

# Vote Mahinda Rajapaksa: The Future Is In Our Hands



Ven Uduwe Dhammaloka is the voice of reason amidst the political furore that governs our country. He is an Independent Member of Parliament who voices his concerns to ensure the betterment of all communities. With the Presidential elections to be held in January 2010, Ven Uduwe Dhammaloka Thero spoke to Business Today on why Sri Lankans should vote for President Mahinda Rajapaksa considering the achievements of the past four years while reminding those that safeguarding the democratic process in this country is in the hand of each citizen.

**By Udeshi Amarasinghe | Photography by Menaka Aravinda**

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**Why should we re-elect President Mahinda Rajapaksa as the President of this country?**

When we look at the history of Sri Lanka compared to the rest of the world, we have a history that is second to none. That history is a proud one. There are many signs to prove this fact. We pride ourselves that the people in this country live according to the Buddha Dhamma, where the people are pious. When I say the Dhamma, I mean the noble truth. The truth is the same regardless of religion and race. The Dhamma is the truth – people understand the reasons as to why good and bad happen, and the people in this country lived according to the Dhamma.

Therefore from ancient times the importance of being grateful and repaying kindness has been engrained in the people. Therefore in a country where people show their appreciation re-electing President Mahinda Rajapaksa is definitely what we should do in the name of this country.

I will support him, not only is that support very important I will temporarily halt all other activities and travel to every nook and corner in this country, basing myself at each temple and other religious places in this country.

**It was an aim of President Mahinda Rajapaksa to go beyond party politics and build one united front, would you say that he has established that?**

President Mahinda Rajapaksa has successfully gone beyond party politics and has achieved unity between parties. The President is somewhat restricted in his movements because he cannot travel freely due to his position. Therefore as members of the alliance it is our duty to look into the needs of the people and inform the President so that he can take action.

Anyone with the thinking ‘I helped to elect this person to this position, therefore he should come to me and not vice versa’ that is a very wrong. Even though a political party may have supported the President, he cannot bestow favours on them and party members should not expect that. Thus from the side of the President, he has gone beyond party politics and established a united front.

**You have given your support to the President in the past, will you continue to do so in the upcoming elections and why?**

Yes. I will support him, not only is that support very important I will temporarily halt all other activities and travel to every nook and corner in this country, basing myself at each temple and other religious places in this country. I will spread this message and remind the people. This message is known by all the people. When we go to the villages the people say who do we have except the President? The people are so close to the President. All the Buddhist monks love him and consider him as a brother, their child or parent. Therefore we only need to remind the people of that message there is nothing new to teach them. I will give my utmost to take this message out to the people and ensure that the right path that we have followed so far will continue and the President will have victory.

**At this time when President Rajapaksa is going for an election, he has fulfilled about 90% of the promises made in his 2005 manifesto Mahinda Chinthanaya, what are your thoughts on this?**

Actually the President’s priority was ‘honourable peace’ and today we have that honourable peace. In these last three months I visited Jaffna, Trincomalee, Ampara and then from the other side I went upto Talaimannar. In all those areas, Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher communities are happy. This is a country that faced a war and as such there are still investigations but then that is what is to be expected. We have to understand that. For example when I was entering the USA,

they were suspicious of my robe and they asked me to remove the robe for inspection. I did not resist I took off my robe and gave it to them to check. In that way we have to comply because it is for our own safety. We respect the security of the USA, in that way we need to respect and comply to the measures taken to ensure security in this country. Therefore if we are asked to do something such as checking we should comply. There are instances where we have to go through certain difficulties during these security checks and investigations. However today, there is the required environment for Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher people to live together in this country.

The President understood the importance of having a good road network. It is not only in Colombo but also in Hambantota , Trincomalee, Vavuniya, Ampara, Talaimannar and Puttalam. Now Everyone can travel to these places.

Therefore in my view the President has accomplished his first promise successfully. However just like he fought the war and won the war, he has another very big challenge that he hasn't been able to overcome as yet and that is corruption and fraud, there are many people like that. I know that within the government there are very corrupt ministers. Some of them sell the President's name and some others sell the names of the President's brothers while using others names as well they have crept into the system and are involved in many illegal activities. That I will accept.

However in this instance I feel that the President is helpless because the President neither has the power of the constitution nor the power of the parliament. Due to that reason the government is a coalition. Therefore if he goes to investigate them and impose laws on them then they try to leave the government and then the parliament will collapse. Then internationally it will be very big problem for us. Even now there are problems but if parliament is dissolved the problems will be even more. Therefore the decision to hold the Presidential elections first and then the parliamentary elections next is a way of addressing corruption within the system. Therefore I am confident that the President will be able to address the issue of corruptions, fraud and those who are involved in illegal activities during his next term.

**It is a well known fact that President Mahinda Rajapaksa won the war, but many programmes were done to develop the country simultaneously, can you tell us about this?**

Yes, I appreciate development work that has been done so far. Something that I have repeatedly said is that the country cannot develop without the construction of roads. The reason for this is I first visited Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia about 30 years ago. At that time it was very difficult to travel in those countries because there were no roads, people were cooking on the side of the road, we had to walk through people of the road and the air smelt bad, it was such an environment. When we visited the second time the environment had changed significantly. There were massive concrete roads being built amidst the slums and now there are no slums but large buildings.

In my experience having good roads is essential especially to increase efficiency and reduce transactions costs. For example for people to come to work from outstation it takes them a very long time. They spend much of their time on the road. Then when we want to go somewhere we waste a lot of time in traffic. Therefore the President understood the importance of having a good road network. It is not only in Colombo but also in Hambantota , Trincomalee, Vavuniya, Ampara, Talaimannar and Puttalam. Everyone can now travel to these places around the country because there is an extensive road network. This is something that has been done for the first time in history. Many people laid the foundation stones but didn't proceed. We see things happening now. Projects are being completed and we are already using the infrastructure.

A personal experience of mine is when we have to travel to Dehiwela for a bana we waste much of our time on the road, the same goes for Nugegoda and Peliyagoda. Now with the flyover's in place, travelling time has been reduced. Some may say that certain individuals or companies are getting commission, and stealing. Let's say ok, people are taking commission and stealing but can anyone take the bridge? Ports are being built these will be our legacy to the future generations. Recently I went to the Central Bank Governor's office, which is on the top most floor of the building and the view I saw was beautiful, the Governor asked me "Thero can you see the Colombo harbour being built?"

I was amazed by the scene in front of me. For me, the Colombo port that we had before was extremely small compared to what's being constructed today. Therefore how valuable and useful are such constructions to our country? By constructing the Colombo and Hambantota ports in the future we can earn a massive amount of

foreign exchange. Additionally electricity power plants are being constructed as well. In that way, imagine if during the last four years while the war was being fought if such development work was done then imagine what are country will be in another 8-10 years? Our country will be one of the most developed countries in the world. I have no doubt about that.

However because of the progress that our country has achieved, as you know internationally there is this mafia, where Sri Lanka has become one of their major focus, many countries are very worried about the progress we are making. They are upset. We condemn the person by the name of Prabhakaran because he is a terrorist. If he was not a terrorist and if he was a person who loved this country then we would all embrace him like we do Muralidaran. Now we know about Karuna Amman. He was a terrorist at one time. However Karuna Amman turned a new leaf he left the LTTE. Today, even the Dalada Maligawa accepts him. See how compassionate our people are?

Regardless of race, religion or caste, if a person is a good person and has renounced his evil ways, we are willing to accept them. However in the rest of the world, people are not willing to accept this, they’re not used to such compassion.

Karuna Amman joined me in a programme in Ampara recently. There were about 10,000 people that day. Now I do not know the true story but it is said that Karuna Amman was the LTTE leader of the East during the Aranthalawa massacre. However he removed his stripes and came over to the democratic process, he denies that he was the leader at that time. The people accepted Karuna Amman graciously at the time we visited Ampara. Why is that? Why did they forget the past and accept him? It is because he chose the right path. Regardless of race, religion or caste, if a person is a good person and has renounced his evil ways, we are willing to accept them. However in the rest of the world, people are not willing to accept this, they are not used to such compassion. Therefore many are jealous of our progress.

**Since you mentioned the international community, now President Rajapaksa went beyond the traditional countries such as the USA and UK and built relationships with other countries specially with those in the region. What are your thoughts on that?**

As soon as President Rajapaksa was elected he didn't treat any country as special. He extended his friendship to all countries. He spoke to them and met them and showed the leaders of those countries that he was genuine. He told them the truth and many countries understood that.

However if certain elements even after knowing the truth are imposing obstacles in our path then more than going to them we would always go to the person who would help us. That is the human way. In that way the President has become close to those who have extended their helping hand. The special characteristic of President Rajapaksa is that he did not get angry with anyone who didn't help.

**The village was not neglected and it was a priority of the President, what are your thoughts on this?**

Actually in the past an injustice has happened, it was the city that received all the benefits. For example when we look at education all the facilities have been provided to city schools. We have seen how parents strive to get their children into Colombo schools. In that way if we look at roads, it is very rarely that the village will get the same benefits. Actually without developing the village, without making the village rich the country cannot develop. Why do they say that our country is poor? What they mean is the people in this country are poor. Where do the majority of the people in this country live? They live in the village not in the city.

**Anti narcotics and campaigns against alcohol and tobacco have been initiated by the President, this has been pivotal in alleviating poor people from the poverty trap and also to build values in society. How do you see the progress in this area?**

President Rajapaksa has unimaginable love for the younger generation. Until now this country has never had a leader who loves the children so much. That is why he said 'I am the proud father', he is the father of the children in this country. Now this father always thinks; alcohol, drugs and cigarettes are harming the younger generation. This thinking has had a positive impact on the country. Just like he eliminated terrorism which is something that he strongly believed in, the President believes that without solving the issue of alcoholism and addiction to narcotics poverty cannot be addressed. There is no use in telling young people not to consume liquor if it is readily available therefore by curtailing those avenues and

penalising those who are involved in such businesses the President has made a great effort and that is something that has happened fortunately for our country.

**President Mahinda Rajapaksa has worked tirelessly to ensure that religious harmony is maintained in this country. As a Bikkhu what are your thoughts on this?**

The President is a very good Buddhist. Rev Oscar Abeyratne always says that if the people in this country conform to the five precepts of Buddhism then there will always be religious unity. That is if this country is governed according to the five precepts then other religions will have their freedom and security. That is a very good idea.

There is something important that I need to say which might result in objections from various quarters but this needs to be said. The wars we see in the world today are conflicts between religions. It is no other. On one side that is the Western side give priority to one religion and are trying to build their power base. Then the other side, which is the Middle East are trying to build their power base by giving their religion priority. It is a race between two religions and the rest of the world religions are caught between the two. If we look at the fundamentalist conflicts today, the two countries that are mainly pressurised are India and Sri Lanka. It has become a very big challenge for both countries. Fortunately, the Buddhist monks in this country didn't allow fundamentalism to rise its head. It is when religious fundamentalism raises its head that wars happen.

If A Certain Person Thinks That He Is Following A Religion To Gain Power, Then It Is Very Wrong. We Follow A Religion To Obtain A Sense Of Peace And Happiness That We Cannot Obtain Through Wealth. The President Understands This Well And He Has Created The Required Environment.

If I give an example, when the UNP ruled this country for about two years, there was an eruption of religious battles. During this time a huge damage occurred between Buddhism and other religions. The reason for this divisiveness was the then Minister for Internal Affairs strongly followed fundamentalist policies. For instance he gave permission for prayer centres to be built near every temple, which led to arguments. If these were built according to the need of the people then there is no issue but when it is done forcefully then there is friction. Therefore during this time

there were many problems between religions and it was due to this reason that Buddhist monks had to go to Parliament. We know that even the passing away of Soma Hamuduruwo is shrouded in such conspiracy. Therefore the peaceful religious environment has to be maintained. There should be no friction.

If a certain person thinks that he is following a religion to gain power, then it is very wrong. We follow a religion to obtain a sense of peace and happiness that we cannot obtain through wealth. The President understands this very well and he has created the required environment therefore it is not only the Buddhists but also other religions who can work closely with him.

**The end of the war was undoubtedly a relief to the Tamil people of this country, as a clergy how do you see the communities have been brought together by the President?**

After every single sermon I remind the people of this fact. I remember how mothers stood in front of the schools of their children with fear in their hearts, how parents used to run to their children's schools when they here that a bomb has exploded they would worry and run with fear in their hearts. It was a time where people could not relax. My temple is Walukaramaya in Colpetty, that is in the heart of the city. The viharaya collapsed when the bomb exploded in front of the JOC. Couple of times my life was saved by only a matter of seconds before a bomb exploded.

Due to the end of this war, we are able to live in peace without any party or racial friction. Even today, the people from the opposition can walk on the road and engage in their activities because the war is over and there is peace. We are able to engage in religious activities because of that.

Today we have freedom. Just like there are unexploded elements hidden in the ash, there can be such hidden elements. This is usual, therefore we have to work very carefully while giving much consideration without being a hindrance to anyone we have to address and solve these issues.

I don't think any parent is going to forget the pain they had to go through every single day they sent their child to school. They are not going to forget the pain they went through when bombs exploded.

The people will never forget the shock and sadness they felt when villagers were massacred in threatened villages. In our country, there is no village where young people have not sacrificed their lives. In every village, one person has sacrificed his life for our country. This situation has been completely changed. For 6 months up to now, not a single drop of blood has been lost. With the blessings of the noble triple gem, we pray that the future will be devoid of any blood.

**President has learnt Tamil as well. Thus, he himself is taking steps to create unity among the people of this country. What are your thoughts on this?**

Something that I can always see is that the President does not have any hatred towards the Tamil people, though certain elements are trying to bring an argument towards this. A good example of the fact that the President does not have any hatred towards Tamil people is his attempts to learn and speak Tamil. The fact that he is still learning despite being the President, a mature person, someone who is very busy and the first person in the country is an example not just to our country, but to the entire world as well. Therefore, truly, if he is someone who hated the Tamil community and was angry with them, he would never speak a word of Tamil and would not even make an effort to learn the Tamil language. The President is a person who loves to talk to the people and inquire himself about their joys and sorrows, that is why he is learning the language.

Therefore, we feel very happy about this.

The President Is A Person Who Loves To Talk To The People And Inquire Himself About Their Joys And Sorrows, That Is Why He Is Learning The Tamil Language. We Feel Very Happy About This.

**Some may say that the President represents the Sinhala Buddhist majority, what are your thoughts on that?**

Yes, the President represents the Sinhala Buddhist majority. However this is not the only group of people he represents. Just like he represents the Sinhala Buddhists, the President also represents the Tamil people; Tamil Buddhists, there are many Tamil Buddhists in our country, Tamil Hindu, Tamil Christians, Muslims, Burghers and about another 23 such communities. The President represents them all. If you

look at the people who serve under him, all these people are there. He gives his attention to everyone. Therefore, if someone states that the President is representing only one group, then that's completely false.

**Do you see Sri Lanka also going in that direction under the leadership of the President?**

I feel that at the end of the President's second term, our country will once again become the Granary of the East. Once when I attended a workshop in South Korea, while speaking about the relationship between Korea and Sri Lanka, I explained how during Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike's time Sri Lanka exported rice to South Korea. The youngsters at this seminar became annoyed with me when I mentioned this. They thought that I was insulting their country.

They asked me "how could you send rice to us when your country doesn't have enough rice for yourself? Yours is a poor country". Then I told them, although we are today, at one time we were rich and wealthy. That is why we were able to export rice to other countries.

Therefore, truly, we can go back to that past era. Unfortunately what we do is, we proudly speak of the past, but we don't think of ways to fix the present. Usually we say, that in the past, we were like this and like that. We say that very often, however what is important to us more than the past is the present. We don't try to build that environment in the present as well. The person who brought back that hope and prosperity to the present is President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

**To divert a bit, the Opposition has announced its common candidate what are your thoughts on that?**

The opposition is just playing a trick. The Opposition parties have decided that the common candidate is General Fonseka. However within the party there are certain disagreements. These disagreements are not because they are thinking of the country, but because they are thinking about their power and their positions. Everyone has a question about what is the position available to them, what will their powers be.

The majority of those in the Opposition, actually 99% of them are those with a western mindset and attitudes. They have no understanding of and can't integrate with our country, our identity, the local culture and heritage. There may be a few who have good ideas, but most of them are extremely westernised. We should have in ourselves a middle path. We should not be against the west, or be for the west. It should be about who we are – our identity.

I Feel That At The End Of The President's Second Term, Our Country Will Once Again Become The Granary Of The East… Usually We Say, That In The Past, We Were Like This And Like That. We Say That Very Often, However What Is Important To Us More Than The Past Is The Present.

It is true that we should learn from others but those in the opposition completely accept the lessons from the West. For example, UNP released a policy plan by the title of Anagatha Abhiyogaya. They speaks about future challenges, but what do they say in the first line? It says at the time when the country was being freed from the 30 year long brutal conflict, the leader of the party was abroad. From there on we can see, I feel that, someone who is integrated into our culture and knows our own identity, will never say such a thing, especially not at the beginning of a policy document. At least, if at all it should be mentioned in following sections saying that they were not present in the country at that particular time. Thus, the opposition with their western mindset can never reach out to the people of the country. Therefore, we definitely know, there are those who are interested in party politics. There are people who when thinking about the party, forget their parents, race, religion and country. If you take on average within the Opposition there are those who are extremely westernised, they possess the same western ideas and are determined to work according to an agenda that is unsuitable to our country. What is unfortunate is the new party that has joined them is the JVP and the new person that has joined them is Sarath Fonseka.

**What are your thoughts on UNP and JVP joining together?**

There is no bigger joke, no bigger insult than this in this country's politics. If you take in terms of the principles of the parties, the JVP and the UNP are poles apart. They are like the earth and the sky that never can be brought together.

If Rohana Wijeweera was alive today, he will commit suicide at this destruction done

by the JVP members. The current leader of the JVP is telling the UNP that they will enter the stage from one side and that the UNP should enter from another. Why are they saying like this? To trick the people. They have chosen one presidential candidate, are they going to split this candidate into two saying you go from here and we'll go from here? What is the practicality in this? Which party is going to compromise their principles in this union?

If you take the core of both parties they have 100% different beliefs. I therefore see this as the destruction of the JVP to fulfil the needs of one or two people of the party. There are people in the JVP who are trying to bring about the destruction of the JVP who have been accepted on a contract. If you say it another way, there are there are one or two in the JVP who are caught in the mafia – the western countries that are working against us. Based on the needs of one or two of those, the whole party is being destroyed. This turn of events is very unfortunate because the JVP is a very valuable party. On one hand, we were proud of this party. Almost everyone said that we need a party like that. The reason for this was that at one point, I remember, they built a Parivasa government. They came to that point because they were stable during that time. They also developed as a party because of that. Today, that situation has completely changed. It is a very sad situation. I feel that the JVP is bringing about their own destruction.

**A Sangha Agnayawa was to be decreed if General Fonseka did not adhere to the request of the Sangha Nayakas of the three Nikaya to refrain from politics, why was such a decision taken?**

General Fonseka is a brilliant Army officer. However he is not suitable to be the President of this country. President Mahinda Rajapaksa was able manage this personality quite well while he was the Army Commander. The educated people in this country would know the gravity of electing a Military Personnel as the leader of the country.

He's coming into the elections not by thinking of the country, or the future, he is entering the election based on selfish desires. What is his decision based on – "I could have stayed longer in the Army but I was not allowed to, they didn't trust me, they didn't appoint the person I nominated as the Commander of the Army". This is selfishness. Is he thinking about the country? No. I feel that in the end the UNP will

be destroyed and the JVP will be destroyed. There will be a major destruction. I only see this as the UNP and JVP expanding their period of misfortune by getting involved with General Sarath Fonseka.

On one side, looking at it from the President's point of view, we admire General Sarath Fonseka for his brave acts in bringing about peace to this country whatever he does now is a different matter. We respect him for his great service to the country. From one side what the UNP and the JVP have done is, they have freed the President. They have taken away a headache that the President had.

Why did we decide to decree a Sangha Agnayawa? Why is it that we asked General Fonseka not to get involved in politics? It is because through these actions he is ridiculing this hard fought victory. That is very sad. We have heard much about how King Dutugemunu saved our country.

Truly, the war fought during King Dutugemunu's time was not a battle over race. I would like to clearly say that. It is clearly stated in history that this was not a war between races or communities. It was a war against terrorists. King Elara's Army jumped into villages and murdered people. It was for this reason that King Dutugemunu fought against King Elara and saved the country. Although we have heard of this history, we have never seen it. The war that was fought and won this year is an moment where our country was saved again. Therefore, what I feel that is this historic victory has been somewhat ridiculed by the recent events involving the actions of General Sarath Fonseka. Therefore, why we took that decision was to ask him not to ridicule this victory. Therefore the majority of the Buddhist priests in this country will not take his side, regardless of the whether a Sangha Agnayawa is decreed or not.

**What can we expect in 2010?**

Everyone should have positive expectations for 2010 – that our country will be a rich, developed country where no one suffers and everyone lives happily in an economically developed country. For this, there are too many lazy people in our country, there are too many crooks in our country.

In This Country's Name, For The Future Generation Of The Country – It Is Necessary To Build A Good Country For Them. Just Like We Built Peace, We Need To Focus On

The Other Aspects Of The Country. That Is Why I Say, We Should Vote For President Mahinda Rajapaksa Again.

If someone constructs a building, there is a petition, if someone buys a car, there's a petition. However the number of people who will try to see how he brought that car and strive to develop themselves in the same way are less. Therefore, in 2010 we should strive to achieve economic development, without envying others. In the same way we should curtail stealing and build a country that has a religious people. All these expectations will come true in January 2010.

**Final thoughts?**

Finally I would like to say, someone might raise a question as to why I said such good things about the President? Why would this priest say like that? In our life, there is nothing we can gain, nothing we can lose. I wish to lead a simple life. Up to now, I have never taken anything, even in the slightest from the President or the Government. Even in the future, I don't expect to take anything. As long as we have something to eat, as long as we have a place to stay and as long as we can achieve our basic needs, that's enough for us. I have no need for anything else. The reason I say this is because someone can think I expect great gains. Some people claimed that I acquired a many riches and that I was eyeing for various positions, they have said that I'm trying to be the Speaker of the parliament, many newspapers accused me of this. Some insulted me by saying that I want the post of a minister. However I did not do any of the things that certain elements accused me of. Therefore, I'm saying all of this about the President not because I expect anything.

I saw in the President untainted expectations for the country – an untainted and 100% pure expectations. He is protected because of this power, because of this strength, the earth knows this. Just like I got to know it, long before me the earth identified it, nature identified it, the sky identified it. Therefore as long as the sky and earth exists, the President will be protected, he is by that fundamental truth. The reason why I say about the President like this and ask you to re-elect President Mahinda Rajapaksa for another term is not for any personal gains, but because I am thinking about the country. Thus to the educated people I say, in this country's name, for the future generation of the country, for the children of the country, it is necessary to build a good country for them. Just like we built peace, we need to focus on the other aspects of the country. That is why I say we should vote for

President Mahinda Rajapaksa again.