62nd Independence Day has special significance - President

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The 62nd anniversary of independence we mark today has special significance being the first such celebration of our freedom since the defeat of terrorism in our country last year, and also as it takes place soon after our people have expressed their firm and resounding commitment to democracy.

The freedom from colonial rule that we gained 62 years ago is now more meaningful, because we have been liberated from the forces of separatist terror that marred our freedom for nearly half the period since independence, and also gravely threatened the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country. As much as we recall with gratitude the great contributions made by our patriots of the past in the struggle for independence, it is also fitting that we pay a tribute in full measure to all our heroic troops and their families for the sacrifices made in the battle against terrorism, as well as all sections of our people for the patriotism they showed in putting up with the hardships during this battle to restore freedom and democracy to our entire country. We are particularly grateful for the courage shown by the people as we were confronted with the armed might of the forces of terror from within, as well as forces from outside who sought to pressure us into conceding to the aims of those who used terror as a political weapon. We are also grateful to all friendly nations, from East and West, those near and afar, who understood the true nature of the struggle we were engaged in, and extended to us all support to achieve our objective of true freedom for our country and people. As we move into the new era of peace in our country, we are ready to face the challenges of the future. It is necessary that we give equal priority to the tasks of national reconciliation and the building of trust among all sections of our people, as well as to development that will take us to our rightful place in the community of nations. The fruits of peace and the aspects of development that were not neglected despite our major occupation with the battle against terror, are already seen in the many projects initiated and completed in the power and energy sectors and in infrastructure development. As our forefathers did in the glorious days of our past, and the more recent leaders in the struggle for freedom showed us, we remain committed to a single, unitary Sri Lanka, where all our people, irrespective of differences of ethnicity, religion or political persuasion, can enjoy the full benefits of freedom, development, and equal rights in a democratic society. The new and even stronger mandate you have given us, gives greater confidence to move ahead in building the New Sri Lanka, which we envisage as the hub of economic activity and a beacon of progress in our region; together with a full commitment to the Rights of Man which are integral to the heritage bestowed on us from the past. On this historic and significant anniversary of freedom, let us re-dedicate our nation to the ideals of peace, tolerance, mutual trust and progress, in the democratic tradition our people have cherished and protected as the oldest democracy in Asia. I wish you a Prosperous Future. May our nation be blessed by the Noble Triple Gem. Mahinda Rajapaksa 4 February 2010