

# Dual Citizenship Put On Hold

By Janith Aranze



The current review of the system of dual citizenship could deprive thousands of expatriate Sri Lankans the right to a Sri Lankan identity.

With many choosing to live abroad due to work commitments or family reasons, dual citizenship is seen as the ideal way to integrate into a new community while still keeping an allegiance to your country of birth. With dual citizenship currently suspended, the new system is expected to be a lot tighter for those wishing to obtain it. It is indeed true that a number of key government positions are held by those who have acquired dual citizenship. The President's own brothers, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Secretary of Defence, is a citizen of both Sri Lanka and the United States, while Basil Rajapaksa, Minister of Economic Development, holds a US Green Card along with his Sri Lankan passport.

Speaking to the Controller of Immigration and Emigration, W.A.C. Perera, he said that current laws are being reconsidered, but he could not say when dual citizenship will be reintroduced. "At the moment we are formulating new laws again and again, after a decision has been taken then we can let people know what they are," he told The Sunday Leader. "No decision has been made yet, we expect it to be concluded in the very near future. We are just waiting for the President's approval," he explained. It is believed that up to 35,000 cases of dual citizenship for those living abroad will come under review, however when asked if this would include those from the President's family, Perera could not answer. "I'm not sure about this, that is there business," Perera replied.

The Senior Assistant Controller of Immigration and Emigration, I.C.R. Pathiraja, confirmed that the suspension of dual citizenship was only temporary. "It's a process of change, it should take about 2-3 weeks, but it will be given again," he explained. Like Perera, Pathiraja would not go into detail over what the new laws will be. "I cannot tell you what the new changes will be. The President wants us to review the system; there will be some sort of differentiation from the old system," he said. He did confirm however that those who are currently in possession of dual citizenship will not be restricted from travelling. "For those who already have it there is no problem, they can do as they wish," Pathiraja explained.

As it stands if you are an ex- Sri Lankan holding citizenship of a foreign country, or a Sri Lankan qualified to receive citizenship of a foreign country and who may contribute to the socio-economic development of Sri Lanka you can apply for dual citizenship. There are five main categories under which dual citizenship is granted, these are: 1) Professional Category, 2) Wealth Category, 3) Fixed Deposit Category, 4) Senior Citizen Category and 5) NRFC/RFC/SFIDA Category. Applying for dual citizenship will cost Rs. 200, 000 and for the spouse of the applicant to gain dual citizenship it costs Rs. 50,000.

It is believed that the government wants to make sure the screening process excludes those who are not helping Sri Lanka socially or economically. Though it is feared that this could lead to people being excluded on ethnic or religious grounds, the Department of Immigration and Emigration has been at pains to deny this will happen. What is for sure is that thousands of expatriates will be waiting with baited breath to see what the new regulations will entail