

“You are aware that during the operation to defend the country, I protected the heroes who fought for the country. I represented them everywhere. And now in the nation building process, I will protect the honest and skilled people who work for the betterment of the country. The country cannot be developed with harassment, gross punishments or by the gun. Discipline is not revenge. The nation can only be built through commitment, discipline and elimination of corruption,” stated President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the 62nd Independence Day celebration in Kandy today (04 Feb).

Today we celebrate the anniversary of independence after the liberation of the entire country from terrorist threat for the first time in 30 years. I am proud to proclaim that we are in a position to raise the flag of Sri Lanka with dignity in the entire country,

President Rajapaksa, addressing the nation in Sinhala and Tamil, further stated that the people of the North and East suffered for thirty years without the democratic right. “I was able to grant them democracy. That is the greatest victory we have achieved,” he said.

We were able to gain many achievements because infrastructure was speedily built whilst the war was being waged. I will use this mandate given by you to re- establish all that was lost for the past 30 years due to the war, stated the President.

He continued, “an efficient, advanced nation needs to be built to replace a country which is lazy, lethargic and lacks energy. It is meaningless to blame our nation for its inefficiency whilst referring to the efficiency and progress of other countries. We proved at the recent overwhelming victory that our people could overtake them”.

I protected the heroes who fought for the country. I represented them everywhere. Even during the nation building process, I will protect the honest and skilled people who work for the betterment of the country, the President emphasized.

Following is the full text of the speech:

Today we celebrate the anniversary of Independence after the liberation of the entire country from terrorist threat for the first time in 30 years. I am proud to proclaim that we are in a position to raise the flag of Sri Lanka with dignity in the entire country.

In 1815, Variyapola Sumangala Thero hoisted our flag on this historic land after lowering the Union Jack. I wish to pay my respect to the venerable monks as well as the revered clergy of all religions for their dedication and commitment displayed to preserve this freedom.

When I unfurled the national flag today, I remembered those heroic soldiers who sacrificed their lives and limbs for the freedom of the country and all those who worked with dedication for the liberation struggle.

Friends,

Freedom is a responsibility. The people of this country have entrusted me with that responsibility on January 26 by a larger majority than in the 2005 Presidential election. I would like to assure you that I will fulfill that trust placed upon me.

Accordingly, it was demonstrated to the world that for us the Motherland is first, second and third. Thus, we have become richer with the supreme human quality of gratitude. It is my fortune to fight along side people with such great qualities to preserve the freedom of our nation. It is indeed a privilege to live in a country with such intelligent people. I am fortunate to be the leader of a country of fathers, mothers and children who know the value of gratitude.

I have succeeded in uniting the territory. Now, I am entrusted with the task of uniting the hearts of all sections of our people. I willingly take over the noble task of creating peace among our communities.

The first Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. D. S. Senanayake stated on the occasion of the first Independence Day that the meaning of freedom is to curtail sorrows and enhance happiness. That is the desire of the people when a country attains independence. I would like to point out that the past four years was the most meaningful era of freedom since we attained independence.

Friends,

This is the time when the benefits of unifying the nation begin to show results. Now that the war has ended, the nation is saving more than the cost of the war. International research magazines recently reported that Sri Lanka is among the 31 countries in the list of best tourist destinations. Sri Lanka is second only to China among Asia's fastest growing economies. Sri Lanka is also listed among the best countries for investment. We cordially invite investors here.

We were able to gain such achievements because infrastructure was speedily built whilst the war was being waged. I will use this mandate given by you to re- establish all that was lost for the past 30 years due to the war.

Our country which fell back in progress because of the war needs to be advanced swiftly. Peace alone is not enough. An efficient, advanced nation needs to be built to replace a country which is lazy, lethargic and lacks energy. It is meaningless to blame our nation for its inefficiency whilst referring to the efficiency and progress of other countries. We proved at the recent overwhelming victory that our people could overtake them.

In the development of the country the private sector too has a responsibility similar to that of the public sector. There is a better environment for the private sector which was at a standstill during the war. I expect a public service which can take quick decisions and which is people friendly. I will make the government service a service for the public.

You are aware that during the operation to defend the country, I protected the heroes who fought for the country. I represented them everywhere. And now in the nation building process, I will protect the honest and skilled people who work for the betterment of the country. The country cannot be developed with harassment, gross punishments or by the gun. Discipline is not revenge. The nation can only be built through commitment, discipline and elimination of corruption.

In the Mahinda Chintana, we mentioned that Sri Lanka will be made a centre of marine, aviation, commercial, energy and knowledge. You may feel that this target is very far. But we will bring the benefits of these five great economic forces closer to your feet in the near future in order to end the era of sorrow and tears. We will give more opportunities to artistes, authors, musicians so that the yield of their creativity would enhance the contentment of the society.

We will make this a country where people return to, instead of leave for fear of life or poverty. We need to remove the bureaucratic hurdles on the path to economic development as we removed road barriers. My people were at a standstill for thirty years because of terrorists. Now this era is over. We will create a country where people can live at ease.

I implore the separatist forces and local and international conspirators not to underestimate our motherland and the people of this nation.

Friends,

We have brought massive development to the North and East regions as never witnessed in history after removing their fear of death. Uthuru Vasanthaya (Northern Spring) and Nagenahira Navodaya (Eastern Awakening) are some of the major development projects in the country.

The people of the North and East suffered for thirty years without their democratic rights. I was able to grant them democracy. That is the greatest victory we have achieved.

We do not strengthen the parties based on divisive politics on the basis of colour or tribe, pro-LTTE or separatist.

I am certain that the people in the North and East could stand on their own feet through a solution wrought by devolving powers to the villages and empowering them in the entire country.

In accordance with Mahinda Chintana: Vision Ahead, I believe that discussions should be held with the people and their representatives of those areas to find solutions and take action as necessary.

(In Tamil)

My dear people

Today is our Independence Day. It is a very happy day for all of us. Thirty years of terrorism is now over. We are celebrating our independence in such an atmosphere for the first time. Now all of you can live in consolation without fear or doubt.

Anyone can go anywhere freely. That is very important. This is our motherland. All of us are children of one mother. All of us are kings today. We all should live together as brothers with equal rights and with dignity. Let us discuss our issues among ourselves and resolve them.

Everyone will receive all facilities in equal manner. That is called equality and equal rights.

One country, one people, one law. That is our way, the only way.

Thus, there is no racism, separatism or terrorism. Never forget the motherland; never betray it. We consider no one in our country as a minority person. All those who love the country are children of Mother Lanka.

Our motherland is emerging as a hub of development. Democracy should be protected forever.

Recently, the people of Northern and Eastern provinces too were able to vote democratically. I am very pleased about it. Politicians should not mislead the innocent people.

Hereafter, we will not entertain narrow divisions based on race, religion, language and political ideology in terms of regions. Never leave room for the politics of hate. Peace, brotherhood, co-existence and prosperity -- that is our prime objective.

Let us join together. Let us build this country for the sake of our future generations.

(end of Tamil text)

Friends,

You all are aware that our foreign policy is independent and non-aligned. It is no secret that we have maintained close friendly relationships with our neighbours such as India, China, Japan and others. We also maintain close affinity with Africa, the West, the Middle East and the European countries.

In my foreign policy, whatever I have done was in the interest of the people of this country. Now the world should have a correct opinion about us. The Tiger terrorism that impacted on other countries too has ended. The state of war is now over. We are entering into a new era of co-existence after finishing the period of some controversy. I would like to say that we are now entering the golden era of international relations.

Friends,

I never thought of gaining political mileage and take decisions that betrayed the nation. I will

never betray the country. The decisions I took from the time when I decided to defeat terrorism, were taken while thinking of the country's welfare. I did not think of political power when I took decisions. I did not take decisions to implement major projects; the Norochcholai coal power station and Upper Kotmale hydroelectric project to obtain foreign assistance to stay in power. I have done this for the development of the country. I have done this because those are essential for the country. We will not surrender even an inch of territory from our Motherland. As I have always said, we will not take even a single step backwards to stay in power. On the other hand, we will go forward many steps under any difficult conditions in the interest of the nation.

My feet were worn out by walking in long marches with my people. I have sweated in the fight for the rights of the working class. My voice was trained and tuned to rise up against injustice.

I spent my free time listening to the grievances of the common people. The only time I could not listen to the problems of the common people was when I was imprisoned for fighting for the democratic rights of the people. Our house has become a home for the common people. Today, the luxurious carpets at the Temple Trees affectionately receive the feet of common people.

I did not ask you to crown me. However, please remember that I have placed the crown of freedom, prosperity and heroism on the heads of you and your children.

I have understood the fatherly love and affection of your sons and daughters for me. The affection of the sons and daughters of this country was an enormous blessing for me.

It was on this historic place that Veera Keppetipola sacrificed his life without any fear, for the freedom of the nation. I believe that the leaders who ruled this nation should have a heart which will not betray the country similar to that of Veera Keppetipola.

Now I am addressing you from the place where the child hero, Madduma Bandara, son of Keppetipola's sister, sacrificed his life without display of any fear. Please remember that the hearts of your sons and daughters too are filled with unlimited love for the motherland similar to that of Madduma Bandara. Your sons and daughters have unlimited love for me for the same reason.

I feel I am the world's luckiest leader of state to earn the love and affection of such a heroic and talented generation of children.

Friends,

Please protect your child who grows up with love for the country. We have to build a society where your sons and daughters could live with knowledge and good values. It is for our children that we build this nation to be the Pride of Asia.

I wish you a prosperous future.

May the Triple Gem bless you and the blessings of the Sacred Tooth relic be with you.

