

Sri Lanka independence day

Sri Lanka looks forward to an eventful year of cooperation

New era of peace, harmony dawns

Standing at the threshold of true freedom

Jayantha Palipane
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE OF SRI LANKA
TO JAPAN

On the happy occasion of the 61st anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence, I convey the warm greetings of the people and government of Sri Lanka to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as to the friendly people of Japan. I also extend my very best wishes to all Sri Lankans living in Japan.



Sri Lanka and Japan have continued to enjoy close and friendly relations. Historians have found that the earliest contacts between Japan and Sri Lanka were in the pursuit of Theravada Buddhism in the seventh century. Our ties based on shared values and mutual respect have grown over the years, encompassing a diverse field of activities. The visits of Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayaka last year and the staging of the Sri Lanka Cultural Heritage Exhibition at the Tokyo National Museum last September have been the highlights of our bilateral exchanges in the recent past. We were deeply touched and honored by the visit of Their Imperial Majesties to the exhibition. We believe that the visitors to the exhibition had an opportunity of glimpsing the rich, 2,500-year-old cultural heritage of Sri Lanka.

Japanese ODA continues to make a significant contribution to and have an impact on the economic development of Sri Lanka. We are grateful to the people and government of

Japan for the generous contribution they have made for more than four decades to make a difference in the lives of Sri Lankans.

"Mahinda Chinthana," a program of economic and social empowerment of the people, ushered in by President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the commencement of his presidency, guides the overall development policies of the government. Infrastructure development and the creation of employment opportunities are priority areas under the president's vision. We are happy to observe that the Japanese government has generously come forward to fund many development projects envisaged under the program.

2009 will be another landmark year in our bilateral relations. The Sigiriya Museum at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Sigiriya, constructed with Japanese funding, will open in the first half of this year. The famed fifth-century frescoes are part of the Sigiriya heritage. It is expected that the opening of the museum will help to educate thousands of tourists who visit the wonders of Sigiriya.

Sri Lankans are celebrating their National Day in an atmosphere of unprecedented enthusiasm and hope for a better future. President Rajapaksa's able leadership and pragmatic state policies have taken Sri Lanka to new heights. Our heroic men and women in uniform have been exceptionally successful in their campaign to liberate the people of the north and east from the clutches of terrorism. On this auspicious day, we salute them, and remember with gratitude those brave men and women who have laid down

their lives.

The government has reiterated its commitment to find an acceptable and sustainable political solution to the ethnic issue after the people in the north have been liberated from the LTTE terrorists.

The Eastern Province, once dominated by the terrorists, has been brought under the rule of a popularly elected chief minister. This has been possible only after the province was cleared of LTTE activities. We are hopeful that the same success can be repeated in the north very soon. Re-establishing democracy and the rule of law in the north and east has opened up many opportunities. The government has duly embarked upon an ambitious program to develop the infrastructure in the two provinces as a priority. In this endeavor, Sri Lanka has invited friendly countries to be partners in the economic development of these areas.

I acknowledge with a deep sense of gratitude, the yeoman services rendered by Yasuo Fukuda, who has been the distinguished president of the Japan-Sri Lanka Association for many decades, toward enriching our bilateral relations. I also take this opportunity to commend the sincere and long-standing efforts of Hoseni Norota, chairman of the Japan-Sri Lanka Parliamentary Friendship League, toward promoting our relations.

Having arrived in Tokyo this January to take up my assignment, I am confident that the coming year will see the further enhancement of the friendship between Sri Lanka and Japan. I look forward to a close and fruitful interaction with the government and the friendly people of Japan.

Rohitha Bogollagama
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

We celebrate the 61st anniversary of independence today with a great sense of optimism. As light comes through the clouds of uncertainty, a new hope beckons, and it is this hope that the people of Sri Lanka have desired so intensely to realize, a sustainable peace. Sixty-one years after regaining independence, we are indeed at a momentous juncture of our history.

The core values of democracy and pluralism embedded in our society have for almost three decades been challenged by the horrendous human cruelty unleashed by terrorism. Many innocent lives have been lost to senseless violence. I salute the valiant members of our security forces who have laid down their lives for the noble cause of protecting this blessed land from the curse of terrorism and hatred, thus contributing to open before us a new era of peace and harmony.

Following the successes in humanitarian operations to liberate the people who had continued to live in the clutches of terrorism, Sri Lanka has seen vast strides being made in the resolution of the conflict. The democratic space created within the political mainstream has provided the opportunity even for former militants to enter at regional and national levels. The evolving post-conflict period provides for wider political discourse for those on the democratic path to arrive at a workable, practical mechanism for the establishment of a sustainable political solution through the All-Party Representative Committee process.

Notwithstanding the turbu-

Mahinda Rajapaksa
PRESIDENT OF SRI LANKA

It is with an immense sense of pride that I send this message to mark the 61st National Day celebrations of Sri Lanka.

This pride comes from the many achievements toward the strengthening of our freedom gained in recent months since we launched a decisive humanitarian operation to free our motherland from the clutches of terrorism.

Beginning with the success of the heroic troops of our free and democratic society in clearing the terrorists from Mavil Aru in August 2006, and proceeding to the liberation of the entire east, we have regained control of almost all of our land in the north too, including the entire Jaffna Peninsula.

The terrorist strongholds once believed to be invincible such as Kilinochchi, Elephant Pass and Mullaitivu have fallen in rapid succession, bringing the final elimination of terrorism from our motherland and the dawn of true freedom to all our people well within our reach.

I take this opportunity to pay this generous tribute to our heroic forces for the sacrifices they have made, and the courage and determination they have displayed in ensuring that on this 61st anniversary of



lence in the world economy, the resilience demonstrated by the Sri Lankan economy is remarkable. We have managed to achieve impressive growth rates while fighting terrorism and we can look forward to a bright future with confidence. The government is resolved to empower the people to reap the benefits of economic growth in an equitable and fair manner, and in particular in the north and the east.

Having its foreign policy tenets shaped by nonalignment principles, Sri Lanka continues to play a dynamic role in the field of international diplomacy. Our role in international affairs, with an ethos of moderation and peaceful co-existence, continues to be the foundation of our engagement with the international community. In as much as our foreign policy stands to protect our sovereign independence and territorial integrity, we continue to play an important role in the United Nations. Our role in a variety of multilateral forums, including the Commonwealth, BIM-STEAC, IORARC, ACD, ASEAN Regional Forum and the Group of 77, as well as our significant contributions to the Law of the Sea, Indian Ocean Peace Zone and Israel Practices Committee, bear testimony to Sri Lan-



independence, we have moved beyond the threshold of a freedom that is richer and more meaningful than what was achieved in 1948.

As we pay this well-deserved tribute to our heroic forces, we can be satisfied that many who were once critical of our operations to eradicate terrorism from our land are citing Sri Lanka and the success of our troops as an example on how terrorism should be defeated.

As we move toward a larger freedom, our thoughts go out to the innocent Tamil people of the north who remain in bondage under the ruthless forces of

terrorists who claim to be their liberators. I pledge to you today that these people, who share our motherland, will be liberated, and given the equality and rights that they are entitled to under the constitution.

This is also the occasion to remember with honor all those Sri Lankans from the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher, and every other community and faith in our country, who led the struggles and made many sacrifices to obtain freedom from the colonial domination and exploitation that prevailed in our country for more than 500 years. Those who fight against the pockets of terrorism remaining today continue this great battle for freedom of our forefathers.

At this significant moment in the history of our country, I call upon all of our peoples to be united as a single nation in an undivided country, showing the tolerance, trust and understanding that have been the foundation of our nation throughout its glorious history. Let no one sow the seeds of hatred and mistrust anymore.

May all Sri Lankans achieve their aspirations for peace and equality in full measure, and let us join to take our motherland to the great era of a vibrant democracy and freedom from fear in the new Sri Lanka that lies ahead.

ka's commitment to international diplomacy.

Multilateral obligations have not diminished Sri Lanka's involvement in regional forums. Our proactive role in the region is amply demonstrated by our participation in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which we presently chair. In facing its present challenges, Sri Lanka has never been alone. I take this opportunity to express the appreciation of the government of Sri Lanka to our friends in the

international community for the assistance extended to us in our endeavors to counter terrorism and achieve economic prosperity.

I also call on all Sri Lankans wherever they may be, whether in Sri Lanka or overseas, to join hands in building bridges of amity, hope and peace over the rivers of hatred, enmity and misperception. As we inch toward a new chapter in our history, the Sri Lankan diaspora must play a proactive role in the country's economic ad-

vancement and social development.

Let us draw inspiration from our forefathers who fought so zealously to regain our independence 61 years ago. Let us resolve to protect our vibrant democracy, with its multiethnic, multireligious and multicultural character intact, treasured and nurtured. Let us join hands to reinvigorate the age-old values of tolerance, trust and mutual respect to make this country a better place for ourselves and future generations.

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Best Wishes to the Government and the People of Sri Lanka on the occasion of the 61st Anniversary of Independence

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The Sri Lanka Business Council of Japan (SLBCJ) was established in line with the policy directions given by the Overseas Business Promotion Program launched by the Ministry of Commerce & Consumer Affairs of Sri Lanka. Its mandate is to expand, develop and encourage bilateral trade between Sri Lanka and Japan while also promoting Japanese investment in Sri Lanka. Its membership is open to Japanese/Sri Lankan business entrepreneurs.

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Sigiriya Museum slated to open its doors in April

Sigiriya — the Lion Rock — one of Asia's most fascinating archaeological edifices has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. It offers an insight into the incredible technology, urban planning, architecture, engineering, hydraulics, garden design, painting, sculpture and poetry of a magnificent past. It has attracted the attention of modern antiquarians and archaeologists since the early 19th century. Since then Sigiriya has been an object of intense archaeological investigation. Surrounded by forests, and set in a cultural landscape of remarkable natural beauty and historical interest, an ancient city palace and garden complex are centered on the Sigiriya rock.

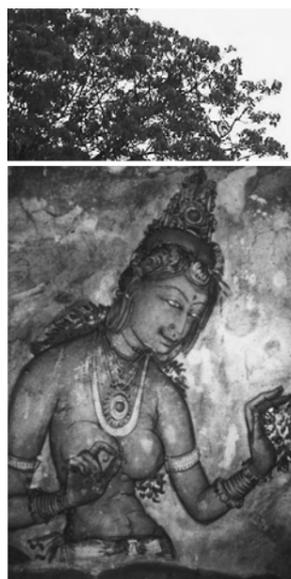
The magnificent rock, rising about 180 meters from the northern plain of Sri Lanka, stands like a sentinel visible for miles in all directions. The world has inherited the present city palace complex, the magnificent water gardens and the famed frescoes from the time of King Kasy-

apa I who ruled in the fifth century.

The ancient glory of Sigiriya and its historical importance should be protected and be open to the world. In this respect, the creation of an archaeological museum has been a long-felt need.

The government of Japan has readily agreed to fund the construction of the Sigiriya Museum. The museum has been designed to be environmentally friendly. The design will also make Sigiriya a prominent natural heritage site promoting culture-oriented tourism. Japanese financial assistance is being provided to meet these goals.

The foundation stone of the building was laid July 14, 2006. At present, 98 percent of the construction and interior design have been completed. The building covers an area of 4,000 sq. meters. It consists of several other facilities for conducting educational, research and audio-visual programs, and an open-air stage for entertainment, in addition to other common facilities.



Rock of ages: Famed fifth-century frescoes and water gardens adorn the Sigiriya World Heritage site. EMBASSY OF SRI LANKA

The 480.9 million Sri Lankan rupees cost of the project is being met by a grant from the government of Japan. The museum will open in April.

The government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka conveys its sincere appreciation to the government and people of Japan for their generous contribution to the realization of this dream. The Sigiriya Museum will be another milestone in Japan-Sri Lanka relations.

Strong ties bedded in cultural affinities

Hosei Norota
CHAIRMAN, JAPAN-SRI LANKA
PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE
MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

I am pleased to extend my heartfelt congratulations to President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the government and people of Sri Lanka on the occasion of their country's 61st anniversary of independence.



Throughout the last 61 years, the world has witnessed Sri Lanka's continued development. I am confident that Sri Lanka's move toward prosperity will be further consolidated under the dynamic leadership of President Rajapaksa, whom I had the honor of meeting along with a Japanese parliamentary delegation during our official visit to Sri Lanka in August 2008.

The Japan-Sri Lanka Parliamentary Friendship League, which was established in 1982, consists of a

number of senior Japanese Diet members. The first chairman of the league was Keizo Obuchi. Since then it has come a long way in promoting friendly ties between the two countries. The league has also contributed to the exchange of several visits between parliamentary members of Japan and Sri Lanka in the recent past.

Japan and Sri Lanka have maintained strong and cordial relations since long before formal diplomatic ties were established in 1952. Cultural and religious affinities became the pivotal link between our two nations. On this special occasion I would like to appeal to the younger generations of the two countries to look for avenues of further expanding their interactions. The landmark visit of President Rajapaksa to Japan in December 2007 has led to a new era of cooperation between the two countries. I hope that Japan will reciprocate with a high-level visit to Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lanka Cultural Heritage Exhibition, the first mega-exhibition presented to the people of Japan in the history of Japan-Sri Lanka relations, contributed immensely to further strengthening the long-standing friendship between Sri Lanka and Japan. The exhibition, which was held at the Tokyo National Museum for three months from September 2008, provided a unique window for the Japanese public to see for themselves the rich, 2,500-year-old cultural heritage of Sri Lanka.

I take this opportunity to wish the government and people of Sri Lanka peace and prosperity, and promise to work toward sustaining our warm friendly relations.



Distinguished guests: Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko (above) admire some of the artifacts at the Sri Lanka Cultural Heritage Exhibition at the Tokyo National Museum in November. (Below) Former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and his wife (below) visit the exhibition.



Progress, growth expand 'Gateway to South Asia'

Sumitaka Fujita
CHAIRMAN, JAPAN-SRI LANKA BUSINESS
COOPERATION COMMITTEE

On behalf of the Japan-Sri Lanka Business Cooperation Committee (JSLBCC), it is my great pleasure to extend our most heartfelt congratulations to the people of Sri Lanka on the occasion of the 61st anniversary of their independence.

The JSLBCC was established in August 1979 with the objective of expanding trade, investment, tourism and promoting other productive bilateral business initiatives. In addition to periodic joint meetings, the committee participates in gatherings and

events to facilitate active interaction among key Japanese and Sri Lankan government and business leaders.

We have great respect and admiration for Sri Lanka's ancient civilization, and the tremendous achievement of building a modern and democratic government to serve your diverse population of approximately 20 million citizens.

In recent years, Sri Lanka's vibrant economy has consistently achieved 6 percent to 7 percent annual GDP growth. Your proximity to the huge Indian market, combined with the ratified FTA, will benefit your citizens and foreign companies operating in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, ongoing programs to provide quality education, to advance your nation's human resources, will enable domestic and foreign companies to achieve higher levels of productivity and growth. I am confident that Sri Lanka will continue to flourish economically and expand its role as the "Gateway to South Asia."

As we are all aware, Japan and Sri Lanka have a very long and rich historical relationship, particularly in terms of cultural exchanges involving our shared Buddhist traditions. Through growing commercial relationships, Japanese firms have become familiar with the special characteristics of the Sri Lankan people, valuing their diligent nature and grateful for the warmth they extend to Japanese people. I believe that these characteristics will encourage more and more international companies to consider expanding their business activities in Sri Lanka.

In closing, we trust that Sri Lanka's continuing policy of welcoming foreign companies will sustain and enhance your remarkable progress. Please be assured that the JSLBCC will continue to promote active economic exchange, and ever-closer commercial ties between Japanese and Sri Lankan businesses.

Congratulations!
to the People of Sri Lanka
on 61st Anniversary of Independence

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