

Strengthening the geopolitical aspects of Sri Lanka by joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

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This research paper focuses on Sri Lanka, an island nation geopolitically significant in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific region. It evaluates the geopolitical aspect benefits versus the challenges of integrating Sri Lanka within the world's most significant free trade agreement (RCEP). Although the economic aspects of Sri Lanka joining the RCEP are analysed, the geopolitical implications and aspects are yet to be uncovered. Therefore, this study investigated the geopolitical implications of Sri Lanka joining the RCEP analysing the impact that it may bring to the relations with member states, especially after India had opted out of participating in the RCEP partnership. The study analysed the possible benefits and challenges that may strengthen Sri Lanka's geopolitical aspect by joining a trade bloc in terms of building relationships with Asia-Pacific, the concept of geopolitical factors, and the geopolitical significance of the RCEP. In this qualitative research, data collection was conducted among experts in relevant fields sampled as representatives of government and non-government institutions. The themes were explored in depth using secondary data. Interview-based qualitative data were analysed and presented through thematic analysis, followed by themes that illustrate the aspects of geopolitics. The findings of this research will contribute to the understanding of how small nations such as Sri Lanka can use regional economic partnerships to enhance their geopolitical aspects and navigate complex international relations in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: *Sri Lanka, RCEP, geopolitics, Asia-Pacific*