

# Programmes, policies endorsed by whole world – President

Auszüge aus einer Rede von Präsident Premadasa vor dem Exekutivkomitee der 'Vereinigten Nationalpartei' (UNP), aus: 'Daily News', Colombo, 29.10.90

The text of President Ranasinghe Premadasa's speech delivered at Saturday's meeting of the Executive Committee of the Colombo Central UNP Organisation:

"I have thought of brining to your notice today some facts that need your attention. As you are aware our country is faced with a national crisis, and so are other countries of the world. They are challenges. That is quite natural. At some time or other, some country or other, faces various crises or challenges. Not only at a global level but even at a regional level, our country as well as other countries have to face both international and regional crises and challenges. The newest challenge is the Middle East crisis. How shall we triumph over these crises and challenges?

Earlier, leaders of countries tried to settle these problems unilaterally, bilaterally or trilaterally. However after that second world war world leaders came to the conclusion that the more appropriate way, the easier way was to discuss these problems collectively and thereby reach solutions. That was how the United Nations Organisation came into being. We have had about forty years experience since then. It has now become crystal clear that it is better to try and resolve international problems as well as national problems through a collective effort – by collective leadership. So, the world is now inclined to overcome these crises, these challenges by a collective effort.

It is not possible for each individual, each country acting alone and pushing his own ego to overcome these crises. All intelligent world leaders and all countries have now realised this. This is how we should try to free ourselves from even national crises. Countries have various internal problems. Even there we try to resolve them through a collective effort and not each person by himself. When faced with a problem of public importance even people with different ideologies should seek a solution to those problems through a process of consultation, compromise and consensus.

## Support to resolve problems

You are aware that our government is pursuing such a policy. We see that today wise statesmen the world over take to the collective approach to not only international but also to inter-regional problems. Wise leaders have today taken the stand that common crises and common challenges should be tackled and solutions sought not by putting one's own individuality to the fore but through a collective leadership. You are aware that we wholeheartedly lend our support to such collective efforts. We do so because we cannot keep away from the problems of the world. We have to face the consequences of those problems. Therefore we extend our wholehearted support to the nations of the world and to world leaders in the courses of action being taken to resolve those problems.

There are a number of fora which we can use for this purpose. Our country is represented in every such forum – the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, SAARC – these are all very valuable fora. We have our representatives in all these places. Our country is represented. Our leaders address these assemblies. We work closely with world leaders who participate at the councils of these great institutions. We participate in the discussion of these problems. We express our views and we contribute our mite to the settling of these problems. That is the correct policy, the correct way. On the other hand trying to exhibit one's self importance, if one were to think, that one can give leadership single handed to solve world problems, you will accept that it is a shortcoming stemming from conceit and arrogance and does not show any cleverness on the part of such a person.

You know that we had a number of problems in this country. Today it is confined to the North and East problem. Our government is trying to overcome this North and East problem also through a collective effort. Unfortunately some sections do not take much interest in this matter. Without at least helping the collective effort they try to obstruct that process.

Before getting on to solving the problems of the world we must take an interest in solving the problems of our own country. Otherwise if we step forward to give leadership to the solving of world problems, without first making an honest attempt to solve our own problems, the old saying "celebrity abroad and liability at home" will become quite applicable. Others will remind us of that saying. Not only that. We will be told "You settle the problems of your country first and come to advise us thereafter".

## Leadership for common good

If other countries were to tell us that way, it will be humiliating for us. That is why our government is adopting a policy of trying to solve the problems of our country through consensus and of giving our assistance to world leaders in their attempt to settle world problems. Unfortunately some of our people have not yet realised that the need of the hour is to support a collective leadership for the common good rather than to use one's position of leadership for self-glorification.

Let me now remind you of some of the challenges that we had to face in 1989 when we formed our government. It may be a weakness on our part, or may be one of strong points, that we tend to forget many things be they good or bad. It could, at times, be beneficial and, at times, harmful. However, we should keep in mind the type of situation we had to face. It is our duty to recall the challenges we had to face in December 1988 when you went to vote during the Presidential Election and in February 1989 when you went to vote during the Parliamentary Elections.

There was the challenge of the JVP terror. There came a time when a mere slip of paper was sufficient to bring the whole country to a standstill. It was a terror that could silence the whole country through a gun and a bullet. It was in the midst of that terror, when your friends and relations and the innocent citizens of this country were being killed in cold blood that the people of this country went to the polls and cast their votes without allowing the ballot to be suppressed by the bullet without allowing the power of their vote to be defeated by the power of the gun.

It was not only for the UNP candidates, but also for the SLFP and SLMP candidates, that the people of this country fearlessly cast their votes amidst all that terror. Why? Not all could have faced a gun with a gun. So, you used your franchise as your weapon to counter the terror of the gun. After your power of the vote brought you victory, what did you tell me? Stamp out this terror somehow, you said. We tried to sort out the reasons for this terror and solve it through consultation and compromise. But we received no response.

Then, the Emergency was re-introduced. The Armed Forces and the Police had to protect the masses of this country. It was to protect the common people of this country who safeguarded democracy and the right to vote that the Armed Forces and the Police acted with so much self-sacrifice.

## JVP did not respond

That situation came about because the leaders of the JVP did not respond reasonably to our just and fair invitation. It took almost an year to suppress that reign of terror.

The next challenge before us was to get rid of the

foreign troops that were in our country. You know how much you disliked having a foreign army in our country. You knew what a disgrace it was to our sovereignty. What is more, you admitted the undesirability of using a foreign army to suppress the terrorist tendencies of a section of our own countrymen. Any aberrations among others at home have to be cured by ourselves. It is not the correct thing to get outsiders to punish them. All of us agreed on that.

You know that when a foreign army comes into any country they don't leave easily. Nobody thought that we would be able to get rid of them. But we were able to do it, thanks to the immense support we received from the people of India, the Indian media and the international democratic forces. That was how we were able to send back the Indian troops peacefully. The newly elected government of Prime Minister V. P. Singh withdrew them in March last year. That was the second challenge we had to face. We overcame that too. Some tend to forget it.

What was the next challenge? The schools were all closed. Our universities had become battlefields. There were many who said that the UNP, the UNP candidates, would never be able to get the schools or the universities reopened if a mandate is given. But, we were able to reopen the schools and the universities under one year.

## The next challenge

The next challenge now before us is the LTTE terror. We tried our best to discuss with the LTTE the North-East problem and arrive at a solution. In addition to those discussions, we even implemented certain programmes and got them included in the administration process and the Constitution itself. Take the language issue. Since 1956 it had become a contentious issue that had brought about conflicts among our people and heartburn and even death to them. We solved that problem.

We amended the Constitution making both Sinhala and Tamil official languages. Thereafter, we ensured that jobs are given according to qualifications and not on race, caste, class or tribe considerations, or on friendship, political connections or party links. It was a system of jobs on merit that was introduced. That system is now being made statutory. What is more, we are now trying to implement it so that jobs will be given according to the ethnic ratio so that Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers will all receive their proportionate quotas.

We have also held discussions to devolve administrative powers on the people themselves. We have taken action to summon an All-Party Conference and solve various issues by consulting the views of all parties. At this very moment we are preparing legislation to introduce special provisions on Human Rights to our Constitution agreeable to all. The All-Party Conference is presently considering the formulation of means by which the independence of the media could be ensured.

That was how we acted in the face of various challenges. We acted through consultation, compromise and consensus. Nevertheless, the LTTE jumped the rails and got back to the path of struggle. Now, our Armed Forces and our Police have had to take up that challenge. The innocent Tamil people, the innocent Muslim people and Sinhala people living in the North and East are sacrificing their lives today.

## Praise from whole world

Vast numbers of people were uprooted from their places of living and left destitute. The terrorists of the Eelam Tiger Organisation even attacked places of worship and killed innocent people including members

of the clergy. Now the whole world has realised the honest policy and the objectives of our government. They praise us and congratulate us for the efforts we have made very patiently to bring about peace. Because of the efforts we have made to resolve the problems through dialogue and discussion we have won the goodwill of the whole world and our people have earned the respect of the outside world. Therefore, the world community is helping us to reconstruct the areas of our country destroyed by terrorists and to rehabilitate people left destitute by the terrorists.

Today very powerful countries in the world are speaking in favour of the stand taken by our government and condemn the stubborn attitude of the terrorists. But sometime back certain countries did not understand our policies. But the reverse of that is happening now. How has this welcome change come about? It is because of the approach we adopted to resolve problems through the process of discussion, consultation and collective action. It is the result of our democratic approach to find solutions to problems. Today our Armed Forces are engaged in an effort to save innocent people from the clutches of terrorists. Today nationally as well as internationally it has been recognised beyond any doubt that ours is not a racial or communal struggle. Today all democratic forces belonging to all communities have joined hands against Tiger Terrorism in our country.

The latest challenge to us came from the crisis that arose in the Middle-East. Now all of you know what happened in the Middle East. Some lakhs of Sri Lankans employed in the Middle East lost their employment and they had to be brought back home all of a sudden. Some thousands of people were reduced to destitution and they were called upon to undergo severe hardship. We faced even this big challenge undauntingly. We had to make arrangements in a great hurry for the repatriation of this large number of people. We did not worry about the huge expenditure involved. We thought only of our people, only of the valuable lives of our people. It was indeed a very great challenge.

#### Six lakhs lost livelihood

Our people were not only deprived of their jobs; they were also subjected to untold hardship. Some even died. Now there is still a small number of people waiting there to be brought back to Sri Lanka. We are still making urgent efforts to bring back all those left stranded in the Middle East. Everybody knows how expeditiously we took action in this matter. We did not worry about the expenses involved. Of course we were generously assisted in this effort by friendly countries and international organisations. Why did they come forward so readily to help us? It is because they have become convinced of our honest intention and developed a confidence in us. If we consider the fact that approximately five persons in Sri Lanka depended on the earnings of one person employed in the Middle-East at least six lakhs of people here have lost their means of livelihood.

But we will not try to run away from this crisis - we will courageously face it. We are now discussing their plight with a number of organisations with a view to rehabilitating them. Called upon as we are to face these two big crises, we are in an extremely crucial moment.

But because of this difficult situation we have not thought of giving up any of our development efforts. According to our plans we are launching on every project and programme necessary for the development of our country. We are carrying on with every project and programme we have started in spite of all difficulties presented to us.

We are executing the Janasaviya Programme in the same way as we planned and promised to the country. We told the country that through this programme we hope to help the seven million people of this country who now live on Food Stamps to lead self-reliant lives standing on their own feet. We made it known that the programme would be implemented in several rounds. Now we have finished implementing the first round. The second round will be started on the 3rd of December.

#### Substantial results

We have already begun to receive very substantial results. Very poor families who had nobody to help them or any income of theirs, are today beginning to live

independent lives through the fruits of their own labour having been given a helping hand by the Janasaviya Programme. Today they are engaging in gainful self-employment projects. At the very start we distributed

#### Investment from '78

We came to power in 1977 and what a great investment we have made from 1978 onwards to serve the people of this country. We have made a great effort to direct the people towards economic development and greater economic production. I would like to place before you some facts and figures because some people appear to be unaware of the massive investment we have made during the last 10 or 12 years to promote economic development based on our practical policies.

#### 1.5 million houses

During the period 1978 to 1983 we built 150,000 new houses. During the period 1983 to 1987 we successfully implemented the Million Houses Programme and from 1988 onwards we have begun implementing the 1.5 Million Houses Programme. I think I need not go into details about the progress that is being achieved throughout the country under the Gam Udawa Movement. You will also see that we have made an unprecedented effort for the spiritual and cultural development as well as for the improvement of the health of the masses of this country.

Education contributes in great measure for the development of quality of life of the people. In 1978 we could manage to spend only 909 Million Rupees for education. Today we have increased that amount to 3980 Million rupees. The number of children attending school has increased from 2.9 million in 1978 upto 3.9 million by now. In 1978 we spent only a sum of 690 Million rupees on health. Today that amount has increased to 3836 Million Rupees. What has been the result of all this? Well, this is the result - by 1978 we had been able to raise the life expectancy of males to 66 years and that of females to 70 years. Life expectancy increases depending mainly on the health of the people. Today you can observe a further increase in the life expectancy of the people. Today while the life expectancy of males has risen to 68 years, the life expectancy of females has risen to 73 years. You must note that these are average figures. This shows how fruitful our health programmes have been.

In 1978 child mortality rate was 42 per thousand births. Today the mortality rate is 29 per thousand births. This situation has to be further improved. But it is observable that the trend has been very favourable. This is the direct result of our nutritional and health programmes. You will see that the quality of life of our people has evidently improved. You must note this progress is the result of the economic policies we are now following. But you will remember that there was a time in this country during which you experienced so much of difficulty in buying a bicycle, a tyre for your bicycle or even a battery for your flashlight. It was a time of controls queues, quotas and permits. You undoubtedly remember the situation that prevailed at that time. That situation has changed now - in fact we changed it. In 1978 the number of motor vehicles registered was 97,100. That number has gone up to 361,588 in 1990.

#### 1.5m radio sets

Also think of the number of Radio Receiving Sets in use among the people. In 1978 there were only 830,000 of them. Today there are 1.5 million Radio Sets in use throughout the country. It was during our time that we introduced the Television Service. Now there are 600,000 Television Sets throughout the country in domestic use. Also there are impressive increases in the number of passenger buses, lorries and vans that are in use for the service of the people.

What amount of employment would it create? These are the things that have to be looked at. I can give you another satisfactory report on production. In 1978 paddy production was 1891 million metric tonnes. Now it is 2466 million metric tonnes. Take textiles and finished garments. In 1978 the total production was valued at Rs. 1008 million. By 1990 it rose to Rs. 18,166 million. Tea production - a major export crop of ours - stood at 199 million kilograms in 1978. By 1990 we have raised it to 227 million kgs. So, you will admit that it is after doing all this that we have had to face this crisis.

#### Total loss Rs. 5000 million

In the midst of all this, what was the loss we had to incur owing to the JVP terror? The biggest loss was in human lives. The JVP terror accounted for the murder of 6500 innocent citizens in cold blood. Now, look at the loss caused by them to public property.

Now there is this Gulf Crisis. You know, I myself stated, that nearly a lakh of Sri Lankans have been left high and dry owing to this Middle East crisis. We have already brought back more than 68,000 of them. At the rate of US\$ 450 per person, the amount we have so far spent on 68,000 is Rs 1224 million. I also told you that in this regard we received a certain amount of foreign assistance. We should be thankful to those countries and institutions that helped us in this instance. Providing transport facilities and food and maintaining refugee camps for these people have cost us 10 million rupees so far. We have to continue spending on this account still further.

We have also increased our sources of revenue, specially after 1989. We collected revenue that had earlier evaded us, through customs duties, taxation, port dues etc. We suppressed wastage and corruption. In 1988 our total revenue from customs duty was Rs 19,000 million. In 1989 we collected Rs 24,589 million from that source. By August this year we have been able to collect Rs 19,900 million. In September, October, November and December our revenue from customs duties will top even last year's revenue of 24,589 million.

In 1988 our revenue from taxes amounted to Rs. 17,000 million. In 1989 it was Rs. 23,076 million. More and more are paying taxes and we are collecting more and more. The law is being applied justly and fairly to one and all.

The income from the Port Authority in 1988 was Rs 2342 million. In 1989 it was 2684 million. This year, upto August alone we have collected Rs 1609 million. From the returns for September, October, November and December we will collect a sum exceeding last year's total.

It is these measures that have made the whole world have confidence in us. It is on this confidence that our donor countries discussed day-before-yesterday the aid they would give us for 1991.

In 1989 we were granted US \$ 780 million. Based on that, we requested US \$ 870 million to carry out our various projects. The 780 million we received last year was at a time when the reign of terror was at its peak. The rupee equivalent of that grant was 31,200 million.

On this occasion we told the donor countries that the terror has decreased, that only the North-East problem is remaining, that we have to raise the living standard of our people and therefore, please help us.

The donor countries met the other day. Our Prime Minister led our delegation. That is our Finance Minister Hon D. B. Wijetunga. The donor countries reviewed our last year's performance. They wanted to see whether we were wasting the money, or whether we were utilizing it to raise the standard of life of the people, to service local production, to increase employment opportunities thereby and accordingly increase the income of the people and also create an increased demand and ensure a better profit for local products.

At that discussion we asked for an aid amounting to Rs.34,800 million. That is US \$ 870 million. We told them that we were given US\$ 780 million last year amounting to Rs 31,200 million which was utilized sensibly for the welfare of the people and asked for US\$ 870 million this year.

#### Granted US \$ 1000m

The soothsayers in this country said that this time the aid wouldn't come and that the Government will not be able to carry on. Some not only predicted it but also prayed that that do happen. They said that the world should not help this Government. They did everything to see that no aid is given. These too were considered by the donor countries.

And, though we asked for only 870 million, I am happy to say they granted 1000 million. We were informed from Paris day-before-yesterday that a grant of US\$ 1000 million was approved by that Aid Consortium. Speaking in rupees, we had asked for Rs. 34,800 million and received Rs 40,000 million.