



## The special statement made by Hon. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to the nation on 26 April 2019

We are all still reeling from the shock and sorrow of the terrorist attack on Easter Sunday. The goal of the perpetrators behind this inhuman act was to start a bloodbath in our country. But Sri Lanka stood together, and we have not allowed this tragedy to create conflict among our communities.

The Catholic Church, led by His Eminence the Cardinal, our venerable Mahanayakes and the Maha Sangha, Muslim and Hindu religious leaders, civil society organizations and village-level leaders, all committed themselves to maintain the peace that prevailed across the land before this calamity. The Muslim community proved their commitment to social harmony. Our people gave their fullest support to the police and security forces.

For this, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of you.

We lost many of our brothers & sisters and children in this attack. A number of foreigners were killed. Among them were foreign nationals who had come here to help our people. Others were here to enjoy the beauty and hospitality of our country. The exact number of lives lost is being determined. Currently, around 149 people are receiving medical attention. We wish them all a speedy recovery.

The value of human lives lost cannot be measured by money. But the Government immediately offered 1 lakh for funeral purposes and pledged a further 9 lakhs per family as compensation.

The Government will rebuild the three churches affected by the attack. I have discussed with His Eminence Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, along with the State Minister of Defence and Heads of the Security Forces, about resuming the regular worship in our Churches. We are working hard to ensure the safe resumption of all religious activities.

I commend our defence forces for swiftly cracking down and apprehending many suspects within a short period of time. Investigations are progressing at a satisfactory pace. Within the limitations of the information that I can divulge, it is clear that this attack has been diligently planned in great detail over a long period of time. A daring operation of this magnitude could not have been pulled off without the knowledge and support of international elements. We have received information that some of the suspects are currently in foreign countries. In such a situation, we need foreign assistance and expertise.

This group commenced their operations by defacing Buddhist statues in Mawanella. Next, they shot at the Secretary of one of our Ministers, accusing him of providing intelligence about them. The Secretary is a Muslim himself. Now they have targeted the Christians.

It is only a small group that launched this terrorist attack. The majority of them have been arrested along with explosives. A few more remain on the run and we have to apprehend them. Until then, they remain a threat and the danger is not completely over. Therefore, all of us have to be watchful and vigilant. Let's help the Police and tri-forces secure the safety of every Sri Lankan.

I would like to draw your attention to another important point.

The Yahapalana Government has taken many steps to strengthen the security forces since we came to power. The intelligence wing was equipped with advanced expertise and provided all the facilities they needed. There were periodic intelligence reports pertaining to the local groups and individuals connected to this attack. Specific information about this dastardly act had been provided by foreign intelligence sources.

While I reiterate the fact that I did not receive this critical information prior to the attack, I do not run away from my responsibility.

As Prime Minister, I share in the collective responsibility for this. I express my sincere regret to the people of our country for the Government's lapse.

But, it is not enough to simply apologise. We have to make sure these mistakes are never repeated in the future. We must take measures to prevent such systemic failures, and commit ourselves to safeguard all human life.

I vow to make this my mission.

The world is already at war against this ideological fanaticism. We now know that these attackers are linked to the ISIS network of extremists who operate from a large number of countries. This global terror has already infiltrated Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Maldives.

Therefore this terror cannot be fought alone by us at a national level. The explosion might be in Sri Lanka, but the trigger might be elsewhere. The planning and training could be done in a foreign country. The brainwashing could take place anywhere. Without weeding out all these elements, we cannot eliminate this danger.

I humbly urge you not to fall prey to false propaganda.

Countries that faced such attacks made changes to their internal legal systems. They introduced new laws to combat global terrorism. But countries that did not experience such situations did not focus their attention on such measures.

Sri Lanka has a very narrow definition of aiding terrorism. Therefore, we find that our existing laws are insufficient to deal with the extraordinary situation we are faced with. If we are to efficiently combat global terrorism, we have to broaden the scope of this old definition to allow us to arrest those aiding terrorism and confiscate their property. We also have to enact laws that deal severely with academic institutions that impart extremist religious views.

A number of clauses that deal with global terrorism were introduced into the Draft Counter Terrorism Act. We further planned to add more such clauses at the amendment stage. But these new laws have not been passed by Parliament yet.

That is not enough. We need a programme to rehabilitate those who don't directly support terrorist acts, but harbour views bordering on extremism. We have seen instances in England where terrorist acts were carried out without a single weapon, by only using vehicles. That is why we need such countries to share their experience with us.

This is a tough challenge. But I promise you that we will eliminate this enemy with the help of every peace-loving Sri Lankan, and all the nations of the world. Leaders of many countries have already pledged us their fullest support.

This entire week our focus has been on security. The entire Government machinery has been focused on arresting the suspects and returning security to normalcy. Next week, we will have to start rebuilding the economy.

This attack dealt a hard blow to our economy. Everyone, from the lottery seller to the large corporates, has faced a serious setback. Tourism has been crippled. According to our current calculations, the estimated damage to the economy is almost 1 billion dollars. It can easily exceed this. That is a serious situation. We must fight hard to win this economic battle as well.

The United States Millennium Challenge Corporation Agreement we signed today is a timely boost for the economy. This gives us 500 million US dollars for development work.

We may speak different languages, follow different faiths, and belong to different ethnicities. But we are all children of Sri Lanka *maatha*. Let us stand together in her service at this hour of national peril. Spread maithri, karuna, muditha and upeksha among all.

We are a resilient people. We have been here before. And we have got through. Let's give each other a helping hand to rise from the rubble, and get Sri Lanka back on track. Let's face these tough times together, and secure a safe future for our children and country.

Thank you.