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State of emergency declared for 7 days

Special Announcement by President Maithripala Sirisena on Wednesday

(pmdnews.lk) - I decided to make this special address today, as a tense situation has occurred during the last few days owing to several very unfortunate incidents in several parts of the country, causing disharmony and tensions among ethnic groups.

From the past, our country has experienced internal as well as external struggles. However, ours is a country where Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher and all other communities have lived with peace, unity and harmony together. If we look at the decade of 1940, we know how we Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim people worked together like brethren to free our country from the grip of colonial masters. It was unfortunate that peace and unity among ethnic groups deteriorated, leaving the country in a situation of protracted war that brought about many a crisis.

You all know that we are a government that is dedicated to bring about national harmony and reconciliation. During the last few days, losses of lives and destruction of property in the areas of Ampara and Kandy, have given

rise to a situation where the normalcy of everyday life of people in the country. I express my profound condolences to the families of the deceased and to those who lost their property. I strongly condemn all criminal activities. I have instructed the Police to take stern legal actions against those people, groups or organizations related in any way to these incidents.

I have also instructed the Police, Special Task Force, Army and public officers as well as regional politicians to act in a manner promoting peace and to contain tensions in order to create an environment where all people can live in harmony. In a moment like this, it is important that we all work together. I want to mention here that the government is dedicated to take all actions necessary to strengthen national reconciliation, peace, trust and friendship among ethnic groups, taking cognizance of situations like this. All respectfully request from all Buddhist, Hindu, Islam and Christian religious leaders to advice regional political leadership to promote and foster peace and harmony as well as to intervene to restore concord and

amity whenever tensions arise in their areas. I emphasize the fact the Police, Special Task Force as well as the Army has been deployed round the clock from yesterday to restore normalcy in the affected areas.

These steps were taken in a special meeting of the National Security Council to discuss the prevailing situation and a formal programme has been prepared for future actions after a meeting with Prime Minister and the Cabinet. As such, I request every citizen of this country to act peacefully in this situation.

Na hi verena verani sammantidha kudacanam averena ca sammanti esa dhammo sanantano (Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred in this world. It is appeased only by loving-kindness. This is an eternal law).

We know as Buddhists that Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred. Therefore, as a Buddhist country, whatever hatred or violence perpetrated brings shame to our country. At the same time, I request

from everybody, including Hindu, Islam and Christian devotees to find peace and harmony within their religious philosophy and to work together to strengthen our freedom and to achieve economic prosperity, in a peaceful manner.

In order to strengthen political stability in the country as well as to restore peace, amity and concord among all ethnic groups in the country, I must mention that the government is committed to take all necessary actions, while taking the strictest legal actions against whatever party perpetrating violence.

At the same time, we observe that some are trying to disturb peace and unleash misinformation and hatred via social media, rumours and telephone calls. We will take stern actions against them.

I consider this an important opportunity to emphasize that I will do everything it takes to restore a free and a peaceful environment in this motherland, which is yours and mine, in order to everybody to live a happy life.

Thank you all! May Triple Gems Bless You

Digana turns divisive

(FT.LK) - The Government on Monday deployed 200 Special Task Force (STF) personnel and declared special area curfew in Digana in the Kandy District, after mobs attacked shops and places of religious worship in the Muslim-majority town.

Some 27 Muslim-owned shops and businesses and several houses were set on fire, while at least one mosque was damaged during the overnight violence that spilled over into Tuesday. Twenty-four persons were arrested by Teldeniya police in connection with the violence. President Maithripala Sirisena called for calm and demanded an independent police inquiry into the Digana violence. President Sirisena also urged law enforcement agencies to ensure the safety and security of residents in the area. In a statement on Monday night, the Government Information Department said police had been placed on high alert to ensure the law is enforced and the

situation does not spiral into an inter-communal conflagration. The suspects had been arrested, the Government Information Department added, calling for calm.

Police fired tear gas to disperse crowds that surrounded the Teldeniya police station following the arrests of the rioters and eventually declared curfew in the Kandy administrative area in order to restore calm. The special police curfew will remain in effect till 6AM today, and is likely to be extended police said.

All Government schools in the Kandy Administrative district were also declared closed in the wake of the riots, Education Minister Akila Viraj Kariyawasam announced.

"We imposed the curfew as the violence was spreading and was becoming difficult to control and there was clear evidence that outside influence was instigating the violence," Sri Lanka Police Spokesperson Superintendent of Police Ruwan Gunasekara told Daily FT. Close to 1000 police personnel have been deployed in Kandy District along with 200 Special Task Force personnel and another 200 army troops to control the situation. Releasing a statement, the Government also said that Police have been put "on alert to ensure that the enforcement of the law proceeds without hindrance and the situation does not spiral into an inter-communal conflagration."

"We have already sent Army soldiers to Digana, Teldeniya and Kandy town areas, and we have also put more troops on standby as requested by Police,"



Brigadier Sumith Atapattu told Daily FT. Reports from the area, including from Teldeniya police, said the violence appeared to be a reprisal for a dispute involving the assault of a Sinhalese

man by four Muslims that happened over a week ago, which eventually took a communal turn.

The incident that sparked violence on the streets of Digana occurred on 22 February, when a 42-year old Sinhalese man was brutally assaulted for attempting to overtake a three wheeler. After nearly 10 days in the Intensive Care Unit of the Kandy General Hospital, the man succumbed to his injuries on 3 March (Saturday), correspondents in the area said. All four accused, who were immediately arrested and remanded until 7 March, hailed from Digana town, the reports said. The funeral of the victim was held on Monday and likely triggered

the violence, police reports coming out of the area said. The man who had been killed in Teldeniya was the sole breadwinner of his family and a hard worker, said Hamzah Rahmath, a social worker in the area. The incident on the road had been over a three-wheeler side mirror, Rahmath said. The accused in the killing had been intoxicated, the social worker added. "Now the whole community is in trouble because of their mistake," Rahmath said.



After hours of rioting and burning, the town of Digana looked war-struck in images and videos emerging from the area. Tyres were set on fire on the main streets, sending clouds of thick black smoke into the sky. White funeral flags swayed in the wind above the smoke and flames rising from the streets. Controversial Bodu Bala Sena General Secretary, Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero, whose presence at these scenes of communal tension often becomes a catalyst for escalation, ... SEE P10



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