

SRI LANKAN ECONOMY AFTER THE TERRORIST CONFLICT

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Abstract

Sri Lanka fought a war for three decades that resulted in the loss of many lives. Expenses for recruiting and maintaining a large military and the purchase of technically advanced weapons were inevitable for the government. Lack of security in Sri Lanka, discouraged tourists from visiting the country and this reduced the amount of revenue generated through tourism. Infrastructure development underwent a considerable decline due to the situation in Sri Lanka; therefore, the material wealth of the country was not conducive with underdeveloped roads etc. Agriculture and livestock farming was affected and foreign investments were not visible due to the climate of uncertainty. The purpose of this paper is to study the economic effects and consequences of the Sri Lankan civil war primarily based on secondary sources.

Keywords – war, terrorism, economic, infrastructure and development

INTRODUCTION

The ethnic conflict that commenced in 1983 between the Sinhalese and the Tamils of Sri Lanka, paved the way for the formation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), to rise as an extremist group that promoted security of the disreputable Tamils in the northern and eastern parts of the country. The movement that started as resistance to tensions in politics, transformed into acts of terrorism within a short period of time due to various visions, policies and actions followed by the LTTE. The vision to create a separate state with their own government was the main slogan used by the LTTE when recruiting new members to the organization and this resulted in them receiving monetary support from international organizations such as the Tamil diaspora and Sri Lankan Tamils who had similar sentiments (Kapur, 2020). The external funds constituted “about four-fifths of the total revenue of the LTTE” (Manoharan, 2004). Indian politicians too extended their support to the group until late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was murdered by a suicide bomb initiated by a member of the LTTE in Tamil Nadu (PTI, 2019). This led to the banning of LTTE in India; being the first country to do so.

From 1983 to 2009, many lives, inclusive of those of the armed forces, terrorists and innocent civilians were lost. Many valuable and influential personalities such as former foreign minister Sir Lakshman Kadirgamar and Cabinet Minister Jeyaraj

Fernandopulle of Sri Lanka were attacked by the terrorists. Minister Gamini Dissanayake was assassinated in 1994 when he was named as a presidential candidate in 1994. The LTTE victimized clergies and innocent civilians popularizing their abilities. The Aranthalawa massacre in 1987 where 33 monks were killed and the assassination of Kithalgama Seelalankara Nayaka Thero, the highest priest of Dimbulagala Forest monastery, were inhumane attacks on Buddhist monks instigated by the LTTE. The Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi was severely attacked killing around 146 civilians (Goldfm News, 2014) while the suicide bombing at the Temple of the Tooth Relic caused serious damage to the temple and killed 17 devotees there (CNNin, 1998). These situations depict the cruelty and antagonism of the Tigers towards the Buddhist monks and the Sinhalese community. Meanwhile, in certain instances it was clear that the rebels targeted other religious leaders and their followers. The attacks in Kattankudy, which killed around 150 Muslim men and boys is a prime example of this (AP, 1990).

Furthermore, attacks such as the Kabithigollawa bus attack that killed a large number of civilians, prompted the government to take action regarding the increase in violence towards the citizens of the country. The humanitarian mission commenced in 2006 as a counter measure to the military exploits of the LTTE on civilians in the north of the country. The authors intend to give a brief understanding on how the war has influenced the development of infrastructure and other economic ideals of Sri Lanka during and after war in the country with reference to a few aspects that help to determine the economic stature in laymen terms instead of an economist's point of view.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The main reason for the war between the Sri Lankan government and LTTE “was to create an independent separate state known as Tamil Eelam in the north and east of the country” (Garg, 2021). As obvious as it is, it had directly affected to the infrastructure of the country. Sri Lanka entered the international system as an independent state on February 4, 1948. It was not fully independent, but it had allowed to take necessary actions and had the chance to improve hard and soft infrastructure of the country. A few insights about the social and economic infrastructure of Sri Lanka before 1948 are that; electricity and water was limited only to commercial cities. However, after independence the Sri Lankan government paid

attention to distribute electricity and water to rural areas as well. In order to do that, the government built new power stations and distributed cable lines all over the country. To achieve this target, the government introduced development schemes like the Mahaweli development programme. The main objective of the Mahaweli Development Programme was to build dams, to improve agriculture and produce electricity for the country. A few innovations of this project were New Laxapana, Canyon, Bowatenna, Ukuwela, Randenigala, Kotmale and Victoria power stations. During the war, buildings, roads, and electricity supply chains in the Northern and Eastern provinces of the country were destroyed. Infrastructure development in North and East provinces was halted. People who lived in the Northern and Eastern provinces were limited to their homes, whilst also watching their homes being destroyed. They lived as refugees in poverty, while millions were spent on defence requirements. War immobilized all infrastructural developments in the country. Before the war, the goal of the Sri Lankan government was to develop infrastructure of the country and uplift the citizen's standard of living. Although this is true, once the war started, the government gave more attention to the defence budget of the country. Post-war government regimes have accounted for a large amount of national wealth for military budgets. Different war-specific tax schemes, such as the 'Defence Levy,' 'Save the Nation Levy,' and 'Nation Building Levy,' were enacted to cover a large percentage of the defence budget (Jayasundara-Smits, 2018). Unlike some other countries at war who reduce expenses through the creation of domestic armaments, Sri Lanka's war did not benefit the country's economy. Importing weaponry had consumed a significant portion of the military budget. The military budget in 2016 was roughly around US\$ 289,160,000. The disparity between the 2015 defence authorization which was about US\$ 2.22 billion and its military spending in 2016, which is anticipated to be US\$ 2.89 billion, demonstrates the growth in the budget (Jayasundara-Smits, 2018).

During the war period, development projects like Mahaweli development project in Sri Lanka seemed like, it had non-continued existence due to economic barriers. Conversely, after the culmination of the war, the several development projects were still under constructions and most of them were handled by MAGA. Nonetheless, as a whole, development indicators of the country showed a gradual growth of the economy in the Northern and Eastern provinces only after the war ended.

Prior to 1948, the British government only considered to develop roads that economically supported them based on their “export-based plantation agriculture” (Caldera, 2005, p.86). Therefore, were not keen on developing rural roads. However, after independence, the government paid attention to improve transportation in rural areas. Nevertheless, infrastructure development in Jaffna was affected during the war. Areas like Kilnochchi and Mulativu where the Tamil tigers used to hide are now largely uninhabited. After the end of the war, there has been massive progress in the reconstruction of roads and bridges in the Northern and Eastern provinces in the country under projects such as the ‘Uthuru Vasanthaya’ and ‘Negenahira Navodaya’. Thirty-five villages in the Vavuniya district were constructed under the ‘Uthuru Vasanthaya’ scheme, and it was a part of the government's 180-day expedited effort to resettle Tamil civilians. Under this development project, the pre-identified infrastructure of these villages were planned to improve to give additional facilities for the Tamil civilians who would be resettled in the area immediately post-war (ReliefWeb, 2009). ‘Negenahira Navodaya’ began shortly after government forces defeated the LTTE in the Eastern front, and ‘Uthuru Vasanthaya’ followed after the LTTE's base in Vanni was taken. Shortly after the LTTE was defeated in the Eastern province, the government launched ‘Negenahira Navodaya’ as a three-year rapid programme to restore normalcy and stability in the area (Chaaminda, 2012). These projects arose at a critical historical moment, with the defeat of the LTTE and the re-establishment and consolidation of state power in the Northern and Eastern provinces. They constitute an important case study for examining the political aspect of development. According to D. Weerakoon (2013), “international financial markets and bilateral partners such as China” provided loans to the state to facilitate the construction of infrastructure and economic development. These constructions not only promoted the building of relationships between the North and South physically, but also between humanity, economy and also between the Sinhalese and Tamils. Today, thousands of people pass through Vavuniya city to enter the North from the South as well as from the North to the South daily without fear of obstacles or violence. Throughout the years, government had arranged for people who lived in those areas to have access to food, shelter and the privilege to live a healthy life under one roof as a family.

War expenditure raised year after year, but Sri Lanka's income did not increase simultaneously. According to the reports of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL),

economic support to and from the north and east were restricted due to the war. War had become a heavy strike to our economy as well as social structure. War completely changed the mindset of humans and, their ambitions in life changed into ambitions to survive.

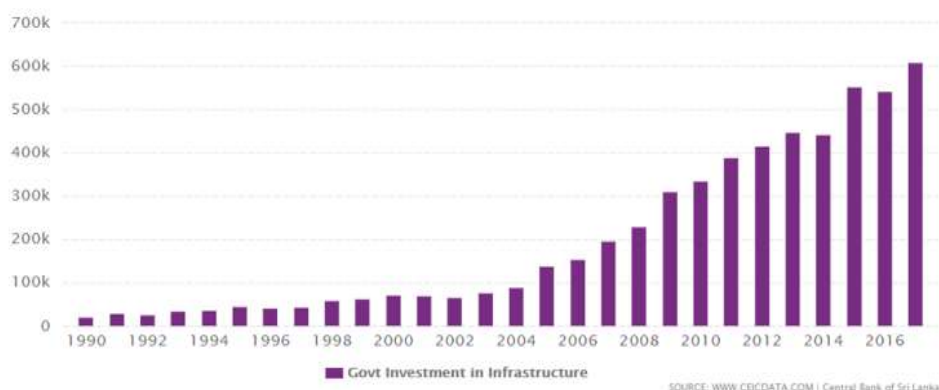
The government had undertaken action to build and restore the railway network into the Northern Province with the assistance of the government of India alongside the development of roads within the country by late 2009 and early 2010. Northern railway lines from Vavuniya to Kankasanthurei and Madawachchiya to Talaimannar were already constructed. The Mannar railway line was completed, and the train service commenced in 2015 and ever since the passengers and goods transportation have been greatly improved in the Northern Province. This could not be done during the period of war. The train service has traditionally been the most popular mode of transport between the North and South since earlier times and it has been a fascination for thousands of people, tourists and pilgrims, including the locals over the years. After the construction of the Northern railway line and restoration of the service, people destined to Jaffna and vice versa have been able to travel with ample comfort and safety.

With the end of war, the government of Sri Lanka had also allocated significant amount of funds to reconstruct and develop the district general hospitals in Jaffna, Vavuniya, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Kilnochi and other additional base hospitals in Northern and Eastern provinces. Health services were compatibly neglected during war and the injured soldiers and civilians had to be treated and taken care of under dire situations according to war veterans. The healthcare framework is an important aspect in determining the status of development of a country, but the involvement of the extremists made it impossible for the development of suitable infrastructure related to the health sector.

Social and financial foundations had to be recreated in the war influenced zones of Sri Lanka, since they had been unfortunately influenced by the 26 years of common war. The Sri Lankan government has given an incredible consideration to satisfy this errand in the Northern and Eastern regions with the assistance of various governmental organizations. A significant number of activities were associated with the general national improvement program too.

The main economic crisis happened immediately before and after the end of war. The graph below (Fig. 1) demonstrates the patterns of investments on infrastructure in

contrary with monetary separations for war. In spite of the fact that there was a progression in financial sector of the country in the previous years, various deficiencies were showed up in war influenced areas in the immediate years after war.



*Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1 Government Investment in Infrastructure: Bar graph depicting the Sri Lanka government investment in infrastructure from year 1990-2016 (source: CBSL Report, 2016)*

Production of goods and services of the country was annihilated due to war. This was mainly because the lack of reliable modes of transportation. Companies and factories were unable to transport their finished goods and raw materials, thus breaking off the production process. As a result, investments and other modes of money inflows into our economy had a massive dropdown. Investors were unsure of their return profits and no individual would take a massive risk of that kind knowing the obvious results. Subsequently the war expenditures were decreasing in 2009, but up until 2015, the economical portion of defence budget was not cut down. Citizens' ambition to develop their lives increased because of the government's focus on developing the infrastructure of our country. Sri Lanka with conviction had lot of challenges to win. Infrastructure of North and East were destroyed by the war. Aimed at the enhancement of social and economic infrastructure, the government of Sri Lanka initiated a number of projects in the war affected zones. Basic necessities such as social and economic infrastructures were very much needed to resettle families and to enable them to follow their daily routines and embrace new technology.

Right after the end of war, Sri Lankan government was more absorbed in developing the infrastructure of Northern and Eastern parts of the country which gave rise to the project "Uthuru wasanthaya". This project mainly focused on the development of infrastructure and to increase the living standards of civilians in Northern and Eastern areas of the country and thankfully the results of the projects were far better than expected. "Uthuru wasanthaya" turned out to be one of the successful projects

initiated after war. It brought many international cash flows into the country in various forms including foreign donations and foreign loans. In addition to “Uthuru wasanthaya” government started other projects like “Gama naguma, rata-naguma, Api wawamu rata hadhamu, Dayata kirula” etc to uplift and power the development of infrastructure and agriculture within the country.

Many of the projects were connected to inter-governmental organizations and institutions. They participated in the overall national development program through this. These programs have benefited the people in war affected areas as much as those in the rest of the country who have links with economic affairs in the former war torn regions. Although there was a progress seen in socioeconomic development in the former war affected areas, a number of shortages like unemployment and housing facilities in some areas still appear which is yet to receive attention from the authorities.

Seeking to restore peace in the country, the government has achieved much with the reconstruction and development of the socio-economic sectors of the war affected areas. The government had given significant consideration to implement the physical reconstruction work within the first five years of the post-war period. Those physical reconstructions represented one aspect of the post-conflict peace building process, which had aimed to re-establish the quantifiable assets of the war affected areas as that would help to rebuild the shattered economy. Although there are some negative issues related to peace dividends, the study observed that the war affected provinces have achieved significant progress in the physical aspects of post-war reconstruction. The theory of post-conflict peacebuilding has suggested that reconstruction and development as an important task to bring back the war affected community to their normal life in the social and economic fields. This does not mean physical reconstruction of the war devastated areas only, but also addressing the root causes of the conflict.

TOURISM

Tourism industry of Sri Lanka is a field that could have been well developed with the gifted location and natural beauty of the island. With its beaches, waterfalls, mountains, vegetation and plains, Sri Lanka has everything that a typical tourist or a traveller wants to experience. The culture and cuisine also add up to the factors which attract individuals towards a particular tourist destination.

Tourists were not attracted into the country due to the civil war. For thirty years, the country that could have been prosperous with the flourishing tourism industry, could not reach its expected targets with regard to tourism. Hence economy of Sri Lanka once again thrashed. However with the end of the war, Sri Lanka saw a gradual increase in the number of arrivals of tourists into the country.

Named as one of the most stunning famous tourist destinations by various tourist magazines and researchers, Sri Lanka's pride and integrity associated with its culture and wildlife are significant assets when inviting foreign tourists into the country. This was not achievable prior to post-war due to the uncertainty on the safety of the visiting tourists. Even though some amount of tourists did arrive, the war torn areas were of course left untrodden. Travel + Leisure, an American magazine named Sri Lanka as the best island for travel in its 'The 15 Best Islands in the World'. Also, 'Lonely Planet' ranked Sri Lanka number one as the best travel destination in the world for the year 2019; a decade after the end of the civil war (Andree, 2019). Yet, Sri Lanka was not even included in the list 'Best in Travel' 2020 as an after effect of the Easter Sunday attacks. This goes to show the clear impact of terrorism and violence within a country on its tourism industry.

The table below shows the numbers of tourist arrivals into the country during and after the height of war. The number of tourists that visited the country in 2018, is more than five times of them that visited in 2008. This is evidence to show that the tourist industry was heavily affected by war. Also, a clear variation between the incomes brought into the country can be witnessed with a significant increase in numbers after the war period. The tourism promotion program 'Wonder of Asia' that was conducted immediately after the end of war was able to attract many tourists to the country.

Year	Arrived tourists	Total revenue/ USD. Mn
2007	494,008	385
2008	438,475	342
2009	447,890	350
2010	654,476	575
2011	855,975	830
2012	1,005,605	1,039

2013	1,274,593	1,715
2014	1,527,153	2,431
2015	1,798,380	2,981
2016	2,050,832	3,519
2017	2,116,407	3,925
2018	2,333,796	4,381

Table 1: Number of tourist's arrivals in Sri Lanka, Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka

According to statistics from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, employment in the tourism industry of the country has increased from 124,970 in 2009 to 388,487 in 2018. As the increase was roughly three-fold, it can be concluded that war limits the opportunities for the tourism industry to grow and develop. Many businesses of different scales have been formed around the popular tourist destinations of the country supporting the renowned tourism industry.

AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRIES

Farming of crops like paddy was halted in the Northern and Eastern regions of the country due to the conflict. The people in war zone had to face various difficulties such as landmines that limited the amount of work that they could do within their premises. The landmines had to be manually removed by the army of Sri Lanka for several years into post-war. With the encouragement of the government through credit grants for paddy cultivation that amounted to Rs. 1,918 Mn in 2009 and Rs. 5,582 Mn in 2015 and taking climate into consideration, more land was harvested from 943,000 Ha in 2009 and 1,211,000 Ha in 2015.

There has been a gradual increase in the contribution of revenue from agriculture and industries in the Northern and Eastern regions to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country after war. The Achchaveli industrial complex was opened, with its first phase targeting investments in textiles, plastic, food processing units etc. The establishment of the Mas Active Vannavil and Mas Intimate garment factories created many employments contributed massively to reduce unemployment in the North while contributing to foreign trade in the country. Additionally, many small-scale industries were established with the government's promotion for self-employment

and provision of vocational training. This goes to show the limitations to opportunities associated with advancement of industries with war and violence.

Province/ Year	Agriculture (Rs. Mn)	Industry (Rs. Mn)	Service (Rs. Mn)
Northern			
2009	28,852	14,534	112,711
2010	30,970	28,836	129,933
2011	58,423	42,275	136,814
2012	59,911	49,664	168,450
2013	66,630	68,176	176,736
Eastern			
2009	63,879	93,667	121,817
2010	73,959	98,357	161,652
2011	61,059	109,111	209,113
2012	85,452	150,339	242,610
2013	92,840	181,383	268,676

Table 2: Provincial GDP by agricultural and industrial origin 2009-2013 (Rs. Mn)

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka

EXTERNAL TRADE

In the last decade, foreign investors have shown a significant interest in investing in the country's infrastructure and industries. Due to the economic dilemma prevailed within the country during the period of war; the investors were left out with a doubt on the investment returns. This paved the way for the low interest in investment within the country. Thus, the flow of foreign money into the country was obstructed. Although this was true, following the end of war Sri Lanka garnered the attention of foreign investments. The Hambantota Port built with Chinese assistance and the earlier mentioned Achchuveli industrial complex are some notable contributions of foreign assistance to Sri Lanka. Also, the establishment of more garment factories has significantly helped increase the amount of profit through exports.

The rate of imports on consumer basis was also increased parallel to the introduction of various new goods to the Northern and Southern regions. The capita allocated for imported investment goods ranged from Rs 240,284 Mn in 2009 to 760,942 Mn in

2018. Accordingly, international trade brought revenue into the country after war as well.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Moving along, increase in the level of unemployment can be seen as another adverse economic influence of the long-drawn-out ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. In the North, there still are places where not only infrastructure, but also employment of people who wish to be employed could be handled better. Reinforcement of self-employment can be considered as one methodology that could increase the contribution of Northern citizens in the country's economy.

Level of unemployment among the youth increased during the war. This can be regarded as an impending threat to the development and stability of the country as the unemployment of youth is considered as the root cause of many other internal problems of the island. It is a known fact that how young and innocent Tamil boys in the North were victims of the Tamil tigers. Children were taken away from their families at a very young age and snatched away their right for education, right for protection and right for safety. By the time the war ended these children had not gotten proper education to get into appropriate jobs and therefore, most of them fell in the wrong paths. Ex-combatants of the LTTE were rehabilitated and equipped with knowledge that helped them earn their living. The government also took measures to establish many vocational training and skill development centres to equip not only the youth of the North and East but throughout the country.

Expansion of the construction industry with the development of infrastructure granted new job opportunities for locals which have been advantageous in terms of family units. They drove the youth from rural areas into the more developed or developing and urban areas of the country. Also, development of tourism and the industries such as the Vaanavil garment factory helped minimise unemployment especially in the North and East of the country. The data depicted below shows the decline in the level of unemployment respectively.

Year	Total unemployment (%)
2007 (a)	6.0/ 6.0
2008 (a)	5.2
2009 (a)/(b)	5.7/ 5.8
2010 (b)	4.9
2011 (b)/(c)	4.2/ 4.2
2012 (c)	4.0

- a) Data excluded both Northern and Eastern Provinces.
- b) Including Eastern province but excluding Northern Province.
- c) All districts included.

Table 3: Level of unemployment

CONCLUSION

Moreover, it has been observed that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of the country massively increased in the immediate years after the end of war. The GDP growth rate that was at 3.5% increased to 9.1% by 2012 (DailyFT, 2019), visibly indicating the effect that war had on the country's economy.

Conflict turned into a courteous war among the Lankans, the on-going period and post-war period had heavy impacts on various aspects of the economy of Sri Lanka. According to various sources, the financial breakdown that occurred within Sri Lanka had economically impacted throughout certain parts of Asia; South-Asia specifically. Post-war recovering and reformation of the economy and the country as a whole is more than hard. It has been over ten years since the end of war but the country is still recovering from the damages caused by the crisis.

Using violence to obtain one's requirements was once a practice of the LTTE in Sri Lanka. It has become a major trend in the modern world even today. In this context, war is inevitable and so is avoiding risks of putting a country into situations of war; but as a society one could always contribute to minimize those risks. May it be cold war, hot war, just war or psychological war at the current status of the world with all the availability of resources, one could always use the power vested upon them to

direct the governance of our country in the right direction. War is something that the human race has gotten used to and expects to last for years to come. When seeing from an outsider's perspective, one could argue that war is not the answer to an unsolved dispute. Although this is true, the power of violence should not be underestimated. When one violates the rights of thousands of civilians, the best way to respond to them is using counter measurements of the same calibre. One cannot spread kindness in a situation where the lives and lifestyles of many more individuals get involved, involuntarily and their rights as humans used in something that they do not wish to be part of. War is a trauma that no one ever wants to go back to.

Sri Lankans who faced major consequences as a result of a thirty-year war, certainly do not wish to put their country in such a position. Generations of the nations' people fell into nadir because of war. The economy could not be brought up to the expectations of the previous leaders. The mutual relationships among individuals were damaged to the extent where some misunderstandings exist to this day. Basically, Sri Lanka is a developing country for several decades and one reason that contributed to its lack in progress is the alleged war.

This situation is the same in any country or region that undergoes war. Be it cold or hot, war destructs and diminishes not only infrastructure, but also humanistic values as a whole. In this world where human rights are profoundly focused on and debated, war has the ability to question whether any of these rights are safeguarded. Even though there might be a thousand explanations for war, the ones that have lived through war at no time will see a justification to war.

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