

Government Economic Development Programme and Jaffna District Development Projects

**under the Chairmanship of
Prime Minister Hon' Ranil Wickremasighe
at the Jaffna District Secretariat
on 19th May 2017 at 3 pm**

views of Hon' Chief Minister, Northern Province

Guru Brahma

Hon' Prime Minister, Hon' Ministers, Hon' Members of Parliament, Hon' Members of Northern Provincial Council, High officials of Central and Provincial Services, my dear brothers and sisters,

We are pleased to have the Hon' Prime Minister discussing with Political Representatives and our Officials the Government Economic Development Programme and Jaffna District Development Projects. This is a process we have been agitating for and not long ago in this very Hall we had Hon' Malik Samarawickrama taking the trouble to find out our point of view before embarking on Economic Development Programmes and Projects which related to his Ministry to establish a National Program of 2000 Entrepreneurs for the whole Island of whom 200 were to be from the North.

Sir, there are a few matters with regard to the psyche of the Tamils of Sri Lanka that you must understand. At my age I believe I am qualified to express same. You would realize from around 1956 when the "Sinhala only" Act was foisted on us, the Tamils of the North and East preferred to critically engage the Government in power rather than approve of an enduring partnership with them except during the short spell in 1965 under the Prime Ministership of Hon' Dudley Senanayake. As a result the electorates in the North and East

suffered due to lack of economic endowments from the Centre. When it was decided to end this period of lethargy and indifference towards the North and East and a positive engagement was opted for what irked the Northern and Eastern Tamils was the “top to bottom” attitude of the Centre.

A few years ago a group of officials from the Northern Provincial Council met a farmer in Vavuniya and asked for his preferences in respect of some matter. The old man braced himself up, looked at the officials and said “Sirs! I am 78 years old. This is the first time I am hearing of officials wanting to note down what my preferences are. Hitherto you decided what was best for me. Never asked me what I want”.

That sums up how the Tamils have felt so far after the end of the war. You must realize that we apportion more importance to the attitude of the Centre rather than their lavish largesse. When we found a discriminative design on the part of the Centre in the post 1956 period we resorted to non - violent struggle openly rather than deign deceptive co-operation in order to obtain our lost rights. It was only when non – violence failed that violence took charge. But it must be remembered that generally we are, as a unit of people with special characteristics of our own, trustworthy, provided you recognized our talents and temperaments. We are as a Nation conscious of our antiquity and our ancient classical language. The older generation among us still approve of the adage “high thinking and simple living”.

All this introduction brings me to the matters at hand. Our Economic Development must ensure that we the people of this Province are at the helm of our own affairs. We cannot be used as a vassal Province for the benefit of wayward investors. We are proud of our heritage; we like to live a life of our own rather than be dictated to by outsiders. But we are most certainly willing to join in earnest co –operation in the economic field, like in co –operative federalism in the field of politics.

Hence there are a few important policy considerations we like to discuss with Your Honour.

In the aftermath of the war there has been certain major infrastructural development already in place. But our Rural areas have been neglected. We must empower our rural folk to have access to markets in the Agricultural and Fisheries Sector while they preserve their rural innocence and simplicity.

In working out our Industries we would prefer not to use our natural resources internally available if alternatives from elsewhere could be procured or purchased. Release of productive lands from the Armed Forces must be followed by rapid economic development based on knowledge and technology transfer bearing in mind our immediate and future needs.

In Private – Public partnership, preference must be given to our local investors first, our own diaspora investors next and if unavailable to others from outside the Northern Province. We would like to give priority to our regional work force, then to our Provincial work force and thereafter to others. Whenever environmental concerns arise it is essential that our local environmentalists official or otherwise are consulted and their opinion obtained. After all we are a war affected community and we need special considerations. We have a different terrain and topography, different climate and also different life perceptions and therefore our consonance in important matters must be obtained.

We do not approve of “one stop” offices in Colombo dictating the course of internal investments and economic regeneration in our areas. Our Northern Provincial Council especially its elected representatives must be taken into confidence and their views obtained when directing the course of such investments.

Thus all investments must get the approval of our Planning Council and the Evaluation Committee of the Northern Province which I intend constituting officially at the local level shortly constituting academics, subject matter experts, professionals and senior Officials with experience and expertise. Having served as CM for 3 ½ years I am acutely aware of the effect and impact of the dual administration system and their negative impact on the governance of the Province under the Thirteenth Amendment.

Next I like to advert to the fact that we work on the principle “small is beautiful”. Unfortunately modern economy treats natural resources as expendable income when in fact they should be treated as capital and/or community assets since they are not renewable and thus subject to eventual depletion. We do not want to be avaritious for more and more profit at the expense of our happiness and depletion of our resources.

There must be appropriate use of technology to engender “enoughness” in prosperity appreciating both human needs and limitations. We have started questioning the oft repeated clichés which say “Growth is good and that “bigger is better”. We prefer to follow the process of production by the masses rather than mass production to ensure community empowerment bearing in mind the need for sustainability. Mass production in developed countries have brought enough problems. Ours is a simple but ancient civilization. Our heritage has produced some of world’s greatest scientists and economists but they have remained simple and humble. It used to be said the reason for this trait of ours stemmed from the fact that even the most richest and powerful male visiting our Temples especially the Nallur Kandasamy Temple must take off his upper garment and walk like any other person.

I remember as a youngster some of the most powerful Tamil men from Colombo who donned the western garb in Colombo and abroad on arrival in Jaffna used to change over to simple vershti and walk about mingling with the common people. Hence we emphasize that the philosophy of materialism should take a second place to justice, harmony, beauty, health and harmonious community living.

Armed with these basic ideas that “small is beautiful” we prefer not to mass use our resources, not to allow control of our resources by outsiders, not to be mesmerized by lavish thoughts on material happiness etc. With such controlling thoughts we would view Government Economic Development Programme and Jaffna District Development Proposals.

Let me give an example of the nature of conditional response we gave to Hon’ Rishard Bathiudeen’s inquiry into the manner of productive engagement with all unproductive

assets with special emphasis on the KKS Cement factory. We said we would welcome productive engagement regarding the unused KKS Cement Factory subject to following conditions –

01. Not to quarry limestone not only in KKS but from any other part of the Northern Province.
02. If private partnership was preferred to recommence work at the Factory, priority must be given to investors from the Northern Province (whether local or diaspora). This must be mentioned clearly in the paper notifications.
03. In recruiting for employment, preference must be given to local labour primarily from the KKS Division, thereafter the Jaffna District and thereafter the Northern Province. Only if unavailable that other Provinces could be considered.
04. Since the matter has connections with environmental considerations all applications for economic development programmes must be processed by the Northern Provincial Council through its Department of Environment.

Having set out our preferences and perceptions let me get on a few specifics which were shared with His Excellency the President day before yesterday and which I would like to flag before you too Sir!

Regarding unemployed graduates demonstrating continuously for close upon 100 days, day and night just outside this secretariat I have suggested -

- a. To call for the filling up of Cadre vacancies in the North in all amounting to 1500 immediately, both in Province and Central Government (1171+329 = 1500)
- b. Open the Police Force to those who wish to apply to be recruited as ASPs. There are hardly any Tamils in the higher echelons of the Police Force leave alone the rank and file. (vide Appendix I to Item I of Provincial Councils' list in the Ninth Schedule to the Constitution. It says there shall be a Provincial

Police Division for each Province consisting of Provincial ASPs, CIs, IPs, SIs, Seargents and Constables recruited in the Province.) Directive should go out to Ministry of Internal Security, to establish a Police Training College to serve the policing needs of our Province.

- c. Find similar openings in State Services so that the complaint that only Sinhalese and Muslims are recruited to State Services could be negated.
- d. Private sector employment be sought for those qualified in Arts and Commerce.
- e. Vacancies in the Tourist sector be made open to those Tamil speaking Unemployed Graduates.

02. There is an urgent Financial matter I need to bring to your honour's notice

It has been observed that the fund for devolved subjects are being allocated to the Line Ministries instead of releasing the money to the Provinces. For the year 2017 we have requested a sum of Rs. 10,000 Mn for development works in the Northern Province. However only Rs 1,657.18 Mn has been released by the Finance Commission and hence there is a reduction of a sum of Rs 8,342.82 out of our request. There is balance due from last year, still unpaid too.

The implementation of the projects for the devolved subjects with the Line Ministry's funding is carried out by our Local Authorities. We have experienced that the Line Ministries are taking over the control of funds and the payment mechanism at the Central Government level. But the implementation mechanism is in the hands of the Provincial administration. These two different approaches create a lot of confusion, tension and practical issues and delays in making payments to the contractors and others. And there is thus tremendous delay in completing the projects.

03. I advert next to the role of the Finance Commission at this stage -

The function of the Finance Commission with regard to the implementation of Projects under the Provincial Specific Development Grant allocation is to stream-

line the Provincial administration to comply with the national policy on development works.

At present the approach of the Finance Commission is to have total control over the funds allocated to the Province. This restricts our ability to decide and prioritize the Projects according to the needs of the Province. This approach could also weaken the process of devolution of power to the Provinces.

A Directive could be given to the Finance Commission by Your Honour to monitor and ensure that the projects are identified and implemented as per National policy and not to intervene in the decision making role of the Province.

04. Fourthly I like to point out that lack of coordination exists among the Central Government Agencies in granting approval for development project initiatives by the Province.

There are number of projects which are identified on priority basis which require approval from the Central Government Agencies such as Environmental Authority , Department of Wild Life, Department of Forest , Geological Survey Mines Bureau, Department of Coastal Conservation, Urban Development Authority, Department of Archaeology etc. However we have experienced delay in getting approval from these Agencies. The main cause for these delays is lack of coordination between the Central Government Agencies and the Provincial administration.

In-order to strengthen the structure of both Central and Provincial level administration a proper coordination mechanism has to be set up and implemented.

A directive from your Honour could be given to the Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government to facilitate and convene monthly meetings between the above Central Government Agencies and the Provincial Ministries to expedite the approval process for the efficient and effective implementation of the Project in the

Province. When informing the Province of the meetings, the Chief Minister and the relevant Minister in charge of the subject must be informed.

05. An urgent matter needs reference. It concerns the shortage of gravel and sand and its impact on Development projects .

A Cabinet directive No.08/2017 under Reference MDE/AD/03/CABPA/2017 dated 01.03.2017 has been issued under His Excellency the President hand. This has resulted in much hardship to us in the Northern Province bringing building construction work almost to a standstill. According to Article 2.3 of the said circular the GSMB-TS will solely undertake sand mining operations in the entire Island. The GSMB-TS is Technical Service of Geological Survey and Mines Bureau registered as a Limited liability Private Company. Due to this Article 2.3 the Central Environment Authority denies permission to mine sand to all others.

Until this circular came out the GSMB granted permission to all in the private sector to mine sand. Now a monopolistic right is reserved in GSMB Technical Services (Pvt) Ltd.

This institution solely cannot undertake this function throughout the Island.

The denial by CEA to permit sand mining has caused severe shortage in sand supply affecting all construction and development activities.

A tipper load of sand has soared from Rs. 20000/- to Rs 40000/- to Rs 50000/- Our people affected by the War have now been affected in their resettlement and renovation activities too.

The CEA has to relax its restrictions. Earlier the Forest Department issued permits to mine sand with the consent of the Provincial Irrigation Department. The CEA permitted the Forest Department to issue authority for Sand mining. We may consider bringing the procedure back to the old system.

May I also suggest the packeting of all sand by the State through its institutions such as GSMB-TS. Packeting would help control waste, make sand readily

available in the Market, there would be control and monitoring of the process of sand mining and helpful to both casual constructors, companies and contractors.

Further Article 2:8 of the Circular refers to a Committee to supervise sand mining process and operations. Nominees from the relevant Provincial Councils have been ignored. River sand mining areas are under the Provincial Irrigation Department. Thus a nominee from our Province needs to be included.

The Wild Life Department has refused sand mining in the Nagar Kovil area. They have nothing to do with sand mining. They should be asked to release the embargo on sand mining. Similar embargos are put in place by the Forest Department. They have prevented river sand movement in Kilinochchi and gravel from Mullaitivu.

06.It may not be out of place for me to refer to the importance of repairing Provincial and Rural roads. They have been completely neglected for over 60 years.

07.Regarding Local Authorities' revenue due, I take this opportunity to mention as follows –

The revenue of Rs.1200Mn of the Local Authorities of the Northern Province collected from stamp duty and court fines during the period from 2011 to 2013 was remitted to the Treasury. Only Rs. 500 Mn has been released this year and the balance fund of Rs. 700 Mn is yet to be released.

A directive may be given by Your Honour to make the budgetary provision and to expedite the release of funds.

These are some of the matters I like to flag before Your Honour at this meeting. I thank you once again for gracing this occasion. I am sure you will do everything on your part to bring solutions to the many matters enumerated here before.

Thank you.

Justice C.V.Wigneswaran

Chief Minister

Northern Province