

Statement following the election of President Mahinda Rajapaksa to a second term

President Mahinda Rajapaksa won a historic and resounding victory in the Presidential Election held yesterday (26), the first free and fair election in which the entire country could participate in nearly three decades, and also the first such election since the defeat of terrorism in Sri Lanka in May last year.

The people of Sri Lanka have spoken and they have voted for an end to division, an end to terrorism, and for a new beginning of peace and prosperity.

We are proud at this demonstration of the vitality of our democracy.

President Rajapaksa, who called this election two years before the end of his first six year term, to get a fresh mandate from the entire country, thanks those who supported him to achieve this massive victory, and also thanks all those who voted for the other candidates in the spirit of, and belief in democracy; helped ensure a peaceful election; and for their commitment to the democratic process. He is proud at being the first President for almost three decades who can rightly claim to have the widest mandate from all of Sri Lanka.

Following this unparalleled victory, the President assures that he will work with utmost vigour on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka, considering himself as the leader of all Sri Lankans, and expresses his determination to make this to be Sri Lanka's decade.

Amidst the new surge of democratic feeling, President Rajapaksa sees the need to put behind the challenges of the past, driven by violence and division, and continue the work already initiated to heal those wounds of the past and give ear to the new needs and aspirations of the people.

The results of this election marks an exciting time for Sri Lanka, for many reasons. Firstly, it endorses Sri Lanka's commitment to peace. President Rajapaksa intends to ensure that we build on the peace already achieved and move towards a full reconciliation programme, and that our land is respected around the world for justice and equality of rights

Indeed, across Sri Lanka, one already sees the fruits of securing peace, in enhanced development, new investment both Sri Lankan and foreign, new infrastructure development and the rise of entrepreneurship. There is an upswing in the economy endorsed by international financial institutions.

Emergency measures taken to defend the country and people against terrorism will be dismantled, not hastily but in due course, and in keeping with the proper security considerations.

President Rajapaksa conducted this election campaign with the promise of taking the country to a prosperous future. Therefore, the policies of

government in the years ahead, will lead to Sri Lanka embracing prosperity. No one will be left out, or left behind in the new prosperity of the country.

The mandate given to the President by the people has also taken note that for many years, international observers have regarded our economy to be a success despite significant problems faced. Now, we will be an even greater success because we have resolved the most pressing problems.

For those in the north and east of our country, including many who have been displaced, President Rajapaksa acknowledges the hardships they have experienced; and is determined to ensure that they are supported to rebuild their lives. In the period ahead, areas that were once populated by mines and characterised by fear, will be filled with crops, new skills, and characterised by hope.

The President has a detailed programme to improve the whole of Sri Lanka, building on the steady economic foundation developed by the Government in the last four years. The country's factories will be modernised and workers will begin producing higher value goods; the service sector will be improved, markets will be expanded and new areas of economic activity explored. The country's energy supply will be brought up to 100% removing power shortages from the country once and for all, and new and sustainable sources of energy will be developed and harnessed.

New homes, roads, airports and ports are being built and new water supplies, both for drinking and irrigation are being developed, bringing the evidence of progress, peace and prosperity for all to benefit from.

The policies of the President are aimed at bringing the world to come and experience the real Sri Lanka. Tourism will have an important place in economic planning and investment. In other fields, too, investors will see the opportunities available because of Sri Lanka's highly skilled workers, significant resources and proud work ethic. The expansion of Information Technology will be actively encouraged, and the New Sri Lanka will see more jobs for youth, better training, better services, and improved quality of life.

Sri Lanka will quickly move from a country known for brain-drain, to one of brain-gain, with the new incentives by Government, and new economic activity that will draw Sri Lankans back to their motherland.

There were many, both in Sri Lanka and abroad, who criticised President Rajapaksa's policies to bring an end to violence and terrorism that threatened our own people, as well as our region. They alleged that the measures taken by the government undermined democracy.

The overwhelming mandate given to President Rajapaksa in this election has given the answer to these critics. The people of Sri Lanka, democratically and very clearly, have shown that they are now free of

threats, free of fear, free of terrorism – and they have shown they support the measures which have freed them.

Today, the President says to all those who have criticised him and his policies in this regard, often out of ignorance, that it is the time to set aside these differences and join in helping Sri Lanka to achieve its goals of progress through democratic means.

President Rajapaksa's call at this moment of electoral victory is for all Sri Lankans to set aside their differences, and come together to help build the nation on the firm foundation of the peace achieved, and strengthened by the people's own faith in democracy, in the oldest democracy in Asia. He calls upon all to transcend differences of ethnicity, religion and politics to join in the great task of nation building, and also invites all friends of Sri Lanka to join in this admirable venture.

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