

COMMITMENT. DEDICATION. ACHIEVEMENT.

Posted on



On May 19, 2012 Sri Lanka celebrates the third year anniversary of the end of the conflict that gripped this country for three decades. The LTTE - the most ruthless terrorist organisation was destroyed by our gallant Armed Forces under the guidance and direction of Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the political leadership of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. As we enjoy the peace, stability and freedom, which provided the enabling environment for economic development, many have forgotten the years of conflict that created fear and insecurity among us. Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa reminds us of the dividends of peace, the great progress achieved during the last three years and the importance for the people to recognise their responsibility in ensuring that this hard won peace is not jeopardised for any reason. It is his plea that the people are not misled...it is a plea because he knows the devastation of war. Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa

believes that with commitment and dedication, achievement is not impossible... He would know.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe

Photography Menaka Aravinda and Mahesh Bandara

It has been three years since the end of the conflict and the elimination of the LTTE, the most ruthless terrorist organisation in the world. Can you tell us about the progress made so far in conflict affected areas?

We have made significant progress after the end of the war. The main aim of the Government and the Ministry of Defence is to bring normalcy to this country. That is, not only to Colombo or the South but also to the North and East. We want people to feel that after 30 years of war there is peace and freedom in this country for them to lead normal lives. Therefore, to ensure this we have implemented many activities.

During the period immediately after the conclusion of the war, the biggest issue that we had to address was the approximately 300,000 internally displaced people (IDP). Our first priority was to ensure the well-being of these people. Therefore, we first provided them with accommodation in welfare camps and we had a special organisation to take care of them. However, we were very keen to send the IDPs back to their original homes. The main obstacle to this process was the mines that had been planted by the LTTE to prevent the advancement of the Armed Forces. In the North and in the entire Wanni there was a massive number of anti-personnel mines, anti-tank mines and various types of IEDs. Therefore, it was paramount that all of the mines had to be cleared before any civilians could be settled in these areas.

We first identified areas that could be immediately demined so that the maximum number of people could be resettled. Presently except for approximately 7,000 IDPs all others have been resettled in their original homes. This is a great achievement. We were able to do this because our de-mining service was very successful. The most important aspect is that even though INGOs and NGOs were involved in this process the majority of the work was carried out by the Engineering Corps of the Sri Lankan Army. It is very important to recognise this fact.

Furthermore, another important factor to remember is that during the Humanitarian Operations when the Military was successfully advancing to LTTE controlled areas, the LTTE forced the civilians to leave their homes and directed them to dismantle the roofs, doors and windows of their houses. These people were forced to withdraw with the LTTE. Now, when the civilians return to their homes they have to rebuild the whole structure. It needs to be stressed that these houses were not damaged by the war. The LTTE ordered the civilians to dismantle their homes. With the end of the war and with the people returning to their homes the Government has to assist them to rebuild their homes. As such all this work is done by the Government.

As we celebrate the third year anniversary of the end of the war, we are proud of the progress we have made in resettlement. It is a success story; there is no country in the world that has been able to resettle its displaced due to natural disasters or conflict in this timeframe. They have taken many years especially where de-mining is concerned. In Sri Lanka within a very short period of time we have resettled nearly 95 percent of the people back in their houses. That is a success story.

What can you tell us about the rehabilitation of ex-combatants?

At the end of the war approximately 11,600 combatants surrendered to the Armed Forces. The Government made the decision to rehabilitate these individuals rather than send them to detention camps and interrogate them. The rehabilitation programmes were very successful and today many of them have been released and re-integrated into society. This is another very successful story that the world must recognise. We invited many people including those from abroad to visit these centres and see for themselves the work we are doing. Many of them recognised that the rehabilitation programme was a success and they appreciated the efforts we had made.

Today, those who had been fighting at various levels in the LTTE - they may have been leaders engaged in attacks or they may have been forcefully recruited or been in the LTTE for a very short time - are part of society. As part of the rehabilitation programme these people were given training in various skills such as masonry, carpentry and heavy vehicle operating. Now they have a means to seek employment and live their lives normally because they had only been trained for combat and nothing else before. They are no longer combatants but members of our society.

Another very important aspect are the detainees. At the time of the end of the war nearly 4,000 LTTE combatants were in detention. However, we felt that even these people should be given the opportunity to lead a normal life. We investigated the various allegations against them and except for about 200 detainees, the remainder have been rehabilitated and released. Today there is only one detention camp in Sri Lanka and that is in Boossa. We do not treat them as detainees or prisoners, but we give them spiritual guidance, we encourage them to participate in cultural activities and also provide rehabilitation instead of punishing them.

Many speak about the Military presence in the North and East, what can you tell us about this?

If we take the Wanni region in particular the LTTE was controlling this area and the Armed Forces had to liberate it. As I emphasised before the Government wants to bring normalcy to these areas. This is an area that has been misunderstood with various complaints about Military presence. We have gradually reduced their numbers in civilian populated areas; we have withdrawn them from their day-to-day involvement and are now in their camps. The maintenance of law and order has been handed over to the Police. We have opened new Police stations in Mankulam, Killinochchi, Pooneryn and other such areas. A key feature at these Police stations is that we have recruited Tamil speaking individuals who are from Jaffna and other northern areas. We have trained them and they are now stationed at their respective police stations so that it is ensured that the Police can effectively communicate with the Tamil speaking people in these areas.

What about development work in these areas?

Immediately after the end of the war we initiated development work so that the people can engage in their livelihoods such as farming, paddy cultivation and fishing. There is major development work in progress such as the construction of road networks, including the A-9, railway lines, rehabilitation of irrigation canals and the renovation of tanks. Furthermore if you take the northern coastal belt from Silavathurai in the west all the way to Jaffna and Point Pedro up to Mullaitivu, the main livelihood is fishing. During the conflict the fishing industry in this area was completely destroyed, the reason being that the Sea Tigers were dominating there. For that reason during the conflict there were many restrictions.

Fishermen were not allowed to go out to sea freely because there were many restrictions on boats such as the size of the boat and the extent of horsepower of the out-boat motors used. Furthermore fishermen were only allowed to fish in certain areas due to security reasons. Three years after the completion of the war we have removed all restrictions. We are

encouraging the fishing community to engage in fishing and develop the industry. The Government is providing all the facilities such as the provision of loans, assistance to purchase boats and equipment and also establishing ancillary infrastructure such as ice factories. It is very important to recognise that all of these activities are being done to develop the fishing industry.

What about High Security Zones?

The demarcation of High Security Zones (HSZ) during the war was a great topic of discussion. Today you will find that we have completely removed all HSZ. Of course in Palaly as you know the original camp was very small and today there is requirement for a larger camp. We have acquired certain land for this purpose and what is important is that we are paying rent to the owners of that land, and when we are able to purchase the property we will do so. The people have been given compensation for their land. Furthermore, they will also be given alternate land elsewhere. If there are any kovils or other religious or culturally significant sites within the camp premises the public is given the freedom to visit these places.

The Demarcation Of High Security Zones (HSZ) During The War Was A Great Topic Of Discussion. Today You Will Find That We Have Completely Removed All HSZ.

What needs to be stressed is that there are no longer any large areas demarcated as HSZ. Many areas have been released for the public to utilise especially in Palaly, which was a massive HSZ; that is from KKS, Keeramalai to Thondamannar. This has been reduced significantly and only the most essential areas have been kept. Over the past three years we have provided whatever assistance possible to bring normalcy to the people in the North and East.

How about the rest of the country?

During the 30-year long conflict it was not only that the LTTE was dominating the North and controlling the majority parts of the East. They were also creating fear and insecurity in the rest of the country with killings and bombings. As a result we lost many innocent lives of civilians, Military personnel and property, which curtailed our freedom. With the end of the war we have completely put a stop to such destruction. For the last three years we have not heard of bomb attacks on buses, cars or economic targets, we are not seeing dead bodies or Armed Forces personnel being killed. The LTTE has bombed the Central Bank and the surroundings, they have bombed hotels, the International airport and the Kolonnawa oil storage. Every single economic institution was a target. There used to be so many bus, car and three-wheeler bombs, and we have put a complete stop to all that.

This I feel, certain people have forgotten. I will not say everyone but there are a few who have forgotten the fear and the terror caused by the LTTE and they want the people to forget this too. They are talking about the security situation today. Compared to the time of the war, the security situation in the country has improved significantly. There are no killings. All of this has been stopped. It is true that we lost lives, property and economically important installations were destroyed, but most importantly we should not forget that in terms of development we went backwards, because in a conflict situation no serious investor will engage whether they are local or foreign. While no foreign investors came to the country Sri Lankan businesses too went overseas.

As we have created a conducive environment for investments there is a huge demand and many investors are coming to the country. If we look at the tourism sector, during the war the industry was in very bad shape. Today if you ask the hoteliers, they will all say that during the entire year they have done very good business. The number of tourists coming to the country has increased significantly and investment is taking place in a large scale. Presently there is a huge demand for condominiums, houses, office spaces and IT services.

Through investment, business and employment opportunities are created. Furthermore, during the past three years living standards have improved and income per capita has increased. This is the biggest achievement during the last three years – after the end of the war we have created a safe, peaceful and stable environment in this country and that has improved our economy significantly. In each and every way, we have moved forward in this country because we ended the war. Everyone in this country must remember the past and take this opportunity, we must not go back to the time after defeating the LTTE, we must not go back to the 80s or the 90s. We must move forward from 2009. It is very important to remember what we went through as a country. We should preserve this hard won peace without destroying this opportunity for the sake of petty politics and personal gain. We have to move forward. There are certain people who are trying to destroy this freedom, we must not get involved in this. We are a democratic country, use this freedom to move forward.

Today anyone can engage in politics. Many members of the TNA are able to speak freely and visit the North and East without any fear but when the LTTE was there, were they able to do that? They had to do what Prabakaran said. During the war most of the TNA members lived abroad. They were not free to say anything. But today they are free to do anything. The TNA has forgotten the past. They must not forget. Today, if we consider only the people in the North and the East, specially in the Northern area – they were the people who suffered the

most. They now have this opportunity to move forward, to develop the area, to educate their children, to seek investment, to do business, to sell their products, engage in agriculture and cultivation and sell their produce. That is what is necessary.

Even when the conflict escalated after 2005, there was no communal violence, it is only today that certain people are trying to instigate divisions among the communities. Such actions are not necessary. These are very sensitive issues that people can avoid; we must insist on this. Whichever race or religion we belong to we must remember what we went through with the conflict for 30 years. We should not give the slightest opportunity for something similar to happen again. That is very important. People should not believe in rumours. Today, rumours are being spread by people who want to create a situation in this country. We must not believe such rumours and the public should not allow such things to happen.

In this country, whether you are a Muslim, Tamil, Burgher or Sinhala, you are a Sri Lankan. That is the most important thing. You must not get involved in unnecessary issues: ethnicity and religion that is not important, what is important is that you are a Sri Lankan. We now have the opportunity and it is there for everyone. No one can say that this is not true. Take Colombo or anywhere in the country - there are many Tamil leading businessmen in many sectors. There are also the Tamil professionals such as surgeons, doctors, engineers, lawyers and architects. Who can say there is no opportunity for them? They can buy land everywhere, whether it is in Colombo, the South or the North. There are no restrictions for a Tamil to buy land. They live in all areas of the country. Even if you look at the Muslim community, they are free to do business and the fact that we have so many leading Muslim businessmen in this country is proof of that. Who obstructs? No one.

This is what the people want but it is the politicians who create unnecessary problems. We must move away from petty politics. We must not get entangled in religious or ethnic disputes. Why should we engage in such activities when we have ample opportunities to move forward? We have to be cautious of those who try to create a situation by projecting false issues. When people are educated and they are able to earn and engage in business activities their interest is in improving their lives.

We Have Achieved Stability In This Country After A Long Time. We Must Consolidate This Stability In Order To Attract More Investment... The Solution For All Problems Is Development, Not Fighting

We have achieved stability in this country after a long time. We must consolidate this stability in order to attract more investment. We can encourage tourists to visit the country. That is how we can solve our problems. The solution for all problems is development; not fighting. We want the people to improve their lives and live comfortably. The most important thing is that we must preserve this freedom and stability. We must not go back, we must move forward.

Why do you think that certain elements and even politicians are trying to cause problems among the communities?

This is being done for their own advantage. It is not for the people. Let the people live in peace. Everyone, especially in the North, want to educate their children, they want to build their houses, they want to do their farming or fishing or cultivation. We have to bring investment, factories and training facilities to these areas. At times investors are reluctant because there are issues such as finding trained people, therefore we have to provide those facilities to the people. It is development that we need; not fighting on baseless issues and living in the past.

What is the role of the Military today, after three years?

There is no emergency in the country. As many may have noticed there are no road blocks or checkpoints. We do not conduct cordon and search operations. We want to bring normalcy to the country. But, we must remember - and this is very important - that the primary role of the Armed Forces is to protect the country, from internal and external threats. They have to be ready. They cannot relax though we have defeated the LTTE; we need to be cautious. The LTTE was in this country for 30 years, therefore there could be certain aspects that we need to be careful about.

We Want To Bring Normalcy To The Country. But, We Must Remember - And This Is Very Important - That The Primary Role Of The Armed Forces Is To Protect The Country, From Internal And External Threats

We have rehabilitated and released all those who surrendered. They were all combatants. Some did not surrender. They could be leaders, we do not know who they are. We are still finding hidden weapons. Not one or two but a massive quantity. We know that the LTTE had a large armoury. We are recovering these weapons almost everyday. Those who did not surrender could still be among the people because it is only three years.

Furthermore, there is a huge threat from outside the country; that is the people who were able to escape and also the international network. Even during Prabakaran's time there was a massive international network in UK, Canada, Norway and other European countries, Australia and US. The LTTE fronts have formed different organisations in these countries and while living overseas they are trying to destabilise Sri Lanka. They are bringing immense pressure on us. In such a situation there is a possibility that the LTTE can regroup and do something. But this is not what we want.

The Armed Forces have to be very careful. However, the way they achieve this - that is ensure security - is different. They do not want to disturb civilian life. We do not want to place roadblocks or conduct search operations. We do this through surveillance, gathering information and other different methods to ensure that the country is not in danger. That is the main task of the Military - to ensure the security of the country.

We have withdrawn the Military from civilian life and we have handed over the day-to-day law and order to the Police. But of course, one might ask "why are you still keeping the military in the North?" Obviously, the North is a part of Sri Lanka. Therefore we have to position the military in different parts of the country. It is not only in the North but also in Hambantota that we have stationed troops. In every district we have troops. But yes, in the North we have more. Why? That is because you position your military in strategically important places. There is always a possibility that some terrorist group can reorganise themselves. That possibility is always there. In that case, to counter such threats you have to position the Military in strategically important locations. The Military decides on the strategic locations where the camps should be placed and we have positioned them accordingly. Though the camps have been positioned in these locations the Military personnel are confined to their camps where they continue with their daily training, intelligence gathering and other such activities.

At the same time today the Military is engaged in development work. They are a disciplined force and our Military consists of very young people. They are young, trained and disciplined and with many skills. We can use that in our country's development. It is nothing but right to give them the opportunity as they are also part of the society. In many countries they do this, where while they engage in their military work they can also utilise their skills in other areas. Now, in Colombo, the canal system is maintained by the Navy. If you take some of the tasks done by the Urban Development Authority, we use certain military officers because of their commitment and skills for various projects.

When you take the military, you must understand that there are various divisions in the military and it does not consist of only fighting soldiers. There are engineers, who are very capable. Even during the war, they were engaged in similar activities such as building bridges and roads when the troops were moving and also clearing obstacles. That was their task even during the war. In a conflict, engineers are trained and also equipped to do that. Additionally, the engineers did the mammoth task of de-mining. Furthermore, we have civil engineers and engineering services, trained carpenters, masons and plumbers whose duty is the construction of buildings for the Military.

Now if you take the Dutch Hospital, which we have renovated in Colombo, it was completely done by the Army engineers. The Race Course, again done by the Army engineering services. There are some other buildings renovated like this by the Navy. They are constructing children's playgrounds as well. Therefore we utilise the skills of the forces for development work and they are quite happy to contribute to these projects. At the same time, within the Military they are being utilised to build houses for soldiers and disabled soldiers. The Military is building the houses, hospitals and places for the disabled soldiers, such as Mihindhu Seth Medura and Abimansala. The most important thing is that they are very keen to do this work, because they are motivated. They are trained and disciplined and as such can be utilised for development.

If we look at the general stability and security, how do you feel as the person who has been able to disassemble the underworld networks, crime, robberies and extortion, thereby creating a safe environment for everyone all over the country?

While a 30 year long conflict was raging with the LTTE, other illegal networks were also developing. There was a thriving underworld and drug network, I will not say that we were able to completely eradicate the drug problem but we have been able to control it very effectively. Of course, we all know that such networks are prevalent not only in Sri Lanka, however we have to continue this work so that the people are safe; the society is safe. Today, we have achieved that. In the media we find various reports of crimes but what we are trying to control is organised crime. That is very important.

We need the assistance of the people. They have to believe in us. There was one time, when a large underworld network was taking over peoples' houses and land, where people have sold land that does not belong to them under a false name, using a forged identity. The public has to be made aware and be extremely careful. We can arrest the culprit but what can you do if he says he doesn't have the money? You are nowhere. Therefore, the general

public has to assist us. There were also kidnappings and ransom collection, most of the time the people are too scared to inform the Police. They just give the money. At times they feel that the Police might not be able to help them but we have solved many issues such as this and we have arrested many culprits who were trying to take ransom from people. We can do this only if the people help. They must not be frightened and should inform the authorities immediately. We should not give them the opportunity to engage in such illegal activities.

It is very challenging but our aim is to completely eradicate this menace of underworld and drug networks. Of course, we need the assistance of the public. They must support, they must believe in us. Together, we can achieve this. It is very important so that we can become a developed country where anyone can be safe. Tourists, investors and businesses must be confident. Whatever certain people say we have achieved this security.

Unfortunately, Individuals Who Are Not Thinking Of The Country And The Future Are Engaged In Creating Instability. Everyone Must Understand This Situation And Must Not Be A Pawn In Their Game.

Unfortunately, individuals who are not thinking of the country and the future are engaged in creating instability. Everyone must understand this situation and must not be a pawn in their game.

Why is it that certain people do not appreciate this effort?

The majority of the people appreciate what we have achieved. It is a very few who are opportunists, who want to criticise and show an inaccurate picture because they want to come into power. They want to create fear among the people. They just think of themselves. That's all. They are the people who do not appreciate but the general public do. It is the poor people who are at a disadvantage.

If you look at the entire society there is discipline as a whole.

The people want discipline and they want to see development happening and order maintained. A very good example is that when we removed all the garbage from Colombo, people too stopped throwing waste in public places. Under how many administrations did they try to solve this issue. The people are also proud to maintain this clean environment. Many people who have come from abroad have commented on this because they see the difference. Even Heads of State, have commented on this. Lord Naseby who has been visiting Sri Lanka during the past 50 years said to me that he has never seen Colombo so

clean and he had mentioned this to the President as well.

Tourists do not want to see garbage, they like to be in a clean city. It is not only the tourists, imagine the people living in the city itself, everyone likes to live in a clean city. There are many advantages including the prevention of diseases.

Similarly, you cannot ask people to walk on the pavement if there are no pavements. If the pavements are full of hawkers and potholes, how can you ask the people to walk on the pavement? They have no choice but to walk on the road. Today we have cleaned the pavements as well as built new ones. We must make our cities people friendly, not only for the motorists, as a majority of the people walk. That is how the discipline comes.

Take the Galle road, from Bambalapitiya to Colpetty. We laid new pavements and introduced pedestrian crossings. Today you don't see people crossing the Galle Road from everywhere. They wait for the green light and cross. This is discipline. Give the people the opportunity to be disciplined. If there are no proper places to cross the road, people will cross from any point. Once they are used to that, once order is brought people will obey. The majority of the people want that.

If we take Colombo we can say that it is most probably the cleanest city in South Asia, why aren't we promoting that?

It is very important to promote this because it is one way that we can attract tourists to our country. This should be done not through promotions or advertising but by word of mouth. Anyone who visits Sri Lanka today, talks about the cleanliness and discipline, therefore we have to maintain this. We can improve and we must improve and the officials must keep this in mind. Especially, if you take Colombo, the majority of the responsibility falls on the Municipal Council, though we are doing all this work through the Urban Development Authority.

We are starting a project with World Bank funding mainly for Colombo and its suburbs such as Kotte, Kolonnawa, Dehiwela and Mount Lavinia. It is a huge project to improve the infrastructure facilities such as the roads and pavements. We have also developed the Beira Lake and the areas surrounding. I have developed many walking spaces and these are full of people, whether it is Vihara Maha Devi Park, Independence Square, Parliament Grounds or

the new Battaramulla Japanese-Friendship road. All these places are crowded because people want to spend time outside with their families. We have to create more public spaces and we are doing that.

Floods was another issue. Today we have been able to solve this problem to a great extent. If we take the Parliament area, Waters Edge, Rajagiriya and further down, these places would have been under water during the rains. But today we are not experiencing any floods that is because we created more lakes and dredged tanks to increase the water retention capacity. We have cleaned all the canals and maintain them, therefore to a great extent we have been able to control flooding.

We have started a programme to remove unauthorised constructions such as slums and relocate them into proper housing. We cannot allow these people to live under such low standards. We are building apartments for this purpose. We must give them the opportunity to live well. With that, discipline will also come to them. It is not that they don't like to live like that. If we take the Slave Island area, there are so many, sub standard and old houses. Together with the private sector, we have created very good programmes. Currently there are two projects where the private sector will develop the Slave Island area with accommodation and transfer these people to their new houses. The vacant land will be used for commercial purposes. In such a way it is a win-win situation for both the developer and the people.

Even for this type of project, there are those who are trying to mislead the public, which is very bad. This is for the benefit of the people alone. I have found investors, who are willing to take this land and build good houses for them, according to their requirements. The balance area to be developed is to cover the expenses. This is done by the private sector but the UDA is facilitating this project. Such projects will change the face of Colombo and uplift the lives of the people.

Development entails unpopular decisions.

Yes, but we are not throwing people out of their homes. We always look after them but they must understand, this is for their benefit. We have to do such programmes for the advancement of the people and the country. When we remove shanties, we house them in temporary shelters and once the shanties are demolished we build houses. Unfortunately there are people who, without understanding or thinking of the country, its future and

development, try to mislead. That is why they protest. It is very important for the public to understand what we are doing. We need to demolish unauthorised constructions and remove pavement hawkers if we are to move forward and develop their lives and standards. We must move fast because we were lagging behind due to the war that lasted 30 years.

How have you been able to achieve all of this where others have failed?

It is not that others have failed, it is that we have proven that nothing is unachievable. For example many people thought we could not defeat the LTTE but we did. Therefore if you have the commitment and the will ,anything can be achieved. There are many people who have achieved great things because they believe in themselves and they are committed.

It Is Not That Others Have Failed, It Is That We Have Proven That Nothing Is Unachievable... Many People Thought We Could Not Defeat The LTTE But We Did.

I am totally committed, I know what needs to be achieved and I work towards those objectives. As such the people who work with me and my subordinates also work towards achieving the set objectives. They will follow your lead. If you are not committed others will follow suit. The majority I know want to work and do their job well, but you need to give them leadership. For example the clearing of garbage, I do not personally remove the garbage; but I supervise and guide the officials to ensure that the work is done.

That commitment is the most important aspect. Furthermore you have to be genuine. I asked all the Government servants, whether they are committed. When there is an opportunity to do something, it is wrong to place blame elsewhere. If you want to do something there is ample opportunity for that. The only thing you need is the commitment. And when you work to achieve that goal, you must have a vision, you must have dreams and you should work towards making those a reality. Many will support you and follow you. Subordinates will work. That is how we have achieved success.

Even the renovation of the Dutch Hospital and Race Course no one thought it was possible?

The two buildings at the race course were neglected for 40 years. It was an eye sore and there were various people living there. Though it was ultimately condemned, the buildings were not demolished because no one was interested. My initial reaction was why not? We

can utilise it and that is how we started on its design and development. Work is ongoing now. You have to give leadership. Truly, I am thinking of the country. I want my country to come up to that level of a highly developed country. Therefore I always think of how I can contribute to achieve this aim.

The cleaning of garbage is not my responsibility, it is the responsibility of the Municipal Council. Urban Development or Defence has nothing to do with this. There have been instances where those in the Opposition have asked what the Secretary of Defence has to do with cleaning, but if no one is doing it, I thought how can we live in this way? We have ended the war, therefore we must move forward, develop this city and the country. Therefore I analysed the problem and looked at the reasons as to why the clearing of garbage was not happening properly and I provided a solution. I supervised it and gave leadership, that is how everyone should work.

If you are bound to your duty to serve the people and the country, you overcome whatever obstacles and move forward. We must not fall into this trap where certain elements are trying to create disharmony in this country. It is my earnest request from the public, please do not be misled and fall into their trap. We are after all human beings and we want to live our lives in peace.

As you mentioned is Urban Development is progressing outside Colombo as well?

We have selected about 18 cities including Jaffna around the country to develop, as we have done in Colombo.

Could you also speak about the Eagles Golf Link in Trincomalee, which is a novel concept?

There is a great demand for golf, in the whole world. I felt that we can develop a golf course because such facilities are essential for tourism. Beaches, heritage, wildlife and tea estates are some of the assets we have for tourists but that alone will not suffice to encourage tourists to the country. Facilities such as golf courses and hotels should be in these areas. Therefore I thought it would be a good idea to have a golf course in Trincomalee.

The Air Force was very keen, they selected this place in Clossenburg, Trincomalee and the golf course has become very popular. There are many people from abroad who have played

at the golf course. Recently, the Managing Director of Noritake and other Japanese officials played on the course. Many people from Colombo go there over the weekend. It is a very nice and peaceful environment. If we look at the Navy they are conducting whale watching expeditions, so in that way the Armed Forces are also doing their part to develop the tourism industry of the country.

Everyone identifies you as a doer a person who can do the right thing, and we find that people from various sectors, even the private sector, saying that if they speak to the Defence Secretary he can get the work done. Why is that?

I do not know whether I am a doer but whatever responsibilities fall upon me I take it very seriously and I want to produce results. I look for results and I work very hard. I am committed to whatever is assigned to me. I always think of the country and the future. I will do whatever I can do to make this country better. With dedication and devotion I will do my duty and that automatically brings results. It is a very simple thing. That is why we were able to finish the 30 year long war within three short years. We worked to achieve set objectives with commitment.

I Look For Results And I Work Very Hard. I Am Committed To Whatever Is Assigned To Me. I Always Think Of The Country And The Future. I Will Do Whatever I Can Do To Make This Country Better.

At the time I saw the Dutch Hospital I thought, I must create a place like a mall. With that concept in mind we proceeded. We were able to achieve our aim. Therefore, you have to visualise what you want to achieve. With that you can move forward and accomplish your aim. We have to be result oriented, that is the most important thing. Sometimes that is a weakness I have seen in Sri Lanka. Many people have nice plans and they think that just by having a plan it will become a reality. It is useless to just discuss plans unless you implement them. The end result is the most important thing. Without the result, making plans is a waste of time.

A new identification system such as the social security number is to be introduced to Sri Lanka. What are your thoughts on this and when can we expect this to happen?

This has been something that has been talked about for the past 30 years because we already have the ID card system which is not at all satisfactory. It has been a major obstacle during the terrorist period, because many terrorists and suicide cadres came to Colombo with forged identities. Most of the suicide cadres were able to obtain forged ID cards

claiming they are Muslims and disguised themselves. There is no security in the current ID card. A person, a genuine citizen will not do anything illegal but a person who wants to do these things, can.

We Were Able To Finish The 30 Year Long War Within Three Short Years. We Worked To Achieve Set Objectives With Commitment

The plan is to have a proper ID card and it will be a very sophisticated system. We will call for tenders from various interested parties and evaluate and make it a reality. It is very important because this will prevent crimes and will be a tool to maintain security. If you have a forged ID card you can take another passport. Therefore by forging they engage in many fraudulent activities. When you have a proper ID system you can stop such activities.

Visa on arrival was stopped. What was the reason behind this and so far how has it affected the number of arrivals to Sri Lanka?

No, the on arrival visa system was not stopped but what we introduced was a system where tourists can obtain their visa's online. As a matter of fact the number of tourists to Sri Lanka has increased, it has facilitated people because now a lot of people are applying through the internet. We do still issue visa on arrival but for some reason if the visa is rejected the tourist has to leave the country as soon as they arrive. Therefore we have made it easier by providing this facility for them to obtain their visa online prior to their departure. You go online and apply, within 48 hours you are given the visa. This has prevented long lines assembling at the immigration counters.

Now with the end of the military campaign and with the work you are doing for urban development, are you planning to enter politics?

No.

Now that we have peace and security, how do we maintain this freedom?

That is up to the people. We have to move forward rather than go back. The Government is very keen to bring normalcy and ensure that all people live in freedom. Many restrictions have been removed including the emergency. To move forward we need the support of the public. It is very unfortunate that certain pressures are being exerted by the international community. They must see what we have achieved during this time period. We have gone very far on ground. That is the reality. Rather than get entangled in these unnecessary problems, as Sri Lankans we need to move forward as one country and one people. We

should shed any petty differences in the name of the country. The Armed Forces and the Police are committed to that. Therefore it is up to the public.

Politicians Should Understand That Sri Lanka Is A Democratic Country. After Independence, We Had Many Parties And Many Governments... If The People Are Not Happy They Can Always Change The Government Because The Ballot Decides.

Politicians should understand that Sri Lanka is a democratic country. After Independence, we had many parties and many Governments. At one time the JVP was part of the Government and they had ministries under their purview. The Marxists were also part of the Government. The UNP was in power and subsequently the SLFP was in power. People change so do the Presidents, Governments and Ministers. Why is that? That is through the ballot. Ultimately, this is a democratic country. The people appoint the Government and the President after they govern their term. If the people are not happy they can always change the Government because the ballot decides.

As a progressive country, you must allow the process to go on rather than be an obstacle to it. Opposition is good but it is not their duty to use undemocratic means or create instability or to harm the country. Sometimes, they use methods which will not change a particular government or harm the President but it will harm the whole country.

There are certain media institutions today, that are spreading wrong information. It is very detrimental to our country. It will bring disharmony among the community and that will give a wrong impression to the world. That will cause more and more foreign involvement, which will bring instability. We are a peaceful country but are we moving forward like Vietnam, China, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia or Singapore? Or are we going to follow the countries that have protests, fighting and bombings with unnecessary foreign involvement? Are we going in that direction or are we going in this direction. It is up to the public. If you want to come to power you have to use the correct method. Don't bring unnecessary instability into our country. If you are thinking of governing, you must have a country to govern. Think of moving forward. The President has solved the most difficult problem. Now it is up to us to move forward.

At The End What We Want Is For Everybody In This Country, Every Citizen, To Improve Their Living Standards. Live In Dignity. Live As A Sri Lankan.

Finally,

We have this great opportunity which we have not had for a long time. Now we must use this opportunity and develop our country and develop our society. At the end what we want is for everybody in this country, every citizen, to improve their living standards. Live in dignity. Live as a Sri Lankan.





