

THE ECHO
AT THE
FOOT OF
HIMALAYAS



THE STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY

J. R. JAYEWARDENE

President of the
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

AT THE THIRD SAARC SUMMIT AT KATHMANDU

**November 2-4
1987**

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J. R. STEALS THE SHOW AT SUMMIT

by
Hugh Pain

A sad, dignified speech by the 81 year-old leader of strife-torn Sri Lanka stole the show at the opening of a South Asian summit meeting.

"It was a plea for understanding, almost an apology, and a masterly piece of showmanship", said one western diplomat who attended Monday's first session of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation, summit in Nepal.

President Junius Jayewardene used his address to the six other SAARC leaders to explain publicly why he had invited Indian troops into his country to quell die-hard resistance from the Tamil guerrillas who have fought a separatist rebellion there since 1983.

Jayewardene, a slender, stooped figure in a traditional Sri Lankan full-length white robe, spoke slowly in English marked occasionally by an almost Churchillian rasp.

"In July this year we concluded a peace agreement under which India will assist Sri Lanka in settling this separatist problem", he continued. At the same time we established the basis for our foreign relations on the principle that nothing would be done by either that could be detrimental to the other in any way.

"It (the peace accord) is an agreement of friendship not conflict, it is an agreement for peace not war, it is an agreement for life not death", said Jayewardene.

And turning with understand drama to the Indian Prime Minister sitting high above him on a platform behind the speaker's podium, he added: "Except, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, to the two signatories – you escaped death by a few inches and I escaped death by a few seconds."

The reminder of the human dimension to Sri Lanka's tragedy and Jayewardene's own dilemma set the seal on the speech. "It was a master-stroke the climax of the performance and it worked" said one diplomat, who felt Jayewardene had succeeded in his aim of reassuring the other leaders and reasserting his own independence.

*Mr. Chairman,
Your Majesty, Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.*

May I offer you, Your Majesty my felicitations on your assumption of the Chairmanship of this Third Summit Meeting of our Association. I and my delegation have the fullest confidence that with your wisdom and experience as a Statesman over a long period, you will preside over our deliberations and bring them to a successful conclusion. We are confident that your Chairmanship for the coming year will consolidate what we have already achieved in SAARC and provide momentum for future progress.

Before proceeding further let me convey our appreciation to His Excellency Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, for the contribution that he made as Chairman of SAARC and for providing guidance during the crucially important early period of the Association.

I and my delegation would also like to express our appreciation for the warmth with which we have been received, for the gracious hospitality and kindness shown to us and for the excellent arrangements made for us in these most congenial surroundings.

As we all know, regionalism in South Asia has had a late beginning. One of the remarkable developments since the Second World War has been the spread of regionalism, manifested in

the setting up of regional organisations which have come to cover most of the globe. The fact that SAARC came to be formed so late has been explained by the disparities and imbalances within our region. Nevertheless, there is at the same time an underlying homogeneity among South Asian countries, on which we hope to build an enduring regionalism for the common benefit of all of us.

We have to recognise the fact that whether we make a success of SAARC or not, will have to depend on the extent to which we can confront and solve bilateral problems we may have between us. ***We have also to recognise the fact that our internal problems sometimes have an external dimension, for instance by causing a spill-over effect in a***

neighbouring country. And we have furthermore to acknowledge that our bilateral problems could have an effect on the region as a whole to the detriment of all of us.

Your Majesty, Sri Lanka's separatist problem provides a convincing illustration in support of the generalised observations that I have been making. For several years Sri Lanka has been struggling with the problems caused by a group of terrorists who have used this problem as cover. For several years my Government has tried to solve the separatist problem through the good offices of India. In July this year we concluded a Peace Agreement under which India will assist Sri Lanka in settling this separatist problem. At the same time, we have established

the basis for the conduct of our foreign relations on the principle that nothing would be done by either that could be detrimental to the other in any way. This has to be regarded as an unexceptionable principle, and indeed a prerequisite for good neighbourly relations. In our view, the Peace Agreement, apart from making it possible to solve Sri Lanka's separatist problem, has also to be regarded as a contribution to the stability of our region. ***It is an Agreement of friendship not enmity; of peace not war; of life not death: except for two significant events, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, you escaped death by a few inches; and I escaped death by a few seconds.***

The Peace Agreement demonstrates the importance of not confronting each other

but of confronting our bilateral problems together. Above all, it demonstrates the importance of our engaging in consultations as frequently as possible. It has to be recognised that consultations on bilateral and common problems, even if only at an informal level are of crucial importance for the long-term future of SAARC. Nevertheless, we can even envisage regional approaches to the solution of many of our problems.

We have also demonstrated how we can help each other in times of distress and emergency through the establishment of the South Asian Food Security Reserve, which is a further example of our sense of brotherhood and our willingness to help each other.

Still we are a long way from resolving our own economic problems. We have not been able to promote trade among countries of our region, and it is ironic that in each of our countries the volume of our trade with other member countries does not exceed 5 per cent of our trade.

Mr. Chairman, we should not be discouraged by any difficulties we may have to encounter at present as we are yet in an early stage of our regional cooperation. It is to be expected that it may take time to build between us that high degree of trust and confidence which is essential for optimal economic interaction for our common benefit.

Mr. Chairman, we decided in Dhaka—and reiterated in Bangalore—the need for the increasing involvement of the people for ensuring the success of regional cooperation. Initiatives have already been launched in a variety of activities, such as festivals, seminars, sport events, the performing arts and scholarships to get our people more fully involved in the concept of SAARC. Following on our meeting in Bangalore last year new initiatives have taken towards this end by schemes involving the sharing of broadcasts and telecasts under the South Asian Broadcasting Programme, the promotion of organised tourism among SAARC member countries and the regular and frequent interchange of scholars, artists, authors and professionals.

We are meeting under the shadow of the most majestic mountain range on Earth, from where arise mighty rivers flowing into the plains of this great sub continent giving sustenance and life to the people who live here. ***Physically we cannot climb higher than Mount Everest which we see in front of us. Mentally our minds can soar even above these mighty mountains. It can also soar above the jealousies, intrigues and the ambitions of man. Cannot even a sunbeam from these heights illuminate us in wisdom and elevate our thoughts towards purity and compassion.***

We must also remember that not far from here about 2600 years ago, an event of great significance to the World took place in a park of

Sal trees in Lumbini—the birth of Siddhartha Gauthama. We are meeting not far from the hallowed spot which is the birth place of the Buddha whose teachings have inspired millions of people all over the World. We, Mr. Chairman, are worried about defining terrorism. Why? Whoever adopts violence against the state for whatever cause should be outside the pale of friendship and protection. Is that not the message of the Buddha; of love; of maithree; of perfect love which transcends all human understanding—to protect life which all can take but non can give—that is the message of the great civilisations that have lived on this continent. It is my fervent belief that the ideals of Buddhism and all the great religions of the World which are practised in the countries of Asia should guide our destinies.

Great civilisations have flourished here and have decayed and passed away. New civilisations have arisen. We have during the period of colonial rule lost many of the good things we learnt during these 2500 years, but now we have regained our independence and taken our rightful place in the community of nations as free, equal and independent states and have now entered a new phase of cooperation.

Mr. Chairman, from Dhaka to Bangalore and to Kathmandu, we have come a long way in a relatively short period of time. At Dhaka the SAARC ship set sail; in Bangalore, we found we were away out in the open

sea, and here in Kathmandu, I am happy to state that we are firmly on course and proceeding full sail ahead.

**CONCLUDING SPEECH MADE BY HIS EXCELLENCY
J. R. JAYEWARDENE, PRESIDENT OF SRI LANKA
AT THE THIRD SAARC SUMMIT MEETING HELD IN
KATHMANDU ON 4TH NOVEMBER, 1987**

*Mr. Chairman,
Your Majesty,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I must join my colleagues in thanking you Mr. Chairman for the diplomatic, able and friendly way in which you have conducted the affairs of your office. You have been ably assisted by your Minister of Foreign Affairs and other Foreign Ministers, and by your officials. I join my colleagues, therefore, in thanking you and congratulating you.

When next year you come to my country, I hope we will be able to equal you in the hospitality and the ability with which we conduct our Sessions. I do not hope to achieve more than you.

Our country is an ancient one in its civilisation. On the day Gauthama the Buddha, one of your greatest sons, passed away, was the day that King Vijaya, from what is called in our books Vanga Desa, came to our land and founded our race. Throughout these 26 centuries we have continued to survive, many of us are the same people; worship the same shrines, and still speak the same language. We welcome all of you to our country about this time next year.

We must also thank the Foreign Ministers and their helpers, the Secretariat, for the work they have done during the year, since the last Summit. This helped us to come to the decisions we did during the three days of our Sessions.

They are important and memorable decisions—one dealing with Terrorism—others dealing with Food Security and the Media business. We are thinking even further ahead; wondering whether it is possible to associate in our deliberations during the year, Members of our Parliament as in the International Parliamentary Union, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; as well as Members of the Legal fraternity in the coming year.

We have achieved much and we hope to achieve more, particularly to improve the quality of life of our people, both physical and mental. I need not reiterate what has been said by my colleagues, but to say that I agree with all of them without reservation.

When I came here I knew that Nepal was a part of the area in which Gauthama the Buddha was born, lived and preached for almost 50 years. He walked all the way from Lumbini to Buddha Gaya, up and down the Gangetic Plain, and passed away at Kusinara, where the Mallas lived. The Mallas are still in Nepal. They live in the area round the Palace complex, and their leaders lived in some of the Palaces we visited yesterday. The Mallas were a democratic people, and so were the Lichchavis who also lived in Nepal till sometime ago. ***During the time of the Buddha they were the Republics of the Gangetic Plain. To them He preached the doctrine of democracy. When they came and asked him; what they were to do if they were to be invaded by their neighbours, He replied; "Do your***

Assemblies meet often? Do they follow the rules of procedure? Do they respect their elders? Do they follow the laws of the country?" The reply was "Yes". Then He said, "Oh! Lichchavis, Mallas then you cannot be defeated". That is the message of the Gangetic Plain; the message of democracy; the freedom of the people. The other message He preached was also of Love and Non-violence, that is also the message of the Gangetic Plain.

It was this period of History, the sixth century before Christ, that H. G. Wells said "saw the adolescence of the human race". ***When in Greece, Socrates, Aristotle and Plato preached doctrines which saw the birth of European civilisation, when humanity there***

moved away from Idol worship and Animism, to what we now know as modern civilisation. In this period in Persia, Zoroaster preached a similar doctrine; when in China, Confucius preached a doctrine still relevant and in India Gauthama the Buddha preached the doctrine of Love, Maithriya, Non-violence and Democracy.

It was one of India's great leaders Rajendra Prasad, when he was the Chairman of the Reception Committee at the Ramgarh Sessions of the Congress, held on the banks of a tributary of the Ganges river, which I attended as a young man beginning my political life in 1940, that he said, ***"Every inch of land in this region, is hallowed by the touch of the feet of Gauthama the Buddha".***

I remember another great orator, Surendranath Benerjee from Bengal when he addressed an assembly of Oxford students in England, and they derided the Indian people, and scoffed at their language, and customs, saying in his reply; ***"My friends, when your ancestors were swinging by their tails from the trees of your primaeval forests, my ancestors had perfected a system of philosophy which is still the wonder of the World and practised it."***

When you meet here, when you talk of freedom of the media, of the other matters that have been part of our discussions, when you talk of terrorism and seek to join together to see that violent way of life can be done away with, ***let us remember that throughout the World***

it is only because of man's ultimate adherence to non-violence, by and large that we can live together. It is because of his adherence to truth, to love, to democracy, that in spite of Empires; in spite of those who believe in violence and nuclear arms that he is able to survive. So many other species of animals have disappeared. That is the message that SAARC must give not only to our Region but also to the World.

In this great Assembly which I am proud to be a Member of, I like to say that we must work together, whatever differences we may have, whatever problems we may face, keeping in mind the message of all the great religions; Christianity, Islam, the Message of the Buddha, the Message of the Vedas, the Bagavad Gita,

where Love, Friendship, Compassion, Humanity
and Non-violence are the guiding principles.

Ours should be a land about which the sages
have said;

***“Where the Mind is free,
Where Words come out from the depths of
Truth;
Into that Haven of Freedom;
My father may my Country awake!”***

Thank you.

"PRESIDENT RESIDES IN NEPALESE' HEARTS

The concluding speech of President Jayewardene has not been carried by the official media here though Nepal Television did quote the President's remark: 'The land is content where the minds are free'. The word democracy continues to be a taboo here, whatever may be the attitude of the official media, President Jayewardene's speech is the main topic that is discussed generally here in the context of SAARC".

Dr. Devendra Raj Panday, Head of integrated Development Systems of Kathmandu, Nepal says commenting on the President Jayewardene's speech at the concluding sessions of the SAARC Summit.

He further says: "His speech was somewhat like a redemption for the section of our population and the general public who value the ideals of democracy and humanism. President Jayewardene should know that he is now residing in the hearts of hundreds of thousands of Nepalese."



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