

## Independence Day Address 2022

Most Venerable Maha Sangha,  
Other Religious Dignitaries,  
Hon. Prime Minister,  
Hon. Speaker,  
Hon. Chief Justice,  
Hon. Leader of the Opposition,  
Hon. Ministers and Hon Governors,  
Hon. State Ministers,  
Hon. Members of Parliament,  
Ambassadors and High Commissioners,  
Secretary to the President and all Government Officials,  
Chief of Defence Staff and Commander of the Army,  
Commander of the Navy, Commander of the Air Force and Inspector General of Police,  
Director General of the Civil Security Department,  
Distinguished Guests,  
War Heroes,  
All Sri Lankan Brothers and Sisters,  
Beloved Children,

Throughout history, people of various nations have struggled, fought and made great sacrifices for their right to live as dignified citizens in a free country.

In Sri Lanka too, Great Kings such as Dutugemunu, Walagamba, Maha Parakumba, Vijayabahu and Parakumba the Sixth fought against foreign invaders at various periods during a 2,500 year history, liberated the country from foreigners and united it.

It is now 74 years since our country finally gained freedom from 450 years of European colonial rule. Even after independence, we had to fight for nearly three decades against an attempt to divide this country through terrorism.

Today Sri Lanka is a free, sovereign, democratic country. We are its proud citizens.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all patriots who dedicated themselves to gain full freedom for our country facing various obstacles throughout the history, and continue to secure the freedom so gained.

Every Sri Lankan citizen, irrespective of any community or religion, has the right to live freely and safely anywhere in the country today. There is freedom to practice the religion

of their choice. There is freedom to hold independent opinions and express ideas. There is full media freedom in the country. Sri Lankan citizens have the freedom to elect their representatives through a fully democratic mechanism, and for those interested, to engage in the political process and governance.

This is a cause for joy and pride for all of us.

As people of a free and democratic country, all of us have rights as well as responsibilities.

The greatest benefit from freedom is when everyone fulfils their duty to the country. It is not appropriate to speak of rights only, whilst forgetting responsibilities.

The freedom of a country is most meaningful when it is strong in social, political and economic spheres. As much as a government, the people too have the right to actively contribute towards this.

When steering the country in the right direction, we know that the support of each and every person in the country cannot be expected. We are not ready to abandon our plans for the country's future prosperity by looking upon those who will not change. Our objective is to do what is right by the country, and not to please everyone.

We can make our way forward successful only with a positive attitude that looks optimistically towards the future. We can surmount the challenges we meet only if we dedicate ourselves to a victorious journey.

Pessimists do not change the world. They do not even have the capacity for it. Those who habitually criticize without proposing a solution to a problem do not have a vision for the future.

A nation's leader has to constantly face many difficulties, calamities, problems and challenges. Leading a team towards a vision is not easy. Changing the existing ways, no matter how good the intention is not easy either. On certain matters, both local and foreign forces organise against us. Sometimes it may seem that everything that happens around you is conspiring against you.

What the people expect from leaders is to manage all these crises and take the country forward, but not to escape from problems. We have the positive mindset needed for that. I am always ready to provide the necessary leadership to overcome any challenge facing the country.

The world has been changed, and will be changed by those people with positive ideas, who dream of a future with optimism and strive to make it a reality. We see this throughout the history.

Social progress in all developed nations has been possible due to the positive thoughts of their leaders and the people.

Our own kings in the past built vast stupas such as *Ruwanweliseya*, *Jethavanaramaya* and *Abhayagiriya* in this same positive attitude. We had an excellent irrigation technology that created *Minneriya Tank*, *Kala Wewa*, *Parakrama Samudraya* and *Yoda Ela*. Cities such as Sigiriya still mesmerize the world. Sri Lanka was a famed naval hub in the ancient world. If we were able to accomplish such feats then, we ought to be able to compete with the world in the future as well.

The most important criterion for this is the belief in ourselves.

Difficult times do not last forever. People of great resolve are needed to face difficult times. Anyone who demoralizes another is not doing any good to the society at this moment. Therefore all of us have an enormous responsibility to build a positive attitude in the country to face these crises successfully.

We have faced critical problems in the recent history as well, and found solutions. When pessimists maintained that terrorism could never be defeated in war, brave military leaders like General Denzil Kobbekaduwa and General Vijaya Wimalaratne instilled the positive attitude in their men that terrorism can in fact be defeated. Later, under the right political leadership, we were able to vanquish terrorism in as little as 3 ½ years because we had belief in our own capabilities.

None of the crises we experience today are long-term problems. We can find solutions to them with an optimistic approach. There is a role that each of us can play to expedite this process. We must all endeavour to do our utmost for the country by fulfilling our responsibilities in a proper manner.

We realized early on that the only solution to control of Covid-19 pandemic was vaccination. Hence we have been able to provide both vaccine doses to over 85% of the targeted population, control the disease and resume normal community life. By now, all vaccine doses required to administer the booster to the people have been imported to Sri Lanka.

Rather than go back many years into the past searching for reasons for the economic problems that the country faces today, what is more relevant is to find both short and long-term solutions for such. This is what we as a government is focused on.

We need to improve all three sectors of agriculture, industry and services in order to strengthen the economy of Sri Lanka. Special attention must be paid on ways and means to enhance export revenue whilst encouraging local production. While our national policies are very clear on this stance, there should be more active participation in all sectors in implementing them.

Investment is an essential factor in the development process of our country. While the government is constantly working to encourage investments, we need both local investments as well as foreign investments. Foreign investment is especially important for large scale projects, industries requiring modern technological know-how and new

ventures that open up global market opportunities for us. People need to be more vigilant of those who attempt to propagate incorrect public opinion against foreign investments, based on political motives.

We cannot accelerate economic development without encouraging entrepreneurship and removing obstacles faced by entrepreneurs. We have a responsibility to be more respectful and friendly to entrepreneurs who start their own businesses amidst various vulnerabilities and provide employment and income opportunities for others as well. Government officials should fully understand the contribution of entrepreneurs to the country's development and provide all assistance they require expeditiously within the legal framework. By preventing major delays in business registration and investment approvals, we can mobilize the entire economic process in the country.

A number of education reforms are taking place in the country to create a more productive citizen. Every child completing school education must strive to develop a skill or industry that can contribute to the country's economic process. One must try to enhance knowledge in the chosen sector and also acquire professional qualifications if possible. In this manner, you have the opportunity to directly contribute to the country's economic process.

The people who shed their sweat in farmlands, factories and workplaces make an active contribution to the country's economy. I pay my respects to all of them.

Expatriate Sri Lankans who provide foreign exchange to the country are a major resource to us. We have not forgotten how they came forward for the country in the recent past and supported us making great sacrifices. We greatly appreciate their regular contribution to energize our economy. I invite all expatriate Sri Lankans to invest in their homeland. This will enable you to continue to actively contribute to building the future of the country.

If we are to win over the challenges before us and accomplish our future goals successfully, then all of us have to make a change. We all have to make some sacrifices towards it. As the President of the country, I am ready to set the necessary example for it. I am already doing this to the best of my ability. I ask all Ministers, Parliamentarians and other politicians to act in an exemplary manner for the country at all times. If you set this example to the people, then the majority of the people will follow you.

Forces against a national leadership that values our indigenouness and protects the country's sovereignty are subtly misleading the people through various false propaganda. I urge the people of this country to always act prudently. No one can mislead the people if they make inquiries based on fact, ascertain the truth and make decisions.

I have pledged as the Head of State to always protect the freedom won for the future generations, and to safeguard the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of this country. We will always abide by that pledge.

Cultural freedom is important to all communities. We consider it our prime responsibility to preserve our thousands of years of indigenous traditions and customs, values and identity. Steps have been taken to preserve and develop places of archaeological value that have been subject to various threats and destroyed in the recent past.

We are a nation that safeguards the rule of law and respects international conventions. Although some parties have attempted to make various allegations against Sri Lanka for narrow motives, the government has not condoned any type of human rights violations, and will not leave room for such incidents in future either.

Under no circumstances shall we allow extremism to raise its head in this country. Today we have secured national security as promised by the government to the people.

The people have given the opportunity for the current government to implement the *Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour* Policy Statement presented by us.

There have been no changes in the policy framework we presented in regard to identified priorities such as green agriculture, promotion of renewable energy use, education reforms compatible with the modern world, encouragement of local entrepreneurship, export diversification and value addition, and promotion of technology use for a new leap in the economy.

We are committed to achieving the basic goals of a productive citizen, a happy family, a disciplined, virtuous society and a prosperous country.

I was given the leadership of the country at a very difficult time. In the last two years we have had to find solutions to a number of unanticipated problems. Despite all these difficulties, our government was able to carry out many development activities.

All the plans required for the sustainable development of the country, during my remaining tenure are being implemented. No matter what the obstacles are, if the majority of the people in our country are optimistic about the future and give their due contribution, we will be able to achieve those goals.

I heartily invite all patriotic Sri Lankans to unite to build a proud nation that has achieved the true meaning of freedom.

I thank you all.

Theruvan Saranai.