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(හන්සාඩ්)

பாராளுமன்ற விவாதங்கள்
(ஹன்சாட்)

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

නිල වාර්තාව
அதிகார அறிக்கை
OFFICIAL REPORT

[1.39 p.m.]

ගරු රාජවරෝදියම් සම්පන්දන් මහතා
(மாண்புமிகு ராஜவரோதயம் சம்பந்தன்)
(The Hon. Rajavarothiam Sampanthan)

Mr. Deputy Chairman of Committees, we are debating the Policy Statement enunciated by His Excellency the President to Parliament on the 03rd of this month.

He outlined the programme that his Government will follow; he has identified issues of importance. It must be accepted that they are action-oriented and result-oriented. Depending on its implementation, things could get substantially done. One must concede that people and youth could benefit. The emphasis laid on technological progress is important and using fully and effectively Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean Region, developing Sri Lanka into an export-oriented economic hub with an export orientation to all countries both in Asia and the Europe is vital to the country's economic resurrection.

As everyone knows, the country is neck-deep in debt, both domestically and internationally. Substantial debt was incurred in prosecuting a war for more than 25 years. The war could definitely have been avoided, if commitments made to moderate Tamil leaders were honoured. Our income is insufficient to service our debt; we are in the doldrums. We need massive investment, both domestic and foreign. There have to be massive investment and development with export-oriented production. All these things have been talked about in the past, but things have not happened. We have not been able to get our act together. We have been in conflict from shortly after Independence. Governments' commitments, both domestic and international, have not been kept. Governments have blamed each other, but the country and its people have not been salvaged.

Do we, even as at present, command the trust and respect of the world or for that matter, our own people? If we are to succeed in our efforts to bring about substantial changes and progress, the country needs to be seen in a different perspective. What has been the country's main ailment? Like many countries the world over, we are a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multireligious, multicultural, pluralistic society. The Sinhala Buddhist people are in a majority. That is beyond dispute; that cannot be ignored. But, that does not mean that everybody living in this country is in a subordinate position. There are other people in this country who have their own civilization and traditions and who have lived in this country at least as long as anybody else. I refer in particular to the indigenous Sri Lankan Tamil people who have historically inhabited the North and the East. I do not intend, in the course of this Debate, to refer to historical data in proof of that fact. Our intention is not to confront anyone, but to cooperate with everyone in such a manner as to resolve the issues facing the country amicably.

The Constitution of a country is the primary and supreme law of the country. In many instances in many countries which are pluralistic in character, Constitutions have been framed on the basis of a consensus amongst the

different peoples to accommodate such pluralism. Such accommodation has united distinct peoples with distinct identities, who, while preserving their distinct identities, have constituted a single nation within one country. The Policy Statement enunciated by the President envisages the adoption of a new Constitution. No Constitution has thus far been framed in this country on the basis of such national consensus.

Efforts have been made since 1957 to 1965 and thereafter to address the Tamil question. Post-1983, particularly post-1987, these efforts have become more intense. For the first time, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution enacted in 1988 created provincial councils, a merged North-East Provincial Council with the sharing of powers of governance within the framework of a united, undivided, indivisible Sri Lanka. Since the enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1988, various processes have taken place under different Governments and different Presidents to advance the constitutional framework for the sharing of powers of governance within a united, undivided, indivisible Sri Lanka. Substantial consensus has emerged under these processes. I will not, in the course of this Debate, go into details, but only state that leaders such as the Hon. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the Hon. Dudley Senanayake, President J. R. Jayewardene, President Ranasinghe Premadasa, Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, the Hon. Mahinda Rajapaksa and the last Government of the Hon. Maithripala Sirisena and the Hon. Ranil Wickremesinghe were involved in these processes and all these stalwart leaders, over 60 years, had made efforts aimed at resolving the national question, the Tamil question, in an acceptable way. It will be the duty of the present Government, under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the Prime Ministership of the Hon. Mahinda Rajapaksa, to bring this process to an acceptable and satisfactory conclusion.

Before I conclude on this point, Sir, I will only refer to certain positions enunciated by President Mahinda Rajapaksa, now Prime Minister Rajapaksa, during the time he was the President of this country. There are many matters I can refer to, Sir, but I am not doing that now. But, I think it is important to put on record what President Mahinda Rajapaksa had to say when he was President. He is now the Prime Minister of this country and also the brother of the present President and the Leader of the Party to which both the President and the Prime Minister belong. President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Sir, addressed the All Party Representative Committee - APRC - and the Multi-Ethnic Experts Committee on the 11th of July, 2006. I will only quote the relevant parts. He said, I quote:

"The unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of our country must be preserved. This cannot be open to bargain. Our approach has been widely endorsed by the international community, notably India and the Co-chairs have clearly stated and have clearly ruled out any form of division of this country. Our objective must be to develop a just settlement within an undivided Sri Lanka."

He further said, Sir, I quote:

"People in their own localities must take care of their destiny and control their politico-economic environment. Central decision-making that allocates disproportionate resources has been an issue

for a considerable time. In addition, it is axiomatic that devolution also needs to address issues relating to identity as well as security and socio-economic advancement without over-reliance on the Centre. In this regard, it is also important to address the question of regional minorities.”

He went on to further state, Sir, and I quote:

“Any solution must be seen as one that stretches to the maximum possible devolution without sacrificing the sovereignty of the country. Given the background to the conflict, it therefore behoves on particularly the majority community to be proactive in striving for peace and there must be a demonstration of a well-stretched hand of accommodation.”

Sir, I quoted this particular statement made by President Rajapaksa, now, Prime Minister Rajapaksa, on 11th July, 2006 when he addressed the Inaugural Meeting of the APRC and the Multi-Ethnic Experts Committee because he enunciated the policy position of his party, his Government and, I say, even the present Government in the course of that statement in regard to the nature of devolution, the quantity of devolution and the quantity of power sharing. Identity is needed to be addressed, security is needed to be addressed and also maximum possible devolution within the framework of a united, undivided, indivisible Sri Lanka. It is fundamental, Sir, that we remember this. All these efforts, were aimed at resolving the national question and it will be the duty of the President and the Prime Minister to complete this task. I made this quotation available to the House, Sir, in order to facilitate the process.

There have been commitments made to the international community, including India and the Co-Chairs. They need to be kept and implemented. The international community played a major role in the military defeat of the LTTE; India played a major role. There was a trio from each country that strategized the military defeat of the LTTE. On the Sri Lankan side, there were Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the current President and the then Defence Secretary, the Hon. Basil Rajapaksa, an important Minister and Mr. Lalith Weeratunga, the then Secretary to the President. On the Indian side, there were Mr. M.K. Narayanan, the then National Security Adviser of India, Mr. Shivshankar Menon, the then Foreign Secretary and India's Defence Secretary.

The LTTE was seen by both Sri Lanka and India as an impediment to a reasonable, negotiated political solution. The military defeat of the LTTE was seen as a precursor to a reasonable political solution. Commitments were made to India and other members of the international community, including the Co-Chairs, in regard to a political solution. The military defeat of the LTTE is also substantially attributable to the assistance of both India and the international community to achieve that objective. The said commitments need to be honoured. They cannot be reneged upon. If the commitments made to the international community are not implemented - these are all a matter of record that cannot be disputed - it would mean that the international community was used to obtain the necessary assistance to defeat the LTTE militarily, but the commitments made to the international community are now being reneged upon. This would not be good for

anyone, certainly not for Sri Lanka and could become a great disincentive for export-oriented foreign investment in Sri Lanka and all the economic development that is now being planned. The economic miracle that could happen in Sri Lanka under the Policy Statement of the President could just vanish if Sri Lanka wants to renege on the commitment made to the international community in regard to a reasonable political solution after the military defeat of the LTTE.

Different peoples in a country, Sir, define their political agendas based upon equality, justice, dignity and peace. There are such instances in several countries the world over: in Asia, Africa, Europe, America, all over. It is a fundamental human right to be governed according to your will and consent in accordance with the democratic decisions of the people. Democracy is the foundation of our system of governance. We are all strongly committed to the continuance of this commitment. The Tamil people of the North and the East have since 1956, for over 60 years, democratically determined very clearly their political aspirations within a united, undivided, indivisible Sri Lanka. The national question, the Tamil question must be addressed on the basis of an acceptable national consensus within the framework of a united, undivided, indivisible Sri Lanka.

Sir, before I conclude, I would like to say that under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, we, probably for the first time, have a President who is not a politician, who is prepared to speak the truth and to do the right thing. If he is making any errors, we need to advise and correct him. We are prepared to work with him. The country is more important than anything else. The future of all the peoples in this country, whether they be Sinhalese, Tamils or Muslims, depends upon the survival and the progress of the country. Ever since the enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1988, the Tamil people have decided at every election held since 1988 that they will work for sharing of powers of governance within the framework of a united, undivided, indivisible Sri Lanka and Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, as President, will work towards the achievement of those objectives. He can rest assured that he will have the absolute support of our party. You cannot deny the fact that it is the TNA that today represents the Tamil people.

Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa polled seven million votes of the country. Eighty five per cent of the Tamil people, on our call, voted against him; he could not capture their vote. You cannot capture their vote with henchmen; you cannot capture their vote with stooges. You will only capture their vote with the support of people who understand the legitimate aspirations of the Tamil people, their civilization, their traditions, their language, their culture, their dignity and their self-respect. Those are fundamental. Therefore, we are prepared to work with you. Let us join together and bring peace and prosperity to this country.

Thank you, Sir.