



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Dragon strengthens its footprints in India's backyard

May 29, 2021, 10:18 PM IST SD Pradhan in Chanakya Code, India, TOI



SD Pradhan

S D Pradhan has served as chairman of India's Joint Intelligence Committee. He has also been the country's deputy national security adviser. He was chairman of the Task Force ... [MORE](#)

Dragon's foreign policy moves have become highly predictable under Xi – it is guided by the 18th Century concept of expansionism.

This policy is being pursued with focused objective of acquiring predominant position in the world order. The tool used is the debt trap: the sword is used to coerce its weaker nations. Changing the facts on the ground to slurp territories of other countries is the Dragon's metier.

Sri Lanka has been the target of the Chinese Machiavellian approach. A New York Times report indicated that initially Sri Lankan government struggled to make payment on the debts taken for the Hambantota Port but under heavy pressure and after months of negotiations with the Chinese state-owned company (China Harbour Engineering Company), the Sri Lankan government handed over the port along with 15,000 acres of land around it for 99-years on lease.

That the ports in Sri Lanka for China are not only for commercial use was clear when the Chinese submarine Changzheng-2 and warship Chang Xing Dao docked at the Colombo port in October 2014.

In recent years, the Chinese submarines have frequented the that northern and eastern Indian Ocean. The increased frequency of the Chinese naval ships and submarines is a source for concern for India. The Chinese experts indicate that China has plans to have three life-lines in the Indian Oceans. The manner in which it is creating bases and 'cities' in the Indian Ocean reveals that China is moving in that direction.

Speaking at the Raisina Dialogue, the Indian Naval Chief had pointed out that India had observed regular presence of the Chinese naval ships in the Indian Ocean. In the same meeting, Admiral Phillip Davidson, commander of US Navy's Indo-Pacific Command warned that the Chinese approach to the region includes efforts to coerce, corrupt and co-opt governments, businesses, organisation and ultimately the people of the Indo-Pacific.

In view of the above, the recent approval by the Sri Lankan Parliament of the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill deserves urgent attention. While the government has hailed it as a source of investment (US\$ 15bn) that would generate employment for 2,00,000 persons, the Opposition has pointed out that it would not only compromise the country's sovereignty but would create a 'Chinese colony' in Sri Lanka.

The port has been built on 269 hectares of reclaimed land off the Port of Colombo at a cost of US\$ 1.4 bn. Significantly, it will include a Special Economic Zone, which will be governed by Special Commission which could include foreigners and would have exemption from legal and constitutional oversight mechanism of the Sri Lankan government. Moreover, this region would be free to operate any currency. Does it not become a Chinese colony? There is justification in the allegations of the Opposition.

Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) Member of Parliament Dr. Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe has rightly termed the bill as disastrous. He further pointed out that the Bill was inconsistent with Article 12(1) of the Constitution on equality and would not help the economy of Sri Lanka as the bill allows all profits to flow out to China.

Considering all aspects, he observed that this bill is more dangerous than the Hambantota Port's handing over to China. The move is unlikely to generate employment for Sri Lanka as the top positions would go to the Chinese and only unskilled workers would find employment as is happening in Pakistan.

However, China's growing influence in Sri Lanka is not merely restricted to Hambantota or Colombo port 'colony'. At the end of April, China's Defence Minister Gen. Wei Fenghe and a delegation of senior military officers made a three-day visit to Sri Lanka to strengthen military and naval ties between the two countries. Crucially, during the defence dialogue, the two countries also signed a Mutual Assistance Protocol. Its details are not available but it is certain that in defence field, Sri Lanka's dependence on China is going to increase.

For India, this has a significant security implication. There would be enhanced presence of PLA(N) in its backyard. And this would not be the only Chinese city in India's neighbourhood: China is reported to be building a city in Gwadar in Pakistan. Going by its record in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, with increased presence of the PLA (N), its efforts aimed at encroachment in EEZ would be a distinct possibility. Already India has noted the Chinese ships in the India's EEZ. In September 2019, the Chinese 'research' vessel Shiyan 1, was seen near the sensitive Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

In August 2020, even in the middle of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ladakh on the Indo-Tibetan border, China had sent its Yuan Wang class research vessel into the Indian Ocean. Such activities are being perceived by India as a strategic challenge.

India had tried to build good relations with Sri Lanka but their economic conditions are so bad that they do not miss any opportunity to get loan, even at the cost of losing sovereignty in instalments. And China does not miss any opportunity to convert its economic power into strategic expansion.

This demands a well-planned and coordinated move by the Quad and others to ensure that the Indo-Pacific Ocean does not become a victim of the Chinese sinister design for hegemony.

Earlier India had suggested an excellent concept of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), based on four pillars of development and cooperation projects, quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, enhancing capacities and skills, and people-to-people partnership under the Free, Open and Inclusive Indo-Pacific. Now this should be actualised and even extended to cover the entire Indo-Pacific region.

The US's Blue Dot Network and Japan's willingness to fund quality infrastructure should be aligned with India's AAGC at the earliest to check the drift of weaker countries in the region towards China and their conversion into the Chinese puppets.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/ChanakyaCode/dragon-strengthens-its-footprints-in-indias-backyard/>