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**SPEECH MADE BY
HIS EXCELLENCY R. PREMADASA,
THE PRESIDENT,
AT THE HIGH LEVEL OFFICIAL CONFERENCE
ON "POLICY GUIDELINES
ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION"
AT 'SAWSIRIPAYA' – 13.02.1989**

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I thought of explaining the object of 'Janasaviya' to all of you who are the top level officials, who will be responsible for implementing Government decisions regarding this Programme. The Janasaviya Programme has a vision before it. We should first understand that vision. It is only if that vision is understood, that appropriate policies can be formulated. And, it is only if those policies are properly formulated, that the Programme can be successfully implemented.

In fact, several policy guidelines relating to Janasaviya were detailed by me on 3rd July 1988, which was the last day of the Anamaduwa Gam Udawa. On that occasion the former President, His Excellency J. R. Jayewardene, was with us as the Chief Guest. The speech I delivered that day has been brought out in print. I believe copies of that publication have been issued to you. I would like to invite you to read that speech well. That speech contained a little of the philosophy behind the Janasaviya Programme.

Let me read out to you a few extracts from that speech—I read from page 8: **"Whatever development we may bring about, should be to the benefit of the**

poor. Development, in any sense should help people live. It is to help people live that we need irrigation facilities, highways, electricity etc. We need science not for the sake of science, but to help people. We need technology not for technology's sake, but for improving the living conditions of the people. Our Party is aware that there is no meaning in any development that keeps the people in hunger and in malnutrition, leading to death. Our Government is well aware of this. That is why our Government always acts with the welfare of the people in mind. For whose benefit is science meant? For whom is technology? If hunger cannot be eliminated through science, and if it cannot eliminate sickness and physical weakness, we have no need for that science. If technology cannot eliminate poverty, unemployment, want, we have no need for that technology. If the scientist and the technologist cannot provide relief to the poor, what need have humanity for such a scientist or technologist! These poor people are served better by buffaloes, draught cattle and pack-bulls. We can imagine how these innocent animals serve humanity without any knowledge of science or technology." This is one excerpt from the speech I made that day.

In another place in the same speech I say this: "Half of our people are today living on Food Stamps. We should save them from the abject poverty they have been reduced to. Ours is a country with a great potential. Although half of our population is poor, our country is rich in natural resources. We have no need to make our country an Europe, an America or an Africa. Let us make it an Asia. Let us make it a Sri Lanka. Through justice, self

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reliance and eternal values and truth, let us bring this about. As you know if there is any obstruction to this programme, we should change it. That is what is meant by "progressive" attitude."

Let me quote from another place: **"Our efforts should be to remove this distinction between haves and have-nots altogether. A distinguished President of the United States stated "if a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." That President was the late John F. Kennedy." If anyone tries to force upon the people what they themselves believe, without considering the needs of the people, the result would be waste and displeasure. What we should do is to take each family and find out their needs and help them to overcome their difficulties. That is the need of the day. That is the challenge before us. The poor are suffering in silence. We go to them and ask for their votes. What happens thereafter? A limited crowd hangs around the person who received the vote."**

Let me quote two other parts of my speech: **"We should think for a moment whether we pay to our innocent families the same consideration that we pay to a tender tea leaf or to a rubber sapling or to a coconut plant. How great is the concern we show to the tender tea leaf or to a tea bush? How many experts try to find out why a particular tea plant doesn't grow well or what ails it? And also how concerned are these experts about the coconut plant and the rubber plant? Hon. Ministers and Members of Parliament here are well aware of the measure of concern we show to our innocent and poor people. I need not tell you how often we feel impelled to look into these problems."**

“Thousands of youth who are leaving school and entering society are living in frustration. There are many vicious forces that are trying to exploit them and lead them astray. Therefore, it is our duty to protect our worthy people who in their hundreds of thousands are helping us in programmes of this kind. We would like to tell those who are aiding us that there is nothing wrong in helping programmes that bring results, may be, ten, twelve, fifteen or twenty years later. But the first thing necessary is to help us find a remedy to our immediate problem.”

This is only a small part of our vision of future development. As you know, we built the infrastructure needed by our country during the past eleven years. We took action to provide irrigation facilities. The Mahaweli Ganga Scheme is one of them. We provided facilities for provision of more electricity. Under the Mahaweli Scheme we have already constructed five large reservoirs. We generate power from all these five reservoirs. The benefits of these projects will accrue to everyone of our villages in the next two years. Work on rehabilitation of our highways has been started and is being carried on. We have already liberalized our trade. Conditions have been created to bring about a new growth of small scale and large scale industries. In the next two years we should fully commit ourselves and direct our efforts, to transform half of our population who now live on Food-Stamps, into people with some means and capability. This population, if taken as consisting of families having five members each, would amount to 15 lakhs of families. Those 15 lakhs of families may comprise seventy lakhs or, may be, eighty lakhs of individuals who are now living in utter want. It is to meet this challenge that we should direct our efforts on all fronts – our science, technology and even

administration. That is to strengthen our people. I believe that a family of five living on Food Stamps is not receiving more than Rs. 350/- inclusive of even the recent increase. How can that family live on that income? If they have one meal, they will have to skip the next. They do not have enough clothes to permit a change of clothes. Their children suffer from malnutrition. They do not have a piece of land or a house to call their own. What we are now trying to do, through Janasaviya, is to strengthen these people. Today, we are investing money on various projects. Hereafter, we are going to invest money on our people. I believe, the most fruitful investment is the investment on people. If it is the people who are going to benefit from our development activities, we should strengthen the people, so that they will be able to help themselves. We should get the people to participate in our development work. It is only through production that a country's wealth can be increased. What we need is people-based production.

This Janasaviya Programme is for that purpose. We want to provide nutritious food for our people. It is then that they become a healthy people. It is such a people who can participate in development work and in production. That is why we are going to give them Rs. 2,500/- per month. There is no need to select anew the people who should receive this Allowance. The category of people who should receive assistance has already been named. They include families receiving Food Stamps and other poor families, who are qualified to receive Food Stamps. So, they need not be selected over again. Nevertheless they have to be identified. That should be done at village level in the presence of the people themselves. It is not an identification by officials who go from house to house and get a Form filled. The

authorities will have to visit those villages for this purpose. We will be setting up a Unit which will comprise of Government officials and village representatives. The whole village should be in the know as to what is happening. The families already receiving Food Stamps as well as other families qualified to receive them, though not issued with them still, should be summoned before the Unit, one by one. When this is done all the villagers will see what is happening. That is how this identification will be done. Our survey will embrace all the 25,000 villages in the country. Of the amount of Rs. 2,500/- given to each family, one part is for consumption and the other for saving. They should be provided with proper guidance in regard to consumption. They could cultivate nutritious food themselves. They should be encouraged to do so. Otherwise this money might be wasted on non-essentials. The Allowance given is not a Charity Allowance. The Allowance is a support provided for the people to get their necessary nutrition, for their physical growth. The Unit, I spoke about, should guide the people in this regard. The part of the Allowance to be saved should be deposited in a Bank. By the end of the 24 months, the saving will amount to Rs. 25,000/-.

This saving can be utilised for some enterprise by the family. During the 24 months the Unit should find out the wishes, talents and the abilities of the family, and direct them to some suitable form of trade, or small industry, or cultivation in order to ensure an independent existence to them. Now, these are families that receive Food Stamps or qualify to receive Food Stamps – in other words, the poorest of the poor. Apart from these families, there are others in a village who are not qualified to receive this amount of Rs. 2,500/-. They are people who are fairly well off. The Unit should look into the conditions of these

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families too, and find out what their weaknesses and shortcomings are, and also where their strength lies and what they have. The Unit should advise them on how best their capacity and strength can be utilised. There are credit systems provided by the State. There are various forms of assistance given. Many of these families are unaware of them. There may be, in these families, members with various talents. Even among the Food Stamp receiving families, there may be individuals with various innate talents and abilities. All these years, though we have been trying to find out what their weaknesses and shortcomings are, we never worried ourselves to find out what their capabilities and talents are. The other day, I had the opportunity of listening to a set of verses recited by a child of a poor family. Her performance made me wonder what great talent she possessed for recitation and delivery. On further inquiry, I found out that she came from a family living on Food Stamps. On another occasion, I saw a wood carving done by a child. It was a beautiful creation. The wonder was that the child had done it without any guidance or training received from anybody on the art of wood carving. What a clever craftsman he will be, if he is trained in the techniques and the technology of the art! In poor families we come across persons with innate talent and are capable of new creations. But so far we have not bothered ourselves to find out them, and to give any help to them. All this time, if ever we thought of the people, it was to find out whether we could impose new taxes, or, in some such other way, add to their burdens, and not to help them.

In colonial times all that our rulers did was to exploit us. Nothing was done to help us to develop and grow. Our inherent skills were never discovered or sharpened. The slavish mentality of dependence on others, generated by

colonial rule, and also, the system of administration of that period are, yet with us. All those who join us in these activities should keep this important point in mind. Our attempt is to be responsive to a large section of people, who still remain neglected, and get their participation for development and production, and thereby, increase our country's resources base. As I stated earlier, please do not consider this monthly grant of Rs. 2,500/- to these poor families, as a Charity Allowance. It is nothing but an investment made to mobilize more resources for our society. The aim of the programme is to look into the needs of, not only families living on Food Stamps, but all others too, so that we can help them to get over their difficulties, and get them to contribute their strength to the effort of social advancement. This programme does not need any new taxation. It does not need cutting anybody's salary. All that is necessary is to direct available resources to this task on a priority basis. In fact, what we are trying to do is to make available to our society a whole mass of resources that we have so far forgotten about and left neglected.

I have also directed that lands that could be given to our poor be selected, and that arrangements be made to take stock of the quantum of such land available. We believe that every family should have a piece of land large enough to suit its needs. They should have a house of their own. If no land is available in urban areas, we might be able to give them the ownership of the houses they live in now. We might be able to draw such urban families to some form of productive activity. This is the type of concept of development that we have in Janasaviya. If you read my speech made at the Udagam Anniversary on 3rd July 1988 in full, you will be able to understand this concept better. I intend to speak to the Field Officers also about this

programme on the coming 25th. I wanted to make a brief explanation of the Janasaviya concept to you who are in Government Ministries, Departments and Corporations, first.

Now, these Units I spoke of, are expected to be established in all the 25,000 villages. They will comprise representatives of the villages, as well as, Government officials. We will be able to get the assistance of village level organisations in this matter. There are various voluntary organisations at village and urban level. Those organisations are now represented in the Gramodaya Mandalayas. All of them should be drawn into the effort to implement this programme. There are three main Institutions in our country, that now function separately. Firstly, there are the Buddhist, Hindu, Islam and Christian places of worship in the villages. Think for a moment, of the amount of influence these temples, churches and mosques wield today. They cultivate righteous thoughts among the people. The clergy of these places provide an example to the people. Secondly, we have the village schools. These schools too, teach the growing generation the proper way to live in society. Thirdly, there is the Police Station that serves the area. What the Police does, is also, to advise the people and guide them to abide by the country's laws. That is the main task expected of the Police – i.e. to point out to individuals or groups the harm that will be caused to society by breaking the law. It is to do this, that the people are even brought before Courts. When that happens, it is the Courts that decide on the punishment for breaking the law. In fact, basically these three Institutions – the place of worship, the school and the police – serve the same objective, though in different ways. However, we note that these three Institutions work separately without any co-ordination. I would like

these three important Institutions to work with some co-ordination for the welfare of the people of their areas. I have already told the Inspector General of Police to get the officers in-charge-of the various Police Stations to go to the place of worship in the village, not in Uniform, but in normal dress like any other ordinary citizen, and meet and discuss matters with the clergy. If they do it, it will provide an impetus for peace. They should show that they are always ready to work together with others. They should next go to the school and meet the Principal and the Teaching Staff. There are also the senior students with whom they can discuss matters. They should be told that the Police are there to help them to get on in the society, as much as the schools. They can also tell the school children that they are ready to share with them the benefits of the discipline they had got through Police training. Such discipline would come in handy when they leave school and take up employment in the outside world.

Just think of the difference that would be brought about in society, if only, these important Institutions work with such co-ordination. At present they work separately with no contact with each other. One Institution does not know what the other is doing. So, a programme of this nature should also be included in the Janasaviya. The Janasaviya is for the welfare of the people, both spiritually and economically. It would be the important means of creating peace, ensuring discipline and achieving prosperity. This vision, this concept, should be understood by all of us. The people of this country appointed me as their President to conduct the administration of this country on these three foundations. Therefore, those of you at top level should take this to heart. Your economic programmes will be prepared in

conformity with this programme. We need technology. But that technology should not be something that dominates the people. I can refer to an incident that happened recently, to illustrate my point. All of you know of the tragedy that took place at Ahungalle. The absence of a rail gate resulted in a train-bus collision. Some forty odd innocent persons, including school children, died on the spot. About hundred more were injured. Why did this happen? Because there was no rail gate there to close the road, when the train was on the track. To provide a rail gate, a sum of Rs. 350,000/- or so, has to be spent, normally. There are seven hundred odd such unprotected level-crossings in the country. Now imagine the total sum of money that would have to be spent on all these level-crossings.

Now, I believe, this requirement of a rail-gate at every level-crossing has already been fulfilled, not by spending lakhs of rupees, but a mere sum of Rupees 125/- or so, on each. We made use of human labour. A protection has been provided round the clock. Six persons living on Food Stamps and residing in the area, have received jobs. Each person gets Rs. 1000/ per month. Under Janasaviya that person's family will be getting Rs. 1,500/- being the balance from the Allowance due to him. We told them to raise at least a bamboo across the road when a train is on line. Within a week that task was completed. You can imagine now how a job for which about three to four thousand lacks of rupees were to have been spent, has now been completed for almost a song, and with extreme ease. In other areas too, we should learn to find solutions to problems thinking on the same lines.

In most offices we only fatten our office files. We can cut down on documentation to a large extent. We can

reduce Form filling. Office staff should develop the habit of discussing among them matters relating to the subjects they handle. The large tables in offices are like beds. You can make two tables out of each table that you are using now. Besides, a large table only clutters up space. It also calls for unnecessary buildings, furniture as well as equipment such as telephones. I have ordered the Treasury to look into this matter. When some money is allocated for a project, a large part of the fund was for the organising of the project. In 1977, when I told my officers that a particular project had to be started, I was told that a building of such and such a size would be required with so many officials, and so many telephones, and various furniture. Ultimately it was found out that 3/4ths of the money meant for the project went for the establishment. So we should now think of re-organising these offices. The larger the office, the greater the inconvenience in keeping the place tidy and clean. There is no use working seated at these tables, dressed nicely, if we do not worry ourselves to find out whether the work is being done properly, without leaving room for inordinate waste. At present, in almost every office, there is waste of funds taking place, which can very well be prevented by a little bit of thinking and planning. For example, in most of the offices, nobody looks around after closing time to see whether the fans are still working or the taps remain running. If we avoid this sort of waste we would be in a position and would have enough funds, to implement not one Janasaviya, but several of them, without having to find additional money. I earnestly invite you to think about these things seriously, after your going back to your work places. If you do so, you would undoubtedly be able to think up new ideas and tell me how to implement this scheme even in a better way than

we contemplate now. I would be very happy to receive guidance from those who think about this and make their suggestions for improvement.

I leave it to you to effect a complete re-organisation in the existing administration on these lines. Please reduce waste as much as possible. We must effect economy as far as possible in the use of equipment and vehicles. Very often several officers go to the same place, in separate vehicles, when a single vehicle would have been sufficient for the transport of all of them. Recently, I came to know of an instance, where a lorry had been sent from Colombo to Galle, taking only an almairah as its load. An empty lorry too had been sent to Galle, from the same office, to bring down certain articles which awaited despatch from Galle. Strange though it was, this arrangement had been made in the same office. The amazing thing about the matter is, that the two clerks who deployed the two vehicles, sit opposite each other looking at the faces of each other, throughout the day. The two men talk a lot about everything under the sun, except the duties they attend to. It is said that a subject they discussed with particular relish is horse racing and betting. When I heard of this incident, I had inquiries made, and the person who made investigations reported, that even at the moment he went to the place, the two officers had been engrossed in talk about racing.

If one of these officers happened to tell the friend sitting opposite, that he was sending a lorry to Galle for the purpose he had in mind, the other man, most probably, would have been reminded of his need and made use of the same vehicle for it too. When questioned about the matter the officers had said that they were expected only to minute in files about their work, and not to discuss with

others. Both had minuted in their respective files, but neither one had the opportunity of knowing what his colleague had written. They had handled two different subjects and the files had gone to two superior officers for orders who mutually did not know what the other man did. A little bit of co-ordination of work among officers would have avoided this duplication of work and waste of funds.

I must tell you that it is not necessary for the Ministry of Public Administration to send down Circulars to correct this sort of thing taking place in offices. If you think on the lines, I just mentioned, you will be able to bring about the radical re-organisation that is necessary to remedy the situation. I earnestly request you to do so and make a success of the Janasaviya effort. Janasaviya is actually an effort to help the people, and in turn, to secure their participation and assistance to do an immense good to the country and society. Janasaviya need not become a burden on anybody. It will generate the strength necessary for its own existence and progress. Those of you who implement the programme will, undoubtedly derive much satisfaction from the good results which would be beneficial to all.

