

NEWS SRI LANKA

Embassy of Sri Lanka, Washington DC

RANIL WICKREMESINGHE SWORN IN AS PRIME MINISTER



Following the victory of the United National Front for Good Governance at the general election on August 17th, the leader of the United National Party Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn in as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka on August 21.

After Mr. Wickremesinghe took oaths as the new Prime Minister, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP), to work together in the next Parliament.

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe who contested from the Colombo District in the election consolidated his victory by polling a record 500,506 votes. It is the highest number of votes polled by a candidate in Sri Lanka's election history.

Ranil Wickremesinghe has served as Prime Minister thrice before: first, from May 1993 to August 1994, then again from December 2001 to April 2004 and most recently he was appointed as Prime Minister for a third time following the election of President Maithripala Sirisena on January 8. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has been the leader of the United National Party since 1994 and a Member of Parliament for the Colombo District since 1977. He is also the leader of the United National Front for Good Governance.

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe was educated at Royal College, Colombo. Later he entered the Faculty of Law at the University of Ceylon (now University of Colombo). After graduation, he completed the law exams at the Sri Lanka Law College and took oaths as an advocate in 1972.

VISIT TO SRI LANKA BY U.S. ASSISTANT SECRETARIES OF STATE



U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Nisha Biswal and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour Tom Malinowski undertook a visit to Sri Lanka in August. During the visit they called on President Maithripala Sirisena, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and also met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mangala Samaraweera as well as other government leaders.

The meeting with the Foreign Minister on August 25, was followed by remarks to the media by Minister Samaraweera and Assistant Secretaries Biswal and Malinowski:

Minister Mangala Samaraweera: Good Morning Ladies & Gentlemen. I have just concluded discussions with Ms. Nisha Biswal, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia and Mr. Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour of the US State Department. I also welcomed Ambassador Atul Keshap who just assumed duties as the United States' Ambassador to Sri Lanka.

We have continued the dialogue that began following the election of President Sirisena in January and my appointment as Foreign Minister then. During our previous meetings and following to my visit to Washington in

February, this year, we agreed to rebuild our multifaceted bilateral relationship. Several new areas of cooperation were identified during the very successful visit of Secretary Kerry to Colombo in May this year.

Our discussions today focused on follow-up on those understandings and on working towards even closer and tangible links. We discussed steps taken by the Government of President Maithripala Sirisena to promote reconciliation and to strengthen the rule of law as part of our Government's overall objective of ensuring good governance, respect for human rights and strengthening our economy.

In keeping with the specific pledge in President Maithripala Sirisena's manifesto of January 2015, and now that we have achieved political stability through one of the most free and fair elections held in this country, I outlined measures being taken to address concerns regarding alleged human rights violations, including through independent domestic mechanisms.

We have agreed on prioritizing closer economic cooperation. The United States is Sri Lanka's single largest export market. 23% of our total exports enter the US market. We want to enhance our trade and business relations and encourage more US investors to take advantage of the economic opportunities in Sri Lanka.

We look forward to regular high level interactions at all levels, reflecting the current trajectory in the US - Sri Lanka relationship.

Later today, Assistant Secretary Biswal will call on President Sirisena and on Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

MANGALA SAMARAWEEERA APPOINTED FOREIGN MINISTER

DEP. FOREIGN MINISTER TO FOCUS ON ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY



Mangala Samaraweera was appointed Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister on August 24th. Taking oaths in the presence of President Maithripala Sirisena at the Presidential Secretariat, he re-affirmed his commitment to "faithfully perform the duties and discharge the functions of the office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in accordance with the Constitution".

This is the third time Minister Samaraweera will hold the portfolio, having held it for the first time between November 2005 and January 2007, and for the second time between January 2015 and August 2015.

After the ceremony, Minister Samaraweera said that

he would "build, with even greater vigour, on the tremendous goodwill the international community extended to Sri Lanka after the January 8 revolution", adding that, "this intensification of engagement and strengthening of relations will be made possible by the political stability arising from the decisive mandate given by the people in the general election".

He said that he would "place economic diplomacy at the centre of Sri Lanka's foreign affairs - focusing on promoting trade, tourism and investment". Minister Samaraweera also noted that "restructuring the Foreign Ministry and the rationalization of Sri Lanka's diplomatic missions abroad was an urgent priority".

Dr. Harsha de Silva assumed duties as the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs on September 11th. The Deputy Minister was received at the Ministry by the Secretary of the Ministry and other senior officials. A religious ceremony was held at the Ministry prior to his assuming duties.

Speaking to the media after assuming duties, the Deputy Minister said that he would immediately focus on economic diplomacy in his work at the Ministry to help move the country forward from peace to prosperity.

He stated that Sri Lanka had fallen behind by not having been able to focus on the global economic agenda, while tackling the political aspects of foreign policy and that he looked forward to join and complement Foreign Minister Samaraweera's work

and efforts in the diplomatic field with the increasingly important area of economic diplomacy.

He stated that he would focus on the four areas of trade, investment, growth and business and noted that it would be through enhancing and strengthening these areas that Sri Lanka would be able to address its challenges in the years ahead and move the trade agenda forward.

He noted that his immediate focus would be on trade agreements, both bilateral and multilateral and that he would bring his wealth of knowledge, proven experience in economic and financial issues to bear on his work and tasks ahead at the Foreign Ministry, so that Sri Lanka could move ahead resolutely and confidently.

U.S. CONGRATULATES SRI LANKA ON HOLDING FREE AND FAIR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

The US hailed the holding of free and fair parliamentary elections on August 17th. A statement read out by the Spokesperson of the US State Department said: The United States commends the Sri Lankan people and government for yesterday's election, which demonstrated their enduring commitment to democracy and the rule of law.

The United States applauds the Sri Lankan elections commissioner, Sri Lankan civil society, and the candidates themselves for holding free and fair elections that were widely hailed as among the most peaceful in Sri Lanka's history. The United States looks forward to working with President Sirisena, the prime minister, and the new government.

U.S. AMBASSADOR TO SRI LANKA AND MALDIVES PRESENTS CREDENTIALS



Atul Keshap, the new U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka and Maldives, presented his credentials today to President Maithripala Sirisena in a ceremony in Colombo. The ceremony marks the official beginning of Keshap's tenure as the U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka.

EVENT: ELECTIONS IN SRI LANKA & NEW PROSPECTS FOR U.S.-SRI LANKA RELATIONS

On August 17, just a few months after the election of Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena, Sri Lankan voters confirmed their support for a broad-based national unity government with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe at its head. By decisively rejecting former President Mahinda Rajapaksa's comeback bid, voters also validated the new government's foreign policy orientation and opened the way for a greater rapprochement with the West. In May, U.S. Secretary John Kerry became the first United States secretary of state to visit Colombo in over a decade. However, much more must be done to rebuild the U.S.-Sri Lanka relationship. Ambassador Kariyawasam will discuss the future of U.S.-Sri Lanka relations. Carnegie's Frederic Grare will moderate.

REGISTER

DATE Tuesday, September 15, 2015

TIME 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

LOCATION 1779 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20036

SPEAKER Prasad Kariyawasam

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DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL: NO MORE BARRIERS

Checkpoints are usually found at border crossings between two countries, such as USA and Canada. This is to ensure that visitors travelling from Country A to Country B have all the correct papers and would not pose a security or other threat. But here in Sri Lanka, there was a unique situation where a "border crossing" in all but name operated for nearly two decades at Omanthai near Vavuniya, physically separating the North and the South. Worse, it not only physically distanced but also emotionally divided the various communities in the island.

This military checkpoint came into being as a result of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) dominating most of the North in the 1990s. It was vital, from a national security point of view, to ensure that the LTTE would not have access to materials that could be used for purposes of terrorising the Southern populace. Hence baggages and personal belongings of North-bound persons were checked. Persons coming to the South from the North were also checked to block the entry of hardcore terrorists and items such as explosive devices. It was a necessary evil in the context in which it came into being and operated thereafter. Beyond the checkpoint was a so-called "No Man's Land", followed by Tiger-controlled territory.

This checkpoint was so deeply ingrained in our psyche over a period of time that many people referred to villages bordering the North as "Border Villages", an anachronism of the highest order. It became an accepted fact of life that no one disputed. The checkpoint somehow reminded the people that they were living in a physically and emotionally divided nation.

Even after the complete liberation of the North from the LTTE in May 2009 and the re-opening of the Kandy-Jaffna A9 road to civilian traffic, the military continued to operate the Omanthai checkpoint

though on a somewhat reduced scale. This was the right thing to do, because one cannot afford to take chances with national security immediately after a war.

However, six years after the war when the North and the South have been completely integrated and the people are free to move as they please anywhere in the island (a right guaranteed by the Constitution itself), there is no need to maintain a checkpoint, even in reduced form, that harks back to the era of division. That could somehow give the impression that the North is a separate part of the country. This is the last thing our country needs as the Government is working towards achieving genuine reconciliation among the different communities.

Fortunately, the defence authorities have come to the same conclusion and dismantled the entire checkpoint complex with effect from Saturday. The checkpoint was redundant for some time anyway because the Northern rail passengers and goods are not subject to any checks at all.

It is a step in the right direction that will give a correct signal to the International Community that Sri Lanka is no longer a nation divided on ethnic lines. To Sri Lankans, it will mean they are free to travel to the North and South without even a minor hassle. It will bring the communities even closer together. With the Omanthai checkpoint gone, only a very few checkpoints manned by the Police are still being maintained in Colombo primarily to check heavy vehicles entering the city. At some point in the future it may be possible to remove them as well, but such matters are best left to the security analysts and experts who know what they are doing.

It must be stressed that the removal of military checkpoints or posts does not compromise national security in any way, because the defence authorities are taking

FIRST GENUINE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT IN LANKA'S HISTORY

- *Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Foreign Affairs*



Today, the 3rd of September 2015, will be remembered as a red letter day in Sri Lanka's political history. For the first time since Independence a National Government has been formed with Parliamentary approval: Sri Lanka's two main political parties can now work together to address the many unsolved challenges facing our country. The recognition of Mr. R. Sampanthan as Leader of the Opposition has also made this a red letter day; heralding a new era of unity, consensus and reconciliation.

This is the first genuine National Government in post-independence Sri Lanka. The so-called 'National Governments' of the past were either, an

exercise in 'Power Politics' based on political opportunism and self-interest, or a coalition of the unwilling put together through intimidation, bribery and blackmail. Opposition Members of Parliament were spirited away to the Government benches without the consent of the political parties they represented, leaving a trail of splintered political parties in the country weakening the very fabric of democracy.

During the last Presidential election, both Mr. Maithripala Sirisena and Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe promised to depart from this unsavoury and undemocratic practice. In the first 100 days itself, the 19th amendment was passed which, along with many other important constitutional reforms, introduced the contours of a National Government.

That dream has turned into reality. Today, on the 3rd of September, Parliament recognized and approved the National Government as proposed by the Prime Minister. Gone are the days when the numbers of Ministers were decided according to the whims and fancies of the executive. Today Parliament consented and approved to increase the size of cabinet from the constitutionally stipulated 30.

We have opened new chapter in Sri

Lanka's history: forming a genuine national government through consensus rather than subterfuge will help entrench good governance and create a new political culture in Sri Lanka.

The reset in political culture was also demonstrated in the unanimous appointment of the Opposition Leader. The upholding of Parliamentary convention and tradition marks a departure from the divisive and self-interested partisanship which was a hallmark of our politics since independence. The appointment of Mr. R. Sampanthan, one of the most senior and respected politicians in the country, as Opposition Leader also reflects Sri Lanka's commitment, resolve and determination to the reconciliation process and the establishment of a Sri Lanka where every citizen feels that they are free and equal. In the new Sri Lanka no one would be denied their rightful place in society due to race, religion, caste or gender.

The National Government will ensure the formation and implementation of urgently needed national policies. In particular, we will pass a new Constitution that will include a Bill of Rights.

This constitution will not only take into account civil and political rights but economic, social and cultural rights as well. It will be a Constitution that addresses the requirements of all citizens and communities; one which will allow greater public participation in decision-making processes.

These measures will enable more accountable and more responsible government in the country. Such a Constitution, with electoral reform and the restoration of stronger Parliamentary government, will be essential to ensure reconciliation and durable peace with justice and rule of law.

The bipartisan consensus intrinsic to a national government will also be able to secure the legislative reforms, policy stability and level playing field that are urgently needed for our economic development.

LOS ANGELES SPECIAL OLYMPICS 2015

SRI LANKA RETURNS WITH 3 GOLDS, 2 SILVERS, 3 BRONZES

The Sri Lankan contingent competing at the Special Olympics brought honour and fame to Sri Lanka by winning three gold, two silver and two bronze medals.

The games concluded on August 2nd in Los Angeles, US. Sri Lanka fielded seven athletes at the Special Olympics who competed in athletics and badminton.

The Special Olympics is held eve-

ry two years in the summer. Over 6,500 athletes from 165 countries arrived in Los Angeles to show the true meaning of courage, joy and determination.

The athletes competed in 25 different sports at venues throughout Los Angeles, including USC and UCLA. The 2017 Special Olympics will be held in Austria from March 14-25.

FULL STORY AT: <http://ft.lk>

VISIT TO SRI LANKA BY U.S. ASSISTANT SECRETARY...

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I wish Assistant Secretary Biswal and Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour Tom Malinowski and the delegation a very pleasant stay here in Sri Lanka.

Thank you.

And now may I invite Assistant Secretary Nisha Biswal to address you.

Assistant Secretary Nisha Biswal: Good morning and everyone and Mr. Minister thank you so much. It's such a pleasure to see you again and to congratulate you on this very important election. We also had the pleasure of meeting with the Justice Minister, Minister Rajapaksa as well and members of the Minister's team.

Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour and myself are thrilled to be here, particularly also on the heels of our newest Ambassador, Ambassador Atul Keshap, having presented his credentials also just a couple of days ago.

We are here at this very momentous occasion, to really re-affirm the strong support of the United States for Sri Lanka, for the Sri Lankan people and for the commitment of the Sri Lankan Government and Sri Lankan people towards this path of democracy, of good governance, of peace and of prosperity.

I was here last May during the historic visit of Secretary Kerry and since then, we have seen not only this enduring commitment to democracy, but also just a tremendous momentum of progress, towards institutions of good governance, towards combating corruption and towards promoting reconciliation. As Secretary Kerry noted at that time, this is a long and difficult road, but one that the

United States is committed to walk down with the people of Sri Lanka, and to provide support. And it is in that spirit that Assistant Secretary Malinowski and I are here today, to reaffirm our support, the support of the United States for Sri Lanka. Just recently, we let President Sirisena know, that we would be supporting resettlement and education in Sampur with a commitment of 1 million dollars in resources and we look forward to working with the President, with the Prime Minister and with new government in this and other endeavors to ensure that the country is able to realize its enormous potential.

During this visit we will have an opportunity to meet with senior leaders, with political party and civil society leaders and with the private sector in the spirit of that partnership. And I simply want to at this moment say that we are in incredibly proud of the journey that is being undertaken here. The story that is unfolding in this great country is one that stands as a testament to the rest of world.

Thank you.

Let me now turn to Assistant Secretary Malinowski.

Assistant Secretary Tom Malinowski: Ministers, it's been a great honour and pleasure for me to come back to Sri Lanka and to see you and to see the formation of this new government and with all of the hope and promise that it represents.

In just the short time since I was here last, and in the shorter time since Secretary of State Kerry was here, we have seen steady progress towards the forward looking agenda this government has set. And it has been heartening to people all around

the world. With the most recent example, of course, of the election. Another promise made that was kept.

What is most important to us is the message that the people of Sri Lanka have sent. Twice now this year, the people of Sri Lanka, North, South, East and West, have told us that they support change. Twice now, they have voted, North, South, East and West; for the rule of law, against impunity, for reconciliation, for building this country, developing this country for everyone, and against the politics of ethnic and religious division, against extremism on both sides.

They have set an important challenge for their government and for the international community. They have told us that the promise of this transition now needs to be fulfilled. And what we hear from the Government is a recognition that the work, the hard work must continue to meet their expectations.

We recognize that some of the choices ahead are going to be difficult. We recognize that this process is going to take time. Nobody expects miracles. But we do see an extraordinary opportunity, so long as the forward momentum is sustained.

We also see in the United States, an extraordinary responsibility to support this process. So as long as the government of Sri Lanka keeps making courageous decisions, the United States will stand by its side and provide the support that is needed to keep this process going forward, until Sri Lanka succeeds in every respect, in terms of security, economic development, democracy, and playing its rightful role as a respected leader on the world stage.

Thank you very much.

NO MORE BARRIERS...

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adequate alternative measures. It is a well-known fact that remnants of the overseas network of the LTTE are still operating in certain countries, but the security authorities are taking cognizance of this and devising appropriate responses.

According to the Military Spokesman, a new security system similar to what is operational in the South will be adopted to maintain security in the

North in the immediate future.

Indeed, it is vital to make a pragmatic assessment of security needs in the context of emerging global threats and deploy appropriate security measures. Coincidentally, this is the theme of the Sri Lanka Defence Seminar 2015 which begins tomorrow in Colombo. Such a periodic review of security concerns is essential for our region due to the emergence of new global

terror outfits such as the ISIS.

Here in Sri Lanka, as the results of the recent polls indicate, the people have comprehensively rejected the politics of communalism and division. Their message is that all communities are keen to live in harmony in one nation sans any barriers. Omanthai, that physical and psychological barrier to reconciliation, is now no more and lasting peace is one step closer.