



As the general public of this country at times we wonder at the seemingly inexplicable happenings in the international arena, where relationships seem strained between Sri Lanka and certain nations. We jump to conclusions on the progress of the reconciliation process and discussions with the TNA.

Sajin De Vass Gunawardena is the Monitoring Member of Parliament to the Ministry of External Affairs, he dispels urban myths in relation to foreign policy and engagement with other nations, where positive achievements are failed to be highlighted in Sri Lanka. He speaks about the progress made so far and agrees that there is more to be done. With regards to the TNA, he cautions that history should not be repeated through the actions of the TNA, where the needs of the Tamil people should be given priority and not the political aspirations of the TNA. He says it is the last chance for the TNA to make the difference for posterity. The ball is in their court, it is time for them to play it right.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe | Photography Menaka Aravinda and Mahesh Bandara

Many things have happened over the past few months that have been disturbing. However, there is no sense in dwelling on the past, but to

learn and move forward. Can you tell us what plans or strategies have been made to maintain good relations with other countries especially the West and India?

We have to look at this in the context of the US backed human rights resolution that was passed against Sri Lanka in Geneva recently. Taking from there, I feel we have managed to maintain the fact of the importance of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission and the action that is emanating from that. Our relationship in terms of the West and India must be viewed in that proper context.

If we look at our relationship with the West and India in a generalised manner, then we have very cordial relations with these countries because human rights is only one aspect of a relationship with any country. We have strong bi-lateral relations with all these countries. For example if we look at the UK; His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa attended the celebration of Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee, where he met with Rt Hon David Cameron and we as part of His Excellencies delegation met with William Hague. We had a very constructive engagement. Prior to that the Minister of External Affairs, Hon G L Pieris led a delegation, which I was also part of, to meet US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, where we discussed the progress we have made, what we intent to do and the process of which the LLRC recommendations would be implemented was discussed. We are in a much better place in terms of our relationship with any country, including India, where they also have recognised the good work that we have done.

From the outside it seems as if Sri Lanka is antagonising other countries.

It depends on the perspective that you look at it from; friends of Sri Lanka would see it otherwise, enemies of Sri Lanka would see it in another way. But, we need to look at it in an analytical way at the contextual issues and on what our relationship has been based on. Human rights is only just one aspect of the relationship. We have bilateral trade and investment. Then we have other forums where we engage with them but for those who have a negative perspective, they may interpret the situation differently. But from our perspective and from the perspective of those who value Sri Lanka and want to see the country progressing towards development and reconciliation, we have moved forward quite positively and effectively.

Relations with India, USA and European countries were much more cordial during the war than it is right now. What are your thoughts on this?

If we look at the relationship between war-time and now, I do not see much of a change. At that time there was one thing paramount, that was the eradication of terrorism. Let us talk on the premise of eradication of terrorism, the principle based on that. Having eradicated terrorism, the grouse on some of these entities, especially the LTTE diaspora - I will not say the Tamil diaspora as we need to differentiate sections of the diaspora that are supportive of the aspirations of the LTTE. We see the propaganda that was propagated by them in the aftermath of the war in terms of reconciliation and accountability. When you take the aspect of accountability, the Ministry of Defence has clearly identified the number of people who are actually missing. This amounts to approximately 4,600. These figures have been provided to the respective countries. We have to understand that certain countries, especially Britain, are being forced to recognise certain aspects of the LTTE diaspora as they make a large voting block in their respective constituencies. When you sit with these people (LTTE diaspora) and talk to them, you realise that they do not speak on facts. They have a conceived perception of what Sri Lanka should be and that's the ultimate goal of Eelam. In that context, when you take the UK, there are about 300,000 Tamil residents in UK, of which approximately 140,000 are in the greater London area, where there is a huge pressure by them on the members of parliament who represent their constituencies. Taking those into consideration, certain governments have to give a little leverage in terms of accommodating their requests. However, if we look at the overall relationship -from a government to government perspective - we have dialogue and interaction, between the West and Sri Lanka. That is without compromising our stand. We have to maintain the stand that we have taken, and we have been quite transparent in our view. Therefore in that context our relationship is still the same and there is no setback in that regard.

If We Look At The Overall Relationship - From A Government To Government Perspective - We Have Dialogue And Interaction, Between The West And Sri Lanka. That Is Without Compromising Our Stand

The LTTE overseas propaganda machinery is working over time creating a bad image for the country. How is the Ministry of External Affairs

addressing this?

It is a herculean task. The issue we have here is that, the diaspora is entwined into the political system of these country. UK is a perfect example. At the time the President was in "London to celebrate the Queen's "Diamond Jubilee, we all know what actions the diaspora took. They surrounded the Marlborough House, where the lunch in honour of the Queen was being hosted by the Secretary General of the Commonwealth. That was not our event. There were so many heads of states that were visiting and the Police gave us a presentation the day before and showed us how dangerous the LTTE diaspora can be for civil society in UK. That is where we have to draw that reference from. They have been able to congregate and to make themselves powerful within the constituencies. In certain constituencies the balance of power, that is whether a certain candidate wins or loses, is dependent on their vote.

This is the issue that the Ministry of External Affairs has, where we cannot go down to the level of what the diaspora does, but we have to counter their actions. We have done that very effectively by working with the respective institutions, by using other diaspora members, by visiting foreign ministries and other civil peers. But at the end of the day what becomes successful? Is it what we say, or is it what they say? What they say is very clear, what we say is factual. We give factual evidence of what is happening; whether it is development in the North or reconciliation. Whatever we do it "is transparent as a government.

However, at the end of the day all these governments succumb to one thing, political power and votes. That is the problem that we face.

The Threat Today By Such Congregation, Use Of Violence And Force By The Diaspora Is Not To Sri Lanka... But To The UK...

One thing I was very specific about after the recent fiasco in terms of the LTTE diaspora protesting in London and surrounding the Marlborough House, was that the threat today by such congregation, use of violence and force is not to Sri Lanka. Today they, LTTE diaspora, will take up Sri Lanka as an issue, but tomorrow when the British Government takes perhaps some action, which is detrimental to the Tamil community - this is just a hypothetical situation - then you will see how they will destroy British society. This is something the British government must take into consideration. Deal with us on the issues that they have to deal with us, but keep the diaspora aside. The LTTE diaspora will never

realise the ground-weariness, they will never come to Sri Lanka and see for themselves. They have an agenda that they want to take forward, but they also do not want to leave their homes and luxurious lives in London and come back to Sri Lanka. There are so many multi faceted reasons as to why they would behave like that.

The Ministry of External Affairs of course has continuous engagement. Anybody can come and visit. We have been giving our facts. It is a continuous process that we undertake, but whether what we do is seen objectively and positively is something others have to decide.

Tamil Nadu has played a pivotal role in the decisions that the Central Government of India has made. Sri Lanka needs to give attention to these aspects.

In the context of Tamil Nadu, whatever they are asking for is not something that we can concede to. Recently, Chief Minister Karunanidhi had said that 'they have to get Eelam'. One question I would ask from the larger majority of the population of Tamils in Sri Lanka, is whether they accept that? Tamil Nadu is in another country, Sri Lanka is another country. Tamil Nadu is part of India. Rightfully, I remember Secretary of Defence, Mr Gotabhaya Rajapaksa saying in reply to that statement, that they should start Eelam from there (Tamil Nadu), if it is their desire to have Eelam. Eelam is a concept - it is not something tangible, it is not something that is achievable - it was the vicious aim of Prabakaran who is no more. He caused massive bloodshed for over 30 years to achieve that aim. Therefore if Karunanidhi or whoever in Tamil Nadu wants to propagate that, the best place to start Eelam as Secretary of Defence said is in Tamil Nadu, not in Sri Lanka. But let the majority of the Tamils of this country speak for themselves. As far as we are concerned irrespective of ethnicity or religion we will not permit a separation of this country.

Sri Lanka does not need to take this very seriously. In terms of our relationship as a country, our relationship is with India, it is not with a part of it. If I am to say that our relationship is with Tamil Nadu, that is wrong. We do not recognise Tamil Nadu as a separate state or as a separate country. Our relationship is with entire India and in that context I think we have an excellent relationship with the country.

We Do Not Recognise Tamil Nadu As A Separate State Or As A Separate Country. Our Relationship Is With Entire India And In That Context I Feel

We Have An Excellent Relationship With The Country

Do you think the entire machinery of the Ministry of External Affairs is efficient?

Well, I would say that we are very efficient from what we were sometime back. Our entire machinery is working towards achieving a common objective of what the Hon Minister G L Pieris has made out as policy.

We may have short comings. One thing is that the Ministry of External Affairs does not have many good people and numbers in staff. All the seniors have retired, there has been no proper succession for sometime and even the people who are there to succeed are very young. Of course they have now been given opportunities and more responsibilities at the level of director generals and directors. You can see that people are performing well, because there is a very clear policy agenda that we have to achieve and most importantly team work is at play. Personally as the Monitoring Member of Parliament assigned to the Ministry of External Affairs, I can say that there is tremendous progress.

In June 2011 of Business Today too we asked this question, shouldn't Sri Lanka be more proactive as opposed to being only reactive?

We certainly are not only reactive but proactive as well, but the problem is that the media does not recognise that. If you look at the media, they have some grouse against the "Ministry of External Affairs. I do not understand why. Perhaps it is the personality. Therefore, what I would request is that these people who write critically to write the positive as well.

Ministers come and go. Each government has different ministers of external affairs or in any other ministry. I feel it is not right to compare one minister to the other. Personalities differ. But at the end of the day, if the objectives are fulfilled and if the people of the country, the President and the government are satisfied then due credit should be given.

Hon G L Pieirs does a tremendous amount of work. He has travelled all over the world on behalf of the country. He may now be physically tired but, he manages, supervises, convinces our friends, our allies and our enemies at the same time in recognising the actual position that Sri Lanka is faced with.

This criticism on the part of the media on the Ministry of External "Affairs is not helping Sri Lanka. We are being proactive. In fact it is because of the fact that we are being proactive that we have come so far. I saw some articles criticising

the President's travelling. People might think that we are going on joy rides, but we are not. If you "look at the amount of work that His "Excellency the President has undertaken in the international forum for the last three months, its tremendous.

Where is our problem today? Our problem is with the international community in terms of the reconciliation and accountability. How are we going to address that situation? By going and meeting people, by going to forums, by meeting leaders of other countries, explaining to them what Sri Lanka has done and showing them the factuality of our post war development. In that area we have been very proactive and we have generated the results that we desire. You can see that the pressure that has been mounted on Sri Lanka is reducing drastically. But at the same time we have to be reactive also. We should have a good equilibrium between these two.

We Have Been Very Proactive And We Have Generated The Results That We Desire. You Can See That The Pressure That Has Been Mounted On Sri Lanka Is Reducing Drastically

Strained relations with countries especially our trading partners affect the economy as well. It seems like a vicious cycle. How can we proceed?

There has been no adverse affect on our trade relationships as a result of the human rights accusations or because of the resolution passed at the UN Human Rights Council. Our relationship with each country consists of different components, that is the case with every country. The GSP petition that was taken up against Sri Lanka was discontinued and normalcy restored in terms of the US GSP. That is a great achievement that Sri Lanka has had and at the same time it is a great recognition on the part of the US in terms of progress that Sri Lanka has made.

We have our free trade agreements with India, Pakistan and other countries. These relationships work in different ways and it has not been affected. Of course the global economic situation is such that there is a retraction of the quantum of trade. But in the Sri Lankan context, our trade deficit has increased drastically. People are importing more items like never before. There has been a 34 percent increase in the credit market. Therefore, you see an overall progress in the Sri Lankan context. I do not feel that the international trade and investment relationships that we have with countries have taken any setback just because of

these other issues.

If we look at the country, do you think there are too many players involved in all areas?

I will give you a very personal reply irrespective of any political relativity. The problem in Sri Lanka as I see, especially the opposition parties look at every single matter in a political perspective and on an electoral basis. This is where we go wrong. “If you take the economy, if you take politically, if you take socially, if you take any other issue, every single thing is equated to politics.

Through our government’s approach, we have brought about long lasting peace, we have brought about economic prosperity and we have brought about rural infrastructure development, we have done all of this regardless of party colours. We have not differentiated people. But when you look at the opposition, when you look at the things that are happening within the opposition and those who are opposed to the government for the sake of being opposed to it, everything is looked at from a political perspective and criticised from that perspective. We should get out of this habit.

Having civil society and business entities in this country, the personalities of this country should rise up and tell, “whatever it is right or wrong we have permanent peace now. We don’t have terrorism in this country and economic opportunities are there for people to develop. Let us recognise that and let us work in that context without politicalising every single issue.”

If you ask me whether too many people are involved in too many things, that is a democracy. If we try to curtail that then they will turn around and ask me, “why is this is a dictatorship, why are you not permitting these people to get involved and have a more expanded approach.”

Therefore, we have proved the fact that we have democracy in practice. But whether we have to listen to all “of those people is another matter. “We have received the peoples’ mandate to govern this country.

But we end up listening to everyone?

You have to listen to people. You have to take on board what they have to say. But the decision that we make as a government - people talk in compartments, people

talk which is beneficial to individuals, communities or religious factors – but as a responsible government we have to look at it across the board so that it will benefit the whole country at large. Therefore, democracy remains in Sri Lanka, it is because of the democratic process that we listen to people. And that is our strength. Sometimes too many players are good. But you should know when to stop so that it doesn't spoil the soup. That is the decision of the government.

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What can you tell us about the progress with the TNA?

Once again this is a very personal view having been involved in the process. The fundamental reason that I attribute to the attitude of the TNA today, and their reluctance to sit down and sort this issue out, is because we have made critical progress during the one year that we have had discussions with the TNA. We have made massive progress in terms of the issues that we discussed. For over one year we did not just sit and wait, we spoke about all issues and it is at this last stage where they had to come and commit to the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC), which has a time frame of six months, within which time we can conclude all of this, that the TNA is prolonging the process. The TNA had to deliver in terms of reaching a final solution and that is why they are behaving in this manner. I must say in fairness to certain senior members of the TNA, I have a feeling that they are also keen to finalise this and to put an end to this matter. But there is a faction in the TNA that wants to go back to the ideology of the LTTE and make this process a failure. The failure of this process will be the starting point for their next struggle.

We have committed ourselves and said we will settle this within six months. There are 21 different political parties represented in Parliament. And for us to bring a lasting solution it has to be inclusive. It is a time bound process and the UNP has also come on board. Hon Ranil Wickremesinghe has met with His Excellency the President and took the responsibility to bring the TNA into the process. "The UNP has recognised the genuineness of the government.

If we look at how the TNA is behaving now comparing with what has happened in the past, what are your thoughts on this?

If we draw references from the book "Gota's War", there are a few things that stand out. When you look at certain developments that occurred during the last three years, if we go back into the history of this conflict, we can see that through the actions of the TNA history is repeating itself.

Now, the TNA has started satyagrahas, and Hon Sampanthan made this statement about detachment during the ITAK convention. When you go back in history it is the same thing that has happened before. If I quote from this book page 31, "speaking about this ITAK satyagraha in parliament, Bandaranaike said, that these satyagrahas look peaceful but they are meant to spread ill feeling and tension all around. What is expected is anything but peace." Now is this not true today? It is the same thing that is happening. In 1956 an ultimatum was given to the government for separation, which led to the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact. Then if you look at the Vaddukodai proclamation in 1976 that calls for an independent Tamil state.

Another reference is to A Amirthalingam and S L Rasamanickam declarations, which are similar to Sampanthan's at the ITAK convention. This is history repeating itself. We see Mavai Senadhirajah going to Jaffna congregating people and having protests about land, having satyagrahas and calling for detachment. They are going back in time. They are taking the same course of action that leads to in their minds detachment from Sri Lanka, which is not so.

In an article written by K T Rajasingham that came in the Asian Tribune, which I quote "the TNA has decided to bring to the notice of the United Nations against the illegal acquisition and forceful occupation of lands in the Jaffna Peninsula, said Mavai Senathirajah Secretary General of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchchi and the Jaffna electoral district parliamentarian." Now these are things that they can sort out with us. This is why the PSC is in place. Instead of coming and talking to the government, instead of winning their grouse in the PSC and evolving a solution that can be tailor made for this problem, they are rallying the people who should now be having a proper life because for thirty years this war has ruined their livelihood.

The Government has spent more than USD 3.2 billion postwar up to now for development and rehabilitation. Without taking advantage of this they are provoking the people, taking them to do sathyagrahas and protests, then violence emanates out of this; for whose benefit is this for? The 11 Members of Parliament

of the TNA. I am surprised that the larger Tamil population in this country is tolerating this. The time has come, to the point where the TNA should recognise the needs of the people before their political ambitions. The government will have elections in the North very soon once the electoral lists are completed. That can be the venue where the people can vent their desire politically. The TNA should create that opportunity; come into the PSC process discuss these issues - land is obviously an issue that has to be discussed - formulate a mechanism and get them resolved. The only conclusion that I can come to as a Member of Parliament and as a Sri Lankan citizen with a conscience, is that all that the TNA wants is to go back in history. You can see this very clearly and as described in "Gota's War", they are enacting the whole thing once more.

In Hon Sambandan's speech he says that the only option left for them is Eelam, in other words separatism and going for self determination. "Legally that cannot be tolerated because he is a Member of Parliament of Sri Lanka and under the constitution the first oath that we take when we become a Member of Parliament is to protect the constitution of this country. And the constitution very clearly says that Sri Lanka is a unitary state and there is no division in this country that can be accepted. Hon Sampanthan is a senior politician and a learned personality who I respect in terms of "a parliamentarian, but unfortunately he is being misled by LTTE elements to the extent that he has failed to realise the oath that he took in Parliament.

The TNA Wants To Go Back In History. You Can See This Very Clearly And As Described In "Gota's War", They Are Enacting The Whole Thing Once More

Whatever actions that the government of Sri Lanka has taken we have ensured that the minority populations are consulted. Rightly or wrongly when we take decisions all these parties are consulted. We have a lot of minority representation in Parliament and other civil groups. Therefore, when you look at it, is there a need for agitation? There are enough democratic ways of airing your views. "As you mentioned too many people are handling too many things and that is the strength for our Government. We have our critiques. We have certain people who visit the US State Department on a monthly basis, who walks the corridors of the State Department and is known on first name basis. They feed the US with wrong information, but is it a problem? No, that is their democratic right to do what they want. Let them do that, but we know what to do. By and large we have been good

to all communities. One of the headlines recently stated that the IOM has been giving identity cards to rehabilitated LTTE cadres. My question is why are they trying to differentiate them? It is like branding cattle. They carried arms before, but now they are rehabilitated and are part of civil society. The past must be forgotten, so what do these NGOs want? All these NGOs will create an issue asking, 'why isn't the Army allowing the ID cards' what do they want to achieve? They want to differentiate these people, brand them like cattle, castigate them from society and whenever they require people to take up arms they can identify them; is that their motive? The rehabilitated cadres have come into the democratic process and they have their livelihood. The government of Sri Lanka is treating them equally. "If at all it should have been the government that issues separate ID cards so that we can keep a track of them, but are we doing that? No.

Whatever Actions That The Government Of Sri Lanka Has Taken We Have Ensured That The Minority Populations Are Consulted. Rightly Or Wrongly When We Take Decisions All These Parties Are Consulted

The government is doing everything in all sincerity. The former LTTE cadres have been taken off the wrong track and rehabilitated. We have given them the opportunity to lead normal lives, have a means of earning an income and having a family. Recently "I saw a news item where a soldier has married an ex-LTTE cadre. That is what reconciliation is all about. It is not the normal Tamil people in this country who have a problem, it is only the 11 TNA MPs who are unhappy because they want political power for themselves. They are trying to achieve this power in a wrong manner. "The objective of the government is bringing in a longterm settlement to this question. The 13th Amendment plus factor is to bring in a more wider participation into the politics of "Sri Lanka, especially minority politics of Sri Lanka. This is not confined only to the North, but also to the other areas. Let the Tamils, let the Muslims, let all minorities come in numbers to mainstream politics.

From my personal perspective, I see that the TNA is in a very peculiar situation. The TNA was the proxy of the LTTE in Parliament, that is a widely known fact, which no one can argue. They were voicing the opinions of the LTTE. Today the North is open to everyone whether they are a foreigner, a local or the TNA they are free to do politics anywhere. Previously when the LTTE was present there was no free will. They had to do what the LTTE asked. Otherwise the solution would have been a gun to your head. But that is not recognised by the TNA

unfortunately. The fact that they are propagating the ideologies of the LTTE is saddening. A person told me recently that the TNA has started going to schools. They have started giving lectures about Prabakaran, about what he stood for and the fact that he should be revered and the ideology taken forward. Now for whose benefit is this? Keep the ideology aside for a moment, keep the TNA's desire for detachment from Sri Lanka aside, but when you go into schools, when you go to youth and try to brainwash them by saying that what Prabakaran did was right, that terrorism should continue and the war should resume, what are they trying to do? They are trying to ruin the younger generations and again propagate the psychological warfare that these children "went through for the last 30 years. "Who will say this is right?

It Is High Time That The Tamil Polity Of This Country Who Reside All Over Sri Lanka - Not Only Confined To The North And East - Wake Up And Tell The TNA That They Should Sit Down And Talk To The Government And Finish This, Because We Have To Progress As One Nation

The TNA must also appreciate the normalcy that is there and also the freedom that they have been given to propagate in their political work. "Recently, the President chaired the district committee meeting in Jaffna. The majority of them were TNA elected members who were talking very openly with the President wanting certain actions taken on development, which was addressed then and there. At the grassroot level administration is taking place. This is what the TNA Members of Parliament do not want. They do not want a proper administration to be in place, they do not want the people to get used to a civil administration. They keep on harping on the LTTE. With the North opening up and the younger generation getting involved in politics who is it going to be bad for? Not for the government nor the people but for the elected TNA members. It is high time that the Tamil polity of this country who reside all over Sri Lanka - not only confined to the North and East - wake up and tell the TNA that they should sit down and talk to the government and finish "this, because we have to progress as "one nation.

How can we foster moderate Tamil leadership? The TNA is not the sole representatives of the Tamil people.

The perfect example I would say is Arun Thambimuttu who is our SLFP organiser in Batticaloa. Arun's parents were killed by the LTTE, they were looking for him as well, but he managed to save his life. That is one example of the new

leadership that has come up. However, for us to draw in more individuals then a conducive environment must be constituted. But what is the TNA doing today? They are poisoning the minds of the people. They want to keep them as close to their fists as they can. From the perspective of the government we are encouraging minority participation. Hon Namal Rajapaksa does a lot of work in the North and the East and there is a lot of enthusiasm that is generated from the youth. They participate in these programmes and it is essential that they realise that there is another side to the coin; that there are opportunities. You know its not an easy process everything has to happen by and large simultaneously with the aspect of reconciliation, integration of societies, individuals and ethnicity into the larger cycle of life. Therefore, it is an integrated process. If the TNA comes and becomes part of the political process to settle the remaining issues, the flood gates will open with increased opportunities and development. This is exactly what the TNA does not want. I think this question is more pertinent to be asked from Hon Sampanthan and the likes of the Hon Suresh Premachandra or maybe Mavai Senadhirajah than from me.

This Is Your Last Chance To Prove To Your Community That You Are Committed In Giving Them A Lasting Solution

What does the future hold for Sri Lanka?

The future is good for Sri Lanka if you take it from the present. Tell me a country in this region that has had a continuous growth of eight to 8.3 percent in their economy? Our per capita income has gone up and is expected to reach USD 4,400 in the next couple of years. That is a huge advancement in your income. That is an increase in the disposable income of the people. And if you go to the rural areas you see that the rural economies are today, in terms of agriculture and self employment, are moving now. People are coming out, people have more money and people are getting more involved in economic activities. One of the factors that contributed to such a development is rural infrastructure. Our government under His "Excellency the President according to Mahinda Chinthana has progressed in the four areas of social, political, economic and religious development simultaneously.

To analyse this you must go into the rural areas, Colombo does not indicate what generally takes place by and large. 80 percent of our population is dependent on an agriculture based economy. There is huge development taking place in the villages. The Divi Neguma programme, though some people criticise, from my

perspective is a positive development. It enhances the production whether it is a household project or a commercial project. It starts as a household project. I represent Balapitiya, in my area you must see the development that is taking place. Every household is contributing to the economy even in a very minute manner. The next step is how you commercialise that activity. You create awareness among the people and give them the opportunity to participate and produce and then the next step is commercialising it by creating the market. That is in terms of production, in terms of expansion you can see that our credit has increased by 34 percent last year. Why has it increased? People are increasingly engaging in economic activity.

The Central Bank Governor argued with me that 34 percent is too much of an increase and that we must reduce it in order to control inflation. I of course defer in my opinion on a practical basis because of the increase in per capita income you see that people are consuming more and more. Therefore, you see that there is another disparity in terms of our trade deficit. But when you take the global situation, India recently devalued their currency further. There are global situations that are affecting Sri Lanka, which we are not immune to. However, when you look at the economy in a broader sense, tourism has increased and foreign direct investment has increased. Shangri-La is building hotels in Galle Face and Hambantota and now they have acquired another land in the Eastern Province. Why are all these people coming here? Because there are prospects. Therefore, looking at the overall Sri Lankan context we are definitely advancing. There maybe shortcomings, I will not say that the government is 100 percent perfect but if these are shown to us we can rectify them. I can very clearly say from an individual perspective when you look at an average person if you ask him whether there has been a development in his personal life whether it be political, economical, social or religious advancement during the last seven years, he will say yes.

The TNA Must Also Appreciate The Normalcy That Is There And Also The Freedom That They Have Been Given To Propagate In Their Political Work

Final thoughts?

His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa eradicated terrorism from this country. It is sad to see that the Opposition has forgotten the herculean task that has been achieved. Lasting peace and stability were brought not to benefit a particular segment of this country, but for

everyone. If you look at every aspect of our economy there has been tangible advancement; but this is not recognised, which is very saddening. My appeal finally is to the TNA and to all who are concerned about this issue, there is only one personality in this country politically who has the ability and the capability and the need to solve this ethnic problem that we have had. My humble request to all these people as the citizens of Sri Lanka is, there is a golden opportunity, I can say this because I am from the younger generation, I see things differently. I have studied what the past was and went through some of it. Being a Member of Parliament today within the system I can well afford to say this to Hon Sampanthan and the TNA, this is your last chance, in terms of giving what is rightful to the Tamil people of this country not to the Sinhales, not to the Sri Lankans. They have to do justice by their community who have been deprived in terms of a lasting solution from time immemorial. This is your last chance to prove to your community that you are committed in giving them a lasting solution. Join the PSC and make the solution a reality. "The ball is in his (Hon Sampanthan) court and I wish he plays it right.



