



The new Minister of External Affairs, Prof. Gamini Lakshman Peiris assumed duties at the Ministry of External Affairs on 3rd May 2010 amidst the chanting of pirith followed by a brief sermon and blessings by the religious dignitaries present on the occasion. Thereafter, addressing the staff of the Ministry, the new External Affairs Minister stated that he has assumed duties as the Minister of External Affairs at a time when terrorism has been successfully defeated and the focus is on social and economic development. He stated that the approach of President Mahinda Rajapaksa to Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy as underlined in the Mahinda Chinthanaya was to ensure that it was homegrown, indigenous and reflects Sri Lanka's history, culture, social and economic values which are considered sacrosanct, and our own relations with countries. He also pointed out that while it may not be possible to be in agreement with the international community at all times, Sri Lanka would convey its stance in the spirit of camaraderie, listen and respect the views of others. He also said that Sri Lanka would continue engaging with other countries and that it would be on the basis of partnership and participation. The External Affairs Minister also stated that one of the main objectives of the country's foreign policy would be to focus on the unique opportunities available in Sri Lanka and encourage countries to explore them and be partners in Sri Lanka's progress.

Address the gathering further, Prof Peiris pointed out that that the Government would focus on the areas of resettlement of the displaced persons, the restoration of their livelihoods and reintegration in the democratic process. At a time the country is coming out of a harsh and unpleasant period of its history, the Government would focus on national reconciliation so that the country can learn lessons from the past and move forward.

The Minister also announced that in commemoration of the World Press Freedom Day on 3rd May, President Rajapaksa had decided to pardon journalist J. S. Tissanayagam.

Minister Peiris also stated that efforts were underway to scale down the emergency regulations and that there will be a debate in Parliament to that effect. He pointed out that these were measures which would show to the world that the country was fast retuning to normalcy.

Discussing his plans for the Ministry of External Affairs, Prof. Peiris stated that he planned to establish a 'think tank' for 'brain storming sessions' on foreign policy issues. He added that he intended to work closely with Consuls in Sri Lanka and the business community in order to meet emerging challenges.

Deputy Minister of External Affairs, Gitanjana Gunawardena, welcoming the new Minister, recalled the valiant efforts and sacrifices made by the soldiers to free the country from terrorism and stated that the President had received a strong mandate from the people at the recent General Elections for his efforts. He also recalled Sri Lanka's long history since colonization and the establishment of the country's foreign policy many decades ago. He added that he was looking forward to working with Minister Peiris, the staff at the Ministry and in Missions abroad.

Secretary to the Ministry of External Affairs, Mr. Romesh Jayasinghe also addressed the gathering.

The ceremony was attended by Parliamentarians, Mrs. Savithri Peiris, former Secretaries and Additional Secretaries to the Ministry, dignitaries and the staff of the Ministry of External Affairs.