India's interests in Sri Lanka. This aspect, however, is of lesser unanimity than the opposition to Tamil Eelam. Delhi's vote against Sri Lanka, considered a stab in the back by some, is regarded by others favourably as it calls for the implementation of the LLRC recommendations. India's involvement in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has left both nations at logger-heads occasionally, but the resistance to Indian political pressure probably has its origins in 1987 in the context of the Indian Peace Keeping Force's (IPKF) bloody sojourn in the island nation that caused the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government to work together to rid the island of the IPKF. Indian involvement in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict and Sri Lanka's distrust of Indian tactics are both rooted in India's funding and training of young Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups in the 1970's, the IPKF involvement in the 1980's and the living contestation of the 13th Amendment[32]. Nevertheless, given this less than rosy past, the two countries have worked together amicably. Thirdly, the fork in the works is the Sri Lankan government's complacent attitude towards peace building and evolving a political solution to the conflict. It is indeed a telling commentary that most of Sri Lanka's sore points with India have revolved around Sri

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[31] 83.9 per cent of all survey respondents disapproved of the idea of forming a separate state, in the ICES report on 'Seeking Space for State Reform', p.27

[32] The 13th Amendment has been contested by right wingers in the country as an imposition on the island nation, by the ruling government as a flawed move and by some members of the TNA as insufficient.

Lanka's ethnic conflict. Until the Sri Lankan government makes haste (while the sun shines on it) to solve the ethnic conflict, opportunistic Indian and Sri Lankan politicians can and will manipulate the situation in Sri Lanka for their own ends. For normalisation of relations with India, Sri Lanka needs to get its act together, the war-victory party is over and it's time to nurse a 3-year-old hangover.

The Problem with Peace

How does a politician 'sell' peace when there is no physical threat to it? By listing ways in which peace could be lost, by creating a new or exaggerating an existing bogey, by continuously referring to measures taken in the past to ensure peace or by promoting a vision of a prosperous future. Politicians in Sri Lanka, whether in the government or opposition, have adopted all three tactics; peace is a commodity in Sri Lanka, rare at first and now extravagantly priced. Regardless of whether the peace that Sri Lanka now enjoys is negative or positive, the current situation is the most peaceful state of affairs that many of its people have ever known so far. It is precisely this existing peacefulness that has enabled the shifting of focus to a milieu of issues which were previously ignored by and large and for a protracted period of time. Issues addressed in Sri Lanka today include the abuse of women and children, corruption, injustice; and amongst these is the seeking of a solution to the ethnic conflict. While there has not been a large and vocal push for a solution, a sizeable portion of the population has commanded government attention and action. All small actions are powerful as an aggregate, and given today's connected world, small movements and initiatives do not remain small for long. For the politicians in the country, peace is an issue; it underscores their ineptitude and provides no muse as the war with the LTTE did. For them, there is also no incentive in sustaining peace and building an inclusive society, because the more united a society is, the more accountable a politician has to become. The absence of war in Sri Lanka has made the issues of economic development and equality for all very real. It takes effort, determination and the will to resolve these – this may actually be harder than fighting a terrorist group.

Peace is also not an incentive for a segment of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora which had supported or sympathised with the LTTE and continues to support the demand for the establishment of a separate state, Tamil Eelam. Arguably, if peace progresses amongst the communities in Sri Lanka, the extreme positions held by various communities will lose out. A harmonious society makes it difficult for extreme ideologies to cause schisms; for those who want to prevent this from happening, the easy way is to prevent the existing peacefulness from flourishing by highlighting communal differences and leveraging past atrocities – not for the purpose of grieving but for furthering a political agenda. This too should in some form or manner be considered a dastardly act.

Delivering peace by coming to terms with a war-torn past requires political maturity. The problem with peace in Sri Lanka is that while it has dawned, the politicians have not awoken to post-war realities. Identity politics has taken centre stage in Sri Lanka; although there is initiative to define what it means to be Sri Lankan, this initiative falls on its head when it is imposed upon people and not nurtured from the ground up. A great deal of self-introspection, recognition of realities and forward movement is required if the peacefulness that Sri Lanka currently enjoys is to include all its citizens and improve over the years.

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