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Govt. unveils human rights action plan

By Ashwin Hemmathagama

(FT.LK) - Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe yesterday urged the media to help establish human rights in the country and protect whistleblowers, be it an individual or non-governmental organisation.

Launching the National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights 2017-2022 at the parliamentary complex, the Prime Minister highlighted the importance of receiving media support in a responsible manner.

"Today we have passed new laws, especially the Right to Information. We have strengthened the Parliament and have established committees. In the absence of human rights, we have religious and ethnic issues. We need to protect human rights and educate people on their rights, which are unlimited. Unfortunately, the media is not supportive. The media should stop attacking whistleblowers. We should not get worked up simply because non-governmental organisations highlight human rights issues. We will reply wherever possible. There are certain human rights organisations attacking me. But let the human rights organisations continue their work. From birth to the deathbed there

are human rights. Many media persons were hurt, lost their lives or fled Sri Lanka. The media should talk about important matters. Getting Page One publicity about these matters is very important, rather than talking about less important issues," said the Prime Minister. Highlighting the Unity Government's attempts to ensure human rights during the last two years and the impact of them, PM Wickremesinghe said: "The action plan on protecting human rights and promotion is launched today. The five-year period from 2017-2022 will be under this plan. I extend my gratitude to Minister Mangala Samaraweera for working towards an action plan, enabling us to execute. With the approval of the Cabinet, I have appointed a committee comprised of ministers. In addition, there is another committee with the state officers, which is headed by Minister Sagala Ratnayaka. The committee is to submit reports on a monthly basis and the committee with ministers will sit once every three months. "Previous attempts to bring a similar plan faced a lot of issues. But this plan has no issues simply because we have pledged to protect human rights. A key reason for us to create this Government with President Maithripala Sirisena is to

establish human rights in this country. We need to remember that there was an era when human rights were unavailable. People were unable to resort even to the Judiciary to assure their rights. The Judiciary had an issue. The Chief Justice was removed and there was no place to resort to for a remedy. So against this background Maithripala Sirisena became the President on 8 January 2015, followed by him establishing the unity Government in September to ensure freedom," he added. The Minister of Finance and Mass Media, who was instrumental in formulating the National Action Plan for the Protection

and Promotion of Human Rights 2017-2022 during his tenure at the Foreign Ministry, stated he hoped establishing human rights would help develop the country where the benefits would be immense. **SEE P12**



The National human rights action plan was launched at Parliamentary complex by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. Minister of Finance Mangala Samaraweera and Minister of Law and Order Sagala Ratnayaka were also present.

Pic by Pradeep Pathirana

Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, title sponsor, British Guild of Travel Writers Awards(See pages 14/15)



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