

By MAHINDA RAJAPAKSA

January 26 was an historic day for Sri Lanka . It was the first presidential election for more than 25 years that was unaffected by the terrorism and intimidation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, otherwise known as the Tamil Tigers. The overwhelming majority of Sri Lankans who exercised their democratic right last Tuesday voted for an end to division, an end to terrorism and for a new beginning of peace and prosperity. I am proud that the election was well fought, but peaceful on voting day. All who wished to participate, could.

But this victory is merely the start for Sri Lanka . After removing terrorism from our country, I sought a full mandate from my people. Now I shall seek to work to build our nation for all of them; to make the nation stronger and more able to succeed in today's globalized world.

I know as well as anyone that our future success relies on a lasting peace. The removal of terrorism was an important milestone in this process, but the nation needs to be bound by a common purpose. That purpose will be built around a full reconciliation program. My new government will address the genuine grievances of all communities and bolster the enforcement of equal rights for all. We will emphasize better police training to meet the new conditions of peace, and boost representation from all groups in Sri Lankan society.

More importantly, the lasting peace will unlock the true potential of Sri Lanka and provide a range of opportunities for all of our people. Already the International Monetary Fund has upgraded Sri Lanka to a "middle-income emerging market," and our economy is now the second fastest growing in Asia . With our educated workforce and our strategic trading position, I intend to make good on predictions that Sri Lanka can become South Asia's Singapore —or better.

We will work hard to ensure that this economic growth benefits all our people through improvements in job opportunities, skills training and education. No one will be left out. No one will be left behind.

For citizens residing in the north and east, we will continue to rebuild local infrastructure and

essential facilities, so these areas can grow in tandem with the rest of the country. For people that were displaced by the conflict, we will realize their expectations of new livelihoods in peacetime. The people of these regions, whose lives were filled with fear and despair, will now have hope and opportunity.

The evidence of peace and prosperity will be there for all to see. My hope is that the world will come and see this change for themselves. We ask tourists to come. Our island is full of unparalleled beauty. The hospitality of my fellow countrymen has been described in the superlative throughout history.

We ask investors to see the huge opportunities and natural resources available to them, to experience the proud work ethic of Sri Lankans and make use of the enormous talent of our graduates and adaptability of our skilled workers.

We are sure that if the world's people come to see the real Sri Lanka , they will support our country. That, in turn, will benefit us all through more trade and employment, jobs and opportunities.

I know that there are some people and policy makers abroad who have criticized what we did to bring an end to violence and terrorism. They said our measures threatened the people and undermined democracy. This election has shown that the reality is very different. The people of Sri Lanka, democratically and very clearly, have shown that they are free of threats, fear and terrorism, and that they want to embrace the future that could only be achieved through the decisive measures taken last year.

I call on the international community to support us as we build a peaceful and successful Sri Lanka , united in our resolve to achieve the progress denied for decades. My government will work hard for all its people. Our economy will grow and the highest standards of rights will be upheld. I can say with confidence that Sri Lanka is ready for the new decade.

(Mr. Rajapaksa is president of Sri Lanka .)

Courtesy: Wall Street Journal 3. Feb. 2010