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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: DEVELOPMENT

- UNDP – (Relevant) 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development goals
 - Poverty,
 - Hunger,
 - Education
 - Gender equality
 - Decent work and economic growth
 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

THE LECTURE

- The aims of his lecture will be to place migration and asylum into the context of the UNDP sustainable development goals.
- Migration and asylum invariably has – or is gaining - an adverse reputation. This may not be wholly justified.
- I will also seek to develop these themes in the context of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is a country that is very strongly associated with migration (and asylum). Traditionally, many Sri Lankan families seek to leave – go ‘outside’ - to take advantage a greater opportunities.

- However, Sri Lanka is historically a location for inward migration

SRI LANKA – BEYOND THE PAST

- With the exception of the Veddas, Sri Lanka is – one way or another – a population of immigrants, although so much of this happened so long ago, it might not seem so.
- This lecture seeks to move beyond the past, to the present and to the future.

ASYLUM & REFUGEES IN SRI LANKA – THE PRESENT

- UNHCR is the main source of source of data on Sri Lanka.
- When asylum seekers are granted indefinite leave to remain and then citizenship, they cease to become asylum seekers and become recognised as refugees.
- In Sri Lanka, asylum cases would seem to be handled by the Ports and Shipping Ministry.
- Not entirely clear whether Sri Lanka has a robust procedure in place to deal with asylum seekers, or when and where a legal appeal process can be invoked.

REFUGEES & ASYLUM – THE FUTURE

- It is axiomatic that – in global terms – the distances asylum seekers can travel depends upon their funding.
- Although there are not a lot of asylum seekers in Sri Lanka in relative terms (UK for example has 23,000 Pakistani a year, Sri Lanka only has 1,100 in total).
- But, Sri Lanka could become a more significant destination for asylum seekers in the future, in the same ways that employment opportunities for foreigners will open up. Compared to other South Asian countries, Sri Lanka is a relatively benign host nation.

HOW SHOULD SRI LANKA HANDLE ASYLUM?

- Both politically and socially, Sri Lankan communities must work out how to handle asylum.
- The government must work out a more considered response.
- So must local communities.

AND AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL ...?

- How should government deal with asylum?
- A) Understand the drivers.
- B) Decide upon integration, deportation and voluntary repatriation. Stateless status?
- C) Engage with other members of the international community – UN, countries of origin, partner host states?

SRI LANKA AND INWARD MIGRATION

- Sri Lanka has a very small pool of asylum seekers and it is by now means certain that numbers will increase in the future.
- Refugee problems are largely sorted out now and are mainly a logistical problem for the authorities. In the continuing absence of war, and barring natural disasters, this should be a permanent condition.
- However, in the future, there will be island-wide challenges in the form of inward migration.

OUTWARD MIGRATION FROM SRI LANKA

- Outward migration is in the nation's DNA.
- Tamil, Sinhalese, Muslim and Burgher have all left Sri Lanka in their millions.
- Skilled and unskilled workers.

INWARD MIGRATION INTO SRI LANKA

- Not a subject that is of recognised importance.
- Like many other countries, Sri Lanka is a country that is largely defined by inward migration – Sinhalese, Tamils, Chettis, Muslims, Burghers ... Jewish community?
- The Dutch, Portuguese and the British also left their marks.
- Sri Lanka may be at the start of a new wave of inward migration

SRI LANKA – ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT & INWARD MIGRATION

- Sri Lanka embraced economic liberalisation far earlier than other South Asian countries – the ‘Singapore of South Asia’.
- Progress was halted by the civil war.
- Money was scarce and there was no take-off of island-wide development.

POST-WAR SRI LANKA

- The civil war is now over – and very, very unlikely to come back.
- Thousands continue to leave the country, though external migration to the West is becoming more difficult.
- Sri Lanka is – probably – poised for significant economic take off, though there are problems – taxation, debt, power ...
- Having lost so many of the best and the brightest, opportunities will open up for foreign professionals.

SIGNS OF CHANGE

- There is clear evidence of an increasing foreign presence in the workforce.
- Bangladeshis, Chinese, Indians, constitute a growing presence in the country.
- The numbers seeking asylum may increase, depending upon political dynamics in other parts of the world will be important.
- So will political dynamics within Sri Lanka.

THE CHALLENGES

- Numbers are small at the moment but may increase.
- Geographically, this is not a problem – Sri Lanka has space.
- But will the arrival of foreigners (especially non-Buddhists) be met with negative sentiments, which is very often the case in other parts of the world.