



Independence Day of Sri Lanka



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Sri Lanka Achieving Structural Changes in Export Sector



Message

Today when we celebrate the 52nd anniversary of the attainment of independence by our country I consider as a day of profound significance for all Sri Lankans. The reason for this is that this is the first independence day of the millennium as well as the first to be celebrated following the People's Alliance's second victory at the presidential election.

We consider as the greatest victory of the last five years our success in restoring democracy and human rights and in bringing within the reach of our people every kind of freedom based on a planned economic development. The special features of this process were the largescale development of the social infrastructure and significant progress in key social areas such as education and poverty alleviation.

The greatest challenge facing the people of Sri Lanka in consolidating these gains and in advancing with the new millennium is to put an end to the wasteful war we are embroiled in and bring about peace. We are entrusted with the task of creating the social and legal climate in which it is possible to forge trust, unity, brotherhood and coexistence among the communities. It is only in such a climate that we will be able to taste to the full the fruits of our independence. We have now entered upon a most appropriate and auspicious time to evolve a fresh resolve towards that end.

With the People's Alliance emerging victorious for a second time at the Presidential election we have taken several new and firm steps in that direction. We are now launched upon the onerous task of enacting most expeditiously a new constitution which will ensure that all the communities of Sri Lanka will be able to live in peace and unity with one another and which will guarantee them equal rights and a sense of national identity. It is our hope to enact this new constitution with the optimum consensus on the basis of the renewed mandate given to us by our people.

I wish to recall the appeal I made after taking oaths for a second term as President with a view to achieving for all of us those goals that we desire. I appeal to you all to first join together abandoning all narrow attitudes, differences and all such divisions so that we can achieve that most necessary and urgent goal of peace before we attain our other objectives.

It is our noblest belief that on the basis of that peace achieved in unity the country will be permitted to partake of freedom and development for all her people.

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
President of Sri Lanka

SRI LANKA is witnessing great structural changes in the export sector. The non-traditional exports were to the tune of 79.17 per cent of the total export in 1998. Inflation is at its lowest level, interest rates are declining, unemployment is down and export performance is improving.

To augment exports and help the exporters the opening of the Cyber Trader-the-E-Commerce Centre at the Export Development Board premises was a major event. The Centre is open to exporters and the services are available at a nominal charge.

Amidst the tide of South Asian crisis which rocked most of the Asian economies, Sri Lanka recorded an economic growth rate of 3.6% for the first three quarters of the year and the country's Central Bank is confident of having achieved its targeted 04 percent growth in the final year end analysis for 1999.

Inflation at 4% is at its lowest levels, interest rates are stable or declining, unemployment is down, export performance is improving. Governor, Central Bank was quoted in an interview in the "Daily Mirror", 11 January 2000. Prospects for tea, one of the main exports for which the country is known the world over, remains bright, with higher prices fetched at the first Colombo auctions for year 2000.

The year gone by was not a happy one for the country's exports. Exports valued SL Rs. 2292307 million at the end of September 1999 however is expected to record a higher value by the year-end. Total exports for 1999 therefore will be higher than the total exports in 1998 which was SL Rs. 306322.8 million. By the year end the export sector showed signs of recovery with the rates somewhat improving.

The country is still on a steady path to its major objective of achieving structural changes in the export sector. The non-traditional exports, which were 43.20% of exports in 1980, reached 51.52% of total exports in 1985. There was a further increase of this share to 66.69% of total exports by 1990 and to 79.17% by 1998. The corresponding decline in the share of traditional exports was 56.8% in 1980, 48.5% in 1985, 32.81% in 1990 and finally in 1998 to 18.75% of the total exports.

The heavy dependence on traditional exports which had limited market opportunities was a major concern for Sri Lanka authorities, which established the Sri Lanka Export Development Board-EDB in

1979 with the exclusive responsibility of promoting non-traditional exports. Several measures were taken by the EDB, setting its sights on the needs of the new millennium. To keep in line with the developments of the information age, steps were taken to popularize the use of electronic trade information among the exporters. Opening of the Cyber Trader-the-E-Commerce Centre at the export development Board premises was major event. Trade information on prices, products, and markets is now computerized with EDB having obtained access to major data bases in the international trade centres. The website tradenets.lk which has 2 mirror sites in the USA contains details of the Sri Lankan exporters, products and company profiles.

This centre is open to exporters and its services are available at a nominal charge. Business advisory services, web advertising, CD ROM preparation, e-mail and Inter-

net services, video conferencing are some of the facilities available to exporters.

Under its special programme to develop the small and medium sector exports, which comprises nearly 70% of the country's total exports, e-commerce centres were opened in the provinces, aligned to the main Cyber Trader E-commerce Centre at the EDB. The e-commerce facilities are in the offices of the EDB in Kandy, Kurungala and Galle, which were established earlier to assist the SME sector in the provinces. Trade information on products, markets, prices are made available to the SME sector. The SME development programme was also further strengthened with provision of information and technical advice through seminars, workshops and training courses.

Under the programme of entering new markets, two major fairs were held in the Chile and Jamaica where Sri Lankan products were displayed in special Sri Lankan fairs. There

was much interest by the participants and CD Roms were prepared for each of the events with details of products, company and exporter profiles.

Sri Lanka was the venue for an Asia and Pacific Regional Conference and a fair on e-commerce solutions organised by the EDB in collaboration with UNCTAD. Nearly 2000 participants from the region attended the seminar.

Also getting ready to face the fiercely competitive international trade situation, USAID took the initiative to launch studies on competitiveness in selected developing countries including Sri Lanka. A continuous dialogue has been initiated on competitiveness by the company JE Austins, a partner of Harvard Monitoring Group which has opened an office in Sri Lanka, last year after the study carried out in 1998 which was well received.

On the initiative of the Ministry of Internal and International Commerce and Food an Asia Pacific conference on "competitiveness-the global challenges" was held in Sri Lanka, assisted by the USAID. Nearly 350 participants-industry and business leaders as well as key government officials attended the conference which the participants felt was very useful and stimulating. Several sectors including tea, rubber, garments, tourism, ecotourism, retail jewellery, information technology, electronics, coir, high value non-traditional agriculture, ceramics, fisheries are some of the sectors which have been receptive to the call for improving competitiveness which would be assisted by USAID. Competitiveness means not only "doing things better but doing better things" to be competitive in the new millennium. The export sector is expected to benefit from this exercise.

The EDB continued to concentrate on high growth areas such as electronics and information technology. Sri Lankan entrepreneurs revealed a clear competence in these areas. In order to attract capital to the sector a seminar was held on venture capital. This was to attract venture capital to the sector similarly in the area of electronics. The regular programmes on product and market development too were carried out. Exporter participation in trade delegations, fairs and other promotional events was organised in a number of countries, India, Korea, Germany, Japan, UK, Iraq, France, Singapore, UAE, Australia, Jamaica, Russia, Chile, USA, Italy Netherlands, etc.



Message

Sri Lanka enters the new millennium with renewed hopes of peace and expectations of prosperity to come. Notwithstanding the many trials and tribulations the country experienced in the past year, the continued resilience shown by the Sri Lanka people and its economy, and the confidence the country has been able to maintain in the international community are remarkable. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the international community for the continued support extended to the Government of Sri Lanka.

On this occasion when we commemorate the 52nd anniversary of Independence, it is fitting that we pay tribute to all those who have laid down their lives to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and those who made the supreme sacrifice in defence of democracy, justice and human rights. It is important that we rededicate ourselves to the relentless pursuit of lasting peace in our troubled land.

I also wish to salute at this time all expatriate Sri Lankans. It is hoped that they, wherever they may be, would remain actively engaged in following these processes and would contribute in whatever way they can towards safeguarding and promoting peace in Sri Lanka and the interests of Sri Lanka abroad.

Lakshman Kadirgamar
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka



Message

Today, the Sri Lankans celebrate the 52nd anniversary of Independence both at home and abroad. On 04 February 1948 Sri Lanka gained its independence from the British and re-emerged as a sovereign nation, as a country with freedom to decide for itself its destiny.

During the past 52 years, Sri Lanka maintained close and cordial relations with its neighbours, particularly with the countries in South Asia. With the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent sovereign nation in the year 1972, Sri Lanka had taken significant steps to maintain excellent bilateral relations. These cordial relations have been cemented by the traditional cultural links and the common history and heritage.

In more recent years, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have taken meaningful and positive steps to enhance regional cooperation with a view to achieving development collectively. Being active members of the SAARC, the two countries have worked together in close cooperation, motivated by a common desire to improve the quality of life of the people. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh also have worked together in international fora adopting a common stand in order to achieve their common objectives.

Exchange of high level visits also have made its contribution to strengthen and consolidate the friendly relations between the two countries. The bedrock of firm friendship between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh provides an ideal environment to build a mutually beneficial economic and commercial relationship. Both countries are committed to this goal. My own endeavour is to do my utmost to enhance the good relations during my tenure of office.

On this auspicious occasion of the 52nd anniversary of Independence, I extend my cordial good wishes to the people of Bangladesh as well as the Sri Lankans resident here. I am confident that the Sri Lankans in Bangladesh will make their own contribution to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two countries.

E G Dayananda
High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Bangladesh



Message

Every Independence Day we concentrate on targets and expectations to be achieved at the time we celebrate the next Independence Day. When assessments are made at the next Independence Day as to how much we have been able to achieve during the preceding year it is evident that we are unable to be happy as our expectations have not been fulfilled. Therefore, we have to take cognisance of this fact at this year's Independence Day. We have to work with dedication and commitment with this in mind so that our expectations could be fulfilled.

We have to develop a new vision in keeping with the rest of the world who are in the march towards progress. Our main task here would be to achieve economic development and it is vital that correct national plans are formulated and implemented. Concurrently, social and cultural development too should be ensured whilst steps have to be taken to sustain progress in development achieved in different spheres. In general, it is also important that we become a law abiding and disciplined people. When in-disciplined, people tend to err and resort to malpractices. In fulfilling the responsibilities bestowed on us if we are able to be satisfied true to our conscience that we have shouldered the responsibilities as entrusted, it becomes a decisive factor for overall development.

It is also relevant that we show remarkable development in conduct as well as our habits. We have to be devoid of destructive thoughts in order to achieve this. It is my belief that we would be able to overcome most of our problems by practising equality and non violence. Unity among all communities is the most important factor in resolving our national conflicts. It is clear that efforts to be divided and to achieve narrow gains will not last long.

Therefore, when Sri Lanka is celebrating its independence in the new year of the new millennium, let us resolve to build a prosperous and united Sri Lanka whilst ensuring that independence is meaningful and ever lasting. This, then, would be our strongest resolution in commemorating our independence.

On this momentous occasion let us commit ourselves to resolve all conflicts and to view life in a more meaningful manner so that future generations will be able to live in this world in a better environment.

Sirimavo R D Bandaranaike
Prime Minister of Sri Lanka

Our heartiest felicitations and best wishes on the auspicious occasion of

THE 52nd ANNIVERSARY OF THE INDEPENDENCE DAY

OF

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