Selected Speeches of the Hon. R. PREMADASA Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

THE PRIME MINISTER SPEAKS . . . . .

Selected Speeches of the Hon. R. Premadasa, Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

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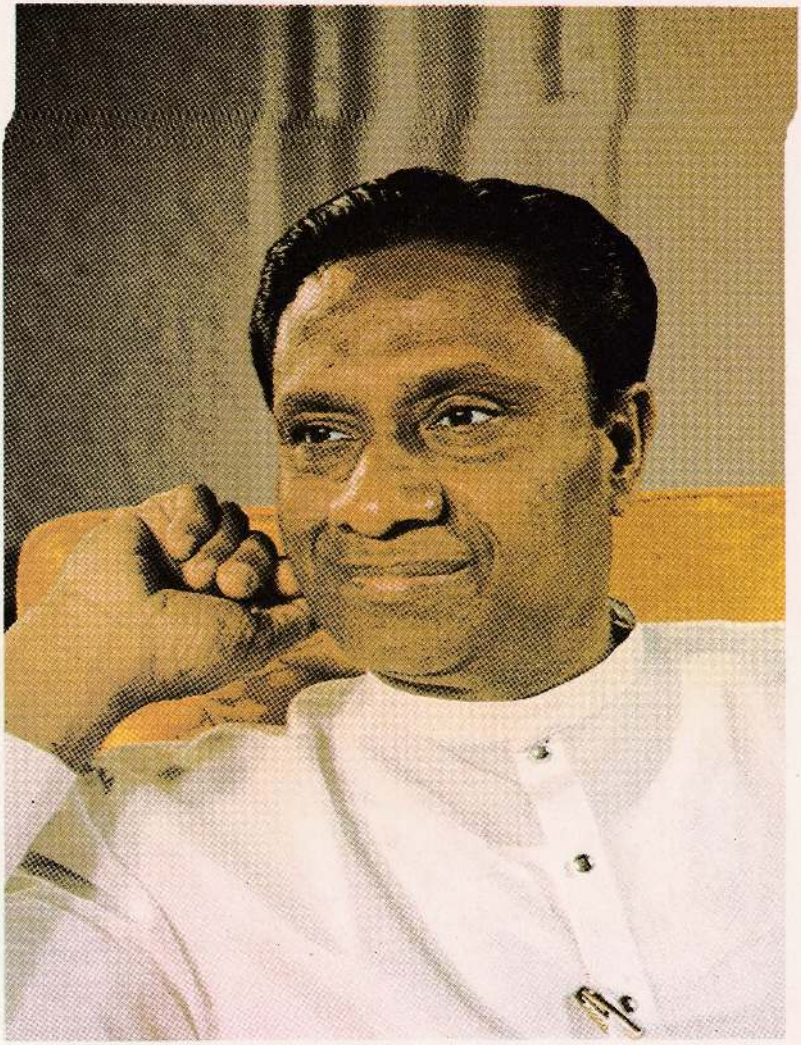

Hon. R. PREMADASA

Prime Minister of Sri Lanka

'Let us go forward together.....'

Mr. Speaker,

It is with a surging sense of pride tempered however with a deep feeling of humility that I stand before the Honourable Members of this House as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. To our revered President, to the voters of Colombo Central, to the Members of Parliament and through them to the people of Sri Lanka, I am eternally grateful for the great trust and confidence reposed in me.

The void created by the departure of our Leader from this House cannot be easily filled. I can only endeavour in my own small way to strive to perform the tasks that have now fallen on me ever mindful of the high ideals and noble example of our Leader. For this in all humility, I shall always seek your guidance, goodwill and co-operation.

Correct me when I am wrong; encourage me when I am right; support me when I am in need and share my responsibilities in the fulfilment of the tasks before me.

To reach here I have had a long and arduous journey in public life. Victory, defeat, joy, sorrow, exaltation and humiliation have all been my lot from time to time. These have chastened me and today I am ready once again to re-dedicate myself to the service of my country and my people. I am confident that I will be able to draw heavily from the lessons learnt in public life for a period of nearly thirty years and from the collective wisdom of this House.

There is one matter to which with the leave of the House I must advert at the outset. When I look back over the years, I cannot fail to recall the many things that I have left undone. I may even in the thrust and parry of debate have said things which might unwittingly have hurt the feelings of others. Much of it stems from the sincerity of purpose, the forthrightness and the speed with which I act. I take this opportunity to ask all concerned to erase from their minds all that is bitter and carry forward only what is sweet, in the true spirit of the noble principle of "Maithri".

Ours is a multi-racial, multi-religious and a multi-linguistic society. But we are all one People and this I shall always bear in the forefront of my mind. It shall be my constant endeavour to attempt to build unity and a respect and regard for the diversities of race, religion and language. Let us therefore create together a new national spirit of unity, national integrity and trust amongst us all. Let us live together, learn together and work together, always confident that in the end we will all triumph together.

This country is a blessed one in a multitude of ways. Nature has been generous to us. We have a fertile soil, abundant rainfall, luxuriant forests and unmatched scenic beauty. The diversity of climatic conditions within a small island is in a sense unique. We have been free of natural disasters, such as typhoons, earthquakes and volcanoes. We have no border problems.

Our human resources are plentiful. The talents and skills of our people are the envy of all. How then do we continue to remain a developing nation? We have not forged ahead to take our place at the helm of things. The answer is simple and not far to seek. We just do not work enough and nothing comes without work and very hard work at that. It is indeed sad to contemplate that even our basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter are yet far from being satisfied. A country which was a granary in ancient times is today dependent on imported rice. An island surrounded by the sea is without fish.

The dry-zone cries for water; the wet-zone resents floods; the producer seeks markets; the youth clamour for work. This is the challenge. Let us go forward together to face it.

We have had blue-prints but no practical plans. We have had plans which are airy nothings unless translated into action. It is about time that we settled down to hard work. I am determined to set an example myself. I do not want excuses. I do not want very learned reasons as to why things cannot be done. I want results and results will necessarily follow dynamic action.

We have through our Leader set for ourselves new standards of conduct and behaviour. Let us add to these, new standards of hard work coupled with devotion and dedication to our country and our people.

I do not for a moment deny that plans for socio-economic development have yielded some results. But has their impact been substantial? Have the benefits of planned development gone down speedily to the grass roots, the mud huts in the villages and the dilapidated slums in the Towns and to the weaker sections of the community? The answer is most regretfully in the negative. Let us not forget that Sri Lanka lives in the villages and in the slums.

Our people have borne immeasurable hardships. The youth have been vainly searching for opportunities, economic advancement and security. We must not take for granted the endurance and patience of our over-burdened people. Their circumstances may drive them sometimes to desperation and none will be able to predict their course of action thereafter. Policies, their implementation and the necessary subsequent administrative action have all to be reviewed in the light of these considerations. Speed appears to be the essence of all matters; speed in the translation into action of well thought-out plans and policies.

Our greatest asset is our people and the youth hold the key to the future. May I in the words of John F. Kennedy say, that "We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe" to ensure political freedom, promote economic strength and social advancement and secure equality of opportunity for all.

It is the happiness and glory of a representative of the people to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence and the most unreserved communication with them. Their wishes have great weight with me and their opinion I respect, their business receives my undivided attention. It is my duty to sacrifice my rest, my pleasures and all my time to theirs and above all, ever to prefer their interests to mine. I propose to do not what appears expedient but what is in fact just and right. Freedom and not servitude is the remedy for lawlessness and religion and not lack of it is the true remedy for superstition.

Mr. Speaker,

It shall be the dedicated aim of this Government to create a land not for the privileged few and a less privileged majority but a just and free Sri Lanka—

* Where everyone has work, food and a home;
* Where no man or woman is exploited—or worshipped;
* Where merit and ability will receive due recognition;
* Where agriculture, industry and commerce aims to answer the needs of our people, and are not an endless battle for control, profit and wages;
* Where schools and universities have freedom without chaos and discipline without dictatorship;
* Where a person's character matters, not his birth or riches;
* Where right is approved and wrong condemned.

Let our Clergy bless our journey; let our Press light our path; let our Foes check our steps; let our Friends inspire us; and let our People sustain us.

Thank you.

Text of Speech in the National State Assembly on 23rd February, 1978.

Paramount aim : a free and just society

Your Excellency Mr. Keng Piao,

Madame Chao Lan-hsiang,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honour and privilege to be able to welcome you Mr. Vice Premier and the other distinguished guests fron the People's Republic of China. We regard your visit as particularly auspicious since it is the first official mission to visit Sri Lanka from China after the formation of the new government under the leadership of President, His Excellency J. R. Jayewardene. I wish to assure you that your presence in our country offers demonstrable proof of the deep and abiding mutuality of the relationship between our two countries.

The relations between Sri Lanka and China reach back to the distant past and have been nourished by centuries of peaceful and mutually beneficial contacts, encompassing varied fields of activity. We have had a long history of exchanges in the field of trade as much as in the spheres of culture which helped to keep alive the friendship between our two peoples.

It is a source of pride and satisfaction to us in Sri Lanka that our country was among the first to extend recognition to the People's Republic of China in 1950. We moved forward to provide a stable framework for the trade relations between the two countries, when in 1952 we concluded the Rubber-Rice Agreement. The commercial exchanges between our two countries have since expanded to make China, taken country-wise, Sri Lanka's largest trading partner.

Your visit forges a further link in the ties binding our two countries and will help to renew the deep-rooted friendship between our two peoples.

Mr. Vice Premier, China has always been ready to come to the assistance of Sri Lanka in times of need. The people of Sri Lanka remain grateful for

the consistent support which your country has extended to our development efforts through the generous provision of financial grants, credits, technical assistance, etc.

The government which it is my privilege to represent, is a Democratic Socialist Government and our paramount aim is to create a free and just society founded on human and moral values. In the pursuit of this goal, we have adopted a development-oriented strategy, centred round two major development schemes, the accelerated Mahaweli River Basin project and the Greater Colombo Economic Commission. We are confident that our economic and social policies will enable us to overcome the critical problems facing the country at present and usher in a milieu of national renaissance. We feel assured that we can depend on the whole-hearted support of China in the historic task that we have undertaken.

Mr. Vice Premier, we in Sri Lanka admire the spectacular progress in national reconstruction made by the People's Republic of China since liberation. We are aware that this remarkable transformation of your country has been the result of inspiring and dedicated leadership as well as the dynamism and deep commitment of the Chinese people to build a new society. May I be permitted to say that under the able and wise leadership of Chairman Hua Kuo-feng, China has entered a new, vibrant phase in her history when she will consolidate her revolutionary gains and reach out to still higher levels of national well-being.

The Bandung Conference of 1955 is a landmark in the history of the emerging nations of Asia and Africa and Sri Lanka is deeply appreciative of the active role played by China to ensure the success of the Conference. I would like to say that the spirit of Bandung continues to animate the policy of non-alignment followed by Sri Lanka.

China and Sri Lanka have consistently stood together in opposing colonialism and imperialism and extending unreserved support to the efforts to democratise international relations. Both our countries stand committed to the view that strict compliance with the principles of peaceful coexistence alone provide the foundation for an acceptable framework of international relations.

The gross imbalances in the present international economic system, apart from heaping intolerable burdens on the peoples of the third world, also pose a critical challenge to the fabric of world peace. The establishment of a new, equitable system of international economic relations is therefore an issue of the utmost urgency and the non-aligned countries as well as the

other nations of the third world are deeply indebted to China for the support which they have received from her in their struggle to secure a fair and just international economic order.

Mr. Vice Premier, the maintenance of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace is vital to the peace and stability of the region and I wish to take the occasion to reiterate our appreciation for China's support for the proposal. We are confident that both our countries will continue to work together along with the other like-minded nations, to make the concept a reality.

We hope, Mr. Vice Premier, that your stay in Sri Lanka, brief though it is will be pleasant and fruitful.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, may I now request you to join me in a toast to:

the lasting friendship between the governments and peoples of China and Sri Lanka;

the continued progress and prosperity of the People's Republic of China;

the health and well-being of Chairman Hua Kuo-feng;

the health and well-being of His Excellency Mr. Keng Piao, Vice Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China; and Madame Chao Lan-hsiang;

the health and well-being of our other distinguished guests from China.

Text of Speech at the banquet to the Vice-Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China His Excellency Mr. Keng Piao and Madame Chao Lan-hsiang on 21st June, 1978.

Improving the life of the poorest sections

I want to thank you for your kind words of welcome and for your invitation to address this meeting. Today is the 33rd Anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. Peoples throughout the world will be joining in celebrating United Nations Day to review the work of the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies and to see how they could re-dedicate themselves and make renewed efforts towards the attainment of the objectives which have been enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Constitutions of the Specialized Agencies. It also serves to remind us that we are living today in a world in which the peoples of the world have been brought together in more ways than one through technological advances. These have brought about an increasing awareness and recognition of the inter-dependence of the countries of the world, the need to work together towards maximizing the limited resources of the earth for the benefit of all.

During its 33 years existence, the United Nations despite occasional setbacks has succeeded in bringing about a relaxation of tensions and in creating an era of detente. Today we all recognize that the foundation for lasting peace can only be built in a climate of goodwill, mutual trust and on a just and equitable world order. Unfortunately, although the international community has recognized that these conditions could best be achieved by the establishment of the New International Economic Order, there has been hardly any progress which gives us hope and encouragement. Declarations and Programmes of Action have yet to be implemented and the disparities between the rich and the poor nations continue to widen, creating tensions in the world.

In the context of economic development, the United Nations Development Programme has played and must continue to play a key role. We appreciate what has been done but, admittedly, much more remains to be done. The United Nations Development Programme, therefore, faces a challenge ot contain and reduce the growing illiteracy, hunger, poverty,

disease and malnutrition amongst the vast masses of the world today. Self-reliance is a strategy which most developing countries would like to follow to improve the quality of life of their people. But given the worsening terms of trade and balance of payments, they are compelled to seek external resources to carry out and accelerate their development programmes. It is in the mutual interest of the developed and developing countries to co-operate in this effort. The improvement of the living conditions of the poorest nations would create the markets for manufactured goods of the developed countries and stimulate their economies.

We, in Sri Lanka, are striving hard to lead our people from a period of control and rationing to an era of plenty and prosperity. We have given top priority to economic development and have embarked on a programme of economic planning and development which has avoided the pursuit of short-term gains in the larger interest of the people and the country as a whole. It calls for sacrifice, patience, courage and vision and we are confident that the people will give us their support in our efforts to improve the quality of life of the poorest sections of our community. In these efforts, we appreciate the assistance which we have received from the international community and international organizations which have recognized the soundness of our economic policies and are determined to achieve the objectives which we have set ourselves.

I thank you again for your invitation and wish you every success in your efforts to help those seeking to help themselves.

Text of Speech in reply to the address of welcome by the Resident Representative of the UNDP, at the U.N. Day Meeting on 24th October, 1978.

When in doubt, ... find out

Mr. Chairman,
Hon. Minister,
Distinguished Delegates to the Press Foundation of Asia,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I consider it a privilege to be present amongst you all at this luncheon meeting and to have been called upon to say a few words.

It is also a matter for gratification for me to note that your organisation — The Press Foundation of Asia — had its inaugural meeting some ten years ago in our own hill capital — Kandy. Since that time your organisation as well as the Press in the various countries represented by you had gone through a variety of experiences — some happy and some not so happy. The Press Foundation of Asia has been able, however, to give the Press of our countries a certain degree of stability and perhaps also some thrust to proceed in the right direction during certain dark periods. For this, we are all grateful to you. It is my hope that you will continue to give the right lead to the Press and media institutions in the region in the years to come.

I am particularly struck today by the variety of countries represented at this conference and the types of officials and representatives that make up this gathering. There are, I believe, proprietors. publishers, editors and newspaper executives. The late Frank Moraes, the famous Indian journalist used to say that what a newspaper needed was a live editor and a dead proprietor! The two did not go together. Well, your body seems to have been able to bring the two categories of persons together into a harmonious and working whole.

You represent, if I may say so, a powerful segment of opinion in our region. You are all experts in various fields. Some of you have stood up for the freedom and integrity of the Press at the risk of great personal danger.

I see from the programme you have drawn up for discussion at this conference a whole range of subjects. What is or what should be the relation between the Press and the Government of a country? Is there an Asian position on the question of imbalance in news flow between the Third World and the West? How should the Asian Press report the remarkable changes that have taken place and are taking place in the world's economic scene? How has the Japanese Press tackled the problem of the new technology in the field of news media? How should we train our journalists for the future?

Now these are all important questions. These are questions which we cannot overlook if we do not want to be left behind in the modernising march of events. We in Asia must keep in step with the rest of the world. We must be ready to meet the coming changes of tomorrow and be ready to meet them adequately.

Whilst all this is true there is one aspect of this whole question of Mass Media to which I, as a layman and politician would like to draw your attention. It is in a sense the fundamental question. What does the public — the ordinary man in the street — expect of the Press? What has he the right to expect particularly in a country which is prepared to tolerate varieties of opinion — in a country which does not count the holding of contrary views a crime against the State? Does the Press as it functions in our representative countries do its duty by its patrons — the reading public?

It has been my happy experience and no doubt it must have been the experience of many of you also to attend a public meeting or to be present at a function and to find it reported the following day in the local press fully and in a balanced fashion. It is not necessarily the length or the flattering report that catches the eye and wins approval. It is the fairness and correctness of the report. With consummate skill the whole spirit of what took place has been recalled and recorded. That is one aspect of it. It has also been my experience where the contrary has been the case; what is recorded has had little or no bearing on what was actually said or what really took place.

What is the reason for this difference? Why does one report correctly spell out what took place and the other suppress or distort. Is it malice or indifference and carelessness or just sheer incompetence?

It is customary to say that a public figure and a political party in power or out of office always wants adulation and praise. It is said that they are critical of the Press that does not appear to be enthusiastic over every pet scheme of the party or the Government.

It is my contention that this is not true. I believe it is not true in the majority of the cases. Certainly, it is not true as far as the present Government in Sri Lanka is concerned. I have said times out of number, both in Parliament and outside "correct us when we are wrong, encourage us when we are right, support us when we are in need"

Press and media reporting and criticism must be fair and above-board. When that is so, it is generally welcome. It is even more so when criticism is also constructive. All sensible parties and Governments welcome it. Our Government recognises the important part that opposition political party and Press criticism can play in the conduct of affairs of our country. Indeed when we as a political party were returned to power with an overwhelming majority, we categorically stated that we recognised the role of the Opposition. We said that in the absence of a strong Opposition in Parliament, a great responsibility lay with the Press. The Press has an important part to play and we expect it to play that part decisively and effectively and also fairly and justly.

What I have said so far about the Press, its reportage and criticism might appear to reflect only the views of active participants in politics but I believe that what I have described as the shortcomings of the Press in general are equally true from the point of view of the reader of newspapers and other periodicals. What the reading public too wants is that the reporting should be fair and unbiassed and the comment well-informed and without malice. It has been really summed up in the aphorism of your great spiritual ancestor, C. P. Scott of the "Manchester Guardian" when he said "Facts are sacred: comment is free". Unfortunately, this great statement has now been reduced to the level of a cliche to which quite often only lip-service is paid.

Now I should like to ask "Is this a very difficult task — this business of fair reporting and fair comment?" Judging by what appears in the daily newspapers throughout the world this does indeed appear to be a formidable task. What is the reason for this? There are probably many reasons, but I should like to suggest a few tentative ones. Press work, and I include in this all type of mass media, is work carried on at a hectic pace and under difficult conditions. So the chance of error is great and consequently a wide allowance must be made for whatever mistakes and shortcomings that appear.

Then again there is the alarming shortage of trained and competent personnel in the field or journalism and its related professions. I see that your organisation is paying particular attention to devising programmes of training for future Asian Journalists. This, I observe is one of the major topics for discussion by you at this conference. When this scheme takes effect and when the average journalist and broadcaster brings to bear on his

job the skill and professionalism that he has acquired after years of apprenticeship a considerable part of the present shortcomings might well disappear.

But I am afraid that one drawback will still continue to bedevil this profes sion of journalism unless we make a firm resolve to root out this failing. There must be a total commitment to the truth.

I read in the Daily News recently an account of an interview given by the Chief Executive of the Press Foundation of Asia, Mr. S. M. Ali. I entirely agree with him that what Asia needs today is "a whole new breed of journalists, who are not merely craft-oriented, but who have the necessary motivation and commitment to journalism, to development and to national welfare".

The present Government of Sri Lanka is committed to the hilt to development — the full utilization for the benefit of everyone of all the manpower and resources of this country. At the same time we are also totally committed to the creation in our country of a free, just and righteous society. We want our journalists to help us achieve our goal of development. This does not mean that we seek only bouquets. We do not mind brickbats too when we deserve.

The famous American Press Baron, Joseph Pulitzer declared that accuracy is to a newspaper what, virtue is to a woman. I trust the Press Foundation of Asia will infuse into journalists the need for accuracy. One of your journalistic maxims is "when in doubt, leave out". May I suggest a slight amendment, "when in doubt, find out".

The need for this has been stated simply and unequivocally by one who was an ornament to your profession — the late Walter Lippmann of America, "The paramount point is whether like a scientist or scholar, the journalist puts truth in the first place or the second ..... In so far as he puts truth in the first place, he rises towards — I will not say into, but towards — the company of those who taste and enjoy the best things of life".

It is my wish that you and future journalists and newspapermen will belong to that happy category of individuals. It is also my hope that in this process you will take us — your readers — along with you so that we can also savour and taste the best things of life.

I thank you all for the kindness and forbearance with which you have listened to me. I hope your stay in our country will be pleasant, and I wish your deliberations all success !

Thank you.

Text of Speech at the luncheon Meeting of the Press Foundation of Asia on 27th November, 1978.

Civic consciousness, . . . a prime need

Mr. Chairman, Ladies & Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be present at this Seminar on the Protection of Public Property organised by the Lions Clubs International of Sri Lanka. The Lions of Sri Lanka have always been in the forefront of activities connected with national development. They are a set of enlightened and public spirited people. I wish to congratulate them for organising a Seminar which will undoubtedly highlight the magnitude of the problem, the extent of waste of resources and the burdens placed on the Government as a result of the destruction of both public and private property that is taking place around us all the time. I sincerely believe that this Seminar will inculcate in the minds of the public a greater element of civic consciousness, public duty and responsibility.

This Seminar has been organised at a point of time in the history of our country when all available resources, both in the public and private sectors, are being diverted to a massive development effort to combat poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment. The fact that destruction and damage to public property is causing a drain on the meagre resources available for development has not been recognised in full measure. Government musters its resources for development with great difficulty. Moreover many of the development projects require foreign exchange investment which is even harder to find. The damage, destruction and neglect of public property not only result in a waste of resources but act as an hindrance to meaningful development.

What do we mean by public property? I would like to give this term public property a fairly broad interpretation. Our natural resources such as the soil, water, forests and animal life which are part and parcel of the natural environment, should also be considered as public property. The term public property usually connotes property owned and operated by the State such as public buildings, Railway, Roads, Electric Installations, etc. Even in this

narrow sense the inventory of public properties assumes massive proportions in socialist countries as well as in countries such as ours which have accepted the doctrine of democratic socialism. Social welfarism brings in its wake nationalisation of public amenities and utilities, basic industry and other means of production which continuously adds to the list of public property.

Destruction and degradation of public property is caused by wanton destruction, neglect, theft, and lack of proper care and maintenance. Natural calamities such as cyclones and floods are responsible for damage to public property and the damage caused by such calamities cannot be completely averted. However, through properly designed and implemented programmes of flood protection and protection of property through safeguards such as designing and strengthening of buildings to meet anticipated wind velocities, damage can be minimised. Communal disturbances, civil commotion and political strife have also contributed their share to the damage of public property.

We are aware of the destruction that is caused to public property in everyday life. I have often wondered why youngsters resort to pelting stones at electric bulbs in street lamps, especially in areas where rural electrification schemes have been newly installed. Could it be pure and simple curiosity or giving vent to a psychological problem of frustration or mischief? I have often heard that trains have run for long distances throughout the night without any kind of lighting as the bulbs and sometimes even the wiring have been removed. I am personally aware of the large sums of money spent annually by the Ceylon Transport Board and the Railway in replacing or repairing damaged seats and other fittings. Stand pipes provided for the public convenience by the Colombo Municipal Council free of charge, are damaged as a matter of course and are under repair, utilizing public funds.

I would like to focus your attention on another aspect of damage which is the damage to the environment caused by illicit felling of timber, encroachments on steep hill slopes, pollution of water resources and air. There is a more visible form of destruction of the environment by way of throwing litter and garbage in any convenient place, the blocking of drainage channels, pasting of posters, etc. As I mentioned earlier this could also be viewed as a form of damage to public property and the long-term consequences of such damage can cause problems for many generations to come.

This Seminar should try to identify the causes underlying such a high incidence of damage to public property. Such causes may vary from the need for a particular article or item which the individual cannot readily afford

to a complex set of attitudes and patterns of behaviour. It could be argued that the ultimate solution to the problem can be found only with full employment, a reasonably good standard of living, better income and the establishment of a just and free society. This I believe is the experience of the developed countries.

The question of attitudes and social behaviour are intricately interwoven with historical, social and economic factors. The mass of our people have not been able to reconcile themselves to the fact that we are a free and sovereign nation and that public property is supplied and maintained out of public funds. During several centuries of foreign domination we have got accustomed to a situation where we treat public property as the property of alien rulers. Granting of adult suffrage during colonial rule has only strengthened this attitude where the masters were still foreigners. A sense of belonging vis a vis the people and the Government was not there. Even after 30 years of independence this attitude pervades our society.

Some people may be of the belief that public property can be protected by enactment and application of rigid laws and regulations. In a democracy like ours enforcement of rigid rules and bringing offenders to book is not quite feasible. While having adequate legal provision and giving deterrent punishment we should explore other more practicable and realistic solutions.

One solution lies in the direction of creating public opinion which should eventually change the attitudes of people. This can be done by mass education through mass media, schools, religious bodies, vigilance groups, etc. in order to inculcate in the minds of people the civic consciousness to protect public property. Groups like the Lions Club could act as pressure groups in creating public opinion and influence the masses. Public opinion once created is a vital and strong force which can effectively prevent destruction of public property. Once public attention is focussed on this problem we have achieved the desired results to a great extent.

The people in this country are politically mature than in most of our neighbouring countries and their participation is essential to solve national problems. The Government alone through its own machinery cannot solve problems of this nature. The people who are the rightful guardians of the State should be told of the need to protect public property so that they can safeguard them for the benefit of all.

Destruction does no good to anyone. It only brings about hardship to fellow beings. No one in his right senses will cause irritation or hardship to a fellow human being. The negligent few who cause damage to public property should be ashamed of themselves. They should be corrected with the co-operation of the citizens of this country.

We should use every forum to take across this message of protection of public property throughout the length and breadth of this country. The Government on its part will render whatever assistance required to propagate this message and in conclusion I thank you for initiating action on a problem that has not been publicly made known all these years. I trust that this Seminar will arouse wide public interest which will no doubt help in its objective of protection of public property.

Text of Keynote Address at the Seminar on Protection of Public Property at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute on 13th January, 1979.

Paving the way for a united Asian view

Mr. President of the Conference,
Honourable Ministers,
Mr. Secretary General of UNCTAD,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I consider it a privilege and pleasure to formally inaugurate today the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the Asian Group of the Group 77.

It is my pleasure to bring to you the good wishes of His Excellency the President, J. R. Jayewardene, and of the Government and people of Sri Lanka for the successful conduct of this Conference. We welcome you all to Sri Lanka and wish that your stay here, though short, will be a pleasant and purposeful one.

The Conference forms part of Asia's preparation to work constructively and to formulate a framework of co-operation for all developing countries, in tackling the important and critical issues of trade and development. Your deliberations and decisions, will represent the views of 38 Asian countries, in which nearly 2/3rds of the world's population live. This exercise must indeed, turn out to be an invaluable input into the deliberations of the world community, on the most urgent and pressing problems that face the developing countries.

The countries represented here share no uniform political, social or economic system. They are diverse in their political outlook and are in different stages of economic advancement and well-being. However, in the midst of all these diversities, we share a common hope and aspiration. That is the creation of a New International Economic Order, in which equity and justice will prevail. In this context, I wish to refer to the decision of the Nairobi Conference of UNCTAD on the Integrated Programme for Commodities. Although, some progress has been made in certain areas in this sphere, it would be correct to state that the overall progress has not matched

the expectations of developing countries. It is heartening that the recent Conference on the Common Fund held in November last year, has confirmed the willingness of the developed countries to participate in its establishment. Still, there remain areas in which consensus has to be reached. It would be in the interest of both developed and developing countries to resolve them before UNCTAD reconvenes in Manila.

The record of progress on the establishment of international commodity arrangements has been much less satisfactory. What appears to be lacking in the movement towards implementation of the Integrated Programme for Commodities, is an inability to move from the stage of commitment to that of action. It is here, that we, the developing countries, and more particularly the developing countries of the Asian region, should provide the political impetus that is required to translate our commitment into action.

While we speak of the New International Economic Order, we are witnesses to a new round of protectionism that seeks to build higher tariff walls against the exports of developing countries. Among the developing countries, it is the Asian ones, which were in the vanguard of the Movement towards industrialization and diversification. We feel that if protectionist tendencies are allowed to continue there is a danger of what took place in the 1930s being repeated. It must be pointed out that the benefits of trade are mutual; and that the developed countries, by introducing new rounds of protectionism, can create a situation that will bring adverse results not only to the developing countries but also to themselves.

The question of the mounting external debts of developing countries has gained great importance in the past few years. I must here, refer to the work of the Ministerial Conference of the Trade and Developing Board of UNCTAD in March last year, under the able and wise Chairmanship of our Minister of Trade and Shipping. This Meeting was able to make a significant contribution towards the alleviation of this problem. We hope that your deliberations will contribute even further in finding appropriate solutions to it.

The Agenda before you is a long and comprehensive one. You will be engaged in the search for solutions that have evaded us for so long. You will be called upon to examine and assess, what has taken place in the fields of trade and development since UNCTAD IV.

Elsewhere, other Regional Groups are also meeting in a similar exercise to establish greater harmony and co-ordination of viewpoints. This Conference, therefore, has an important role to play in developing, and

sharpening, the Asian point of view. This view, along with the views of other like-minded countries, must form an important factor that will influence the outcome of the UNCTAD V deliberations.

We in Sri Lanka, since July 1977 when the present Government was returned to office, have attached great importance to the concept of Asian Regional Co-operation. We have in a number of international forums and at bilateral discussions, both at official and unofficial levels, stressed the importance of forging greater co-operation amongst the Asian countries. Regrettably, for us Asians, progress towards greater regional co-operation has been very slow. But we welcome the results that have surfaced so far. We hope that this Meeting will also provide an impetus for constructive action towards greater co-operation between all Asian countries.

Economic co-operation between developing countries is unavoidable today. More so, it has become an imperative of our times. The need for self-reliance, both on an individual country basis, and self-reliance within a region, is inescapable. I hope that your deliberations will keep in focus, the necessity for such co-operation in the Asian region. I have no doubt that out of this Meeting, will emerge a new initiative towards forging closer links among our countries in the field of economic co-operation.

Since we were returned to office, we are engaged in what is perhaps the most historic exercise of modern times in our country. We have laid the foundation for a just and free society. We have commenced work on restructuring the economy on a liberal basis. We are determined to ensure not only the basic needs of the mass of the people but also equal opportunities for all. We are also dedicated to provide our people a life of quality and dignity with the economic benefits filtering right down to all levels.

As you know, for over three decades Sri Lanka has pursued a policy which resulted in stagnation and frustration in all spheres of economic and social progress. The economic policy, that the Government of Sri Lanka is now pursuing seeks to combine distributive justice with sound and continuing economic growth. We hope that with the assistance of our many friends, both in the Asian region and elsewhere, we will be successful in our efforts.

Mankind is approaching the third millenium. The decisions that we take in the next two decades will influence the kind of society we will create for the New Era. Standing on the threshold of the Twenty First Century, let us act with vision and foresight to achieve the goals that we have set out.

I hope your deliberations will contribute towards this end and that your Meeting here in Colombo will turn out to be a historic one, paving the way for a United Asian point of view on the vital economic issues that face us.

I wish you success.
Thank you.

Text of Speech inaugurating the Preparatory Meeting of Asian Ministers for UNCTAD V on 15th January, 1979.

What is democracy ?

I think it is my good fortune that has given me the opportunity of meeting this distinguished audience interested in both Democracy and morality. Amongst them I count my good friend Shri Rajmohan Gandhi, the distinguished grandson of two still more distinguished grandfathers — Mahatma Gandhi and Shri Chakravarti Rajagopalachariar — two of the most saintly statesmen of our time.

You are meeting in Sri Lanka today when we of Sri Lanka are trying hard to build a brave new Democratic society based on the principles of personal freedom and social justice for all.

At the outset, let me make it clear that I do not expect to hold forth as such, but only to think aloud on the subject of your seminar — "Prospects of Democracy in Asia."

You must excuse me if I speak of only my country and not of any other. This is because, Sri Lanka is the country I know best.

What is Democracy? Isn't it a much abused word today? Isn't it used to cover a multitude of sins of suppression and oppression? It is used by even totalitarian Governments that have no right to make any claim to Democracy. This is because Democracy is a magic word that carries a halo round it. Today, it is universally accepted that Democracy is the best form of Government for any country in the world.

Democracy is of very ancient origin in our country. We have had it from the very earliest days even before the word was coined by the Greeks. We had it in the form of Gamsabas or Village Councils which in large measure corresponded to the Indian Panchayats — the cradle of Democracy.

Today, the Definition of Democracy by Abraham Lincoln is regarded as the finest description of what is meant by Democracy. He called it —

"A Government of the people, by the people and for the people". Even this definition has to be expanded if it is to suit our present needs. It should read — *"A Government of all the people, by all the people and for all the people"*.

The Government of His Excellency J. R. Jayewardene to which I have the honour to belong, has taken giant strides towards the achievement of the second objective of Democracy, namely — that of Government *by all the people,* by providing for referenda on all important national issues that may arise as and in between General Elections. Besides the General Elections, at which all the people will have the right to choose their rulers, they will also have the right to express their will on all important issues that will arise in between elections. Our Parliament will have to get such a mandate from the people before it can extend its own term of office even if such a decision is adopted by Parliament on a unanimous vote. We took this step to tie ourselves and those who will follow us in office, from extending their own terms of office without reference to the people. This same principle applies for the extension of the period of the executive President as well.

We have also taken another step in this same direction by adopting proportional representation as the form of voting to elect members to Parliament. In this way, we have made sure that a mere arithmetical majority in small electorates will not result in an overwelming majority in Parliament, quite out of proportion to the actual strength of the respective Parties in the country. So you will see that we have done everything possible to achieve this second objective of Democracy, namely, Government *by all the people.*

Even before we formed the Government, our President, the leader of our Party, who led us to this historic victory at the polls, took great care to see that our Party candidates were nominated from men and women from all sections of the people. This was to ensure that the Government, when formed, will truly be *of all the people.* He selected his candidates from all sections of the community, from all walks of life, from all social strata and from all age groups that comprise our heterogeneous society. There is no doubt that our list of Members of Parliament is the best sample of the people that could have been selected under the circumstances. Even after we formed the Government, our President has taken into our fold, representatives of other sections so as to improve on this representative group, and is still prepared to take into our fold any others from the Opposition if they accept our Democratic principles. We want our Government to be truly representative *of all the people.* We are quite prepared to share our responsibilities with anybody who is prepared to serve the national interest.

The third and last, but nevertheless the most important part of Democracy is also the most difficult to achieve, namely a government *for all the people.*

There is always a tendency among all human beings to please themselves before they please others. It is the corrupting influence of power that we all have to guard against. How could we prevent it? Even in highly developed countries where there may be enough to satisfy everybody's need, it is said, that there isn't enough even to satisfy any one man's greed. Well, how can we contain the greed of man? That is the problem confronting us today.

Another aspect of the same problem is how can we enthuse those in office to achieve that degree of administrative efficiency which is needed to bring about rapid economic development. The two great drawbacks of present day Democracy are corruption and inefficiency.

We have in our own way taken some steps to meet these contingencies. We have diffused power. We have appointed District Ministers in the several districts in an attempt to decentralise power, so that the electors will have an opportunity of participating in government. The elected will always be facing the electors, so that the problems of the electors will always be uppermost in the minds of the elected.

We have encouraged criticism from the Press, Parliament and the Public at large. In short, the freedom of the Press and the freedom of dissent are the corner-stones of our policy. But still we are not satisfied with these administrative steps, for, to my mind, Democracy is more than a form of Government—it is a way of life.

The law of Democracy is the rule of love—the love of one's fellow beings based on the principle of "Love thy neighbour as thyself." This love of one's neighbour cannot be enforced by laws, regulations and decreses. Laws cannot make good men even though good men can make good laws. This love for one's fellow-beings and concern for their welfare is what we call "Maithri". This is the surest and the only guide for true Democracy.

Democracy cannot thrive without religion. May be that a form of humanism may keep a few good men good; but for the majority of the people only the observance of religious principles can make them good.

Only good men can work Democracy, and Democracy can work only with good men, be they politicians, bureaucrats or businessmen. It is not a matter "What do I get out of this action or that?" or "Can I do this or that and get away with it?" but "Is this right or wrong?". It is only on the basis of righteousness that we can build a truly Democratic society. There can be no Democracy without morality and there can be no morality without religion.

It is to emphasize this spiritual aspect of Democracy that we have set as the goal of our Government—"Dharmishta Samajayak Sandaha"—FOR A JUST SOCIETY. Our Ministry of Cultural Affairs is taking great pains to help all religions to come into their own. Today the conflict is not between one religion and another, but between religion and irreligion—between those who believe in spiritual values and those who have embraced mere materialism—between those to whom power is only a means to a higher spiritual life and those to whom power is an end in itself—power for its own sake.

If we can realise such a society based on spiritual values, then Democracy is safe in Sri Lanka and will flourish for a long time to come. But, if by some chance our concept of a just society fails to enthuse the nation, then the prospects of Democracy in Sri Lanka are very bleak. It may even bring about its own destruction.

But for my part, I am sure that our efforts to realise a Democratic society will succeed so that Sri Lanka will be one of the foremost Democracies in Asia.

We have within us the tradition of over twenty five centuries of Buddhist doctrine and practice. It was the Buddha himself who spelled out for us the guide-lines of Democracy. He taught us that all men are equal and that no man is a Brahamin or an outcast by birth, but it is his own actions that make him so. He also taught us that for human happiness not only must we have economic security (-Bhoga Sukha) but also a blameless moral and spiritual life (-Anavajja Sukha).

I hope you would not mind my having spoken only about ourselves. I have still another reason for doing so. We in Sri Lanka have been actively experimenting with Parliamentary Democracy from even before Independence, which came only in 1948. Ours was the first country in Asia to have universal franchise which was introduced almost over fifty years ago. As a result, political consciousness among our people is at its highest today. At our last General Elections in 1977, over 86% of the voters voluntarily went to the polls. This is a record for any Democratic country. Further since independence we have changed Governments six times through the ballot without any resort to bullets. These, I think, are good reasons by themselves which entitle me to claim that Sri Lanka deserves your special consideration as a State that has understood the theory and practice of Democracy.

Before I conclude, I must thank you all for the courtesy you have shown me by listening to me so patiently, for the honour you have done my country by coming here for your deliberations and for the services you are rendering the cause of Democracy by generating thinking on all its aspects.

May no harm befall you
May no danger beset you
May no disease afflict you
May you live long in peace

May all beings be HAPPY and this is the purpose of DEMOCRACY.

Text of inaugural address at the Seminar on "Prospects of Democracy in Asia" at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute on 19th January, 1979.

Where everyone cares for, and shares with others.....

Honourable Speaker,
Honourable Morarji Desai
Honourable Ministers,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Your Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

It is my privilege to introduce to you the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, the Hon. Morarji Desai. Normally it would not be a difficult task to introduce a Prime Minister, especially when he happens to be the Prime Minister of neighbouring India. But in introducing Shri Morarji Desai, I feel that I have undertaken a task of an exceptional nature. For Shri Desai is to us more than the Prime Minister of another country. He is the chosen leader of the largest democracy in the world. He is one who has dedicated his entire life to the creation of a new society—a society based on the highest moral values—values which are relevant at all times and in all places—Truth, Justice, Peace and Respect for Human Dignity. If I may be permitted to say so, it is this special quality in the person I am introducing to you today, which invests this occasion with an unique significance.

Mr. Speaker, Shri Desai's life and political career has not been a bed of roses. At the age of 15, he was called upon to witness the death of his father. As the eldest son, he had to support the rest of his family and we have learnt of the hardship he endured in his early life. He made a selfless sacrifice when he gave up a lucrative position in the service of the British Government to join Mahatma Gandhi in the struggle for freedom. As a Freedom Fighter he was imprisoned thrice. In the Post War period he rose from the position of Minister to become the Chief Minister of the State of Bombay. He has served his country as the Minister of Commerce and Industry, as the Minister of Finance and as Deputy Prime Minister until he resigned in 1969. Then he sat in the Opposition until 1975 when he was arrested under the Emergency and kept under detention in solitary confinement.

The long story of the relations between our two countries—India and Sri Lanka—is one which has resulted in the mutual enrichment of our two peoples. We both have had similar experiences under colonialism. We were ruled by foreigners. Ultimately we won our freedom. It is part of history. But it is after Independence that we have drawn closer to each other. It is only in recent times that we have been able to follow similar policies. We take pride with India in the fact that, in the Asian region, it is only our two countries that share the distinction of having changed Governments through the democratic process. And today the vision of common ideals and aspirations knit our two peoples closer than ever before.

Mr. Speaker, we in this country have followed very closely the achievements of the present Government of India in the field of economic and social development. India's progress in her struggle against poverty, inequality and ignorance has been a source of encouragement to us in Sri Lanka.

We too accept the virtue of the village based development so effectively emphasized by Shri Desai at all times. We too are of the same conviction that our people should work towards a self sustaining economy built upon self reliance.

Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to recall the events leading to the victory of our two peoples at the General Elections in that crucial year of 1977. There are striking similarities in the manner in which our two Governments were elected to office by our peoples. In both countries the trend towards arbitrary rule and authoritarian Government had reached its zenith. The forces of democracy were in disarray—demoralised and disheartened. The people were in a state of complete apathy. It was a dark hour in the history of both our countries. The populace had even been led to lose faith in Democracy itself.

It was at such a moment of crisis that, in India leaders like Shri Desai and Shri Jayaprakash Narayan ; and in Sri Lanka leaders like our President Srimath J. R. Jayewardene, showed a new path for the people to tread. The promises they held out to their respective peoples were not a series of mere political pledges ; they were not the usual election manifestos. They were calls for complete reorientation of our individual and social lives ; a change of heart and being. They called on us to hold fast to unchanging principles in this changing world. They spurned the hollow, immoral doctrine of expediency, the doctrine that the end justifies the means. It was a return to righteousness that they pledged.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, our peoples have always been inspired by the teachings of our religious leaders. The greatest gift that India gave to the world, and for which we in Sri Lanka owe a lasting debt of gratitude, is the

timeless message of the Buddha. Another great son of India the Emperor Dharma Asoka demonstrated how the spiritual principles set forth by the Buddha could be applied to public affairs—to the day to day administration of a State. Then came in our own times, another noble son of India, namely, Mahatma Gandhi. He was no King. He was a humble man with no political authority or office. But with the spiritual weapons of Truth, Love and Ahimsa, he was able to challenge and break a mighty empire.

Mr. Speaker, all these go to testify to the fact that in the building of a Nation moral values are inseparable from politics.

During the last General Elections, both in India and in Sri Lanka, the peoples were assured of a society and a Government that would be motivated by the highest moral principles. This assurance found an answering chord and a response in the hearts of the people which resulted in the election triumphs in both countries.

Our people want good houses with the spirit of real homes; they want clean running water and sanitary facilities in villages and in towns ; they want nutritious and wholesome food ; they want roads without holes and administration without corruption; they want hospitals without congestion; they want their food and beverages unadulterated ; they also want their fields to flourish, their industries to hum with activity. They want all these. But they also want something more. They want human dignity restored; political freedom preserved and moral values upheld.

You, Mr. Speaker, can remember the dark regimes of misrule that the peoples of both countries rejected. They rejected that period where some were treated like Gods and others like dogs. Instead, they want a society where all the people irrespective of class, creed or community are treated like Royal Souls. They want a society where the worship of wealth and position gives way to the desire for the service of man; where lethargy and indifference gives way to intelligent and enthusiastic labour; where love replaces strife and conflict; where the spirit of compromise and human understanding melts the hardness of hearts; where everyone cares for and shares with others.

Mr. Speaker, this is a challenge which the present governments of both India and Sri Lanka have accepted. In the face of such a challenge, I can assure you we are neither afraid nor faint-hearted. The road ahead, no doubt, is long and full of toil. But however long the road, and however toilsome the labour, in my own mind I am convinced that with determination, devotion and dedication, we can fulfil the sacred trust that the people of our two countries have placed in us.

May this visit of Shri Morarji Desai to our country further strengthen our existing ties for the mutual benefit of our peoples.

On behalf of all of us, I wish him.

" Sukhi Dhighayuko Bhava " —
May you live long in happiness.

Text of Speech introducing the Hon. Morarji Desai, Prime Minister of India to the members of the Parliament of Sri Lanka on 6th February, 1979.

The task young people face

Mr. Deputy Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have looked forward to this opportunity of being with you here this morning to share with you some thoughts on one of the most critical issues facing mankind today — that of establishing a new international economic order based on peace and social justice, and the contribution you, as young leaders of the Commonwealth could make towards achieving this objective.

But before doing so, it is my pleasure and privilege, on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka, to extend to all of you a warm welcome. I hope that you will find the time to see something of our country and get an insight into the life-styles and aspirations of our people, particularly those of our own young people who represent about 60% of the population.

We are indeed happy that our country has been selected to host, what I understand is, the Second Meeting of the Young Commonwealth Leaders. I should like also to commend the Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Secretariat for again taking the initiative to arrange this Meeting of Commonwealth Youth Leaders under the aegis of the Commonwealth Youth Programme to focus attention on a problem which is engaging the minds of peoples, both in the developed and developing countries, today.

Young people in leadership positions is a phenomenon which should be encouraged. In Sri Lanka we have a large number of young people in leadership positions as ministers, deputy ministers, parliamentarians, professionals and also in women's organisations. Sri Lanka, therefore, is perhaps a suitable venue for a meeting of Young Leaders.

It is my firm conviction that the youth of any country; given the opportunity, will not shirk the responsibilities. They will be able to fulfil the obligations that society places on them. I sometimes wonder whether the youth unrest throughout the world, so much spoken of a decade ago, was not partly the result of the fact that the energies of youth were not properly channelised. For almost thirty years since the end of the Second World war, we have had no major international conflict. Could it have been that the energies of youth, so often wasted in fruitless warfare, found its release in the unrest of that period? Youth has energy, youth has vision, youth has a spirit of high adventure. It is our duty to find the tasks of great endeavour to grapple with and to accomplish.

Many of you delegates present here represent countries which share a common historical background and also common aspirations. Your peoples have recently achieved political independence and you have set yourselves the goal of making this a reality by achieving economic independence. You have recognised, from bitter experience, that the achievement of these objectives have been thwarted, if not retarded, by external economic factors beyond your control.

Even among those of you representing the developed countries, there has been increasing recognition that to revive the process of growth in the global economy, measures have to be taken to generate economic growth in the developing countries. A preception is emerging of the inter-dependence of nations and inter-relationship of issues in the fields of trade, money, finance and development.

Recent developments in the world economy have clearly demonstrated that the existing international economic order is not only inequitable, but that it is also incapable of coping with the changing circumstances. The framework and structure established in the post-war period to govern international economic relations is under threat of disintegration and it is becoming increasingly difficult for Governments of even developed countries to solve their problems within the existing system. There is also deep disappointment and grave concern that the negotiations in the North-South dialogue in different international fora have not yielded the expected results so far and that no significant progress has been achieved in the implementation of the Programme of Action on the establishment of the New International Economic Order.

In the face of the inequities of the present international economic order, what should our expectations be of the Commonwealth? I am mindful, in asking this question, of the impending Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to be held in Lusaka, Zambia, in August this year.

In looking towards Lusaka I feel sure that many of you will agree with me that a special interest should be taken in the problems and needs of the smaller and particularly the poorest countries in the Commonwealth.

Your task at this meeting, if I may say so, can be described as threefold. The first is to evaluate the economic policies of national governments and identify the factors and areas in which they have failed to respond to the needs and aspirations of the people, particularly those of the youth. The second is to analyse as to what extent this failure has been the result of external economic factors beyond the control of national governments; and the third, to see what constructive role the youth in these countries could play to bring about those changes which will lead to the improvement of the physical quality of life of the people and usher in a new order based on equity and social justice.

At the same time, I should like to suggest that you ask yourselves these questions; In a world which has witnessed in recent times a greater awareness for each others problems, massive technological advances and which has committed itself, in principle, to the pursuit of human rights how is it that we allow thousands of men, women and children in poor countries to die of starvation every day? How is it that almost half the labour force of the developing countries are condemned to remain permanently unemployed or underemployed? What has caused the accelerated urbanisation, poverty in rural areas, slums in cities and deprivations of basic social amenities for the masses?

As I mentioned earlier, developing countries when they achieved political independence worked out economic development programmes. These programmes would undoubtedly make their political independence meaningful by eradicating hunger, disease, poverty and illiteracy. Despite their efforts to expand production and increase exports, they found themselves being called upon to bear the burden of inflation in the developed countries by paying more for their imports. This was owing to adverse terms of trade, receiving less earnings although they produced more.

Even where they had a competitive advantage in certain exports, they found themselves against a wall of protectionism which deprived them of access to developed country markets. The aid which they have received with appreciation from developed countries have, unfortunately, been inadequate and irregular. They have continued to get into serious debt situations, and many countries spend about 20 to 30% of their external earnings on debt servicing. In short, what we have witnessed is a worsening situation whereby the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer.

The developing countries have waited with patience hoping that ad hoc piecemeal measures taken by the developed countries to readjust this imbalance would be productive. It was this recognition that led to the call for the establishment of the New International Economic Order at the VIth and VIIth Special Sessions of the General Assembly.

I believe this meeting also offers you an opportunity to have an exchange of views on your own national experiences on this problem. In fact, this exchange is in itself a form of co-operation among countries which is an important element in the strategy for development and employment generation.

It is appropriate, therefore, that I should share with you our own experiences in approaching this problem. The country paper prepared by Sri Lanka would, no doubt, provide with detailed information, but I shall try to put, in broad perspective, our own approach to these problems.

The Government of Sri Lanka, under the leadership of President J. R. Jayewardene, is committed to the establishment and maintenance of a just and fair economic, social and cultural order in which the dignity and freedom of every individual is fully realised and where he enjoys equal basic human rights and opportunities under Parliamentary form of democracy. To achieve this objective, the Government oriented its economic strategies and created the necessary institutional framework.

One of the major problems which the Government was faced with was that of unemployment, particularly among the educated youth, which has arisen under the system of free education that obtains in Sri Lanka. Whilst evolving a strategy for the future generations, the Government has had to work out a programme to absorb the 1.2 million who were unemployed or underemployed and the 200,000 or so joining these ranks annually. The Government established a separate Ministry of Youth Affairs and Employment entrusted with the important task of integrating the youth in national development and preparation of youth for employment. The Government recognized that the youth in this country was an important national resource which should be harnessed to its full potential for the development of the country.

At the same time, the Government gave priority to certain development schemes which were employment-oriented. The most important of them is the Multi-Purpose Accelerated Mahaweli Development Scheme. This will not only develop 900,000 acres of land, but provide for the opening of new settlements involving 225,000 families constituting a population of 1.2 million, the electrification of rural areas, and employment opportunities in agriculture and agro-based industries.

Although we have been encouraged by the initial success in that we were able to register a growth rate of 8.2% as a result of these new economic policies, we are fully alive to the fact that much more remains to be done for the poorer sections of the community. We can take pride in the fact that we have provided everybody an equality of opportunity to better his economic situation just as at the international level we have been seeking equality of opportunity to develop. We have not sought to socialize poverty but, within the framework of an equitable income distribution system, we have provided incentives and opportunities to the poorer sections of the community to better their economic prospects. It is encouraging to find that already many of them have made use of these opportunities not only to help themselves but also help in the country's economic development.

As I said earlier, it is not my intention to give you a detailed account of our Development Programmes which the Sri Lanka delegation to your Meeting will provide you. However, I have tried to give you an insight into our economic thinking and strategies.

During the next few days, you will be addressing yourselves to the problems of economic development and employment. I need hardly say how momentous will be the final results if success crowns your deliberations. We shall all look forward with great keenness to the conclusions you arrive at, the programmes you work out and suggestions you make. It has been my fortunate experience never to be disappointed when I have watched young people entrusted with great tasks. It is therefore with confidence that I wish you all every success in your endeavours.

Text of Speech at the Second Meeting of Young Commonwealth Leaders on 3rd May, 1979.

The people have rights

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to be present on the occasion of the first Annual Convention of the Lions District 306 A of Sri Lanka. Your's is an organisation dedicated to the service of fellow beings. Your members work for the welfare of the community in which you live. Your interests, I see, are both national and international. While taking note of the deficiencies and shortcomings in the community around you, you try to remedy them, in however small a measure you are in a position to do. You do not think of, and live for yourself alone. You realise the duty that man owes to his neighbour. You have an organic view of society. You believe that the society in which you are is a living organism, that one section or member of it cannot prosper at the expense of the other. The whole community must prosper or perish together.

Now, when we are engaged in this most important task of serving our fellow-men, there are, I think, a few matters which we must keep in mind. When we do something for others, we should not make it appear to be in the nature of charity — that we are giving something and someone else is receiving it. That the affluent section of the community is helping the less-well-to do.

Such an approach is not good both from the point of view of the giver as well as the receiver. From the point of view of the giver, there is a tendency, if I may say so, to be a little conceited, self-satisfied, arrogant or, may be, a little self-righteous. And this, as all religions tell us, is not a good thing.

From the point of view of the receiver, it is bad because there is a tendency for the receiver to become dependent on others for his own welfare. He is

not being given an opportunity of developing the virtues of self-respect and self-reliance. Again, it is bad because, however well — intended the service and help — human nature being what it is — there will always be a tendency on the part of the receiver to feel some kind of resentment, to bear some kind of a grudge. There is, therefore, the likelihood of some form of class or sectional antagonism arising.

Now, how can we avoid this? This is not an easy task. I do not know what answer most people will give. The only answer I can think of is that when we help, we make those whom we are helping feel that what they are receiving is their due, that they have a right to demand a decent living from society; that it is not charity but their due that they are receiving.

I think that this feeling — the feeling that every individual has certain inalienable rights — is a matter well understood in our Sri Lanka of today. The people of our country — all of them — know what their rights are; and they want to see them implemented. They want hood houses to live in; decent clothes to wear; good and wholesome food to eat; and honourable and recognised ways of earning their daily living. They want all this, and they know they have a right to ask for them. And what is more, they want to be treated like respectable human beings. The dignity and worth of every human individual must be recognised.

The main interest of your organisation during the course of last year has been, I am told, the young people of our country. I can think of no better cause to which anybody can devote one's time and energy. Children and young people are our most precious wealth. You have been trying to implement a programme of propagating the concept of Patriotism and National Consciousness by working with the youth of the country and you have, I am told, achieved considerable success in this direction.

Your main effort for this purpose has been on the lines of sponsoring Youth Service Associations in Schools. During the first eight months since you started your programme, you have, I am told, sponsored the formation of 70 such Youth Service Associations throughout the country. This is a remarkable achievement.

The National Flag and the National Anthem, two items to which your organisation has paid special attention, are two national symbols to which, I am afraid, due regard and respect are not being shown by many. I am told that you have made arrangements for your Youth Service Associations to honour the National Flag and also to sing the National Anthem at their school assemblies. You have gone still further in this direction by organising Seminars on the concepts of Patriotism and National Consciousness, National Understanding, Service, Discipline and other similar subjects.

You have, I am happy to note, not neglected the material and practical side of welfare work. One of your Clubs, I am informed, constructed and donated a special ward for housing the E. C. G. Equipment at the General Hospital, Colombo. This has cost the Club nearly Rs. 75,000/-. Another similar useful venture was the very unique Eye Camp you conducted at Weligama. This was on the international level. The Lion's Club of Bangalore also came into the picture. An eminent team of surgeons, nurses and assistants came to Sri Lanka and, within a period of a week, examined as many as three thousand patients and completed 60 operations.

Speaking of matters like the National Flag, National Anthem and the protection of public property, I am reminded of the fact that we in Sri Lanka tend to forget certain things that are taken as matters of the utmost importance in other countries. Take, for instance, the average person's respect to the National Flag and the National Anthem. I am sure that there is nothing really lacking in our people as far as patriotism and national consciousness is concerned. It is merely that many are indifferent; or that they have *not* been trained to respond to some of these symbolic but really important matters. And, if what I say is true, what better method can we adopt to set things right than begin to instil such feelings of reverence and respect from the earliest stage of one's life.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, it has been a pleasure to me to have had the opportunity to be among you. Before I conclude, I should like to emphasise once again the importance of the work in which you are engaged — the work to which you have dedicated a considerable part of your time, energy and money. We silently admire your sense of national and civic responsibility for the welfare of our country. It is my wish that the good work you are carrying *out* is also conducted in the true spirit of brotherhood and service to one's fellow beings.

I thank you for the welcome you have given me and my wife. I now declare this District Convention open.

Text of Speech at the First Annual Convention of Lions District 306 A—Sri Lanka—on 5th May 1979.

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