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எதிர்க்கட்சித் தலைவர் - இலங்கைப் பாராளுமன்றம்  
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION - PARLIAMENT, SRI LANKA

11 June 2019

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Political aftershocks of the Easter Sunday terrorist attack**

**(Translation of a speech made by the Leader of the Opposition Hon. Mahinda Rajapaksa on Tuesday, 11 June 2019 at his official residence on Wijerama Mawatha Colombo.)**

Venerable members of the Maha Sangha, clergymen of all other faiths, citizens of Sri Lanka and friends,

The terrorist attack that took place on the 21st of April is a watershed in the history of this country. Today, a fear of terrorists who murder those who do not subscribe to their religious ideology, has spread throughout the country. Economic activities have been adversely affected. As was the case during the war, parents are once again guarding schools. Today, religious observances have to be performed under tight security – a situation that we did not experience even during the war. We are unable to celebrate Vesak and Poson as we used to. Devotees are searched before being allowed to enter places of worship.

There is now mutual mistrust between the Muslim community and the followers of other religions. This mistrust is now developing in a dangerous direction due to the allegation that a Muslim medical specialist attached to the Kurunegala hospital had due to extremist religious ideology, rendered women belonging to other religions infertile. At a time like this, the leaders of the country and of the Muslim community, should act in a very responsible and circumspect manner.

Two or three weeks after the bomb attacks, we saw organised groups of people attacking Muslim owned business establishments in certain areas obviously with a view to igniting a countrywide riot. But those incidents ceased almost as quickly as they started due to resolute opposition from the general public. There was strong

opposition to these acts of violence in the social media as well. We saw similar incidents taking place around 2014 in the run up to the 2015 presidential election. On the 9th January 2019, we found that both the perpetrators and victims of those incidents, were with the common candidate. This time too they seem to have been aiming at a similar stunt, but their attempt failed.

All of us should understand that everything that we see happening now, is directly connected to the presidential election that is due to be held in a few months. The present government is seeking to retain for the next presidential election as well, the Muslim vote base that they organised around themselves using various stratagems before 2015. Opposition MPs tabled a no-confidence motion against one Cabinet minister on the grounds that he had connections with the terrorists responsible for the Easter Sunday attacks. No confidence motions are an integral part of the parliamentary tradition and a right exercised by the parliamentary opposition.

When a no confidence motion is tabled in Parliament, it can either be debated and a vote taken, or the Minister concerned can resign and resume his portfolio if he is cleared of the charges. That is a tradition that applies to all members of Parliament regardless of their ethnicity or religion. In years past, no-confidence motions had been tabled against Muslim Speakers like M.A.Barkeer Markar and M.H.Mohamed but at that time, nobody looked at them in religious or ethnic terms.

This time however, when a no confidence motion was tabled against one Muslim Minister, all All Muslim ministers in the government resigned. This seems to be ploy on the part of the UNP government to organise and line up all Muslim politicians on one side and to obtain the Muslim vote at the forthcoming presidential elections.

In any case, the en masse resignations have resulted in the opposition's no-confidence motion being rendered void. Since public attention has been distracted by the mass resignations, the government has managed to sweep many other issues under the carpet. The Central bank bond scam has been forgotten. The debt crisis has been forgotten. Some of those injured in the Easter Sunday attacks are still in hospital but they too have been forgotten. There is now no talk about extremists. The searches have stopped. The discovery of weapons has ceased. There is no talk of the steps being taken with regard to the terrorist suspects arrested. Thus, the government has killed about a hundred birds with one stone.

The UNP is making good use of the Muslim community for their political purposes. The UNP needs the votes of the moderates as well as the extremists within the Muslim community. They don't care where their votes come from. The Muslim leaders for their part, want a government they can manipulate at will. But this confluence of interests will not solve the problem that the ordinary Muslims of this country face today. The ordinary people of this country want protection from extremists terrorists. The ordinary Muslim folk in this country want to weed out the terrorists from their midst and to resume their normal lives.

Today, a brutal terrorism that targets the followers of other religions has emerged from within the Muslim community. Buddhists, Hindus and Christians are joining hands in a common endeavour against that terrorism. Moderate Muslims should not be isolated from this unity of purpose that is being forged. Muslim religious leaders and intellectuals have admitted that as a result of the extremist ideologies that came into this country from outside, the Sri Lankan Muslim community had gradually isolated themselves from the rest of Sri Lankan society.

Due to the emergence of exclusively Muslim political parties from the 1980s onwards, Muslims isolated themselves in the political sphere as well. The en masse resignation of Muslim Ministers marks a high point in this process. When the former ministers who resigned came to explain matters to me in my capacity as the Leader of the Opposition, I raised this issue with them.

My friend Mr M.H.M.Ashroff who was the first to form an exclusively Muslim political party, later realised his mistake and towards the end he formed a political party that was open to all communities called the National Unity Alliance. But after his death, this trend towards integration stopped and the isolationist trend gained momentum.

Due to the fact that Muslim political leaders are completely dependent on the Muslim vote, they need the votes of the extremists within their community as well. Muslim extremism spread throughout this country because the Muslim leaders were unable to oppose it. There is the oft heard charge that the Muslim leaders speak of reconciliation in Sinhala but spread the message of communalism in Tamil. Islamic extremism has gained traction in this country due to that kind of politics.

The spread of extremist ideologies among the Muslim population in this country did not take place all of a sudden. It took place over a number of years, in the midst of

heated debates, threats, exchange of fisticuffs, the burning of mosques, the burning of houses and even murder. Even in the midst of all that, Muslim political leaders provided patronage to the extremists and allowed them to flourish. After the Easter Sunday bombings, Muslim leaders said that they never thought something as serious as this would happen.

Be that as it may, we now have to find a solution for what has happened. The people of this country will never tolerate terrorism. This extremist terrorism will have to be destroyed by whatever means necessary. Due to the JVP's terrorism, Sinhala persons were arrested, Sinhala homes and temples were searched. Due to LTTE terrorism Tamil persons were arrested, Tamil homes and kovils were searched. If a terrorism that has emerged from within the Muslim community is to be crushed, Muslim individuals will have to be arrested, Muslim homes and mosques will have to be searched. Anyone who says that terrorism can be crushed without such measures, is not being truthful.

Terrorism based on religion may be a new thing to us, but it's a very familiar menace in all Muslim majority countries. The vast majority of Muslims in the world are moderates. In all the Muslim majority countries from Indonesia and Malaysia through Oman, Dubai and up to Morocco, the vast majority of Muslims live ordinary lives like we do. Adherents of other religions live in large numbers in most Muslim majority countries and they are secure to the extent that religious extremism has been suppressed in the country concerned.

As in the case of Sri Lanka, religious extremism is the biggest enemy of the worldwide Muslim community. This is the main tool used by imperialists to destroy Muslim countries. Imperialist powers have already destroyed Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libiya and Yemen by promoting religious extremism in those countries. The extremist terrorism that has now come into this country will not do the local Muslim community any good. I hope the danger of isolating local Muslims from other communities in this country would have dawned on our Muslim leaders at least at this late stage.

All other communities must get together and protect the moderate Muslims at this juncture. Every Muslim for his part should use his own reason and eschew narrow religion based politics. That change should come from within the Muslim community. When the people of different communities in this country are uniting against terrorism, we expect the moderate Sri Lankan Muslim community to join

them, following the example set by the vast majority of the global Muslim community. I wish to emphatically state before the people of Sri Lanka that terrorism will not be allowed to exist in this country under a government led by me.

Thank you.

May the blessings of the Triple Gem be upon you, God bless you.