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## 'Without development, there won't be peace'- President

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"Without development, there won't be peace; we must develop the economy, I don't want to just be the liberator, I want to be the leader who brings permanent peace and development to this country and reconciliation with Tamil communities in the North and the East", said President Mahinda Rajapaksa in an extensive interview with the 'Forbes' Magazine. "The war is over," he said. "Now we have no excuses. We have to start working and develop this country." "I am a president for the whole nation. I divide people not as Sinhalese or Tamils or Muslims or Burghers. I divide them into people who love the country and people who do not," the President said. He said he speaks Tamil when he wants to, as he can approach them more closely by speaking to them in their own language. The President Rajapaksa spoke of the country's current economic trends and said even in the war time the economy grew by at least 6% each year. Inflation is now down to 1.1%, from 11% four years ago, according to Central Bank figures. And he notes that per capita income has risen on his watch from \$1,200 to \$2,000. He spoke of his government's commitment to economic development and said "We must have a Sri Lankan model." "I prefer to be agriculturally based. If you can be self-sufficient in food, then the industries will come," he said. On the question on inquiries into alleged violations of Human Rights during the war, especially in its final stages, President Rajapaksa said "We must not follow what happened in Africa or in Europe." ... "I don't think it is healthy to start digging into the history, these problems. We must forget about the past and start a new life, new thinking," he further said. When 'Forbes' Magazine asked the President, "whether Sri Lanka does 70% of its business with the West, now have new best friends, he said "Whoever wants to help me, I will welcome them without strings," and said "I have invited Americans. New bridges and dams are being done by the British and Canada." He said he's instituting a Singapore-style "one-stop shop" to limit paperwork and smooth official contacts. "Every ministry and department wants to be the king" and the President said he has "zero tolerance of corruption". "If you give me the evidence, certainly I will take action against anyone," he said. 'Forbes' reported that: For now, bottom-fishing investors are looking at the country with new enthusiasm. Singapore's Calamander Capital is raising \$75 million for what it claims is Sri Lanka's first private equity fund, targeting the plantation and ceramics sectors. Chief Executive of Colombo's Hatton National Bank, Rajendra Theagarajah, wants President Rajapaksa to encourage "Lankans overseas to invest as part of their contribution towards nation-building." "I am the man who is closer to the people and who would risk my life for the country. That's why I won the war, and that's why I'll win the economic war, too," the President said. Courtesy: priu.gov.lk