
Change attitudes for true freedom & progress– President at Independence celebrations

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“Inconvenient and difficult decisions also necessary for nation’s progress” The people of our country must change their attitudes about future progress of the country, similar to the manner in which they began to think afresh about achieving victory over the forces of terror. There is the need for an enormous attitudinal change from children to adults to achieve national development, stated President Mahinda Rajapaksa addressing the nation at the 63rd celebration of Independence in Kataragama today (4 Feb). This is the true freedom that we believe in, he stressed. Similar to the success of our conviction that terrorism could be defeated, we have also shown our ability to build large power stations at Norochcholai, Upper Kothmale and Kerawalapitiya, build massive ports in Hambantota and Colombo, develop major irrigation schemes as in Moragahakanda and Uma Oya, and make our cities clean, he said. He pointed out that all of this will not make our freedom meaningful in the absence of a law-abiding society. “Therefore, we are committed to building a law-abiding society. The respect for discipline in a society is essential for development.” President Rajapaksa added that the country cannot be developed solely on popular decisions. “Inconvenient and difficult decisions are also necessary for the nation’s progress. It is the nation’s responsibility to take hard and difficult decisions to bring light to the future of our children, rather than take popular decisions that will lead them to darkness ahead”, he said.

Following is the Speech by President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the celebrations of the 63rd Anniversary of Independence in Kataragama- (04 Feb 2011)

Friends, I am extremely proud to address you as a nation that has shown immense commitment to the freedom of the motherland. On this occasion, I remember all heroes who fought for freedom against the world’s dangerous invaders and bestowed upon us with a heritage that is precious and invaluable. I also remember with great honour all the war heroes who sacrificed their lives to defeat terrorism. Friends,

Winning freedom is a challenge faced by every nation. Safeguarding that freedom is an even greater challenge. The freedom struggle of a country may end in a particular time span. Yet, protecting that freedom is a task that remains forever. We must realize that it is a great struggle continuously carried out with patience, vigilance and love for the country. Therefore, unlike in the past, we have taken many giant strides towards upholding and strengthening that freedom as never taken before. We now face the immense challenge of restoring all that was lost to the nation, except the lives of those lost, in the thirty years of terrorism. The history of the world has shown that it needs a great deal of time to rebuild a nation that has faced such devastation. Even at this moment, many countries in the world undergo much hardship due to effects of adverse weather and climate change. Our own citizens living in some parts of our country also face these conditions. Although we are unable to control the effects of extreme weather, we are committed to uplift all those who have fallen victim to it. We have already allocated a large amount of funds for this work and sent it to the authorities concerns. Friends,

Whatever the obstacles, we shall not delay to regain the lost opportunities for economic development. The best example is that before two years have passed, areas that were littered with deadly landmines are now prosperous and beautiful with a bountiful harvest. The per capita income in our country had been increased only to USD 1030 through sixty years since attaining Independence. Yet, in the past five years the GDP was increased to USD 2400. Similarly, electricity, supply of water, irrigation and the road network has been expanded throughout the country. Education and healthcare services have been improved. The public service has been strengthened. The economic environment necessary to expand private sector activity has been established. The rate of unemployment has been brought to a record low. Hundreds of thousands of displaced persons have been resettled, and necessary steps were taken to uplift the lives of people in all areas. Similarly, we have built enormous bridges such as those at Sangupitti, Kinniya, Manampitiya, Mannar and Katugastota, and flyovers around Colombo. The massive development of roads has been carried out throughout the country. Electricity facilities have been expanded in all areas. Steps were taken to develop dry zone areas through irrigation projects such as Moragahakanda, Uma Oya, Deduru Oya, Weheragala and Rambukan Oya, and the restoration of a large number of ancient irrigation tanks and systems. Similar to hospitals and schools, the university facilities too have been expanded. The first Nena Sala was established at Kiri Vehera with the blessings of the Kataragama deity. Today, Nena Salas are spread throughout the country. Computer literacy was brought to a high level within five years. Steps were taken to build sports stadiums of international standard at Diyagama, Suriyawewa and Pallekale, especially for our children. We were able to protect our national assets as well as restore and rebuild them as needed. Accordingly, a new airline - Mihin Lanka - was established, the national airline that had been sold out was given to the ownership of the people, and the ownership of the Gas Company was also bestowed to the people. Our nation can therefore, be proud of the past five years as being the most meaningful period since Independence in moving forward with peace and development. However, much remains to be won in the cause of freedom. There should be opportunity for our people to enjoy the victories and successes obtained by those in the countries of the developed world. Our aim should be the eradication of poverty. For that we need to expand employment opportunities. We must become a high income country by expanding the avenues for income generation. Our freedom will be sustainable only when the gap between the rural and urban sectors is removed, by further expanding services such as electricity, roads, telecommunication, education and healthcare. Our march forward is most decisive. The Independence Day celebrations formerly held in Colombo, is now brought to the village. Mahinda Chintana shows the way to a strong, self-sufficient economy. What we expect from such an economy is not only to produce a successful business community but also paddy farmers with a good earning capacity. We also look towards agriculturists who will get the best prices in the world market by supplying vegetables and

fruits, as well as tea, rubber and coconut, and also to industrialists who supply goods that are suited to international standards. We look forward to a productive economy that will add value to the produce of our own soil. The goal of the Mahinda Chintana is to bestow on our people their rightful inheritance from our land and the sea around us.

This is the true freedom that we believe in. The people of our country must change their attitudes about future progress of the country, similar to the manner in which they began to think afresh about achieving victory over the forces of terror. There is the need for an enormous attitudinal change from children to adults to achieve national development. Similar to the success of our conviction that terrorism could be defeated, we have also shown our ability to build large power stations at Norochcholai, Upper Kothmale and Kerawalapitiya, build massive ports in Hambantota and Colombo, develop major irrigation schemes as in Moragahakanda and Uma Oya, and make Colombo and our other cities clean. Yet, all of this will not make our freedom meaningful in the absence of a law-abiding society. Therefore, we are committed to building a law-abiding society. The respect for discipline in a society is essential for development. The country cannot be developed solely on popular decisions. Inconvenient and difficult decisions are also necessary for the nation's progress. It is the nation's responsibility to take hard and difficult decisions to bring light to the future of our children, rather than take popular decisions that will lead them to darkness ahead. Friends,

We are a country that respects the policy of non-alignment. We have close relationships with all countries. We appreciate the support extended to us in recovering from natural and man-made disasters as well as to take our development forward. We are one of Asia's oldest democracies. Similar to this democracy, the unity and unitary nature of our motherland should be protected. We have traversed a mature democratic path where we are able to solve our own problems. We have shown the world the humanitarian and democratic values of our society in rebuilding after the destruction of the tsunami and resettling the internally displaced.

As a nation that inherits a proud history of 2500 years, we have a tradition of caring for and giving shelter to all species amongst us and protecting the greenery and environment around us. Our commitment towards human rights is the heritage handed down to us from this historic cultural tradition. Similar to the right of all citizens to the freedom of expression, it is also their duty and responsibility to respect the dignity of the motherland in enjoying that freedom. I wish to emphasize this is also the responsibility of the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and all communities among us, as well as of all political parties. Friends,

King Dutugemunu commenced his journey to unite this motherland with blessings from this sacred land of the deity of Kataragama. Many of the successful freedom struggles in our history commenced with blessings from this sacred land of Kataragama. It is with similar blessings that I, as the leader of a mature democratic nation, take on with responsibility and confidence, the task of this era -- to align you in the forefront of a rising nation of Asia. At this decisive time in our country, I trust that you will be with me in carrying out this task, sharing with me the love for our motherland. May the Noble Triple Gem Bless you! May the blessings of the Deity of Kataragama be with you! Courtesy: PRIU