



50th Anniversary of Independence

NATIONAL DAY OF SRI LANKA



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MESSAGE

Fifty years is all too brief for a Nation that has a recorded history of well over 2500 years. However, the last 50 years was a new phase in our history. On 4th February 1948 we re-gained our freedom as a nation. In the ensuing years our sovereignty was completed, first by the withdrawal of foreign military bases and finally by the declaration of ourselves as a sovereign republic.

At the dawn of independence the more perceptive and the socially sensitive among our leaders saw the event as only the opening of a vast vista of opportunity — an opportunity for the

betterment of the lives of the millions of our countrymen, an opportunity for the re-establishment of our national identity. We have had our successes and failures. It is for a future historian to assess whether on balance we have spent our time well. There is no gainsaying the fact that the quality of life has improved for the vast majority of our people. There has been a cultural resurgence. We have made giant strides in the fields of education, health, and culture and arts, the law, industry and technology.

At this decisive moment in the history of our country, while we take pride in our achievements, let us have the humility to accept our failures. We have failed to forge together the diverse communities of our peoples into one coherent and strong Sri Lankan nation. We have faltered along for 50 years, permitting the differences to emerge and dominate our social fabric, rather than nurture the commonalities.

The fissures have now deepened to the extent that some groups desire to carry their diversity to the point of separation from the whole. This has caused a devastation, of such immense and tragic proportions as the country has never experienced in its entire history.

The flower of our youth is being decimated in a fratricidal war. National assets worth billions of rupees are being destroyed. We are compelled to divert to the war effort vast sums of money which would otherwise have gone to improve our children's lives and to provide productive employment for them.

We must reconcile ourselves to the reality of a Sri Lankan society comprising diverse elements and make the compromises and the mutual accommodations that such diversity entails, while safeguarding our territorial integrity and the richness of diversity, if we wish to enter to next 50 years of independence without the bitterness and violence caused by ethnic strife.

If we can individually and collectively take the mature and wise path of peace we are poised to enter the brightest era of our history.

I am confident that the vast majority of our people will make the right decision. I am confident that there has been a revolution in their thinking. I am confident that we will put the bitterness of the past behind us and together we shall march forward to the 21st century as a united, strong and resurgent nation.

Let that be our resolve when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of our independence on 4th February 1998. May the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem be with you.

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
President of Sri Lanka



MESSAGE

On this occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of our independence from British Colonial rule we as Sri Lankans can be happy over several events that have taken place in our country. Foremost among them is the sense of dignity springing in us that we are free from colonial control. We are equally happy that our precious heritage as represented in our language, the arts, religion and generally our own culture with which we were endowed as a free nation, has come into its own. Consequently we have been able, during the fifty years past to place before the world

all these achievements and values and thereby ensure prominence for Sri Lanka.

It was the social transformation that Mr Bandaranaike brought about in 1956 that caused a more meaningful awakening of the freedom gained in 1948. Subsequently in 1972 during my period of office when Sri Lanka was declared a "Free and Sovereign Republic" any other remaining bondages that my have been left in relation to other foreign countries were cast off entirely.

If we are to further safeguard and maintain the freedom thus gained we should always secure the support and assistance of other countries. Particularly as a developing nation we must constantly maintain friendly relations with other countries. In this sphere, our Foreign Policy is of importance.

As Sri Lanka was then wise enough to pursue a policy of non-alignment, we were able to enjoy our freedom without hindrance. We were in a position to mediate even in international issues owing to our background of non-alignment. Subsequently with such progressive steps as nationalization of the plantations, we were able to ensure for ourselves the rightful ownership of our patrimony, the land of our country.

On this occasion when we are commemorating a significant milestone of our independence, it is important for us to assess how far we have been able to safeguard and maintain our freedom as a nation.

The then leaders who fought for freedom were not divided by race, religion, caste and spearheaded the struggle unitedly. And they achieved the goal of independence. Today when we are celebrating that freedom, we should reflect on any possible shortcomings there might have been on our part and make good any wrongs. Here solidarity and national unity are the important factors. I consider it the most important task for everyone of us living in Sri Lanka and we should bring about a healthy future for the coming generation.

As we thus celebrate a half-a-century of freedom, we fervently cherish the memories of all our patriotic national heroes and our ancestors who had fought for independence and freedom whether their names are now recorded in history or not. We also reverently call to mind the patriotic heroes of the war who have laid down their lives fighting at the battle front for the tenure, freedom and security of our country.

Let us also determinedly take steps to make the national flag the symbol of our Independence and proceed to show it the respect that is its due.

Let us present to the world our national identity as a proud and dignified people.

Sirimavo R D Bandaranaike
Prime Minister of Sri Lanka



MESSAGE

Sri Lanka is one of the few modern States which has remained a distinct sovereign entity for nearly two thousand years excluding the period of colonial domination which began early in the 16th century. During this long period of time Sri Lanka became the second home of Buddhism. It made a notable contribution to the culture and civilisation of the ancient world in the realms of architecture, irrigation, literature and painting. During those bygone centuries Sri Lanka was also a flourishing emporium in the Indian Ocean with a wide network of international trading contacts. Throughout its history Sri Lanka

has distinguished itself in the domain of foreign relations.

Like all developing countries Sri Lanka has had to face daunting challenges in the wake of independence. It has had to contend with the task of building a nation, of constructing an economy that would serve its own people not the colonial regime. It has worked diligently to ensure the social upliftment of its people. It has addressed the problems of its people. It has addressed the problems of literacy, nutrition, education and social welfare and has achieved significant progress in these areas. Sri Lanka's commitment to the perpetuation of democratic values has been well known ever since universal adult franchise was conferred on the people of Sri Lanka in 1931. It has played a pivotal role in international affairs, through important diplomatic initiatives such as the Non-aligned Movement and the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

At long last Sri Lanka is at the threshold of dealing decisively with the ethnic problem which has bedevilled its history in the last 50 years. It can be expected that with the evolution of a lasting political settlement of this problem many difficulties that the country has faced in accelerating growth and development would be overcome, and Sri Lanka would be on the road to realising its full economic potential.

As Sri Lanka endeavours to meet these challenges it is strengthened by the knowledge that it has the support, cooperation and goodwill of the entire international community which has stood by Sri Lanka in times of adversity confident in the resilience of the Sri Lanka people to overcome their problems. I thank all our many friends in many countries for their understanding and their continued friendship.

On this historic occasion of the golden jubilee of Sri Lanka's independence I wish particularly to appeal to the Sri Lankan expatriate community belonging to all ethnic, religious and other denominations to set aside the prejudices of the past, to dispel the misunderstandings that have divided our peoples and to join in earnest in the process of moulding a united, peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka.

Lakshman Kadirgamar
Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka

50 Years of Tourism in Sri Lanka

Tourism Trends

The Sri Lanka (Ceylon) Tourist Board established by an Act of Parliament on 5 May 1956 to encourage promote and develop adequate efficient and attractive tourist travel and the related services. Sri Lanka has long been a country of tourist attractions from time immemorial.

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation came into being on 9th June 1997. Prior to that it functioned along with the Ministry of Media from August 1994 till that day. The Ministry actively and vigorously pursues a programme of action geared towards development of tourism and civil aviation in the country. The Ministry is very much alive to the potential of tourism as a means of foreign exchange earning for the country. When looking back on the past three years the Ministry can be very happy about its performance.

The tourist arrival figures for 1994, 1995 and 1996 are 407, 511, 403, 101 and 397, respectively. The number of tourist arrivals in 1997 upto the end of September stand at 266,928. The recent bomb explosion at Hotel Galadari has not significantly affected tourist arrivals. The available statistics are reasonably positive and do not paint a dismal picture.

Sri Lanka experienced 15 years of rapid expansion of its tourism sector between 1967 and 1982. Arrivals increased at an average annual rate in excess of 20%, reaching a level of 407,230, which

has yet to be exceeded. The tourism sector was severely affected by the ethnic violence in Colombo in mid-1983 and subsequently both by the long-running ethnic conflict in the north and east of the island, and by a separate conflict, the subversive activities of the JVP (People's Liberation Front), which took place in areas closer to the tourism operations on the west and south coasts. In consequence, international tourist arrivals fell in each year from 1983 to 1987, when only 182,620 arrivals were attracted. 1988 and 1989 saw the same level of arrivals as 1987. The ending of the JVP problems and the greater appreciation in European tourist markets where the ethnic conflict in the north and east did not impinge on tourist operations, led to restored confidence in Sri Lanka and a major recovery with tourist arrivals up 61% to 297,888 in 1990.

The recovery of the tourist industry was held back in 1991 by the Gulf War and global economic recession, though the increase of 6.7% was higher than in most countries in the South Asia region. 1992 has witnessed a resumption of the strong recovery commenced in 1989. A slight decline was reported in the tourist arrivals in 1996 when

compared with the year 1995. The growth in supply of graded tourist accommodation has matched the rise in tourist arrivals taking the 25 year period as a whole. There was one room for every 31 tourist arrivals in 1967 and one for every 33 arrivals in 1991. However, during the period of most intense growth in tourist activity the supply of new rooms lagged. Because of the supply lag, accommodation capacity continued to rise while arrivals declined, from 1983 to 1985.

Seasonality

Sri Lanka's tourist flow is characterised by seasonal fluctuations as follows:

- Main season November-March/April with peak arrivals in December;
- Secondary peak in July/August;
- Shoulder period in September/October;
- Low season in May/June.

The reason is partly the seasonality of the West Coast with peak monsoon period from late May to July, and partly because Sri Lanka has traditionally attracted European tourists during their harsh winter climate. Recent years have seen an increase in the summer traffic as the short-haul European

tourists have been attracted into taking long-haul holidays. July and August accounted for 19% of all tourist arrivals in 1991, as against only 10% in mid-1980s.

Historic and Cultural Attractions

Sri Lanka has attractions dating from prehistoric times and a range spanning the past twenty five centuries covering the kingdoms and colonial periods. The major historic attractions are designated by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites: Anuradhapura, Dambulla, Kandy, Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya. They are important domestic and international pilgrimage and visitor centres. The five ancient cities are conveniently grouped in the centre of the country forming the "Cultural Triangle". Sri Lanka's other historic World Heritage Site is Galle Fort, which was developed during the Portuguese and Dutch colonial times. Sri Lanka's historic sites have been identified and ranked according to their importance for tourism. Forty-nine attractions were ranked as "unique" and 91 attractions were ranked as "rare". Both categories are of tourist interest and the sites are dispersed throughout the country. *Abridged*

Heartiest Felicitations on the National Day of Sri Lanka



MESSAGE

It was today, 50 years ago, that we regained our lost independence. It is with the signing of the "Udara Gaisuma", known as the Kandyan Convention on 2nd March 1815, the sovereignty of the whole nation was lost to us. Even at that very moment, Venerable Wariyapala Sri Sumangala Thero resisted, our Lion Flag being lowered, and thus started our Nationalist Struggle. Since, then there were a series of rebellions and uprisings by our nationalists. Venerable Kudapola Dinnanse, Veera Keppelipola, Veera Puranappu and Veera Gangapala Banda held against a mighty Empire with nationalist movements in 1818 and 1848.

Venerable Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala Thero, Venerable S Mahinda Thero, Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala Thero and Sri Arumuganavalar rekindled the spirit of nationalism. Leaders like Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, Sir Ponnambalam Ramandan, Sir D B Jayatilake, Sir James Peiris, D S Senanayake, with a large number of other young leaders like S W R D Bandaranaike, J R Jayewardene, Dr N M Perera, Philip Gunawardena, Dr S A Wickremasinghe spearheaded the political struggle, since the early part of this century, although their political ideologies were different to each other. The lives sacrificed and the names of those who led the struggle for independence are too many to be recorded here.

On this solemn occasion, I bow my head in deep veneration and gratitude to each one of those heroes who made Sri Lanka a better place for us to live in. Since 1948, we kept vast strides in the development of human resources, in the sphere of literacy, education, health, life expectancy and over all standards of living. We are in the forefront of most developing countries in human development and, equal to developed countries in some areas. The leadership given by successive governments and the sheer will of our people were the hall marks of this success story. We take pride of our achievements.

Since 1980s the spectre of terrorism has raised its ugly head impeding the acceleration of our national de-

velopment programmes. In spite of the separatist war, a sustained economic growth has continued. The majority of the people committed to peace under the leadership of H E the President, are resolved to end this dark period, in our history. We will succeed in these endeavours.

On the threshold of the 21st century, we dedicate ourselves to make our motherland, a peaceful place for our younger generation. The role of the Sri Lankans living abroad is paramount in this nation-building process.

In the international arena, we have carved a respectable niche for Sri Lanka. Our role in the UN, NAM and SAARC, Commonwealth, IORARC has been acknowledged by world community. Our bilateral relations in the "comity of nations" had always been friendly.

Bangladesh-Sri Lanka relations have stabilised and strengthened greatly over the years. Having the same historical, cultural affinities, our bonds are solid. During 1997, President Chandrika Kumaratunga met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Commonwealth and SAARC meetings. Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar too had meetings with Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Abdus Samad Azad at similar venues. Other political leaders of the two countries too have had visits to either each other's country or have forged links. The Shipping Minister of Bangladesh, Abdur Rob led 37 member business delegation to the Expo '97 and was the Chief Guest on its 2nd day. Minister of Samurdhi, Youth Affairs and Sports, S B Dissanayake was a Special Guest at the Asian Youth Festival in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad is a Special Guest at the Kandy Independence Day Celebrations on 4th February.

Our bilateral trade has improved steadily. Investors from Sri Lanka have established relations with Bangladesh. Banks and other business establishments have contributed to the ever strengthening economic bonds between the two countries. Sri Lanka participated in the Bangladesh Trade Fair. The SAARC relations have further enhanced the trade and investment opportunities between the two countries. Administrators, experts and officials of the two countries have frequent exchanges and share each other's experiences in nation-building.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have become partners of progress. Sri Lankans contribute to the national development of Bangladesh, especially in the investment and business sectors. There are Bangladeshis in Sri Lanka, giving their expertise. Sri Lanka has been a trusted friend of Sri Lanka. They assist us, in overcoming our national problem for which we are grateful. There were cultural visits by delegations to each other's country. Most Venerable Madhe Pinnashe Mahanayake Thero's visit to Bangladesh was one such.

On this auspicious day, let me express my gratitude to Honourable Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister and her Government, the Opposition Leader Begum Khaleda Zia and her former Government, the other leaders and the people for their generosity towards Sri Lankans, and personally to me, for making my task easy. This Golden Land — the "Sonar Bangla" — and its warm and friendly people provided me a "home" in their midst, making my stay pleasant and happy.

I take this opportunity to convey my warm greetings to my compatriots living in Bangladesh.

May the Bangladesh-Sri Lanka relations grow from strength to strength.

S B Atugoda
High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Bangladesh

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