

# **DEFENCE SEMINAR 2014**

## **SRI LANKA: CHALLENGES TO A RISING NATION**

### **CONCLUDING SESSION**

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

By His Excellency Dr Chris Nonis

“The wealth of our country is the diversity of our people and it is up to us, all of us, domestically and regionally, to leverage on that diversity. But in order to do that we have to respect each other with our differences. Because I believe that it is when we respect each other's diversity that we give each other dignity; and when we give each other dignity we will ensure a durable and long lasting peace globally.”

Commander of the Army, Lieutenant General Daya Rathnayake, Chief of the Tri Forces, Distinguished International Delegates, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure, indeed it is a great privilege to been asked to deliver the concluding remarks in what has been, I think, an excellent and extremely informative Defence Seminar 2014. I think the proceedings of the past 3 days have provided all of us, with a really nuanced understanding of the challenges to Sri Lanka in the post conflict era. But more importantly, I think it is also shown us the myriad of opportunities that exist for Sri Lanka and for our partners regionally in our ascendance.

I think it an enormous tribute to the Defence Secretary, Mr Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, for having conceptualised this Defence Seminar, because I think it provides an eminently suitable platform where we can have military personnel, civilians, academicians and researchers, all coming together, discussing the Sri Lankan model, sharing their thoughts and having intellectual discourse and dialogue. And I think this Defence Seminar, in its fourth year has really defined its place in international Defence Conferences.

As you know, we in Sri Lanka, have a rich two and half thousand year history and heritage, and spiritual and cultural aesthetic, of which we are justifiably proud. And I feel our two greatest strengths, are firstly our people and secondly our geo-strategic position. Throughout all the difficulties we've had over the last several thousand years, from the colonial legacy to the World Wars, to the 30 year conflict with the terrorists and to the tsunami, what has really stood us through these difficult times has been the strength of our people. And I think it is an enormous tribute, particularly with the 28 year terrorist conflict to the commitment, the dedication, the resilience, the fortitude of our Sri Lankan Forces, who sacrificed their lives and their families in service to our country. All of you in the Forces, in the Sri Lankan Forces present here today, who have sacrificed so much for us; it is because of you, that we are free and we owe all of you an enormous debt of gratitude. We achieved that freedom in May 2009 under the leadership of His Excellency, President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the pivotal role played by the Defence Secretary, Mr Gotabhaya Rajapaksa. And in achieving that peace we exercised the greatest human right, which is the right to life. Because since then we have not had a single major

terrorist incident and all the people of Sri Lanka: Tamil, Sinhalese, Muslim, Burgher, Malay are free of the autocracy and hegemony of terrorism.

Now during this Defence Seminar, the Keynote Speaker Dr P B Jayasundra gave a comprehensive and really perspicacious analysis of the context of Sri Lanka, the history of Sri Lanka from an economic, cultural perspective and also spoke about our current macroeconomic environment and potential for the future. That was of course preceded by Lieutenant General Daya Rathnayake, the Commander of the Army who in his welcome address, focused on the balance between security, development and prosperity and also articulated the Sri Lankan model for defeating terrorism.

Several speakers during this session articulated the very comprehensive reconciliation, rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration programme that has taken place since May 2009. Two hundred and ninety seven thousand people were rescued in probably the world's greatest hostage rescue operation. And all those internally displaced people have now been found their homes. At the time of May 2009 there were something like 1.5 mines and unexploded ordnances, the majority of which had been cleared, leaving only an area of just say 86 square kilo meters. 12600 LTTE cadres have been rehabilitated and every one of the 594 child soldiers have been returned to their families. The emergency regulations were lifted, the A9 was reopened and there's a multi-million dollar programme in the Northern and Eastern revival in terms of infrastructure development. The tri-lingual policy is being implemented island-wide and everyone of all ethnicities: all of them are being absorbed into the Forces, the Police Force, and into the Civilian cadres. Most importantly we've had Northern Provincial elections and finally after three decades the people of the North have been able to exercise their suffrage.

The Minister of External Affairs. Professor GL Peiris, in his address gave a very comprehensive overview of the very pragmatic measures taken to achieve social and equity. And he also articulated very clearly and highlighted the imperative of not internationalising domestic issues. Mr Lalith Weerathunga, the Secretary to the President traced the nexus between peace and development and the contribution of the LLRC towards building a positive peace. And he also spoke from a very human perspective about social capital and trust, which goes beyond monetary value.

The speakers on the first day, the Senior Minister Amunugama as well as the Governor of the Central Bank Nivard Cabraal, both spoke about the extremely conducive macroeconomic environment that we have today. We have a over 7 percent year on year GDP growth rate, we have single mid digit inflation, single digit interest rates, we are narrowing the fiscal deficit, we have a historically high external reserves of over 9 billion dollars and the recent sovereign bond which was issued at a relatively low coupon rate for frontier markets 5.125% was several times oversubscribed and I think that's an independent and surrogate marker of confidence of contemporary Sri Lankan narrative.

But I think what is of real importance is the fact that our regional growth as articulated by a lot of our speakers; our regional growth was over 25% both in the previously conflict affected areas of the North

and the East. And that demonstrates our commitment to build a truly pluralistic and inclusive society, where everyone in the country can reap the dividends of peace. And that's very much in consonance with His Excellency, President Mahinda Rajapaksa's Mahinda Chinthana Policy of bridging the urban rural divide and achieving a proper growth and a growth with equity.

I think Prof Peiris also articulated that was the same theme that was chosen for the Heads of Governments Meeting - the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which we were delighted to host last year and the theme was "Growth with Equity; Inclusive Development" to demonstrate that all of us, particularly in developing countries, and in post conflict developing countries should all reap those dividends of growth. Not only for us but also for other countries too who have experienced the same. And His Excellency the President, Chaired the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and has assumed the Chair in Office of the Commonwealth, which is a sense of enormous pride to all of us. Because I remember when a few years ago when I commenced my tenure in London, there was a very strong, very well funded lobby to try and move the site of CHOGM away from Sri Lanka. And it was an enormously difficult task to change ingrained opinion. At the time I was Chairing the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth Secretariat which comprises of over 50 Commonwealth High Commissioners, but I did realise that with persistent dialogue, with persistent articulation, with separation of fact from fiction eventually the majority of Commonwealth Countries understood that we all have similar histories. We all suffer from the legacy of colonisation. And we all are at very different stages of development. And it is that depth and breadth of understanding that we need from everyone. And that is something which we should all move towards.

We were delighted that the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting were held in Sri Lanka; and rightfully so. Because many people don't know that we are one of the 8 founder member nations of the Commonwealth if we go back to the London Declaration, we achieved universal suffrage 17 years prior to independence in 1951. So we can also say a few things about gender parity and democracy to the world. And also we have always subscribed to the twin pillars of Democracy and Development. We subscribe to the Singapore Principles of 1971, the Harare Principles of 1991, the Muntanyi Statement on Respect and Understanding and the Principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter.

And the beauty of hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Sri Lanka was that it was a great index of confidence in Sri Lanka today. And it also enabled us to further strengthen bilateral relationships particularly with other Commonwealth Countries. And as Minister Peiris said they were very surprised - pleasantly surprised at the peace that is prevalent in Sri Lanka, at the positive peace that is prevalent in Sri Lanka and also at the beauty of Colombo. And many people expressed this when we were here and also they continue to articulate this when I'm back in London. They all say it is so different from the very negative, anachronistic picture that is constantly being spread by those demagogues of division who simply fan the flames of hatred, but who are extremely well funded. This very small rump of the Diaspora - and I don't demonise the Diaspora at all - I grew up there and I feel the majority - 95% are perfectly decent, educated, sensible people. It is only a very small group of people who use terrorism as a business. It is they who are now out of a job. But they perpetuate it because they

still have access to that funding. And that funding is now being legitimised into other businesses. And they are the people who continue to spread this very negative narrative and also continue to lobby even legislators and opinion leaders, think tanks and certain aspects of the media. And I think that is something that is quite a challenge to address.

I mentioned at the outset that our two greatest strengths were our people and also our geo- strategic location because Sri Lanka lies exactly at the nexus of the maritime routes between the East and the West. And I think historically in terms of our trade routes that is probably why we are such a multi-ethnic, culturally diverse and heterogeneous community. And in his speech Major General Perera also outlined the concept of the Land Force Doctrine that transforms a component of the military from security related duties to those of development and nation building. And he also outlined the very complex interplay and the multiplicity of actors both domestic and international in the post conflict era. All three; Major General Perera, Rear Admiral Gunawardana and Air Vice Marshal Jayampathy, in their extremely clear and focused presentations, articulated the value and the geo-strategic importance of Sri Lanka and the interplay between those great superpowers - the USA, India and China in the Indian Ocean region. Because the Indian Ocean is the third largest Ocean in the world, and comprise of 38 littoral states, 24 ocean territories and 17 landlocked countries. And 50% of the world's containerised cargo and 2/3 of the world's oil passes through the Indian Ocean region.

So its lines of communications are critical globally for trade security and energy and an even greater percentage of the world's sea borne trade passes through these choke points, like the Straits of Hormuz and the Straits of Malacca and the Sunda Straits. So in a world of maritime politics Sri Lanka having achieved peace, has assumed enormous strategic significance and can play a key role globally and within the Maritime Silk Route, particularly enhanced by the shift in economic power to Asia. From a US perspective after 9/11 and after the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, their Port Diego Garcia has assumed enormous strategic significance for them. And even after the withdrawal, trade and energy security will still demand enormous interest in the Indian Ocean region and its choke points.

If you look at Sri Lanka and its harbours, if you look at Trincomalee from the old days, it's the third natural largest harbour in the world and I think Admiral Nelson said it was the finest natural harbour in the world and Churchill said it was the most strategic. In fact I think it housed the British Seventh Fleet during the World War, and when Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942, it was of enormous strategic importance to Britain. And in fact they used it to exercise some degree of control over their Empire in India. In addition I am told that the depth of the inner harbour in the days of nuclear power and nuclear powered submarines actually is also of enormous strategic significance. And if you go to Britain, visit the Cutty Sark and so on the oldest frigate belonging to Admiral Nelson which is in water today as a museum ship is called HMS Trincomalee. And there is even a HMS Trincomalee fan club back there.

And if you look at Hambantota today, it's just 10 to 12 nautical miles from the great sea lanes communication, the busiest shipping line where over a hundred ships pass on a daily basis. And Hambantota has the potential to make Sri Lanka one of the preeminent shipping hubs and fulfil part of our 5 hub strategy.

Now Air Vice Marshal also mentioned the aviation perspective, and that we are just 4 hours away from the Far East, in fact we are just - probably 3 to 4 hours away from Singapore, KL, Bangkok, Delhi, Qatar, Doha and Dubai. That is the value of Sri Lanka.

Our speakers also emphasised that because of our geo-strategic position the importance of regional cooperation and regional integration and having a collaborative maritime and aviation diplomacy harnessing our shared maritime domain expertise. We were reminded by our speakers that whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia, and again of the interplay between China, India and USA for primacy in the Indian Ocean. And in this context Sri Lanka's geo-strategic position is pivotal.

In terms of our regional discussions professor Bandoro of Indonesia spoke about the potential value and rationale of our engaging with SAARC and Dr Patrick Kugle gave a EU perspective and outlined EU concerns on human rights and the asymmetrical trade relationship and their declining aid. He gave a few scenarios which were actually rather pessimistic but Dr Kugle in his last light gave a very interesting –in fact made some very interesting points about a potential alternative strategy. And I think that's something that really the EU should take heart of. What he said and I quote from some of what was said in his last slide: he said "be modest,... if European states could show more modesty and understand in their assessment of Sri Lanka's civil war as its own experience of interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq have exposed them to the many challenges in counter-terrorisms." He said "be consistent.... The EU should be ready to address the accusations of double standards and hypocrisy in foreign relations and reassure its policy on Sri Lanka is not very different from assessment of other conflicts." " Be patient; give us the time and the space as you have given any post conflict country. Are we not deserving of that? And particularly in comparison to peer reviewed countries we've done substantially better than the majority of peer reviewed countries who have suffered a conflict like this." " Be open; Europe needs to continue their dialogue with Sri Lankan partners in every possible level. " "Be supportive; offer more carrots and less sticks; support Sri Lankan led and Sri Lankan owned reconciliation processes." and "be partners because we have the same aim of having a pluralistic and inclusive society with a sustainable peace." And I thought actually that was an excellent slide, because if people adopt that particularly those who seek to internationalise what is a domestic conflict and seek to abrogate our territorial integrity and our sovereignty, I think if people actually use that slide and put it into practice a lot of their concerns would actually disappear.

Our colleague from Tanzania, Dr Luoga, spoke again of the problems of the African subcontinent in the perennial search for identity. Only two countries in the entire African subcontinent have not been colonised: Liberia and Ethiopia and he said so many are struggling. Also Tanzania itself struggles with so many issues of identity and he said what kept them through was unity; their constant emphasis on unity and unifying all the different people. It also reminded me when we had our speaker from Africa about the struggle against apartheid and Nelson Mandela; I remember when I was involved with Commonwealth Society in my younger days, many years ago, also as a young activist, campaigning, there used to be a flame outside the South African High Commission in London, for every day that Mandela was in prison and all of us used to go as students and stand outside and have a vigil and I remember joining that vigil, and when Mandela was released in 1990 and he first came to London, he gave his first press conference at our society. What really struck me about Mandela was not he was successful, just to beat apartheid but after 27 years in captivity he forgave his captors. And I think he was really the personification of the equanimity and from the South African trauma and process, came the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

And we had a very comprehensive Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission which really was based fundamentally on the TRC of South Africa. Our LLRC which many people criticised before it was launched; I know- I used to get constant criticism- people said: "Oh High Commissioner this is going to be edited or its going to be biased, it won't be critical, it will be a white, wash,".. constant criticism. But when it was published and I remember it was published in December 14th or 16th on a Friday; and I remember presenting it to the British Parliament on the following Tuesday, people were absolutely astonished by it. It was not only released, but it was released in full and unedited. And it was a very comprehensive, impartial, critical report of over 380 pages. It was set within the Principle of International Humanitarian Law, incorporating the Principle of Distinction, and the Principle of Proportionality. It had over a thousand oral submissions and five thousand written submissions. And a substantial part of the LLRC is currently being implemented. I know there is more to be implemented but if you compare our reconciliation process and the LLRC process, to many other countries who've had similar processes, we've actually done substantially better. And I think it is so important when people seek to criticise, that they actually compare us to themselves and their processes post conflict and also to our peer countries. When people ask for accountability well, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission was based on the Principle of Restorative Justice not Punitive Justice; where people have forgiveness, and that encourages them to discuss the trauma of conflict and it actually helps to heal the wounds of conflict. So I think that was enormously important and National Human Rights Action Plan which looks at the implementation and monitoring of the LLRC.

We also had some other speakers who also spoke about regional challenges but before I go on to I must say that there was another excellent exposition of the challenges that many western countries are facing with the Diaspora, by His Excellency Ravi Ariyasinghe, who very clearly articulated the challenges, even though terrorism may have finished; the physical war has finished here but the international war still continues. And I think it's so important that we address it with the same focus, the same strategy that you all have done for the physical war. I think that is very important. The war that is being fought- I said it previously in an interview- that it's a proxy propaganda war, but I chose my words very carefully.

It is a war. I don't think it can be laughed off in terms of lack of communication or lack of marketing. It is literally a war because the funds used by the rump of the LTTE to procure arms; all those funds are now being diverted to fight this propaganda war. And I think it's important that we understand, really the seriousness and gravity of that. And the resources therefore and strategy that needs to be put in to combat it because it uses social media; it uses an enormous network of international money laundering and financial transactions. And it's used as I said earlier really to prey on opinion leaders and sections of the media and many other people, and that actually influences people. It also influences people, particularly where there's a very narrow margin in terms of votes, in terms of seats. So it actually appeals to the domestic electoral compulsions of certain countries. What it is down to essentially is votes and funds. And I think that is something that we need to be aware of when we do get some criticism from certain sectors.

I also want to mention that His Excellency Prasad Kariyawasam also highlighted issues of the post colonial legacy and very clearly articulated what we have gone through in that process. We then went on to our speakers from the Far East; we had a very interesting discussion from Malaysia about their challenges in defining the State of Malaysia and the challenges with nation building. And he also mentioned Dr Mahathir's 'Look East' policy. He took Malaysia from a per capita income of USD 450 to USD 9000 at the end of his tenure. I remember when he came down here, he was invited I think by CIMA, during which he was very pessimistic regarding the potential for Sri Lanka. He said Sri Lanka will not survive because we have neither peace nor political stability. So therefore, after the end of the conflict, we were involved with the Malaysian Business Community, we invited him back in 2010 and at that point he was extremely positive. He said Sri Lanka has the two essential ingredients that are necessary for its ascendance; peace and political stability. And what was also very interesting about Dr Mahathir, there were some very challenging questions, and I had the onerous and rather difficult task of chairing that session with about 400 corporates: many of them asked: "Well Dr Mahathir if it is that you are anti-capitalist, how do you reconcile that with your development? He said "I'm not anti-capitalist: I take what's best from capitalism which is appropriate for my country at that stage in its development and reject the rest. I take what's best from socialism which is appropriate for my country at that stage of its development and reject the rest. I am a pragmatist, but if at a later stage there's something else that is appropriate for my country at a later stage of development, I will take that too. "So he was very practical and he didn't hold himself to any particular ideology. Another question that was asked was whether he was anti- American and why was it that he had this constant battle. He said "actually I was not against the US, it was American Foreign Policy that was against me and what I did was I created a very conducive macroeconomic business environment which attracted US business leaders and when US business leaders tasted the fruits of that business environment they changed US Foreign Policy on my behalf." So I think you see very interesting ideas from these different people.

We also had a very interesting point about the four pillars of governance from our speaker from Singapore, and she also mentioned how impressed she was with Sri Lanka's progress in the post conflict era. We also had a very interesting discussion from our colleague from China; he started off with the travels of the monk and scholar Faxien many centuries ago, and Zheng He the Admiral, and went on to the value of the Rubber Rice Pact of 1952 ,because at the time Sri Lanka was again very brave, because we had everything to lose at the time- China at the time was ostracised by the US but nonetheless little Sri Lanka actually went ahead and signed that barter agreement, the Rubber Rice Pact. And subsequent to that, he spoke about how they have increased their cooperation and upped it during His Excellency, President Mahinda Rajapaksa's time from 2005 and also increased it to a different strategic level in 2013.

In our final discussions on regional issues we had, I think, a very brilliant articulation of India's current policy by Dr Subramaniam Swamy. He was very clear that this was a distinctly new party under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and his intention that he was committed to improve India's relations with Sri Lanka and that his intention was to harmonise national progress with spiritual advancement. I remember the time, a few years ago, prior to my becoming High Commissioner, I had the enormous privilege of meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi ,at the time he was Chief Minister of Gujarat and we were accompanying a Commonwealth Business Delegation to Gujarat and it was a very small round table meeting. But during that time, after discussion with Prime Minister Modi, after listening to his razor sharp focus on building a strong and resurgent India, I had no doubt that one day he would be the leader of India and I had no doubt he would maximise the true potential of the world's largest democracy. Dr Swamy also very clearly articulated that their foreign policy will be based entirely on national interest and not on narrow regional and local considerations. He very clearly articulated that the UN enforcement and pressure on Sri Lanka was unbalanced and intrusive, and they would not accept it. He very clearly articulated that the new pole and the centre of the world was Asian and that they would not accept any group placing international interest above national interest.

And finally, I think Asanga Abeyagoonasekera who also spoke to us again on the tremendous challenges of combating terrorism and security particularly in the region and the opportunities thereof for collaboration.

So Your Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, I return to the first point I made. I said initially that the strength of Sri Lanka is our people and our geo-strategic location. The final point I'd like to make about our people and also for lots of the countries present today; most of us have a tremendous diversity of our people, of ethnic backgrounds and religions, and rather than fearing them I think we should all realise that is the true wealth of our country. The wealth of our country is the diversity of our people



and it is up to us, all of us, domestically and regionally to leverage on that diversity. But in order to do that we have to respect each other with our differences. Because I believe that it is when we respect each other's diversity that we give each other dignity; and when we give each other dignity we will ensure a durable and long lasting peace globally. So it is in that spirit, ladies and gentlemen, of respect and understanding that we are moving forward in Sri Lanka's ascendance and also with an emphasis on forging a common national identity. I don't call myself a Sinhalese or Tamil or Muslim or Burgher; I am Sri Lankan and I am proud to be Sri Lankan and that is my identity. And I think this Defence Seminar in addition to sharing expertise and experiences has also certainly opened my eyes and I'm sure it has given all of you an idea of the tremendous opportunities we have to collaborate and to be partners together because I think what is obvious is we all share similar experiences. And I think this Defence Seminar has been enormously enriching and also given us the opportunity and given us the ideas of how we can collaborate both domestically and regionally because, ladies and gentlemen, I believe, that as we have articulated, this is Asia's century and we invite you all to join us in our endeavour of building and moving towards Sri Lanka's renaissance.

I thank you.