

An Alternative Not Only By Name



Western Provincial Councilor Udaya Gammanpila is part of the movement to bring former President Mahinda Rajapaksa back to the forefront as the prime ministerial candidate at the next general elections. With it becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between the government and the opposition, the people are seeking for an alternative. Udaya Gammanpila assures that Mahinda Rajapaksa is that alternative not merely by name but by action too.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe

Photography Mahesh Bandara

Why do the people of Sri Lanka need Mahinda Rajapaksa to come back?

Mahinda Rajapaksa symbolises national security, economic prosperity and a disciplined society. Simply Mahinda Rajapaksa symbolises a better future.

You are part of the movement to bring back former President Mahinda Rajapaksa as a prime ministerial candidate, what is the thinking behind that?

While I was a member of the JHU, I found out that President Mahinda Rajapaksa

was going to lose the presidential elections. Sri Lanka was heading towards a disaster since presidential candidate Maithripala Sirisena was backed by separatist and federalist elements who were puppets of western forces. That is why I publicly announced on December 11, that Maithripala Sirisena was going to win and with his victory, separatism will return to the country and as I could not be a part of such a situation, I made the decision to ensure a victory for President Mahinda Rajapaksa. As I predicted he lost the election and we failed in achieving our target.

Mahinda Rajapaksa Symbolises National Security, Economic Prosperity And A Disciplined Society. Simply Mahinda Rajapaksa Symbolises A Better Future.

On January 10, within one day of the new president assuming office at a media conference of the UPFA, I vowed to defeat the government after 99 days since they had come for 100 days and a day had already passed. On January 13 at a media conference I vowed to bring Mahinda Rajapaksa as our prime ministerial candidate. After seeing these two media conferences on television former minister Gamini Lokuge called and told me that he had planned to retire from politics, but after seeing our intentions to bring back Mahinda Rajapaksa he wanted to know what our programme was so that he could join us. I told him that we do not have a programme as such, but only an idea; and that we should meet up to develop a programme.

Both of us met and discussed with Wimal Weerawansa and Dinesh Gunawardena. Later on we invited Tissa Vitharana, DEW Gunasekera and Vasudeva Nanayakkara. Vasudeva Nanayakkara joined us, but the other two opted out. We started as a very small movement, but soon found out that due to actions and inactions of the present government the people were very disappointed. They realised the government did not practice the good governance that they preached. People found that even though the present government came into power claiming to catch thieves, they were the worst type of thieves in post-independent Sri Lanka. Therefore, people began to respond to our campaign.

We had a massive rally in Nugegoda on February 18, it was a success in terms of the number of people who attended, but on the other hand the response from the SLFP was very poor. Only Chief Minister of the Western Province, Prasanna Ranatunga openly declared that he will join the rally, he was the only SLFP member at the rally. But at our second rally in Kandy one parliamentarian joined

us, the solitary parliamentarian was Dilum Amunugama. This increased to 26 in our third rally in Ratnapura and then rapidly to 57 when we had our fourth rally in Kurunegala. The fifth rally was a landmark and can be considered as the biggest political rally in Sri Lankan history where 71 SLFP parliamentarians joined us. There may have been only 71 parliamentarians present, but several others sent us congratulatory messages saying that even though they were not able to attend the Matara meeting due to various reasons they were with us. We now command the majority in the UPFA.

We decide the political journey of Sri Lanka. The present government never expected Mahinda Rajapaksa to bounce back in this manner. They thought that the Mahinda Rajapaksa era was over. Even those who supported him, admired and sympathised with him after his defeat, never expected him to come back. But we made it a reality.

Some would say that Mahinda Rajapaksa was defeated at the election, then why are you trying to bring him back?

No one can say that. President Jayewardene was defeated in 1956 in the Kelaniya electorate during the early part of his career. If he was forced to end his political career because he was defeated once, we would not have had a seasoned president such as him who introduced the open economy and the executive presidency to the country. At the very same election President Ranasinghe Premadasa was defeated at Yatiyanthota. If the people forced him to retire from politics just because he faced one defeat we would not have had a hard working president who introduced good concepts such as Jana Saviya and Gam Udawa.

In Politics People Win And Lose, After A Defeat We Have To Review What Happened, Make Adjustments And Come Back. That Is Part And Parcel Of Politics. People Who Are Really In Fear Of The Return Of President Mahinda Rajapaksa Are Forcing Him Not To Come Back Since He Was Just Defeated Once.

Take Mahinda Rajapaksa for instance, he faced an election in 1977 where he was defeated. If people forced him to exit politics in 1977, we would not have had a president who saved this nation from the clutches of terrorism. In politics people win and lose, after a defeat we have to review what happened, make adjustments and come back. That is part and parcel of politics. People who are really in fear of the return of President Mahinda Rajapaksa are forcing him not to come back,

since he was just defeated once. They forget the fact that the leader of the UNP, Ranil Wickremesinghe has already faced 29 consecutive defeats at elections, but no one forced him to retire from politics. Don't you think it is ridiculous and discriminatory to direct such statements only at Mahinda Rajapaksa. It is done so because there are certain people who fear his return as then they will not be able to fulfill their political aspirations.

There is also a criticism that President Rajapaksa is using religious places for political motives. What are your thoughts on this?

This is the biggest allegation against President Mahinda Rajapaksa in the present day. It is true that he spends his evenings in temples holding Bodhi Poojas and making statements. It is true that he has chosen Abhayaramaya in Narahenpita as his political office. The Sinhala meaning of Abhayaramaya is fearless temple. Ven Muruthettuwa Ananda Thero knows nothing about fear. During the time when President Jayewardene banned May day rallies in 1987, university students wanted to hold a May day defying President Jayewardene's decision. They were unable to find a place to hold the meeting, because everyone was in fear of President Jayewardene as he was a very powerful figure. No one was willing to accommodate the rally. Ven Ananda Thero agreed to give his temple for this purpose. While the May day rally was in progress, a police team led by SP Abdul Gaffoor shot at the people who participated in it. People began to run, but Ven Ananda Thero took the mic and shouted at the police urging them to stop firing. He was never in fear of his life. That is because he knows the history of this country, which is not known by the members of this government.

Lord Buddha guided and advised the kings on what to do and what not to do; King Kosala and King Bimbisara amongst others were great followers of Lord Buddha and they visited his temple seeking his advice and guidance to make administrative decisions. As a Buddhist country Sri Lanka followed that tradition. The democracy in Sri Lanka was one that was very unique in the world. We had the king, the people and the monks in a triangle. Although the king inherited his position, the monks were there to ensure that the king ruled the country for its own benefit. The monks were the representatives of the people because they became monks from ordinary families. But the king had to bow his head and worship the monks. Therefore, the monks were above the king. In any other country the king is supreme with no one above him except God. But in Sri Lanka the monks were above the king.

Whenever the king goes against the wishes of the people the monks organise a coup and expel the king and replace him with a suitable leader. In ancient times there were no elections to defeat the ruler only wars. When kings were defeated at war the monks would protect the defeated and support him to return if he was a good leader. The monks' traditional role is to provide accommodation and protection to the defeated leader and bring him back at the opportune time. Monks are merely doing their traditional duty. Unfortunately the present government is not aware of the history of this country. I invite our present rulers to read the Mahavamsa and if they do not know Pali and if they cannot understand the Mahavamsa, then at least watch the Sinhala movies Weerapuran Appu, Maha Raja Gemunu or Siri Parakum, which tells what I explained in a very simple manner.

The movement to bring President Mahinda Rajapaksa is seen as an alternative to the UNP and SLFP. Can you elaborate on this?

Presently you cannot distinguish the UNP and SLFP as two different alternatives for the people. They have a joint government where the President is from the SLFP, Prime Minister from the UNP and they have a common programme. As they are sharing a common vision the people badly need an alternative. From the people's response to the current government we can see that they want another choice, since both major parties are in the government as well as the opposition. We are forced to provide that alternative. It should not be an alternative only by name, but it should be an alternative by deed. We should have a different vision and we should have a different action plan. And I can definitely say with responsibility that we have a completely different vision and action plan for the country.

People voted for a change because they wanted to make the situation better, but what happened was unexpected; they ended up with something worse. They now need to change the change.

What is your outlook on the future of politics in the country?

At present we are in deep trouble. The future is very gloomy. There were policies that I did not accept of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa's government, however rightly or wrongly there was a clear-cut policy. He knew what he was doing. He openly presented it to the people. There will always be supporters as well as opposers, but once he set his principles, vision and programme, he never slowed it or stopped it because of resistance. He fought resistance. President

Rajapaksa decided to eradicate terrorism and the LTTE from this country. There was immense internal and external pressure to stop the war. But no one was able to stop him until he eradicated terrorism from this country.

We need a leader. Any country needs a leader. Unfortunately what we lack today is a leader to lead the nation towards prosperity and the future. Lee Kwan Yue, Mathir Mohamed and Vladimir Putin are leaders because they led their people in a certain direction. You may not agree with that direction, but they had a target. They took the entire nation towards that target. Today, this government is like a ship floating in the ocean without any direction or destination. That is the first weak point.

Secondly there are too many leaders. As the well-known saying goes 'too many cooks spoil the soup', the elected leader of the country is President Maithripala Sirisena, however there are many de facto leaders including Ranil Wickremesinghe, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Champika Ranawake, Rajitha Senaratne, Sarath Fonseka, Vigneswaran and to some extent Erik Solheim and Narendra Modi. They think 'we defeated Mahinda Rajapaksa, so we should have a say in this government'. They can think so if they have a common vision or programme. But they have different visions and programmes. Everyone is pulling the government in whichever direction they want. As such this government is stagnating in one place without any progress.

With the introduction of the 19th and 20th Amendments to the constitution, what can we expect during the elections?

I am confident that Mahinda Rajapaksa will have a landslide victory. The logic is simple. As we know during the last presidential election President Sirisena obtained 6.2 million votes and President Rajapaksa obtained 5.8 million votes. The political parties that contributed to the 5.8 million vote bank are still with President Rajapaksa. This was clearly seen at the rally in Matara on June 12. All parties were on stage.

On the other hand look at the camp of 6.2 million votes; the TNA has already decided to contest alone with their 700,000 votes, then the JVP with 500,000 votes will contest alone, similarly 200,000 of the DP of Gen Sarath Fonseka and the 100,000 of the JHU are not with the Swan symbol anymore. More or less 300,000 voters shifted from our camp to the opposition camp along with Maithripala Sirisena and the other SLFPers who followed him during the

presidential elections, but they too are not with the current government anymore.

If we calculate about 2.1 million voters who were with the Swan symbol coalition on January 8th have already left it. That leaves them with 4.1 million votes.

There are five groups who are disappointed with the UNP government and have decided to support Mahinda Rajapaksa. Firstly youth, they were disappointed with the previous government because of the stories they heard about corruption. The UNP and the West very smartly manipulated those stories, to repeat the Goebbels theory, that is if you repeat a lie 100 times it eventually becomes the truth. Likewise they spoke about mega deals and having large files in their possession. They came into power only for 100 days, but they have been in power for more than 150 days and so far they have failed to expose a single mega deal. Let's leave mega deals for a moment. Have they exposed at least a mini deal? Youngsters are thoroughly disappointed with the government because during the election campaign, they were grouped as Toiyya and Baiyya in social media. Now Baiyyas that supported President Rajapaksa are laughing at the Toiyyas who supported President Sirisena and are sarcastically asking who are the thieves they have caught so far?

The youth are very frustrated with the government because they came to catch thieves and they have now become the worst thieves in the country. As all of us know the fraud committed in the bond issue of the Central Bank is the biggest fraud committed in post-independent Sri Lanka. The loss incurred to the government is more than 51 billion rupees. You may not immediately get an idea on how large that sum of money is. If I say I lose 100 rupees I know what I can buy with it. With 51 billion rupees we would have been able to build three hydro-power projects such as the Upper Kotmale or we would have built two airports like Mattala or we could have built three expressways like Galle-Matara. So what we have lost is massive.

Therefore, the youth who wanted to have an administration that was better than Mahinda Rajapaksa's have now ended up with something that is worse than that. They now want to go back to what they had before January 8th. Moreover, they found that the people who are labelled as thugs and thieves are no longer with President Rajapaksa, but with President Sirisena. People are now wondering that President Rajapaksa had some weaknesses, but now he has been able to dissociate himself from those elements and the thieves and thugs are not with

him, therefore the people are ready to embrace him again to defeat the present government. Due to these reasons, the youth no longer support the present government. Then the Sinhala middle class no longer supports the government.

At Present We Are In Deep Trouble. The Future Is Very Gloomy. There Were Policies That I Did Not Accept Of Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa's Government, However Rightly Or Wrongly There Was A Clear-Cut Policy. He Knew What He Was Doing.

During the election campaign we voiced that separatism will come back if President Sirisena was elected. But some people did not believe us because the JHU and Gen Sarath Fonseka were part of the coalition and they promised that they would not allow such a situation. But when Ranil Wickremesinghe together with Swaminathan and Mangala Samaraweera appease the separatist forces, the JHU and Gen Sarath Fonseka cannot do anything.

The poor voted for the current government expecting some relief in terms of reducing the cost of living. The budget presented by the government on January 29th was a great disappointment to the general public. They reduced the prices of nonessential items such as coriander, chillie, maldive fish and other such items. They reduced the prices of these items, which were clearly not essential items. The people became very annoyed because the government did not understand the pulse of the people. We know that items such as rice, milk and coconut are essential goods, but they reduced the price of something else. They planned to increase the prices of these items after 100 days. Due to whatever reasons, they had to extend the term of the government and now they are increasing the prices of everything. We named this budget as the coriander budget because they reduced the price of coriander and Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake put up massive hoardings in Colombo saying that they reduced the price of coriander. But soon after placing those billboards the price of even coriander has increased. As such that solitary claim cannot be made anymore. Today, this group of people has returned to us.

President Rajapaksa Now Knows That If He Makes Mistakes The People Will Send Him Home. He Is Reformed Now.

Fourthly the government servants, President Rajapaksa provided them with a motorcycle worth 150,000 rupees where 100,000 was borne by the government

and the government servant was to bear the remaining 50,000 rupees. President Sirisena said that if he comes to power he will write-off that 50,000 rupees as well. To get this 50,000 rupees written off, the government servant forgot all other concessions and voted for President Sirisena. At the end of the day, they did not write-off that amount as promised. They promised to increase the salaries by adding 10,000 rupees to the basic salary. But they increased it only by 6,500 rupees and that too was given only as an allowance. Government servants are very disappointed and disheartened.

Traditionally UNPers were better managers, better entrepreneurs and better businessmen. They were the political party of the business community. As such the business community thought that if President Rajapaksa was able to perform in the manner in which he did where a continuous growth of over five percent per year for five years was maintained the country is in a good situation and stable, and if we allow the UNP to manage the economy then they will be able to do even better. That is why they were looking for a change. After this government took control of the economy, interest rates are increasing at a rapid rate. Of course the Central Bank fraud is a contributory factor. The rupee is depreciating at a rapid rate and the government has stopped all mega projects as a result of which the inflow of funds into the country has stopped. And, the entire top brass of the government has been charged with different criminal allegations from former presidential secretary downwards. As a result senior administrative officers have become very cautious in making decisions. If they took five minutes to make a decision, they now take at least two weeks resulting in a huge inefficiency in the government sector.

No One Should Be Qualified To Hold An Office Just Because Of His Relationship With A Power. Similarly No One Should Be Disqualified To Hold Office Just Because Of Their Relationship Or Association With The Power.

The government sector has become the red tape of development. There is a very popular saying nowadays in the business community-that development begins after 5pm; that is development begins only after the closing hours of government offices. Those days the government was the facilitator of development, now the government is the barrier and troublemaker, because government officials are very reluctant to make decisions. Therefore, the business community is with us.

Even if we take a very pessimistic estimate, more than one million voters from these categories are back with us. If we look at our previous calculations we still have our 5.8 million vote base, but their numbers have come down from 6.2 million to 4.1 million because many groups have left the coalition. All members in our coalition are intact. Then another one million voters have shifted from their group to our group and as a result their total vote base has reduced further from 4.1 million to 3.1 million and our numbers have gone up from 5.8 to 6.8 million. This is why I originally said that Mahinda Rajapaksa is heading towards an unprecedented victory.

President Rajapaksa was not without fault. He had two weaknesses; firstly he was surrounded by opportunistic rogues, secondly, after the war victory, he lost his ear. He was very reluctant to listen. The people who were around him had given him the impression that because of the military victory, as a gratitude for his achievement people would never defeat him. President Rajapaksa now knows that if he makes mistakes, the people will send him home. He is reformed now. As we know he ensured national security, he brought huge infrastructure development to the country, he increased the livelihood of the people and brought discipline and beauty to the country. But what was lacking was that he was insensitive to the mistakes made by the people around him. Now he has corrected those mistakes. His third term will be the golden era of post-independent Sri Lanka.

Two main reasons that the people want him to come back is that his two brothers managed the two most important aspects of the country-Defence and the Economy very well. Then should they not come back as well?

Many people speak about Rajapaksa & Company and he was under attack because of his association with his brothers. I look at it in a different manner. No one should be qualified to hold an office just because of his relationship with a power. Similarly no one should be disqualified to hold office just because of their relationship or association with the power. We should evaluate that individual objectively, independently and decide.

Take Gotabaya Rajapaksa for an example. I associated with President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa before the war. It is something well-known in the country. During the presidential elections of 2010, there was a debate in the country as to who was the real hero of the war, President Rajapaksa or General Fonseka. My conclusion was that it was none of them, the real hero was Gotabaya Rajapaksa. If he was not there we would not

have been able to finish the LTTE. Imagine a scenario where we stop President Rajapaksa appointing him as the Defence Secretary just because he was his brother. What would we choose? We should not reject someone just because he is a brother or sister or any kind of relation of someone at the top, but should evaluate their capabilities objectively.

On the other hand, we should not offer positions to individuals merely because they are relations. Let's evaluate those people's merits. If they are suitable and they have capabilities and a strong track record for that particular office, we should not hesitate to appoint them. That is my thought. We should not be carried away with unfair and illogical criticism about the Rajapaksa family. The Rajapaksa's have made a great contribution to this country. But this does not mean that there were no unnecessary appointments of the Rajapaksa family either. Because of those appointments even fair appointments were criticised. The future Prime Minister Rajapaksa has learnt a good lesson by now and he would be very cautious in making his appointments; whether they are Rajapaksa's or not.

There is a concern that if President Mahinda Rajapaksa comes back, then the minorities in this country will be treated differently because there is a perception that it is through their votes that President Sirisena came into power. What can you say about this?

That is a myth. Take a look at the previous presidential elections where President Mahinda Rajapaksa secured the victory in 2005 and 2010. In 2005 the majority of the minorities had voted for Ranil Wickremesinghe. If you look at the electoral map, it is very obvious that the majority of the minority have voted for Ranil Wickremesinghe. This was more obvious in the 2010 electoral map, the majority of the minority had voted for Gen Sarath Fonseka.

President Rajapaksa Never Took Revenge On The People Who Did Not Vote For Him Unlike This 'Yahapalana' Government.

Let me pose this question, did President Rajapaksa discriminate those minorities just because they didn't vote for him. I will quote several examples. He failed to win the Muslim dominated East, but if you see the infrastructure in the Eastern Province, he has not spent that much of money for infrastructure development in any other province in Sri Lanka. Take the North, he knew very well that he would lose the Northern Provincial Council election because the results of all previous elections clearly indicated that the UPFA would not win the election.

The President had a great excuse not to hold the Northern Provincial Council elections because there were issues with the 13th Amendment. Having all that and knowing very well that he was going to lose he never hesitated to hold the elections for the Northern Provincial Council. These two examples on the North and East clearly show that he has never ignored the people who did not vote for him. He never took revenge on the people who did not vote for him unlike this 'Yahapalana' Government.

The SLFP and the UPFA had a common grievance. Their grievance was that President Mahinda Rajapaksa maintained a more cordial relationship with the UNP than the people who had worked for him. That is why he was able to win UNP's time and time again. Though they had worked and voted against him, he never considered it a factor to work against them. Because of his attitude he was able to bring everybody around him.

But take President Sirisena, the SLFP did not support him, but despite that the SLFP offered him the leadership and he accepted it. But because of his revenge taking attitude and hatred, he could not win their hearts. Although he won the election and secured the leadership of the party, he failed to capture the hearts of the people because his heart is not full of compassion. His heart lacks love. President Rajapaksa was the total opposite. His heart is full of love for his enemies more than his friends. That's why he was able to win enemies. Those days people used to say that Ranil Wickremesinghe was advising his parliamentarians not to respond to any calls from Mahinda Rajapaksa because if you do you will end up in his government.

These explanations will make the minorities comfortable and clear their doubts or fear, if they had any, that if Mahinda Rajapaksa comes back they will be in trouble. But I do not think they have such a fear because from their past experience with President Rajapaksa there cannot be such fear. This is a story made up to instill fear in their minds.

As you mentioned the Government of Mahinda Rajapaksa was not vindictive, but within the past 100 days it is not only politicians but officials and professionals that are being targeted, what can you tell us about this?

Take the establishment of the FCID. It is against the constitution. Article 12 (2) of our constitution says 'no citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of

political opinion.’ But the FCID investigates complaints forwarded by a Cabinet sub-committee headed by the Prime Minister. There is a political filtering process for the complaints received by the FCID. Therefore it violates Article 12 (2).

They discriminate on the grounds of political opinion. The FCID is unconstitutional. Why did they establish this? According to our law if someone has caused a damage of more than 25,000 rupees it’s a non-bailable offence. The case can only be heard by the High Court and not the Magistrate and the entire process takes a minimum of three months. Their strategy was to put away all leading politicians of the opposition under the charges of financial fraud above 25,000 rupees. Nowadays if there is an alleged fraud, obviously it will be more than 25,000 rupees. Then there will be no bail for them and when every leading politician from the opposition is behind bars they can easily crack down on the opposition and win the parliamentary elections.

Fortunately we were able to politically expose this. We must bow our heads to the Supreme Court because they made bold decisions with respect to the FCID arrests and granted bail for several leading political personalities. Their victimisation was not limited to politicians. They arrested the administrative top brass. That is why government officers are so reluctant to take any actions resulting in a dysfunctional governmental machinery.

They did not stop there. They went after the professionals too; take Saliya Wickramasuriya for that matter. He was an expert living overseas who came to Sri Lanka to help in the exploration of oil reserves in the country. Where is he now? He is behind bars for more than two months just to make one politician happy. Will other professionals volunteer to come to Sri Lanka to help their motherland? No they will not. The present government within 100 days showed the world how badly they are running the country. That is why the people urgently need a parliamentary election.

What is your stand on the 20th Amendment?

Conceptually we are with the 20th Amendment. The 20th Amendment has two objectives, a representative for all electorates and ending the preferential vote war within parties. These two objectives are healthy, holy and appreciated. The mechanisms introduced by them are not accepted by us. It is not scientific, it is discriminatory and it is designed to appease certain political parties for their support for the amendment. The electoral system cannot be decided or tailor-

made to appease certain political parties. It should be objective, independent and scientific. Unfortunately the 20th Amendment lacks that.

The Electoral System Cannot Be Decided Or Tailor-Made To Appease Certain Political Parties. It Should Be Objective, Independent And Scientific. Unfortunately The 20th Amendment Lacks That.

When it is available to be challenged in the Supreme Court, we will be forced to do so for the sake of future generations. What we say is hold the parliamentary elections first because the 20th Amendment is not something that has to be decided by the government. It has to be done by the parliament. For instance, if the government promised to increase the pension by 2,500 rupees that is a governmental policy decision. The implementation of the 20th Amendment has to be decided by the parliament with a 2/3 majority. Both the government and opposition should get together and pass the 20th Amendment. All parties have to get together to pass the 20th Amendment and it has to be a collective effort. The parliamentary elections will not impact the 20th Amendment as long as all parties are ready to support this. That is the present stance of all political parties. Therefore, we want the government to hold the general elections first and then go to the 20th Amendment.

There Will Be No Sri Lanka For Us To Govern If We Allow This Government To Continue For Another Nine Months. Therefore, We Stand For An Early Parliamentary Election, Which Is Over Due By Two Months.

The government has gazetted the 20th Amendment on June 12, after publishing in the gazette the government should give the people two weeks to study it. Then it can be placed in the Order Paper in the parliament. Then it should be kept on the Order Paper for a week giving the people an opportunity to challenge it before the Supreme Court. If challenged before the Supreme Court, the court has three more weeks to make a decision. That is six weeks in total. When it comes to the parliament, it will take another one week to debate. That is seven weeks. The Supreme Court may direct the parliament to place the amendment before the people at referendum. This may take another two months for the process. After passing the 20th Amendment, we need at least three months for delimitation or determination of the boundaries of the electorates. Thereafter, we may have to give three months for the electoral organisers to familiarise themselves as it will be new electorates and new organisers. We are nine months away from the

parliamentary election under the new system.

Nine months is a very long time. When you analyse the damage caused to this nation in terms of national security and the economy by this government during the past five months, another nine months will be a disaster. There will be no Sri Lanka for us to govern if we allow this government to continue for another nine months. Therefore we stand for an early parliamentary election, which is over due by two months. We are not against the 20th Amendment, but we cannot allow this government to continue for nine more months.

Final thoughts?

President Rajapaksa is now an historical figure. You may know that Sri Lanka has the longest written history in the world. We have written our history for 2,600 years. No other nation has such a record. For the last 2,600 years there were only eight historical figures that have unified the nation. That is Dutugemunu, Valagamba, Datusena, Vijayabahu I, Parakramabahu I, Parakramabahu II, Parakramabahu VI and finally Mahinda Rajapaksa. Parakramabahu VI unified the country in 1449. Then President Rajapaksa is the only historical figure that has unified the nation after 600 years. Therefore, he has an exclusive place in our society.

People will not compare him with Presidents JR, Premadasa or Chandrika. He is compared with Dutugemunu, Parakramabahu and Vijayabahu. When the people voted for the Swan symbol to mark their protest and frustration with the Rajapaksa government, they did not expect him to be defeated. People started to cry when they saw him leaving Temple Trees. There were those who did not eat for days. That is why when we said we will bring back Mahinda they were thrilled. Many people consider Mahinda Rajapaksa as a person to be revered. That is why people want to touch him. That is why when he visits a place there are hundreds of mothers waiting to give him to hold their baby. I have found as a father that little babies are reluctant to leave their mother's arms. But when kids are afforded to this unknown person called Mahinda Rajapaksa, I have never seen a single baby who is reluctant to go to his hands. This is a remarkable feature of Mahinda Rajapaksa. That is why people consider him as a person to be revered.

They are genuinely worried about what happened on January 8. They want to correct their mistake. During the recent past our intent was to give an opportunity to the people to make that correction. The people are quite happy to

make that correction and are impatiently waiting for the parliamentary elections to do so.





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