New Minister of External Affairs briefs the media on the 16th SAARC Summit

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The newly sworn in Minister of External Affairs, Professor G. L. Peiris had his first interaction with the media at his residence, on the eve of his departure to take part in the 16th SAARC Summit and the Council of Ministers, to be held in Bhutan from 27th to 29th April 2010.

The Minister said that President Mahinda Rajapaksa will take part in this Summit at a time when SAARC is taking stock of what has been achieved and looking at defining what should be the SAARC priorities, moving from formulation to implementation, to serve the region. The focus at this Summit would be to make SAARC more ‘people centred’ so that it is seen by the people of the region as an instrument for their well being. In this regard the SAARC leaders would be looking at ensuring rural prosperity so that discrepancies between the urban and rural populations are lessened. If the member countries were to pool their resources they would be able to achieve the SAARC objectives as outlined at the Colombo Summit held in 2008, namely, countering terrorism, food security and energy security. The Minister said that Sri Lanka’s successful defeat of terrorism and the resounding mandate the people have given President Rajapaksa both at the presidential and the general elections, must be seen as a way forward, and a unique opportunity for economic development for the country as has been stated by the President. The Minister noted that this would be of interest to the leaders of other SAARC countries as well. Minister G. L. Peiris added that climate change, environment and sustainable development would also be main topics of focus at the 16th Summit.

Responding to a question relating to counter terrorism the Minister said that Sri Lanka would share its experience in counter terrorism for the benefit of other member countries. The Minister added that despite many prophets of doom predicting that the LTTE could not be defeated militarily Sri Lanka has shown that it was possible with a combination of strong political leadership, correct policies and coordinated use of resources. A question was also raised on Sri Lanka being ‘under attack from the West’ on human rights. The Minister responded by stating that the new Government would be looking at making appropriate changes to laws that were necessary in times of turbulence. Elaborating further he said that emergency regulations were also under ‘active consideration’ in this regard. He emphasized that these laws were not made in perpetuity and therefore were “bound to change”. The Minister added that Sri Lanka would be looking at constant dialogue, engagement and reaching out towards further strengthening its relations with the outside world. Ministry of External Affairs 25 April 2010