Seek commonalities: Rajapaksa

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B. Muralidhar ReddyCOLOMBO: For the first time since a section of the Tamil groups in Sri Lanka took to arms 30 years ago to fight for their rights, representatives of all political parties came together here on Thursday at the inaugural meeting of the newly constituted All-Parties Committee (APC) for Development and Reconciliation chaired by President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Representatives of the opposition United National Party (UNP), pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the break-away LTTE political party Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) participated. Besides discussing development and reconciliation, the APC would focus on speedy resettlement and rehabilitation of the nearly 3,00,000 war-displaced sheltered in government-run relief camps in the Northern Province. In his remarks at the opening session, Mr. Rajapaksa told party representatives the operation to free people from terror was now over and it was time for a humanitarian mission to address new challenges. He said it was time to set aside the past and look ahead. “It is necessary to bring peace and tranquillity to the minds of the people in the North whose lives had been so badly shattered in the recent past, and restore their democratic rights and self-respect,” he said. “It is more important to search for the commonalities that existed among the political parties gathered than seek the causes that divided them”. N. Srikantha of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the single largest party of the Tamils in Parliament, expressed the “gratitude” of his party to Mr. Rajapaksa for the opportunity to participate in the forum. TNA was invited to an all-party conference by the President some weeks ago but it chose to stay away. The TNA made a plea for the speedy resettlement and rehabilitation of the war-displaced. “Our party assures all support to you and all democratic parties in achieving democratic solutions,” said Mr. Srikantha. He told the conference the TNA believed the country now had the political will to solve the national question. Nimal Siripala De Silva, Minister of Healthcare and Nutrition, representing the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) told the meeting the present situation required a positive attitude towards development and reconciliation to ensure lasting peace. Kabier Hashim, UNP MP, offered the cooperation of his party to the initiative. The Eelam People’s Democratic Party stressed the need to give priority to resettlement of IDPs as well as opening the A-9 highway for civilian traffic.Courtesy: hindu.com