

SRI LANKA

G. WIJAYASIRI, Temporary Alternate Governor

On behalf of the Sri Lanka delegation, I wish to join the previous speakers in expressing our sincere thanks to the Government of the Republic of Korea, especially to the Honorable Governor of Jeju Province and the people of Jeju Island, for their hospitality, and to the Management and Staff of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for the excellent arrangements that have been made for this meeting. Mr. Chairman, on behalf of my delegation, may I congratulate you on your election as Chairman of this meeting and let me also welcome the new members of ADB—Luxembourg and Palau.

With the strong support of ADB, the Asia and Pacific region continued to progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Overall poverty rates in the region have fallen and growth has continued. Yet challenges remain and enormous efforts are still required in many areas. Cross border public health problems, lack of access to safe water and sanitation, and rehabilitation of war-affected areas are some examples.

The South Asian economy grew at the level of 6.5% in 2003; yet it accommodates the majority of the poor in the Asia and Pacific region. I was pleased to find from the Annual Report of ADB, for the year 2003, it was a landmark year for ADB with \$ 6.1 billion of lending. This is ADB's highest lending since 1997. Sri Lanka also benefited from this lending and we note that in 2003, ADB approved a record level of assistance to Sri Lanka, totaling \$276 million, including a \$80 million emergency loan. In this connection I wish to thank all donors to ADB for their valuable contribution.

It gives me much pleasure in addressing this meeting on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has been a member of ADB since its inception and has been a fortunate beneficiary of considerable financial assistance in furthering the country's economic program in varied fields.

As you are aware, in April 2004, the people of Sri Lanka, under the leadership of Her Excellency the President, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, elected a new Government to office. The new Government is committed to building a prosperous nation, where all our people, of all ethnic communities, religions, and political affiliations could live with dignity and equal opportunity..

We are also determined to restore peace and harmony among communities and resolve the national problem through a process of negotiated political settlement. We are also committed to take all measures required, to prevent our nation from going back to war.

The new Government is determined to build a strong and viable economy. We want to build a new economic order through the competitive participation of a strong private sector and strong public sector which are accountable to the people, based on well-managed foreign investment incentives and the promotion of local industries and

enterprises. We will set up a National Council for Economic Development to ensure effective implementation of government policies and programmes.

We fully support ADB's continued assistance to building the public sector, promoting private sector growth and improving access to basic economic and social services, and the efforts to address economic and social development issues. We remain strongly committed to supporting the private sector in Sri Lanka. We would like to stress the importance of strategic infrastructure investment and institutional and policy changes to support the creation of productive employment opportunities for the poor.

However, it is our view that structural changes represent a long and complex process, and, as we make incremental progress, the implementation of the reforms would need wider consultation with stakeholders.

We specifically look to ADB's continued support as our country goes through a challenging period. Sri Lanka takes pride in its excellent relationship with ADB. This year we would greatly appreciate ADB's continuing support to further the Government's priority programs in areas such as highway development, power generation, education, and rehabilitation of the North and East, and to promote private sector development. We also attach considerable importance to issues of good governance.

Finally, I would like to place on record our appreciation of ADB for its substantial support extended to Sri Lanka. I express our deep appreciation to President Tadao Chino of ADB, the four Vice-Presidents, the Board of Directors, the Management, and the Staff for their valuable contribution to the work of ADB.