
New Year Message of Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama

Thursday, 31 December 2009

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It gives me great pleasure to send this message to all Sri Lankans at home and abroad at the dawn of 2010, the New Year. The year that has just ended has perhaps been the most significant in Sri Lanka's post independence history as it saw the scourge of LTTE terrorism finally being eliminated from Lanka's soil after almost thirty years, under the leadership of H.E President Mahinda Rajapaksa. This victory was achieved from many fronts. While the tri-forces were able to defeat the LTTE militarily, there were also many others who worked at various levels and from different fronts to make this victory possible. The Foreign Ministry led this war on the international front. Our continuous engagement with the international community during trying times culminated in challenging the machinations of the LTTE's global network to complete the annihilation of terrorism. Such engagements brought about good-will from our friends in the international community, which has been demonstrated in the provision of various forms of assistance to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), including expediting the demining process to facilitate the speedy resettlement of these civilians and provision of livelihood support, which has gone a long way in terms of supporting the rehabilitation efforts of the Government of Sri Lanka during a crucial time. The Government of Sri Lanka appreciates all these gestures.

In this context, I also wish to place on record my appreciation to all Officers of the Sri Lanka Foreign Service, Officers serving in our Missions abroad, and officers from other services serving in our overseas Missions, for their unstinted contribution in this endeavour. In the midst of a time of turbulence while pursuing action against terrorism, Sri Lanka was also able to step into several international organizations and fora to enable our country to have the widest possible engagement with global decision-makers. In retrospect, I am pleased to highlight some of Sri Lanka's achievements in the international arena such as securing membership in key organizations where the new architecture for the international system is being built. This includes the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Asia Middle East Dialogue (AMED), G-15 and G-11. Sri Lanka has also made considerable headway in these fora and is now the current Chair of SAARC and ACD. Sri Lanka is also billed to Chair the G-15 from next year. This is perhaps the first time that Sri Lanka is holding the Chairmanship of three important international and regional organizations. In addition, Sri Lanka was endorsed to host the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). In continuing our engagement with the international community, H. E President Mahinda Rajapaksa undertook State Visits to a number of countries while many Heads of States and Governments and other important dignitaries including the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, also visited Sri Lanka. Further, greater visibility has been accorded to our engagement with several important missions being undertaken by Foreign Ministers and other special representative. These visits have not only boosted Sri Lanka's relations with the international community but have also opened many avenues to promote the Economic Diplomacy Initiative spearheaded by the Foreign Ministry, since I assumed office as Foreign Minister. Having vanquished terrorism from our country, the time is opportune for us to focus on strengthening our economy which was further affected due to the impact of the global economic downturn. In this context, I wish to urge our overseas Missions to use the emerging opportunities to secure new markets for our exports, while expanding our existing market share in the countries of their accreditation. It would also provide additional impetus for Missions to work in close cooperation with the Sri Lankan diaspora in promoting economic initiatives and activities which would directly benefit the people of Sri Lanka. I call upon the Sri Lankan diaspora to become involved in the development agenda of their country of birth- Sri Lanka. At this juncture, I wish to emphasize that there is no longer a sectoral diaspora, and that all Sri Lankans living abroad, encompass the 'Sri Lankan diaspora'. The doors of our Missions abroad and the shores of Sri Lanka are open to them all. In our bid to strengthen our bilateral ties and widen our international engagement, Sri Lanka has opened an Embassy in Tripoli, Libya and a Consulate in Chengdu, China this year. Currently, Sri Lanka has 58 diplomatic/consular representations abroad. Plans are also underway to establish Missions in the African, European and the Far Eastern regions. At a time when we are finally enjoying the benefits of peace and tranquility in our Motherland after almost three decades, it is worth recalling the destruction wreaked by the LTTE, which disrupted normalcy and caused loss of lives. Sri Lanka's economy was also affected due to terrorism. Therefore, it is of absolute importance to ensure that no form of terrorism is allowed to raise its ugly head in Sri Lanka again. It is imperative that our national security interests which is of paramount importance, be protected and strengthened. It is our duty to meet the expectations of the people of our nation in ensuring their security, liberty and sustainable peace. Therefore, during this phase of reconciliation and healing and with the dawn of peace finally becoming a reality in Sri Lanka, I am convinced that we would be able to usher in an era of permanent peace and prosperity for all our people in the year 2010. I wish to extend my warm and sincere greetings to all Sri Lankan nationals at home and abroad, for a bright and prosperous New Year.

Rohitha Bogollagama, MP Minister of Foreign Affairs

1st January 2010