Speech By His Excellency President Gotabaya Rajapaksa On 74th Independence Day

February 4, 2022



His Excellency President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Most Venerable Maha Sangha, Other Religious Dignitaries, Hon. Prime Minister, Hon. Speaker, Hon. Chief Justice, Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Ministers and Hon Governors, Hon. State Ministers, Hon. Members of Parliament, Ambassadors and

High Commissioners, Secretary to the President and all Government Officials, Chief of Defence Staff and Commander of the Army, Commander of the Navy, Commander of the Air Force and Inspector General of Police, Director-General of the Civil Security Department, Distinguished Guests, War Heroes, All Sri Lankan Brothers and Sisters, Beloved Children. Throughout history, people of various nations have struggled, fought, and made great sacrifices for their right to live as dignified citizens in a free country.

In Sri Lanka, Great Kings such as Dutugemunu, Walagamba, Maha Parakumba, Vijayabahu, and Parakumba the Sixth fought against foreign invaders during various periods a 2,500-year history, liberated the country from foreigners, and united it.

It is now 74 years since our country finally gained freedom from 450 years of European colonial rule. Even after independence, we had to fight for nearly three decades against any attempt to divide this country through terrorism. Today Sri Lanka is a free, sovereign, democratic country. We are its proud citizens.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all patriots who dedicated themselves to gaining complete freedom for our country, facing various obstacles throughout history, and continuing to secure the liberty so gained.

Every Sri Lankan citizen, irrespective of any community or religion, has the right to live freely and safely anywhere in the country today. There is the freedom to practice the religion of their choice. There is the freedom to hold independent opinions and express ideas. There is complete media freedom in the country. Sri Lankan citizens have the freedom to elect their representatives through a fully democratic mechanism and for those interested to engage in the political process and governance.

This is a cause for joy and pride for all of us.

As people of a free and democratic country, we all have rights and responsibilities.

The most significant benefit from freedom is when everyone fulfills their duty to the country. It is not appropriate to speak of rights only while forgetting responsibilities.

The freedom of a country is most meaningful when it is robust in social, political, and economic spheres. As much as a government, the people too have the right to contribute towards this actively.

When steering the country in the right direction, we know that the support of each and every person in the country cannot be expected. We are not ready to abandon our plans for the country's future prosperity by looking upon those who will not change. Our objective is to do what is right by the country and not please everyone.

The People Expect Leaders To Manage All These Crises And Take The Country Forward, But Not Escape From Problems. We Have The Positive Mindset Needed For That. I Am Always Ready To Provide The Necessary Leadership To Overcome The Country's Challenges.

We can make our way forward successful only with a positive attitude that looks optimistically towards the future. We can surmount the challenges we meet only if we dedicate ourselves to a victorious journey.

Pessimists do not change the world. They do not even have the capacity for it. Those who habitually criticize without proposing a solution to a problem do not have a vision for the future.

A nation's leader must constantly face many difficulties, calamities, problems, and challenges. Leading a team towards a vision is not easy. Changing the existing ways, no matter how good the intention, is not easy either. On some issues, both local and foreign forces organize against us. Sometimes it may seem that everything that happens around you is conspiring against you.

The people expect leaders to manage all these crises and take the country forward, but not escape from problems. We have the positive mindset needed for that. I am always ready to provide the necessary leadership to overcome the country's challenges.

The world has been changed and will be changed by those people with positive ideas who dream of a future with optimism and strive to make it a reality. We have seen this throughout history. Social progress in all developed nations has been possible due to the positive thoughts of their leaders and the people.

Our kings in the past built vast stupas such as Ruwanweliseya, Jethavanaramaya, and Abhayagiriya in this same positive attitude. We had an excellent irrigation technology that created Minneriya Tank, Kala Wewa, Parakrama Samudraya, and Yoda Ela. Cities such as Sigiriya still mesmerize the world. Sri Lanka was a famed naval hub in the ancient world. If we were able to accomplish such feats, we ought

to compete with the world in the future.

The most important criterion for this is the belief in ourselves.

Difficult times do not last forever. People of great resolve are needed to face difficult times. Anyone who demoralizes another is not doing any good to society at this moment. Therefore, we all have an enormous responsibility to build a positive attitude to face these crises successfully. We have faced critical problems in recent history as well and found solutions. When pessimists maintained that terrorism could never be defeated in war, brave military leaders like General Denzil Kobbekaduwa and General Vijaya Wimalaratne instilled a positive attitude in their men that terrorism can be a fact defeated. Later, under exemplary political leadership, we could defeat terrorism in as little as 3 ½ years because we believed in our capabilities. None of the crises we experience today are long-term problems. We can find solutions to them with an optimistic approach.

There is a role that each of us can play to expedite this process. We must all endeavor to do our utmost for the country by properly fulfilling our responsibilities. We realized early on that the only solution to the COVID-19 pandemic was vaccination. Hence, we have provided both vaccine doses to over 85 percent of the targeted population, controlled the disease, and resumed everyday community life. By now, all vaccine doses required to administer the booster to the people have been imported to Sri Lanka.

Rather than go back many years into the past searching for reasons for the economic problems that the country faces today, what is more, relevant is to find both short and long-term solutions for such. This is what we as a government focuses on. We need to improve all three agriculture, industry, and services sectors to strengthen Sri Lanka’s economy. Special attention must be paid to ways and means to enhance export revenue while encouraging local production. While our national policies are evident on this stance, there should be more active participation in all sectors in implementing them.

Investment is an essential factor in the development process of our country. While the government is constantly encouraging investments, we need both local and foreign investments. Foreign investment is significant for large-scale projects, industries requiring modern technological know-how, and new ventures that open up global market opportunities for us. People need to be vigilant of those who attempt to propagate incorrect public opinion against foreign investments based on

political motives.

We cannot accelerate economic development without encouraging entrepreneurship and removing obstacles entrepreneurs face. We are responsible for being more respectful and friendly to entrepreneurs who start their businesses amidst various vulnerabilities and provide employment and income opportunities for others. Government officials should fully understand the contribution of entrepreneurs to the country's development and provide all assistance they require expeditiously within the legal framework. By preventing significant delays in business registration and investment approvals, we can mobilize the entire economic process in the country.

Several education reforms are taking place to create more productive citizens. Every child completing school education must strive to develop a skill or industry that can contribute to the country's economic process. One must enhance knowledge in the chosen sector and acquire professional qualifications. In this manner, you have the opportunity to contribute to the country's economic process directly.

The people who shed their sweat in farmlands, factories, and workplaces make an active contribution to the country's economy. I pay my respects to all of them.

Expatriating Sri Lankans who provide foreign exchange is a significant resource. We have not forgotten how they came forward for the country in the recent past and supported us in making tremendous sacrifices. We greatly appreciate their regular contribution to energizing our economy. I invite all expatriate Sri Lankans to invest in their homeland. This will enable you to continue actively contributing to building the country's future.

If we are to win over the challenges before us and accomplish our future goals, we all have to make a change. We all have to make some sacrifices towards it. As the country's president, I am ready to set the necessary example. I am already doing this to the best of my ability. I ask all Ministers, Parliamentarians, and other politicians to act in an exemplary manner for the country at all times. If you set this example to the people, then the majority of the people will follow you.

Forces against a national leadership that values our indigenousness and protects the country's sovereignty are subtly misleading the people through various false propaganda.

I urge the people of this country always to act prudently. No one can deceive the people if they make inquiries based on fact, ascertain the truth and make decisions.

I have pledged as the Head of State always to protect the freedom won for future generations and safeguard this country's unity, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. We will always abide by that pledge.

Cultural freedom is essential to all communities. We consider it our prime responsibility to preserve our thousands of years of indigenous traditions and customs, values, and identity. Steps have been taken to maintain and develop places of archaeological significance that have been subject to various threats and destroyed in the recent past.

We are a nation that safeguards the rule of law and respects international conventions. Although some parties have attempted to make allegations against Sri Lanka for narrow motives, the government has not condoned any human rights violations. It will not leave room for such incidents in the future either.

Under no circumstances shall we allow extremism to raise its head in this country. Today we have secured national security as promised by the government to the people.

The people have allowed the current government to implement the Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour Policy Statement presented by us.

There have been no changes in the policy framework we presented regarding identified priorities such as green agriculture, promotion of renewable energy use, education reforms compatible with the modern world, encouragement of local entrepreneurship, export diversification, and value addition, and promotion of technology use for a new leap in the economy.

We are committed to achieving the primary goals of a productive citizen, a happy family, a disciplined, virtuous society, and a prosperous country.

I was given the leadership of the country at a challenging time. We have had to find solutions to several unanticipated problems in the last two years. Despite all these difficulties, our government could carry out many development activities.

During my remaining tenure, all the plans required for the country's sustainable development are being implemented. No matter what the obstacles are, if the

majority of the people in our country are optimistic about the future and give their due contribution, we will be able to achieve those goals.

I heartily invite all patriotic Sri Lankans to unite to build a proud nation that has achieved the true meaning of freedom.

I thank you all.

Theruvan Saranai.







