
A Trilingual Sri Lanka

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In a far-sighted, visionary move the state under the guidance and unwavering commitment of President Mahinda Rajapaksa has launched the Ten Year Programme for a Trilingual Sri Lanka; a much awaited initiative which could be easily described as historic. Accordingly, year 2012 has been proclaimed by the government as the Year for a Trilingual Sri Lanka and the hope and prayer of the well meaning and thoughtful of Sri Lanka is likely to be that this ground-breaking project would succeed fully and be a boon to the citizenry of this country. We join the progressives of this country in wishing the Trilingual project all the very best. It should be plain to see that the initiative, if implemented flawlessly and enthusiastically, would deliver this country from some historic and tragic blunders which contributed in no small way towards the explosive emergence of the blighting 30 year conflict which bled Sri Lanka white and steadily undermined its well being.

It was fitting that the project was flagged off on Saturday by no less a person than the legendary former President of India and scientist of universal fame Prof. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. If there is one public figure of note who has been promoting increasing connectivity between peoples for the purpose of ushering greater world harmony, it has been Prof. Kalam and we hope the words of wisdom he expressed at the launch of the Trilingual initiative and at the public lecture he electrifyingly delivered to mainly the youth of this country subsequently at the SBMEC auditorium, under the aegis of the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies, would be deeply reflected upon by one and all. It would be also fitting to place on record that besides the tremendous zeal for the project evinced by President Rajapaksa and the continuous 'push' provided by him, the Trilingual project would not have seen the light of day if not for also the continuous exertions of Presidential Advisor Sunimal Fernando and the officials led by him, who spared no pains to make the venture a reality. It is indeed a great moment for them all. It is habitual for some sections to dwell obsessively on the 'Sinhala Only' Act and other legislative and executive blunders which helped in fomenting the 'National Question' but what was right along needed was some visionary zeal to put things right in the country and this is being provided right now in the language policy sphere by the Trilingual initiative. Through the focus on making the public of this country knowledgeable in Sinhala, Tamil and English, what is being aimed at is the bridging of all language barriers which have been keeping our communities in separate language cocoons and preventing them from communicating meaningfully and empathetically with each other. Ideally, every citizen of this country must be knowledgeable in Sinhala, Tamil and English; the latter being an important link language as well as a medium of universal discourse. For decades, the main communities of this country were not in a position to communicate freely with each other because the majority of their members did not know each others languages. This factor enabled a separation wall of suspicion and distrust to come in between them, resulting in the emergence of friction between some sections of both communities. Needless to say, this situation and the resultant conflict could have been avoided if both communities were talking freely to each other in each others Mother Tongues and discoursing in depth on the issues of the day. The mutual understanding which would have been gained by the communities would have prevented suspicion and doubt from blighting their relations. Considering the foregoing, the Trilingual initiative should be seen as one of the most far-seeing public sector projects to have been put in place in post-independence Sri Lanka in the conflict-resolution sphere. We call for its swift and effective implementation. We also call on all sections of the local polity to wholeheartedly support this project which, clearly, has the national interest in view. There ought not to be any divisive sentiments in any quarter that could rouse and nurture prejudice and doubt about the project, for, the aim of the initiative is the public good. The Trilingual initiative should be valued greatly because it also rejects in full language chauvinism which has played a highly divisive role in post-independence Sri Lanka. In fact it is a resounding rebuff of all language chauvinists and other purveyors of division. If effectively implemented, the project could prove a great instrument of healing and reconciliation. Source: Daily News (23 January 2012)