



His Excellency's  
address in Parliament

23 - 02 - 1984

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*Hon. Members,*

On the 22nd December 1982, the people voted at a Referendum to extend the life of Parliament from August 1983, by six years, to August 1989.

If not extended, the last date for a General Election was in December 1983. The first year of the New Parliament would have been 1984. Now also six years from 1984 lie before Hon. Members to continue the work of Reconstruction, Development and Innovation they began in 1977.

In my address to Parliament on 9th February 1983, I outlined many of the measures, legislative and administrative, the Government had taken to implement the programme of work outlined in the 1977 Election Manifesto.

“ Many promises in our Manifesto have been implemented. Some still need consideration. Even if we implement every word and syllable in the manifesto the problems that face us today, which we face together with the entire developing and

developed nations will remain, and we have to face them together. There is a recession among the developed nations ; rising unemployment ; continuing high energy costs and interest rates ; volatile exchange rates ; inflation ; low growth of world trade and declining prices of primary products, other than petroleum produced in developing nations.

There is not much hope for optimism in the global outlook in the short term. All these have led to difficulties for developing nations including Sri Lanka. Our growth strategy has had to be tried and tested in an entirely hostile international economic environment. What is remarkable is the resilience shown by some of the developing nations of which Sri Lanka is an outstanding example."

These remarks are as relevant now as when delivered an year ago.

The Minister of Finance in his 1984 Budget Speech delivered on 16th November 1983, has emphasized the same points and outlined to us the latest figures and measures adopted.

He concluded by saying : "the key to our remarkable achievement in the economic sector has been without doubt our ability to maintain political stability and law and order from 1977 to 1982".

Unfortunately in the July 1983 riots we suffered an experience which all right-thinking people hope will never be repeated.

Since the Minister of Finance in his Budget Speech last year dealt comprehensively with the contemporary economic scene and described government policies

dealing with them, and they were fully debated by Hon. Members, I cannot see any use in my traversing the same ground once again and so soon.

Let me therefore say something of an equally important political and social situation arising from the racial antagonisms that have arisen between the Sinhalese and some of the Tamil citizens of our country since the 1920s.

Let me trace over the years the differences that have arisen between them.

In 1912 the British Government created the Educated Ceylonese Seat and held an All Island Election. Ponnambalam Ramanathan (later Sir) was elected defeating Marcus Fernando (later Sir). My father and his brothers sponsored Ramanathan and were his chief supporters.

Ramanathan rendered yeoman service to the Sinhalese during and after the 1915 riots and became their hero. When he returned from England after fighting their cause before the British Government and Parliament, Sinhalese leaders pulled his carriage from the harbour to his house at Ward Place, walking all the way.

In December 1918 all communities joined to form the Ceylon National Congress to agitate for Reforms. Ramanathan's brother, Arunachalam (later Sir), was elected the first President and James Peiris (later Sir) succeeded him. My father moved the resolution to form the Congress and E. T. de Silva seconded it.

In 1920 the Legislative Council was enlarged. Arunachalam was not nominated to the Colombo Town seat but James Peiris. Because of this Arunachalam and a large body of Tamils left the Congress and did not rejoin the Sinhala politicians till the United National Party (UNP) was formed in 1946.

When the Donoughmore Commissioners visited Ceylon in 1927 to report on Constitutional Reforms, Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam asked for " Fifty-Fifty " or balanced representation in the Legislature. He asked for 50 seats for the Sinhalese and 50 seats for all the other communities. This was rejected. Throughout the 1930s and up to Independence the question of the proper Sinhalese/Tamil ratio in the Legislature became the central bone of political contention in the country.

Owing to the World War of 1939–1945 these conflicts were stilled and the State Council elected in 1936 continued to function till 1947. Mr. Ponnambalam formed his Tamil Congress and pressed before the Soulbury Commissioners in 1944 for " Fifty-Fifty " which was again rejected. The Soulbury Constitution was accepted by 51 votes to 3 by the State Council in November 1945. Mr. D. S. Senanayake, the Leader of the State Council, assured the Tamils, "On behalf of the Congress and on my own behalf, I give the minority communities the sincere assurance that no harm need you fear at our hands in a Free Lanka". All the Ceylon Tamil Members voted for the acceptance of the Soulbury Constitution. Two Indian Tamils voted against and one Sinhalese, Mr. Dahanayake. I was also present and voted for the Motion. Only Mr. Dahanayake and I of that Council are in this Parliament today.

The Soulbury Constitution was introduced in July 1947 and elections were held in September of the same year. The United National Party included all communities and was formed of several parties, mainly the Congress, the Sinhala Maha Sabha, the Muslim League and later the Tamil Congress.

On February 4th, 1948, Ceylon became free under the Soulbury Constitution, with suitable amendments.

Right up to 1956 all parties agreed that Sinhala and Tamil should be the Official Languages replacing English. Resolutions were moved in the State Council in 1932 by Mr. G. K. W. Perera ; in 1937 by Mr. Philip Gunawardena ; in 1944 by Mr. J. R. Jayewardene ; and in 1946 a Select Committee of the State Council of which I was Chairman reported how Sinhala and Tamil could be made the Official Languages.

With the passing of the Indian and Pakistani Citizenship Acts of 1949 a large number of these citizens lost their civic rights. The Tamil Congress broke up and Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam formed the Federal Party in 1949. At its first Annual Convention in 1951 Tamil politicians defined the Tamils as a distinct nation.

The United National Party also split and Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in September 1951. They accepted Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages and stated that the administration of the government must be carried out in Sinhalese and Tamil.

In December 1955, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party changed its language policy to "Sinhala Only" as the official language. The United National Party followed in February 1956. In the General Election of May 1956 the U.N.P. was defeated and an Electoral Front, the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), led by Mr. Bandaranaike won the election and formed the Government.

On June 5, 1956, the "Sinhala Only" Bill was introduced, and the first Sinhalese-Tamil riots broke out when the Federal Party staged a protest on Galle Face Green. A large number of Tamils were killed, houses burnt and properties damaged. This was the first of the series of riots between Sinhalese and Tamils and they occurred again in 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983.

In order to meet the demands of the Tamils, Prime Minister Bandaranaike, introduced the Reasonable Use of Tamil Bill in April 1957, and signed the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact in July 1957. This Pact conceded Regional Councils and permitted them to amalgamate beyond provincial boundaries. He later abrogated it.

In March 1965 Mr. Dudley Senanayake signed a pact with Mr. Chelvanayakam which also was not implemented.

Mrs. Bandaranaike, Prime Minister from 1960 – 1965, first sent the military to Jaffna, occupied it and did not even discuss with the Federal Party.

The first expression of the idea of a Separate State was made in 1960, and later in 1964 and 1975. In 1977 the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was formed with Secession as the goal of the Tamil People.

The first act of terrorism was in 1975 when the Mayor of Jaffna, Mr. Duraiappa, an S.L.F.P. Member ~~of Parliament~~ was assassinated. Since then terrorism has killed 13 Members of the UNP and SLFP ; members of the Armed Services and Police ; disrupted elections at meetings and polling booths ; and left behind a trail of bloodshed in parts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The unfortunate Riots commencing from the 24th July 1983 were directly caused by the murder of 13 military personnel in the Jaffna Peninsula on the 23rd July.

∫ summoned an All Party Conference for July 20th 1983 which proved abortive as neither the TULF nor the SLFP attended and when it was resumed for the 27th July the riots prevented it from being held.

Since 1977 the Government has made Tamil a National Language in the Constitution ; amended rules governing entrance to the universities and removed any racial bias governing those rules ; removed the regulations prescribing racial considerations governing entry to the Public Services and promotion in the Services.

District Councils have been created and District Ministers appointed. The TULF accepted them and worked them for two years and contested elections. Last year they withdrew from them as sufficient powers and finance had not been allotted to them.

All these events reached an explosion point in the July riots which, though they did not cover large parts of the Island, were ferocious and destructive of life and property where they occurred.

The July riots took place in the full glare of world publicity. Television, Radio, the Press and all forms of international media, true and false ; favourable to us or not were used to spread stories of what happened.

India took a special interest, especially Tamil Nadu where local politics played a significant role. The Tamil population in the developed nations used the occasion to spread their propaganda against the Sri Lanka



Government to stop aid on the ground of violation of human rights, ignoring the issue of separatism and the terrorist movement.

Sri Lanka cannot shut its eyes and ears to the international consequences arising from what happened in July.

While accepting the necessity of finding an equitable solution to the racial problem that exists, we cannot at the same time permit it to grow in bitterness or violence.

The All Party Conference now sitting affords an opportunity to all Parties represented there to meet together and discuss peacefully ways and means of easing tension and solving problems.

I feel that the terrorist campaign has made agreement difficult. I wonder whether they want a solution. Some think that a solution will make terrorism wither away. Others think that any solution will be impossible unless terrorism is first eliminated.

The Tamil representatives of the North have to satisfy the extreme elements that seek separatism through the bullet. They have to convince them that the solution they accept and wish the others also to accept, comes as close to separation as possible within a united Sri Lanka.

The leaders of the Sinhala and Muslim people on the other hand have to explain how the proposals they put forward are as far away as possible from secession. There is almost an unbridgeable gap between the two positions. May the leaders of all parties have the courage, the wisdom and the patience to arrive at the correct decisions.