Confidence and hope for Indo-Lanka bi-lateral relations – Nirupama Rao

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The Indian Foreign Secretary Shrimathi Nirupama Rao who met President Mahinda Rajapaksa today congratulated the President for his resounding victory in the recent Presidential Election, said she observed that so much had taken place for the better in Sri Lanka since she was last here as High Commissioner.
During the meeting at Janadhipathi Mandiraya she said the victory of the President gave much cause for confidence and hope for bi-lateral relations between India and Sri Lanka in the future, and that the Indian Prime Minister looked forward to an early visit by President Rajapaksa to India.

Discussing current political developments in Sri Lanka, she said that the presence of more than 1,000 candidates for the forthcoming general election and the North and Eastern Provinces alone showed the enthusiasm of the people for the democratic process, and the change that had taken place with the restoration of peace. “There is a great sense of hope and optimism in the air wherever I have been to”, she said. The Indian Foreign Secretary is here to participate in the opening of the Sri-Lanka-India Centre of English Language Training (SLICELT) at Peradeniya earlier today, said the President’s vision to promote the teaching of English in Sri Lanka deserved commendation, and that India was glad to assist in this task. President Rajapaksa thanked India for the assistance given to the furtherance of his policy of providing English as a Life Skill to Sri Lankan youth. Smt. Nirupama Rao also said the participation of more than 3,000 pilgrims from India at the recent feast at the shrine of St, Anthony in Kachchativu was a further indication of the good interaction between the Sri Lankan and Indian people. Commenting on the forthcoming general election, President Rajapaksa said there was much enthusiasm by the people to participate in it, being the first nation-wide election of representatives to parliament after the restoration of peace, and that he was looking forward to working with the many new faces and leaders who are expected to be elected, especially from the North and the East.

The Indian Foreign Secretary was of the view that Sri Lanka had made considerable success on the resettling of IDPs in the North and the East, with the number now standing at less than 70,000, and noted that this issue had now gone away from the attention of the international community. She expressed India’s willingness to continue assisting Sri Lanka in the resettlement of the IDPs. Similarly, India was also keen to assist in the complete restoration of the railway line in the North, she said.Among other matters of mutual interest discussed were that of the problems faced by fisherman from both counties, the proposed coal powered power project in Trincomalee, and the necessity for understanding between India andSri Lanka on the protection of the environment and the eco-systems.

President Rajapaksa later hosted Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao to lunch at Janadhipathi Manidiraya. She was accompanied by the Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka Shri Ashok Kantha. President Rajapaksa was accompanied in the cordial discussions by Secretary to the President Mr. Lalith Weeratunga, Secretary, Foreign Affairs Mr. Romesh Jayasinghe and the Governor of the Central Bank Mr. Ajith Nivard Cabraal. Presidential SecretariatColombo

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