Tamils issue: Rajapaksa for 'homegrown political solution'

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Colombo (PTI): Fresh from his victory against the LTTE, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa has said his government will devise a "homegrown" political solution to resolve the decades-old ethnic problem in the country. He invited Indian industrialists to come and contribute to the development of Sri Lanka especially since the security atmosphere will see a radical transformation now.

"The India-Lanka accord led to the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution. In that way the homegrown approach covers the position of India, too. This time, a political solution will be devised after taking every shade of Sri Lankan opinion into consideration," Mr. Rajapaksa told The Week in an interview. "Since peace is in the interest of Sri Lanka, we have to sit down and decide on its content ourselves," he said. The President said he has fought "India's war" by eliminating the LTTE militarily, which had assassinated former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi 18 years ago. "I think my war is part of the South Asian campaign against terrorism. In fact, by eliminating the LTTE militarily, I have fought India's war." Mr. Rajapaksa said the next responsibility of the troops will be to contribute to the relief and rehabilitation of the displaced people in the north and northeast and added that even during the war, they were building roads and bridges in the north. The President said "nothing is more important for me than what India thinks" and thanked Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Congress president Sonia Gandhi and the Indian people for the support to Sri Lanka during the war. "My victory coincided with her (Sonia's) electoral victory. I have written to her congratulating her on winning the elections. India's moral support during the war was most important," Mr. Rajapaksa said. Asked whether he wants to build bridges with politicians in Tamil Nadu, he said he was congratulated by many politicians in Tamil Nadu after the war. "Look at the fate of LTTE supporters in Tamil Nadu in the elections. All those who supported the Tigers have been routed. The people of Tamil Nadu have given these terror supporters a fitting reply," he said. He also criticised certain NGOs and other aid agencies and said "these are the elite of Tamil society who had no clue about the hardship faced by the people in the LTTE-held northern Sri Lanka." Mr. Rajapaksa said he wants to have friends all over South Asia. "I find it all right to have good ties with Pakistan also," he said when pointed out that he has engaged antagonistic parties like the Israelis and the Palestinians and India and Pakistan. On allegations of human rights abuse by Sri Lankan soldiers, he said he thinks that the human rights lobby got its timing wrong. "Where were they when the LTTE terrorised Sri Lankans all these years?"
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