

17.07.2018/ 3.13-17/

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(மாண்புமிகு ராஜவரோதயம் சம்பந்தன் - எதிர்க்கட்சி முதல்வர்)

(The Hon. Rajavarothiam Sampanthan - Leader of the Opposition)

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman of Committees, for the opportunity given to me to say a few words in regard to this Adjournment Motion moved by the Hon. Dinesh Gunawardena. I do not wish to go into the technicalities of the Sri Lanka-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, Sir. There have been some criticisms made. I think the Government should look at whatever criticisms that had been made.

Sir, I only want to refer to our two countries, Sri Lanka and Singapore, and their history over the past several decades. When Singapore attained independence, its legendary leader, the first Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, wanted to model Singapore's development on Sri Lanka. Singapore was a backward city-state. He looked upon Sri Lanka as a country that was developing and flourishing after Independence with an efficient Public Service, an efficient educational system even at the university level and he wanted to model Singapore's development on Sri Lanka. But, over a period of time, it appeared and became clear that while Singapore was advancing in several areas and becoming a prosperous country, Sri Lanka was receding and going backwards.

I have been reading the biography of Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore and from what he states in his biography, it is clear that he had been visiting Sri Lanka several times; Sri Lankan leaders have been visiting Singapore several times. Mr. Lee Kuan Yew met with Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike; he met with Mr. Dudley Senanayake; he met with Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike; he met with Mr. Ranasinghe Premadasa and before that, he met with Mr. J. R. Jayewardene and all these leaders were asking Singapore to assist Sri Lanka in the matter of development when, unfortunately, such development did not take place. And why did such development not take place? There was no agreement

signed between Singapore and the Governments of any one of the leaders I referred to in the past.

What is the key to Singapore's success? Where has Singapore gone and where are we? I find, Sir, that in the late 1960s, a few years after Singapore attained independence, its per capita income was US Dollars 500. Today, currently, its per capita income is US Dollars 55,000! It was US Dollars 500 in the late 1960s and 50 years later, it is US Dollars 55,000, which is an increase of more than a hundredfold! The per capita income of Singapore has increased a hundredfold in the last 50 years. Where have we gone? What has happened to us?

I will tell you, Sir, why Singapore has succeeded. In Singapore, good governance operates on five principles. The first is, meritocracy. You are judged on the basis of merit; not on the basis of political influence, not on any other consideration, but on meritocracy. The second is, ethnic harmony. In Singapore, you have Chinese, you have Malays and you have Tamils. There are also four official languages in Singapore: English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. That is, they give recognition to all the people who live in Singapore. There is complete equality; there is no discrimination; there is no denial of anyone's entitlement. The third is, clean government. Bribery is not tolerated; corruption is not tolerated. From top to bottom, everyone has got to be clean, free from bribery and free from corruption. The fourth is, the rule of law. The rule of law is strictly enforced irrespective of who you are. You may be a big man, you may be a small man, but the rule of law is strictly enforced. The final principle is, social equity. Whether it be in the field of health, in the field of education, in the field of employment or in the field of development, there is equity, there is equality. So, Sir, those are the basic principles on which Singapore has developed.

It is because we have not observed those principles - we have not observed ethnic harmony; we have not brought about unity amongst our people; we have not observed meritocracy; we have not observed clean government; we have not observed the rule of law and we have not observed social equity - that we have

moved backwards. I think, Sir, that is something we must remember. We must improve.

Sir, when I read Mr. Lee Kuan Yew's biography, there was a very interesting comment he had made. Singapore had no port initially. Subsequently, he built a port in Singapore. He was asked the question, Sir, as to whether he praised anyone for the miraculous development in his country. His answer was, "I owe very much to the leftist politicians in Sri Lanka." He said that he was prompted to construct a harbour in Singapore to provide bunkering facilities to ships sailing around the world when the Colombo Harbour was constantly crippled due to trade union actions led by Left politicians and that was the beginning of Singapore's development. Our Harbour was crippled through strikes organized by Left politicians and Lee Kuan Yew saw in that an opportunity to build a harbour in Singapore and supply facilities to ships from around the world. That, Sir, is the position. If Singapore has succeeded and we have not succeeded, these are the reasons why we have not succeeded. We have not been able to take our country forward because we have not governed our country on the basis of principles that are necessary, compulsory and essential to ensure proper economic development.

When I listened to some of the criticisms made by some of my friends here, I was wondering whether we are looking a gift horse in the mouth. There is a story, Sir, that when somebody presented another person with a horse - the horse was a gift - the other person, instead of thanking the gentleman who gifted the horse, looked in the mouth of the horse to find out whether the teeth were in good condition. So, this is like looking a gift horse in the mouth to see whether its teeth are in good condition. Singapore does not need a Free Trade Agreement with us. Singapore has gone so far away from us. People in Singapore earn more than hundred times what we earn. So, Singapore does not need a Free Trade Agreement with us; it is we who need a Free Trade Agreement with Singapore.

I would, therefore, urge the Government, if there be any corrections that need to be made to the Agreement, make those corrections, but implement the

Agreement for the benefit of our country, use the expertise of Singapore, use the technology that Singapore can provide you, use the services that Singapore can provide you and develop our country's economy because this country needs to be developed. This country needs to go forward. Our people are suffering from a diminishing quality of life. Every day, every week, every month, every year we are moving backwards. We cannot move backwards. This must end. We must start co-operating with countries that can be helpful to us. There is an Agreement we have to sign with India: ETCA - Economic and Technology Co-operation Agreement. That has not been signed. Why? Fear, prejudice, irrational thinking. You cannot go on like this. You cannot turn a blind eye to development taking place the world over, in several countries. You must open out. You must have courage, you must have the confidence that you can engage with the other countries, with development taking place in other countries and benefit ourselves from such engagement, from such co-operation, from such coordination. We must abandon this attitude of fear, apprehension and irrational thinking.

I would therefore urge Sir, that subject to whatever corrections that need to be made in terms of the criticisms levelled against the Agreement, please, implement the Agreement without delay and please, give Sri Lanka an opening towards development.

Thank you.