

---

## Bitter at West, Sri Lanka looks East for support

Monday, 04 May 2009

Last Updated Monday, 04 May 2009

by Nicolas Revise Nicolas COLOMBO (AFP) &ndash; The Sri Lankan government is increasingly tilting towards Iran, Libya and China for foreign aid as its traditional Western allies ramp up their criticism of the war against Tamil rebels. Many Western nations have outlawed the Tamil Tigers and cut off their funding networks, but the Colombo administration is deeply upset over repeated calls from the United States and the European Union for a truce. President Mahinda Rajapakse believes he is on the verge of victory over Tamil separatists after 37 years of fighting, and he fears that nations such as Britain, France and the US could throw a lifeline to the rebels. "Never did history unmask the hypocrisy and the sanctimony of the Western powers than (it has in) their behaviour towards Sri Lanka during recent times," the defence ministry said on Sunday, without naming specific countries. Rajapakse himself vowed last week that he would not bow to outside pressure for a ceasefire, and lashed out at what he regards as Western interference. "They are trying to preach to us about civilians. I tell them to go and see what they are doing in Iraq and Afghanistan," he said in a speech. Historically, Sri Lanka has had close links with the West after four centuries of colonial rule starting with the Portuguese and then the Dutch, and ending when the British left in 1948. "We have had the closest relations with the West," said Nanda Godage, retired additional foreign secretary. "But today, we are disappointed by their hostility." He said Colombo understood the concerns of the West over ethnic Tamils because about 1.5 million Sri Lankan Tamils now live in Europe and the US. Elected in 2005 on a promise to wipe out terrorism, Rajapakse put his retired army colonel brother Gotabhaya in charge of the defence ministry. The duo are the architects of the war against the Tamil Tigers, which has proved widely popular with the island's Sinhalese majority. Buoyed up by such support and major battlefield advances, the government has begun to openly criticise Western governments for their alleged support of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). "In this country, we have become a bit paranoid, we think that the whole world is against us," Godage admitted. "But because of this hostile attitude of the West, we have been forced to look at Iran. China has always been here (supporting). We are even looking at Libya. Japan understands us." The shift was underscored in Sunday's defence ministry statement, which said that Sri Lanka was "grateful for the wholehearted support" of countries including China, Iran, India, Libya, Russia, Pakistan and Vietnam. "But for their understanding on our plight and the trust they placed on us, we would never be able to come this far in our battle against terrorism," it said. Japan provides more than half of bilateral foreign aid to Sri Lanka and holds two thirds of its foreign debt. But Yasushi Akashi, Japan's special envoy to the island, stressed at the end of his three-day visit on Saturday that -- unlike Western nations -- there was no link between the aid and progress in peace efforts. China also lends heavily to Sri Lanka while being the biggest supplier of small arms to its military. And it is building a deep water port in Hambantota, the home constituency of the president. "Pegging Sri Lanka to Asia is a major trend," said Eric Meyer, French historian and expert on Sri Lanka. "During this crisis, China has prevented a UN Security council resolution against Sri Lanka." With the support of Asians, Colombo is also looking to Iran, which in 2008 agreed to lend a billion dollars for a hydroelectricity facility and the refurbishment of the island's only oil refinery. Sri Lanka is also holding uneasy talks with the International Monetary Fund for a 1.9 billion dollar financial bailout. "Even if we don't get the loan, we will survive," Godage said. Especially, because negotiations for a 500-million dollar loan from Libya is at an "advanced stage," according to the central bank. Courtesy: yahoo.com