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PRESS RELEASE  
ஊடக வெளியீடு



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President's Media Division, President's Office, Colombo

*English translation*

**Speech delivered by H.E. the President Maithripala Sirisena at the 68<sup>th</sup> Independence Day Celebrations on February 4, 2016**

Today, we have gathered here to celebrate with pride and grandeur the 68<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Independence Day. This is the 68<sup>th</sup> annual occasion that we celebrate the National Independence, since we gained independence from British administration and colonial rule 68 years ago.

Between 1948 and 2016, the world as well as our country has undergone immense changes and transformations in economic, political, social and cultural spheres. I believe that there is a difference between the interpretation of 'freedom' the people of this country expected in 1948 and the 'freedom' we expect today, sixty eight years later.

I would call a child born in 1948 or in the 1950s, a Child of Culture. Today, children born in 2016, in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, may be called Children of Technology. I believe that we should unite the 'Child of Culture' and the 'Child of Technology' in our collective effort to build the nation and the country.

Dear children, parents and friends,

We are aware that in our struggle for independence from colonialism, many of the contemporary Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim national heroes then fought together for independence with unity, amity and brotherhood, zealously sharing the same conviction for independence, which they achieved.

If we go back in history, we see that, from the days when foreign invaders occupied our country from 1505 to 1948, a period of over 400 years under foreign domination, we lost many things. We lost what was ours and our authenticity. Our culture eroded. The economy was heavily ruined. During those four hundred odd years as a colonised nation, Sri Lanka lost the agricultural prosperity we enjoyed, and the great irrigation systems built in the days of our great Kings.

This devastation took place during a period of 400 years. Since 1505 our heroic leaders sacrificed their breath, sweat and tears and fought for independence for years, which was won in 1948. Although we were emancipated from colonialism, the foreigners who invaded

and ruled our country for four hundred odd years left us leaving behind many problems they created.

At this moment, when 68 years have lapsed in the task of building of our country, following the victory we achieved as a result of united struggles carried out by our national heroes in the decades of 1930s, and 1940s, casting aside their differences in religion, race or caste, we have to question our conscience as to whether we have solved the problems left behind by those who invaded our country.

Almost every government that came into power has given priority to physical and economic development. I believe that if we accomplished the tasks that were necessary to build unity, reconciliation, brotherhood and friendship among all communities, we wouldn't have faced the barbaric terrorism that lasted for 26 years since it started in the 1980s.

As much as the development of the economy and physical resources of a country is a priority, I firmly believe that, it is essential that the leaders should also understand the cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics of the people living in a country.

I observe a problem faced by the leaders not only in our country, but also of the countries with the highest levels of development in the entire world. It is that the new generation living with super technology and Internet and the public are a step ahead than the leaders in their thoughts, expectations, attitudes, determinations and objectives. This should be clearly understood by us, as I said earlier, as the main differences between the Child of Culture of 1930s, 40s and 50s and the Child of Technology who is born today in 2016 in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Therefore, the people in the super technology world when striding with new attitudes and new aspirations face transformations in every field. During these transformations, they see revolutionary changes in all subject areas; they develop revolutionary concepts; embrace new ideas. There is a lot for us to understand in this change. It is essential that everyone collectively carries out governance in order to withstand these transformations. Considering all this, I believe that as a country it is essential to look at the meaning of the word 'freedom' in a new angle and a new perspective. I think that 'freedom' is the most complicated, complex and difficult word to define in this world. The word 'freedom' has extended to a wide range of meanings. There are several broad definitions given to the word 'freedom'. The meaning of the word 'freedom' has been further broadened with the growth of new super technology. When we look at the new world and new concepts through the perspective of our system of values and civilizational heritage, the word 'freedom' which has a broad and a complex meaning poses grave challenges to leaders as well as general public.

Today we live in a world where democracy is strengthened. There are issues that we have to understand clearly. We do not live in an era of rule by kings.

I emphasize that when freedom and democracy are discussed, just as the government and citizens are always committed to safeguard freedom and democracy, the Armed Forces of a country too are committed by the Constitution to safeguard freedom and democracy.

I strongly declare that the whole nation must pay tribute to patriotic war heroes who sacrificed their lives or limbs to defeat brutal LTTE terrorism, which dragged over for 26 years, and, strengthened the freedom, peace and democracy of the country, and continues to do so today. I would like to strongly emphasize that we should recall with honour the commitment, sacrifice, courage, self-confidence and self-determination of the Tri Forces, Police, Civil Defence Department, public service, the general public and political leaderships to achieve peace and freedom to our country, defeating brutal terrorism and separatism.

In the present context, now to face the present problems we have given priority to political, social, and economic reforms. As I have mentioned many times in the past, as a result of our failure to address the issues that should have been addressed in the post conflict era, immediately following 19, 20 May 2009, several proposals were submitted to us through the United Nations Human Rights Council.

I believe that if we had taken the steps that should have been taken in the immediate post-war period at the end of the war during May 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> of 2009, we would not have had these proposals submitted to us through the United Nations Human Rights Council in September 2015 for the implementation of what should have been implemented immediately following the end of the war. The people of this country have given a mandate to me and to our Government on January 08, 2015 to solve these issues and deliver on what we had previously failed in order to foster national unity and reconciliation among all the people in our country, Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, Malay.

I must firmly state that after 68 years, it is essential that we resolve the problems and issues that the Colonial rulers left behind for us in 1948 and fulfil the pledges given in the Election Manifesto, which was presented at the Presidential Election on January 8th 2015. I therefore believe that all of you accept, without any disagreement, that it is essential that we solve the problems which have continued as tasks which have remained unaddressed since May 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> 2009.

Most countries that received their independence after us have now developed and progressed as strong nations as they have succeeded in ushering in political and social reforms by strengthening comprehensive processes through peace, reconciliation and religious and linguistic harmony among communities in their countries.

Therefore, this opportunity we have today should be seized to achieve this important task. There are incorrect interpretations given about the resolution presented through the United Nations Human Rights Council. I clearly state that we will face the implementation of these proposals in order to protect the dignity of our state, the dignity of our people and of our security forces, and also to make our Tri Forces to be internationally respected and accepted.

I must clearly declare that we will face the implementation of these proposals with patience, discipline and restraint so that our country could be respectfully recognized by the United Nations, all international organizations and all States in the world.

Some political rivals, with hopes for capturing power in the short run, are spreading numerous false interpretations to mislead the people about the government's process of

implementing these proposals. I clearly state that it will be freedom, democracy and reconciliation which will be reinforced by implementing the provisions of the resolution.

These political rivals and various extremists are spreading misinformation and wrong ideas to create unrest especially in the minds of the members of the security forces.

On this day, as we celebrate the 68<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence, I pledge and assure the Nation, as the premier devoted Servant of the Public, the Commander-in-Chief of the Security Forces and President, that we will fulfil all these responsibilities while safeguarding the freedom and territorial integrity of our nation, strengthening the reconciliation process in the country, and protecting the dignity of the government, security forces and the people.

Therefore, on a day like this, we should determine that everybody should actively work hard to mark our country on the world map as a proud country and a proud nation. I earnestly believe the entire population will work towards that objective with determination.

I clearly mention that the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution to safeguard democracy and freedom of the people in this country was a major triumph of our new government during the last year; and, it is a great victory gained by the people in this era. Through establishing Independent Commissions we established the Election Commission, which was a major demand of the people in this country for more than 40 years. By establishing Commissions related to Elections, Public Service, Police, Human Rights, and Audits through the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, the unassailable rights of the people in this country were safeguarded.

The steps taken by the government to minimize corruption, fraud, and waste during the last year have resulted in significant successes. All of you agree that we have strengthened the Parliament by adopting the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. In the future, the Independent Commissions will work towards depoliticization of the public service.

In accordance with our policies on media freedom, we have been able to ensure broad media freedom in the country. Media freedom is at its peak today. I have to emphasize that this freedom was granted to the learned, intelligent, wise, humanitarian media personnel to use the media with discipline and decorum.

I will caution that if the media freedom so granted, if improperly used, someone who is in power after us in the future will someday deprive such freedom. Hence, I must with respect say that it is the responsibility of all the journalists and the media institutions to protect this freedom.

In order to develop an economically prosperous country, we will dedicate to a policy to implement our policies to enhance academic status, reinforce free education and health services, create a country free of malnutrition, move forward by combining new super technology with the youth to conquer the competitive world, develop domestic industry and local food production, and strengthen marketing operations for our domestic products in international markets

How far we have utilized our marine resources for the development of our economy during the past 68 years is a question before us. When comparing with the developed countries in the world we have not utilized even one percent of our marine resources for the development of our country.

Therefore, in this high-tech world, as an island nation, we have a great opportunity to develop our economy and to gain from the knowledge of technology by utilizing the large marine resource.

On a blessed day like this, while recalling our great leaders who fought to gain independence for our country in 1948 and paying tribute to our great war heroes, who sacrificed their lives to end the 26 year long brutal terrorist war, I request everyone to set aside narrow political conflicts and narrow thinking, withdraw from reckless actions aiming at short term power grabbing, to unite collectively to safeguard freedom and democracy, committing themselves for a better tomorrow.

Concurrently, I wish to appeal here especially to political opponents to be committed to act intelligently, wisely, and with restraint when enjoying all the rights of democracy and freedom that prevail.

I respectfully plead from everyone to work collectively, in harmony, friendship and brotherhood to prepare our tomorrow to face the forthcoming decades and to transform our noble motherland to the greatest admirable Nation in the world.

May the Triple Gem bless you!

President's Media Unit  
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