# Sri Lanka Lifts Travel Alerts After Defeating Rebels

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By Paul Tighe June 25 (Bloomberg) -- Sri Lanka is lifting travel alerts for the country after the defeat of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as it wants to attract tourists to the South Asian island, President Mahinda Rajapaksa said.“We have ended the need for travel advisories that crippled tourism,” Rajapaksa said in the capital, Colombo. “With terrorism defeated after three decades, our people can now travel freely. Tourists should have no fear to visit our attractions.”

Sri Lanka’s army defeated the last Tamil Tiger forces a month ago, ending their 26-year fight for a separate homeland in the country’s north and east. An estimated 280,000 people fled their homes to escape the fighting and are now in camps in the northern region. The U.S. and U.K. maintain their travel warnings for Sri Lanka, according to the State Department and Foreign Office Web sites. They advise against traveling in the north and caution there is a high threat of terrorism in the country. Rajapaksa’s government formally banned the LTTE in January this year after scraping a 2002 cease-fire with the group a year earlier. The LTTE is also designated a terrorist organization by the U.S., the European Union and India. Tourist Sites Sri Lanka aims to attract 2.5 million tourists by 2016, Rajapaksa said in an address to promote a new tourism program, published yesterday on the government’s Web site. The end of the war will allow tourist sites to be developed in the north and east, Rajapaksa said. The country aims to increase tourist numbers by at least 20 percent annually, Dileep Mudadeniya, managing director of the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, said in an interview in Colombo earlier this month. The war discouraged travelers from visiting the tropical island with the capital’s five-star hotels having 40 percent occupancy rates in the past two years, according to Jerome Auvity, general manager at Hilton Colombo. Rajapaksa’s government has pledged to resettle displaced people in the north and has appealed for international aid to rebuild the region. By June 9, 4,330 people had left transit camps in Vavuniya, Jaffna and Mannar, the government said two days ago. The LTTE said on June 16 it is creating a committee to continue the campaign for self-rule. “It is time now for us to move forward with our political vision towards our freedom, bearing in mind the practical realities in our homeland,” Selvarasa Pathmanathan said in a recorded statement sent by e-mail. Tamil People The “provisional transnational government” will be “the voice and conscience” of the Tamil people internationally and “take forward the next phase of the struggle,” Pathmanathan said, without saying where the committee would be based. Sri Lanka’s government “will have absolutely nothing to do with this body,” Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona said at the time. The rebels are defeated and Pathmanathan is wanted by Interpol, he added. A political settlement in Sri Lanka won’t include “space for racism and separatism,” Rajapaksa said at a parade last month marking the victory over the LTTE. Courtesy: bloomberg.com