



**J9 Radio**

## **“Independence Day Celebration 2008”**

### **Message from the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

**H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa**

Sixty years is a small interlude to a country with a history and civilization dating back more than 2500 years. Yet, this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence has its own significance as it marks the period since we achieved freedom after nearly half a millennium of colonial rule, and made our mark as a free people in the community of nations.

Sri Lanka has cause to be proud of her many achievements in this period, in many of which she stands out as an example to other countries in our region and the larger developing world, too. We stand unique with the longest tradition of representative democracy in Asia. As one of the first developing countries to promote universal health and education, gender equality and social mobilization, we have been able to achieve exceptional socio-economic indicators; way ahead of those normally expected of a country in the lower middle income range, and today we are moving to achieving or surpassing many of the Millennium Development Goals. In recent years we have also seen a welcome rise in the per capita income of our people, once again ahead of the larger engines of growth in our region. Significantly, it is despite the ravages of brutal terrorism of 25 years that we have been able to notch these gains in social development.

As we complete sixty years of freedom there are two main challenges before us. One is the challenge of eradicating terrorism and the other is that of eradicating poverty. With regard to the first there is cause for satisfaction that the entire Eastern Province has now been cleared of terrorism. The moves to eradicate it from the North are still under way, with good expectations for success. We owe a heavy debt of gratitude to security forces for their exemplary work in the battle against terror.

Poverty alleviation requires more equitable economic development in the country, taking the fruits of progress to the many regions that have been neglected in the development plans since Independence, and those that have suffered due to terrorism and the battle against it. My government has already initiated several measures to expedite development in hitherto neglected rural areas, including the Eastern Province which is seeing a new awakening, with freedom from terror.

While facing up to these challenges, it is also necessary to ensure equity in the rights enjoyed by all our people who in their rich diversity of language, religion and culture make up the Sri Lankan nation.

Having completed sixty years of measurable success amidst turbulence, and progress despite many an obstacle, we should look forward to the hard work that still lies ahead in our efforts to forge true unity as a nation, moving away from the divisions and suspicions that have held us back in the past, and proceed with determination to the daring new world of opportunity that lies ahead.

Let us renew our pledge to move in unity towards a New Sri Lanka.

04<sup>th</sup> February 2008