

On a three-day visit to the State of Kerala, High Commissioner Prasad Kariyawasam called on Chief Minister of Kerala, Oommen Chandy, on 12 June. Member of Parliament from Kerala in the Lok Sabha, Shashi Tharoor, was present at the meeting as well. Having conveyed the greetings of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the High Commissioner expressed Sri Lanka's interest in reinvigorating ties between Kerala and Sri Lanka encompassing all spheres. The High Commissioner emphasised that although the economies of Kerala and Sri Lanka appear similar at first glance, there is potential to create synergies and leverage market advantage through creation of a common platform and conduct of research on commodities that both Sri Lanka and Kerala dominate in the world market.

Reciprocating the sentiments expressed by the High Commissioner, Chief Minister Chandy invited Sri Lanka to participate at the highest possible level in the 'Emerging Kerala 2012' Conference cum Trade and Investment Promotion event scheduled to be held in September 2012 in Kochi.

The High Commissioner attended a dinner hosted in his honour by the Minister of Home Affairs of the State of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram Radhakrishnan, at which all senior officials of the Home Ministry and Internal Security were present. High Commissioner also met with Minister of Forest, Wildlife, Sports and Cinema, K.B. Ganesh Kumar a former prominent Malayali film actor and discussed possibilities of cooperation between Sri Lanka and Kerala especially in his fields of responsibility. The visit included an interactive session with the Kerala Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a Public Forum organised by the Kerala International Centre, a visit to the Centre for Development Studies and media interactions.

The High Commissioner's address at the Public Forum organised by the Kerala International Centre is appended below.

**Speech delivered by H.E. Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, High Commissioner for Sri Lanka to India at the Public Forum organised by the Kerala International Centre  
13 June 2012**

**Sri Lanka and its Relations with India**

My visit to Kerala is a manifestation of Sri Lanka's desire to expand relations with the Southern Indian States and the primacy we have given in this context to Kerala.

Sri Lanka and Kerala have had an age old relationship with vibrant people-to-people contact that is recorded in history. Though the economies of Sri Lanka and Kerala appear similar at first glance, there is potential for us to create synergies and leverage market advantage through creation of a common platform on commodities that both Sri Lanka and Kerala can dominate in the world market. This includes spices, coconut and rubber products. Sri Lanka is keen to revive and reinvigorate ties with Kerala in all spheres including the political contacts.

My topic today is Sri Lanka and its Relations with India.

Relations between India and Sri Lanka are ancient and predate the modern State system based on the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. Bonds between our peoples, our kings and our rulers are even older than recorded history.

Somehow, with the evolution of history, that is, the long years of colonial rule, the travails of freedom struggles and Independence, and the efforts thereafter to govern in the modern Nation State System, which itself is evolving; while dealing at the same time with several complications inherited from colonial rule; resulted in the blurring of the ties that bound our people in the ancient past.

Today, with the end of terrorism that plagued Sri Lanka for 30 years, and the rise of India on the world stage, we have a historic opportunity to once again go back to building our traditional friendships, especially with the Southern States of India and restore our age-old ties. This is a path that our two nations have already embarked upon. Relations with Kerala are most important to Sri Lanka in this context. In our historical narratives, Kerala has found a special place and was referred to during Emperor Asoka's time as "Keralaputra". We have had continuous people-to-people and economic contacts thriving until the arrival of European powers in our region. It is widely believed in Sri Lanka that exchanges between the people of Kerala and Southern Sri Lanka was a normal fact of life until recent times.

In this context, I want to first set before you, very briefly, what Sri Lanka was historically and the nature of Sri Lanka's relations with India.

A strong influence on Sri Lanka's history right throughout, for thousands of years, has been her position in the Indian Ocean, namely, her strategic location: an island, located midway between East and West. For over 2000 years before the advent of the colonial powers, Sri Lanka served as a safe and important entrepôt, providing ports for the exchange of goods between East and West; a contact point between two great regions.

Sri Lanka, since time immemorial, has seen the continual absorption of influences from the outside world. This is evident in the multilayered make up of the population, its manners, its traditions, culture, architecture, food and attire. But, throughout history, the people of Sri Lanka have displayed a resistance to attempts at physical conquest and control. Nevertheless, we have welcomed those who settle and integrate with us including those from Kerala. Being divided by India by just 30 miles, a narrow strip of Sea, Sri Lanka has been close enough to India to be influenced throughout history, but remained fiercely independent so as to preserve a distinct individuality.

The history of Sri Lanka from the 3rd Century BC onwards is one of the best documented in the region. The island has a collection of historical chronicles and religious writings which have no parallel in South Asia. Recorded history begins over 2300 years ago when Emperor Asoka of India sent his son and daughter to Sri Lanka. They set out to Sri Lanka from Sanchi and were received in Sri Lanka's ancient Kingdom of Anuradhapura. This is an important civilizational link between our two countries. A sapling of the Pipal tree under which Prince Siddharta attained enlightenment as Gautama Buddha in Bodhgaya, was taken to Sri Lanka by Emperor Asoka's daughter. That tree continues to stand in Anuradhapura even today. It is acknowledged as the oldest recorded tree in the world and has remained in continuous worship since the inception in 3rd Century BC. For nearly 13 centuries Anuradhapura remained the principal seat of government and the major centre of Sri Lankan culture and civilisation. Its monasteries were great centres of learning, visited by scholars and pilgrims from many parts of Asia. It housed an international trading community, which included traders from India, China, Rome, Arabia and Persia. It was from the court at Anuradhapura that Sri Lankan ambassadors were despatched on several occasions to the imperial courts of Rome and China. The Great Indian Buddhist scholar and commentator, Buddhaghosa, spent many years in Anuradhapura during the 5th Century, codifying the Buddhist scriptures which had been lost in India. Gunavarman, the Kashmiri monk, who carried Buddhism to Indonesia and China, passed through Sri Lanka, and must certainly have visited the city's monasteries. Monks from Anuradhapura went out to many lands, such as India, China, Cambodia and Java, leaving in those distant places, inscriptions and records of their visits.

Influences from southern India have been of fundamental importance from prehistoric times. For

a thousand years before the arrival of the Portuguese, several conquerors from South India invaded parts of Sri Lanka and established dependencies. At the same time, there was a long history of Sri Lankan rulers sending emissaries to Southern India for their queens and for cultural and economic pursuits. The Buddhist temples from the Polonnaruwa period onwards incorporated Hindu shrines in their premises. This is a feature one would find in Buddhist temples even today.

It has been said that 'there is no island in the world that has attracted the attention of authors in so many distant ages and so many different countries as Ceylon'. During much of the historic period, there are descriptions of the island: in the Hindu epics, in accounts of early Chinese Buddhist travellers, in the works of the Greek, Roman and Arab geographers, and eventually in the Portuguese and Dutch archives.

One of the earliest foreign records is that of a pilot in one of Alexander's fleets, who seems to have visited Sri Lanka in the 4th Century BC. In the 1st Century AD, Pliny gives a description of the country and its people, which he seems to have compiled from the accounts of Sri Lankan ambassadors to the court of Emperor Claudius. Some of the most accurate accounts are considered to be by the Chinese Pilgrim Scholar, Fa-Hsien, who visited Sri Lanka in 5th Century to visit the Buddhist monasteries which by that time had become great centres of learning. The beauty and wealth of the Island had caught the imagination of Arab writers to such an extent that the land they referred to as 'Serendib' was incorporated into the stories of Sinbad the Sailor. They believed that Adam lived there when he was exiled from Paradise. Even today, a Holy Mountain in Sri Lanka, 7,300 feet in height, called Siri Pada or Adam's Peak, which has, at its Summit, a depression resembling a foot print, is considered by the Muslims as Adam's. The same footprint is venerated by Buddhists as that of the Buddha; by Hindus as that of Shiva; and by Christians as that of St. Thomas the Apostle.

It is also said of Sri Lanka that 'there is probably no place that occurs so frequently or is so correctly situated on ancient maps'. Perhaps nothing conveys this so graphically as the map of the world by Ptolemy, the Egyptian geographer of the 2nd Century AD. There, Sri Lanka, referred to as Taprobane, appears about 20 times its actual size, dominating the twin arcs of the Indian Ocean formed by the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.

All this stands testimony to the fact that Sri Lanka was not only a rich and beautiful Island but that it was also the seat of one of the small but important historical civilisations of Asia. Historians of science have placed the Sri Lankan builders amongst the great hydraulic engineers of the pre-modern world, on a level with those of ancient Egypt and China. The scale of their achievement can be measured when one considers that in the 12th Century, there were 600 miles of man-made canals in an island that is less than 300 miles long. The ruins of great monasteries and cities, colossal man-made lakes, numerous inscriptions and a large body of

ancient literature still survive as testimony to the achievements of the Sri Lankan people over a period of 2000 years and more. They indicate that from about 3rd century BC to about the 15th century, Sri Lanka took its place with other countries in Asia, as one of the most advanced and developed countries of the pre-modern world. Throughout this period, the people of Sri Lanka had evolved its own distinctive culture and economy while keeping in close contact with the outside world and being open to ideas and exchanges with the countries of the Indian Ocean region and beyond.

With the beginning of the modern era, the world began to change and enter upon a new historical stage. Sri Lanka was compelled into forming new relationships with powers from overseas, particularly, the Europe of the Renaissance. The colonial expansion of the European maritime nations had a direct political, economic and cultural impact on Sri Lanka. Our traditional relations with the people of Kerala may have been somewhat severed as a result. The Sri Lankan people were outmanoeuvred by successive waves of Portuguese, Dutch and British colonisers armed with military power and aggressive economic and diplomatic strategies of a rising Europe. The country remained a British colony for 150 years until Independence in 1948.

The process of transformation of Sri Lanka into a modern nation with modern institutions, therefore, took place under colonial domination.

Modern constitutional governance in Sri Lanka commenced in 1833, during the time of the British, with what is known as the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms. These reforms provided the first inklings of constitutionalism for Sri Lanka. From this point on, constitutional governance evolved. At first, Restricted Legislative Assemblies were established. In due time, they were enlarged until, in 1931, the people of Sri Lanka received Universal Adult Franchise. Thereafter, a National Assembly was established and the political party system emerged. In keeping with the British system of governance, a strong Bar and an independent Judiciary developed in the country. The Parliament was established with the advent of Independence in 1948 and the Constitution known as the Soulbury Constitution, modelled along the Westminster model of government, was adopted. This was not an end in itself. Although, what may be described as a vibrant, practicing democracy was established at the time, the process of finding the perfect constitutional model for the empowerment of people encompassing all communities still continues in Sri Lanka, even after 60 years of Independence.

In 1972, a new Constitution was formed under an electoral mandate given to the Left Front Government. This exercise saw Sri Lanka breaking away from the colonial model. Continuing the process of modernisation of the Constitutional structure in Sri Lanka, another new

Constitution was adopted in 1978, following the mandate given by the electorate to the United National Party. This saw the introduction of a new Constitution that broke away completely from the previous Westminster model. The 1972 Constitution declared the President of the Republic to be the Head of State; thereby changing the role of the Governor-General from one of being a mere representative of The Queen to that of a President, as a Head of State for Sri Lanka. The 1978 Constitution changed this completely, expanding the role of the President as Head of State, Head of the Executive and of the Government and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. This 1978 Constitution is the one by which Sri Lanka is currently governed.

For 30 long years, since the late 1970s, democracy in the country was under siege. A terrorist group, bent on carving out a separate State in the North and the East of the country, unleashed indescribable violence on the nation. Their aim was to convert the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious society that the people of the country had enjoyed for many centuries, into a narrow, mono-ethnic, mono-linguistic State. The ruthless methods they used included the deployment of child soldiers and suicide bombers. They killed a Prime Minister of India, a President of Sri Lanka, a Tamil Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka and many more Tamil political leaders as well as Sinhalese and Muslims. They completely destroyed the economy and the infrastructure of the North of the country while inflicting heavy damage on other parts of the country intermittently. They eliminated the democratic political leadership of their own Tamil community. A large number of innocent civilians from all races became victims of their violence. This even included Muslim and Buddhist civilians at prayer in mosques and temples. The LTTE also carried out ethnic cleansing raids. All non-Tamils, including a large number of Muslims who lived in the North were evicted by the LTTE. For example, in 1989, the entire Muslim population in Mannar were asked to leave their land, and in 1990, 75,000 Muslims from Jaffna were given 2 hours to leave the Northern region. The ruthlessness of the LTTE and its intransigence resulted in its proscription by the USA, India, UK, the European Union and Canada.

The many attempts at bringing the LTTE into the democratic path included amending the Constitution as well. This was in the form of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1987, which came into effect along with the Provincial Councils Act, to devolve power to the Provinces. As you all know, the LTTE would not accept power-sharing and was adamant on using terror tactics to carve out a separate State that would be under their complete writ. The Provincial Councils, however, are up and running. With the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, Local Government and Provincial Council elections which could not be held in the LTTE held areas for several decades have finally been held. The people of those areas are now once again electing their own leaders at free and fair elections.

The Constitution of Sri Lanka, through all this, continues to evolve, responding to the needs of the people. A Parliamentary Select Committee has been set up to take a fresh look at power sharing, based on our experience in the past two decades. This exercise is aimed at addressing

the grievances of all communities in terms of administration, governance and power-sharing. Our aim as a nation is to ensure that all communities and all groups in the country are able to address all their problems through democratic means.

The rejection of the LTTE and their sympathizers to follow the path of the ballot rather than the bullet and rejection of the peace process by the LTTE led the Government of Sri Lanka to take resolute action to defeat the LTTE militarily, once and for all. The end of conflict has resulted in rapid economic growth and normalisation of civilian life in the conflicted affected areas. Inflation is down to single digit; unemployment is below 5%; fiscal deficit is down to 6.8% to 5%; malnutrition is down from 35% to 13.5%; and poverty is down to 7%, the fastest reduction in the world.

Statics-wise, Sri Lanka today has a population of 21 million made up of 74% Sinhalese; 18% Tamils consisting of Tamils of recent Indian origin and Sri Lankan Tamils; 7% Muslims, and 1% made up of other groups. The main religions practiced are Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. The population growth rate is around 0.9%.

Sri Lanka's social indicators are among the best in Asia. According to the UNDP Human Development Index, Sri Lanka enjoys the highest physical quality of life in the South Asian region. Another achievement is near universal literacy with a very narrow gender gap. The World Economic Forum has rated Sri Lanka among the top 20 countries in the world on gender equality. These are the results of sound policies implemented soon after Independence to provide free healthcare and free education for all Sri Lankans.

With a per capita income of US\$ 2,836/-, Sri Lanka is now categorised as a middle income status country by the IMF. We have achieved an economic growth rate of 8.3% this year. Our current aim is naturally to capitalise on post-conflict opportunities for the betterment of the people of our country. We are well placed on our path towards this aim: our workforce is versatile and easily trainable, with English widely spoken and understood; having ensured that our economy withstood the 30 year conflict and the impact of the December 2004 tsunami, our workforce can also claim resilience. We have the second largest pool of UK qualified accountants in the world which helps us compete in the financial and BPO markets.

Taking into account Sri Lanka's strategic location on the east-west maritime route, close to the ocean routes that link Asia to Europe and the rapidly expanding markets of the Indian sub-continent, our vision in terms of our overall economy, as laid down in the Government

Policy Document 'Mahinda Chintana' is to become a dynamic hub for the region to connect with the world as a key link between the East and the West.

Growing trade in the Indian sub-continent and its increasing integration with the rest of the world have created demand for enhanced port facilities, giving Sri Lanka the opportunity to increase its volumes and market-share of trans-shipment traffic. The current expansion of the Colombo Port (the Colombo South Harbour Project) and the new Port in Hambantota are expected to significantly boost shipping activities in the region in the years ahead. The ancient and world renowned natural harbour in Trincomalee in the East of the country is envisaged to become an industrial port, in addition to ship refuelling. The Government intends setting up heavy industries in Trincomalee and the port will be used increasingly for commercial activities including power generation, cement production, flour milling and oil storage. The Indian Oil Corporation already operates out of Trincomalee. Shortly, NTPC, the giant Indian State owned Power Company, will enter into a Joint Venture with the Ceylon Electricity Board to build a 500MW coal power plant. In addition to these 3 ports there are also the ports in Galle, Olivil and Kankasanthurai. The Galle Port in the South is being developed as a commercial and leisure port. The Olivil Port which is seen as a catalyst for the growth of the eastern region is being developed as a commercial and fisheries harbour. The Kankasanturai Port in the North is currently being rebuilt with Indian assistance.

With Sri Lanka's GDP growth rate of about 8%, it is expected that per capita income, by 2016, would reach US\$ 4000/-. Tourist arrivals, currently growing at 40%, are expected to reach 2.5 million by 2015. IT literacy is expected to increase from the current 35% to 75%.

As mentioned earlier, our focus is to capitalise on post-conflict opportunities to ensure a better future for the people of our country. Our challenges in this respect include consolidating the hard won peace after 30 years of conflict and taking our nation as a whole towards greater prosperity and social cohesion. This involves safeguarding Sri Lanka's national interests, meeting the aspirations of its people of all communities, harmonising our multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, safeguarding our cherished and long standing democracy, and projecting ourselves as a nation at peace and a venue for secure investment and for good profitable business.

Since Independence, Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy has been guided by non-alignment. The policy of staying away from great power rivalries continues to serve Sri Lanka well. This policy is in line with our national ethos and persistent desire to be an independent nation, working with friendship towards all and enmity towards none. In this context, we enjoy close and friendly relations with all Member States of the UN. However, extra effort is made towards developing

closer ties with countries in our immediate neighbourhood. India, in this respect, holds a very special place. In the words of our President, “India is our relation and all others are our friends”. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “It is, at least it should be, impossible for India and Sri Lanka to quarrel. We are the nearest neighbours. We are inheritors of a common culture.”

Relations between Sri Lanka and India, in the post-Independence era, have matured over the years and diversified with the passage of time, encompassing all areas of contemporary relevance, including trade, services and investment, development cooperation, science and technology, culture, education, as well as security aspects. The conclusion of the armed conflict in May 2009 created the space for new opportunities and further expansion of areas of cooperation between the two countries. The State Visit by President Mahinda Rajapaksa to India in June 2010 was a landmark event that laid a strong foundation for the future development of bilateral relations, with the two leaders agreeing to harness the enormous potential available for consolidating and strengthening the bilateral partnership. Today, India and Sri Lanka work together on the basis of mutual respect and understanding.

India today is Sri Lanka’s largest trading partner. India is first in terms of Foreign Direct Investment. The largest number of tourists who come into Sri Lanka are from India. In all three sectors, trade, Foreign Direct Investment, and tourism, India occupies a dominant position in relation to our economy. Trade between the two countries has increased exponentially since the entry into force of the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement in the year 2000 and has now reached about US\$ 5 billion. The Colombo Port and the Colombo Dockyard feed on substantial Indian business. Many Indian corporations are investing in Sri Lanka. Indian banks and insurance companies operate in Sri Lanka as well. Physical connectivity between the two countries continues to expand. There are more than 100 flights a week between the two countries now and over 250,000 Sri Lankans visit India, annually, mostly on pilgrimage to Buddhist sites in North India.

India’s assistance towards the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the conflict affected areas of the North and the East of Sri Lanka is substantial and continuing. Sri Lanka has permanent official representation in New Delhi as well as in Mumbai and Chennai. India has expanded its representation in Sri Lanka since the conclusion of the conflict. While the High Commission is based in Colombo, India has Consulates in Kandy in the Central Province, Jaffna in the North and Hambantota in the deep South.

Recognising India’s role as an emerging power in the world, Sri Lanka was one of the first countries to pledge its support for a permanent seat for India in the UN Security Council.

There are sensitive matters on which we remain engaged to find solutions. Fishermen from either side crossing into each other's waters is one such issue. The main issue in this regard is that of fishermen from Tamil Nadu crossing the IMBL in the Palk Bay, in large numbers, and fishing in the resource rich shallow waters off the coast of Sri Lanka. The Northern Sri Lankan fishermen who have returned to their traditional livelihood after the lifting of restrictions on fishing following the conclusion of the armed conflict, protest that their resources are being plundered by the Southern Indian fishermen. Their other concerns include the fishing methods used by the Indian fishermen which are reportedly harmful to the marine eco-system. The problem is not something that can be solved easily as it involves livelihood concerns of fishermen of both sides. But both countries recognise and acknowledge the problem and related concerns. We remain engaged at all levels including through Fishermen's Associations, to find practical solutions to the problem.

The Government of Sri Lanka, several Sri Lankan Tamil political leaders, as well as several sections of the Sri Lankan Tamil emigrants abroad, have urged all sections of the Tamil communities overseas, including those in Tamil Nadu, to contribute their collective strength, in the aftermath of the defeat of the LTTE, towards rebuilding efforts in the North of the country. This includes restoration of the livelihoods of the people in the North, rehabilitation efforts and uplifting the economy of the North. While several have joined this effort, some who primarily live in western countries and some in Tamil Nadu as well, have rejected this call for help, ostensibly for human rights concerns but in retribution for the military defeat of the LTTE. In fact, these groups work against our efforts to bring normalcy to the Northern Province. The inability or refusal of such groups to come to terms with the defeat of the LTTE and rejection of separatist ideology, seem to impact adversely on the politics of Tamil Nadu.

Since time immemorial, the Indian Ocean has been an important location in the strategic calculations of the great powers of the world, primarily due to the economic impact of the Indian Ocean in the east-west maritime trade. Sri Lanka, located right in the middle of the Indian Ocean at a strategic location has not been immune from these strategic calculations and speculations. Think-tanks, academia and the media engage in constant speculation over these issues. The Sri Lankan State maintains constant vigilance and remains mindful at all times to ensure preservation of its Independence. We are determined to ensure that our actions only contribute positively towards enhancing the security and stability of the region, and not damage, in any way, the interests of nations, especially in our immediate neighbourhood and in Asia. Sri Lanka is determined to ensure that our soil and our seas will not become a theatre for manifestation of great power rivalry, ever. We would certainly not allow one country to use Sri Lanka as a launching pad for hostile action against any other country. Having suffered from terrorism for 30 years, we understand well, the suffering of people and nations in times of conflict and the pain that society as a whole undergoes in such times. We will therefore continue to make all efforts to be mindful at all times and to understand and take care of the concerns of

our neighbours, especially our closest neighbour and friend, India. We will always act in a manner that contributes to strategic stability in the region. This also serves our national interest of securing enhanced maritime security in and around the Indian Ocean as well as ensuring peace in the region. It is in this context that we continue to enjoy very friendly relations with all countries, especially those in our region like India, China, Pakistan, Japan, Indonesia and others.

The single immediate challenge that Sri Lanka faces today is to provide a peace dividend to the people in the North and East of the country who were directly affected by the conflict. These are our people who were deprived of their rights for upward mobility in terms of social and economic advancement due to 30 years of conflict. Although people belonging to all communities, living everywhere in Sri Lanka, express relief and happiness that they can now live their daily lives free of terrorist violence, they are not free of grievances. The Government acknowledges this and has recognised that the military gains must be invested in sustainable political and socio-economic initiatives. The process of consolidating hard won peace through resettlement of the displaced, reconstruction and rehabilitation began immediately after the conclusion of the conflict two years ago. An independent mechanism was established for reconciliation. This mechanism, called the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), sought to provide restorative justice. The Commissioners have visited all the conflict affected areas and heard, first hand, the grievances of the people. The LLRC has now completed its work; recommendations made by the LLRC are now being implemented step by step.

There are several calls from different sections of the international community, especially from the western world, for retributive justice. Calls of this nature, at a time when the people who actually live in our country and have faced the brunt of the conflict, require time and space to heal, are unhelpful at best, if not inimical to our immediate needs. The Government and the people faced a threat from within, to the sovereignty of our people and our nation. It cannot be dismissed that some of the interventions made and attempted by external actors during the three-decade long conflict, no matter how well intentioned they were, caused complications that adversely affected the lives of the innocent people, especially those in the North and the East who were trapped in the clutches of terrorists. We realise that we need to focus, without delay, on reconciliation, confidence building and nation building. These processes, needs to be and indeed home grown are now on stream. The people of our nation have the confidence, that, after emerging from an injurious and costly conflict, we still retain the strength of character and the will to introspect and take remedial measures on our own. We believe that we alone can do this, and that we alone, as a nation, must do this, if such processes are to be successful, and their effects, meaningful and long lasting. In this context, I must emphasise that any action that has the potential to lacerate the healing process and cause communal disharmony will not be helpful to the process of consolidating the peace. Efforts by some sections, especially those motivated by LTTE sympathisers living overseas, to push for retributive justice, in the guise of calls for accountability, are counter-productive and inimical.

Sri Lanka takes its international responsibilities and obligations as well as its role in the international community of States, seriously. We have signed international treaties and other agreements, each of which require us to share with other countries and multilateral institutions, reports and rationale for some of our decisions. We believe in the need to be transparent, accountable, and reasonable. Accordingly we engage and work with member States of the UN according to established UN practice and international law. We expect reciprocity from other countries and actors on the global stage.

Sri Lanka remains committed to the ideals of the United Nations as well as regional Organisations such as SAARC. In SAARC, we recognise the lead role that India can and must play in taking forward regional cooperation objectives.

Sri Lanka remains fully committed to the global endeavour to eradicate terrorism worldwide and particularly in our region. We believe that terrorism and extremism have no place in the modern world.

As Sri Lanka once again takes its rightful place in South Asia, and on the world stage, both in terms of its economic potential and political profile, we want the world to take note of what is being accomplished in the country, against all odds, and the hand of friendship, support and understanding to be extended to our people. This will enable our nation to march forward, complementing the efforts of the rest of the world and contributing towards economic, social and political advancement on the basis of our vibrant democracy and ever liberalizing economy. In this effort, the support of our brothers and sisters of Kerala will be very important for the people of Sri Lanka. We are eager to re-connect with the people of Kerala and revive our age-old mutually beneficial relationship, especially in the economic sphere. As we look for expansion of our relations with Southern States, the State of Kerala is very important for Sri Lanka. Let us work together for a better tomorrow for both Kerala and Sri Lanka.

Thank you very much.