Resilient Sri Lanka on road to recovery

Sri Lankan authorities are working to stabilize the situation in the country and bring order and routine. Special concessions are being made to restore confidence in the tourism sector, write Srimal Fernando and Kirtan Bhana for South Asia Monitor

By Srimal Fernando and Kirtan Bhana

MAY 10, 2019

Sri Lankans are more resolute than ever to continue building a peaceful nation. They are aware that the cowardly suicide bombers have no ideology and are carried out by a faithless few. They believe that the over 300,000 strong tri-forces have the knowhow, support and will to extinguish any threat and restore normalcy once again.

The past decade has been a boon for this teardrop shaped island nation lapped by the waters of the Indian Ocean. Millions of people who have travelled to the country since the three decade long ethnic war ended describe it as a paradise. They have shared their experiences with others advising them to place Sri Lanka on their bucket list of must-visit destinations.

As Sri Lankans mourn the victims of the Easter attacks, many of them children, they have to come to terms with the fact that the perpetrators were Sri Lankans who coordinated a series of suicide bomb attacks targeting Christian churches and luxury hotels across the country. The attacks on Easter Sunday were timed to inflict maximum casualties, shock and awe.

The deadly assault was unexpected. The decade that followed the end of the decades-long civil conflict saw Sri Lankans enjoy the benefits of the peace dividend. Efforts for reconciliation and rebuilding a unified country were proving successful. It is a progressive society with human rights at the core of its constitutional democracy.
New laws were passed to create a free and just dispensation, spurring growth and development in the country. Trade, tourism and investment levels increased exponentially. Colombo, the capital city, has developed into a modern-day metropolis. Towering skyscrapers and property developments glisten in the backdrop of a tropical horizon.

Sri Lanka’s location, close to India and China, two of the world’s largest economies, the nations of ASEAN, Africa and West Asia, makes it attractive for trade and investment. It is positioned in the heart of the world’s busiest shipping lanes.

Tourism is up 5 per cent and growing. With its coconut palm tree lined and pristine white sandy beaches, Sri Lanka is the ideal getaway for some rest and recreation. The over 1000 km coastline also offers opportunities for adventure sport enthusiasts. Scuba diving, surfing, kayaking, kite boarding, among other activities, are available.

Ceylon tea is Sri Lanka’s world-renowned commodity. The tea estates in the cooler hill stations inland provide informative tours of the production of tea. Some also provide accommodation among the manicured plantations and unique tea spa health and beauty treatments. Its cuisine is a culinary expression of its tropical vegetation and the bounty of the majestic ocean that surrounds the island nation.

Sri Lanka’s history goes back thousands of years. Its many temples and historic sites are linked to the epic stories of the Ramayana and Buddha, enchanted by gods and demons and the triumph of good over evil. Its recent history of ousting oppressive colonialisits and building a modern independent state is testament to the determination and resilience of its people.

The international community’s solidarity and support after the Easter attacks again places the spotlight on the ordinary people. The overwhelming majority put in an honest day’s work, with reasonable expectations of decent accommodation, good food on the table, sensible education, affordable healthcare and a holiday getaway every now and then.

People travel; they move everyday crossing streets, neighbourhoods, cities, continents and even oceans. Research shows that people will easily spend time and money on enriching experiences and exploring new destinations, learning new languages, indulging in exotic food and encountering unique cultures and traditions.
Even the trauma and humiliation caused by airport security checks has not deterred travellers. In fact, people are travelling more and more. Innovations in communication and technology have made travel accessible. Travellers are better informed; the online booking, marketing and promotion systems have created a platform to make excursions affordable or bespoke and sophisticated as desired.

Sri Lankan authorities are working to stabilize the situation in the country and bring order and routine. Special concessions are being made to restore confidence in the tourism sector. Emergency laws will grant security officials extra powers to seek out, investigate and extinguish any credible threat. Assurances are being made that measures being put in place will effectively and efficiently bring the situation under control in a relatively short period of time. Remaining vigilant will remain a challenge without infringing on human rights or hampering economic development.

Natural feelings of sadness of memories of lost loved ones will always remain as effects of shock and bewilderment recede, but will never be completely wiped out. Sri Lankans will have to keep their anger in check and move beyond the circumstances that seem so unfair.

(Fernando is a Doctoral Fellow at Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA), Sonepat, India and Bhana is the Founding Editor and Travel Envoy for the Diplomatic Society of South Africa.)