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## President stresses significance of Local Government for Democracy - SL President

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Our experience demonstrates the vital role of local traditions and culture in moulding the practices of local government institutions. It also highlights the unique significance of the part played by these institutions in sustaining and strengthening the democratic way of life. This is especially so, because democratic governance impacts most directly on the people through these institutions which bring government literally to their doorstep, President Mahinda Rajapaksa said. "My vision of a new Sri Lanka is to interface development between cities and villages. We must bring the facilities of the city to the village, and the value system and environment of the village, to the city. This will ensure a livelihood of quality for all Sri Lankans. Sri Lanka's local government system has been the main implementation body, giving effect to this process," President Rajapaksa said delivering the keynote address at the Commonwealth Local Government Conference in Kampala yesterday (14). We in Sri Lanka are proud of our long history and the concept of local government has existed in Sri Lanka from ancient times, the President said adding that a system of village councils or Gam Sabhas had been in operation in the country prior to the colonial era.

In 1818, following the uprising of the people led by the rural leaders against British rule, the Village Council system was abolished. However, it was re-introduced in 1856, by the British perhaps in recognition of its value and effectiveness. Village Councils administered all local affairs, addressed people's grievances. Sri Lanka has witnessed an evolution of this decentralized system of governance over the years. Successive governments have advocated the strengthening of effective forms of local administration in order to realize the aspirations of the people. Local government has not only been practical but also effective in taking development directly to the people. Therefore, it is sustainable and helps to reduce poverty and provides a variety of vital public services. I am of the view that a certain level of state intervention is also necessary in order to ensure equitable distribution of the benefits, and social inclusivity. As you are aware, the terrorist conflict ravaged my country for over three decades and prevented its development, both at rural and urban levels. Local Government was among the first targets of terrorism. The first victim of terror, we recall was the Mayor of Jaffna in the North. I wish to remember here all the local government leaders who were the victims of terror. With the defeat of terrorism in 2009, our first priority was to restore local government," President further said. Full text of the President speech.