

SRI LANKAN OF THE YEAR
President Mahinda Rajapaksa

LMD[®]

AWARDED
Superbrands
SRI LANKA
2008

THE VOICE OF BUSINESS



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I am of the strong view
that Sri Lanka is at the
threshold of a new era.

The President

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW 126

**DECEMBER
2009**

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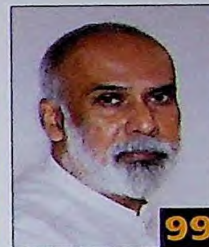
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STATE OF JOBS

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IN THIS EDITION OF THE VOICE OF BUSINESS



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Zola Dowell



“My mother was embarrassed each time I rushed across the street to get as close as possible to this magical creature...
Nihara Jayatileke



“In the case of Sri Lanka, I think some streamlining is needed, as there are so many agencies involved in promotion...
Dato' Patricia Yoon-Moi Chia



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When a reputed business magazine recognises the performance of an individual and decides to make an award to that person, no wonder that individual will be happy.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa



SRI LANKAN OF THE YEAR CRY FREEDOM

Two thousand and nine will undoubtedly go down in the annals of history as the year a tiny island-nation succeeded in defeating one of the most ruthless terrorist organisations the world has ever seen. It's been a year fraught with many hardships for the people and the Executive – security issues, political drama and unprecedented economic strife.

Which is why the military victory is all the more monumental, in that despite these hard times the people of this nation found the re-

solve to suspend, at times, and perhaps look away when personal and civil liberties were trod on for the greater good and the broader goal of defeating terrorism. *Terrorism did, after all, hold us all to ransom for almost three decades.* Some of us may ponder on the fact that even 20-something Sri Lankans would be hard-pressed to recall a time when the suicide bomber was not the deadliest weapon in a terrorist's arsenal – a weapon that was borrowed and made even deadlier by international terror groups, culminating in that fate-

ful day in September not long ago. With the now infamous fall of the Twin Towers. And so, it is in this backdrop of *not* forgetting (as is often the want of Sri Lankans) that we honour the architect of the military operation that united the country once again, and the custodian and First Citizen of Sri Lanka – the President, Mahinda Rajapaksa – with LMD's award for Sri Lankan of the Year. This honour is bestowed on the President in the context of him being Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces who were heroic in getting about the business of annihilating

an enemy at great personal cost – a feat that no one before him could even come close to achieving. In an exclusive interview with Time less than two months after the war was won, the President proudly said that “we showed that we can defeat terrorism”. Hailing from a family with much experience in politics spanning many decades, Mahinda Rajapaksa has proved his credentials as an astute politician and a strategist who is capable of gathering the support of many diverse factions including the Marxist

JVP, which helped him in no small measure in his bid to secure the office of Executive. No leader in modern times has had the kind of public support and elevation to demigod status as this President. A fact that, we hope, he will now use to right many of the wrongs perpetrated on the people in the name of politics and under the guise of democracy. But while the ruling coalition continues to bask in the glory of the military victory, voices of dissent have since sprung up to issue a call to arms. Only this time, this is chiefly to fight the good fight on the economic front.

Impending elections and a postponed fiscal budget are added speed bumps along the road to President Mahinda Rajapaksa emerging as a leader who will be remembered for more than this historic victory – as a true statesman and servant of the people. But the President's resoluteness cannot be questioned. Having tackled detractors from many quarters, including the mighty West that sought to bring a halt to the fighting when it was at its zenith, he has overcome many obstacles that were thought to be insurmountable by opposition forces and those

Why it is hard to deny the role of the President in maintaining this nation's sovereignty and crushing the scourge of terrorism after a lapse of 26 years.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANTHONY JAYATHARAKA FOR TIME MAGAZINE

SRI LANKAN OF THE YEAR

CRY FREEDOM



MEDIA SERVICES PHOTOFILE (DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION)



who didn't or still don't believe in his brand of governance.

Indeed, questions have been raised that may never be answered to the satisfaction of each and every one of us. And there are issues that may not see any resolution in our lifetime.

But one thing cannot be denied... that there emerged a person from within the people that led the nation victoriously into an era of hope, however uncertain that may be.

Mahinda Rajapaksa will also be remembered for articulating what no leader of post-independence Sri Lanka has done before – the public denouncing of segmentation based on race.

“We have removed the word ‘minorities’ from our vocabulary... No longer are there Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and any others minorities...” the President assured, in his historic address at the opening of Parliament in May this year.

What is perhaps even more memorable was his attempt to speak directly to the Tamil-speaking people of Sri Lanka, which he did in their language: “This is our country. This is our motherland. We should live in this country as children of one mother. No differences of race, caste and religion should prevail here... Protecting the Tamil-speaking people of this country is my responsibility; that is my duty. All the people of this country should live in safety without fear and suspicion. All should live with equal rights. That is my aim. Let us all get together and build up this nation.”

So, what does the future hold for Sri Lanka?

And what are the Executive's plans to tackle the thorny issues faced by the people because of the economic hardships so long endured?

Much of Rajapaksa's plan is laid out in his Mahinda Chinthana – a document released as an election pledge and on which the President continues to articulate much of his envisioning for a better Sri Lanka.

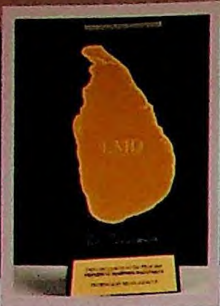
Development is being carried out in earnest, or so we are told. And the northern peninsula has joined the bandwagon with crucial road networks being repaired and revamped to see to it that the region joins the engine of growth sooner rather than later. But some have drawn attention to the pace of such developments – a concern that is shared by many among us, the citizenry.

Among the mega initiatives undertaken by the Rajapaksa administration are port projects in Hambantota and Trincomalee, which are intended to bolster Sri Lanka's commercial marine capacity, while expansion of the Port of Colombo and work on the long-awaited Southern Expressway are also underway.

There is hope also that Sri Lanka's energy needs can be met in the medium term, thanks to the commissioning of new power projects.

In an interview with Forbes Asia a few months ago, the President acknowledged that “without development, there won't be peace... we must develop the economy”.

He added: “The war is over. Now we have no excuses. We have to start working and de-



SRI LANKAN OF THE YEAR

CRY FREEDOM

MEDIA SERVICES PHOTOFILE (SUDATH SILVA)



velop this country.”

To cap it all, many rich nations and indeed the mighty IMF have seen fit to grant Sri Lanka standby facilities, loans, aid and assistance of varying degrees to help get us back on our feet.

China, in particular, is now involved in both the ports and energy sectors, while Iran has also stepped up to the plate to offer much needed assistance in the petroleum arena.

Thus, the country's direction it seems is presently set on a more east-east direction, rather than a westerly one, under this President.

Another pragmatic leader who proved to the world that this can be a viable option for developing countries in Asia was Dr. Mahathir Mohamad.

His 'help your neighbour' policy saw rich dividends accruing to his beloved Malaysia, which he led so very successfully for many years.

While Sri Lanka may have been in the news for what some would say are all the wrong reasons in the past, there have been some comet-like beacons to break the doom and gloom more recently.

Our stock exchange was deemed the best-performing bourse in the world, which is no mean feat for a country that has just entered middle-income status and ended a 26-year war only earlier in the year.

And then, there's been the announcement that the mighty London Stock Exchange will use a system developed by a Sri Lankan company, no less.

But we cannot rest on such laurels...

The West, which if nothing else provides the most lucrative export markets for our products, is still groggy from the onslaught brought on by the global economic turmoil – and rightly or wrongly, it has been critical of this administration's human-rights record, so much so that a crucial trade concession for our top forex earner (the apparel industry) is at risk of being terminated because of it. And of course there's the thorny issue of some 140,000 IDPs of the original 280,000 or so that still have to be resettled, with the President's target of end-January looming on the horizon.

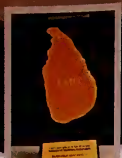
So, much hangs in the balance for Sri Lanka at the upcoming elections. They could very well tell us where our destiny lies as a nation and as a people.

And whether this future will be rested with the incumbent or a fresh pair of hands is the question on the mind of the citizenry at this juncture – and for an answer to this, we will all simply have to wait and see.

In the meantime, let's savour the peace that is now on the horizon... even if we still have to win it.

As we said in our letter to President Mahinda Rajapaksa, in announcing LMD's Sri Lankan of the Year: "Your leadership has delivered peace to this nation, and it is everyone's hope that this will bring rich dividends in the future."

– Larry Enas/LMD



PRESIDENT IN CONVERSATION WITH LMD
KEEPING THE FAITH

Q: Sir, you will undoubtedly be remembered as the President who freed the nation from terrorism. In that light, what does this award mean to you personally and in terms of a massive joint effort by all those who supported you in this difficult task, who (if any in particular) would you dedicate this honour to?

A: When a reputed business magazine recognises the performance of an individual and decides to make an award to that person, no wonder that individual will be happy. Therefore, it brings happiness to my heart since you say I will be remembered for freeing our nation from terrorism.

Every award I receive, including this one, is dedicated to all patriotic citizens who mentally and physically subscribed to this combined endeavour.

People elected me to perform a task, and I

have performed it. I believe the confidence they have placed in me is among the best of the awards I have received.

Q: The recent military victory is a clear indication of the resoluteness of your purpose in wresting the nation from a home-grown menace that held the country to ransom for 26 years. Overarching the military manoeuvres, what was your primary strategy throughout this operation?

A: My primary strategy was to set the political direction for the humanitarian operation, set time targets, pick the right people for the job at hand, provide the necessary funding and other requisites to the armed forces – and above all, to have confidence in their ability to eradicate this menace. I also believe in monitoring the progress of operations on a

regular basis. I knew I could eradicate terrorism from our soil and create a peaceful environment for our people.

Q: The war to win the economic battle has now begun in earnest, especially in the north and east. What is your personal vision for the development of the nation – including the south and of course the highlands of our country?

A: Ours is a truly irrevocably unitary state. The benefits accruing from the envisaged rapid economic development of the country should be shared by the entire citizenry irrespective of which part they live in.

Now, the north and east, suffering from the vast consequences of the war, would naturally require my earnest attention. It will be my responsibility to ensure that whatever resources directed towards this end will be op-

timally utilised. I am keen to see people enjoying economic freedom and having a high quality of life.

What I set out to do, I have been able to achieve: firstly developing the east, and progressing well in the northern development as well. I am strongly of the view that infrastructure of the country must be in very good shape. Roads, electricity, water and agricultural infrastructure are important aspects of our development effort.

In the matter of the south and highlands, the population will have to equally share the economic benefits accruing from our rapid development strategies. However, areas such as the Uva Province – where economic benefits may not have reached – will have to receive special attention. In my own district, Hambantota, there is massive infrastructure development.

“Forming national governments at this point of time is not an answer to our issues. Maybe, if the environment is conducive in the future, we could consider this...”

Q: Mr. President, many concerns remain on the economic front from many quarters in the private sector as well as the people. Given the realities your administration is faced with, what is your view on the health and direction of our economy?

A: The people must not forget that we were entangled in a 26-year-old war that depleted almost all our resources that were set apart for economic development. One must understand that in the past, much resources were spent on the war but without any result. There was also no significant infrastructure development, resulting in a drastic slowing down of our economy.

During certain past years, there was, in fact, negative growth. Our Government, during the last four years – while totally engaged in the eradication of terrorism from our midst –

commenced many hitherto delayed large infrastructure projects, thereby giving confidence to the private sector. I am glad that our economy is heading in the right direction because of the strategy adopted.

Q: Among the key sectors within our economy are apparel, tea and agriculture in general, banking and financial services, and tourism. What is your assessment on where these sectors are today, in terms of growth and potential to rebuild the economy of the nation? And in your view, which of these sectors desperately need state assistance – and why?

A: Tilling land is part of our cultural heritage. It has sustained us through the centuries, both good and bad. I am not prepared to accord it a secondary place.

EXCLUSIVE

PRESIDENTIAL VERDICT

President Mahinda Rajapaksa says there will no longer be discrimination because of one's race, religion or any other social classification. "I see a country where people may speak different languages and live in harmony with different cultures," he tells LMD.



My biggest challenge in defeating terrorism was to resist strong attempts by the international community to stop us marching forward...



PHOTO: WICKREMO THIRUWAKKARAPPA/STRENGTH POINTS

PRESIDENT IN CONVERSATION WITH LMD

KEEPING THE FAITH



MEDIA SERVICES PHOTOFILE (DINUSHA PERERA)



However, since new competing economic agents have entered the field, they certainly will receive their due share of attention having regard to their wealth-bringing capacity.

The apparel sector has grown to a healthy level and brought much needed foreign exchange. The tea and rubber sectors are doing well – but of course, world prices will determine how well they do. I am hopeful that tourism will flourish as we have freed Sri Lanka of terrorism; and given its natural beauty, we should be able to attract many more tourists. I have already set a target of 2.5 million tourists a year, to be achieved by 2015.

A: As we have done during the last four years, the Government will always provide assistance where there is a need. We did that to the tea sector, when there was a decline in world prices and our small-holders were not getting a good price.

Q: At this crucial juncture, when our nation will decide its direction for the medium term, what message would you convey to the business community and business leaders in particular?

A: Now that our motherland is free of the scourge of terrorism, the private sector and

business leaders must not hesitate to venture into expanding their businesses through more capital infusion – and also by contributing more and more to the GDP of Sri Lanka.

The business community must have faith in the Government's ability to win the economic 'war', as we have proved beyond any doubt the capabilities of our Government, having accomplished the more difficult task of defeating and eliminating terrorism. The private sector should understand that it is a strong public sector that can assist the business sector; a weak and a depleted public sector cannot provide that support.

Q: What is your take on the state of the nation? In particular, what do you see as being the roadblocks within society that must be overcome for us to progress to a new era of a strong, united and prosperous island?

A: I am of the strong view that Sri Lanka is at the threshold of a new era. For the last three decades, we were constrained in our efforts to surge forward. But all these obstacles have been removed with the help of our heroic security forces.

We have the potential to grow because even with an ongoing battle to defeat terrorism, our economy grew at a healthy six per cent or above. Our Government has laid out much needed infrastructure such as the Norochcholai, Upper Kotmale and Broadlands power projects, the already functioning Kerawalapitiya power plant, as well as many highways and roads and so many other projects that were earlier not even thought of.

Look at our roads today, with flyovers at crucial junctions. Look at the east, which had been completely devastated due to terrorists' destructive activities – but in a relatively short time of two years since its liberation, we have brought the east into its true potential.

I can go on and on about what we have done to revive our country but it suffices to say that our nation and the country are on the irreversible path of development and prosperity.

Let me tell you that every citizen in Sri Lanka must be patriotic. No one can destroy the image of our country here or abroad for petty political gains, as we have seen in the past. If someone engages in that kind of activity, he or she can only be a traitor.

The roadblocks obviously would be the malicious propaganda machinery of the remnant LTTE, which is still very active. They operate in foreign capitals and the global community must help us eradicate this menace.

As I have always said, "terrorism anywhere is terrorism". So, to make the world a free and safe place to live in, the entire global com-



PRESIDENT IN CONVERSATION WITH LMD

KEEPING THE FAITH

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munity must work with one voice to eliminate this scourge of terrorism once and for all.

Let me be very clear: I will not compromise the security and safety of our country and its citizens.

I am confident that our Government has put in place, beyond any doubt, the solid foundation towards a new era of a strong, united and prosperous Sri Lanka.

Q: What is your vision for Sri Lanka? Where do you see us in 10 or 25 years time? Will we have, as a people, risen to the challenge that fate has put before us?

A: My vision for this country is what I see essentially as the attainment of the spirit of Mahinda Chinthana. I can justifiably sense that as a nation, we have been moving in the right direction in the last four years since I assumed office.

In other words, I want to see every Sri Lankan living in harmony and in prosperity. I have already declared that now we don't have any group of citizens labelled as 'minorities'. We will treat everybody alike. There would be no discrimination because of one's race, religion or any other social classification.

In time to come, which will not be too long, I see a country where people may speak different languages and live in harmony with different cultures, but find among themselves a strong bond of common humanity and a Sri Lankan identity.

I see our children growing into good and responsible citizens, not only enjoying the opportunities created to reach their fullest potential, but also enriching their country by giving back their labour, knowledge and skills. I see this beautiful country excelling in many frontiers, becoming the centrepiece of many regional activities, and engaged in healthy competition with its regional and international partners. I see our natural endowments used wisely to give economic, social and technological benefits to the people. I see disparities narrowing and opportunities enhanced.

Of one thing I am certain; we will not see the ugly head of terrorism or ethnic disharmony rising again. We will not permit such a situation.

Q: Sir, given the events of earlier this year, when certain powerful nations put pressure on you and your administration to call a halt to the fighting, how do you view the so-called 'international community'? As bullies practising double standards, or as responsible citizens of the world?

A: My biggest challenge in defeating terrorism was to resist strong attempts by the international community to stop us marching forward.

The LTTE propaganda machinery and unpatriotic opposition political parties have certainly worked overtime to spread false information and data, malicious rumours, etc., with the objective of tarnishing the image of our motherland.

In the world's capitals, Sri Lanka was portrayed as a barbaric nation. But I withstood all that immense pressure to give leadership to our heroic forces to do the job. I was very clear in my mind as to what I was doing - freeing our beloved motherland of terrorism. That I was determined to do.

I reminded everybody who interfered that we are a sovereign country and that no country, big or small, can bully us into submission.

There were many of our international friends, friendly countries, who helped us in international fora like the Human Rights Council, UN Security Council, the IMF, etc.

As you mention, some of the countries practised double standards when it came to Sri Lanka. However, when it came to trade and other bilateral activities, these countries worked with us, maintaining good relations.

PRESIDENT IN CONVERSATION WITH LMD

KEEPING THE FAITH



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Q: There is a feeling in some quarters that the time is right to consider forming a national government of reconciliation for a specified period – given that the war has ended. From your apparent position of (political) strength, why haven't you considered this option? Won't this bring political stability and also be less costly?

A: Forming national governments at this point of time is not an answer to our issues. Maybe, if the environment is conducive in the future, we could consider this.

Across the political divide, what must prevail is patriotism. Some of our political parties, judging by their past actions, seem to be just the opposite.

There is no doubt that our Government has consolidated politically during the last four years into a cohesive, trusted outfit. People have consistently and continuously placed their immense faith in the Government I lead. The best example of this is the results of all the Provincial Council elections. We won handsomely, starting from the east and on to the south.

From another point of view, you have forgotten that our Government *is* a national government.

Look at its composition. It has all the parties in it. The need of the hour is to work diligently towards the development of all sectors in our country. That, I am confident, my Government can do.

Q: Mr. President, how do you view the menace of corruption in this country and how can it be stopped? Can it? Who should take responsibility for this (creating this environment and now putting an end to it)?

A: I do not agree that corruption has assumed "menacing" proportions. With economic development and increasing prosperity, the inducements for corruption will to some extent lose their force. Anyhow, positive steps will have to be progressively introduced in order to confront these incidents.

The Government is always blamed, but by whom? It is the Opposition. They have also been in government at one time or another. Corruption has two sides: givers and takers.

What about the unethical practices some of the private-sector corporate bodies indulge in? They are known to induce public-sector officials and this side is never talked about.

I will not condone any corruption and authorities appointed to oversee these functions of curbing corruption must become more active and pursue with vigour to apprehend all those who are indulging in this kind of activity.

Q: Is there hope for us now that the brain drain will be reversed and that this country will be blessed with the return of many of its people who have chosen to seek greener pastures in the West? How and why?

A: I extended an invitation, as soon as peace returned to our motherland, for all Sri Lankans who have left our shores due to terrorist activities and other reasons, to come back and help in the reconstruction of our country.

Just a few weeks ago, we made a request to Sri Lankan expatriates through our missions to contribute in whatever way they can to rebuild their motherland. Within days, there was a flood of enthusiastic responses. We invited them to Sri Lanka and they paid their way to attend a special forum to find out how they could invest their skills and knowledge for the development of this country.

I am very optimistic that they will play a significant role in the development of this country.

- LMD