



Speech by

His Excellency J. R. JAYEWARDENE

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at the Banquet of

His Excellency SANJIVA REDDY

President of the Republic of India

to participants in the

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Asian and Pacific Region

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Your Excellency,
Distinguished friends,

I am privileged to be given the opportunity of replying to the kind words you have just expressed. I am happy that we are able to meet once more as a part of the Commonwealth. It is also fitting that we should do so in India, one of the oldest members of the Asian region of the Commonwealth. On behalf of all the delegates I offer my thanks to Her Excellency Mrs. Indira Gandhi, her Government and her officials for the efficiency of the arrangements made for this Conference and for the warm hospitality with which we have been treated.

During my visit to India in the latter part of 1978, I said on my arrival that I was an admirer of India, a lover of its people and a follower of its greatest son.

I am an admirer of India because here flourished some of the original human civilisations—civilisations which were contemporary or even older than those of Egypt, Babylon and Assyria. Events mentioned in the Ramayana and Mahabharatha were possibly even more ancient than the Mohenjodaro civilisation. India has been the home of a long and unbroken heritage of philosophies, cultures and civilisations, which continue to flourish even now, unlike the civilisations I mentioned earlier which are now no more.

In more recent times India was a home of one of the great and noble movements of history. The Indian Congress non-violent movement for the achievement of freedom led by Mahatma Gandhi, the Nehrus, the Patels and so many other great men and women brought freedom to India from the most powerful Empire the World has seen and also inspired and helped other countries to attain independence from modern imperialism.

It is also to India that we owe the term “ Non-Alignment”, a word used first by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister of India at the Colombo Powers Conference in 1954 held in my country. I too attended this Conference as Minister of Finance and a delegate of Sri Lanka. This led to the Bandung Conference and the beginning of the Non-Aligned Movement. Today the Non-Aligned Movement which covers the whole world has 94 member nations and has become a powerful factor in the conduct of international affairs.

I am a lover of the people of India the vast majority of whom live simple and gentle lives, nurtured by the non-violent traditions of the great religions which had their birth in India. The Sinhalese and Tamils of Sri Lanka have come from India—the Sinhalese 2,500 years ago from Vāṅgadesa. Our ancestors brought the Aryan language, their customs and ceremonies.

I am a follower of India’s greatest son. Two thousand three hundred years ago the Great Emperor of India, Asoka the Just, sent his only son Mahinda Thera to teach us the Buddha Dhamma and his daughter Sanghamitta with a branch of the sacred bo-tree which remains to this day in our ancient capital of Anuradhapura. Since then the majority of the people of Sri Lanka have followed that teaching in its purest form. Hundreds of thousands daily lay forests of flowers upon his stainless shrines and repeat the stanza :—

“ I take my refuge in the Buddha,
I take my refuge in the Dhamma,
I take my refuge in the Sangha. ”

A shadow of that teaching illumined our lives then as it does now. It was a photograph of a statue carved out of rock in the fourth century A.D., still to be seen in our ancient

capital of Anuradhapura that Pandit Nehru refers to in his autobiography as a gift sent to him by a friend in Sri Lanka which helped him to keep a calm and compassionate mind while in jail during the movement for freedom.

I attended as a youth the Ramgarh sessions of the Congress in the state of Bihar in 1940. It was the last sessions of the Congress held before freedom. We came as delegates from the Ceylon National Congress which we were attempting to revive, re-organise and revitalise, on the lines of the Indian Congress. The night before the final sessions and the speech of the President Moulana Azad, torrential rain poured down in such quantities that the sessions had to be abandoned. Pandit Nehru, who was always so solicitous about his guests, came to the hut occupied by us and the Burmese leader Aung San and other delegates and inquired as to how we were. He invited us to stay a week-end with him at Allahabad on our way back home which we did.

Two years later I again attended the August Committee Meeting of the Indian National Congress held in Bombay. Here Mahatma Gandhi supported the "Quit India" resolution when the Indian Congress under his leadership decided to organise a movement—non-violent non-cooperation, civil disobedience and satyagraha—which would not be abandoned until freedom was attained. Very soon after that all the leaders were arrested and the train in which we were returning to Madras and to Sri Lanka was stoned. That movement inflamed us to adopt Mahatma Gandhi's methods to regain our own freedom.

Mahatma Gandhi followed the teaching of the Buddha that the means are as important as the end to be achieved. On no account should truth or non-violence be compromised, he said.

We of the smaller nations around the Indian Ocean look up to India for the moral leadership that these noble leaders gave to her and the role to free us from imperialism. The leaders of India and its men and women alone can lead the Non-Aligned Movement and the developing world to stand up for what is right in international affairs. There can be no compromise with righteous principles.

What if you fail ? It was the great poet Rabindranath Tagore, a friend of Jawaharlal Nehru, who said to those who strove unceasingly to achieve great ideals,

“ If in this thy great heart fails, bring me thy failure. ”

Rise India to the grandeur of the moral leadership that is yours!
We await your leadership to follow you to lead us to a better and more righteous world.

