

Statement made by Hon. Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Finance and Media of Sri Lanka at the Business Session of the Asian Development Bank's 51st Annual Session in Manila on 5th May 2018

Hon. Carlos G. Dominguwz, Chairman of the ADB Board of Governors,
Hon. Takehiko Nakao, President of the ADB,
Distinguished Governors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for giving me the floor at this august gathering today, that celebrates 51 years of yeoman service to the people of Asia and the Pacific region by the Asian Development Bank. Sri Lanka has been working hand in hand with the ADB for over half a century that I can describe as a robust partnership in empowering our people to achieve sustainable development.

This year's meeting theme "Linking People and Economies for Inclusive Development" resolves to strengthen the ADB's founding vision to create a poverty free Asia and the Pacific. In fact, Mr. Chairman, my own government has been unequivocally promoting an inclusive growth trajectory for Sri Lanka in a knowledge based, highly competitive social market economy with a vision to become a rich country by 2025.

We are living at a time that you can call unparalleled to any age in human history, because of the rapid technological advances that enable innovative solutions for many development challenges. Asia's moment of economic growth, buttressed by fast improving health and educational opportunities allow the millennium generation to connect to each other by overcoming cultural, language and other feigned barriers which regressed our progress for centuries. This unique

opportunity should be seized with much optimism for a new era of prosperity in the 21 Century.

Our concerted efforts at this regional forum would no doubt bring about changes to the millions of lives at a rapid phase. My government's National Budget proposed this year offered a package of concessional credit schemes empowering young entrepreneurs, women, and the differently abled in the country within the theme of "Enterprise Sri Lanka". We wish to reawaken our nation's entrepreneurial spirit and to regain its rightful place as a vibrant trading hub in the Indian Ocean. Your theme here at the ADB today stands a matching tribute to those domestic policies embedded in our core values ranging from inclusive growth, good governance, and empowering the private sector as the engine of growth.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite the brunt of extreme weather conditions and other adverse external factors, Sri Lanka's economy demonstrated time tested resilience in 2017. We recorded our highest ever FDI inflows and our highest ever export performance. These led to meaningful job creation as the unemployment rate also declined to 4.2%. We expect the economy to accelerate growth driven by private enterprise and exports. We have introduced some key reforms including the new Inland Revenue Act, which came to force last month that could be called the most progressive tax reform in Sri Lanka in several decades. This is part of a broader agenda of introducing transparent rules based legislative and governance frameworks. Our Active Liability Management Act was made effective with a view

to improve domestic and foreign debt management. The rules based and transparent auction mechanism for government securities was introduced in the same vein. We are at the doorstep of becoming an upper-middle income country and your continued support to accommodate the desired transition without any hindrance to our national development agenda would be immensely appreciated.

With an ever active ADB resident mission established in 1997, over US \$ 8.5 billion project and policy based active loans, grants and technical assistance since 1968, reaching over 500 projects, Sri Lanka's ADB portfolio remains robust and active. Our interactions span mainly from the Transport Sector, Energy to Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development. I fervently hope that our national priorities and expectations have an attentive hearing in this august assembly that evolves for greater mutual benefit.

As a founding Member and a strong partner, let me Mr. Chainman, reiterate Sri Lanka's steadfast commitment to a long lasting engagement with this entity in time to come for the immense benefit of our own countrymen and millions of others in the Asian Pacific region. I thank you until we meet again in Fiji next year.