VIYATHMAGA DRIVING CHANGE FOR THE FUTURE

Dr Nalaka Godahewa, Founding Member of Viyathmaga.

November 16th 2019 will remain a landmark day in the history of Sri Lanka because for the first time a non-politician was elected President, a result of a campaign that was strategically carried out by a group of professionals who wanted to change the course of the country and re-write its development trajectory. Viyathmaga – a way for professionals has played an enormous role in ensuring the victory of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. What differentiated his campaign was the direction provided by this movement that helped him carve his vision for Sri Lanka as way back as four

years ago. Dr Nalaka Godahewa, one of the founding members of this movement spoke about the origins of Viyathmaga, its strategy and how as an independent organization it will support the incumbent President's people-centric economic policies, which it engendered.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe and Jennifer Paldano Goonewardena. | Photography Menaka Aravinda.

Why was Viyathmaga formed?

In 2015, President Mahinda Rajapaksa lost the election and many people were upset about it. It was an unusual election, because a leader who had lost the election, still had a mass appeal. His supporters were very upset. Although in about three months' time people started bouncing back, President Mahinda Rajapaksa's camp lost, yet again at the August 2015 General Election and a new Government was formed. The 19th Amendment was introduced, thereby taking away President Mahinda Rajapaksa's chance to contest another Presidential Election. Following the General Election, the supporters of President Mahinda Rajapaksa were desperately looking for a solution. The Government in power had both main parties together, the SLFP and the UNP, while President Mahinda Rajapaksa's supporters were a very small group of around 30 Parliamentarians who called themselves the Joint Opposition.

In the midst of all this a few professionals like me who were frustrated with the way the new Government was forming, conceptualized the idea that the ideal candidate to be presented at the next Presidential Election would be Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa. I was very close to him since I had worked with him from 2009, and in January 2016 I proposed to him that he should one day be the Presidential Candidate of the Joint Opposition. He laughed at me and said "Nalaka you know that I am not a politician and I have no political ambitions and I am an administrator, so it is not going to work". I kept pursuing him. He said not to push him into politics, but suggested that if we get together to discuss national policies as a group, maybe we can present those national policies to whoever is going to be the next Presidential candidate from our side. That was an interesting thought process.

Some of us in this group discussed this proposition and then suggested that we form a professional association of which we requested him to be the leader. Not

being an ambitious person, he said he didn't want to be its leader, but will be an advisor. He encouraged us to form the group following discussions with President Mahinda Rajapaksa. We then spoke with the former President to convey our idea of forming a group of professionals that would express opinions and be a pressure group against the incumbent Government. He endorsed the idea. Around eleven of us met at Mirihana with former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa on February 4th, 2016 and agreed to form Viyathmaga – a way for professionals. This organization began growing very fast. The idea of a group of professionals under the advice of Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa coming together to discuss policies of national importance caught up very fast and we began gathering momentum. More people joined us and Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa was also very excited at the pace it was going forward.

A year after its formation we held a convention on March 16th, 2017 at the Golden Rose Auditorium in Boralesgamuwa. The auditorium could hold only 1,500 people and we couldn't accommodate everyone who wanted to join the convention. It was from that day forward that we began describing Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa as the Chairman of Viyathmaga, until then he was the Advisor. The new designation was forced upon him by us. The organization began to grow from that day, and we went around the country speaking to people, educating them about the Government and what was happening to the country. At the same time we started discussion on national policies. Many people joined us to discuss about various subjects. By March 2019, by which time we had had two conventions and had become a very powerful force in the country, people were talking about Viyathmaga. In fact, people were trying to get involved with Viyathmaga. Moreover, we were ready with many ideas on forming national policies. We reached a point where no one could prevent Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa from becoming the presidential candidate as people had begun to ask for him. When he ultimately became the presidential candidate he was ready with a set of national policies, which he supported four years earlier. He was a Presidential candidate who in his acceptance speech on November 18th was very clear on what he wanted to do. He had his vision ready. Now as President he does not have to study everything again as he has an action plan that he hopes to implement.

What is the role of Viyathmaga now with the conclusion of the election?

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa wants Viyathmaga to continue the same way it has been operating all this while, but function along the lines of a think tank. There are various areas that we discussed included in his policy document, which he wants us

to continue in greater depth, while advising him and his ministers on the way forward as independent professionals. But you cannot describe everyone involved in the Viyathmaga as think tank type of intellectuals. There are professionals who want action, which is now a large base, with more people wanting to join. Therefore, we will have to figure out an organization that will on the one hand act as a think tank, and at the same time be involved in projects or activities that will allow such people to be involved. One area that we are looking at is to groom future politicians and leaders, that, we can do as an independent organization.

Is one of Viyathmaga's objectives to encourage professionals into politics?

That was not the original objective, but when we started our journey we realized that people began speaking about having professionals in Parliament. When we went around the country meeting and talking to people they expressed their desire to have professionals in Parliament as they realized professionals can add more value, and that's how the idea of sending professionals to Parliament came about. Four years ago professionals in Sri Lanka did not want to enter politics as it was considered corrupt. One good thing that Viyathmaga has done over the past four years is changing that mindset. Today, people say that professionals should enter politics. In that sense, we can play a role by identifying such people and groom them, so that they can join a political party, irrespective of which party it may be. Today, we consider it our duty to bring in more professionals to be involved in politics.

What was the experience of having conventions and meetings around the country, starting from Colombo and going into the regions?

Interestingly, when we first formed Viyathmaga in February 2016, prior to the first convention in March 2017, Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa used to accompany us for small pocket meetings. The first one was held in Chilaw, second in Galle, followed by Kandy. The first few meetings had only few speakers, and then subsequent meetings had more speakers with more people joining us. The motivation for people to attend those meetings was to meet Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa and to speak to him, as he had earned a good reputation as Defense Secretary. He was not seen as someone who was approachable, therefore, people were very happy to get close to him and speak to him. But later on, we realized that we had to do it on a bigger scale. Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa was not available for every meeting. People wanted us to organize large meetings and bring him along, but, we had to tell them that he was not available. He too insisted that we conduct meetings without him. We did try

it and it worked. I, together with Major General Kamal Gunaratne, Dr Seetha Arambepola, and later Dr Priyath Bandu Wickrama and Dr Prasanna Gunasena and several others conducted these meetings and people began attending them even in the absence of Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa, because we spoke about his ideology and principles.

We were very aggressive in 2019, especially after the Presidential Election was declared our teams went all over the country, from Colombo to Ampara where there was huge participation. People who attended our seminars were people who would never attend a political rally. We were tapping a base that no political party, say even the SLPP, could tap. If you look at the numbers, President Mahinda Rajapaksa had a solid base of five million voters, but we needed at least 6.5 million voters to win. The additional 1.9 million votes that we got I believe was as a result of the contribution made by Viyathmaga, convincing the floating voters to vote for Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

You received a good response even when you had pocket meetings without President Gotabaya Rajapaksa at that time. No other organization has ever become so powerful within such a short period, with a say in the system and made it successful. How did you manage this?

There were two reasons; one was the caliber of people who spoke at our seminars, we spoke substance and those who attended them took something home unlike attending a political rally. Mr Nivard Cabraal and I spoke on the economy with facts and figures, and we also gave them material to take home. The second reason was the branding. We were very clever in our branding strategy from day one. The logo, the colors and everything we did, we did in style and there was glamor around it. Every convention that we did was better than the earlier one. We know the value of marketing and so there was a wow effect. The ability to market the brand also helped make it a powerful brand. I used to tell at Viyathmaga that quite often when a TV crew was recording a rally the background was a blank wall or an unattractive scenery, which even the political party that has been in existence for 70 years did not take seriously, but, we at Viyathmaga ensured that when someone spoke on stage the background was attractive. In marketing such minute things make a big difference.

Is it so even in rural areas?

Yes even in rural areas. We followed a unique model when I ran pocket meetings

in Gampaha for Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa. We arranged someone to organize the meeting for a number that can be accommodated in a house or a garden. Our video team goes ahead of me and in the first half hour those present were shown videos of us, such as our battle in Geneva, what Viyathmaga is and a few speeches of Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and by the time of my arrival the people were mentally prepared and knew something about me. Otherwise the people in Gampaha didn't know much about me. I spoke for a maximum of 20 minutes and opened the forum for questions. When you ask them to pose questions, as always it takes time for the first question to be raised because the people present feel shy, but the moment you answer the first question, a barrage of questions follow. They ask very intelligent questions that you don't expect, such as about the constitution, sovereignty and foreign relations.

Travelling through villages made me realize the high extent of these people's political literacy. You will be surprised when I say that their knowledge of politics is much higher than the so called educated people in the city. People in the city are busy, so they have no time to watch news or read newspapers, but people in rural areas read newspapers and watch news on TV and hence are politically more literate.

When you take professional networking, Viyathmaga is encouraging professionals living abroad to get involved. Can you tell us about this initiative?

When Viyathmaga began growing there was great interest among people living abroad to form a similar association in those countries, which started with Italy, followed by the United Kingdom, France and Australia. People in those countries wanted us to deliver speeches and help them form Viyathmaga associations. I believe we were highlighted because of our involvement in Geneva, when Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekara and I, as founding members of Viyathmaga participated in the so called Geneva battle, speaking at the Geneva UN Human Rights Council, which added color to Viyathmaga. Today, we have a large number of people from around the world who call themselves members of Viyathmaga.

Will Viyathmaga as a force drive for change in Sri Lanka?

The idea is for us to remain an independent organization. After the election of Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa as President we sat down to discuss the way forward. There were two schools of thought; one was to make Viyathmaga part of the Government

machinery through an Act or to remain independent. We ruled out the first one, because although this way we could obtain more facilities to do our programs, still we would become part of a Government, and then arose the question of what would happen if the Government changes. We want to be independent and continue our ideology, because we believe in something. Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa's concept of a people centric economy was developed by us. Hence we stand by that ideology. We decided to remain independent while pushing for that ideology to be implemented in this country. We will therefore remain independent.

We will function at three levels; first will be to function as a think tank, second level will include people involved in various taskforces and projects and the third level will function like that of the Rotary and the Lions, with branches spread throughout the country, with organizers and district coordinators that will work as a network. Our model was inspired by the model adopted by Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore. His political party was present all over Singapore. When people used to accuse him of being undemocratic he had pointed out that he cannot be called so because he had his party people in every street and every apartment and that they told him their problems. He said that he was represented by a majority more than anyone else. That I believe is a nice concept and Viyathmaga is trying to do the same. We want to be present everywhere, so that we can accelerate the solutions for the issues in the villages, cities or housing schemes and bring it to the notice of politicians, while using our clout to solve those issues. We want to be a pressure group outside of political parties, which works for the people.

Can you tell us about the achievements made so far by Viyathmaga?

If you look at the policy framework that Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa as President is going to implement, that entire policy framework evolved through continuous discussion with our people. He reads a lot, something that not very many people know of, and he likes to sit with people and discuss with them. We used to meet him in groups of 50. When our first office was opened in Mirihana it had space only for 50 people, and although we moved to larger spaces we continued to accommodate only 50 persons at a time for a meeting and even if it was larger, we continued to call it the 50 member group. We used to discuss various subjects at those meetings, for instance, if it was agriculture, one meeting would wholly focus on what Sri Lanka's policy on agriculture should be, the issues and how to move forward. People who were experts in that area joined the discussion. We sat throughout those meetings, which sometimes went on for more than three to four hours. Such meetings helped us to finally develop his manifesto. Today, Mr

Gotabaya Rajapaksa's manifesto is mostly a product of the Viyathmaga thought process, with the addition of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna's program 'Gama Samaga Pilisandarak' that saw them going around the country to receive people's feedback on issues, and subsequently ours and theirs were combined to develop Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa's policy. He keeps telling the people that he is implementing what he promised, so the achievements that you are seeing already, we can humbly say, that, we were part of them.

Can you tell us about your role in Viyathmaga?

I was a founder. I can humbly say that the original idea was conveyed to Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa by me, including that he should be the next presidential candidate, which I believe many others also may have said. But I told him so with a strategy to gather professionals around him. I remember the exact words that I used. When he refused my request to him to be the next Presidential candidate I told him "The people of this country will ask for you and you will not be able to escape, because in four years' time people of this country will ask for you. I am going to gather people around you and we will do that through an organization". When I said this, he suggested that such an organization be used to develop national policies. I take pride in the part that I played in this journey.

I was initially involved with him in building the organization, which was followed by many others later on. Today, no one can lay ownership to Viyathmaga as there are so many good people on our team who have made significant contributions to bring it to this level, people such as Ms Manori Unambuwa, Admiral Mohan Wijewickreme, Mr Indika Liyanahewage, Maj Gen G A Chandrasiri, Dr Prasanna Gunasena, Dr Seetha Arambepola, Maj General Kamal Gunaratne and many more were part of this journey. I have a sense of pride that I was part of the very first team, when the initial concept was floated and the team was formed. Today, since Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa became the President our team met again and requested me to be the convener of Viyathmaga. We didn't have official positions, we had only a chairperson and we worked on an understanding. And we continue to do so even today. The members want to have me to ensure continuity. An organizational structure will eventually evolve, about which we are not overly concerned, as our objective is to do something for our country.

Can you tell us about your diverse experience in the private and public sectors?

I am an electronics and telecommunications engineer by profession. I am also a Chartered Management Accountant and a Chartered Marketer, and I have an MBA and a PhD in Economics. I was in the private sector until the end of 2008. I started my career at Unilever as a Management Trainee. I always wanted to retire at the age of 42, which I mentioned at my interview. I was one year late when I retired at the age of 43. When I retired I was the CEO of Sri Lanka Insurance. I wanted to retire because by then I had completed my PhD and hence wanted to be an academic. But in July 2009, when Sri Lanka Insurance was taken over by the then Government from the private sector as a result of a Supreme Court ruling, President Mahinda Rajapaksa as the Finance Minister was looking for someone who could take over the organization. He didn't want to give it to any political acquaintance, but to someone who knew the job. Many had told him to bring in the former CEO. I had left my job at Sri Lanka Insurance only six months earlier.

I had never known him before, in fact I didn't know any member of the Rajapaksa family prior to this. He found me and gave me the responsibility of managing Sri Lanka Insurance as its Competent Authority until a new Board was appointed, which I did alone. I became the Managing Director when the new Board was appointed. I made a significant difference in the Sri Lanka Insurance portfolio in my first year, particularly to its investment portfolio, a time when the financial crisis in the world had just been overcome. There were a lot of good stocks available in the market, so we bought stocks in banks such as NDB, HNB and Seylan, thereby expanding our portfolio. Our capital gains alone amounted to billions of rupees. Quite impressed with my achievements there, President Mahinda Rajapaksa appointed me as Chairman of Sri Lanka Tourism, where I worked for two years, and half way into my assignment at the Tourist Board a crisis arose at the SEC. There had been a market crash which continued for about 18 months. President Mahinda Rajapaksa asked me to take over the SEC. I had to reluctantly leave Sri Lanka Tourism, a sector which I was very passionate about to manage the SEC, which we turned around, from a crash to become a positive story.

By December 2014 we were rated as the most sustainable stock exchange in the whole of Asia. We were recognized with an award by a UK company. We had a significant growth during that period, and I had a plan to make it a stock exchange with a USD 100 billion market capitalisation. It was USD 25 billion at that time. I presented a plan on January 5, 2015, but President Mahinda Rajapaksa lost the election on January 8th and so the plan could not be implemented. The new Government never implemented that plan. The stock market fell from USD 25 billion to USD 15 billion when we should have gone up to USD 100 billion, something that I regret as the country lost. I believe under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa with the right people at the SEC we can achieve this target.

I have been supporting Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa during the last five years through Viyathmaga. I had retired and since I had no other ambitions I was supporting him for the sake of the country. Now that a new Government is in power he wants me to be involved in politics, which is his wish, and he wants me to contest the next Parliamentary Election. He has also appointed me along with four others to a committee to select people for Government institutions. I will start my campaign once I finish this assignment.

When you started Viyathmaga you were not in politics. Did you ever think that you would someday come to this point?

I never thought that I would be involved in politics. It all happened in 2018 when the 52 days Government was formed. Parliament was dissolved at one point and a subsequent Supreme Court ruling said it was not valid. With the dissolution of Parliament suddenly there arose a situation where we had to prepare ourselves for an election and it was during that time that one day Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa told me that he wanted me to contest the next election. I refused because I had just 60 days to prepare. He specifically wanted me to contest from the Gampaha District. When I subsequently met President Mahinda Rajapaksa he too requested me to contest at the General Election. I gave him the same answer. He said that if not this time, there will be no other time to win, because by then there was a huge trend of support. On another day, both Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa and President Mahinda Rajapaksa spoke with me and said something interesting; they said that this time people are asking for professionals and demanding for new faces. If we do not give

them new faces to vote for they will find fault with us, they said. Therefore, whether I win or not they wanted me to contest for their sake, which I could not refuse. I then went around preparing myself. Fortunately for me the election was postponed.

I have been campaigning for the past one year in Gampaha for Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa and I have built an organization called ‘Siyane Kathikawa’, which is like an extension of Viyathmaga and having campaigned for Gotabaya Rajapaksa for one year we take pride in the increase in his vote base in Gampaha. The SLPP won 550,000 votes in the 2018 Local Government election, with the SLFP also obtaining nearly 150,000 votes. There has been an increase of nearly 100,000 votes at the Presidential Election. I believe our campaign may have contributed to a certain extent to that increase. We were the most aggressive campaigners for Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa in the Gampaha District for the past one year.

You said in 2016 Gotabhaya Rajapaksa was not interested in contesting the election. Did you think that one day he would be the President?

I told him because I was very confident that he would win some day. He was not ambitious, neither is he power hungry. President Mahinda Rajapaksa could not contest again because of the 19th Amendment, likewise Mr Basil Rajapaksa also couldn’t and neither could Mr Namal Rajapaksa, leaving only Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa capable of giving a good fight to the Government. He had great acceptance among the people as a very good Defense Secretary and as a clean person. He had not tarnished his image during that time. I saw him as a potential Presidential candidate and hence I told him that the people will ask for him even if he didn’t want to. And I was right.

For the first time professionals played a signifi□cant role in the campaign. We have seen previ□ously professionals coming through different parties, but have failed. Most of the profession□als in your group are first timers. What made them join the campaign?

It is clearly the leadership of Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa that made them join Viyathmaga. In fact, most professionals who joined it said that they joined because of its leader. They had no doubt about their choice, while they had no confidence in traditional politicians. And neither did they want to work with traditional politicians. They liked the new movement. They learnt about the work we were doing through word of mouth, the discussions and the intellectual forums, which encouraged more and more to join us and subsequently, I and other professional members began

speaking about the importance of professionals in politics. Although I never thought that I would be the one to start the process, I was encouraging many others to enter politics. Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa also kept on telling that professionals should enter politics. We changed their mindset which made them realize that they should be in politics.

Yes there were professionals involved before, but they were involved because they were interested in politics. The professionals entering the fray this time are doing so not for personal gain. They are people who worked with Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa for the betterment of the country, it is a kind of a selfless approach that they have. I have a feeling that such people will be different if we encourage more and more of them to enter politics. They will be like Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Just look at how different he is as the President. He considers his job as one where he should be serving the people. I think if we bring professionals who have never aspired to be politicians and allow them to enter Parliament, they too will be like their leader.

How successful do you think they will be?

Just because you are a professional you cannot be a politician. They are very different roles. A professional can contribute in the administration with his knowledge, but if you want to be a politician you have to develop certain skills such as being able to get close to the people and understand their issues, communicate, inspire, which are additional. I do not think just because you are a professional you can contest and win. However much people say that professionals should contest elections, winning is not easy, it’s a different ball game altogether. One thing I regret is that when the next Parliamentary election comes most of our professionals will not be ready because they have not done what I have been doing for the last one year. I have been campaigning for the past one year in Gampaha. I know how the system works now, in fact I have become like a politician. I am no longer a traditional professional. Many others have not done the same, which gives them very little time, but I still think more professionals must get involved in the three months ahead. Even delivery as a politician has two different roles. There are certain skill sets that you need to be a good politician, which these professionals need to develop.

We cannot however say that politicians are not professionals. There are many lawyers, engineers and doctors even in the current Parliament, but they are politicians, which makes us forget the fact that they are also professionals. So the new set of professionals that we have asked to get involved will become politicians

eventually.

I don’t think there will be a huge number of newcomers in the next Parliament, although people would like to see it happen. I predict that you will see many of the existing faces getting elected again, but, there will be a significant number of new faces as well and these newcomers, as I said, will be those who were involved in the last one year through Viyathmaga or Hari Maga or Eliya or Jathika Ekathuwa. Those who were involved in this political process understand the people and are likely to be elected.

The professionals you speak about are those who parachuted into politics, who were invited to contest an election by a political party and somehow won the election, but having done no politics before they are alienated from society. But the indivuals that we have groomed will be different because they have the exposure to people.

This time too there is a possibility of such people receiving nominations, but whether they will win is a question as there is far more competition this time. Earlier when a party nominated an individual for a district as the only professional probably such individuals had an advantage, but, this time people will have more to choose from. So it will not be that easy for someone to parachute without doing any prior groundwork.

For the first time we saw a candidate who did not engage in mudslinging or involved in character assassination, which he follows even after becoming the President. Do you think the political landscape in Sri Lanka is changing?

The political landscape in Sri Lanka is changing. When I sat with him supporting him to prepare his acceptance speech and from then on till now I have been in his team to discuss what he would tell the people, one thing that he has been telling from the beginning was to not engage in any mudslinging. We created a different value system, tried it out and it worked. He said that there should not be any posters or use of plastic and polythene and mudslinging. And, everyone had to follow to a great extent at the last election. Even the opponents couldn’t do it much, maybe some people put up a poster here and there, but other than that they couldn’t because we had set a standard. I think if he continues his presidency the same way with no wastage, no luxury and genuine service, the other politicians too will have to follow. This way, even if another Government comes into power they

will follow the same standards.

The way forward

We have a vision for this country, which President Gotabaya Rajapaksa very clearly spelt out. He wants to create a productive citizen, a happy family, a disciplined society and a prosperous nation. In order to achieve these four, the economy has a big role to play. For this, he has outlined people centric economic policies. The people centric economic policies also have four cornerstones – that is, every citizen must have some economic standing, which means there cannot be poverty, so poverty alleviation will be one of the key objectives of this Government; secondly everyone must have equal opportunities to progress, not everyone wants to progress as some are happy with what they are, but if you want to, individuals should have equal opportunities notwithstanding a person's personal wealth or favoritism. The Government therefore must ensure that there are equal opportunities to do business. Thirdly, a clean and efficient Government, the President is already visiting Government offices to ensure that they are efficient and at the same time he wants the Government to be clean as he is totally against corruption and he will go all out to tackle corruption and will be tough on whoever is found guilty. Fourth is protecting local entrepreneurs, which I believe many Governments are scared to speak about, whereas he says it openly and will continue to do so. We must create global entrepreneurs out of our local entrepreneurs. These are the four points in our people centric economy.

What are the opportunities out there for us to grow? The opportunity is that Asia is becoming the next economic hub. The center of gravity of economics is moving to Asia, which has a population of five billion with a growing middle□class. We see our entrepreneurs looking at Asia, rather than worrying about the West. The opportunities are in the region and hence we will support them. Secondly is the new technology that is taking over our lives, such as the Internet of Things, robotics and nanotechnology, which we call the fourth industrial revolution. In this instance we have the prospect to align ourselves with this opportunity as quickly as possible. If we take the first three industrial revolutions, beginning with the first one in the 15th century, mechanization, energy and computerization, all of which we missed as the country was not ready, but in the case of the fourth industrial revolution our youth can align themselves very fast if we support them. The President wants to focus on technology, enhance our facilities, provide education in technology and get our youth ready for this opportunity while focusing on Asia. You can see that there is a thought process, a very clear vision evolved through our discussion during the last

four years. We want to implement that vision and when we implement that we believe that people will hopefully want to continue.

I believe we have got a golden opportunity with a President who has a good vision for the country and a lot of people seem to be aligning themselves with his vision. But the present constitution is a big limitation. With the 19th Amendment we will have the same issues that we saw in the last five years between the President and the Prime Minister, although President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa are working hand in hand. Therefore, we have to overcome this problem for the betterment of the country and for the sake of the future generation. The incumbent President and Prime Minister will work well for the next five years, but we must think beyond that. For that, changing the 19th Amendment and bringing in a new constitution which will ensure a strong executive, a strong legislature, and a strong judiciary will be very important. For that purpose the next Parliamentary Election is going to be very crucial and I sincerely hope that the same commitment that the volunteers showed at the last elections which created this change will continue at the next Parliamentary Election as well, because we need it for the country in order to build a stronger Parliament, which will be able to bring a good constitution. Governments will come and go, but the constitution will remain, hence we have to ensure that any existing constitutional issues are addressed and resolved.