

**PICTORIAL**

**President salutes Motherland amidst rousing welcome**

**WIJITHA NAKKAWITA**

The return of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, when the Sri Lankan aircraft touched down at the Bandaranaike International Airport was charged with emotion as he was returning to a country liberated under his political leadership from the grasp of a terrorist group that was being held up as an invincible fighting machine. The moment he stepped on the soil he bent on his knees to salute the Motherland amidst the spontaneous applause and cheers from the large crowd gathered to welcome a leader who had created history by vanquishing a ruthless terrorist outfit. President Mahinda Rajapaksa was greeted warmly by the clergy of all three religions, Ministers and senior officials. The Maha Sangha blessed him with pirith chanting. Since independence no leader was received with such a rousing welcome as the country's freedom and territorial integrity was threatened as much as during the last 30 years. President Rajapaksa had achieved the impossible and demonstrated the world that terrorism could be wiped out if the correct leadership was given.



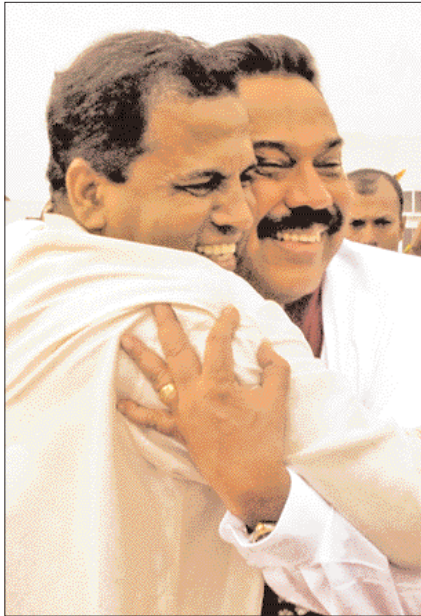
Maha Sangha invoke blessings on the President.



The President acknowledges cheers. AFP



The President greets the public



Warm welcome from Acting Defence Minister Maithripala Sirisena



Artists waiting to greet the President

*Pictures by Sudath Silva*



Meeting Minister Dinesh Gunawardena and other Ministers.



The President given a hero's welcome at the airport.



Large crowds await the President's arrival



With senior Ministers