

*Full text of the Minister's statement:*

Excellencies,

Heads of Specialized Agencies of the United Nations and of other International Organizations in Colombo,

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Diplomatic Corps,

I thank you for joining in this diplomatic briefing. As you are aware, our country has a long tradition of democratic governance, with our people having been exercising without a break for 79 years now since 1931, the right to elect their administrations on the basis of universal adult franchise. During this long period, we have had many elections. Few have been as momentous however, as that which took place yesterday.

There are several reasons for rightfully describing yesterday's poll as momentous. It was the first electoral process to have been held on a nationwide basis after our country was liberated from the menace of the terrorism, that threatened for over 2 ½ decades our territorial integrity and our peace and prosperity. It also showed that despite the difficulties and hardships they had to endure and overcome during this long period, the commitment to democratic governance of our people was not in anyway dimmed, but rather encouraged to burn even brighter. The enthusiasm of our people to vote which I believe would have been noted by those of you who travelled about yesterday either in Colombo or in areas outside the capital, was truly remarkable. The election also took place in an atmosphere of peace, when compared to some earlier occasions on which the then prevalent sinister and anti-democratic forces did everything within their power, to intimidate voters from casting their ballots.

Almost all of us are now aware of the final segment of this election, when today at 4.30 in the evening the Commissioner of Elections declared President Mahinda Rajapaksa elected as the sixth Executive President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. The President secured 6,015,943 or 57.88% of the total votes polled, votes as opposed to the 4,173,185 votes (40.15%) cast in favour of the other principal contender General Sarath Fonseka. The results show that the President obtained his victory with a wide margin of 17.73% over that gained by his nearest rival

As one who is a qualified voter in Sri Lanka, I wish to use this occasion to place on record my own personal appreciation for the manner in which the Commissioner of Elections and his staff ensured the success and integrity of the poll. As I understand, the Commissioner took every possible measure necessary to prevent any attempt at malpractice, including through the deployment of 68,000 Police personnel plus 25 Army battalions. Each polling station was therefore very well secured by both the military as well as the Police. The Commissioner deployed 250,000 Public Servants for election duty, either in the polling stations or for purposes of counting. He also invited foreign Observers for the election and obtained in this regard, assistance from the Association of Asian Election Authorities and the Commonwealth Secretariat. These Observers were deployed by the Commissioner in all Provinces and in all Districts of the country and I believe that at the moment they are engaged in the preparation of their findings, which they will present tomorrow.

In addition to those foreign Observers invited by the Commissioner, there were also Sri Lanka NGOs that engaged in observing the election process. These NGOs too were able to invite foreigners to augment the number of Sri Lankans they deployed for this purpose and whenever the Commissioner recommended the issue of visas for such persons, our Missions overseas promptly complied and facilitated. Let me refer as well to the comments for example of one of these NGOs, the Centre for the Monitoring of Election Violence, whose Chief Spokesperson in an audio comment posted on the internet characterized the polling on the 26th as “relatively incident free”, while also adding that though there were claims, there was “no hard evidence of malpractice”. If one were to go by these comments, one could assume that all those, both Sri Lankan and non-Sri Lankan involved in observing the election, would commend the Commissioner and his staff for their dedication.

I believe it is sentiments on these same lines that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition wanted to emphasize, when he stated at his Media Briefing yesterday at the end of the polls and I quote “in the overall context, the election was conducted peacefully”. End of quote.

It is however regrettable that there are some who have sought to tarnish the celebration of democracy which took place yesterday, through the propagation of unsubstantiated rumour and malicious innuendo. I refer to the stories that have been circulated of a “stand off situation” involving General Sarath Fonseka. Let me say with all responsibility as Minister of Foreign Affairs that Sri Lanka is a democratic country and that the Government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa like its predecessors, is committed to the supremacy of the rule of law.

Therefore, everyone in Sri Lanka is entitled to equal protection under the law. At the same time, the rule of law requires that no one can transgress the law and then claim to be above the law and immune to the consequences of his or her actions. Therefore, only those who are not innocent of wrong doing, have grounds to be fearful.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The margin of victory of almost 18% provides President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his administration a strong and firm foundation on which to build for the further strengthening of national amity and for the progress and prosperity of our nation. In the “Mahinda Chintana – Vision for the Future” released earlier this month, President Rajapaksa said “the people of our country are now awaiting the victory in the “economic war” in a manner similar to our victory in the war against terrorism”. The President went on to pledge “I am well prepared and ready to face this challenge”.

President Rajapaksa envisages that Sri Lanka would attain economic progress both through the necessary domestic measures, as well as through leveraging her location, so that she becomes a dynamic global hub for maritime transport, for aviation, for knowledge based services and for the development of energy resources. All of this would require our continued and productive engagement with the international community.

Let me therefore conclude ladies and gentlemen, by affirming to you that the decisive mandate gained by President Rajapaksa will give Sri Lanka the strength to be a firm and steadfast partner, who seeks to develop with each of the nations or institutions you represent relations that are mutually beneficial and founded on the principles of friendship, respect and understanding. To those who respond to our overtures of friendship, we can confidently say that in the coming period of President Rajapaksa’s continued administration, you and we will together surely see a phenomenal and exponential growth in all aspects of our relationship.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention to my opening remarks. I am now ready to respond questions or clarifications you may wish to seek.