

Ranil Wickremesinghe vows to work with rivals to build unity government

20/08/2015 17:36 by admin

Colombo: Ranil Wickremesinghe, set to return as Sri Lanka's premier for a fourth term, today appealed to all political parties to work together to heal the divisions of the past as he began piecing together a new national unity government with possible support from minority Tamils.

A day after the 66-year-old incumbent premier thwarted ex-president Mahinda Rajapaksa's bid to stage a political comeback amid a surge in support for his reform-driven mandate, Wickremesinghe struck a reconciliatory note and called all parties to contribute to nation-building.

"I want everyone to come together now, think of the country, think of the people," he said ahead of his swearing-in as the new Prime Minister tomorrow.

He said he will continue the mandate for good governance given in parliamentary polls and work together with all parties in a national government for 2-3 years.

"The parliamentary elections of August 17 confirms the January 8 revolution," he said, referring to the presidential election held in January in which Rajapaksa had lost.

"We can't turn back," Wickremesinghe said, adding he will build a consensus on the new government's national policy.

"I have got a mandate to put our plan before Parliament, so that we could arrive at a consensus and build a national framework within which we will do our politics," he said, striking a reconciliatory note.

"Through this approach ... all parties could work together either in government holding a ministerial position or in Parliament through the oversight committees."

Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) coalition won 106 seats in Monday's parliamentary election, just 7 short of a simple majority in the 225-member assembly but enough to form a government.

He was certain to receive the majority support from Rajapaksa's United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) which has 95 seats.

The minority Tamil National Alliance (TNA) swept the ethnic Tamil-majority Northern and Eastern provinces with 16 seats and media reports today quoted a senior TNA leader that the party will extend support to the government.

"We will sit in the opposition but back the new government," TNA MP Dharmalingam Sithadthan said.

Rajapaksa, who accepted the poll result with "humility", today said he will not retire from politics and will serve the nation as an MP.

Â The 69-year-old two-time president, elected from Kurunegala province to the 225-member National Assembly, said: "I accept with humility, the result of the parliamentary election that just concluded and I thank the voters who placed their confidence in our party despite the unprecedented obstacles that we had to face.

"I also wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to all the activists and the people's representatives of our party who

worked indefatigably in the election campaign. I will continue to engage in politics in keeping with the people's mandate and function within Parliament to safeguard the nation and the democratic system.

Wickremesinghe, the veteran reformist was handpicked by President Maithripala Sirisena to lead a minority government after the longtime president Rajapaksa was defeated in the January 8 elections.

Rajapaksa contested the parliamentary elections held on Monday to return to the power as prime minister.

A group of Sirisena supporters is likely to join a broad-based national unity government led by Wickremesinghe.

Wickremesinghe became prime minister for the first time in May 1993, when a suicide bomber assassinated president Ranasinghe Premadasa.

He got his second chance in 2002, when he was credited with pulling the country out of recession.

A total of 196 members have been elected for a five-year term while 29 will be appointed based on the national proportion of votes polled by each party.

- PTI