



SPUR New Zealand

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Calls for boycott of sporting and economic ties with Sri Lanka will not work

We have seen recent news reports that a section of New Zealand Tamils supporting the international terrorist organization LTTE has suggested that the New Zealand Government should cancel the Black Caps' Sri Lankan cricket tour and should also boycott Sri Lankan goods as a retaliation for defeating terrorism within Sri Lanka in the recently concluded war.

This agitation follows the unsuccessful attempt made by Tamils living in foreign countries to influence the western world to cause an inquiry on the civil war by the UN Human Rights Commission. At the Commission's sessions held on 27 May 2009 an overwhelming majority of 29 countries out of 47, with 6 countries abstaining, ruled that no investigation against Sri Lanka is necessary.

In such a backdrop, "New Zealand Society for Peace, Unity and Human Rights in Sri Lanka (SPUR NZ)" would like to denounce the demand by LTTE supporters in New Zealand for an economic and sports boycott of Sri Lanka that might seriously damage friendly bi-lateral relationships. It would also cause substantial economic consequences for both countries.

Although we are very positive that the New Zealand Government will not even take any note of these demands, it is interesting to ponder on the potential repercussions of such a scenario.

At present the bi-lateral relationship between the two countries are maintained at an excellent level. The trade and other business relationships are expanding rapidly. Skills of the Sri Lankans of all ethnic groups i.e. Sinhala, Tamil and Moslem are utilized very productively by New Zealand to its quest for economic recovery.

At present, a major share of the Sri Lankan imports to New Zealand consists of Dilmah Tea. Its popularity built on the excellent quality. Sri Lankan Cricket and Dilmah Tea have gone hand in hand in New Zealand !

Ironically, that the immediate and direct sufferers from a boycott of Sri Lankan tea will be the Tamil tea estate workers in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka. On the other hand the importers and distributors of Sri Lankan food stuffs to New Zealand are the Tamil businessmen and any boycott of these goods will force them to close their shops putting the jobs of a number of Tamils who work in these establishments in jeopardy.

For most of the New Zealanders, Sri Lanka is synonymous with Dilmah Tea and Sri Lanka Cricket. Similarly for most of the Sri Lankans, New Zealand is synonymous with Anchor Milk and Black Caps Cricket Team.

Sri Lanka is New Zealand's fifth largest market for milk powder products and it is growing year on year. It is reported that Fonterra Brands Lanka, the producers and distributors of Anchor Milk in Sri Lanka, has an annual milk food market worth of \$286m in 2009. It is projected to grow up to \$419m in 2012. The majority of the milk imports to Sri Lanka (94 per cent) are from New Zealand that includes 40,000 tonnes of milk powder from the Te Rapa and Te Awamutu sites in the Waikato, according to a news report published in April 2009 by Taranaki Daily News. Recently, Fonterra built a \$12.2 million culture food manufacturing plant alongside its two existing plants in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan Minister of Livestock Development C B Ratnayake has recently said that the SL government wanted to continue working with Fonterra to expand the dairy industry after the war is ended. He wanted greater production from Sri Lankan cows and to open up newly liberated land in the North and East of the country to dairying - and he wanted Fonterra's help to make it happen due to the name and the confidence the company has created among the Sri Lankan consumer. It is abundantly clear that through bi-lateral trade and economic relations populations of both countries are mutually helping each other. A disruption will not be tolerated by any body.

A great opportunity is now available for the Sri Lankans living around the globe to get involved in creating more economic opportunities to their brethren living in the liberated areas in the North and East. Those people living in the in the North and East of Sri Lanka need every assistance to resume their life, and rehabilitation and re-construction of these areas is THE PRIORITY.

What the Tamil Community living in New Zealand should do at this juncture is to promote the bi-lateral relationships and economic activities between the two countries further rather than advocating a boycott.

