

Basil Rajapaksa The Force Unseen



Basil Rajapaksa is the younger brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. As a person who never sought the limelight, his strengths and capabilities were not known by many. Yet Basil Rajapaksa has been part of the political landscape of Sri Lanka since the 1970s. He is a meticulous planner, brilliant strategist, negotiator and above all a hard worker. He is loyal to the people of the country and to the President. He is the force unseen that ensured that no harm would come to Sri Lanka or its people from within and abroad during trying times. A modest person, who is a loving father, brother and friend, his commitment and dedication to any task, is unswerving. These are the events that made the difference.

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Photography by Menaka Aravinda

Presidential Election 2005

The run up to the Presidential Election in 2005, for SLFP candidate and then Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa was a trying one. He did not have the support of the leadership of the party and funding for his campaign was limited. At that time many believed that others spearheaded the campaign. But they were wrong. It is Basil Rajapaksa who was the strength behind the campaign; the others were merely a façade.

The most difficult part of the 2005 elections was getting the party candidacy. Since Basil Rajapaksa was not in the mainstream of the SLFP, he had to fight for his brother’s candidacy from outside the party. Once Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected as the UPFA candidate the next step was to determine whether the election was to be held in 2005 or 2006. The leadership of the country at that time attempted to delay the election by one year, so that Mahinda Rajapaksa could be compromised for Helping Hambantota. Thus, in order to prevent this from happening Basil Rajapaksa was instrumental in filing the petition in the Supreme Court, which gave the ruling stating that the election was to be held in 2005. Basil Rajapaksa knew that the majority received from the Southern vote base was enough to secure the

win, even if the entire North and East voted against the UPFA candidate. He also knew that the LTTE came into voting areas during the General Elections 2004, in Batticaloa where they stuffed the ballot boxes and the percentage rose from 20% at 3 pm to 85% at 4 pm. It was of great importance to prevent this from happening again. Therefore, a court order was obtained to prevent the voting in LTTE controlled areas. In actual fact the LTTE did not boycott, they had no choice due to the conditions laid down in the Supreme Court order. Firstly, the LTTE had to cross to government-controlled areas if they wanted to vote. Secondly, since the number of heads was to be counted at the checkpoints, the number of votes had to tally with the number that crossed over to vote. This stopped one person from voting more than once, which was what happened at the parliamentary elections. Through Basil Rajapaksa's strategic move, the LTTE was cornered into a trap.

There were many obstacles for then Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa from the party leadership. There was an instance where a letter was hand delivered to Temple Trees in the night, which stated that the Party would take disciplinary action and that Mahinda Rajapaksa will be expelled from the party after the Presidential elections. Basil Rajapaksa knowing that his brother would be severely affected by this letter did not show to this to the Prime Minister until later.

During the 2005 Presidential campaign the SLFP party office was closed which was something that had never happened before when a member of the party was contesting for the Presidency of the country. Even at the very first campaign meeting where the then President made a speech to the public, she made statements that were contradictory to the agreement the UPFA candidate Mahinda Rajapaksa had made with the JVP and JHU, which in turn could have jeopardised the entire campaign. Another instance was when certain members were taken on trips abroad. Minister Thondaman who accompanied President Chandrika Banadaranaike Kumaratunga to the UN Summit left with 18 conditions; this was later amended by adding conditions that were contradictory to the agreement made with the JVP and JHU and were faxed to the party despite the fact that the original 18 conditions had been agreed upon.

It Is Through His Capabilities As A Strategist, Negotiator And His Ability To Remain Calm Even Through Periods Of Uncertainty That Basil Rajapaksa Was Able To Ensure The Victory For President Mahinda Rajapaksa In 2005.

Though attempts were made by various persons to dissuade Minister Athaulla and Minister Douglas Devananda from supporting President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Basil Rajapaksa's strong skills of negotiation and diplomacy ensured their support. Separate meetings were held with the respective parties and thus the accurate situation was determined. It was in such an environment that Basil Rajapaksa forged ahead ensuring victory for Mahinda Rajapaksa.

There were those who thought that President Mahinda Rajapaksa would lose or that there would be the need to go for a second count. Further, though certain UNP lawyers tried to stop the election commissioner from announcing the results once every counting station had been certified, the results had to be announced.

During the early hours of the day of the final result of the Presidential election 2005, a lady Minister arrived at Temple Trees panicked, as she had heard that Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had lost the election. The Prime Minister woke up hearing her cries of "Sir, we are finished, we have lost the election", which made him very upset. However Basil Rajapaksa, who was diligently recording the final results reassured his brother, with a look of victory and confirmed that Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had crossed the 50% mark.

It is through his capabilities as a strategist, negotiator and his ability to remain calm even through periods of uncertainty that Basil Rajapaksa was able to ensure the victory for President Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005.

Negotiator – Bringing the parties together

In 2005, when the UPFA was forming a Government, they did not have a majority. It was through alliances with various parties that the Government was formed with 105 seats. Knowing that the JVP would go against the Government and that the JVP, UNP and TNA would form an alliance, Basil Rajapaksa strategically initiated a dialogue with the UNP and JVP.

A genuine attempt by the Government was made to bring these parties together. An agreement was entered into with the UNP and SLMC. However, precautionary

measures were taken. This was similar to the case with the LTTE, where President Rajapaksa unlike his predecessors, included in his manifesto that he will first negotiate with the LTTE for a peaceful settlement. However at that time too, he took precautionary measures knowing the mentality of the LTTE. Therefore, a military strategy was also formulated. In the same way, the President genuinely discussed with the UNP, JVP and SLMC but also took precautionary measures.

The motives of the UNP were apparent after the signing of the agreement when the Secretary General of the UNP stated at a meeting, “this will be the last Sinhala and Hindu New Year under the UPFA government and the next one will be held under the UNP Government.”

By this time, negotiations had been initiated with 17 members of the UNP. Though the popular belief was that Karu Jayasuriya was the leader of this group and that he had brought these members with him to the UPFA, it was actually the opposite that had happened. An agreement had already been reached with 15 members and it was Karu Jayasuriya who joined them later. The reason being that he had not been re-elected as the Deputy Leader of the UNP. The President was not keen on bringing Karu Jayasuriya to the Government and his crossover was postponed for a couple of weeks. The President informed Ranil Wickramasinghe that he did not want to accept Karu Jayasuriya. When Karu Jayasuriya crossed over he only brought one MP who rejoined the UNP after a few days.

With regard to the JVP, Basil Rajapaksa knew that Wimal Weerawansa, Nandana Gunathilake and Piyasiri Wijenaike were the real assets of the party. It was they who worked tirelessly supporting the President during the elections. Lal Kantha has always had a very good relationship with the President. At the time when the President was the Opposition Leader, Lal Kantha joined in the protest against the cost of living during the UNP Government. He is a person of good intellect coupled with an ability to understand the common man. In such a way Basil Rajapaksa identified those who could serve the country well. However he never encouraged the JVP to split. It was the strategy of the JVP leadership to expel Wimal Weerawansa from the party, as he possessed the stature and charisma.

Following the Presidential elections in 2005, it was the aim of certain international

media to portray the Government as a Sinhalese Buddhist Government. Therefore, it was of utmost importance to gain the support of the Tamil and Muslim parties. Minister Thondaman and Minister Chandrasekeran supported the Government. Though there were disagreements between Minister Thondaman and Basil Rajapaksa, Basil Rajapaksa is always considered a friend and his straightforwardness is much appreciated.

Prior to his demise Minister Chandrasekeran had invited Basil Rajapaksa personally to attend his convention. Minister Chandrasekeran had said that he had much pressure from various sectors, but it is not only due to his policies that he could not go against the President but also because of the assistance he had received from Basil Rajapaksa. Minister Chandrasekeran had stated that the President was genuinely working towards the development of all communities and has done much for the estate community. In one instance Minister Thondaman wanted to resign from the Government because of Basil Rajapaksa. However when Basil Rajapaksa made the things clear, in spite of the media misrepresentation Minister Thondaman understood. Minister Muthusivalingam is very fond of Basil Rajapaksa and the feeling is mutual.

Strong relationships have been formed through understanding and trust, therefore the Tamil leaders except a few were genuinely supporting President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s re-election. It may seem that the Government does not have their support because the UPFA did not win the Nuwara Eliya District. But while receiving 70-75% of the Sinhala vote in other areas, the Government cannot be expected to win both Sinhala and Tamil votes together.

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Entering Parliament

Basil Rajapaksa was never interested in entering parliament. He did so as he could not refuse the request of the President. Through his entry many baseless accusations by the Opposition were thwarted.

Basil Rajapaksa entered the Parliament the same day that Minister Sripathi Sooriyaarachchi was to present the special select committee report on a deal with the LTTE. However, since Basil Rajapaksa was present and was aware of the truth, he could not do so.

To enter parliament there needs to be a vacant seat. Basil Rajapaksa did not enter through an SLFP seat but through the National Congress, where a vacancy was created by the demise of Anwar Ismail. Minister Athaulla and other leaders insisted that Basil Rajapaksa should enter Parliament.

After the Southern Provincial Council elections in 2009, there was an issue over the Chief Ministerial post. A discussion was held to appoint one of the two candidates as a Member of Parliament and the other to be the Chief Minister. However there was no seat available in the Parliament.

Immediately Basil Rajapaksa offered to resign. However the UPFA constituent parties, Minister Thondaman, SLFP leaders and also those who were fighting over the Chief Minister position protested and were adamant that Basil Rajapaksa remain as a Member of Parliament. Despite his reluctance to remain in politics, it was evident that the other members valued his presence greatly.

Gathering Support for the 2007 Budget

Gathering support to pass the 2007 Budget was a challenge since the JVP was with the Opposition and the Government did not have a majority. Therefore, parties that were not part of the Government were invited to join including JVP, UNP, SLMC and CWC. The CWC and SLMC including Minister Hakeem joined the alliance. The UNP too agreed and later there was a split within the party and 17 MPs crossed over to the Government. Though later Rauf Hakeem managed to take three out of the five members with him back to the opposition, the other two remained with the government. At that time, though Arjuna Ranatunga had decided to crossover from the Government, his father, the late Reggie Ranatunga who was a very strong SLFPer had convinced him to stay with the Government. Minister Thondaman also remained with the Government and supported the budget.

Knowing the strategy of the opposition, a move was made to break their numbers. By the third reading, even the JVP was in two groups; in one was Wimal Weerawansa who directed either to support or abstain from voting while Anura Dissanayake and Tilvin Silva were against the budget. However the JVP knew that even if they voted against the budget they would lose. Therefore Wimal Weerawansa's idea to support the budget won.

Even though the President was not in the country during the last voting days, the alliance remained united in support of the budget as they had confidence that the budget would be approved. The late Minister Fernandopulle and Basil Rajapaksa spearheaded the entire campaign and they had discussions with each individual.

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Foreign Relations

Foreign policy and foreign relations are important to any country for various reasons such as economic, commercial and military purposes. For Sri Lanka, foreign relations are of importance in two different ways. Firstly, for the administration of the government, and secondly, in dealing with an internal conflict or a war. In this respect the immense contributions made by Basil Rajapaksa in maintaining Sri Lanka's foreign relations is commendable.

In 2005, many were under the misconception that Mahinda Rajapaksa had no solid hold on international relations and believed that he was incapable of diplomacy. It was thought that he had no team to manage international issues. This was a key concern during the campaign. The opposition tried to highlight this through their poster campaign.

President Rajapaksa had a vision on how to manage foreign relations. The

humanitarian operations began with the closure of the Marvil Aru anicut by the LTTE. During the operations, after Muttur was liberated, the President encouraged the predominantly Muslim community to return to their homes in Muttur. However, Sampur which was under LTTE control was bordering Muttur, the people were reluctant to return because the LTTE was known to use heavy machinery to attack the naval base. The military was also aware that the LTTE was aiming to destabilise the Trincomalee harbour in order to cut off the movement of soldiers and supplies to Jaffna.

Entering Sampur to militarily clear the area meant a violation of the ceasefire accord as Sampur was named as an LTTE controlled area by the UNP government. Muttur and Marvil Aru were not in LTTE controlled areas and the humanitarian operations in those areas were not a violation of the Ceasefire Agreement.

At that time the Government assigned a sensitive mission to Basil Rajapaksa. He was sent to India not only to obtain approval and support of India but also to receive their blessings for the Armed Forces to move into Sampur. However, the conditions set by India were that the mission should be completed within a matter of days, as a prolonged operation would bring about unnecessary international pressure. Consequently, the armed forces successfully carried out the operation in a matter of days. Basil Rajapaksa successfully facilitated this mission along with the Defence Secretary while keeping in mind the interests of both parties.

Following The Discussion, The UN Secretary General Walked Him To The Door, Which The Secretary General Usually Does Not Do. He Took Basil Rajapaksa Into His Confidence And Said That He Is A Good Friend Of Sri Lanka.

During the height of the humanitarian operations the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi began a fast to appease his constituency against the progress of the Sri Lankan military. This was yet again a sensitive issue as the governments were at a deadlock. The Indian High Commissioner conveyed a message to the President at a meeting held in the presence of President’s Secretary, the Defence Secretary and Basil Rajapaksa. According to the message, Karunanidhi’s fast was a crisis of such magnitude that it would even destabilize the Indian Government if he decided to leave. This would in turn be detrimental to Sri Lanka. As the High Commissioner was leaving, he personally met with the President and asked him to send Basil

Rajapaksa as a special envoy to India as a last resort to break the deadlock between the two countries because Basil Rajapaksa was the only person who was capable of achieving this.

That very same night Basil Rajapaksa flew to India. He met the Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Indian National Security Advisor M K Narayan, Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon and agreed on certain conditions, which were drafted as a joint agreement. The President's approval was obtained and the External Affairs Minister met with Karunanidhi, who then broke his fast because of the agreement between the two countries. This was the first joint statement made by India and Sri Lanka, which stated that the Indian Government did not condone terrorism and was in support of the Sri Lankan Government.

Incidentally, that day Prabhakaran issued a statement saying that Karunanidhi is the only leader who understands the feelings of the Tamil people in the North.

It was decided during a meeting to form a permanent three-member committee, which included National Security Advisor, the Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary from India and the President's Secretary, Defence Secretary and Basil Rajapaksa from Sri Lanka. From then onwards, until recently, the committee met regularly to discuss the security situation and many other issues that were important to both countries. Karunanidhi's daughter, Kanimozhi who was one of the key opponents of the humanitarian operations visited the IDP camps in Sri Lanka and seeing how the Government was treating the Tamil people, she has now become one of Sri Lanka's closest friends.

Even during the crisis of the North, the Government of Sri Lanka managed to obtain assistance from various foreign countries including China, Europe and even countries that openly criticised the Government. All these ambassadors coordinated with Basil Rajapaksa.

During the last phase of the humanitarian operations the UN Permanent Representative in New York informed the President that an unfavourable situation was being created by the UN Security Council members. Notably three Foreign

Ministers from the permanent representative countries who have veto powers, Bernard Kuchnor from France, David Miliband from the UK and Hilary Clinton from the US were to be present in New York.

It was at this point that Basil Rajapaksa met the Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who is very close to President Mahinda Rajapaksa- ties which were fostered while he was the Foreign Minister of Korea and had visited Sri Lanka during the Tsunami.

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Following the discussion, the UN Secretary General walked him to the door, which the Secretary General usually does not do. He took Basil Rajapaksa into his confidence and said that he is a good friend of Sri Lanka and that he recognises the President as a genuine humanitarian, further adding that he would never embarrass the President and do whatever possible to help Sri Lanka. He inquired about the appropriate time to send a special envoy. This visit ensured that Sri Lanka would not be included in the Security Council agenda. Even at the discussions that were held at the UN, countries such as China, Russia and a few other countries that were members of the UN Security Council at that time supported Sri Lanka. This was a great victory to the country.

Foreign Funding

It was Japan that first funded the development of the Eastern Province. This came as a break through when Basil Rajapaksa met the Foreign Minister of Japan, the Chairman of Sri Lanka-Japan friendship Association and Yasushi Akashi. Since then Akashi has been a constant supporter of Sri Lanka at the Co-chairs meeting. Once Japan started providing assistance the rest of the donors followed suit to help re-build the Eastern Province.

At the time when the Eastern Province was liberated, and the western countries were of the view that Negenahira Navodaya should not be funded because the eastern liberation was not a political solution but a military one. The western powers were reluctant to give any support to develop the Eastern Province, as they

believed the Government would follow the same in the North. They were also of the view that the Sri Lankan government had violated the ceasefire agreement by venturing to the LTTE controlled areas. Not only did these countries cease to give aid, but also withdrew the help that was already being provided.

It was the skillful planning of Basil Rajapaksa that sometimes eased the tensions between certain Foreign Ambassadors and Sri Lankan ministers by facilitating visits to their areas.

Basil Rajapaksa’s strong diplomatic skills and negotiating style has ensured that Sri Lanka could stand strong amidst international pressure and conditions. He has successfully saved Sri Lanka from many sensitive situations. He has been an excellent Ambassador of the country forging new relationships while maintaining the old.

Managing donors and the IMF

During the early part of 2009, Sri Lankan foreign reserves dropped drastically. This was not only due to domestic reasons but also was the result of the global recession. Sri Lanka’s foreign reserves can be categorised as, US dollar and Sterling Pound reserves. When the Sterling Pound depreciated, the reserves depreciated automatically. Furthermore on one hand while Sri Lanka’s export prices decreased, import prices increased. The price of petroleum and other imports increased while the total value of remittances decreased because of the devaluation of the Dollar.

It was at this time that Sri Lanka sought to obtain the IMF facility to increase its foreign reserves. Upon the request of the Central Bank Governor, Basil Rajapaksa met with the official who was in charge of the Asian desk at the IMF, who was incidentally an Indian national. Sri Lanka was able to garner the support of the new chief of the Asian desk who had also worked in Sri Lanka. His advice to Sri Lanka was not to be afraid of the IMF and for Sri Lanka to start a new relationship with the IMF.

An IMF delegation visited Sri Lanka and they understood the ground situation. The delegation was also very impressed with the Mahinda Chintana. However due to the

political pressure on the IMF board they did not approve the recommendation presented by the IMF delegation that had visited Sri Lanka. No one expected Sri Lanka to eliminate terrorism by May 2009. Western elements also hoped that Sri Lanka would face a major financial crisis with the appreciation of the dollar and as such would be forced to agree to all the conditions stipulated by the IMF.

On the day that Basil Rajapaksa visited Washington to discuss the loan, a local newspaper carried the headline that quoted the President as saying that Sri Lanka would not agree to any condition betraying the country. At the meeting in Washington, Basil Rajapaksa was told that the IMF conditions apply to all of its member countries and his response was, “you have your policies and we have our policies if we can come to a consensus we will go ahead with the loan, if not Sri Lanka will find another way.”

One strategy that was adopted by the President was that the dollar was given a fixed rate. The other was that the Government of Sri Lanka sought assistance from non-traditional donors such as Libya who agreed to provide assistance amounting to US$500 million. Thus the IMF realised that Sri Lanka was receiving loans from China, Libya and Iran and thus withholding the foreign reserve facility would not have an impact on the Government of Sri Lanka.

This Was The First Time That A Country Has Received The IMF Facility Without The Support Of The USA. The Man Behind This Strategy Was None Other Than Basil Rajapaksa Who Had A Clear-Cut Strategy To Acquire The IMF Assistance To Sri Lanka.

There are six directors from the EU in the IMF. Each country has a share though the weight of their vote is not equal. Usually the EU countries make decisions together. However by canvassing individual directors and by indentifying their voting strength, Sri Lanka was able to break the group of six into two, where three countries abstained and the other three voted for Sri Lanka. Thus Sri Lanka was able to obtain the required 75%. This was the first time that a country has received the IMF facility without the support of the USA. The man behind this strategy was none other than Basil Rajapaksa who had a clear-cut strategy to acquire the IMF assistance to Sri Lanka.

Closure of the A9

During the humanitarian operations when fighting was ongoing in Marvil Aru, Muttur, Thoppur and Mahindapura, the military strategy of the LTTE was to control the entire sea route and create a blockade. Once the LTTE attacked Muhamalai, there was no other option other than to close the A9 road.

With the closure of the A9 and the LTTE attacks on the ships, shop owners were forced to close down their shops. With approximately 500,000 people in Jaffna and with the supply routes cut off, it was of the utmost importance for the Government to provide food and other essential items to the Peninsula.

During this time Basil Rajapaksa was visiting his family abroad. Having received a call from the President he immediately returned to Sri Lanka. He met with all the Sri Lankan ship owners, which numbered about 25 and requested them to provide their ships to transport essential items to the North. As international insurance companies charged very high premiums due to the security threat caused by the war, nobody was willing to send their ships to the North. However Basil Rajapaksa was able to acquire two ships that transported essential items to the North and thus prevented a major humanitarian catastrophe.

Another problem that had to be sorted was the issue of fuel storage. Every morning Basil Rajapaksa ensured that he received a detailed list of the amount of fuel available at every fuel storage unit in the Jaffna Peninsula. He knew the number of gallons of petrol, diesel and kerosene that was available at every fuel storage unit per day. Everyday a ship carrying fuel would transport the fuel to the Peninsula where bowsers were filled, but since it was a danger to keep the ship at the harbour it had to be taken back to the sea at night and return in the morning. Basil Rajapaksa decided to make use of the huge tanks that belonged to the Cement Corporation, which contained furnace oil that was not being used. However, the furnace oil could not be discarded, as the environment would be polluted. A pipeline was brought from Singapore Petroleum and was fixed to pump oil from the ship. The entire 55,000 litres of furnace oil was transported to Colombo in barrels. Once this mechanism was put in place the Cement Corporation in fact earned a considerable profit by selling the furnace oil. Thus the fuel storage problem was solved and now there are facilities to store sufficient quantities of fuel.

Basil Rajapaksa’s determination and commitment to the people of Sri

Lanka is much evident in his organisation and facilitation of the essential items to the people of the Jaffna Peninsula.

Army and Police shops were opened in Jaffna to provide supplies to the civilians. At a time when the LTTE forced the closure of shops and the co-operatives were functioning the LTTE pressurised them to close as well. However when the co-operatives did not close, the LTTE killed some of the co-operative chairmen. There was a time when five items such as rice, dhal and such other essentials were purposefully sold at prices that were cheaper than Colombo by the co-operatives.

Just prior to Christmas the President sent about 22 Ministers including Basil Rajapaksa and the three Commanders to discuss the needs in Jaffna. During the meeting it was revealed that the people in Jaffna needed eggs since the festive season was approaching. Therefore a decision was made to airlift the eggs to Jaffna. However, providing such a big supply of eggs was a problem as such a large quantity was not available in the market in Colombo. The three Armed Forces had a ration and they were willing to forgo their ration of eggs and this was air lifted to Jaffna for the festive season. Within a few days Basil Rajapaksa also made arrangements for day old chicks to be sent to Jaffna. A few months later, the Jaffna farmers were able to supply eggs to the Forces in Jaffna Peninsula. In fact the Jaffna Peninsula became almost self sufficient during the closure of the A9, they had their own products that were similar to those that are available in the South such as samaposha. It was even possible to bring onions, tobacco and sea cucumber from the North to the South. Since the day-to-day functions of Jaffna were normal, the international community could not bring up any arguments or demand to open the A9.

Despite The Criticisms, Basil Rajapaksa Ensured That The IDPs Were Given The Best Provisions, Not Left Vulnerable To Exploitation, Their Privacy Protected And Their Interests Safeguarded.

Just prior to the Co-chairs meeting, the Government delegation, which included Basil Rajapaksa, expressed its willingness to open the A9 under the supervision of the Bishop or an independent team. The goods would be sent and unloaded before the independent team and the LTTE would not be allowed to open the consignment. However, the Co-chairs knew that the government was willing to open the A9 but it was the LTTE who were not willing to agree because the purpose of the LTTE was

not to provide food to the people.

Basil Rajapaksa’s determination and commitment to the people of Sri Lanka is much evident in his organisation and facilitation of the essential items to the people of the Jaffna Peninsula. His close monitoring of the situation and recognising the needs of the people ensured that the people’s requirements were fulfilled.

IDP resettlement

The experience that the government had gained from resettlement in the Eastern province and the tsunami proved useful in indentifying the strengths and weaknesses of the resettlement process. The President had also visited China to see the earthquake victims and brought back pictures of their camps. Therefore, the Government gained knowledge on how best to handle resettlement but was not prepared for the large number of IDPs. Therefore, when it did take place, many thought that the Sri Lankan government could not cope. However under the guidance of Basil Rajapaksa, the situation was dealt with very systematically while keeping in mind both the security concerns and humanitarian needs.

During the Tsunami, the Galle town was damaged but a kilometre inland the temples and school buildings provided shelter for the displaced. However in the case of the North and East, people of Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, part of Mannar and part of Vavuniya had to be accommodated and the vast area of two whole districts did not have adequate facilities or shelters. On the one hand, there was a security crisis while on the other there was a humanitarian crisis. Many believed that they could not all be accommodated in one place but resettlement in more than one location would pose a security threat.

Basil Rajapaksa was also concerned about privacy issues. People were not allowed to visit the IDP camps as if on display. The privacy of the IDPs had to be protected and the camps were not for photo opportunities. Instead IDPs were made to live with dignity; they were provided housing with sanitary facilities. No other IDP camps elsewhere in the world had playgrounds, co-operatives, waste management projects, libraries, health centres, ayurveda, schools, hospitals, recreation facilities and farms. Even seeds were provided for home gardening.

There was heavy criticism on all these measures taken. NGOs criticised the provision of seeds for home gardening expressing views that it was done to prolong the IDPs stay at the camps without rehabilitating them. These views were echoed when the floors were cemented and roofing sheets were laid. NGOs instead preferred to acquire tents, which would cost US$ 5,000 each, but at such an amount building permanent housing was possible. Most NGOs would incur excessive expenditure and would keep their vehicle engines running at the camps throughout the day. The Government refused permission for these large vehicles to enter the premises in order to prevent environmental pollution and health problems caused by the dust. However this was publicised around the world that the Government was not allowing these organisations to visit the IDP camps.
Despite the criticisms, Basil Rajapaksa ensured that the IDPs were given the best provisions, not left vulnerable to exploitation, their privacy protected and their interests safeguarded. He worked day and night in order to ensure that people are resettled in safe areas with the necessary facilities so that they may resume a normal life.

Demining

As a part of the resettling programmes and development of the North and East, Basil Rajapaksa was instrumental in ensuring that the demining process was carried out efficiently. Many organisations provided funds for their own companies and publicised in the newspapers that they were providing machines. Some of these organisations never increased the number of demining machines or their workforce and in fact did nothing towards supporting the demining process.

There were many who wanted to sabotage the resettlement process and thought that by the time of the election, the expected monsoon would turn the IDP camps muddy and result in the IDPs rioting against the Government. The western delegations never ceased to ask about the monsoons. Fortunately the monsoon delayed and the demining machines were airlifted.

Demining machines were purchased from the same country from where military equipment was purchased. However, getting the demining machines proved to be a difficult task. Various permits and approval of committees had to be obtained from the country that Sri Lanka was importing the machines from. Committee members would be absent and consequently weeks would pass before receiving approval

again. However, the supply of military equipment was done with far more ease and required less time in processing the documents.

Many believed that if the Government failed to demine, it would delay the resettlement process and IDPs, which in turn would mean that the terrorists would not be rehabilitated. Further with the monsoons and the inevitable riots the Government would have to let the IDPs go. However their plans proved to be futile as all mechanisms had be put in place to provide the best to the IDPs.

Uthuru wasanthaya and Negenahira Navodaya

When the President assigned Basil Rajapaksa to the task of developing the North, he focused on the key requirements of the people. The first was access. Without access, there would be no scope for development and prosperity, while creating an environment for terrorists to function. Through the programmes, Uthuru Wasanthaya and Negenahira Navodaya, Basil Rajapaksa has ensured that the North and East were well on the way towards development.

The road network was badly affected, the bridges destroyed; and in certain instances there had been no bridges since the time of the British. It was also the vision of Basil Rajapaksa to provide electricity, agricultural facilities and irrigation. Thus under his guidance, many irrigation schemes such as Unnichchi tank, Karavahu drainage system, Allai were commenced. Irrigation tanks were repaired or rebuilt and abandoned paddy lands were cultivated, and fisheries were also begun.

He also enforced the 4D concept of the President: Demilitarisation, Democratisation, Development and Devolution – political solution. The elimination of the LTTE, rehabilitation of child soldiers and disarming armed groups other than the security forces ensured Demilitarisation. Local government, Provincial and Presidential elections were held for Democratisation and parliamentary elections are to be held as a further step forward in the democratisation process. Development is underway at every level, be it rural, middle or provincial level. Devolution is the final solution, which will be reached after the parliamentary elections.

Under the Uthuru Wasanthaya programme, the development of road networks and

irrigation of giant tanks such as Iranamadu are underway. Bridges are being built and now the Jaffna Peninsula is linked from Elephant Pass. Soon there will also be three more of such links; one via the Sangupitiya bridge, second from Elephant Pass and third from Chalai to Point Pedro. There will be a road built from Arugam Bay to Point Pedro and with the Kinniya bridge and Yan Oya bridge also completed, a road will be built through Pulmudai, Mullaitivu, Chalai to Point Pedro making it the East Coast highway. There will also be another road from Colombo through Negombo, Puttalam, Mannar, through Wilpattu to Sangupitiya Bridge to Jaffna, which in turn will be the West Coast highway.

The Mannar-Puttalam Road has been on the maps from far back, but certain environmental organisations are against opening this road, as it prevents their accumulation of funds through illicit timber merchants.

One Of The Key Aspects Of His Strategy Is That He Is Physically Present At The Places Where Projects Are Carried Out. His Knowledge Of These Areas Has Given Him That Extra Edge To Carry Out His Functions Towards Making These Projects A Reality.

The main strategy in the North and East is to have ease of access, livelihood and development. Basil Rajapaksa is constantly in the field and makes sure that people work according to their designated role. He takes a personal interest in each of their responsibilities and does not always believe what people say. He has travelled to all areas in the North and the East and is well versed with the surrounding areas, the facilities and the ground realities. Thus it has become possible for him to ensure that these projects are implemented according to the plan.

The North and East had to be developed immediately, but manpower is required for the contractor to work in these areas. On the other hand personnel cannot be sent to these areas without the basic amenities. Therefore, it has become a considerable issue. Since repairs have to be carried out nevertheless, the government approached China for support and now government organisations carry out the repairing work. From its inception the Uthuru Wasanthaya programme has been carried out by government organisations. The Central Engineering Consultancy Bureau, State Trading Corporation and State Engineering Corporation carry out demining and resettlement in the North and East, as there are no private contractors in those areas.

Once when the TNA Members of Parliament came to visit the President, Basil Rajapaksa was also present at the meeting. He was able to counter all the claims they were making as he has been to the areas in the North and the East and is the first politician in history to visit some of the villages in the area. One of the key aspects of his strategy is that he is physically present at the places where projects are carried out. His knowledge of these areas has given him that extra edge to carry out his functions towards making these projects a reality.

Gama Neguma and Jathika Saviya

Jathika Saviya was a programme that was initiated in threatened villages following the Kebethigollawa incident. The President assigned Basil Rajapaksa to the task of looking after the needs of the people living in these villages. The Defence Secretary had also stated at the Security Council that if people move out then that land would be available for encroachment by the LTTE allowing them to move towards the interior. Therefore Basil Rajapaksa visited every single village, looking beyond security concerns to provide the required facilities such as infrastructure, roads, electricity and livelihood security.

Gama Neguma programme was initiated, as President Mahinda Rajapaksa understood the needs of the village. At the time when Gama Neguma was included in the Mahinda Chinthanaya, no one took it seriously. They thought it was going to be a programme where a culvert would be put in place, the same was thought of the Maga Neguma programme. From the time the President was in the Ministry of Highways he was promoting Maga Neguma and as President his aim was to provide concrete roads to all villages.

Therefore Gama Neguma, is not just building roads and giving electricity it is uplifting the life of every individual family in the village. As the President stated first you have to build the individual, then the family, then the village and then the country to win the world. Gama Neguma has a participatory approach and the man who makes the President’s vision a reality is Basil Rajapaksa.

However there is criticism, which is unavoidable. When thousands of roads are being built there may be a few roads that have issues where the contractors may not be able to provide the required standards and these are highlighted by the

media. It is inevitable that mistakes occur and these can take place only if one actually does the work. To draw an analogy, as a person who doesn’t drive in Sri Lanka Basil Rajapaksa has a clean driving license, but in California he has a few tickets.

Crucial decisions always need to be taken and it is Basil Rajapaksa who is ever present
to make decisions with utmost responsibility.

In order to provide electricity to all the villages power generation is important. It is for this reason that Kotmale, Kerawalapitiya, Norochcholai and all other projects are being simultaneously implemented. At the planning stages of the flyover bridges, there were those who were sceptical and thought that these would just be a figment of the imagination as an election gimmick. However under the strong leadership of Basil Rajapaksa, roads and flyovers are being constructed successfully. There are flyovers at all the main entry points into the city of Colombo; Kandy Road, Highlevel Road, Galle Road, Lowlevel Road and now the Rajagiriya Road as well.

Crucial decisions always need to be taken and it is Basil Rajapaksa who is ever present to make decisions with utmost responsibility.

Presidential Election 2010 – Strategy

Though the President was confident of his victory in the 2010 Presidential election, a survey was carried out to determine the situation. It was evident that Colombo and a few urban towns such as Galle, Negombo and Kandy may not give a majority to the President. The support from the North was also not strong. However the UPFA campaign was confident of the support of the rural areas because much had been done to develop the rural economy through Gama Neguma, Maga Neguma and Jathika Saviya programmes through which roads were constructed, electricity was provided to villages and a good price was given for agricultural products such as paddy, cinnamon and tea. With the increase of prices the farmers income increased and though it is good for farmers, the rise in prices is largely felt by the consumers who live in urban areas.

The credit for ending the war would always go the President regardless of claims

made by many others. For the first time in history, professionals such as lecturers, doctors, lawyers, sports personalities and artistes extended their support to one candidate – President Mahinda Rajapaksa. All Religious leaders except a very few also openly supported the President.

He Assumed Not 10% But 100% Responsibility Of Everything. He Undertook The Mammoth Task Of Campaign Manager Of President Rajapaksa While Being An MP, Advisor To The President And Also The Chairman Of The Task Force Of Northern Development.

As Campaign Manager Basil Rajapaksa was confident, his strategy was very clear. A gradual momentum was created and it was not aimed to gain a peak during the initial stages of the campaign. One mistake the Opposition made was that they used all their trumps against the President's campaign at the initial stages of the campaign even before the day of nomination.

Basil Rajapaksa faced each challenge as and when it came and did not waste his time countering allegations. For example, the first was the white flag story, which was in the news for about 3-4 days and then the HICORP issue came which lasted approximately another 3 days. Following this, a man by the name of Upul made a statement about HICORP, this lasted for about another 3 days and then the TNA issue arose. This was followed by the Kalawedda story, and then NFF MP Muzamil was offered a bribe. There were also the corruption charges and finally even on the Election Day itself there was an issue that Sarath Fonseka did not have voting rights. The Opposition also attacked the Executive Presidency but it failed to maintain a momentum. The inappropriate behaviour of the Opposition Presidential Candidate was a positive for President Mahinda Rajapaksa's campaign.

Basil Rajapaksa who spearheaded President Mahinda Rajapaksa's campaign had a clear focus. Time and energy was not wasted on baseless accusations and the Opposition did not have anything to counter the campaign of Mahinda Rajapaksa. A tabloid featuring the development work completed all over the country by President Mahinda Rajapaksa's Government by the name of Rata Perata, Yana Gamana (The Journey of the Country as it Moves Forward) was distributed among the public during the first week of January 2010.

Though various committees were formed to overlook various aspects of the campaign, Basil Rajapaksa as the Campaign Manager diligently monitored every single document and activity. He was aware of every single aspect of the campaign. He ensured that he checked every single document that was produced. He knew the location of every single vehicle that was on campaign duty. He assumed not 10% but 100% responsibility of everything. He undertook the mammoth task of Campaign Manager of President Rajapaksa while being an MP, Advisor to the President and also the Chairman of the Task Force of Northern Development.

Presidential Election 2010 – Western Agenda

During the Presidential election campaign, a strategy was put in place by certain western countries to embarrass, create chaos and destabilize the election campaign of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. This was apparent through certain events that took place during that period. However, as the Campaign Manager Basil Rajapaksa knew what was required and did not deviate from the strategy that he had envisaged to ensure the victory of the President.

Following the announcement of the Presidential election in 2009, an Ambassador from one of the western countries tried to dissuade the campaign of President Mahinda Rajapaksa by saying that the President would lose because the Southern vote base had been split by the candidature of Sarath Fonseka who was the Former Army Commander and also came from the South. The Ambassador stated that the Tamil community would not vote for the President because according to him not much had been done for this community. However Basil Rajapaksa being the Chairman of the Northern Task Force and also the Uthuru Wasanthaya and Negenahira Navodaya programmes disagreed as development that had not been seen in those areas for more than 30 years was now finally being carried out and the IDPs were given the best possible facilities, which has not been seen in any other country so far.

A Person Who Is Calm Amidst The Storm, Diligent And Persevering, Hardworking But Most Of All A Humble Human Being Who Does Not Forget To Offer A Cup Of Tea Or A Meal To Those Who Work With Him Or Meet Him.

In one of the western countries a meeting was summoned for the leaders of the

Muslim and Tamil communities of Sri Lanka so that they could come to an agreement to support one candidate. However, knowing their plan Basil Rajapaksa was prepared for this challenge and Tamil and Muslim Ministers who supported the Government were sent to this meeting. Members of Parliament and also from the Government were summoned to this meeting and leaders of the Tamil and Muslim community who the LTTE could not even approach were brought together at this meeting. This was done by sponsoring the delegates' travels and giving them money. Their main aim was to put forward conditions that the Government would not agree to. Since they were sponsoring Sarath Fonseka, their strategy was to obtain the support of the Tamil and Muslim community for the opposition candidate. Due to the sharp acumen of Basil Rajapaksa their plot was destabilized as those who supported the Government either walked out or objected to the conditions, causing their plan to be foiled. It was some members of the SLMC and TNA who supported the move of the western countries.

In December 2009, some countries tried to demoralise the President's campaign by saying that the minorities are not with the President and that the war victory was the only trump card that President had which was being claimed also by the Opposition candidate Sarath Fonseka. He was selected by these elements and it is indeed a cause for concern how the western countries were able to change the JVPs stance on Norway. They used various methods to force Ranil Wickramasinghe to withdraw from the Presidential elections and some members of the opposition actively supported these measures.

Basil Rajapaksa was not to be discouraged by such tactics and his reply to the Ambassador was that in two weeks the country would be able to see the choice of the people. The western elements were of the belief that President Mahinda Rajapaksa was depending on the war victory. But they were not aware that as part of the campaign strategy Basil Rajapaksa would highlight the economic and development achievements of the President during the four years.

Who is Basil Rajapaksa?

A person who is calm amidst the storm, diligent and persevering, hardworking but most of all a humble human being who does not forget to offer a cup of tea or a meal to those who work with him or meet him. He strives for perfection and he is

loyal to the President. He implements programmes that the President has decided upon.

Basil Rajapaksa takes responsibility for whatever he is assigned. He is a person who only takes what he is certain that he can fulfil. Even though some may say that he takes 10%, in actual fact when he is assigned a duty he gives 100%. This was evident during the Presidential election campaign where Basil Rajapaksa worked not considering day or night. He likes to work and he engages in it tirelessly, but when he needs rest he takes it in a timely manner. He enjoys his work and finds constant satisfaction in it, as he is able to choose what he likes; as a result, he is adept in what he does.

During the election campaign he avoided paying attention to anti-campaign material. He didn't read the newspapers nor watched television, instead, he fixed his undivided attention on the plan and worked without allowing distractions to get in the way of his work. He is meticulous about his work and knows exactly what he wants and what needs to be done. If he were to counter all the allegations that were made by the Opposition at the time of the elections, the entire campaign would have been on counter allegations and the tabloid, Rata Perata Yana Gamana would not have been printed to highlight the development of the country or any other work would not have been done.

The Rajapaksa Family Has Gained Much Politically From President Mahinda Rajapaksa But In All Other Spheres The Family Members Are At A Loss Or Disadvantage Because Of The Mahinda Rajapaksa Name.

His good management skills are evident when one looks at the land in Hambantota that he inherited from his father. It is the best-maintained land compared to the others. He fertilises the land at the correct time and as a result it is his paddy fields that have the best harvest. He is an agriculturist at heart and even when in California he grew his own vegetables such as pathola (snake gourd) and karawila (bitter gourd). Even in Colombo where he has a small patch of land he grows his own vegetables. He is a person who understands the country and the pulse of her people.
Though he is very much in the centre of politics, Basil Rajapaksa has no liking for it. He is a simple person who enjoys going out for a meal. Until now he was unable to do so because of the security situation of the country. However after the

Presidential elections he and his wife went out for dinner without any security. However, as a well known person in the country and as Sri Lanka is renowned for its hospitality, the staff of the hotel made an extra effort and the Chef, Restaurant Manager and the General Manager of the hotel came to their service.

Family -A Legacy

Basil Rajapaksa comes from a family that has a political legacy. This has resulted in slandering and various accusations being made against the family. As a Member of Parliament he has not accepted any perks such as car permits, even the telephone that he received was given to the SLFP Teacher's Union. It saddens him when people make false allegations because he believes that a person can sleep only in one place, wear one shirt at a time and eat only three meals a day.

He does not know where the so- called houses, lands and hotels that he supposedly owns are, but makes a request for those who make such allegations to let him know the location of the properties because he is in fact looking for a house to rent in Gampaha!
The Rajapaksa family has gained much politically from President Mahinda Rajapaksa but in all other spheres the family members are at a loss or disadvantage because of the Mahinda Rajapaksa name. Not only now but even when he was a Minister, many family members had to face difficulties.

Basil Rajapaksa's Family Is As Humble As He Is, But Has The Same Determination And Strength.

Basil Rajapaksa is the father of two daughters and one son. His children are well educated and employed and they do not depend on their parents. The children completed their primary education in Sri Lanka, the daughters at Visakha Vidyalaya and the son at Royal College. It is with great pride and emotion that he speaks about his children. After the family migrated to California in USA, his daughters completed their tertiary education at Berkley University, one of the best universities in the world. While the eldest daughter completed her studies in Chemical Engineering, the other studied Structural and Environmental Engineering. Both completed their Masters at Cornell and USC respectively. His son studied Chemistry at USC and all three of them received scholarships from the respective universities. His eldest daughter has a Phd in Pharmacology and is married to an Indian national

who also holds a Doctorate. She is part of the academic staff of the University and has many published papers in her name. As a Structural Engineer, Basil Rajapaksa's second daughter is constantly travelling and is in the field most of the time. His son is working in a pharmaceutical company. As children of Basil Rajapaksa their freedom is curtailed due to security reasons.

His children do not like their father being in politics. They always read what is published on websites and at times they too ask their father where the alleged wealth and land that has been mentioned on these sites are.

Mrs Rajapaksa is a Lawyer. Prior to leaving the country she worked in Sri Lanka and upon migrating she completed a postgraduate degree at UCLA Law School and worked at a legal firm in USA. She is a constant support to her husband and is a partner in all the work that he does. Even while he is away she would coordinate the work and ensure that everything is done in a timely manner. Basil Rajapaksa's family is as humble as he is, but has the same determination and strength.

Basil Rajapaksa is the Senior Advisor to the President, Chairman of the Presidential Task Force for the North, the UPFA national organiser for the upcoming General Elections, father, brother and friend. He stands tall as a pillar of strength and all seek his advice. He is known as a meticulous worker, strategist and negotiator. He is a humble person with great responsibility, which seems effortless to him. Basil Rajapaksa is truly a son of Mother Lanka.