"We will uphold the principles of Democracy"

His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka

“At a time of clashes between democracy and terror, we have shown the world that terrorism can be effectively defeated, and the cherished values of democracy restored to people who were denied it for nearly three decades,” stated His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Vice Patron of the CPA yesterday.

The President was addressing a galaxy of over 650 distinguished delegates, observers and spouses of delegates from 54 Commonwealth countries and Sri Lankan invitees participating in the official opening of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference last morning at the state-of-the-art Nelum Pokuna (Lotus Pond) Mahinda Rajapaksa Theatre, Colombo.

The overseas Parliamentary representatives comprised Delegates (Hon. Speakers, Members of Parliaments, Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs), Observers, Secretaries, Accompanying Persons, Society of Clerks-at-the-Table (SOCAT) participants and Spouses.

Extracts from the President’s speech is given below:

“As the current Vice Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I am pleased to welcome all delegates to this 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Colombo and honoured to address you on this occasion.

This is an organization with a long and distinguished history in the annals of modern democracy. It was begun in 1911, as the Empire Parliamentary Association, when the British Empire was at the height of its strength, when the Sun never set upon it.

Later, as the success of key freedom movements from imperialism and colonialism succeeded, as in India and Sri Lanka, it was changed to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, as we know it today.

Sri Lanka, as one of the earliest members of the CPA, is glad to host this important International Parliamentary conference for the third occasion. It is also important to recall that Sri Lanka is among the members of the CPA, having one of the oldest traditions in parliamentary democracy, being the first country in Asia to have universal franchise, from as far back as 1931.

We have continued this tradition of parliamentary democracy through the past 81 years, protecting it from those who plotted against it, both in uniform and through insurrection.

continued in p.3 ....
On behalf of the Sri Lanka Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I am honoured and privileged to welcome you all to the opening ceremony of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

This is the third time we are hosting this meeting in Sri Lanka and that is a reflection of the strong commitment Sri Lanka and our people have towards the values of the Commonwealth and our dedication for Parliamentary democracy which form core values of this association.

Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association are bonded by a shared history: the history of British colonialism.

This shared history runs as a thread that binds us together and undoubtedly it has enabled us to create this association and to promote Parliamentary democracy and good governance among our member states.

We, Sri Lankans received universal franchise in 1931, over eighty years ago, when we were still a colony.

Since receiving independence in 1948 the country has had an unbroken tradition of multi-party democracy with regularly held elections and political power alternating between different political parties.

We are intensely proud of the democratic tradition we have nurtured over these 64 years since gaining independence and will continue to ensure that Parliamentary democracy remains vibrant and robust in this part of the world.

It is because of this commitment to Parliamentary democracy that the Commonwealth has bestowed upon His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka for the support, guidance and encouragement extended to us in organizing this event and your presence this morning has encouraged all of us.

I must also acknowledge the support we have received from the Rt. Honourable Sir Allen Haselhurst, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the CPA, Dr. William F. Shipley Secretary – General of the CPA, and from the staff of the CPA Headquarters.

May you have a rewarding meeting, may you forge stronger bonds.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my privilege and great pleasure now to call upon His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, to formally declare open the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

May the Noble Triple Gem Bless you.

Hon. Chamal Rajapaksa, Speaker and President, CPA

My country is proud of its history, its people and its tradition of constitutional democracy.

On behalf of the Sri Lanka Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I am honoured and privileged to welcome you all to the opening ceremony of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

This is the third time we are hosting this meeting in Sri Lanka and that is a reflection of the strong commitment Sri Lanka and our people have towards the values of the Commonwealth and our dedication for Parliamentary democracy which form core values of this association.

Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association are bonded by a shared history: the history of British colonialism.

This shared history runs as a thread that binds us together and undoubtedly it has enabled us to create this association and to promote Parliamentary democracy and good governance among our member states.

We, Sri Lankans received universal franchise in 1931, over eighty years ago, when we were still a colony.

Since receiving independence in 1948 the country has had an unbroken tradition of multi-party democracy with regularly held elections and political power alternating between different political parties.

We are intensely proud of the democratic tradition we have nurtured over these 64 years since gaining independence and will continue to ensure that Parliamentary democracy remains vibrant and robust in this part of the world.

It is because of this commitment to Parliamentary democracy that the Commonwealth has bestowed upon His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka for the support, guidance and encouragement extended to us in organizing this event and your presence this morning has encouraged all of us.

I must also acknowledge the support we have received from the Rt. Honourable Sir Allen Haselhurst, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the CPA, Dr. William F. Shipley Secretary – General of the CPA, and from the staff of the CPA Headquarters.

May you have a rewarding meeting, may you forge stronger bonds.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my privilege and great pleasure now to call upon His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, to formally declare open the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

May the Noble Triple Gem Bless you.
Be mindful of the weight of items, if you opt to buy some of them. Porcelain ware created by talented Sri Lankan designers. Please note that you will be able to see the intricately designed pair of comfortable footwear. You will be visiting the beach. You will be comfortable in cotton clothes & flat shoes today.

Note to Spouses:
- You will be comfortable in cotton clothes & flat shoes today.
- Preferably a wide hat to beat the sun, casual cotton clothes, and a pair of comfortable footwear. You will be visiting the beach.
- It will be rather warm and hot inside the Porcelain Factory.
- Please note that you will be able to see the intricately designed pair of comfortable footwear. You will be visiting the beach.
- You will be comfortable in cotton clothes & flat shoes today.

Cultural Show at Nelum Pokuna (10.09.2012)

Spouses’ Programme:
07:00 Breakfast at respective hotels
07:30 Assembly in Hotel Lobby
08:00 Leave Hotels for Dankotuwa Porcelain Factory
10:00 Arrive at Dankotuwa Porcelain Factory
10:00-12:00 Tour of Dankotuwa Porcelain Factory and visit the Showroom
12:00 Leave Dankotuwa Porcelain Factory for St. Mary’s Church, Negombo
12:15 Arrive at St. Mary’s Church, Negombo
12:15-12:45 Visit St. Mary’s Church, Negombo
12:45 Leave St. Mary’s Church, Negombo for Hotel Jetwing Blue
13:00 Arrive at Hotel Jetwing Blue, Negombo
13:00-15:30 At Hotel Jetwing Blue, Negombo
• Lunch
• Refreshments
15:30 Leave Hotel Jetwing Blue, Negombo
17:00 Arrive at respective Hotels

Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) It was to learn from the lessons from the conflict, understand how we could avoid such situations again, provide justice to those who had been affected, and, most importantly, seek the path of reconciliation as a nation, through our own experiences. The recommendations of the LLRC are already being implemented, according to a well worked out Plan of Action that we have presented to the nation and the world. With our undoubted commitment to parliamentary democracy, we have a keen interest in the work and progress of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Your efforts to promote parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance, and interest in building an informed parliamentary community among the member nations, has our strongest support.

The many educational programmes on parliamentary practice and procedure, the efforts at studying matters of regional importance in the development of democracy, the study of democratic systems in the world’s smallest nations, the efforts to train knowledgeable and efficient parliamentary staff, are all in keeping with the goal of strengthening democracy in the world.
We will uphold .... continued from p.3

A matter of special importance is the work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians to increase female representations in Parliament and recognizing the importance of gender considerations in all activities of Commonwealth countries and devise ways to facilitate such trade.

I have no doubt that the CPA has achieved much success in realizing the aims of its Strategic Plan 2008 - 2012, especially in assisting

highest priority to the welfare of the people to economic progress and development that positively impact on the lives of people.

In this context, it will be interesting to look at Sri Lanka’s own record of success through democracy. Our achievements in education and health stand out as examples to other countries and societies. Our 96 per cent literacy is a proud record that has come from the blend of
democracy, with a great tradition of education that came down from Buddhism and later advanced through the Christian churches. Similarly, our success in providing free health services to all also comes from a great tradition of healing that was advanced through democracy.

It is also important to note that Sri Lanka achieved 8 per cent GDP growth last year, and the year before, after 6 and 7 per cent growth earlier even during the battle against terrorism because of our commitment to the people and the values of democracy. It is our strong belief that there cannot be peace without development. The reverse is also true; there cannot be development without peace.

These are all subjects of much relevance today. One must look forward to this conference recognizing the proper priorities in furthering the democratic process. You will no doubt take into consideration the current global realities that often seem to threaten proper and effective democracy, and also seek to challenge the sovereignty of nation states.

Your presence in Sri Lanka gives you a good opportunity to see for yourselves the progress of democracy in our country, after the major threat it faced under terrorism. This is important in the context of the barrage of lies being spread about Sri Lanka today. As you will see, there is full freedom of travel to any part of the country. You can also speak to anyone, from Government or the Opposition and different communities. I urge you to make use of this opportunity to learn of the real Sri Lanka, in its post-conflict era, when the highest priority is given to nation building through reconciliation.

It is unfortunate that today, many impressions of Sri Lanka in foreign countries, are based on un-verified facts, and wrong or deliberately manipulated dis-information, carried out by those who once supported the forces of terror. These same elements continue to sow the seeds of division and separation through various media, and also influence politicians in their new countries of domicile, to act against Sri Lanka, based on such dis-information.

These are people who claim to speak for Sri Lanka or a section of our people, while slander the country from their shelters abroad. They do not bother to

continued in p.6.......

Opening Plenary
Address by the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Secretary General of the Commonwealth

Dr. William F. Shija
Secretary General CPA

stated that the theme of the current conference was “Ensuring a Relevant Commonwealth for the Future”. It was essential for the CPA to come up with a dynamic process with the objective of promoting parliamentary democracy within the Commonwealth as well as beyond the Commonwealth.

Dr. Shija was addressing the Opening plenary of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference which commenced at 3.30 p.m. yesterday at the BMICH - Sirimavo Bandaranaike Memorial Exhibition Centre, Colombo. He pointed out that a simple definition of parliamentary democracy would be governance based on majority rule with minority care and share. Many programmes were organized each year with the funds of CPA, to promote parliamentary international diplomacy by establishing new parliament structures. He emphasized that the CPA should continue its gender programmes to support women’s parliamentary governance and ensure gender equality within the Commonwealth Secretariat as well as other partners.

At his conclusion, Dr. Shija stated that regional issues such as human trafficking, terrorism, women’s issues and climate change were discussed at Commonwealth conferences and it may assist to overcome these problems by exchanging their regional experience.

M e m b e r s

and Branches to adopt the good practice of democratic governance and strengthen the institution of Parliament. You have no doubt helped the Commonwealth deepen its democratic commitment, in big and small nations by promoting best principles of representative government that removes barriers to equality in gender, community, faith and other aspects that seek to limit democracy.

This Conference in Colombo will discuss and decide on the CPA’s new Strategic Plan for the next four years. This is a good time to think of strengthening the core values of democracy.

Our work should not be confined to theories and concepts but should look at the more practical aspects that affect the people. Our emphasis on the will of the people should lead us to give the most importance to policies that best serve the interests of the people. There is the need to give the

decision that was advanced through the CPA to come up with a national action plan.

achievement for Sri Lanka.

Overcoming the forces of terrorism was a major achievement for Sri Lanka. He appreciated the steps being taken to implement the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt & Reconciliation Commission and the National action plan.

In his presentation, he stressed the importance of the relationship between government and opposition parties. He emphasized that it helps to create a democratic framework, harmony and development.

Dr. Sharma thanked the Sri Lanka Branch for hosting the CPA Conference. The two presentations were followed by a Question and Answer session.

Hon. Kamalesh Sharma, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, addressing the Opening Plenary drew attention to the fact that the CPA was a vital component in the global architecture of the Commonwealth. The CPA enhances Commonwealth values with democracy, development and respect for the diversity among the CPA countries. He pointed out that “an outstanding feature of the Commonwealth as a community was its capacity to convene, to connect, bringing people and institutions together, to share experience, helping each other for mutual and collective benefit”.

Hon. Sharma stated that this conference is an opportunity for Sri Lanka, to make an important contribution to the Commonwealth and the world beyond.

He observed that in Sri Lanka there was progress in assisting the people and the values of democracy. It is our strength that there cannot be peace without development. The reverse is also true; there cannot be development without peace.

The country from their shelters abroad. They do not bother to

continued in p.6.......

ONCONFERENCE
Your Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Vice Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Hon. Chamal Rajapaksa – Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament and President of the CPA, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association - Secretary General, Hon. Kamallesh Sharma, Vice President of the CPA, Hon. Minuwva Johannes Mahlangu, Officers of the CPA, General Secretary Dr. Shija, Members of the Executive Committee, Parliamentarians, Clerks, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and other distinguished guests.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope it is a comprehensive and correct introduction.

It is a very great honour and privilege for me as the elected Chairperson of the Executive Committee to stand here today on behalf of the CPA, to the first of all you, Mr. Speaker, for introducing the proceedings, to you, Mr. President for declaring formally open this 58th Conference and indeed for being here greeting us with your presence on this occasion. I wish to say to you and to all our colleagues here, how grateful we are for your country’s willingness to host the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Colombo.

Ishadbhai 2012 has been quite a year, distinguished perhaps in the minds of many by the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games, by the achievements of Usain Bolt and the Jamaican trio, Stephen Kimotcho who won astonishingly the marathon, Oscar Pistorius and the news that Sri Lanka got their first Bronze medal in the Paralympic Games. The spell of success was terrific and we hope that it is a legacy for young people throughout the Commonwealth.

Then there was another major event here in Sri Lanka. Before the T20 Cricket World Cup takes place, we have this important gathering, we do not know whether the visitors are confused by the profusion of signs aspiring both the CPA Conference and the T20 World Cup, but I suspect it gives a hint of the hearts and minds of your citizens, who may be more easily captured by the cricket than by the proceedings of our Conference. I must say despite that, I am astonished by the amount of global media coverage of this press. I do not think we have ever had in this past. I really do think we have such front page attention in the press. I do not think I have ever seen as inspirational. It is one of the many challenges facing us, but I suspect it gives a hint of the hearts and minds of your citizens.

Today because I welcome Andy Murray winning his first ever Grand Slam. Murray winning his first ever tie which was given to me at the reception that was given to me at the CPA, Hon. Ranil Wickramasinghe, the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Daminda Dassanayake, Secretary General of the CPA, Hon. Ravi Wickramasinghe, the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Dammika Dassanayake, Secretary General of the CPA, Hon. Ravi Wickramasinghe, the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Dammika Dassanayake, Secretary General of the CPA, Hon. Ravi Wickramasinghe, the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Dammika Dassanayake, Secretary General of the CPA, Hon. Ravi Wickramasinghe, the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Dammika Dassanayake, Secretary General of the CPA, Hon. Ravi Wickramasinghe, the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Dammika Dassanayake, Secretary General of the CPA.

This week we as Parliamentarians, Clerks and Officers will come together as equals in various fora such as workshops at regional meetings. We will talk about issues on topics covering health, education, youth unemployment, foreign policy, gender issues and of particular interest of me is the role of Parliamentarians in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building.

Here today, in this magnificent hall you probably feel and you realize like me that you wish to engage, network, learn and flourish to the diversity of the experience, knowledge and expertise that is around us. The true purpose of CPA comes out when one sees representatives from all over the Commonwealth, stretching over five continents, coming together, as we do here today, to talk with each other and learning from each other.

Let us resolve that in this week in the delightful setting that we have been given, to explore all that we have not slept and to talk about other, talking with each other and learning from each other.

Sri Lanka has a lot to be proud of but surely its greatest pride should be its peace, which has driven this momentum of change and it is a peace which must continue, not as an unusual novelty but as a way of life. Hopefully, the momentum that is driving Sri Lanka forward under the Government of President Rajapaksa should inspire us because we too in the Commonwealth are in need of renewal and reinvigorating.

Serendipity is a rather beautiful word. Interestingly, it has a connection with Sri Lanka. Its origin derives from the word ‘Serendi’ the name that Arabs originally gave to this splendid island. I am sure that you will agree with me that having the 58th CPA here and now in Sri Lanka is indeed serendipitous. Because we have the opportunity to witness the rejuvenation, reinvigoration and transformation that has taken place in Sri Lanka - like from the ashes of violence and turmoil. Serendipity is because we in this CPA must also renew and progress in the first year of the second century. Sri Lanka finds itself in the spotlight in a happier way than for many years. Sri Lanka could be seen as inspirational. It is one of the most literate countries in the establishing world order. It has grown at an average of eight per cent over the last few years, low unemployment, expanding industries in IT, nanotechnology and banking, tourism is booming and exports strong.

President Rajapaksa should inspire us because we too in the Commonwealth are in need of renewal and reinvigoration.

Serendipity is a rather beautiful word. Interestingly, it has a connection with Sri Lanka. Its origin derives from the word ‘Serendi’ the name that Arabs originally gave to this splendid island. I am sure that you will agree with me that having the 58th CPA here and now in Sri Lanka is indeed serendipitous. Because we have the opportunity to witness the rejuvenation, reinvigoration and transformation that has taken place in Sri Lanka - like from the ashes of violence and turmoil. Serendipity is because we in this CPA must also renew and progress in the first year of the second century. Sri Lanka finds itself in the spotlight in a happier way than for many years. Sri Lanka could be seen as inspirational. It is one of the most literate countries in the establishing world order. It has grown at an average of eight per cent over the last few years, low unemployment, expanding industries in IT, nanotechnology and banking, tourism is booming and exports strong.

Sri Lanka is a lot to be proud of but surely its greatest pride should be its peace, which has driven this momentum of change and it is a peace which must continue, not as an unusual novelty but as a way of life. Hopefully, the momentum that is driving Sri Lanka forward under the Government of President Rajapaksa should inspire us because we too in the Commonwealth are in need of renewal and reinvigoration.

The theme of the Summit for the 58th Conference is “enabling a relevant commonwealth for the future”. All of us as a global community must commit ourselves in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, to be reminded, with some of them to eradicate poverty and hunger amongst our people, which is a very crucial issue among those developing countries, especially to achieve universal primary education, to promote gender equality and to should not be afraid to be unpopular with Members of the Executive, if they are not acting in the interest of the people. It is expected that all these checks and balances that we have the roles of implementing and those who oversee implementation in a democracy.

Serendipity is a rather beautiful word. Interestingly, it has a connection with Sri Lanka. Its origin derives from the word ‘Serendi’ the name that Arabs originally gave to this splendid island. I am sure that you will agree with me that having the 58th CPA here and now in Sri Lanka is indeed serendipitous. Because we have the opportunity to witness the rejuvenation, reinvigoration and transformation that has taken place in Sri Lanka - like from the ashes of violence and turmoil. Serendipity is because we in this CPA must also renew and progress in the first year of the second century. Sri Lanka finds itself in the spotlight in a happier way than for many years. Sri Lanka could be seen as inspirational. It is one of the most literate countries in the establishing world order. It has grown at an average of eight per cent over the last few years, low unemployment, expanding industries in IT, nanotechnology and banking, tourism is booming and exports strong.

Sri Lanka is a lot to be proud of but surely its greatest pride should be its peace, which has driven this momentum of change and it is a peace which must continue, not as an unusual novelty but as a way of life. Hopefully, the momentum that is driving Sri Lanka forward under the Government of President Rajapaksa should inspire us because we too in the Commonwealth are in need of renewal and reinvigoration.

The theme of the Summit for the 58th Conference is “enabling a relevant commonwealth for the future”. All of us as a global community must commit ourselves in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, to be reminded, with some of them to eradicate poverty and hunger amongst our people, which is a very crucial issue among those developing countries, especially to achieve universal primary education, to promote gender equality and to
We will uphold......

continued from p.4....

countries with a deeper and richer understanding of Sri Lanka.

In seeking to advance democracy in the world, which is the commitment of the CPA, it is also important to appreciate the different cultures and values of each country where democracy has been rooted, or is growing. The Commonwealth is a rich diversity of nations with the common bond of democracy. It is also a rich diversity of cultures, traditions and values. There are countries where culture and heritage date back to many millennia. There are others with shorter histories and traditions. Democracy will truly blossom when these differences are best understood and respected in all our dealings with each other.

It is necessary for all of us to be anchored in the true meaning and concept of democracy - which is the will of the people - freely expressed. Recently, we saw fears of this in the very Mother of Democracy, in the early stage of the current financial crisis in Europe. There is also an unfortunate trend we see of efforts to impose democracy on people and States. There are many who seem to think of regime change as the necessary path to democracy, without seeing the consequences of such action that stare at us today. We are also aware of how Human Rights can be made a slogan by the worst violators of such rights, to threaten traditional democracies.

Democracy, or representative democracy, is today competing for headlines with various emerging national or regional springs. There is also the hum of drones that seek to bomb democracy into place with a carpet of destruction. We must be cautious of all these strategies that experience shows have not helped real democracy to take root and thrive. It is necessary to bear in mind that democracy does not foster hatred within societies among communities and among nations and countries. Democracy stands for unity of purpose in a spirit of mutual understanding.

In conclusion, I wish to state that having your conference in a vibrant democracy, where the will of the people has been cherished, and protected for eight decades and more, there is every hope that your deliberations, amidst the well springs of democracy that prevail in our land, will produce the best results for parliamentary democracy in the Commonwealth and the world.

May you be blessed by the Noble Triple Gem!

Theruvan Saranai!
Address by Rt. Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst MP Chairman CPA Executive Committee

Your Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Vice President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Hon. Chamal Rajapaksa – Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament and President of the CPA, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Hon. Kamlesh Sharma, Vice President of the CPA, Hon. Minuwva Johannes Mahalangu, Officers of the CPA, General Secretary Dr. Shijia, Members of the Executive Committee, Parliamentarians, Clerks, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and other distinguished guests.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope it is a comprehensive and correct introduction.

It is a very great honour and privilege for me as the elected introduction. As the elected introduction, I do not know whether the visitors are confused by the profusion of signs appointing both the CPA Conference and the T20 World Cup, but I suspect it gives a hint of the hearts and minds of your citizens, who may be more easily captured by the cricket than by the proceedings of our Conference. I must say despite that, I am astonished by the amount of literature that you are all pressing in your pockets. I do not think I have ever had such front page attention in the newspapers here than I have in Tewetada and thirty-five years back home.

Those who are able to see most clearly with the aid of 1-Pads may notice that I am wearing a shirt which warns me to the Scottish Parliament. I wear that today because I welcome Andy, plugging on his first ever visit to Sri Lanka.

However, what I really hope is that the hearts and minds of President Rajapaksa should inspire us because we too in the Commonwealth, we are striving for political freedom and reinvigoration.

This week as Parliamentarians, Clerks and Officers will come together as equals in various fora such as workshops at regional meetings. We will talk about issues on topics covering health, education, youth unemployment, foreign policy, gender issues and of particular interest for me is the role of Parliamentarians in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building.

I am saying this because as public representatives from Parliament and State Legislatures, we have the responsibility to represent the interests of the people. It is our duty to see that the resources that our nations have individually and collectively are being used efficiently in order to advance development. As public representatives, we are going to participate in the economic activities.

With these words, I would now like to share with you some of the key aspects of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. We have heard about the knowledge about matters that impact on our democracies and to strengthen the Commonwealth. It is therefore, opportune that we look at the conference that took place this year and what it tackles the challenge of youth unemployment. The Employment Act was passed to give young people some means of earning a livelihood. It is a difficult task and I am sorry that it is also a significant issue in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Youth unemployment was also a significant issue in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

I would like to thank you for taking a few minutes of your time to listen all speeches which we have been given in Sri Lanka. I would like to thank you for taking a few minutes of your time to listen all speeches which we have been given in Sri Lanka. It is our duty to see that the resources that our nations have individually and collectively are being used efficiently in order to advance development. As public representatives, we are going to participate in the economic activities.

With these words, I would now like to share with you some of the key aspects of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. We have heard about the knowledge about matters that impact on our democracies and to strengthen the Commonwealth. It is therefore, opportune that we look at the conference that took place this year and what it tackles the challenge of youth unemployment. The Employment Act was passed to give young people some means of earning a livelihood. It is a difficult task and I am sorry that it is also a significant issue in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Youth unemployment was also a significant issue in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
We will uphold ... continued from p.3...
A matter of special importance is the work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians to increase female representations in Parliament and recognizing the importance of gender considerations in all activities of Commonwealth countries and devise ways to facilitate such trade. I have no doubt that the CPA has achieved much success in realizing the aims of its Strategic Plan 2008 - 2012, especially in assisting

Opening Plenary
Address by the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Secretary General of the Commonwealth

Dr. William F. Shija
Secretary General CPA
stated that the theme of the current conference was "Ensuring a Relevant Commonwealth for the Future". It was essential for the CPA to come up with a dynamic process with the objective of promoting parliamentary democracy within the Commonwealth as well as beyond the Commonwealth.

Dr. Shija was addressing the Opening plenary of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference which commenced at 3.30 p.m. yesterday at the BMICH - Sirimavo Bandaranaike Memorial Exhibition Centre, Colombo. He pointed out that a simple definition of parliamentary democracy would be governance based on majority rule with minority care and share. Many programmes were organized each year with the funds of CPA, to promote parliamentary international diplomacy by establishing new parliament structures. He emphasized that the CPA should continue its gender programmes to support women’s parliamentary governance and ensure gender equality within the Commonwealth Secretariat as well as other partners. At his conclusion, Dr. Shija stated that regional issues such as human trafficking, terrorism, women’s issues and climate change were discussed at Commonwealth conferences and it may assist to overcome these problems by exchanging their regional experience.

Members and Branches to adopt good practice of democratic governance and strengthen the institution of Parliament. You have no doubt helped the Commonwealth deepen its democratic commitment, in big and small nations by promoting best principles of representative government that removes barriers to equality in gender, community, faith and other aspects that seek to limit democracy.

This Conference in Colombo will discuss and decide on the CPA’s new Strategic Plan for the next four years. This is a good time to think of strengthening the core values of democracy. Our work should not be confined to theories and concepts but should look at the more practical aspects that affect the people. Our emphasis on the will of the people should lead us to give the most importance to policies that best serve the interests of the people. There is the need to give the highest priority to the welfare of the people to economic progress and development that positively impact on the lives of people. In this context, it will be interesting to look at Sri Lanka’s own record of success through democracy. Our achievements in education and health stand out as examples to other countries and societies. Our 96 per cent literacy is a proud record that has come from the blend of democracy, with a great tradition of education that came down from Buddhism and later advanced through the Christian churches. Similarly, our success in providing free health services to all also comes from a great tradition of healing that was advanced through democracy. It is also important to note that Sri Lanka achieved 8 per cent GDP growth last year, and the year before, after 6 and 7 per cent growth earlier even during the battle against terrorism because of our commitment to the people and the values of democracy. It is our strong belief that there cannot be peace without development. The reverse is also true; there cannot be development without peace. These are all subjects of much relevance today. One must look forward to this conference recognizing the proper priorities in furthering the democratic process. You will no doubt take into consideration the current global realities that often seem to threaten proper and effective democracy, and also seek to challenge the sovereignty of nation states.

Your presence in Sri Lanka gives you a good opportunity to see for yourselves the progress of democracy in our country, after the major threat it faced under terrorism. This is important in the context of the barrage of lies being spread about Sri Lanka today. As you will see, there is full freedom of travel to any part of the country. You can also speak to anyone, from Government or the Opposition and different communities. I urge you to make use of this opportunity to learn of the real Sri Lanka, in its post-conflict era, when the highest priority is given to nation building through reconciliation.

It is unfortunate that today, many impressions of Sri Lanka in foreign countries, are based on un-verified facts, and wrong or deliberately manipulated dis-information, carried out by those who once supported the forces of terror. These same elements continue to sow the seeds of division and separation through various media, and also influence politicians in their new countries of domicile, to act against Sri Lanka, based on such dis-information.

These are people who claim to speak for Sri Lanka or a section of our people, while plundering the country from their shelters abroad. They do not bother to

continued in p.6......
Note to Spouses:

- You will be comfortable in cotton clothes & flat shoes today.
- Preferably a wide hat to beat the sun, casual cotton clothes, and a pair of comfortable footwear. You will be visiting the beach.
- It will be rather warm and hot inside the Porcelain Factory.
- Please note that you will be able to see the intricately designed porcelain ware created by talented Sri Lankan designers.
- Be mindful of the weight of items, if you opt to buy some of them.

We will uphold......

continued from page 1......

More recently, we protected our democratic system, and the democratic rights of all our people, against what has been correctly described as the most ruthless terrorist organization in the world. At a time of clashes between democracy and terror, we have shown the world that terrorism can be effectively defeated, and the cherished values of democracy restored to people who were denied it for nearly three decades.

You are meeting here today, just two days after democratic elections were successfully conducted to three Provincial Councils in the country, and you may be observing how the people have freely expressed their choice. Sri Lanka’s long tradition of parliamentary democracy has seen governments change via the ballot, and

constitutions being similarly changed and amended.

It is also noteworthy that among the first things done after the defeat of terrorism, first in the Eastern Province, and later in the entire country, was to quickly hold local government, provincial and national elections to obtain a proper mandate from the people, large sections of whom were deprived of their franchise by the forces of terror.

In fact I myself sought a second term in office, even before the expiry of my first term, to obtain a truly national mandate, because the terrorists whose agents are still active in some parts of the world, denied many people in the

continued from page 1.....

Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). It was to learn from the lessons of the conflict, understand how we could avoid such situations again, provide justice to those who had been affected, and, most importantly, seek the path of reconciliation as a nation, through our own experiences. The recommendations of the LLRC are already being implemented, according to a well worked out Plan of Action that we have presented to the nation and the world.

With our undoubted commitment to parliamentary democracy, we have a keen interest in the work and progress of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Your efforts to promote parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance, and interest in building an informed parliamentary community among the member nations, has our strongest support.

The many educational programmes on parliamentary practice and procedure, the efforts at studying matters of regional importance in the development of democracy, the study of democratic systems in the world’s smallest nations, the efforts to train knowledgeable and efficient parliamentary staff, are all in keeping with the goal of strengthening democracy in the world.

continued in p.4......
On behalf of the Sri Lanka Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I am honoured and privileged to welcome you all to the opening ceremony of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

This is the third time we are hosting this meeting in Sri Lanka and that is a reflection of the strong commitment Sri Lanka and our people have towards the values of the Commonwealth and our dedication for Parliamentary democracy which form core values of this association.

Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association are bonded by a shared history: the history of British colonialism.

All our actions today are directed as a thread that binds us together and undoubtedly it has enabled us to create this association and to promote Parliamentary democracy and good governance among our member states.

We, Sri Lankans received universal franchise in 1931, over eighty years ago, when we were still a colony.

Since receiving independence in 1948, the country has had an unbroken tradition of multi-party democracy with regularly held elections and political power alternating between different political parties.

We are intensely proud of the democratic tradition we have nurtured over these 64 years since gaining independence and will continue to ensure that Parliamentary democracy remains vibrant and robust in this part of the world.

It is because of this commitment to Parliamentary democracy that the Commonwealth has bestowed on Sri Lanka, the honour of host to Parliamentary democracy that is a reflection of the strong relationship we have nurtured over these 64 years since gaining independence and will continue to ensure that the CPA remains vibrant and relevant in the years to come.

Before I conclude, I would like to express my profound gratitude to His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka for the support, guidance and encouragement extended to us in organizing this event and your presence this morning has encouraged all of us.

I must also acknowledge the support we have received from the Rt. Honourable Sir Allen Haselhurst, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the CPA, Dr. William F. Ship Secretary — General of the CPA, and from the staff of the CPA headquarters.

May you have a rewarding meeting, may you forge stronger bonds among your fellow Parliamentarians, and may your deliberations contribute to strengthening democracy in all parts of the Commonwealth.

I do hope that you will carry warm memories of Sri Lanka to your home country.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my privilege and great pleasure now to call upon His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, to formally declare open the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

May the Noble Triple Gem Bless you.
“We will uphold the principles of Democracy”

His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka

“At a time of clashes between democracy and terror, we have shown the world that terrorism can be effectively defeated, and the cherished values of democracy restored to people who were denied it for nearly three decades” stated His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Vice Patron of the CPA yesterday.

The President was addressing a galaxy of over 650 distinguished delegates, observers and spouses of delegates from 54 Commonwealth countries and Sri Lankan invitees participating in the official opening the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference last morning at the state-of-the-art Nelum Pokuna (Lotus Pond) Mahinda Rajapaksa Theatre, Colombo.

The overseas Parliamentary representatives comprised Delegates (Hon. Speakers, Members of Parliaments, Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs), Observers, Secretaries, Accompanying Persons, Society of Clerks-at-the-Table (SOCAT) participants and Spouses.

Extracts from the President’s speech is given below:

“As the current Vice Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I am pleased to welcome all delegates to this 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Colombo and honoured to address you on this occasion.

This is an organization with a long and distinguished history in the annals of modern democracy. It was begun in 1911, as the Empire Parliamentary Association, when the British Empire was at the height of its strength, when the sun never set upon it.

Later, as the success of key freedom movements from imperialism and colonialism succeeded, as in India and Sri Lanka - then Ceylon, it was changed to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, as we know it today.

Sri Lanka, as one of the earliest members of the CPA, is glad to host this important international parliamentary conference for the third occasion. It is also important to recall that Sri Lanka is among the members of the CPA, having one of the oldest traditions in parliamentary democracy, being the first country in Asia to have universal franchise, from as far back as 1931.

We have continued this tradition of parliamentary democracy through the past 81 years, protecting it from those who plotted against it, both in uniform and through insurrection.

continued in p.3 ...