

SRI LANKAN FOREIGN POLICY : SOME PERSPECTIVES*

BY HER EXCELLENCY CHANDRIKA BANDARANAIKE KUMARATUNGA

I wish first of all to thank the Council of Management of the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies for inviting me to address this Convocation. Participating in the award of BCIS Diplomas in International Affairs holds for me far more meaning than the mere exercise of official patronage. It carries with it a very special pleasure.

The Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies, founded in 1974, has performed a pioneering and invaluable role in generating public interest in foreign affairs, and in developing an informed public opinion on foreign policy issues. Its Diploma Course, now in its 10th year, its many seminars and round-tables, and its extensive programme of public lectures by foreign and local personalities have all contributed to that end. The BCIS Council of Management, and their indefatigable Director, Mr. Ray Forbes, are to be congratulated warmly on this achievement.

Moreover, it seems to me eminently fitting that this pioneering venture in the field of foreign affairs should have come to be undertaken by an institution bearing the Bandaranaike name. I say this for two reasons. In the evolution of post-independence Sri Lanka, recognition of the importance of foreign affairs for our national interest and the attempt to forge a coherent foreign policy to serve that end occurred for the first time during the Administration led by my father, the late Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. He was the first Sri Lankan leader to articulate a distinctive world view, consonant with our situation and our legitimate aspirations.

Thereafter, the consistent application of such a policy, and the professional management of our foreign relations designed to acquire for ourselves a distinctive place within the international community, came to be the hallmarks of the Administrations led by my mother, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Under her direction - she was also Foreign Minister - we advanced at two levels. On the bilateral plane, we were able to resolve previously intractable problems with our closest and most important neighbour, India. On the multilateral plane, we played our full part within Third World Councils such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77, as well as at the United Nations, where we served a term on the Security Council too.

The apogee of international recognition of our conduct of foreign affairs could be said to have been reached in the 1970s. In 1976, three Sri Lankans simultaneously held three high elective posts within the international commu-