Miloda: A Centre Of Knowledge For The Public Sector

In line with making Sri Lanka a Knowledge Hub as envisioned through the Mahinda Chintana – Vision for the Future, Miloda, The Academy of Financial Studies was ceremonially opened by President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Housed in the newly renovated and refurbished Times Building, The Academy will serve as a training centre for the Ministry of Finance and Planning, the Treasury and for all other departments that come under the directive of the Ministry.

Dr P B Jayasundera – Secretary, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Secretary to the Treasury

I have the rare privilege to welcome you all to Miloda, our in-house training centre. This is a very happy and proud occasion for the Ministry of Finance and Planning. The occasion is to formally declare open Miloda, an academy of financial studies, which is primarily designed to build our in-house knowledge and skills to perform our job well.

We believe that the knowledge we command is much less than the knowledge that we ought to command. We also believe in sharing what we know with others, to enable them to better understand what we are doing and also benefiting from them, their knowledge for us to better understand them, is essential to enhance value addition to our work.

Miloda will set a platform for that. This is a long overdue need of this Ministry and we thank His Excellency the President as the Minister of Finance and Planning, for his uncompromising encouragement towards fulfilling this need. The name Miloda was given by the late Kalasuri Arisen Ahubudu. This name he explained means the facilitation of the generation of financial resources. We need special knowledge to facilitate the process of generating financial resources indeed. We remember him with gratitude, may he attain Nirvana.

This seven storeyed building, which houses Miloda is influenced by 19th Century European architecture. It deserves heritage building status. The challenge was to transform this building into a model training facility, while preserving its old charm and 19th Century grandeur. The academy has state-of-the-art facilities to develop not only our in house knowledge, but also to share with others. We propose and conduct programmes in finance ministries in other parts of the world, particularly in our region and use academic or international financial studies and workshops.

The state-of-the-art information technology used in this premises is meant to stimulate the interest of both lecturers and learners. The Intelligent Digital Lecture Theatre located in the centre of the third floor is our virtual classroom, presumably the first of its kind in Sri Lanka. The facilities, which are used to generate critical thinking are comparable with those institutes of global repute such as Harvard University in the United States.

We have invited vice chancellors of our universities, reflecting our desire to have a partnership with them, as well as to urge them to recognise, Miloda as a higher standard learning institution and work together to realise the knowledge society vision of our President.

We have in this audience our partner representatives from international financial institutions, comprising the IMF, The World Bank, ADB, UNDP, JICA, USAID, The British Council etc. We also have representatives from the National University of Singapore and the British Council. We intend to make this facility available for their use as well for staff conferences, conventions and regional gatherings.

We request them to give consideration to select, Miloda as a regional centre to conduct, a wide range of training programmes, mobilising participants from other countries to Colombo using the finance and vast global experience and knowledge base of such institutions. We hope that while mobilising globally recruited scholars and experts to Colombo there will be a greater opportunity for our multi-disciplinary staff to develop themselves.

We have invited our trusted lead development partner, the Government and the people of Japan, ably represented by the Ambassador of Japan who has committed to help us to build this institution and its capacity to international ranking. I am personally grateful for his inspection visit a week ago to evaluate the facilities of this place.

The participation of Vice President of JAICA, on such short notice encourages us on our journey. I will be failing in my duty if I don’t recognise the immense contribution extended by the Asian Development Bank, through its Fiscal Management Reform Programme to Sri Lanka.

From the third row onwards we have the representatives of labour unions, the private sector, self employees, women’s organisations, professionals, bankers and the media. They all have been our partners in progress, and more importantly, active partners with policy consultation that have enabled us to take well-informed decisions. I thank you all for joining us in this hour of joy. This occasion is to share

these wonderful moments of the Ministry of Finance and Planning with all of you who represent the vast array of stakeholders, in the march towards making a prosperous nation that all of us can be proud of.

This Book Captures A Bird's Eye View Of Policy, Learning Through A Costly Terrorist Conflict, The Transition From A Poor Country To A Middle Income Country And The Vision To Graduate As An Upper Middle-Income Country.

Your Excellency, distinguished invitees, ladies and gentlemen, we have lined up two important items in this programme. One is to appreciate all former Secretaries of Finance. This is on the suggestion of His Excellency the President himself. Thank you Your Excellency for this valuable guidance. Mr Mahadeva regretted for his inability to attend as he is not well. We wish him an early recovery. We regret that we could not contact Mr Paskaralingam who is not in the country. We have here Dr W M Tillakaratne, Mr C Chanmugam, Mr N V K Weeragoda, Mr A S Jayawardena, Mr D C Perera, Mr Dixon Nilaweera, Mr Charitha Ratwatte and Mr Sumith Abeysinghe. Thank you sirs for accepting our invitation and gracing this happy occasion. Your presence is an encouragement to all of us. We place and show our appreciation to late Mr C John, late Mr C V Perera, late Mr A G Ranasinghe, late Mr E K Seneviratne, late Mr S F Samarasinghe, late Mr H S Samarasinghe, late Mr H E Tennekoon, late Mr H A Samarakkody, late Mr M Rajendra, late Mr C A Cooray, and late Dr L R Jayewardena.

All these distinguished personalities have contributed immensely in their terms of office, as Secretaries to the Treasury being strategic partners in the nation's growth. I am sure that each one of them, late former secretaries, and each one of the former secretaries, had to manage difficult if not unmanageable, thankless tasks.

I would not be surprised if you did get blamed by people, sometimes by your own colleagues, friends and relatives for all what happened in the economy. I am not surprised if no one had appreciated you at all when you were in office for all the difficult work you have handled probably at a tremendous personal cost. In this context this initative is an exception, that you are well-respected and appreciated for the responsibilities you have carried out on behalf of the country for a worthy cause. We are grateful to all of you and your families. In awhile His Excellency the

President, will personally extend the nations gratitude to those of you who are present in this audience.

Next item is the launch of the publication, A Nation's Journey, that captures the key milestones in our post independent era as a nation. This book captures a bird's eye view of policy, learning through a costly terrorist conflict, the transition from a poor country to a middle income country and the vision to graduate as an upper middle-income country. It also has a brief overview of our national international relations, and on Miloda itself. I leave you to judge the value of this publication which you will get a copy in appreciation of your presence, this morning at Miloda.

Our staff proposed to me that this publication should be handed over to His Excellency the President in appreciation of his contribution as the Minister of Finance and Planning, since 2005. While transforming the nation from conflict to peace and from a poor country to a middle income society. The journey has been bumpy. The future will be equally bumpy as challenges are enormous. As shown in the document the country has been positioned on a path of high economy growth, with a sustained reduction in unemployment, inflation and poverty.

We Believe That His Excellency Deserves Credit And Appreciation For All These Bold Moves. We Are A Fortunate Lot And A Blessed One, In The Ministry Of Finance And Planning For His Excellency's Fatherly Guidance.

These outcomes need to be repeated in the years ahead of us, as the Minister of Finance and Planning, His Excellency has been successful in reducing the fiscal deficit, to the lowest ever witnessed in the past 30 years. It is not by any accident, but by carefully designed plans, and strategies. Those achievements are results of bold corrective decisions after having engaged in a wide consultation process. They involve balancing hard choices. More such plans, strategies and consultations will be required to address remaining financial imbalances particularly in state enterprises. We believe that His Excellency deserves credit and appreciation for all these bold moves. We are a fortunate lot and a blessed one, in the Ministry of Finance and Planning for His Excellency's fatherly guidance. We are grateful for such extraordinary human qualities. We as officials of the Ministry remain firmly committed to provide well thought out options to make those choices better and support His Excellency's commitment to ensure that Sri Lanka will consolidate as a

middle-income country free of poverty. We need more knowledgeable and quality people to do so. We will use Miloda to equip us for that cause, as the incumbent Secretary I can proudly say that the Ministry of Finance and the Treasury, the key arm of the Ministry maintain the highest level of professional integrity and commitment to perform our task in the best national interest however hard or challenging the task may be. We invited Mr Lalith Weeratunga, Secretary to the President to speak on the publications title, 'The Nation's Journey, Sri Lanka's Transformation to a Middle-income Economy'. We could not think of a better person to do this task than Mr Weeratunga himself. As a fellow public servant, we are proud of his distinguished position at the head of the public service and his level of integrity, commitment and above all simplicity in life. We on behalf of all our staff thank Mr Weeratunga for accepting our invitation and gracing this occasion. Dr Sarath Amunugama Senior Minister of International Monetary Coorporation, and Mr Nivard Cabraal, Governor of the Central Bank, of Sri Lanka, have sent their greetings to this occasions and have expressed their regret for their inability to attend as they are out of the country on official work. I thank them for their support and coorporation in our work. Last but not least, I owe a special word of appreciation to Mrs Shamalie Gunawardena, Director General, Department of Legal Affairs, and her team who managed this project so well and beyond our imagination.

Speech delivered by
Lalith Weeratunga, Secretary to the President

I feel more than privileged to be asked to address this August gathering on a momentous occasion. The occasion being the opening of the Academy of Financial Studies and with it a launch of a very useful publication, 'A Nation's Journey, Sri Lanka's Transformation to a Middle Income Economy'.

Both these landmark activities are done under the leadership of His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, the President of Sri Lanka, make these two events truly unique and memorable. Your Excellency, you have been this country's Minister of Finance since November 2005, a long tenure during which you have guided this country's destiny, to make it a middle income country. Undoubtedly your leadership to defeat terrorism and bring peace to this country is a prime reason that enabled our nation that was battered by the scourge of terrorism for nearly three decades.

Permit me Excellency to quote from the book, Gota's War by C A Chandraprema. I quote, 'Sri Lanka is the only country in the world that has triumphed against terrorism in recent times. And has become an inspiration for many countries beset by intractable political violence. Why Gotabaya succeeded while everybody else failed is because, unlike all the others he had fullest backing of his brother President Mahinda Rajapaksa. No other President would have taken the decision to go for a head-on confrontation with the LTTE, which was considered by many western powers to be 'undefeatable'. No other President would have taken the political risk of prosecuting a war considered to be 'unwinnable' even by dominant sections of the local political establishment. No other President would have stayed the course so resolutely despite set backs on the military front and tremendous pressure coming from overseas. Well, I must also add without Mahinda there would have been no decision to wage war, without Gotabaya, no victory'.

'I Must Also Add Without Mahinda There Would Have Been No Decision To Wage War, Without Gotabaya, No Victory'.

The nation salutes your Excellency for standing up to pressures that no other leader of our country ever endured. And without that emphatic victory over terrorism there would not have been an occasion such as this for us to rejoice.

If I may say a few words on the importance of opening an academy of financial studies, this has been a long felt need in the capacity building of the public sector. With the knowledge domain becoming more and more advanced, it is imperative that those who serve in the Ministry of Finance and the general Treasury are continuously upgraded to undertake the gigantic task of keeping abreast with the developments that take place in the international scene and contribute to make the lives of people better.

It is my firm belief that the architect of Miloda being the indefatigable Secretary to Treasury and my dear friend Dr P B Jayasundera, will guide this new institute to great heights to make it internationally known as a centre of excellence in financial studies, and congratulations.

The other event, the launch of this seminal publication, A Nation's Journey, Sri

Lanka’s Transformation to a Middle Income Economy, is most certainly highly laudable. This publication encapsulates in milestones of our journey as a nation, particularly in the last 65 years in the post independence era. A student of history would find it the ideal reference. To find a heap of interesting facts pertaining to public administration in our motherland.

It is a quintessence of a compendium of events of Governments and will be an ideal reference to all of us in the public sector. This much awaited reference has in its contents logically divided portions that describes important events in each era of our post independence history.

A short but quite informative, a glimpse into the pre-independence era takes you to the essentials of that period. That’s how the book starts. One cannot expect a very detailed description as one would find in our chronicles such as ‘Mahavamsa‘ but emphasis has been laid on finance and economy particularly for the period that I was talking about.

The era since 1948 up to 1955 is the next section that gives you many historical facts. Such as, who the Governor Generals were, the Prime Ministers who were also the heads of Government at that time. Ministers of Finance, Secretaries to the Treasury and so on.

‘Over And Above Other Achievements President Rajapaksa Will Always Be Remembered By Sri Lankans As The Only Political Leader Who Was Successful In Liberating The Country From The Grips Of LTTE Terror That Prevailed For Over 30 Years.’

The compilation of the list of acts passed by the legislature is also a very interesting feature that I find in this book. Every section that follows has similar relevant information pertaining to that particular era.

The next section, the era of 1956 to 1976, a period of 20 years labelled as emphasis on self reliance, provides the reader with an impressive array of information that will, without doubt, help any student of political science, history, public

administration and of course public finance. For anyone who requires authentic references as to how our journey was shaped, this is of course invaluable.

The section that describes the events from 1977 to 2005, the era towards an open economy provides the reader with much information on how the economy of our motherland took a different path. It is in this period of our history that terrorism and separatism raised its ugly head threatening the very existence of our nation. The set backs we have had are too numerous to mention.

Your Excellency, the story from November 2005 to date naturally provides details that would interest many a reader. This is the era during which we exceeded all expectations.

I would like to quote from page 199 to be exact of the publication that we are about to launch, and I quote, ‘Over and above other achievements President Rajapaksa will always be remembered by Sri Lankans as the only political leader who was successful in liberating the country from the grips of LTTE terror that prevailed for over 30 years.’

In a very short introduction to this well compiled book, one cannot do justice to the hard work of the compilers. And I regret that. Let me therefore once more quote from the book that I think in a few words portray the massive development efforts of this era. That is the era of President Rajapaksa’s governance.

I quote, ‘following the end of the conflict in mid 2009, President Rajapaksa accelerated development efforts as never before seen in the history of Sri Lanka, covering all sectors of the economy. The massive infrastructure development projects that are been implemented throughout the country is a result of increased public investment expenditure channelled towards value creation, to alleviate poverty, to create an enabling environment to facilitate enterprise development and promote private investments while attracting foreign investment, to steer Sri Lanka towards becoming a middle income country’.

As should be the case from page 201 onwards of this publication, is a narrative of the ‘Mahinda Chintana‘ vision for the future. From 2005 onwards we were able to pass several milestones. Let me name some of them. Crossing the USD 2,000 per capita income in 2008, that is doubling the same from USD 1,000 in 2004. And on our way to the USD 3,000 mark very soon. Annual growth of over eight percent particularly in two consecutive years in 2010 and 2011. Inflation brought down to seven percent, unemployment at a record low of five percent. Poverty reduced from 15.6 to 8.9 percent, IT literacy enhanced from under four percent in 2004 to over forty percent in 2012. Budget deficit reduced to 6.8 from ten percent and debt to GDP reduced to 80 percent from 100 percent.

These are only a few indicators highlighted in this publication and I will invite the reader to savor the other interesting details. The last portion of this magnificent publication is dedicated to, what the Ministry of Finance and Planning has done in the service of our nation. It aptly describes the role of the Ministry, that of shaping the economy. The edifice which has housed successive Ministries of Finance of independent Ceylon and later Sri Lanka, and of course the legislative council and its successors, had only cost 450,000 rupees including extra expenses for lifts etc in 1930.

It is from these offices our economy over a period of 65 years of Independence has been shaped. And I see those distinguished gentlemen who have adorned the important chair of Secretary to the Treasury with us today and welcome sirs.

When I Was Given A Manuscript To Prepare For This Address, And When I Read Through I Could See The Hand Of My Dear Friend P B At Work, For I Saw The Lucid, Precise And Yet Descriptive Analysis Of Events In Our History. I Salute You P B, My Friend As A Fellow Public Servant For This Enriching Exercise You Have Undertaken.

His Excellency, honoured guests, I must say a few words about the compilation of this excellent compendium of events and enlightening analysis and presentation of the seminal events of our journey so far. What words could have used to describe this humongous effort, I sincerely cannot find in my store of words. Let me pay handsome tribute to my dear friend and colleague, Dr P B Jayasundera, Secretary to the Treasury and Secretary of the Ministry of Finance and Planning, for both these

activities – the opening of the Academy of Financial Studies as well as the launch of this fantastic publication. I'm privy to the hard work P B has put in with such meticulous care to bring out learning materials of this nature and enrich our literature on public administration and finance.

When I was given a manuscript to prepare for this address, and when I read through I could see the hand of my dear friend P B at work, for I saw the lucid, precise and yet descriptive analysis of events in our history. I salute you P B, my friend as a fellow public servant for this enriching exercise you have undertaken.

My praise and that of all of us, should also go to all of your colleagues in the treasury who ventured to execute this unprecedented task with such finesse.

In conclusion, I want to reminisce what His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa presented to the nation in November 2005 in the Mahinda Chintana towards a new Sri Lanka. I quote, 'blending all your thoughts, developed man towards preserving the family, developed family towards preserving the village, developed village towards preserving the country, and developed country to win the world. These aspirations 'Chintana of Mahinda are placed before you. My dream is an independent nation, a country of greenery, for a prosperous tomorrow and a virtuous man. Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers, all children of Mother Lanka with gleaming eyes filled with expectations, you are gazing at us, that I know. Those expectations ought to be made a reality. The faith I have in me, no doubt will help fulfill them. Towards a blissful future we all shall step together.'

Having placed your thoughts, promises before the nation, your Excellency you ventured as the President and the Minister of Finance and Planning on an unprecedented mission fulfilling almost all your promises particularly to achieve peace. Here is what you said to a fellow countrymen in January 2010 when you presented Mahinda Chintana, vision for the future. 'To win the world, develop the country, to develop the country, strengthen the village, to strengthen the village, protect the family, to protect the family, care for the person. I promised you a free nation. I promised you sustainable development, I assured you a better society, I assured you a land of plenty, I delivered. The children of Mother Lanka, Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Malay, Burgher look to us with hope to be their trustee and to be the

one who realised their dreams. Now I present to you our vision for a brighter future. Together we will make the journey with your trust and I will deliver.’

Well that is the story that I unfold before you, and I have this great privilege of being able to say a few words launching this landmark book. While thanking Your Excellency for your patience and of course your leadership and we have had the privilege of being a part of your team for the past eight years. May I once again thank Dr Jayasundera for giving me this unique honour, an occasion that will linger in my mind for many more years to come.

day of January 2013
by
xcellency Mahinda Rajapaksa
the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
Minister of Finance and Planning
at the request of
Dr. P. B. Jayasundera
Secretary to the Treasury
ecretary, Minister of Finance and Planning
was graced by Hon. Dr. Sarath Amunugama
Deputy Minister of Finance and Planning
and
His Excellency Norbuhiro Hofer
Ambassador of Japan to Sri Lanka