

What is India up to

India featured in the Sri Lankan newspapers last week but not in a friendly manner. First it was on CEPA with many Sri Lankans coming out against the agreement claiming that it is in favour of India. Then IIFA came into the picture with some demigods in Indian film industry not attending the carnival that was staged in Colombo. Later it was learnt that even some of those who had come to Colombo were not seen at Temple Trees where the President had made arrangements to receive them. The President himself was absent at the main ceremony held at the Sugathadasa indoor stadium and it was very clear that everything was not that rosy. Meanwhile Rosy Senanayake having spoken in favour of IIFA first was heard criticizing the government for the absence of so called super stars at the carnival, while Wijitha Herath was lamenting over the money spent by the Sri Lankan government. According to him the money should have been spent on the poor internally displaced people over the “floods”. Then finally a Sunday Sinhala newspaper said under banner headlines that the Indian government wants to discuss the so called ethnic problem and the solutions with the Tamil parties in Sri Lanka.

All three components of western colonialism, namely the economic, cultural and political have been covered by CEPA, IIFA and discussions by the Indian government with the Tamil parties in Sri Lanka. The three components are interdependent and one would affect the others. The CEPA cannot be considered in isolation nor IIFA. Views have been expressed both for and against CEPA and we have to consider what would be the balance sheet in about five years time. There is no economic pundit who could predict what happens in five years in his/her field and in a sense it is a futile exercise to have a chat on economic predictions in five years. However, knowing the attitudes of India and how she treats her neighbours we should be able to come to a decision on the suitability of CEPA.

The attitudes of India were expressed in no uncertain terms at the IIFA. The “big superstars” kept away from the carnival on the pretext that there were threats from the LTTE. It was clear that they were talking of LTTE threats in India and not in Sri Lanka. There are no threats from the LTTE in Sri Lanka and people have been moving without any fear for one year since Prabahakaran and the “invincible” LTTE cadres were drowned in Nandikadal. It is India that is apparently unable to provide security to the big super stars and if India cannot solve its problems then they should not try to implicate the others. In a sense it is India that prevented the so called superstars coming to Sri Lanka and thus using the “threats” by LTTE sympathisers in Tamil Nadu and other places in India, in addition to those living in the western countries, against the Sinhala people and the Sri Lankan government.

Sri Lanka has solved the Tamil problem and is taking steps to reconcile the various ethnic groups with the Sinhala people, and if not for the “allegations”, “pickets”, “agitation” by the Tamil Nadu Tamils and the so called Tamil diaspora living in the western countries and of course the western and Indian politicians and “intellectuals” who sponsor all these activities there would not have been any discussion of the so called Tamil problem within the hackneyed paradigm of injustices, aspirations, homeland and other such parameters leading to a separate state. The west and India rather than supporting these groups and

bowing down to their demands should have taken steps to defeat them. However, what is taking place is something else. Previously they used Tamils and sometimes other ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka against the Sinhala people to see that the Sinhala are not given the place due to them and the Sinhala culture its significant position in the country. Having failed in this game now they are using the Tamils in their countries against the Sinhala people and Sri Lanka. If India and west cannot take steps against these so called agitators, then it is their problem and not ours. In a sense the problem has been transferred to the places of origin of the problem, and Sri Lanka should not take any notice of these “agitators”. If India cannot give protection to the Indian “superstars” in India what can Sri Lanka do? India should not try to make use of their inability to solve a problem that they have created in order to recreate the problem in Sri Lanka. The same goes to the west.

The big brother attitude of the Indians was clear at the carnival. Sri Lanka spent millions of rupees in order to make the carnival a success. It was of course a Bollywood film festival, and not a Sri Lankan festival. However, the Indian organisers should have seen to it that the local artistes were given pride of place without confining actresses of the calibre of Malini Fonseka to a chair in the back row. Further it has been reported that some of the so called superstars after coming to Colombo thought it fit to ignore an invitation by the President to be present at a function. If they kept away due to “threats” in India, then surely it is the problem of India and not of Sri Lanka. India by encouraging these acts of the “superstars” is only giving the upper hand to anti Sri Lanka anti Sinhala groups in India. After all they say that India and Sri Lanka are friendly countries but should a country act in this manner against a friendly country?

If as reported in a Sunday Sinhala language newspaper India wants to have discussions with the Tamil parties in Sri Lanka, then it can be interpreted only as an infringement of the sovereignty of the country. India has no business to interfere in the activities of Sri Lanka however big she may be. India may be big but India is a relatively new (junior) country having come into existence only after the English invaded the subcontinent. It is a collection of dynastic kingdoms and as we have said before a quasi federal state may suite them. We are not going to recommend a unitary state or an ekshat rajya for them not only because they have had no such states in the past but we are civilized enough not to interfere with internal matters of another country. Sri Lanka though considered a small country has a history going back to Pandukabhaya as an ekshat state and the Sinhala as a nation. In that sense Sri Lanka is a very senior country and the Sinhala a very senior nation.

The Sri Lankan government should take a tough decision and not allow India to have discussions with the Tamil parties under any circumstances. Sri Lanka does not agitate on the plight of the Dalit Buddhists in India nor have discussions with political organisations of the Buddhists in India. The President Rajapakse should not bow down to the pressure exerted by India in different fields. It is true that Sri Lanka has had good relations with some of the dynastic kingdoms of ancient Bharat especially with the Mauriyan dynasty of the king Ashoka. However, that should not deceive us to believe that India would be a friend in the twenty first century and we have to be extra vigilant in the months ahead.