



*SPEECH MADE BY HIS EXCELLENCY J. R. JAYEWARDENA,
PRESIDENT OF SRI LANKA AT THE EXECUTIVE SESSIONS
OF THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT
MEETING HELD ON 17th OCTOBER 1985*



Sri Lanka a democracy despite terrorist threat

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NASSAU – BAHAMAS**

The speeches of the distinguished representatives of Cyprus and Granada showed us the dangers some countries are facing. It was at the New Delhi Conference that the question of Cyprus was raised for the first time and I hope that the question raised by the distinguished representative of Granada will also be resolved satisfactorily before our next meeting. Similar ideas were expressed by the distinguished representatives of India and the United Kingdom. We see in their speeches the same theme of terrorism ending in violence and riots. The distinguished representative of Singapore has in the same way expressed an academic view of these problems.

Let me first thank you Mr. Chairman, and your government and people for the generous hospitality we have enjoyed during our stay here.

Exactly 500 years ago Christopher Columbus and his Spanish conquistadors if I may so call his sailors, invaded these islands. They landed at San Salvador, exterminated the native Indians and changed the course of history of many nations. If he lived today we will call him an international terrorist but today he is recognised as a great leader.

Today the leaders of 49 nations living in all the continents of the world meet in peace and amity to discuss some of the illnesses that the world suffers from and to seek solutions to them.

While we talk of these problems we must know each other so that we may be the better judge of the comments each of us makes.

For example, countrymen of some of the leaders present here have made such atrocious statements about my country and its government that I consider it my first task to put the record straight before I proceed further.

For example, one has said that Sri Lanka should be classed with South Africa because of the recent apartheid policy it is following, the media has helped to create these very impressions and I feel that at least among my friends the Heads of Governments of the Commonwealth, there should be no doubt about the events that occur in Sri Lanka today and the policies of its government.

I have myself attended innumerable Commonwealth Conferences during the last 37 years, beginning with the London Economic Conference of February 1948, presided over by Sir Stafford Cripps, Chancellor of the Exchequer. I have met and worked with several of the leaders of the Commonwealth during these years, and I can speak through experience of its value and usefulness of its members, especially to the small members.

In 1948 the Commonwealth consisted of its founder members, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the New Post-Second World War Dominions : Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India and Pakistan. Today we number forty-nine, from all five continents. It was largely the influence of the late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru which kept India in the Commonwealth and thus paved the way for all the New Dominions to follow his example. I wish to pay my tribute to him now for acting as we did.

Sri Lanka is one of the smaller members, but not too small in size or population to be ignored, and geographically so situated as to make it important. I wish therefore to speak first of Sri Lanka as it is today, in the context of its past history and its future hopes.

Our recorded history is ancient, and goes back in an unbroken sequence to the arrival from North India of King Vijaya in 543 BC. They have been ruling our country since then. Kings and Queens of various races and dynasties, Sinhalese, Indians, Cholas and Telugu, British, Hannover and Windsor, and two Presidents, one selected in 1972 and myself, elected in 1977 and 1982, the 193rd in this long and unbroken line of Heads of State, possibly the oldest of its kind and unique in the world.

Sri Lanka has been an independent, united and democratic monarchy since 1948, and a Republic since 1972.

We have had Universal Franchise, elected ministers since 1931 and a limited franchise at the centre since 1911. We have had elected municipalities for 120 years. The democratic process of elected governments of Legislators and Mayors, is well established and efficiently operative over a long period of time. From 1931, we have had ten general elections, changed governments on six occasions and have had innumerable by-elections, and local government elections also down to the smallest village level. We believe in the ballot and not in the bullet.

At the 1977 General Election held by the government of the day, now in opposition, my party in opposition was elected to office till 1983. We have now 143 out of a total of 168 members. An islandwide Referendum extended our term of office for another six years from 1983-1989.

The new Constitution of 1978 introduced by my government made the Presidency, elected and executive, as President, head of the state and government, combining the British and American systems of government and followed closely the French model. At a Presidential Election held in November 1982, I was elected for 6 years by a majority of 903,373 votes and polled 52.9 per cent of the votes in this islandwide election, polling 3.45 million votes. I stress the islandwide election, for in the Northern and Eastern Provinces where there is now a Tamil terrorist secessionist movement. My chief Sinhala opponent and I polled 56 thousand, out of 73 thousand votes in the North, and 144 thousand out of 163 thousand votes in the East.

We have continued and protected the democratic process since the General Election of 1977 by holding up to date, twenty-five by-elections. My party lost only four of them. We have held several District and Urban Council Elections in 1979 and 1981 and won a majority in these councils except in some councils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

We held a Presidential Election and a Referendum in 1982 and won both.

The 1978 Constitution has for the first time created certain fundamental rights, among which are the equality of races and religions, freedom of speech, writing and opposition – the right to vote and assemble – and freedom from arbitrary arrest. These are all justiciable. The elections to the Presidency and Parliament, and the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution, cannot be postponed or amended without the approval of the people at a Referendum.

Very few countries in the world, if any, have similar freedoms guaranteed by its Constitution as we have.

Of course the Government can assume emergency powers when the security of the state is involved. This action again is

justiciable and in some cases the courts have held against the Government. Every month the emergency extended after debate and a two-thirds majority is required to do so.

It is with a knowledge of these aspects of our political and constitutional life that I wish to inform my colleagues of the unfortunate events of violence that have plagued our national life in the Northern and Eastern parts of our Island, engineered by Tamil terrorists, particularly since 1980.

Sri Lanka's population contains four major ethnic groups, viz. —

	<i>Percentage</i>	
Sinhalese	.. 74	11,000,000
Sri Lanka Tamils	.. 12.6	1,870,000
Muslims	.. 7.4	1,200,000
Indian Tamils	.. 5.6	825,000
Burghers	.. .26	38,236

In a population of 14,900,000 (1981 Census Data).

The majority of the Sinhalese are Buddhists. The majority of the two Tamil speaking groups are Hindus, and Muslims who are followers of Islam. The Christians belong to all communities.

The voting, district by district, in the 1977 General Election, for the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the moderate group that campaigned for a separate state of Eelam in the Northern and Eastern provinces was as follows :

<i>District</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Northern Province —</i>	
Jaffna	71.81
Mannar	52.44
Vavuniya	58.82
Mullaitivu	52.16
<i>Eastern Province —</i>	
Trincomalee	27.18
Batticaloa	32.14
Ampara	20.25

In the other seven provinces they did not contest.

The right of each community to use its own language, practise its own culture and customs is recognised. The Government guarantees these rights to them throughout the Island, however small their number may be. We recognise the whole of Sri Lanka as the Homeland of every individual member of each community.

We have agreed that recruitment to the State services and entrance to the universities will reflect the ethnic proportion of the Island. The Chief Justice, the Attorney-General, the Inspector-General of Police, till a few months ago – several Ambassadors and important public officials are Tamils.

The Constitution enacts that the Official Language is Sinhala, and the National Language, Tamil. Every effort is made to teach English to make it the link language.

Constitutional Changes

The Government has agreed on the principles and forms of participatory democracy from the village, urban and district level, to Provincial Councils within a province. They will be vested with executive powers by the President and appointed by him to fulfil the functions of his council.

Only a fraction of the 1.36 million Tamils who live in the Northern and Eastern Provinces supported the idea of a separate state in the 1977 election. The entirety of those who live outside viz., 500,000 and the entirety viz., 2 million of the other communities including 800,000 Indian Tamils too oppose it.

This then is the factual position. Terrorism reared its ugly head first in 1976. With the murder of the Tamil Mayor of Jaffna, who was also a Member of Parliament of the then ruling government party. Since then hundreds of innocent civilians, members of the security services, men, women and children have been killed by the terrorists, including two ex-Members

of Parliament of the moderate group, and several members of my own party. The security services in defence and retaliation have also killed several. It is a massacre without a purpose and with no hope of success.

The classic pattern of terrorism is repeated in my country. They openly say they wish to create a Marxist state in the whole of Sri Lanka and not only a separation of the Island. Their international lobby is wide and effective. The umbrella of the grievances of the Tamil minority, and the unfortunate riots of 1983, – when in Colombo and some cities in the South, the Sinhalese civilians were misled into harming Tamil lives and property, in retaliation for the deaths of 13 Sinhala soldiers in the North by a terrorist bomb – help them to function as a legitimate racial group seeking to redress grievances. The Government is shown as the aggressor or suppressor. Money is collected, arms are purchased, and terrorists are trained to disrupt the smooth functioning of one of the few democracies among the developing nations – a founder Member both of the New Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement.

It is a shame that the help that should come to us to maintain the high principles of these two movements are denied, and that instead there is a vilification of our purposes and behaviour by politicians and the press. I hope that it may be possible to bring peace once again to the troubled North and East of our Motherland, and that the leaders of the terrorist groups living and operating outside our shores will cease to function.

I believe in democratic principles of non-violence, and the principles proclaimed by Gautama the Buddha and Mahathma Gandhi. I hope that the great ideals they stood for, can be proclaimed to the world and remain the principle guiding the members of the Commonwealth.



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