

Sri Lanka

Celebrates 60th Anniversary of Independence



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Message from the President

Sixty years is a small interlude to a country with a history and civilization dating back more than 2500 years. Yet, this 60th 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.



Mahinda Rajapaksa
President of Sri Lanka

Message from the Prime Minister



Today Sri Lanka completes sixty years of Independence. Although we are now free of the shackles of imperialist rule we are still dominated by neo-colonialism. Our self-sufficient pattern of life which we had inherited from our ancestors has collapsed. We have become used to the habit of expecting all our requirements from abroad. We have become a nation of people who look for foreign products instead of appreciating our own local products.

Some other countries in the world do not enjoy the freedoms that we enjoy but they have developed fast. Some of the countries which had been colonies of Britain in our region have achieved varied forms of success. They have developed their countries as they have built up a national economy appreciating and consuming their own products.

There is no other country in the world which has free education and free health facilities. Our country is such a welfare state. During nearly three decades out of the six decades after gaining independence we have suffered from the death and destruction caused by terrorists. We have lost valuable lives as well as the property. The ruthless LTTE has deprived the people of their right to live without fear in any part of the country. Therefore, the objective of every one of us should be to usher in the freedom of living in any part of the country without fear.

I wish that we may get the strength and courage to celebrate the next Independence Day in a free and prosperous country where terrorism has been annihilated.

Ratnasiri Wickramanayake
Prime Minister of Sri Lanka

Message from the Minister of Foreign Affairs

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of Sri Lanka's Independence, it is important to reflect on our achievements over the last six decades and charter our course for the future. Sri Lanka has remained a free, sovereign and independent country and has a long history of democratic tradition. Democratic institutions have been inbuilt into our political system to protect and preserve democracy. This has led to Sri Lanka becoming the vibrant democracy it is today. The rule of law prevalent in Sri Lanka, within the framework of the Constitution guarantees the protection of the fundamental rights of our citizens. A multi party political system, a strong and independent judiciary, and a free press are all hallmarks of Sri Lanka's abiding commitment to the rule of law and democracy.

The mature political climate that prevails in Sri Lanka has advanced to the extent where bipartisan and consensual political pursuits have become possible as seen with the recent wider engagement of all political parties in addressing national issues. This is a particularly heartening development for Sri Lanka at this crucial time. We look forward to maintaining and nurturing our multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious social fabric which has given definition to the Sri Lankan identity. The harmonious and peaceful co-existence among the different communities that inhabit the country is of great importance for our development. Empowering our people, the economic advancement of society and of individuals, and the maximum utilization of resources for the delivery of sustainable economic development will be consistent goals for Sri Lanka. It is time therefore, that we resolve to achieve these objectives by putting the "country first" against all distractions and differences. The time we were dictated to by terrorists should cease and the will of the people should prevail. All parts of Sri Lanka will become one platform for a pluralistic society to emerge.

I am happy to state that the All party Representative Committee (APRC) has delivered draft proposal to solve the national question on the eve of this momentous occasion when we are celebrating 60 years of independence. The timely proposals will no doubt pave the way for a lasting solution and for peace in this country.

Since independence, Sri Lanka has played a pivotal role in international affairs, through important diplomatic initiatives such as formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). More recently we have been able to achieve greater diplomatic success, by gaining membership of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Asia Co-operation Dialogue (ACD) and the Shangri-La Dialogue, whilst strengthening cooperation within the existing regional and multilateral fora, such as the Commonwealth, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation (IOR-ARC), and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

Sri Lanka has gained a reputation as a voice of reason and moderation in the International Comity of Nations. This year, we play host to the 15th SAARC Summit Commonwealth Youth Ministerial Meeting Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Terrorism, Asia Cooperation Dialogue SMEs Forum and several other international fora.

We are on the threshold of a new chapter in our history. I am certain that many would share in my belief that the diamond jubilee of Sri Lanka's independence will herald the dawn of a new era free from terror and in which all peace loving people of our country can look forward to a prosperous future.



Rohitha Bogollagama, M.P.
Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka

Message

Today, Sri Lanka celebrates the 60th Anniversary of Independence. On this occasion, I would like to extend my warm greetings and best wishes of the Government and the people of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, to the Government and the people of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. I would also like to extend my heartfelt greetings and wishes to all Sri Lankan residents here in Bangladesh. I am confident that they all share my desire to continue supporting the bond that grows stronger between our two countries.



It is a privilege to be the High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to the People's Republic of Bangladesh. I am happy to note that I have experienced a warm and friendly reception from the Bangladeshi people. I am also happy to note that the Government of Bangladesh together with the Government of Sri Lanka is holding our bilateral relations in high esteem.

While reciprocating these sentiments on behalf of the Government and people of Sri Lanka, I wish to state that our relations will indeed broaden when we journey together as friendly nations. We already co-operate closely to strengthen both bilateral and regional arrangements such as SAARC and BIMSTEC, and will continue our joint efforts to further address the challenges collectively to take the relations between the two countries to greater heights. I sense the long standing bilateral relations which have existed for many years between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh with fullest satisfaction. I convey my sincere desire to further strengthen the relationship during my tenure in Bangladesh.

I wish to state that the past year shows a number of achievements in our relations. Hon. Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama led a 20-member delegation to Bangladesh on 16 July 2007 and agreed to review and expand the existing relations to give a wider dimension between the two countries. The discussion that was held in a very frank and friendly atmosphere focused on bilateral trade and investment. The two sides agreed to suggest ways and means to achieve to revive economic relations and emphasized that in order to achieve economic prosperity there should be enhanced connectivity between the two countries.

Following the above, the Bilateral Air Services Negotiations between our two countries were held in Dhaka during the 9th and 10th January 2008, where the rules for operation of air services between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were significantly liberalized. Under this new arrangement, the frequency of passenger operations by airlines of both countries has been increased from the existing two, to seven flights per week per destination. Both countries will also be able to designate more than one carrier on such services between Colombo and Dhaka as well as Colombo and Chittagong. I am sure this new development will help to link the two capitals by encouraging people to people contact through expansion of air services, as desired by our leaders.

I also wish to convey our appreciation to the Government and people of Bangladesh for their generous gift of the sacred Hair Relic of Lord Buddha (Kesa Dhatu) to Sri Lanka, as an act of goodwill and friendship that further enhanced the stronger links between our two countries.

The Government of Bangladesh, the Defence Ministry of Bangladesh, and the training institutes of the three armed forces have continuously been providing training facilities to a large number of armed service personnel from Sri Lanka. I would like to thank the Government of Bangladesh for the invaluable assistance that they have given Sri Lanka in this area of relations.

The Sri Lanka Association in Bangladesh (SLAB) and the Sri Lanka-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SL-BCCI), are functioning in collaboration with the High Commission of Sri Lanka to further promote our friendly and cooperative relations. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to these associations for their contributions in encouraging contact between our countries. I would like to express my appreciation to these associations for their efforts with the organization of appropriate programs and other activities to further promote the healthy relations between our two countries.

I value the contribution made by Sri Lankan investors in the apparel, hospitality, health, education and banking sectors in Bangladesh, and by providing skills required in the readymade garments, which has made a contribution to the Bangladesh economy with the creation of employment and generating exports.

I am happy to note that Commercial Bank which has been rated as the Best Bank in Sri Lanka for the 9th consecutive year by the Global Finance magazine - New York and as Bank of the Year Sri Lanka by The Banker magazine UK for five years. It has reached another milestone by opening its sixth branch in Bangladesh, in Narayanganj on 9th December 2007. I congratulate the management of Commercial Bank of Ceylon for their valuable services, combined with innovative products to Bangladesh in their input as to further broadening Sri Lanka Bangladesh relations.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt wishes to the Government and the people of Bangladesh, and look forward to a continued friendship on our bilateral relations in the time ahead. I wish the people of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh peace, happiness and prosperity.

Vadivel Krishnamoorthy
High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Bangladesh

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