**The real lesson from Sri Lanka**

On **Aug 25, 2022** [Ayesha Naseem](https://nation.com.pk/authorpost/columnist/ayesha-naseem/)

The history of Sri Lanka since 2005 has been dominated by the Rajapaksa family. In 2009, during his first term as President, Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was the Secretary of Defence in the administration, were celebrated as ‘heroes’ for ruthlessly crushing the Tamil Tiger insurgency and bringing to an end a three-decade-long civil war that had engulfed the country. Mahinda Rajapaksa served as President for two terms between 2005 till 2015, and then as Prime Minister from 2019 to 2022. During this latter period, Gotabaya Rajapaksa was President of the country. Their other brothers, Basil Rajapaksa and Chamal Rajapaksa also held prominent positions in their administrations serving as Special Adviser and Ports and Aviation Minister respectively in 2005 and Finance Minister and Irrigation Minister in 2020. Chamal Rajapaksa was also the Speaker of the Parliament from 2010 to 2015 and Basil Rajapaksa was the Cabinet Minister for Economic Development during the same time. Mahinda Rajapaksa’s sons also served in key positions in the administration. One of them, Yoshita Rajapaksa, was appointed Prime Minister’s Chief of Staff in 2020 and the other, Namal Rajapaksa, was appointed the Sports and Youth Minister. Even Chamal Rajapaksa’s son, Shasheendra was appointed as the Advanced Agricultural Minister.
Fast forward to the present day, and the whole world has seen striking images coming out of the country. Amidst the worst economic crisis in its history, with spiraling rates of inflation, unemployment, shortage of basic commodities, power cuts, and the country running out of cash reserves, Sri Lanka’s heroes have become the villains. They were blamed for the economic crisis and massive protests were staged in the country for months demanding the resignation of the President and the ruling government. Ultimately, curfews were imposed, armed troops were deployed, and the President even declared the State of Emergency. Mahinda Rajapaksa was ultimately forced to resign in May 2022 following deadly clashes when his supporters attacked the protestors injuring dozens of people. The army had to evacuate him from his official residence in Colombo after thousands of protestors breached its main gate. The President still refused to resign. In turn, the protestors also refused to give in. Referring to the brothers, the often-heard slogan they chanted was “One down, one to go”. Ultimately, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was forced to flee the country on 13 July after hundreds of protestors stormed the Presidential Palace. He then rendered his resignation from Singapore. It was indeed a humiliating end of the Rajapaksa political dynasty.
Many analysts have written extensively about how Pakistan needs to learn lessons from the Sri Lankan crisis about the economy, commodity shortages, rising costs of living, etc. We do, and we need to take remedial steps instantly. But governments tend to shift blame away from themselves—and with regards to the economy at least, all governments can presently blame it on the Russia-Ukraine War. With regards to our internal dynamics, however, for example, our political systems, we still have a lot to learn from global examples. The most important lesson to be learned from Sri Lanka is for us, and everyone else, to avoid a Galle Face Green, i.e. a place where people begin to assemble when they feel so helpless that they don’t see any other choice, and in turn, their government refuses to give in to their demands. Dynastic politics is already a reality in Pakistan. We have seen in recent times how governments in power have simply refused to let go, even in the face of massive protests and dissatisfaction among the masses. This is not what democratic governments do. By definition, democracy is composed of two words: ‘demos’ meaning people, and ‘Kratos’ meaning power, hence the literal translation; the power of the people. When the same people who have chosen a democratically elected government and put it in power, start gathering on the streets and roads in thousands of numbers, and demand changes in its workings and functioning, the least that the government can do is to take them seriously. They need to listen, reflect and act, not ignore and disregard. And in no way should they let it get to the point where those people, frustrated and aghast, storm into their residences to force them out. It is said that you gain experience from your own mistakes, and wisdom from those of others. With regards to our leaders, let’s sincerely hope that they choose to be wise in the future.