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## President swears in 18 new Cabinet ministers



**By Skandha Gunasekara**

(FT.LK) - Cabinet changes made on Tuesday by President Maithripala Sirisena held few surprises with most of the key ministries remaining unchanged with the exception of MP Wijeyadasa Rajapakse who returned to Cabinet as Higher Education and Cultural Affairs Minister.

The six Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) Cabinet members who had voted for the no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in early April were noticeable absentees in the new portfolio distribution with their subjects being redistributed amongst new appointees. The Samurdhi and Labour portfolios, which were earlier held by the SLFP, were also given to United National Party (UNP) members. Former Foreign Minister Ravi Karunanayake,

who was widely speculated to make a comeback along with Rajapakse, was perhaps the most significant name missing from the line-up.

Predictably, Opposition parties were critical of the reshuffle, with the Joint Opposition charging that there had been no positive change and only a change in personalities.

"We have only seen a change in personalities. No positive change has taken place to correct the present collapse of the economy and Governance," Joint Opposition Parliamentary group leader MP Dinesh Gunawardana told the Daily FT.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna too said that it did not see any significant change in the new Cabinet from its previous iteration. "There is no difference in the Cabinet that we can see. Nothing special about the reshuffle

thus far. We will have to see if any significant changes are made to the Deputy and State ministerial portfolios," said JVP MP Sunil Handunetti.

The reshuffle also failed to impress some market watchers who were hoping that the Cabinet would signal an end to political uncertainty which had prevailed since the coalition government saw a setback in the Local Government elections on 10 February. Investors had been waiting for a Cabinet reshuffle since 12 April when Sirisena, in the wake of the failed no-confidence motion, suspended Parliament until 8 May.

"The changes are very cosmetic. There is nothing to boost the market," said a stockbroker in Colombo where the stock index ended flat yesterday, Reuters reported. "The country does not need a Cabinet

reshuffle at this point, but reforms to restructure the country," said Victor Ivan, an independent political columnist was quoted as saying by Reuters.

The reshuffle has been questioned by some analysts for failing to live up to President Maithripala Sirisena's promise of ministries being assigned in a scientific manner, with key subjects such as Education and ... **SEE P10**

### JO scoffs at 'reshuffle' demands election

**By Shamindra Ferdinando**

(Island.lk) - The Joint Opposition (JO) on Tuesday alleged that the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government had harmed the national economy to such an extent, the change of cabinet portfolios couldn't remedy the crisis.

Former External Affairs Minister and Chairman of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) Prof. G.L. Peiris said that fresh parliamentary polls were a must to restore much needed political stability needed to change Sri Lanka's direction.

Prof. Peiris explained the futility of a cabinet reshuffle at a time the country was in turmoil due to constant

failures of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration. The former minister said so at a media briefing at a Punchi Borella temple. Prof. Peiris was flanked by MP Bandula Gunawardana and MP and attorney-at-law Sisira Jayakody. Describing the latest change of portfolios



Prof. G.L. Peiris

as cosmetic, Prof. Peiris questioned the validity of the UNP-led National Unity Government as none of those SLFPers loyal to President Maithripala Sirisena had voted against the No Confidence Motion (NCM) moved by the JO against PM Wickremesinghe. Prof. Peiris pointed out 16 voted for the NCM and 23 abstained.

Therefore, the entire SLFP parliamentary group lacked faith in the PM, Prof. Peiris said. How could they succeed in the absence of consensus, Peiris asked, faulting President Sirisena for not taking remedial measures.

MP Gunawardana said the latest Central Bank report acknowledged that the economy grew at the slowest pace in 16 years to record a worse than expected 3.1 percent GDP expansion in 2017.

The former Education Minister chided the UNP for trying to blame the downward trend on drought and floods.

Gunawardana stressed that the UNP-SLFP administration should accept responsibility for the situation. They had caused irreparable damage and was now offering excuses.

The Central Bank had expected the economy to grow at about 5.0 percent in 2017, but a drought and floods affected agriculture and industry had dragged down overall growth.

At least 213 people were killed in the May 2017 rains that triggered over a dozen landslides and flooded 15 of the country's 25 districts.

"Adverse weather conditions and their spill over effects continued to affect economic activity and the economy surprised to the downside by recording a growth of 3.1 percent," the bank said in its annual review of 2017.

Gunawardana said such excuses weren't acceptable and the country couldn't be deceived.

The JO spokesman on economic matters pointed out that the previous low was a negative 1.5 percent in 2001 during

President Kumaratunga regime when the LTTE destroyed six aircraft at the Bandaranaike International Airport.

Gunawardana alleged that an attempt was being made to save the incompetent government by blaming the extremely poor growth on weather.

The bottom line is that the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe couldn't at least maintain the levels achieved by the wartime government, Gunawardana said, comparing the situation during the war and after under twice President Rajapaksa with the period under Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration. Gunawardana said that the country needed a fresh national agenda, under a new PM capable of leading the country against the rapidly developing crisis that could cause irreparable damage. The MP asserted that the time was fast running out and the country couldn't be saved unless fresh parliamentary polls were called to end continuing political uncertainty.

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