

Sirisena should respect public mandate: Rajapaksa

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Colombo: Former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa today said President Maithripala Sirisena should respect public mandate, a day after the SLFP chief vowed not to make him Prime Minister even if his coalition wins the parliamentary polls next week.

Sirisena, in a letter to Rajapaksa yesterday ahead of Monday's election, had said that he allowed him to contest parliamentary polls for the fear of a split in party.

Blaming Rajapaksa for not allowing succession in the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), Sirisena had said that he will not appoint him as Premier even if the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) coalition wins a majority.

He had also slammed Rajapaksa for alienating Tamil and Muslim minorities from the UPFA by adopting a rabid nationalist stance to win favours from the majority Sinhalese.

Rejecting Sirisena's charges, Rajapaksa expresses hope that Sirisena would respect the public mandate on August 17 election and make him the Prime Minister.

Rajapaksa, who was the president twice since 2005 and is credited for ending country's three-decade-old civil-war with LTTE, has taken the unprecedented step of running for parliament after enjoying two terms as president.

Before Rajapaksa, none of his predecessors had stood for parliament polls after demitting the presidency.

Sirisena was Rajapaksa's Health Minister until he came forward as the opposition unity candidate to challenge the then president last year.

Sirisena faced immediate sacking from the party only to be handed the party leadership when he defeated Rajapaksa in the January presidential election.

The SLFP is a main constituent party in the UPFA coalition.

The campaigning for the polls ends mid-night today with over 15 million of the island's 20 million population are expected to vote on Monday to elect a 225-member assembly for a five-year term.

- PTI