



J9 Radio

**Address by His Excellency President Mahinda
Rajapaksa on the 60th anniversary of Independence, at
Galle Face, Colombo On February 04, 2008.**

Ven. Maha Sangha, Members of the Clergy of other religions, Hon. Prime Minister , Hon. Speaker,

Hon. Chief Justice and Members of Judiciary, Hon. Ministers and Members of Parliament,

Governors, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Secretary to the President and all Officers of State,

The Chief of Defence Staff and Commanders of the Armed Forces and the Inspector General of Police,

Mothers, Fathers and Dear Children,

My friends who join me in celebrating the 60th anniversary of Independence.

On this historic day we witness the proud commemoration of the 60th anniversary of freedom of a great nation. I say with gratitude that we achieved this dignity and greatness as the Sri Lankan nation, not only through the sacrifices of today's heroes, but also due to the immense sacrifices of our forefathers throughout history. Let us make this the opportunity to first bow our heads in salutation to all those who sacrificed their blood and sweat for the country.

Friends,

I believe freedom is something that has to be made meaningful day by day. We have now arrived at an era where we have decisively dedicated ourselves to enrich the substance of freedom.

As I see it, among important measures that should be taken to enrich freedom are the defeat of terrorism, development of the country, and consolidating trust among all peoples.

Just as every drop of water released from the Mavil Aru anicut since its liberation, every plant we grow and nurture in our villages under the theme "Let us grow to build the country" is a gigantic step to nurture the country's independence and freedom.

During the last two years we have as a nation brought forth a very important and decisive factor to enrich the substance of freedom. It is an indicator that has so far never been used to measure a country's well-being or development. Just as the oil reserves that would be harnessed in the future from the sea off Mannar, and the electricity that would be generated from the Norochcholai and Upper Kotmale power projects, this indicator will have great import for Sri Lanka in the future.

This is none other than the patriotism, and love for the country that has emerged among our people today.

Our challenge today is to be true to the nation and maintain this patriotic fervor of our people, without letting it to be subjugated by political party differences, and political interests.

The competition among us should not be among the parties to which we give leadership. Our struggle should not be between the Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim communities. Our disagreements should not be among Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Friends, our struggle should be between the past and the future; between what is wrong, and what is correct; between hate and Maitriya (Loving Kindness).

Friends, the Sri Lankan nation had to live with fearsome experiences of the terrible tragedy and cancer of terrorism for three of the six decades since independence. Infinite are the loss of lives, property and opportunities due to it. However, I am convinced that we can restore the lost opportunities for progress instead of lamenting and sighing, heaping blame

on politicians and the motherland, while looking at and envying the progress made by other countries. I consider such behaviour as both treachery and a betrayal of the country.

Is there any meaning in comparing pre-independence Singapore, or the previous condition of any other country with our present status? We must as a nation stop regurgitating outdated thinking that is harmful to the well being of the nation.

The challenge bestowed to us by history is the defeat of terrorism and the development of the country. You are aware of how most governments that accepted this challenge, later handed it over to its successor, as a heavy and unbearable burden.

Friends, during the last two years, however, we faced this challenge squarely without avoiding it. Our security forces are today achieving victories against terrorism unprecedented in history. Terrorism is receiving an unprecedented defeat.

In less than two years we have liberated the large Eastern Province that was under the clutches of the terrorists and confined them to two districts, only. It will not be wrong to say they are confined to one-and-a-half districts. But Friends, this cannot be a victory of the southern people alone.

When this becomes a victory of the people in the south, we must make it an even greater victory for people in the north. When the people of the south are relieved by the defeat of terrorism, the people of the north have cause for even greater relief.

We are already taking steps to enable the people in the Eastern Province liberated from terrorism, to enjoy their democratic rights. We are expeditiously holding elections that will ensure to people hitherto subdued in silence, the exercise of their democratic right to elect one's own representatives.

We are also rapidly developing these areas that were subject to the extortion and ransom demands of terrorists.

You know that the rate of development of the Eastern Province is faster than the rate of fall of terrorist bastions today. The provision of electricity, water, housing, schools and roads is being accelerated. We want the people of the North and East to be victorious.

It is the same with the political solution.

You know that we did not win independence for the benefit of one community alone. The Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and all participated in the freedom struggle. None of us wanted freedom for a divided country. We all wanted freedom for a single country.

From the time of Handy Perinpanayagam, leader of the Jaffna Youth League who first called for full independence for Sri Lanka, to the time of Dr. T. B. Jayah, and Ponnambalam Ramanathan, whose statue stands at the Presidential Secretariat premises today; all our people were in the freedom struggle. The problem today is that there is no space for the emergence of such heroes. If there were such heroes who fought for the independence of a single country, they would have fallen victim to LTTE guns. Therefore, we will liberate the North from the clutches of terrorism and also provide a political solution and bring political freedom to the people there.

It is only if we act in this manner that we will we once again see the emergence of leaders from the North and the East like those heroes who participated in the freedom struggle. This commitment of ours is to go forward as a single, unitary state.

Friends, our solution must be based on what could be implemented in this country. We cannot offer solutions that are experiments. We cannot experiment with solutions when so much blood has been shed and tens of thousands of lives have been lost. That is why we selected a solution which can be implemented and about which we have experience. This practical solution is to bring the provincial administration closer to the people within the framework of our Constitution.

Friends, we also have a fine opportunity in this instance, to provide an example to the world.

As a policy we do not have cosmetic and shallow associations with the western countries. Our relations with them are true and real.

We have established new relations with our neighboring states, Arab states, and Buddhist states. Our neighboring states trust us. Our problems and issues are also problems and issues of our neighboring states.

The confidence placed in us by the international community has not diminished one iota.

Whatever is said by those people who make a show of their international connections, there has been no reduction whatever in the aid received by us. We have been able to obtain and use aid that is beneficial to the development of the country. The civilized world today, accepts that Sri Lanka is putting one full- stop to world terrorism.

The defeat of the most ruthless terrorists of the world in Sri Lanka is also a victory of the developed world, which too is a victim of terrorism. We are also fully committed to carry on this battle while safeguarding Human Rights. This is the reality.

Friends, you know that every government had to forget their election pledges even before the expiry of one year in office.

This is because either those policies did not suit the reality of the country, or else they were not bold enough to implement them, however great the support they received from the people. Or else, there was no commitment.

You know that we have implemented to the letter the policies contained in the election manifesto approved by the people at the last Presidential Election. All believed that the stopping of alcohol and drug abuse, the non-issuance of new liquor bar licenses and the prohibition of smoking in public places would be controversial and cannot be implemented. It was also believed by many that it was a law of world economics that the economy could not be maintained without divesting ownership of state enterprises. There was also the belief that identifying as terrorists, those who kill the Sinhala people by the thousands, would lead to dangerous consequences. In short, two years ago, no one believed that terrorists could be defeated. But, during the last two years we made it a reality in our motherland.

We have not abandoned the Mahinda Chinthana that was endorsed by the people. We shall not abandon it. Therefore, we say that we shall continue to defend the majority opinion of the people of this country.

During the last two years, we were able to solve many chronic issues that were postponed as being irresolvable. We need not stress that the resolution of these issues was related to the country's independence. Strengthening health, education and the national economy shows the way forward to a better future and an independent country.

Today, the whole country knows that the village exists and is awakening. Factories once closed, such as Thulhiriya have been re-opened. CTB buses are back on the roads with the

Lion logo. The CWE and the cooperative movement are being revived. Good roads as in the western countries have now being laid even to remote villages, under "Maga Neguma". Thousands of new houses have been built in the plantations. Potable water projects could be seen in most villages. For the first time since colonial times, we have now begun the construction of an international airport and harbour. Fly-overs and hundreds of bridges and roads are being built. All these bridges are built by Sri Lankan engineers. Earlier, foreign experts were given contracts to oversee construction of our dams; in a country that was famous for its irrigation and reservoir construction. Now, our own Sri Lankan engineers are constructing huge reservoirs at Moragahakanda, Deduru Oya, and Weheragala.

We are building a country where the farmer could smile as he reaps the harvest from his cinnamon, betel, maize and rice cultivations. Venerable Sirs, when our people construct their own roads and reservoirs, when they receive a good price for their crops, when they consume their own food, they begin to feel that they are not strangers in one's own land.

We have given our nation every opportunity to link with the technologically developed world. We have been able to raise computer literacy in the country to 25% without trumpeting about it, in a country that did not attach much importance to it. During the last two years we have recorded the highest economic growth of 7 per cent after 30 years.

What is essential is to carry these achievements forward. We shall do so as a country that is not subjugated or frightened and open to exploitation or extortion. We shall do safeguarding our national identity and independence. Whatever difficulties we encounter we shall not betray our motherland.

We know that our people, as those in other countries, face the burdens of a high cost of living due to world food shortages and the rise in oil prices.

But as the Head of State who has ensured a difficult victory in our motherland, I say that these difficulties are not permanent. I say with responsibility that I will not allow them to be difficulties even in the long-term. It must be said that short-term difficulties lead to long term benefits and a life free of oppression.

Let us understand the hardships we face due to our efforts to raise our country to a significant place in the world. We are ready to create a country that will utilize to the

maximum our ocean resources that are several times the size of the land mass of our motherland.

I am ready to create a society that will utilize to the maximum the resources of our country.

The task before us is to make maximum use of our natural resources in our skies, our land, our beaches and the sea. We have the huge task of making every inch of land productive and extract from nature all resources needed for a free country. I am convinced that our Sri Lankan nation has the strength to achieve this. Accordingly, our resolve will take us to the creation of a truly free and independent nation in our motherland.

I wish you all a happy and successful future.

May you be blessed by the Triple Gem!