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Interview with President Maithripala Sirisena

By Meera Srinivasan

(TheHindu.com) - Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena on his achievements, challenges, and the importance of a judicial mechanism that has the confidence of Tamils.

In January 2015, nearly six years after Sri Lanka's brutal civil war ended, President Maithripala Sirisena came to power deposing Mahinda Rajapaksa, on the promise of good governance, the abolition of the executive presidency and reconciliation with the Tamil minority. His election, to many at home and abroad, heralded hope of a new beginning for the country.

Almost two years since, he is grappling with old and new challenges — ranging from an open split within the Sri Lanka Freedom Party he leads, to the frictions of coalition politics in the island's first national unity government, to growing impatience of the Northern polity — even as he tries to move ahead with his reformist agenda.

Speaking to The Hindu in Colombo, Mr. Sirisena discusses the progress made so far, the problems that linger, and his political vision for Sri Lanka.

In November 2014, you left the ruling party to join the common opposition. At that time, you spoke of grave personal risks associated with

the defection that proved historic, leading to a regime change in Sri Lanka. When you look back now, how does it feel? What do you

consider your biggest success as President?

Now 22 months have passed since I became the President. I am satisfied with my performance during this time.

There are reasons for that. Firstly, I succeeded in getting the 19th Amendment to the Constitution (The amendment clips powers of the executive President and strengthens the independence of oversight bodies) passed in parliament. We actually proposed that the executive powers of the President be reduced immediately. The Supreme Court said major clauses cannot be deleted without a referendum. Furthermore, the Supreme

Court told us what could be done with two-thirds majority in parliament. So we have changed clauses to the maximum extent possible with two-thirds majority in parliament.

Earlier the President could dissolve the parliament after completion of one year of parliament, but now under the provisions of the 19th Amendment, it has been extended to four and a half years.

Establishment of independent commissions is another reason. It was essential for the country to ensure [protection of] human rights, democratic rights, fundamental rights and the freedom of the people. I have ensured that people get these rights, I have succeeded in doing that as President. I

have given the maximum possible media freedom. There are no killings, abductions or cases of intimidation of media persons. They don't have to leave the country any more. Those who had fled

the country earlier have now returned. That is what people expected from me.

When the people made me the President, they did not ask for food, water or clothes. They wanted a society where they could live freely and happily. I have given that to the people.

But these things should be given to a developed society, where educated, intelligent people live. Only those who are intelligent enough will use these freedoms and rights responsibly. People without a righteous mind will not realise the value of these. They are not happy about these [rights]. They might use this freedom to mislead the society. When these rights are given to the Western societies, they enjoy those rights because of their intellectual capacities.

In our ancient times, we were far ahead of the Western people in our intellectual capacities. SEE P4



Wigneswaran Looks For A Clean Image

by Ashanthi Warunasuriya

(Thesundayleader.lk) - He has been branded an extremist and he has also been accused of attempting to scuttle the reconciliation process.

Last week Northern Province Chief Minister C. V. Wigneswaran looked to clear his name and that of the Tamil People's Council (TPC) which he now leads.

At a media conference in Colombo

Wigneswaran insisted that a wrong image had been given about a recent rally staged in the North by the TPC.

He said the rally was not for a separate state or against the Sinhalese community but merely to draw light on the concerns of the Tamils.

Wigneswaran said he was working with the TPC to obtain solutions for the issues faced by the Tamils as the TPC was taking

a more aggressive approach than the Tamil National Alliance.

Dr. P. Lakshman, Consultant Cardiologist and Co-Chairman of the Tamil People's Council

said that the TPC wants to construct an open dialogue between the people of the North and of the South. "We believe that the answer to any problem lies in understanding the basis of the question, acknowledging the existence of the problem in question, and honestly and forthrightly discussing the question in hand. These, we believe, are basis to solving any problem. However, we would like to stress that obfuscating, through a superficial approach, the source and nature of the problem and the consequences arising out of it, and concealing the just solution to the



problem at hand, is an approach that will most likely produce an undesired result. It is also morally wrong and strategically unwise," he said.

Dr. Lakshman said that concealing the truths will only serve to sow more seeds of discord and distrust between communities, and hamper any hope of a permanent solution.

The TPC feels that the national question of the past seven decades has only become more acute with time.

In a post-war context, people centric discourse on the national question has been actively discouraged.

It (the national question) has merely served politicians in the North and in the South to be utilized for electoral exercises. Sadly, certain sections of the fourth estate too have contributed to this malaise. SEE PAGE 10

Ahinsa Udayani Perera 'Top in the World' Cambridge Award

British High Commissioner James Dauris presenting the 'Top in the World' award to Ahinsa Udayani Perera, a student of Alethea International School, at the 'Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards Sri Lanka' held at the Kingsbury Hotel on Tuesday. She clinched this pinnacle accolade for Business Studies (Cambridge Ordinary Level) in the June 2016 examination series, where around a million Cambridge learners from 10,000 schools in 160 countries prepare for their future with an international education from Cambridge annually. Keith Davies, Country Director, British Council, Ms. Ruchira Ghosh, Regional Director, South Asia Cambridge International Examinations, Panchalika Kulatunga, Country Manager, Sri Lanka, Cambridge International Examinations and Mrs. Kumari Hapugalle Perera, MD, Alethea International School, were also present on the occasion. (Pic by Nishendra Silva)



Sri Lanka Women Set World Record, Dismiss Nepal For 23

Sri Lanka Women dismissed Nepal Women for 23 runs in the Asian Cricket Council Women's Twenty20 Asia Cup held at Bangkok Thailand. Jyoti Pandey scored 16 out of Nepal's 23 runs. Six batters were dismissed for zero. Nepal were 1 for 19 at one stage and the collapse took place while only 4 runs were added. Inoka Ranaweera took 3 for 3 and Sugandhika Kumari took 3 for 7. Sri Lanka lost 2 wickets before they reached the target. Hasini Perera scored 17 not out. Nepal had been dismissed for 47 by Pakistan earlier in the tournament.



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