

Special Address to the Nation by President Maithripala Sirisena (23rd April, 2019)

May Noble Triple Gems Bless You! May God Bless You!

Venerable Maha Sangha, and Priests,

Dear Parents, children, and friends,

Last forty eight hours have been an unfortunate, shocking, and distressing experience to all of us. Today is a day of national mourning. We declared today as a day of national mourning to express the grief of the whole nation.

We, as the government of Sri Lanka, and the people of Sri Lanka, condemn this heinous terrorist attack that came unexpectedly. There are various discussions, debates and criticisms about this incident. Such freedom to express one's views is a fundamental feature of our democracy. We have the experience of cruelty and brutality unleashed by the worst terrorist organization at the time, the LTTE. In that unfortunate and gruesome period of nearly 27 or 28 years, many lives were lost and lead to economic setbacks. Those prolonged period of terror was ended in 2009, a decade ago. Since then, freedom and peace grew in the country. Specially, during the four years since January 08, 2015, all people of Sri Lanka enjoyed the democracy, freedom, civil liberties, press freedom and human rights to the.

In such a context, we did not expect the national catastrophe of last Easter Sunday. It is my duty and responsibility to provide a true and complete account of this situation to the people. Our security services received reports about this terrorist movement since 2017. It was observed that they were receiving training and certain guidance from foreign terrorist organizations. Our security services were monitoring them and investigating about them. However, our security services did not have enough evidence to start legal actions against them or clear information to be produced to courts. I must say that, during the last three years, we paid close attention to their names, movements and foreign travel at the Security Council.

However, this group carried out this attack at a least expected moment under the guidance, instructions, and leadership of a foreign terrorist organization to cause appalling loss of human lives, from the innocent child in the poorest of families to the richest of the people, including foreigners who had come to this land as tourists, diplomats, and business men and women. I express my deepest condolences on their behalf.

In this most dreadful and painful of times, our Christian community showed true patience, discipline and restraint. I must express my gratitude and respect to the all Christians of Sri

Lanka, His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith and other Christian Priests who dedicated themselves to avoid conflicts and ensure peace prevails in the country.

Now we are faced with the task of building a free, peaceful environment, rising from this extremely tormenting experience. In that, I will completely reorganize the Police, Tri-Forces and the Security Services. Specially, in the next 24 hours, I expect to carry out a change of leadership in them. I must thank the Tri-Forces and the Police for their quick response at this moment.

I must specially share with you that, when the LTTE terrorism broke out in early 80s, most Sinhala and Muslim people used to look at Tamils as if all of them were terrorists. However, people quickly learned that not all Tamils were terrorists, and that laid the foundation for the nation to unite for peace. I request from Sinhala and Tamil people not to look at our country's Muslim community with suspicion, fear or distrust. You must keep in mind that not all Muslims are terrorists. It is only a very small minority who are linked to such a barbaric terrorist organization. It is very important therefore, that peace and harmony among Sinhala, Muslim and Tamil communities. It is important for us to foster trust among us.

We had to declare an Emergency situation to suppress terrorists and ensure a peaceful environment in the country. What have been enacted by gazette are clauses pertaining to suppressing terrorism only. If these enactments were not made, the powers prevailed were not sufficient for the Police to take proactive measures and the Army, Navy and Air Force could not take part actively in the operations. These enactments will not interfere in the country's democracy, freedom. I will assume the responsibility in person to ensure that these enactments will not be used to restrain anyone from enjoying freedom of expression, conducting protests and enjoying press freedom.

I must thank the Police, the Tri-forces and Special Task Force officers for their efficiency and the Crime Investigation Division and Intelligence Services for their dedication in responding to this situation. The nation is indebted to the three Police officers who lost their lives in the investigations.

The government has already been able to crack down on many criminals, suspects and those responsible for the recent attacks. Therefore, I truly believe that we can avoid a repetition of such gruesome acts of violence in the future.

At this time, basically, friendly as well as powerful 07, 08 countries have pledged to provide their fullest support to Sri Lanka in the process of curbing terrorism, we are hoping to work in coordination with them in the future. Currently, the issue of why our Intelligence Service

did not take actions according to the information received by them from a State Intelligence Service of one of our friendly nation, has become a question and center of discussion among the people, in the media as well as on political platforms.

I should specially mention here that the responsible chief officers did not submit that information received by them to me. If they informed me about receiving that information I could have taken immediate actions. At present, I have decided to take stern actions against those responsible institutions for not fulfilling their respective duties properly.

The Cabinet including the Prime Minister gathered last evening and discussed in detail regarding this issue. That is why I have mentioned earlier an appropriate process will be implemented while completely reorganizing the security services including State Intelligence Service and Intelligence Units of the Police and Tri-forces, to prevent recurrence of these kinds of terrorist activities.

I have already planned necessary actions to build an environment where the people of this country could live freely and without fear in the future. I would like you to state firmly that as the Government, it will create a background where the public servants, school children, entrepreneurs and the general public of the country could act liberally in a free and peaceful environment.

Similarly, I would like to state a special issue at this time. As I mentioned earlier, we who speak about the experiences of over 27, 28 years prolonged brutal terrorist war as well as victories over it, must clearly understand the difference between these incidents and that terrorist group. I believe, in a situation like this we should speak using our intelligence, but not following the heart.

The L.T.T.E terrorist organization had been a domestically strong terrorist organization. However, we had to face this issue in a different manner to what we faced with that organization in those days. An internationally strong terrorist organization has announced that they are involved in these attacks. Consequently, there is a certain difference between the activities of the domestically emerged terrorist group and the activities of an internationally strong terrorist group which we newly experienced.

I determinedly insist you that I will take action to control and curb this movement which involved with an international terrorist organization by utilizing modern technology as well as using the strategic methods of security forces and acquiring advice and guidance of countries which use technology against this kind of terrorism. In a situation like this the unity among us is a strength to achieve this goal.

We need to work without any political differences and religious divisions. We should clearly understand what is meant by racism and what is meant by terrorism. I believe as an intelligent persons all of you have understood the dissimilarity between the racism and terrorism. Therefore, we need to be vigilant, why this brutal terrorist organization chooses Sri Lanka in this manner.

Everyone has a responsibility to prevent recurrence of this kind of experience which destroys the most peaceful environment in this country, creating fear and suspicion among the public. I believe this is not the time to level allegations or point fingers against one another. Therefore, with all due respect, I urge all of you to act in an exemplary manner. I expect, in the future, to summon all the political party leaders who represent the Parliament as well as who do not represent the Parliament to hold a discussion in this regard and to apprise them regarding the future steps that the government is to take.

I state that I commit myself to do everything possible to ensure a free and peaceful environment for all citizens by summoning all Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Islam religious leaders, intellectuals of various disciplines to one forum to identify our national programme to respond to this situation. It is very important that we do not allow the spread of false information and believe only the truth. I respectfully request from all of you to stand hand in hand with us in our mission to eradicate terrorism from our country, so that the present generation and the our children will have a safer tomorrow.

I thank you all, May Triple Gems bless you! May God bless You!