**Sri Lanka in crisis**

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Pakistan and Sri Lanka are considered friendly countries on the diplomatic front. The two countries located in South Asia are very similar to each other in several respects and both have faced more or less the same situation in the past.

Sri Lanka, with its beautiful beaches, charming wildlife, historical heritage sites and other landscapes, is the centre of attraction of tourists from all over the world.

Unfortunately, Sri Lanka, which until two years ago was the most prosperous country in the region, is nowadays facing the worst kind of financial crisis. Reportedly, several government offices and Sri Lankan embassies in many countries have become inactive due to lack of funds.

There is a severe shortage of petrol and diesel, and the government treasury does not have enough money to purchase from international markets. The local currency is depreciating rapidly, there is a shortage of medicines in hospitals, children are being deprived of education in schools, there are reports of violent clashes between police and protesters. Curfew has also been imposed in some areas to control the situation. People are seen complaining in the media that there is nothing available for shopping in the markets, they take money to petrol pumps but fuel is not available, they can afford the education fees of their children but schools are closed.

Just a few years ago, Sri Lanka, with a network of excellent infrastructure and industry, was one of the few prosperous countries in the world to achieve the goal of overcoming extreme poverty under the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Port of Colombo is considered the largest trans-shipment hub in the region. Top exporters of locally manufactured products include the US, the UK, China, India and the UAE.

Sri Lanka’s economy is heavily dependent on foreign tourism. According to international reports, Sri Lanka was declared the best tourist destination in 2019 but since the Covid-19 outbreak, tourism in Sri Lanka has declined by more than 70 percent.

Although tourism resumed in January 2021, several restrictions on foreigners resulted in further downfall in the sector. Eventually, Sri Lanka could not repay the installments of its foreign debts and was finally declared bankrupt. However, there is another opinion in Sri Lanka in this regard and people blame the bad governance of the Rajapaksa family for the current crisis.

The two brothers in power, one the president and the other the prime minister of Sri Lanka, borrowed heavily from international players for short-term gains, imposed a ban on imports and provided unrealistic reliefs for temporary political benefits. The cabinet has resigned in the wake of the recent chaos. People are on the streets against the ruling family which is still not ready to go home. No doubt, their political party has a two-thirds majority in parliament but the people are not happy with the government.

In my view, any country like Sri Lanka can be a victim of a similar situation where the rulers run the country with the help of foreign debt and put their temporary political interests ahead of national interests. Our economic problems are no different from Sri Lanka. Every Pakistani government adheres to the strict conditions of the IMF for the sake of short-term gains, but the foreign debt is increasing and the rupee is losing its value day by day.

There was no positive change in the lives of the people during the three and a half year tenure of the PTI regime. Today a new government has been formed in our country under a parliamentary process. However, in the past, their experienced team could not get Pakistan out of the crisis.

Our rulers need to learn lessons instead of repeating the mistakes of the past. People are expecting that the coalition government will formulate such solid policies which would bring relief to the public and save the country from debt. Otherwise the situation of Pakistan, God forbid, could be similar to Sri Lanka in the near future.

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