The Asian Century Charting Oneâ€™S Own Course



Namal Rajapaksa MP spoke at the India Today Conclave on ‘Dynasty is a Burden or Boon in South Asia’ from the perspective of the unfolding Asian Century.

Distinguished Invitees Friends

It’s a pleasure for me to participate in this prestigious India Today Conclave. Thank you for giving me the honour of being a part of this event.

Much has been spoken at this Conclave and elsewhere about the Asian Century.

Policymakers, academics, the media and experts in their respective fields continue to dwell at length on whether the 21st century will be dominated by Asian politics

and culture, and as to how leadership can be given to achieve such an outcome for the benefit of our region.

It is in this context that this panel has been tasked with deliberating on the topic of whether, Dynasty is a Burden or a Boon in South Asia, a region which has a vital role to play in the unfolding Asian Century. We need to focus our attention to this subject from another perspective as well, that is the unfolding Asian Century.

Asia has emerged as a global power house. The advanced economies no longer look at Asia as poverty stricken land with famine and misery. Further, the leading economies in the world today are geographically concentrated in Asia.

I come from a country which suffered immensely from brutal terrorism for nearly three decades. The sufferings undergone by our people cannot be quantified. Although my country was one of the pioneering Asian economies in removing barriers to global trade, investment and finance, in order to become a vibrant global partner in economic development, it could not exploit its full potential owing to terrorism that crippled our social fabric and economic fundamentals.

Since November 2005, my country under the visionary leadership of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who hails from a deep rooted, politically and culturally rich family, with an affiliation to political activism in human rights, trade unions, and rural farmers embarked on an economic development strategy, laying a foundation for rapid development within the global framework.

Today, seven years after President Rajapaksa’s assuming office, Sri Lanka enjoys a relatively sophisticated all island infrastructure network. This has been possible, primarily due to the ending of the 30 year long conflict under his administration.

This has enabled him to unify the country ‘on a single platform’ theme, that is, rapid inclusive development along with equal access to development opportunities in the country.

His administration has paved the way for people to be able to express their views in a free and democratic Sri Lanka. His government has resettled almost all displaced people with adequate livelihood support.

The Government of India among other bilateral and multilateral development partners, played a pivotal role in this effort by extending generous support for

infrastructure development and resettlement initiatives in the affected areas.

Sri Lanka has witnessed over eight percent growth for two consecutive years, following a six percent annual growth over the first five year period ending 2009 and remains buoyant for the third consecutive year, despite global economic uncertainties.

All economic fundamentals remain favourable. Food security has been ensured with the country being able to generate a surplus rice production. Highest priority has been accorded to promote energy security as well. It has embarked on a rapid development process in export production of goods and services.

Complementing the key sectors in the economy, the country's comparative advantage in the port and aviation sectors is being fully exploited with the development of new ports and airports in the South of the country, while also developing other ports and airports in the country to ensure global connectivity in trade, aviation and tourism. Overall, the development strategy of Sri Lanka aims at raising the country's per capita income to around USD 5,000 by 2016.

Ladies and Gentlemen, despite all economic fundamentals shifting in favour of Asia, our countries are unique in one sense. We all have a long standing culture and traditional values.

The transformation towards a modern world must be navigated while preserving of two fundamental principles. One is the preservation of our culture, traditions and the value system, which will nurture us in a multiple framework with mutual respect, care, love and compassion. The other is the conservation of our environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am the youngest parliamentarian in the Parliament elected in 2010. I am proud of this achievement for another reason – my father too was the youngest Member in the 1970 Parliament of Sri Lanka and also a lawyer like myself. Coincidentally, a cousin of my father had also been the youngest to enter parliament in his time.

Before my father, my grand-father and his brother and his children too had entered Parliament beginning their public service from as far back as 1936. In that sense, I represent the third generation of politicians of the Rajapaksas.

Friends, all of us have had to contest in highly competitive elections to enter Parliament.

I am also proud that I have entered politics in an era that my country enjoys expressways, aviation and port hubs, IT based activities, buoyant tourism, new generation banking and finance and a strong construction industry, providing support for growth.

Our country envisages a Sports Economy and a Knowledge Based Economy, reflecting synergies of new aspirations of my generation.

I believe that the distinguished panelists would agree that one's success or failure in politics in a democracy, where regular elections are held, depends largely on how one chooses to chart one's own course.

Merely belonging to a political family will not ensure that one would succeed in politics continuously, especially in the present context of an active media, and an even more active civil society.

Democracy, as you all know, is a form of governance with specific institutions and a state governed by elected representatives.

A dynasty, in contrast, typically denotes a series of rulers who belong to the same family or a succession of powerful people from the same family according to rules of that family.

In a functioning democracy, representatives are elected by the vote of the people and for specific terms. Therefore, merely by belonging to a family of politicians, one does not inherit office through succession.

One of the common benefits of being a part of a political family, although short lived, is the comparative ease, perhaps, of being able to receive nomination from a party to contest elections.

But the reason I say that this is a short lived benefit is because although one may win an election the first time around, there is absolutely no guarantee of re-election. The decision lies in the hands of the people.

As a young person I felt strongly and passionately that as a member of a political family, I could play a useful, important and meaningful role in giving voice to the

youth of our country; to revive their dreams; engage in nation building; and in healing our fractured land.

“An Asian Century, Securing The Global Promise. We In Sri Lanka Are Gearing For This Century, A Century Of Promise For Our New Generations.”

I want to see the youth of my country rise to rebuild our nation; and to strengthen institutions that are essential for democracy, that have become weak as a result of conflict.

Our dream is to see the youth of our country strive towards excellence in all fields and demand no less than the best from its public service. This window of opportunity must be seized by our youth to take the country onto a different path; to build a nation that is robust and resilient.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in conclusion, let me reiterate the theme of this India Today Conclave, “An Asian Century, securing the global promise. We in Sri Lanka are gearing for this century, a century of promise for our new generations.”

The gratitude we could show our parents and grandparents, for sacrifices made during their lifetimes is to preserve our heritage, culture, value system and environment.

I hope this conclave will propagate the new vision of Asia for greater collaboration, partnership and unity.