Speech By President Gotabaya Rajapaksa At The Inaugural Meeting Of The Ninth Parliament

highlight

While successfully encountering short-term problems, our primary responsibility is to continue implementing the long-term development program to the country's people and endorsed by a majority. The sustainable future of the country is built on it. Therefore, we must not forget our priorities at any time.

This country belongs to the people who live in the country today and in the future. We are only the present custodians of this country. The end of this country depends on how we act today. Hence we are all accountable for future generations. Therefore, I hope that all those who love the country will extend their support at this time.

Hon. Speaker, Hon. Prime Minister, Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Ministers, Hon. State Ministers, Hon. Members of Parliament,

I wish you and all citizens a Happy New year.

In the democratic system, you, who are elected to this distinguished Parliament, represent the people's voice across different political ideologies. Therefore, all of you who are elected to this Parliament are a unique group accountable to the nation.

Like you, I, who have been elected President by the people's vote in this democratic system, am accountable to everyone in this country. There is no difference in such accountability concerning the people who voted for me or who did not vote during the election. Therefore, as the President of this country, I urge all of you to extend your support to duly conduct the responsibilities of the governing and opposition

parties both in and outside the Parliament to over-come the challenges that the country faces today.

The past two years have been a challenging period for us. We, too, had to face the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the entire world at the same time. As a result of this pandemic, almost all developed and developing countries had to face severe economic crises.

With its small economy, Sri Lanka felt the brunt of it severely. The lockdowns imposed several times in the country caused many obstacles to the country's economic process. The pandemic affected key sectors that brought foreign exchange into the country, such as the tourism industry, foreign labor, and apparel industry. Many businesses, self-employed, and daily income earners were affected by the various restrictions required to control the pandemic. The disruption to everyday community life created a great deal of unrest in society.

The Government incurred a significant expenditure to safeguard the public from the COVID-19 pandemic. Each time the country was closed, we provided relief to those who would lose their daily income. We took action to reschedule loan payments for small and medium entrepreneurs who had lost their income or substantially reduced due to the pandemic. We did not raise any of the reduced taxes again. None of the public servants had their salaries or allowances pruned.

Despite many economic difficulties, the Government acted to bear all necessary costs, prioritizing the people's health. Quarantine centers and treatment facilities were set up all over the country while we added about 35,000 new beds to the hospital system. Every family that was home quarantined were provided with a relief package to the value of Rs. 10,000/-.

We understood early that the only solution to the COVID-19 pandemic was vaccination. Accordingly, we took action to import vaccines even at a high cost and vaccinate all persons above 16 years. Presently, we compare favorably to many countries globally in terms of pandemic control.

We have resumed everyday community life, having vaccinated more than 85% of the targeted population and brought the disease situation under control. At the moment, the administering of the booster vaccination targeting the entire population is carried out successfully.

In this august assembly, the representatives of various political parties have different political views and policy differences. However, we all ultimately wish for the good of the country. During this challenging global catastrophe, we all have a national responsibility as people's representatives to work together and build this country. I invite all of you to join us in fulfilling this responsibility. While successfully encountering short-term problems, our primary responsibility is to continue implementing the long-term development program to the country's people and endorsed by a majority. The sustainable future of the country is built on it. Therefore, we must not forget our priorities at any time.

We promised the people to do some actual work for five years. Although we had to face significant obstacles during the first two years of this period due to the Corona pandemic, we never forgot nor neglected to fulfill our prime responsibilities.

Many had forgotten that the key issue facing the people of this country when I became the President in 2019 was national security. By now, our Government has secured national security. People have no fear of terrorism today.

The underworld threat had spread dangerously at that time. We witnessed a period when prison buses were fired at, and its guards and prisoners were killed. We went through a period when people walking down the streets were caught in the crossfire of underworld gang violence and died. The Government has changed this situation during the past two years.

Drug menace, too, had become a serious problem then. The country's youth was getting addicted to drugs in a significant way. Sri Lanka became a hub for international drug traffickers with the emergence of drug trafficking gangs supplying drugs even to foreign countries. We took action to control this expeditiously when we came to power. This situation is mainly under control today due to the action of our security services and intelligence services. We will continue the program initiated to eradicate the drug menace. Intelligence services of neighboring countries also provide us with the necessary information.

The police have a significant responsibility in providing public security. To ensure a safe environment where ordinary people can live without fear and suspicion, police should be regularly vigilant of public safety. Therefore we initiated several reforms in the police during the recent past. We newly established nearly 100 police stations throughout the country to make it easier for people living in any area to access the services of the police. Vehicles were provided to almost all police stations for

regular inspections. In addition to infrastructure development, special attention has been paid to developing knowledge and attitudes and training police officers.

We reactivated the environmental police that had been inactive. To strengthen the relationship between the police and the public, we sought the engagement of the community in public security and established a new community police state ministry.

We are a nation that respects international laws and conventions. We need to correct the misconceptions that have been taken to the international community in the past regarding our human rights. I say with responsibility that the Government did not support any form of human rights violations during my tenure. We will also not leave room for any such action in the future. We do not condone such acts in any manner.

For almost three decades, nearly all sections of the community in this country suffered due to terrorism. In 2009, we could end this situation by defeating terrorism and bringing peace back to the country. However, we need now to set aside the dark memories of the past and build a secure nation where all sections of the community can co-exist in peace.

We must all unite for this purpose, irrespective of ethnic, religious, or political differences. We have made a significant investment to bring normalcy to community life in the war-torn northern and eastern areas.

During my time as Defence Secretary, more than 90% of the land in northern and eastern areas used for military activities during the war was liberated. Since we can ensure security and maintain peace in these areas, we can deliver the remaining lands in the future.

Missing persons in war are not something unique to a particular group. We will do maximum justice on behalf of all such persons.

We reject racism. The present Government wants to safeguard the dignity and rights of every citizen in this country uniformly. Therefore I urge those politicians who continue to incite people against each other for narrow political gains to stop doing so.

I recently took action to pardon and release a group of LTTE members who have

been in detention for a long time. We are also preparing to make relevant amendments to the Prevention of Terrorism Act that had been in force since 1978.

We are always ready to respond positively to observations made by the international community while prioritizing the country's sovereignty and national security.

We are a free sovereign nation. We do not need to intervene in conflicts among powerful countries. While we respect our neighbors, we wish to pursue a policy of friendship with all States. The people in the North and East whom the war had battered for a long time wanted economic security above all else. They wanted a good education for children, job opportunities for young men and women, market access for self-employed and entrepreneurs, water for drinking and agricultural purposes, housing facilities, hospitals, roads, and other infrastructure facilities. We regard Government's prime responsibility towards reconciliation as providing such facilities to these people without discrimination.

Therefore, I urge the Members of Parliament representing the people of the North and East in this Parliament to set aside various political ideologies, at least temporarily, and support the Government's efforts to improve the living conditions of the people in your areas.

I firmly believe that ensuring law and transparency is essential to strengthening democracy. Strengthening the independence of the judiciary is crucial to ensure the rule of law. Since I became President, appointments to the judiciary and the Attorney General's Department were never politicized. Appointments were made based on merit and seniority of officers in the judicial service, thereby demonstrating the commitment by my Government towards an independent judiciary.

The country needs an efficient judicial system that is fair to all and not a burden to the public. However, the present judicial system has many shortcomings. Even fundamental rights petitions, which the Constitution decrees must be addressed in two months, are not completed, sometimes even during ten years. It takes years to punish persons who have committed crimes against minors. Often, it takes more than a lifetime to resolve land cases. In this context, it is no surprise that public confidence has eroded in the manner that the law operates. Although several governments had previously recognized the need to find solutions for people suffering from law's delays and identify necessary legal reforms to position Sri

Lanka as an investment hub, the previous governments' attempts to present a definitive program to make necessary reforms have not been successful.

However, since my Government came to power, several significant changes have been effected based on the five-point plan to increase the number of judges to end law's delays and establish a more reliable and efficient mechanism for administration of justice, increase infrastructure in courthouses, update obsolete laws, centralized digitalization and capacity enhancement of related agencies.

Projects for the "Adhikarana Piyasa" and digitalization of the court system, which had been planned for many years but could not be started, have now begun. We are extending this digitalization program to cover the judicial system as a whole during 2022.

After 42 years, we increased the number of judges to the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal. We have taken action to establish an efficient judicial system by increasing the number of judges in the lower courts and developing infrastructure facilities.

We have taken steps to establish Investor Courts and Small Claims Courts to solve law's delays. We have also strengthened the alternative mechanism for low-income persons to resolve minor disputes instead of spending money and going to courts. Accordingly, laws have been enacted to establish special conciliation boards to resolve land and monetary disputes, and such special conciliation boards will be established in 2022. At the same time, work has been initiated to gradually expand debt conciliation boards, previously confined to Colombo, to other areas in the country and establish them in Galle, Gampaha, and Kurunegala districts.

In addition, the Government has taken action to increase the cadre of the Attorney General's Department, Legal Draftsman's Department, and Government Analyst's Department and to provide necessary provisions to enhance the capacity required to make the judicial system efficient.

Necessary steps are being taken to amend 98 laws under the broad reforms program in criminal law, civil law, and commercial law.

Over the next three years, we will prepare the legal framework to make Sri Lanka an internationally recognized, attractive investment center.

Governments since 1994 have, on various occasions, attempted to introduce a new Constitution but to no avail. Therefore, I appointed an Experts Committee, with the approval of the Cabinet, to study this subject in-depth, broadly consult public opinion and prepare a preliminary draft for a people-friendly constitution.

I hope to submit the recommendations of this Committee to the Cabinet and the Parliament for broad discussion.

We are well aware of developing infrastructure facilities for rapid and sustainable development. Therefore infrastructure development activities continued even under pandemic conditions. The 100,000 Roads Project, urban development projects, rural housing and urban apartment projects, 5,000-Bridge project, Rehabilitation of 14,000 Tanks Project, Irrigation development projects, programs to provide electricity and drinking water to all households in the country, provision of high-speed internet facilities throughout the country, flood control projects, technological villages, and industrial township projects are all being implemented as planned. Year after year, when these projects get completed, people will see the results of the promises we made to them.

Last week, we commenced constructing the Eastern Terminal of the Port of Colombo as promised in the Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour Policy Statement. Construction of the Western Terminal will begin shortly. By the time these projects end in 2024 and 2025, the Port of Colombo will have doubled its capacity and will be among the 15 busiest ports in the world.

Now the economic process in the country is gradually returning to normalcy. Tourists are returning. There is an evident growth in export sectors. However, several challenges remain before us. Both short-term and long-term solutions are essential to overcome them.

The current budget has allocated a large amount of money for rural livelihood development as a short-term solution. The Government hopes to assist many self-employed people throughout the country through this.

We fully understand the economic difficulties facing people today.

Therefore, the Government decided at the beginning of 2022 to introduce a Rs. 229 billion relief package to the people. Even amid significant economic challenges, these reliefs are being provided because the Government is sensitive to the

people’s problems.

Our Government has provided free fertilizer to farmers for the past two years. We set a guaranteed price of Rs. 50 for paddy. When the Government paid 50 rupees, the private sector paid an even higher price to the farmers. Perhaps it was because of that decision taken by the Government that a kilo could be sold for 60 to 70 rupees. It is unfortunate that a section of the farming community today has forgotten this.

After I became President, I stopped the import of 16 crops such as green gram, cowpea, turmeric, and ginger. Today the farming community is enjoying its benefits. They get reasonable prices for their agricultural produce. Tea, coconut, and rubber also received affordable prices recently. This is because of the policy decisions we have made.

Today we are self-sufficient in turmeric. Producers of crops such as pepper, cinnamon, and arecanut are getting reasonable prices as re-exports were halted. Today, an affordable price is received for betel as well.

At that time, there was a massive protest against importing ethanol into this country. When we came to power, the import of ethanol was completely banned. Sugar factories are making a profit today due to this. Also, sugarcane farmers are getting a good income.

Today a conducive market has been created for dairy farmers as well. Profits of local dairy companies have increased.

We had to face some problems in implementing our policy for non-toxic green agriculture. There was a misunderstanding as our objective and plan were not properly communicated, and some practical issues in introducing the program were politicized. The broad concept of green agriculture, which was sometimes narrowed down to organic fertilizers even by responsible authorities, led to misconceptions. As some decisions led to public hardships, we had to make some changes.

However, there has been no change in our Government’s policy towards green agriculture. Therefore, we hope to rectify the shortcomings and take these policies more productively. Our ultimate goal is to introduce modern technology to achieve higher productivity in agriculture and promote the use of bio-fertilizers to create an international market for non-toxic agricultural produce. Through this, the economy

of the people engaged in agriculture and who provide subsidiary services can be strengthened. In this manner, we hope to make a solid contribution to the future economic development process in Sri Lanka.

Year 2022 in which we will have to make several decisions regarding food security. At the same time, there is a need for an expedited program to increase local production capacity. We must all unite and launch a cultivation effort by utilizing every cultivable land in the country. We are strengthened because several irrigation facilities have been developed, and tanks have been rehabilitated. I especially hope that the patriotic youth who painted wall art and cultivated barren paddy fields in the recent past will also support this.

A number of large-scale projects are being constructed to provide facilities to the people under the “Wari Saubhagya” program initiated by us.

The Uma Oya Multipurpose Development Scheme will be developed by supplying 120 MW of renewable energy to the national grid and developing Alikota Ara, Handapanagala, and Kuda Oya storage reservoirs 300 feeder tanks.

– Kumbukkan Oya Reservoir Project to supply irrigation and drinking water to dry areas in Monaragala District.

– Lower Malwathu Oya Reservoir Project to supply irrigation and drinking water to Mannar District

– Wayamba Maha Ela Project to supply irrigation and drinking water to the North Western Province.

– North Central Main Canal Project to supply irrigation and drinking water to the North Central Province.

– Basnagoda Reservoir Project to supply drinking water to many areas in the Gampaha District.

– Thalpitigala Reservoir Project to supply irrigation and drinking water to Uva Province.

– Mundeni Aru Project provides irrigation and drinking water to Batticaloa and Mahaoya areas in the Eastern Province.

– Develop new freshwater lagoons under the “River to Jaffna” project as a sustainable solution to the irrigation and drinking water problem in the Jaffna Peninsula.

– Nilwala River Development Project provides solutions to the water shortage in the Hambantota District and helps in flood control in Galle and Matara Districts.

– Minipe Maha Ela Reconstruction Project, Maduru Oya South Bank Development Project, and Mahaweli River Basin Development Project.

– Reconstruction work of 5,000 small tanks and anicuts and 52 medium-scale reservoirs throughout the island is in progress.

As a Government that recognizes the real needs of the farming community and places a high value on agriculture, I look forward to completing all 20 large-scale irrigation development projects currently underway during my tenure.

The most serious challenge we face today in economic management is the current foreign exchange problem. Today we are encountering the climax of a problem for which several governments have failed to provide a lasting solution.

When I took over the country in 2019, the country’s foreign exchange reserves were only US $ 7.2 billion. Part of it was short-term loans.

By then, more than the US $ 6 billion a year in foreign debt was to be repaid over the next two years. It is the loans taken by all previous governments from time to time that we had to repay in this manner.

We realized that if we fail to control our spending under these circumstances, there will be a foreign exchange problem shortly. That is why we had to take unpopular decisions such as suspending the import of vehicles and restricting the import of various non-essential imported goods. In this manner, we have been able to control the total import expenditure for the last two years.

Over the years, the country’s average annual trade deficit has been around $ 8 billion. This shortfall was offset by revenues from the tourism industry, remittances from foreign workers, and foreign exchange earned through foreign investment.

Of these, we had the highest hopes for the tourism industry. We had planned to increase the revenue from tourism to the US $ 10 billion over a few years.

But due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in December 2019, the global tourism industry suffered a setback. Thus we lost about $ 4.5 billion in annual revenue flowing into the country through tourism in 2020 and 2021.

We also lost many monthly remittances sent by about 200,000 foreign workers who left their jobs and returned to Sri Lanka due to the Covid pandemic.

Due to the continuous closure of the country, we were not able to attract new foreign investments.

Our reserves plummeted, and imports were severely hampered by this unavoidable process that took place beyond our control.

It is not possible to meet our import requirements without increasing our reserves.

To surmount this problem in the long run, we need to make great strides in our export industry through innovations, export diversification, and value-adding mechanisms. At the same time, there should be a significant development in foreign currency, attracting tourism industry, employment of skilled workers abroad, and information and communication technology. All this had been clearly stated in our policy statement. Their implementation should be expedited now.

As a small country, our country has minimal natural resources to earn foreign exchange. We do not have resources like oil, gas, and coal. Today, all countries that developed without natural resources have chosen foreign investment as the solution. They used foreign investment to boost the export industry, create new jobs and support local businesses. Suppose one misinterprets and creates a wrong opinion about foreign investments for purely political reasons. In that case, such a person is not doing any good to the country. At this time, we have a strong need for investment to develop our country. Therefore, we need to make more efforts to attract new investments to carefully chosen sectors. What matters is not whether they are a domestic or foreign investment but whether they are for the country’s good.

The solution to unemployment lies in job creation. At present, most of the country’s employment needs are met by small and medium-scale local businesses. Therefore, we must always prioritize the protection and empowerment of local entrepreneurs in various companies. We understand the business community’s needs and will do our utmost to encourage them.

About 20% of our annual import expenditure is allocated for oil imports. When the total export earnings are less than $ 1,000 million a month, we have to spend about $ 350 million a month on oil alone. About 70% of the imported fuel is used as fuel for vehicles. It costs about 21% to generate electricity. Only 4% is used for industry.

When we allow the import of vehicles in the future, we hope to prioritize electric vehicles. Accordingly, we should use renewable energy sources as much as possible when supplying electricity to vehicles.

The main problem facing industries in Sri Lanka is the high energy costs. Our country does not have fuel resources such as oil or coal. All of them should be imported. But we have rivers, seas surrounding the country, plenty of wind, and sunshine all year round. This is why renewable energy sources were prioritized under our Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor Policy Statement. We have agreed to the target of generating 70% of the country's energy needs through renewable energy sources by 2030.

We have already made several plans to meet future power requirements. In the last two years alone, we have been able to add significant renewable energy capacity to the local power grid using wind and solar power.

The capacity of the Thambapanni Wind Power Plant, which was commissioned last year and is now successfully operating at 100 MW, will be increased by another 50 MW this year. In addition, under the 'Gamata Balagarayak' program, work has commenced constructing 7,000 small solar power plants with a capacity of 100 kilowatts through local investors, of which 560 megawatts will be added to the power grid within the next two years. Also, the installation of Rooftop Solar panels on the roofs of government offices has commenced with a loan facility of Rs. 20 billion signed with India last year. Construction of 120 MW Uma Oya and 35 MW Broadlands Hydro Power Plant is nearing completion. Moragolla Hydro Power Plant is expected to be completed by 2023.

Our goal is to achieve the carbon-neutral target by 2050. Sri Lanka is already a co-leader in the Global Compact for No New Coal Energy. We will not approve the construction of coal power plants in the future for any reason.

I have always stated that education should play a vital role in formulating national policies.

We need an education system that matches the modern world. To this end, we have paid particular attention to educational reforms and infrastructure development. We are working to increase the number of 379 national schools by a further 1,000. We have allocated a large number of funds for school development in this budget. In the next few years, we will provide basic facilities to every school to reduce the gap between schools.

We recognize the importance of technology education in creating employment and business opportunities for young people in the modern world. Therefore, in the last two years, allocations have been made to all universities to increase the number of students studying Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) streams.

In addition, reforms have already been introduced to introduce courses in IT, English, and Entrepreneurship for all university students, regardless of their subject stream.

We had emphasized the entitlement of every student who passes the Advanced Level to enter a university. Accordingly, steps have been taken to increase the capacity of all universities. All plans have been finalized to start ten new City Universities covering ten less privileged districts.

We have already increased the number of students admitted to universities annually by 35% through these reforms.

Accordingly, last year we were able to enroll 10,000 new students in addition to the 30,000 previously registered. We also increased the number of university staff by about 500 and allocated funds to improve their educational and welfare facilities. In addition, steps were taken to enroll 10,000 new students for technical degrees at the Open University. The courses are designed to enable these students to pursue their education while on the job from the first year.

However, less than 25% of students who qualify for university annually can still enroll in the state university system. Under these circumstances, and concerning the growing population, we must realize that it is no longer a reality for the Government alone to provide high-quality university education to all students who pass the Advanced Level.

Although eligible to enter a university, many young people are frustrated by the

lack of space in the state university system and the lack of opportunity to pay and pursue higher education in Sri Lanka. People with some means will even sell their parents' properties and go abroad to study. Others become helpless.

Instead of sending money abroad for our own children's education, we have lost the opportunity to attract international students to Sri Lanka through a high-quality university system.

Many of the world's top universities are non-profit, non-governmental universities. All those universities offer scholarships to talented students for free education. This model, familiar to many countries globally, is not adopted in our country.

Suppose we create a more conducive environment for university education in our country. In that case, we will have the opportunity to attract world-renowned higher education institutions of international standard to Sri Lanka. Through this, the capacity of the university system in Sri Lanka can be increased, and higher education opportunities can be provided to more people. There is no reason, other than the traditional political ideologies, not to give this opportunity to the country's children. If the country's legal framework needs to be changed to do this, it can only be done by this Parliament.

Therefore, I propose to this august assembly to discuss at length whether, while increasing the capacity of state universities, the establishment of high-quality non-state universities in the country can be permitted.

Today the whole world is moving forward with technology. The use of technology in all fields is essential to achieve the development aspirations of our country.

Over the past two years, we have done a great deal to achieve the goal of creating a Sri Lanka that is technologically driven by a digital economy.

In coordination with all government agencies such as TRCSL, ICTA, and CERT, we set up a separate Ministry of Technology to guide and monitor their activities.

Internet and communication technology infrastructure is crucial for the digitization of any country. Therefore, we are expanding our FIBER and 4G networks to provide BROADBAND high-speed internet access to all parts of the country.

More than 300 villages covering eight districts have already been connected to these networks. In a brief period, we will expand FIBER and 4G networks to all parts

of the island and provide BROADBAND high-speed internet communication facilities to all schools, large and small.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapidly developing infrastructure enabled people to work from home, continue their education online, and run their businesses online.

According to a recent International Telecommunication Union report, we are at the forefront of countries with the lowest communication fees.

Developed jointly by the Ministry of Education and ICTA to take the concept of free education to the digital space, e-Thaksalawa has been established as the official online education system in all schools. Completely free of internet service charges, this access is now open to the public university system.

The introduction of digital technology in public administration is another crucial step. Accordingly, the digitization process of government institutions in several priority areas, including health, agriculture, and the judiciary, is already in full swing.

The project to introduce a digital identity card, long-awaited by the public, is almost complete. The first steps in introducing this will begin this year.

During the last two years, a great deal of work has been done in education, higher education, and technical education to create the necessary human resources and technological workforce for the digitization of Sri Lanka. We are working to build facilities at the national level so that young technologists can start and run businesses from anywhere in the country. Through the Digital Nomad Program, we are working to develop the infrastructure so that local technologists and technologists from abroad can be served overseas from any part of Sri Lanka.

We look forward to encouraging Sri Lankan innovation and bringing foreign technology companies to Sri Lanka through the Technology Parks already under construction in Galle, Kurunegala, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, and Habarana.

In line with the rapid digitization, we are also updating the relevant legal environment. The Cabinet has already approved the Data Protection Bill for the protection of citizens’ data and the Cyber Security Bill for cyber security in Sri Lanka. A new legal framework to protect Sri Lanka’s submarine cable system is also

being drafted.

The Government is using state-of-the-art technology to develop infrastructure in this sector in a manner second to none in the region. We hope to transform ICT/BPM businesses into a US$ 3 billion export sector soon, transforming future Sri Lanka into a technologically driven country. We also aim to create an environment where our future generation can compete with any country in the world through new technology and their creations.

We are a nation that has faced many challenges throughout history. We successfully overcame those challenges when the country had the proper leadership.

We can overcome the challenges we face even at this moment. I am ready to give the necessary leadership for it. We are implementing the plans required to overcome the current challenges and build the prosperous country that the people expect.

Our goal is to make Sri Lanka one of the fastest-growing countries in the region in the next few years. To this end, we are working to achieve definite growth in all three sectors – agriculture, industry, and services.

I need you and the people to support us to make our plans a success.

This country belongs to the people who live in the country today and in the future. We are only the present custodians of this country. The end of this country depends on how we act today. Hence we are all accountable for future generations.

Therefore, I hope that all those who love the country will extend their support at this time.

I thank you all. Theruwan Saranai!