



February 2017

PRESIDENT SIRISENA'S REMARKS AT THE 69TH INDEPENDENCE DAY ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS



Today our country completes sixty-nine years of freedom from colonial rule. I am very happy that we can celebrate this occasion with much grandeur. Given that today we are celebrating our 69th year of “freedom” from colonial rule, it is worthwhile to explore what this concept of “freedom” means. As far as I know,

more than 6000 languages are spoken by various nationalities living in countries across the world. In all those languages, the word “freedom” is accorded great importance.

There is a difference in what “freedom” meant during the era between 1505 and 1948 – when we were under foreign rule - and what it means today. D.S. Senanayake and his fellow national leaders from all communities - the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims - led the national struggle for freedom. During that struggle, there were occasions when our national leaders were imprisoned. Thousands sacrificed their lives during the era of 1505-1948 fighting against colonial rule. On this Independence Day, we should remember the noble sacrifices made by these heroes.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the Donoughmore and the Soulbury Commissions introduced in response to the demands made by the leaders of this country, succeeded in addressing some of the major grievances of the people. This paved the way for the country to win independence on February 4th, 1948.

We are aware that “freedoms” today – human freedoms, media freedom, right to expression, right to thought and right to peaceful assembly, among many others – are vast.

To mold our motherland into a modern state that can thrive in the 21st century, we as a country must prioritize political stability and social development. To achieve these twin goals, national and religious reconciliation should be strengthened. Our government is committed to achieving these goals.

Today when we talk about “freedom” we must remember the valiant war heroes who fought to save our country from the L.T.T.E throughout a period of three decades, sacrificing life and limb. Their families suffered heavily. The country’s economy was ruined. Almost 100,000 persons including civilians perished during the conflict. We should remember these lessons.

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REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR PRASAD KARIYAWASAM AT SRI LANKA'S 69TH INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS IN WASHINGTON

Ayubowan, Vanakkam, Assalamalaikum, Good evening
Ambassador Bruce Wharton, Acting Under Secretary of State, Ambassador William Todd, Acting Assistant Secretary of State, Ms. Angela Aggeler, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Mr. Michael Delaney, Assistant United States Trade Representative, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The people of Sri Lanka have just celebrated the 69th anniversary of Independence, on the 4th of February in Sri Lanka.

All of you, who have so graciously joined me, my wife and my staff this evening, are here to help spread the celebrations right across the globe, joining our Embassies and communities that are marking this day in other regions of the world.

I extend a very warm welcome to all of you.

More: www.slembassyusa.org

REMARKS BY ACTING UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE AMBASSADOR BRUCE WHARTON AT SRI LANKA'S 69TH INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS



Thank you, Ambassador Kariyawasam, for that kind introduction, and for all the great work that you’ve done during your tenure as Ambassador in

Washington to strengthen the ties between our two countries.

It’s my great honor to be here tonight to celebrate Sri Lanka’s National Day with such a fine gathering of friends and colleagues.

On National Day, Sri Lanka and its friends around the world commemorate the country’s peaceful path to independence just 69 years ago. And while Sri Lanka may be relatively young – as nations go – the United States and Sri Lanka are old friends.

More: www.state.gov

SRI LANKA REITERATES COMMITMENT TO OPEN GOVERNMENT PRINCIPLES



At a meeting with Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam on February 1, Chief Executive Officer of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Sanjay Pradhan stated, that the election of the Sri Lankan government two years ago on the plank of good governance gives Sri Lanka the opportunity to play an important role in promoting open government principles.

The Ambassador recalled that Sri Lanka was invited to join the OGP in 2015, in recognition of the measures taken by the government to strengthen good governance, combat corruption and strengthen democracy in the country since coming into office in January 2015. In October 2015, Sri Lanka participated in the OGP Summit held in Mexico City and became a participating country by endorsing the OGP Declaration committing “to foster a global culture of open government that empowers and delivers for citizens and advances the ideals of open and participatory 21st century government.”

More: www.slembassyusa.org

U.S. MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PARTNERING WITH SRI LANKA TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY



Senior officials from the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) visited Sri Lanka January 23-26 to discuss joint

efforts to fight poverty and promote economic opportunity for all Sri Lankans. In December 2016, MCC selected Sri Lanka as eligible for an MCC compact – a five-year development grant linked to sustained reforms that can spur growth and alleviate poverty. During this visit, MCC representatives met with Sri Lankan government officials as well as representatives of industry and civil society to hear their views and explain the MCC process in detail.

“Sri Lanka’s selection for an MCC compact is a testament to the progress the country has made in strengthening democratic governance and economic freedom,” said U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka Atul Keshap.

MCC projects rely on locally-driven solutions to help increase prosperity. Countries are selected based upon rigorous standards for good governance, anti-corruption and anti-trafficking efforts, and respect for human rights.

More: lk.usembassy.gov

WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF WASHINGTON FEATURES SRI LANKA

The World Affairs Council – Washington D.C. (WAC-DC) commenced the New Year with a programme on Sri Lanka at a reception hosted by Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam for members and guests of the WAC-DC at the Sri Lanka Residence on January 12.



This event coincided with the National Integration and Reconciliation Week observed in Sri Lanka and the second anniversary of the inauguration of President Maithripala Sirisena.

The WAC-DC, a leading forum for global education and international affairs, is a non-partisan organization dedicated to expanding awareness among the American public and the international community of geo-political, business, and civil society issues.

The event at the Sri Lanka Residence was formally opened by the President and CEO of the WAC-DC Tony Culley-Foster who introduced Sri Lanka

and the Ambassador to the guests. Addressing the audience, Ambassador Kariyawasam referred to attributes of Sri Lanka in relation to its history, geo-strategic location, natural resources and physical quality of life of the people. With regard to Sri Lanka–U.S. relations, the Ambassador highlighted

the upward trajectory of the bilateral relationship since the election of President Maithirpala Sirisena on January 8th, 2015. Relations are now poised to advance further as the United States and the international community welcome a new U.S. Administration. The Ambassador’s remarks were followed by questions from the guests.

On this occasion, in recognition of his commitment to global education and international affairs, Ambassador Kariyawasam was presented with a certificate of appreciation by Dr. Doug Shaw, Chair of the Board of Directors of the WAC-DC.

More: www.slembassyusa.org

USS HOPPER VISIT SIGNALS GROWING BILATERAL COOPERATION

The USS Hopper (DDG 70) concluded its five-day port call to Colombo today as part of a visit to strengthen growing U.S.-Sri Lankan ties and express appreciation to the Sri Lankan Navy for its assistance during an emergency medical evacuation of a USS Hopper crewmember in September 2016.

“Cooperation between our two countries’ naval forces enhances maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region,” said U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka Atul Keshap. “Sri Lanka’s friendly and prompt assistance to ensure the health and safety of our U.S. Navy Sailors is just one more example of this.”

During the visit, U.S. Navy Sailors joined their Sri Lankan counterparts in sports and cultural exchanges, and shared tactical training for rescue and ship inspections at sea. The USS Hopper crew also enjoyed the hospitality and culture of Sri Lanka. In addition, Sailors travelled to Galle to help repair and restore the All Saints Cemetery, which includes the graves of John Black, who was appointed in 1850 as the first U.S. Commercial Agent to Ceylon, and his wife Isabel.

More: lk.usembassy.gov

FOREIGN MINISTRY REGIONAL CONSULAR OFFICE OPENS IN JAFFNA



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs opened its Regional Consular Office in Jaffna at the District Secretariat on Thursday, 26 January, 2017.

Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera unveiled the plaque declaring the opening of the consular office, with the participation of the Leader of the Opposition R. Sampanthan, Chief Minister of the Northern Province C.V. Wigneswaran, Minister of Industry and Commerce Rishad Bathiudeen, Deputy Foreign Minister Dr. Harsha de Silva and State Minister of Women & Child Affairs Vijayakala Maheshwaran.

Speaking at the occasion, Foreign Minister Samaraweera reiterated the Government’s commitment to continue to release lands in the North. The Minister believed that real reconciliation would only be possible if all people had a better understanding of each other and the need for all to be treated with equality.

The Foreign Minister noted that steps would also be taken to open a Regional Consular Office in Matara, so that the public in the South can have access to consular services without coming to Colombo.

More: www.slembassyusa.org

FOREIGN MINISTRY CONSULAR AFFAIRS DIVISION MOVES TO NEW PREMISES

The Consular Affairs Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was located at the BOI building, 3rd Floor at No.14, Sir Baron Jayathilake Mawatha in Fort, was relocated to the Ceylinco Building, 2nd Floor, No. 69 Janadhipathi Mawatha, Colombo 01 with effect from Monday, 6th February 2017.

A state of the art electronic Document Attestation System (e-DAS) that will reduce processing time for document attestation, with a quick verification process linked in real-time with Sri Lanka Missions and Consulates abroad, as well as other government institutions, has been introduced. An online system for appointments and payments are also in place at the new premises.

The new premises were opened to the public on Tuesday, 7th February 2017. However, to ensure uninterrupted service to the public, consular services will continue to be made available at the BOI building, as well, until further notice.

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SRI LANKAN AMONG ASIA FOUNDATION DEVELOPMENT FELLOWS OF 2017

Iromi Perera, a Senior Researcher at the Center for Policy Alternatives, a Colombo-based think tank, was recently selected by the Asia Foundation as one of the 12 members of its 2017 class of “Development Fellows: Emerging Leadership for Asia’s Future” program. A recipient of the Fulbright Professional Scholar Fellowship in 2015, she has previously worked with the Urban Institute in Washington D.C. Iromi’s research and advocacy focuses on urban development and displacement.

The 2017 Development Fellows represent Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Mongo-

lia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. This year’s class was selected from over 800 candidates from over 20 Asian countries who responded to the Foundation’s October call for applicants.

The Foundation’s leadership development program, now in its fourth year, brings together this network of innovators in their pursuit of creative solutions to the region’s most critical development challenges, including rising inequality, challenges of urbanization, pervasive conflicts, and violence against women.

More: www.asiafoundation.org

JAMES W. GAIR, PIONEER OF SRI LANKAN STUDIES IN THE U.S., NO MORE - CORNELL CHRONICLE

James Wells Gair, Ph.D. '63, professor emeritus of linguistics who throughout a long and distinguished career produced groundbreaking work on South Asian languages and their relation to other languages, died Dec. 10 in Ithaca. He was 88.

"Jim Gair was in many ways the paradigmatic Cornell linguist," said John Whitman, chair and professor of linguistics. "He had a language passion for Sinhala, the language of Sri Lanka, and he threw himself entirely into it, teaching the language, writing textbooks for its learners, and analyzing both the colloquial language and its classical texts.

He helped to build and sustain Cornell's South Asia Program, directing it from 1970 to 1977. His scholarship steered the program to its continuing commitment to Sri Lankan studies and its preeminent place for Sri Lankan studies in the world, establishing the first and only Sinhala language program in the Western Hemisphere.

More: www.news.cornell.edu

SRI LANKA'S 'KITHUL' PALM SYRUP: AN ANCIENT SWEETENER IN NEED OF SAVING - NPR

The story of Sri Lanka's most beloved sweetener starts with the kithul, or fishtail, palm tree and a tapper, like 58-year-old Amuvita Gamage Dayasena.

The slightly built farmer sharpens his knife on the fallen branch of a tree and climbs up a wooden lattice that he has tied to one side of a kithul tree in his garden. Within minutes, he is on the top of the nearly 40-foot-tall tree, making sharp incisions at the base of a cluster of flowers that droop down from a branch like a bunch of grapes. Dayasena ties a jute sack to the base of the cluster to collect droplets of sap trickling down.

He will collect the sap over several days and boil it down over an open wood fire, until it reduces to a sticky and intensely sweet syrup the color and thickness of honey.

More: www.npr.org

SURE, SAMBAL, AND SAFARI: THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO SRI LANKA - VOGUE

Truly great destinations have a well-roundedness that's rare, like the annoyingly gifted straight-A student who's also a star athlete, visionary artist, and genuinely likable human being. Sri Lanka, in a sense, is that person, made somehow even more attractive by little quirks and flaws. The island formerly known as Ceylon is ringed in palm-fringed beaches of caramel-color sand, prime for surfing, swimming, and snorkeling over coral reefs. It also boasts a lush, emerald-green interior with mountains worth trekking, waterfalls worth chasing, and tea plantations worth strolling.

Sri Lanka is a destination that stimulates all the senses. This island of 20 million is where blue whales and humpbacks play offshore (in-season nearly year-round in one of two locations), and its national parks are some of the world's best places to spot leopards, not to mention, elephants and Technicolor birds (more than 400 species).

More: www.vogue.com

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While we have received local and international accolades for our efforts to promote reconciliation and establish peace in the country, there are some opportunistic elements that have been acting against these efforts. I categorically label these groups as working against the country.

When speaking of "freedom," we should commit to ensuring economic freedom in our country. The knowledge and the skills of intellectuals and scholars in the country, the innovative skills, capabilities and efficiency of the skilled work force and the strength of labour including that of farmers and workers are essential to acquiring economic freedom.

I believe this is an era in which the new generation is extremely interested in obtaining knowledge and skills in the field of technology. As a government, we are giving priority to this matter, to enable our younger generation to compete internationally and to help our country transition into a knowledge based economy.

All of us agree that to ensure full democracy in the country during this century, we should first achieve economic prosperity. In that context, we give priority to our new generation. I should especially mention here that it is the young generation that will be the inheritors and custodians of the innovative knowledge based economy that we are developing.

I request all the intellectuals and academics in the country to contribute to bringing up our younger generation by educating them as to how economic concepts like knowledge economy, innovative economy, green economy, digital economy and the oceans economy can be integrated into our national economy. When we work as a country, we work with commitment prioritizing economic freedom.

All of you know, we declared 2017 as the year Sri Lanka will be freed from poverty. We expect the commitment of the public, intellectuals, academics, politicians and public officials in implementing national sustainable development policies and strategies that will help free the country from poverty. I believe everyone will fulfill their respective duties in achieving these national goals.

We are a strong, talented and efficient nation. People in our country are educated and intelligent. We agree that we have the knowledge, resources and skills to move forward as a nation. I appeal to all of you to unite to build our nation.

Everybody acknowledges the imperative need for eliminating corruption, bribery, malpractices, waste and fraud to develop the country and the economy. It is essential for the politicians and public servants to work honestly and with commitment.

To achieve economic prosperity, it is essential for the politician to be honest and committed. I trust that the politicians and public servants will fulfill their responsibilities and duties honestly and with the commitment to building the motherland.

When we talk about political science and economic theories, we are mindful of the strengths and weaknesses in both a social democracy and a market economy. Bearing in mind these strengths and weaknesses and current international economic conditions, we must work to adopt the positive features of both systems in a mixed economic system.

I am pleased that the 69th national independence celebrations were a success. I respectfully thank all those who contributed to the this.

On this 69th national independence celebrations of our country, I request all of you to help develop our beloved motherland as a great and prosperous nation by acting with purity and honesty, promoting economic prosperity and knowledge, and winning the goodwill of the international community.