

THE PRESIDENT WILL OVERCOME TERRORISM



Hon. Prime Minister
R. Premadasa M.P.

A Ministry of State Publication

BKTO159
26/08/2023

PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT
LIBRARY

**THE PRESIDENT WILL
OVERCOME TERRORISM**

Extracts from the Speech made by the Hon. Prime Minister R. Premadasa in the Parliament on 21st December 1984 in the debate on the motion to extend the Emergency

There was a time when there were wars between two countries. That has changed a little and not wars between countries, but what we have today is a situation of wars within a country.

It is not a face to face fight with the terrorists that we have to wage. They hit and run and run and hit. That is the method of war in this era. It is this danger that exists within countries. Not only in Sri Lanka, this situation exists in various countries.

In facing this situation, weakness is found in democratic countries more than in totalitarian countries.

In a totalitarian country, destroying terrorist activity like this is very easy. But it is a little difficult to do so in a democratic country. In a democracy there is also an Opposition.

Totalitarian countries can say : 'We won't allow them to raise their heads'. They won't allow a head to come up. Isn't it only if there is a head that it could be raised ? In totalitarian countries except for the head that is in power they never allow any other head to be born. They may break the head as it is born. In countries like that it is easy to wipe out terrorism.

But when we look at countries in the world we find that there is a special difficulty in suppressing terrorist activity in democracies. Like in totalitarian countries it is not easy to suppress terrorism in democratic countries.

In democratic countries there are members elected by the people. There is the Head of government elected by those members. There is also a Cabinet chosen by the head of State. There is also a government party. There is also an Opposition.

Therefore, there are different views. As such in democracies it is not easy to curb terrorism. In totalitarian countries, the dictator does what he likes. He is not responsible to anybody. He need not give an account to anybody. He need not give an answer. We should understand that.

If we were in the Opposition I would also make speeches similar to yours.

Lessons from the British Parliament

I remember on some days reading in the Parliament Library in the days when we were in the Opposition – the Hansards of the British House of Commons. They were of the old war times.

When listening to these three speeches today I was really reminded of how during the Second World War, Prime Minister Churchill without fail got Parliament to meet. He convened Parliament even when London was being bombed.

PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT LIBRARY

That example became very useful to us when the curfew was imposed to tell the Secretary-General of Parliament at 4.30 a.m. in the morning not to put off sittings of Parliament. That was a great example.

When the House of Commons was being bombed he held sessions on a ground floor. It was a crucial stage in the war. The Nazis, Hitler, Mussolini getting on to one side, with the assistance of Japan and as friendly nations Great Britain, Soviet Union, America the great powers – that is the three called Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin.

At that time, almost the whole of Europe was going under Hitler. It was at a time like that that the meeting was held – really when they went under.

What is this happening here? It is the Kent Farm and Doller Farm that they attacked. It was not like that then. It was a time when across France they were on the verge of subduing Great Britain.

I remember, a member in the House of Commons saying 'What are you doing? They are attacking and we have come to a finish. You are presiding over the liquidation of the whole human world.' On that occasion Prime Minister Churchill said 'Yes it is a difficult situation but with determination, with devotion and with courage we must win for the decent human beings of this world.'

I too, have to say the same thing. Although it is true that they are attacking us we should somehow or other win the struggle. Therefore do not be frightened. Do not get excited. I wish to state that even by sacrificing our lives we will protect the freedom of Sri Lanka.

You all know that our President is a leader with wisdom and wide experience. I don't think anyone is questioning about his wealth of experience or his wisdom. We must also remember that he is a leader of a democracy. He is leader elected by the vote. He is not a dictator.

Therefore, it may be that there is a delay. I told you earlier the difficulties in implementing these matters. He does not rule alone. He is the Head of State in this country. But he is a democratic leader who is ruling a country with a Cabinet, a Parliament, an Opposition and different peoples within a constitutional framework.

It is easy for all of us to sit here and criticise. But if we think how each of us will act in this situation if you are the Head of State elected by the votes of the country ; if we think like that we will be able to find many answers to this question. Sometimes one might think, if he was in the leadership, this situation would not arise. There are such clever people also in this world.

THE PRESIDENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS

We must remember what sort of country, he took over in 1977. What sort of a country did he take over? You know, Sir, he took over a country where there was not enough to eat or drink, where development had come to a standstill, a country which faced a grave economic situation. We must remember that he was a leader who promised to suppress terrorist activity which has grown into these proportions. Those of you in the Opposition should think a little. You might say that because these terrorist acts were there from the years 1974-1975 the President should have known this situation would come after five or six years. All right if he thought of such a thing, if estimates were brought here from 1977 to provide millions of rupees to get the weapons of war to strengthen the forces in the country to purchase aeroplanes, what would you have said? Then you would have said in this House that we are working on dreams of terrorism which would come in five or six years. Will you not ask whether these monies are for that or to build the country? Now it is easy for you to come here and say the army hasn't this, hasn't that, no weapons and various other things.

I am not saying this as a charge. But we must understand realities. We must understand the true position. But I know that even though you understand realities you cannot voice your views as members of

the Opposition. You have a problem because your members will criticise you, what did you all go and speak, didn't you hold 'pandam to the government?'

Therefore, there is no harm. You may speak but the people will know the facts. You may criticise. I know you are criticising and saying 'What is this government doing?' The Leader of the Opposition said 'There the Eelamists have gone and hoisted a flag somewhere in Kokilai'. They have not hoisted any flags. They may have hoisted flags in their camps in the jungle.

I am not speaking today to win the hearts of the Opposition. I must disclose the true position. That is my duty. Not to win an argument by counter criticism. We must remember what we accepted to do and the program we are preparing for. Not that there are no shortcomings. I accept that.

If in 1978, 1979 or 1980 money proposals were introduced in the budget to strengthen the army what would have been the position? If we decided to build an Army of one lakh, a Navy of 50,000, an Air Force of 50,000 and police force of three to four lakhs and if we tried to place army units everywhere and buy helicopters what would you have said? We were criticised by going to buy three helicopters. That is forgotten now. The criticism levelled when we were preparing to buy three helicopters when Parliament building was in Fort is forgotten now. I do not blame anyone for it. One does that sort of thing. But what I

PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT
LIBRARY

am saying is this. If we tried to collect these in 1978, '79, '80, '81, '82 or '83, the opposition would not have praised us.

Without constructing the Victoria Dam, without constructing Kotmale, without constructing Maduru Oya, without constructing houses, without developing industries, without developing our agriculture and achieving self-sufficiency in food, will they say that our increasing the arms and ammunition supplies and strengthening the army units is a good thing, no! Therefore, let us understand the true situation.

In a combat we must always speak of the power of the enemy. Instead of talking of our feats today you all gave us a good advice, that the enemy was very strong. But there was one matter which you all carefully avoided talking about. That is how did the enemy get so strong. That is where the wrong lies. That was not spoken about. Except explaining the weakness of the government in the sphere of war strength and in the security position, it was not stated in what way the enemy received its power.

The need for a political solution

A political solution is necessary for political questions. That is what we are seeking to do even today. Our party cannot do this alone. So we were asked to summon an All Party Conference. We did that also. You all said: "We won't discuss with those who accept the

policy of dividing this country, that they will not be allowed to attend the House. It is true we introduced laws for it. But isn't it you who told us to bring them in also. I have the details with me. Isn't it you all who asked what was the worth of the discussions without Amirthalingam, without the TULF ? These need not be said when I have won the hearts. But understand the reality. You blame us.

But can you charge this government of not seeking a political solution ? We changed the Constitution that we ourselves created and deprived them of their right. You all helped us. We isolated them.

The first All Party Conference was summoned to the hall in the Presidential Secretariat where Cabinet meetings are held. What was it that was said there ? "If this is to be a real APC, the JVP, the NSSP and the TULF should be summoned". Then the President explained the difficulty in summoning the JVP and the NSSP. But your request to summon the TULF was accepted. In short, it was Mrs. Bandaranaike herself who said through the local and foreign press that if a solution is to be found they (the TULF) should also be brought in. I don't think anyone will deny that she said it.

In a desire to find a political solution, I know how carefully our President took that step. We are not a group which believes in a military solution. It is because we did not have such a belief that we are

being criticised, that we did not do what was needed at the correct time. Now we are being blamed for not doing this, out doing that. Now they have come to Kokilai, Sinhapura on that side, Puttalam on this side and to the border from the other side.

You have said everything. That is why I said this is a democratic government. When thinking of the military strength of this government, as reasonable peoples you should ask yourselves how these hit and run, cowardly terrorists had come to such a powerful position? Three petrol bowsers belonging to the Petroleum Corporation had been hijacked, the petrol in them stored as if to say bring some more and the three bowsers left on the road. Where was this petrol taken? Was it put into three or four tins. Is it easy to store them? If a fire takes place suddenly? You understand their military strength!

You spoke of the Allen couple, about the nine employees of the Cement Corporation. In that way you described their feats. Think a little and see. Is this like the 1971 insurrection where some ordinary youth took guns from their villages and attacked police stations? You know that the security forces are stronger today than when you were governing.

Consider whether a few persons expecting a political solution could threaten an army of a country in this way. There are reasonable Tamils who expect a political solution. I won't say it is not so. But what I

have always said I like to repeat. The entire Tamil population in the country are not in favour of riots or disturbances. There is a very reasonable section, too. Today the biggest disaster has been caused to them. I accept what our Leader of the Opposition said. If we suspect a person merely because he is said to be a Tamil, Muslim or Burgher, it would be most unfair. But it is not correct to forget the persons who have no confidence in discussions, or in cordiality or in conferences. Similarly, there are those who support them in certain areas in Sri Lanka. We must remember that also.

How did these terrorists have the power to be able to bring to such a situation the strength of the security forces which had been built in a country for a long time ? How did they gain this strength within seven or eight years. How did they get the money ? How did they get weapons ? When we say this, they say he is trying to provoke our big brother or big sister. I am forbidden from speaking the truth. The Leader of the Opposition spoke of the brutal manner in which those innocent persons in the Dollar Farm and Kent Farm had been murdered. He said he could not see a video film made about it. I saw it. It was made when they went to fetch the dead bodies. How were they killed ? The hands of those innocent persons were tied to their backs. Small children, women and others had been tied in this manner. Then they had been laid flat on their faces. Then the terrorists, as if going over carpet

PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT
LIBRARY

had run over these bodies seven or eight times. Wearing uniforms with shining buttons, and carrying shining weapons, these terrorists wearing boots had gone over these bodies seven or eight times like walking on a carpet. This is the story of a man who was an eye witness. He too had been injured. He had run away and escaped. He said that a number would have died when terrorists were running over those bodies. Then how did they shoot? Some in the ear, some in the nose, and to various other places. They were all shot and killed. It is when they went to bring the dead bodies that the video filming was done. Apart from that film, I also saw some colour pictures and black and white pictures.

Wrong pictures given to Mr. Rajiv Gandhi

Consider and see, how those very pictures were taken and the new Indian Prime Minister was shown them. They were given to him and told "see how innocent Tamil people have been murdered by the security forces of Sri Lanka." When he saw those pictures what did he do? He got excited and made a statement blaming us. I am sorry that the new Prime Minister fell into such a situation. But on this basis we should see who is advising him in India. Didn't these 'Yodayas' get the Prime Minister of a big country like India to utter a falsehood? Didn't it turn out to be an international lie? The situation it fell into was such that the Indian Express made a criticism.

The 'Indian Express' in an editorial comment has faulted Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's statement saying that it helped weaken the hand of moderates both Sinhala and Tamil.

Said the Express : 'It is a pity that the latest flurry of notes and protests across Palk Straits involves both governments in an acerbic exchange of charges and recrimination.

The Sri Lanka government has a justifiable grievance that Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's statement last week, by completely ignoring the terrorist factor, tends to be loaded and weakens the hands of all moderate elements, Tamil and Sinhala'.

The biggest obstacle to our solving this internal problem are the Indian bureacrats. They misled Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Now they have misled the new Prime Minister also and it is on the myth called Human Rights and Racial Rights that the terrorists have got protection. It is because they got this protection that about 20 miles away they have been able to get training which is not available to the Sri Lanka Government's forces.

Not only that, they have been able to collect arms and ammunition in plenty. What are these weapons? If you see the list I have – of the weapons that have been recovered – you will be surprised. What valuable weapons? They possess weapons worth millions of rupees. 'Now you shout at us saying, 'What is this

government'? This government is incapable of safeguarding the security of this country. If we spent millions of rupees to bring weapons you would have said, 'This is a military dictatorship. They came into office by the choice of the people, but now over-load their military strategy.' If we did that that is what you will say. To what extent have they strengthened themselves. That is not thought of or talked about now. Was anyone unitedly coming forward to tell this to the whole world? What you are doing is to put us to one side and criticise us. What are you all in the Opposition who are saying, 'We are prepared to give a hand, the leg, the head' doing? Cannot you tell the entire world that whoever helps the terrorists stand entirely condemned by everybody in Sri Lanka.

We will face the challenge

As a party, in the manifesto which we put forward unitedly seeking the votes of the people we have not made any statement about the situation that has arisen today.

Therefore, even among us there are various views. They say TELO, EPRLF, TLO TELA. But there is a lesson we have to learn from the terrorists. Whatever LA or LO there is, they are united on one thing – on the need to subjugate this country. Whatever differences we have on economic issues, strikes or other matters, do we get up and say, 'We won't allow any devil to subjugate our country. Instead what we do is to talk to weaken our forces and discourage the

people. Isn't that what we are doing ? It is because it will be unfair not to reply to statements they made that I have to say these things.

I'll say one thing. Don't think that we think we consider it a misfortune that we have taken responsibility for the country and the people as a party and a government at a time when the country was facing this calamity, uncertainty, threat and challenge.

I wish to state it is fortunate to hold this responsibility when the country is facing a crisis and seek to rescue it rather than at a time when there was no calamity and the administration went on without any troubles.

Take our early kings. We never speak of kings who ruled.

When the country was administered peacefully without any crisis but those who either faced an economic crisis or foreign invasion or else those who faced a situation of poverty and sought to save the people from it.

Even when we talk of Pandukabhaya, he developed this country according to a plan at a time there was no plan. If there was a very good plan would we speak of Pandukabhaya ?

Aren't we talking of King Devanampiyatissa because he built the country in virtue and good habits at a time when the country was becoming corrupt.

Why do we talk of King Dutugemunu ? Isn't it because when the country was split by wars he went from Magama, straight to the North and united the country ? Why do we talk of Parakramabahu the great ? It is as a king who made the country self-sufficient and sent our grain abroad at a time when this country had gone down economically. We talk of kings who pulled the country out of difficulty.

Therefore those who rule a country at a time when it is facing a challenge are not unfortunate people. They get an opportunity of rescuing the country from the danger it has fallen into. It is in that spirit that we are facing the present situation.

A hundred ministers

Next, there was criticism that various members of the government were holding particular posts. They say it is one Minister at dawn, another Minister in the afternoon and yet another in the evening. You criticised us even when we appointed 20 Ministers. You did so again when we appointed District Ministers and when we appointed Project Ministers. You said there was no government with so many Ministers. As I said earlier the Head of State can appoint a person necessary for a certain subject. Under the Constitution the President is the Commander-in-Chief. He is not only the President. But do you say he should go in front to the battlefield and fight ? There are service chiefs. In that way, he is Commander-in-Chief. On the other hand the head of state has been given a group

of MPs by the people. In the way he thinks, he appoints a person for each subject asking him to do that job for him. What is wrong in that ?

When he returned he said at a public meeting, "If we come to power I will appoint 100 Ministers". If there are 100 subjects he said he would appoint 100 Ministers. Even that was criticised then.

Every one of the Ministers and MPs are prepared to perform their duties as best as they can. Our team of Ministers, and MPs are wanting to fulfil the tasks entrusted to them with dedication.

Only one member spoke today. That was the Member for Uva-Paranagama (Mr. R. M. Karunaratne). If you listened to his speech you will understand – the views you expressed. What did he say ? "I am in the government party. Therefore on this occasion I must remain without giving vent to the feelings which are in the hearts of the people." He could have remained without saying those things. But not so. He spoke. There is freedom for that. Then cannot you say that his ideas clash with other ideas ? Yes, they are in agreement with your views.

There is nothing wrong in each one speaking according to the facts he comes to know in this crisis. Why ?

It is not according to a plan that this crisis took place, not according to a plan that we wished.

PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT
LIBRARY

The nature of the struggle

I stated this was a struggle against this country by the terrorists with outside help, encouragement and protection. Is it to obtain language rights? A heritage regarding the system of government that this struggle is being continued? If so why kill the Tamil people themselves in cold blood? Not only innocent Tamils but also innocent priests? Is that all?

An innocent bhikku who came to this country from Japan, spreading the message of peace. For what wrong? I intend publishing soon, some documents which I have received from Japan. Japanese national Nitidatsu Thera is, I think, about 100 years old. A great bhikku who takes this peace message to the entire world. He donates immensely. Members of this House know about that monk. This pupil monk, a youth, got ordained, dedicated, came to Sri Lanka, went to India too on this peace mission, beats the drum and goes about talking of peace.

The letters which he wrote to his parents before this monk was killed have been copied and sent to me. It surprises me when I see these. "Not only in Sri Lanka but my service is to go to India also and foster peace". Nicely written letters with these wonderful ideas. The letters that monk has written according to the "Dhanta Dharmaya". I intend publishing them. You will see to what great service that Japanese monk was dedicated. Such a monk was killed.

A few days ago, a priest – a Tamil priest – was burnt alive. Never mind if they had done wrong, if they had tried to attack them. Then we could understand. Innocent children ? Innocent women who were Tamils ? Muslims ? Those in the Army ? In the Police ?

Is this for a political solution ? If a political solution is given, do you think this struggle will stop ? Even when there is talk of a political solution, don't they attack ? Don't they kill ? Don't they destroy ? Think of that also. It is easy to say that there should be a political solution. Aren't we doing everything that is asked towards a political solution ? Therefore, we should create an awareness among our people about this. Some of our people do not understand this situation. We must make our people know the situation. The people are waiting. We should enlist the people in our work. There are things the people can do.

Today the people get angry, provoked, excited, for the slightest thing. Then the enemies can create any disaster. That is why we created the civil defence scheme.

Today in every Ministry, the co-operation of Ministers, Secretaries, departmental heads from Government Agents to Grama Sevakas, every organisation is obtained, the assistance of every voluntary organisation is obtained to create an

awareness and have a program of protecting your village and country. This program is being worked out for the last two weeks now.

The member for Gampaha said there was fear that there will be disaster if this is worked on the basis of party politics or on race or caste distinctions. I fully accept that view. It is not with that intention that this is being done. Party politics and other differences are not necessary for this. When there is a crisis or an emergency, however much food items are available, prices go up. Goods are hoarded. There is no way of getting them in an emergency. The Minister of Trade is with local bodies and organisations and carrying out a program of work under that civil defence plan.

In addition a plan is afoot to assist any police station. After screening at our police stations, a home guard system to assist our policemen is being carried out. The Deputy Minister of Internal Security (Mr. Anura Bastian) is carrying out that duty. It is to face the situation that has arisen that each person has been entrusted with each section. As I said earlier we did not expect such a situation seven or eight years ago. But we must remember one thing. Even in a time of war when the soldiers go to the battlefield the ordinary citizens have acted to protect their villages and towns and public property and person. The situation which arose during the Second World War not only in countries where the war was at its height but in Sri Lanka and other countries. When we were

under colonial rule, when Sir Geoffrey Layton was directing military operations as Chief Commanding Officer, there was a civil defence plan for this country. Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, our Civil Defence Commissioner, worked out a civil defence plan to prevent as far as possible the difficulties people faced during the war.

The need for unity

No struggle can be won without the co-operation of the people. We must understand that no struggle has been won without the co-operation of the people.

The member for Maharagama said certain incidents could have been known earlier. True. Our President has a very important division, the Internal Security Division. I wish to say with praise to those officers that there is a good division for this. As the member for Maharagama said we had knowledge on October 31 about the proposed attack on the Chavakachcheri police station. Many facts are known earlier. We have come to know earlier about 80 to 90 per cent. But as I said earlier we have our weaknesses. This is because this is a government which did not prepare for a war.

Explosives are buried today on certain roads. There are effective instruments in the world by which not only can all explosive material be detected at a distance of several miles but they can also be exploded. But millions will have to be spent for them. The Finance Minister has today spent a large amount

RESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT
LIBRARY

to get down various equipment needed for the country. But as I said earlier we did not make lengthy preparations for this. If we had prepared I think the Minister of Finance would have had to face another charge. They will ask him whether money was set aside for developing the country or to collect weapons and strengthen the forces.

Whatever set of proposals came it is a set of proposals which protect the sovereignty and unity of the country that we will consider. Those proposals are before you. You can discuss them.

The MP for Kalawana spoke about an election manifesto. I am very glad about it. Kindly read that election manifesto. See in what manner we have promised the people to decentralise power.

I wish to state categorically that the UNP is a party which bowed its head and continues to bow its head to public opinion. It is because we want to solve this question according to the wishes of the people that the President stated from the outset that he was prepared to hold even a referendum or general election to solve this grave question. We don't intend doing anything secretly, behind the backs of the people.

The President has categorically stated that he was not prepared to have any pacts like the earlier – Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact, the

Dudley-Chelvanayakam pact. That he was not prepared even for a J. R. Jayewardene-Indira Gandhi pact, but his only pact is with the people who brought him to that position.

He said so publicly. Therefore there is no need to fear anything. In this critical moment it is not an exercise that will create dissension, divide the people and disunite them that is essential but we should all stand up against the threat of terrorism we have to face.

Anyone who knows early history or recent history will not accept that a government elected by the ballot can be toppled by terrorism. It is not a thing that will happen any day. But harm will be caused. Innocent lives will be lost. Crimes will be committed. But it is not possible even with deadly weapons to defeat a government democratically elected by the people. They can cause damage. That can happen. Sometimes by terrorism, a totalitarian administration could be wiped out. But it is difficult to destroy a government elected by the ballot.

At this moment what I have to say is this. When such speeches were made in the British Parliament, when Hitler's armies were winning in Europe, what did Prime Minister Winston Churchill say : "That greater than Hitler's arms and ammunition and his cruelty, the strength of determination in our hearts will bring victory some day."





Overseas Information Series No. 28

Published by the Department of Information
Printed at Govt. Press, Colombo, Sri Lanka.