

Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa: The Unshakable Will



A year has passed since the end of the Humanitarian Operations, where the Sri Lanka Military defeated the most ruthless terrorist organisation in the world. The

Defence establishment was given the correct guidance and support, a military strategy was developed that had no room for failure. The Sri Lanka Army, Navy, Air Force, Police and Civil Defence Force all worked together as a team under the leadership of Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa. He was the strength behind the destruction of the LTTE. His strategic planning and leadership was instrumental for this great victory. Through it all, Defence Secretary stood by those who fought on land, sea and air and respected them for their bravery. As the first year anniversary approaches on May 18, 2010 Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa spoke to Business Today on the importance of not forgetting the past and those who had sacrificed life and limb for the country, the importance of reaching beyond as Sri Lanka pushes into full gear towards development. He believes that nothing is impossible for Sri Lanka.

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Photography by Menaka Aravinda

The first year anniversary of the end of the war falls on May 18, 2010. It is important to remind people of the significance of this achievement.

Therefore, what was the situation in Sri Lanka prior to May 18, 2009?

You have to go back to 2005, prior to the time that President Mahinda Rajapaksa took over office. For the past 30 years, because of LTTE terrorist activities, a major part of land in the North and East, was lost to us. The Government, the Military or the Police did not have any control of this land. The LTTE had complete control of those areas where they had their so-called police posts and military camps. The LTTE was planning to achieve what Prabhakaran wanted for so many years, which was to have a separate country. The LTTE was working towards that by establishing camps, strengthening their armed cadres, recruiting, training and procuring weapons. You could see how much weapons they had acquired during the ceasefire and prior to that. The amount of arms and ammunition, weapons they have used from the heavy guns to mortars, machine guns, missiles, the aircrafts and boats, that we captured were matching the Sri Lankan Forces. It was very clear that the LTTE was planning to militarily achieve their goal of a separate state. The size of the army they were building and military power they had accumulated clearly indicated their intentions.

Though it seemed that the activities of the LTTE were controlled and there were no killings because the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) was in place, the LTTE was planning everything until the right moment came. They were using the CFA and the peace talks to militarily strengthen themselves. In the meantime the LTTE was not only infiltrating the North and East, but also other areas like the Western Province so that they could match their military strength and activate them when the time comes. They had infiltrated into the Western Province and the up country where they were positioning their cadres and having safe houses. All these activities were going on during that period. Thus, it was very clear that the LTTE was going to achieve their aim at the right time.

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From our point of view, we completely adhered to the CFA, despite LTTE provocations until it was clear that they were not at all interested in negotiations. When we took over, there were about 3,000 reported violations of the CFA from the LTTE. Unfortunately the ceasefire monitoring body did not have any power to act on these and they could only report them. According to their reports, there were approximately 300 incidents attributed to the military and over 3,000 violations from the LTTE in 2005.

Due to the failure of successive Governments to successfully control the expansion of the LTTE during the last 30 years, everyone, even within the Government, Military and a majority of the people thought that the LTTE was a force that could not be defeated. The common belief at that time was that the LTTE was a military power and it was not possible to defeat them using military means. That was the mindset of the majority of the society as well as the politicians at that time. This was because for 30 years we were not able to effectively control them.

It was necessary to continue with the military operation and thus there was a need to change the mindset of the people and give them confidence that victory could be achieved. Initially, people were reluctant and scared to use words such as "terrorist" and "unitary state." That fear was there even among the politicians. Therefore when we started planning, we had to think of all these factors and decide ways to give confidence. It is not possible to launch a military operation without

mass support. To get the people's support you must give confidence to the people and assure them that victory is achievable. Otherwise the public will be concerned that we would allow soldiers and civilians to be killed. Therefore we had to ensure that the people had confidence with us and change the whole thinking of the people to start the military operation.

Even in the media there were many 'military analysts' who said that the LTTE was strong and therefore it was impossible to defeat them militarily. During that time many individuals including political leaders and diplomats were reading and depending on weekly defence review columns, which were portraying the LTTE as an indestructible force and the other was tamilnet, the propaganda website of the LTTE. Both these sources of information were misleading and gave an inaccurate description of the situation as well as the capabilities of the LTTE at that time. Therefore Ambassadors and foreign countries thought that it was not possible to destroy the LTTE. It was because for 30 years it could not be achieved militarily. Four Presidents and several Governments tried both military means as well as non-combative means such as negotiations to solve the terrorism problem. The Governments failed at that time. They were thinking that we should settle by giving anything that the LTTE wanted in order to stop the destruction of life and property. The mindset that the LTTE was indestructible had to be changed to convince the people and to give confidence to the military. At this time it was not only the thought of military defeating the LTTE, but even the society and the leaders were not ready to even think of a military option. Certain instructions given to the military were such that they were demoralising. There were instructions to have coordinating conferences between the LTTE and the military leadership. The two parties were meeting monthly at so-called "borders" and having coordinating conferences to discuss how to take the CFA forward. That was the situation when President Mahinda Rajapaksa took over office in November 2005.

The international pressure on the Government during the Humanitarian Operations was immense. Even at present the pressure from the international community is there, but in a different form. What are your thoughts on this?

There are various reasons for international pressure. When you say "international", it is not the majority of the international community. There were many countries, including India and Pakistan in South Asia, China and Southeast Asian countries, Middle Eastern countries and also Russia, who understood the situation in Sri Lanka. Many countries supported us in defeating the LTTE. Therefore, it is very important

not to use the term “international community” in a general sense. However, due to various reasons, a section of the international community are putting pressure on the Government. That is because for decades the LTTE controlled the Tamil Diaspora in those countries. There are many moderate Tamil people who do not believe these things, but the voice and the controlling power is still with the LTTE and pro-LTTE elements of the Diaspora. The Diaspora has established themselves and they are citizens of these countries and most importantly they have the voting power. In certain constituencies, they are even capable of deciding the outcome of elections. They have positioned themselves in such a manner that this has become the deciding factor of the Tamil vote. Thus, the LTTE can put pressure on these governments. Thus the pro-LTTE sections of the Diaspora have become a political force that can influence governments.

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In the past, the LTTE was very powerful in their propaganda. They were building up a case and giving the wrong picture of the situation in Sri Lanka. In certain countries, there are many political leaders who believe the LTTE version of the situation and they put pressure on their government. In the world at present there is a big trend in favour of Human Rights, Fundamental Rights and Media Freedom. There are various groups in these countries and NGOs who are acting on these issues. They also put pressure on these governments and they in turn bring pressure through the UN. These NGOs pressurise the UN as well. That is another reason why there is pressure on Sri Lanka.

Since Sri Lanka is situated in a strategically important place or because of our natural resources, these powers who cause trouble could have a different agenda. Sri Lanka is very important for various reasons. Maybe there are certain interests that they have on Sri Lanka. At that time they were putting pressure on the Government to halt the Military operations and talk to the LTTE. But President Mahinda Rajapaksa was very adamant to go through the whole process because we had seen that talking to the LTTE was of no use. We had seen several times, how the negotiations had failed and we saw that the LTTE was not genuine. They were using talks and the CFA to purely strengthen their military purposes or to regroup. At the time President Mahinda Rajapaksa took over office, the talks had collapsed for over one year and he restarted the talks, he gave the opportunity to the LTTE to

genuinely discuss and come to a settlement. But it was very clear that they were not interested in talking. They had no interest in a solution. Therefore, once we started the Military operations, we did not want to stop.

The foreign elements failed to stop the Military operations against the LTTE. They tried very hard to give Prabhakaran and other LTTE leaders an opportunity to escape or surrender, but foreign elements failed in that as well. Therefore, now they are trying through various other means such as accusing the Government of war crimes and Human Rights violations. It is very clear, now the requirement is not to go back on what has happened. The Government was fighting terrorism, which prevailed in this country for a long period of 30 years, which destroyed many lives and property. Today, the Government has been able to stop all violence. There has not been a single incident of violence. Our Military was a disciplined Force, and that is why we were able to defeat such a powerful terrorist organisation. An indisciplined Force cannot win a war. Discipline, training, efficiency and professionalism are key to war victories. That is why we were able to secure this victory.

Our Military Was A Disciplined Force, And That Is Why We Were Able To Defeat Such A Powerful Terrorist Organisation. Discipline, Training, Efficiency And Professionalism Are Key To War Victories.

For example, if a group of soldiers kill innocent civilians, it is a crime. If anyone commits a crime, we punish them. It's the normal law and that is how we have been working. During these four years, not a single case was heard where the Military has used their power to commit crimes such as walk into a village and kill innocent civilians. There were no complaints of such nature. That shows that we were very disciplined. Further, there were no cases reported on rape. These are crimes regardless of whether they were committed during war or peace. We have a system where we take action to prevent these incidents from happening. Otherwise we cannot maintain discipline nor win the war.

During this period, if there were cases of theft or similar incidents, we have taken action against the culprits. We have military and police personnel in custody. We have arrested them, taken action if there is any indiscipline. There were many people, observers, media persons watching the Military as we progressed and there were no complaints from anyone. However, if somebody is trying to find out whether during the height of battle whether some stray bullet had gone and hit a

civilian or a hospital building, those are not war crimes. It is important to understand the difference and also the ground realities at that time.

Throughout this period, we followed certain rules, regulations and principles that were not adhered by anyone in the world even in the recent past. From the very beginning we adopted the principle of zero civilian casualties, which was not followed anywhere else in the world. We also had safe zones and no fire zones. We were not fighting a conventional battle; we were fighting a terrorist group. They adopted various methods of fighting and they did not have rules and regulations because they were terrorists. They could do anything. But we had safe zones and no fire zones for the civilians to go. In each battle we had no fire zones. We even controlled and put a limitation on the weapons that we could use. There were restrictions on the use of heavy weapons and air strikes. These regulations were all self-imposed. Nowhere in the world does the military self-impose this type of restrictions. But we did. It is not a rule or regulation that is written anywhere, UN charters or any other document does not state that they cannot use artillery, but we imposed these restrictions on our side. That shows how we have taken steps to safeguard civilian lives. These are commendable steps. The international community and the UN must commend us for taking these kinds of measures, not criticise us. We maintained that position till the very last minute. Restrictions on the use of heavy weapons, air strikes, all these steps and measures were taken to prevent civilian casualties. These are very commendable steps that the Government put in place to safeguard innocent civilians.

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The civilians had become used to war situations because they have been in that environment for 30 years. Even today, all throughout the North and in the Wanni area, you will see houses with their roofs, windows and doors taken out. It has not been discussed before, but what does it say? They had enough time to remove these things and go because they knew when the Army was advancing. The civilians had enough time to move out. Further, the LTTE also forced them to remove the roofs of their homes. The civilians had sufficient time to remove these things and they knew what zones to avoid. The civilians knew very well, so they were withdrawing when the Military was coming close. There was no possibility of being caught in cross fires. Till the last moment they were able to move safely

avoiding these war areas. At the last stages in Pudukudithiruppu there was a major battle that took place where close to 600-800 fighting LTTE cadres died. The battle took place in an area of about one square kilometre. You cannot expect civilians to stay there. It was surrounded from all the sides. If somebody says that there were bombings on a hospital in this area, you cannot expect patients to stay in a hospital while a battle was going on. Once the patients were removed from the hospital and the LTTE was using it, then it is no longer a hospital, it is just another building. One allegation was that a shell fell close to that place, but they must understand the ground realities. Though it was marked as a hospital, the terrorists were occupying it, therefore it was no longer a hospital. It is just a building occupied by terrorists. Still the Forces managed not to fire at that building. Those were the preventive measures that the Military took. They were very careful. At the last stage the LTTE was keeping close to 300,000 people as a human shield. International community, the Ambassadors and the whole world saw how the LTTE was trying to prevent the civilians coming into safe areas, by firing at them. It was again commendable that the Military rescued these people. The whole world thought that there would be many deaths in this place, but with minimal casualties we were able to rescue a large number of civilians. Without considering any of these measures taken by the military and without studying the ground realities, certain individuals are just blaming the Military. That is just to put pressure and it is not right. They want to satisfy the Diaspora as I spoke about before. This is purely to cater to the Diaspora and their voters and it is very unfortunate.

At The Last Stage The LTTE Was Keeping Close To 300,000 People As A Human Shield...It Was Again Commendable That The Military Rescued These People.

If the international community is interested in the situation, they should not talk about taking us to war crime tribunals or punishing us by various means because by destroying the LTTE it is not only that we liberated land, we also liberated the people. The Tamil people living in these areas were virtually living under a dictator, Prabhakaran. We liberated them. The Tamil children did not have an opportunity to study, at the very young age of ten, twelve or fourteen they were forcefully recruited and trained to fight. Everybody knows that there were so many child soldiers. We rescued them and liberated these people. What the international community and the Diaspora should do now is to help develop these areas, educate these people, give opportunities to Tamil people who were oppressed for such a long time under the LTTE.

In some countries the Diaspora is protesting against buying Sri Lankan products. They are punishing the poor people, the people of this country. They should help these people who have been suffering for such a long time to improve their standard of living, develop these areas, develop the infrastructure, give a better life for them, give them proper roads, give them electricity, give them houses, give them education and opportunities to do business and live a better life. That's what they should do. They should encourage more investment in those areas, not prevent buying products that were produced in these areas. In the East there are some garment factories that are already functioning and some are in the process of being established in the Northern area and Wanni. The people who were suffering under the LTTE will work in these factories. When the products of these factories are boycotted it is those innocent people who will be punished. Such activities cater to the needs of a few people who are more interested in their power. Not the needs of the poor people. They have failed to understand the ground realities, which is why they are bringing pressure. They may have ulterior motives but that is not what this country requires.

What The International Community And The Diaspora Should Do Now Is To Help Develop These Areas, Educate These People, Give Opportunities To Tamil People Who Were Oppressed For Such A Long Time Under The LTTE.

The war victory was an achievement of the whole nation. The President, you the Defence Secretary, the three Armed Forces, the Police, the CDF as well as the general public were all part of the team that won peace. What are your views on this?

The whole country was involved in different ways, at various levels. The support given by the people was very important. We were able to recruit many people; during certain months we recruited nearly 5,000. The war was going on for about 3 ½ years. The youth from rural areas joined the Military. Their parents allowed them to join because of the support they had. The priests gave moral support to the people who were joining and who were fighting. There were civil security committees and vigilant committees that safeguarded railway stations and bus stations in towns and villages. Everybody was involved in winning the war.

We had the ability, but the leadership, motivation and a proper direction was lacking. When the leadership, direction and commitment were given everything fell into place. Everybody from the lowest end citizen up to the President, were motivated. Everybody had a different task to perform and all of them performed

that task as a team. At the highest level, the President gave the leadership. Sometimes the wrong term “political leadership” is used but it was not only the political leadership. He was the leader of the country. Militarily as well as politically he was giving direction and leadership. It is this kind of leadership that was lacking for so long.

As I explained, the President gave the opportunity for the LTTE to come to talks but later once he realised that they were not genuine, he decided that the LTTE had to be militarily defeated. Once it was decided, clear directions were given to the Military and the Police. The President never wavered and maintained that stance till the very end. There was no ambiguity and he was very clear and he was very committed to achieving that goal. He did everything to achieve that goal. Whether there were military, political, social or international issues he handled all these to achieve this final goal. He listened to the intelligence organisations, the Military people and he was able to understand the situation. Most importantly he was able to understand where we had failed during the last 30 years.

Militarily, it was very clear that the major draw back was the strength in numbers. The President immediately gave the necessary approvals and released the funds to expand the Military. It was expanded in a manner that was never seen before. The Military strength was tripled, which was the main reason for the victory. The Armed Forces were able to occupy each and every inch once the Forces liberated the land and the LTTE could not return to those areas. Thus, we were able to operate militarily in a very broader front. Previously, we always operated in a narrow front and when we went forward the LTTE surrounded us. It happened repeatedly. However this time the LTTE did not have that opportunity. We needed a large number of troops and the President understood that requirement. Therefore, he approved to expand the Forces – the Army, Navy, Air Force, the Police and the CDF. All security organisations were expanded tremendously which was a major factor that contributed towards the victory.

The President’s priority was to win the war, therefore he expanded the Armed Forces. A huge military means you have to spend money, not only for their pay and allowances, but also procuring equipment, arms and ammunition. However, since that was the requirement, the President gave everything. He understood the requirements to win.

The President understood what countries were important to us. It is a mistake made by many because they think that US and the Western countries should be the focus. Their focus was in those countries because they were putting more pressure on us. But militarily, to win the war those were not the important countries. The most important country was India, because there are 60 million Tamils living just north of Jaffna. It is a very sensitive issue in India. If one looks at the history, everybody knows India's role in this issue and what happened from the 80's until now. India is the most important country; therefore, the President adopted methods to maintain India's confidence and to retain their support till we get a complete hold on the operation. Sensitive issues came up at certain times. To handle these, President put in place a mechanism that went beyond the Foreign Ministry and assigned officials to manage them.

Pakistan, China and Russia were the main suppliers of arms and ammunition and the President kept them updated and maintained friendly relations with them. He was also aware of how to counter the pressure when it came from the UN and the Human Rights Commission in Geneva. All friendly countries were briefed and we received their support. I believe that it was the best period in our foreign policy. Some people think that only talking to the US, UK and Europe are important but as far as the war was concerned those countries are not important. The President understood which countries were very important. Southeast Asian countries were very important because the LTTE was based there. Therefore, more concentration was put on that region and shared the information with those countries. The President understood that and he tackled military, foreign policy and international community and kept the important people with us. It was important to understand who were key to solve this problem. That was why we were able to keep these countries with us and win.

Socially, we had to retain the support of the majority of people. We cannot go on a military campaign without the backing of people. Success depends on the support of the masses and the President was able to keep the masses with him. The majority of the people were with the President and they knew that he was doing the right thing.

But Militarily, To Win The War USA And Western Countries Were Not The Important Countries. The Most Important Country Was India, As 60 Million Tamils Live There.

Media was also important. Earlier, certain media misinformed politicians, leaders of this country and the international community. We started the defence website and gave our side of the story and people believed in that. We were very successful. We also effectively used the Government television stations to give the correct picture to the people and give confidence to the people. Ultimately our defence web reached 30 million hits. At that time there was an average of 18 million hits a day. People started supporting us and that is how we gathered the support from the masses, the majority of the people.

Political stability was also very important. We could have expanded the Army and won battles, but if the Government had collapsed, terrorism would have been there even today. Prabhakaran would still have been living. The President knew that he had a minority Government and to go forward with the mission uninterrupted he had to have a stable Government. For that reason he had to increase the cabinet. He was criticised because some did not know why it had to be done. The President had to have political stability in order to keep the Government intact. If the 2007 budget had failed and the Government collapsed we would have had to stop the military operation. The President needed political stability and he understood its importance. Therefore, the President had to create ministries and keep the Government intact. He had to ensure political stability, which was very important to end the war.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa never took the war as an excuse...Mega development projects such as Hambantota Port, Norochcholai Power Plant and Uma Oya were started.

The President did not say that taxes have to be imposed or that we have to stop development projects because of the war. He never took the war as an excuse. As a result of the expenditure incurred on the war, people understood that the cost of living would go up. But at that time the cost of living went up in the whole world. The President was aware that we have to go for at least 3 ½ to 4 years to finish the war. It was a long period, therefore the President not only thought of the war effort but also on development. That was why even with all these difficulties he gave the subsidy for fertiliser. From time to time the Government servants' salaries were increased. Mega development projects such as Hambantota Port, Norochcholai Power Plant, Uma Oya were started. The President did all those while the war was going on. He understood each and every aspect and provided solutions for everything. Some people, including some educated individuals think that taking a

weapon and firing is the war. But it is not so. That is only a small part of the whole process.

It is important to realise that the whole nucleus of this Military was developed over the 30 years. It was not in December, 2005 that we created the Special Forces, the Commandos and artillery units. It was an evolving process; from the 70's, 80s, from the day the first soldier died, we did many experiments to counter various LTTE tactics, trial and error, many sacrifices were made to develop this Military. However the Forces were not properly used and not given the proper strength to counter the threat at the correct time. It was not given directions and not led properly by the leadership of this country.

It is not a single Force or service, but it was the effort of a complete team. The President at the top coordinated and gave leadership. That is what is important.

During these 30 years we had many good Commanders and Military leaders such as General Kobbekaduwa, General Wimalaratne, General Janaka Perera and General Laki Wijeratne who sacrificed their lives. There were also many officers who had served for so many years and retired. For example, Gamini Hettiarachchi was responsible for completely building the Special Forces. There were so many senior and junior officers and officers at various other levels, who had served their whole lives and retired. This is an effort of all these people. The President used this Military properly. We had the nucleus. He recruited more people and gave the full strength and gave the proper equipments for the Military and used it. He gave a clear direction and that is very important. The Military was not developed overnight and it has a long history. For thirty years it was developed. What we have achieved today, was through all these people who have sacrificed by way of life and limb, by the people who served, fought, survived and retired.

There are many people like Hettiarachchi, who have sacrificed their whole lifetime for the Army. It is their efforts that ultimately President intelligently used in the proper direction and achieved results.

Throughout the years we had all these people, but they were not utilised intelligently. It was the effort of everyone. The President downwards to the last

citizen of this country contributed in different ways at different levels. The Navy Commander did his job. The Army Commander did his job and the Air Force Commander did his job. The Divisional Commanders did their jobs. The pilots did their job. The policemen, investigators and intelligence were crucial in protecting other areas, Western Province in particular by preventing and minimising casualties, while the soldiers were fighting in the North and Wanni. They also safeguarded the harbour, airport, oil refineries, the Colombo city, and minimised the casualties and attacks. We did not have any major car bomb. Those incidents were minimised through various means. Everybody was motivated and their services were used in a manner that was never seen before.

Every incident that took place in Colombo whether it was the Dehiwala railway bomb attack, Piliyandala bus bomb or the various suicide attacks, in every case we traced down to the last man and caught everybody who was involved. Numerous intelligent units, Police, investigators went and caught the culprits. The LTTE cells and safe houses in Colombo were broken. Some measures that we took were criticised but they were done for a purpose. We effectively used the Police and the CDF. The CDF who was called "gambattas" was trained and formed into a force. They were given machine guns and they protected threatened villages. As a result, after the incident at Kebithigollewa, except a few cases, nothing happened at threatened villages. We protected the threatened villages. Had there been attacks on the harbour, airport and such, the President would have had to stop the mission. If similar cases such as Kebithigollewa happened all over the country, there would have been pressure to stop the war. Every small aspect was very important because it is like a chain. It is not a single Force or service, but it was the effort of a complete team. The President at the top coordinated and gave leadership. That is what is important.

At present, after one year from the war victory, as the person behind the military strategy and who guided the Armed Forces to this victory, what are your views on Sri Lanka achieving sustainable peace?

Everybody should understand that by ending the war, people must feel that we have defeated terrorism. Therefore, now we are able to relax certain rules and regulations and allow people to move freely. This would also include removing obstacles such as roadblocks, search operations and such other precautionary measures. At the same time we must remember that security of the country is number one. We have suffered for 30 years and many sacrifices were made in order

to defeat terrorism in this country. Therefore we should not allow such destruction to recur. Not only for the next two or three years, it is for all future generations to come. As such preventing the rise of terrorism is the responsibility of all. Therefore, not only the Government, Military, Police but all citizens should understand that security is number one.

The Defence Establishments Need To Ensure Peace And Security In The Country. We Have To Improve Our Intelligence And Information Gathering And Make Sure That If A Situation Arises It Is Solved At A Very Early Stage.

The LTTE is no more and there is no one to carry weapons and fight. Therefore, there is no longer the need to continue fighting but we have to implement precautionary measures or conduct operations in a different way to ensure the security of this country in order to guarantee that a terrorist group will never raise its head again.

There are certain actions that the defence establishments need to do to ensure peace and security in the country. We have to improve our intelligence and information gathering and make sure that if a situation arises it is solved at a very early stage. We have to remember that the LTTE began in the jungle. Therefore we are required to dominate the jungles of Wanni in the North and Thoppigala in the East. Surveillance of these areas is a necessity to prevent certain elements from regrouping; even two or three people are enough to start the violence again because we are still recovering weapons hidden in underground caches in Mullaitivu. We do not know as yet the amount of arms and ammunition that have come into the country and where they are buried. It is very difficult to locate these armaments, therefore, we have to find people who know those locations.

At the same time we should not forget the international elements that are working against us as well as the Diaspora. Not everyone, but LTTE biased and the LTTE international network is still functioning, which is apparent from what is happening in the world. This in turn can influence LTTE sympathisers here. There are many LTTE cadres who have surrendered but we do not know to what extent they will give up their ideas. In addition, there are LTTE cadres who went underground. That is why it is important to keep this in mind and the Military and the Police to continue with their planning. That does not mean that we will do search operations and other

such activities, but certain security measures will be taken. That is what is important. Surveillance, intelligence gathering, and most importantly total domination of the sea is the priority now. This is very important to Sri Lanka because the LTTE was able to bring in weapons through the sea to Mullaitivu. It is essential that we dominate the ocean. It is important to see how the LTTE cadres were trained abroad and brought into Sri Lanka, how the weapons were smuggled into Sri Lanka. These are things that we have to remember and take steps to prevent from happening again. Therefore, the Navy and the intelligence personnel have a vital role to play.

It is important for everyone to understand that we have achieved peace after 30 years by making immense sacrifices.

It is important for everyone to understand that we have achieved peace after 30 years by making immense sacrifices. Everybody must understand the difficulty of this and if you neglect the security of this country what the repercussions will be. Especially the legal structure of this country must support the Security Forces and they must understand this aspect. Politicians of this country must understand the situation and continue to support defence personnel to do their duty. It is not for anyone else, but for the future generations of this country. Otherwise there is always the possibility that this could happen again. That does not mean that we will have roadblocks and search operations; we will gradually change into different form of operations like surveillance, monitoring and information gathering. These mechanisms are very important to stabilise the situation and ensure 100% security of this country.

During the past year, one considerable change that we could see was that people travel. This kind of freedom was not there in the past 30 years. People either did not have the financial resources or there was terrorism. As a person who was key in bringing in that freedom what do you feel about it?

The real victory was normalising and to give a normal life to people. For every single man of this country, that is the real victory. It is not just getting the control of each and every inch of this country or defeating and killing all the LTTE leaders. Those are huge achievements. However, the real victory is if you give what the people have lost for the last 30 years and for anybody to live or start a business anywhere in the country, that is the real achievement, the real victory. When I see that is happening, I am very happy because I feel a sort of achievement and self-

satisfaction to see people move and see the freedom everywhere, the people celebrating the festivals. Everybody must do that. That is the real victory.

Following the end of war, we have seen one Presidential Election, one General Election and also Provincial Council Elections where the whole country, even those in the North and East had the freedom to exercise their franchise without any fear from the terrorists. This proves that the LTTE has been destroyed. What is the significance of this achievement?

Everyone can see the real benefits. Tourists are coming and all the hotels are full. In this environment we can invite investors to start new projects. Our own businessmen can invest in the country and that is really the true achievement of this victory. We still remember what happened just a year ago.

The people in the North and East who were under the domination of the LTTE were brainwashed and they did not know any other life. The situation is still very fragile and we are now able to show these people that there is a world beyond weapon and war. That is why the President initiated the *Negenahira Navodaya* and *Uthuru Wasanthaya* programmes immediately after the liberation of the North and East. The Provincial Council elections were held in the East to show them that it is not necessary to fight, that it was not necessary to take up arms to achieve their rights - that there are democratic means. The President wanted to show the people of the North and East that there was a world beyond. Up to a certain extent, he was successful but the situation during the Presidential elections this year was very unfortunate.

For the first time we were able to have many parties and candidates contesting the elections, but we must remember that democratic processes are very new to many of the people in the North and East. They do not know the importance of having the right to vote, political rights and what is an election. A certain percentage came and voted and that is a good trend. It is however important that political parties do not spread this communal feelings and ideas. What is important is that these areas develop their education so that their children can go to school, start their businesses, resettle and start their livelihoods. These are what are important.

However during the past year, with all the achievements, there were unfavourable incidents that distracted people from this great victory. What can you tell us about this?

Anybody has the right to contest the election that is not the issue. But everybody has the responsibility to safeguard the security of this country. There is a limit. At the last Presidential elections we saw the Opposition going beyond these limits. Not thinking about the country as a whole. We know that the victory is not only for the President, not only for the Secretary of Defence or the Forces. It is a victory for every single person in this country. Therefore we have to safeguard and protect this victory. You can sacrifice anything but not this! During the past Presidential elections because of the greediness and selfishness of the Opposition, they went beyond. That is why they used every method to try and win the elections. Their tactics scarred this entire victory that we achieved. It is very unfortunate. Due to the false propaganda and also by trying to paint a different picture certain sections of society were misled which was very unfortunate and it happened purely because of the Opposition politicians thinking only about themselves and their greediness for power.

It Is Very Important For Any Political Party To Remember That They Should Not Take These People Back Into That Dark Age. This Is Very Important.

The TNA came out with the same conditions that the LTTE had also been pursuing: the TNA brought up the issues of the Tamil homeland and power sharing. It was unfortunate because the people who were concentrating on regaining normalcy in their lives were pulled back into the LTTE mindset. I very strongly recommend the Government to ban any organisation that encourages communal politics. Propagating these types of divisional theories among people is bad. Innocent people have suffered for so many years, therefore, we cannot allow this kind of negativity to continue. These political parties are misusing the benefits of democracy and we cannot allow this to happen. This is not about freedom of speech, you cannot go against the norms of this country and the constitution. It is very important for any political party to remember that they should not take these people back into that dark age. This is very important.

This situation has resulted in people losing their respect for the Armed Forces, which is saddening. How can this situation be rectified?

I do not believe that the people have lost their respect for the Armed Forces. Since what the Military has achieved is extremely great. The sacrifices they made during the Humanitarian Operations need to be remembered throughout history. There were issues that arose because of General Sarath Fonseka entering the political arena, which was purely for his own benefit. He wanted power because of his selfishness and greediness. Very few supported him from the Military. As a whole

the Military acted very responsibly. This again proved their discipline and commitment. Now we have to focus on their tasks and bring the concentration back to maintaining security of this country, rather than thinking on unnecessary things. The Officers understood the importance of maintaining security, discipline and concentration. They understand what their future tasks are and their duty towards the country. As I mentioned, stabilisation of the security situation, concentrating on resettlement of the IDPs and concentrating on their new deployments in the present context are very important than being distracted by unnecessary problems caused by people who seek power.

It has only been one year. But people seem to have already forgotten the destruction, fear and the insecurity caused by the most ruthless terrorist organisation in the world that was there for 30 years. Though it is good that people are moving on, it is important that people remember it so that history is not repeated. What are your views on this?

That is true. That is why people should put the security of the country first. Normalcy has to return to this country, but they must keep in mind the security of this country. They must not obstruct. More than the normal citizens, it is the responsibility of the leaders to ensure that security is maintained. Politicians and Diplomats should act responsibly. I do not know whether the people will easily forget what happened during the past 30 years. But of course that does not mean that they have to dwell on the past and not move on. At the same time you must not forget that many people made great sacrifices. During the last 30 years, 26,000 Armed Forces personnel were killed and over 20,000 disabled and there are many civilians who have lost their lives because of terrorism. We should not forget the sacrifices made by these people. This war has left young children and families without a father. Thus, they have made a tremendous sacrifice to the country. The Armed Forces have sacrificed their lives for others to live peacefully. We should not forget that. That is why it is important. As you said people do forget, nothing comes easy. For example, we have different funds such as *Api Wenuwen Api* fund, which was very useful for building houses for Service personnel. At the beginning there were many contributions coming in but now it has fallen to very low levels. People are forgetting.

Stabilisation Of The Security Situation, Concentrating On Resettlement Of The IDPs And Concentrating On Their New Deployments In The Present Context Are Very Important Than Being Distracted By Unnecessary Problems Caused By People Who Seek Power.

There is another factor; unfortunately the Opposition used the collection of funds for the Armed Forces for their political gains. These funds were not for any individual, it is not for my or the President's benefits. It was for the benefit of these soldiers who fought in the war against terrorism. To build houses for these families who lost their family members, for those who were disabled. I have seen the conditions of the houses of the soldiers who come from very rural areas. They need facilities. We have to support them and their families. Otherwise these families will think what a nation this is, what kind of society it is – where their father, son, husband sacrificed their lives – but no one is looking after them. Though the Government has done what is possible to do, there is a responsibility for the country to look after these people and to go beyond the Government and help. That is why we have put in place these mechanisms – giving houses, giving scholarships to the children and such other facilities. All these mechanisms are there to help them. Government's funds are not sufficient and we require the help of the people as well. That is how we can remember those who have sacrificed their lives and limbs for the country.

Even after the end of the Humanitarian Operations there were recruitments to the Armed Forces. People were actually wondering why more were recruited. Can you tell us the reason behind this?

The recruitment depends on the cadre approved by the President and the Government. We have not increased the numbers. We had a certain cadre during the period when the Humanitarian Operations were going on. We particularly strengthened the cadre of the Army, Navy and Air Force. We have not gone beyond the requirement and we will maintain it for a certain period of time. After maybe five years, we can see whether this needs to be revised. Recruitment is done to fill the wear and tear of the Forces. People retire or leave the Forces, therefore, recruitment is done to fill those needs. We have not increased the strength of the Military. It depends on the cadre. At present the cadre is fixed at a stable level.

Government funds are not sufficient and we require the help of the people to support the war heroes and their families. That is how we can remember those who have sacrificed their lives and limbs for the country.

Since the end of the Humanitarian Operations, rebuilding the nation has been assigned to the Armed Forces. Can you explain the reason behind this?

There are certain things that the Armed Forces can do. The Engineering units can build roads and bridges and other such infrastructure. The Army is still assisting in the resettlement of the displaced people in the North and East; especially in the

North at the moment.

Even the Navy and Air Force are involved in non-combatant activities. For example, the Air Force is now offering air transport services including helicopter tours for both tourists and locals. The Navy is also doing similar kind of things. The Armed Forces can help in different fields. There is much talent and resources in the Armed Forces and those can be utilised in many ways while maintaining the security of the country. Development activities, training people in livelihood activities and also providing skills development are some of the services that can be offered by the Military.

The CDF was especially formed to protect threatened villages. What will their role be in the future?

We have to gradually reduce the numbers because the requirement is no longer there. We cannot immediately send them because the CDF has done a tremendous job. We are now thinking of using them in farms and in development work. We have given directions to the Director General to look at different means to utilise their skills. Some of them can join the Army. In fact many have already done so. CDF members have been assigned to work together at the Police stations. We will not recruit anymore into the Civil Defence Force. We will allow the numbers to go down gradually.

At present the Armed Forces are involved in the post conflict environment. In a few years, once the demining and post war reconstruction is completed, what will be their role?

The Armed Forces are a necessity in any country. We believe that the present strength is the correct size for the time being. A well trained Army, Navy and Air Force is a must in any country to protect the country from both inside and outside forces. We will have to maintain the Army, perhaps not to the exact strength that is there today, it will be different in another five years. But we have to gradually evaluate and see what is the required strength that we have to maintain. The Armed Forces have to be well equipped, well trained and professional. Especially in Sri Lanka, where we had a 30 year long conflict fighting against terrorism and as there is the possibility of it coming back. We have to maintain a very professional Armed Force as a preventive mechanism. It has to be kept in a state of preparedness and not allow to relax. Training has to be continued and proper equipments have to be maintained. Gradually we also have to revamp the Forces into a high-tech entity.

We call it a victory parade because it is not the victory of a single community over another, but the victory of the entire Nation regardless of race or religion.

Liberating the country from the most ruthless terrorism that gripped the country for three decades is an event that has to be commemorated in a grand scale. What plans have been made to commemorate the first year anniversary of achieving peace?

Firstly *Ranaviru* day, which was held in June has been brought forward to May 18. Usually there is a ceremony at the war memorial in front of the Parliament in Sri Jayawardenapura every year. From this year, the function will be held in May. In the morning of May 18, we will have a parade – a victory parade at the Galle Face, involving the three Armed Forces, Police and the CDF. It will take a different form from the Independence Day parade; we want to show the victory.

We call it a victory parade because it is not the victory of a single community over another, but the victory of the entire Nation, regardless of race or religion. The defeat of the LTTE especially liberated the Tamil community – the people who are living in the North and East. We liberated the whole country – every single community and citizen from the hands of the terrorists. That is why we call it a victory. This victory belongs to everybody. It is a victory over terrorism, not a single community but every single person irrespective of race, religion or creed. It is the victory of every single person and that is the message we want to give. That is why we want to celebrate.

What is the future for Sri Lanka?

Due to 30 years of terrorism, everybody thinks of the attack on Sri Maha Bodhiya, the bomb attack on Dalada Maligawa, the killing of Priests in Aranthalawa or the massacres in villages, attacks on Katunayake and death of soldiers and then everyone thinks of the North and East as it was part of the LTTE thus ending this war was a huge victory. We have not only lost lives and property but opportunities for development as well, therefore, this victory is a real victory.

Now We Must Seize The Opportunity And Develop The Country. Most Importantly We Must Change Our Attitudes. We Must Think We Can Do Any Thing...We Have Proven To The Whole World That Anything Is Possible.

It is a fact in such an environment, no tourists will come, no good investors will come. Investors came, but 30 years was a long period of time. During the last decade there was a huge development in the whole world in technology, especially computer technology. We did not receive the real benefits of that development. In other countries there was a big movement and development through technology and we lost all of that. Investors did not come to Sri Lanka. Our businessmen invested in other countries because the situation was not favourable here. Look at the Maldives today; they have a massive tourism industry purely because we could not accept these tourists. Our businessmen did not have the environment to invest here. But now we have created this environment and tourists are already coming in. We can develop that industry and invest more. We can invite investors and also convince big investors to invest in Sri Lanka. There is much potential here in many areas. If you take Singapore it is a place for distribution of services to the whole world. However, Sri Lanka is situated in a better position for that kind of business. Sri Lanka can be the business hub; especially starting with Hambantota Harbour. Many support services can be built around the harbour such as warehouses for the entire region including the Middle East. It is better because we are in the centre of the sea routes. Therefore it is much easier for businesses to store their cargo in Sri Lanka. We can do value addition to products and distribute to various countries; thus there is huge potential.

Now we must seize this opportunity and develop the country. Most importantly we must change our attitudes. We must think we can do anything. The war and the constant failure due to petty reasons had a negative impact on society, but now we have proven to the whole world that anything is possible. Everyone said that the LTTE cannot be defeated and it is a powerful terrorist organisation but we proved that no, you can defeat them. If there is a will and if there is the commitment you can do anything. That positive thinking is very important. Especially the younger generation must think positively and not always look for some Government job. They should think beyond that and also think big. There are many avenues and opportunities for them to select from and be successful. You need not always go in one direction to be a successful man. Especially in this country, that is what the youth need to do, to use their talent to the maximum.

The Government must provide opportunities for the youth and also the environment for people to grow. Sri Lankans should think broadly. There are many opportunities

to develop the country. However that is not only the responsibility of the Government it is also the responsibility of the whole society.

Now that we have gained our freedom, we must not relax because the opportunities are there. We should not stop and relax, we have to utilise the momentum. Another important thing that the Government must realise is that people gave this mandate purely because the Government was successful in eliminating terrorism from this country. It is not a mandate or approval of certain things that happened in the past. The Government should not take this for granted and think that the people have given approval for everything that the Government did. There is much that remains for the Government to do and it is a big challenge. There is corruption in the country and inefficiency in Government departments. Ministers must look into those or else the people will oppose them. It is a huge challenge, especially when the country is opening up. Talking about the victory is over. You cannot depend on that and should not depend on that forever. The Government needs to go beyond the victory and that is very important. They must think of how to develop this country, how to bring the benefits to the people. End corruption and bring efficiency to the Government institutions or you cannot bring growth. To bring growth these aspects are very important. The Cabinet, Ministers, the Government all have a big responsibility. The people have given a very big mandate so now the results must be shown.



