

Shumaila Rafiq

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

South Asia

Weekly Report 105: from 30th jan to 5th Feb. 2010

BHUTAN

POLITICAL

- **Every day is a learning day”**
- **Faster and friendlier”**
- **Dredging, energy to top agenda**
- **2012 deadline set**
- **Hon'ble Lyonpo returns from the First Asian Ministerial Conference (AMC) on Tiger Conservation**

SOCIAL

- **Indo-Bhutan friendship car rally flagged off**
- **Founder and CEO of Joie de Vivre Hospitality**
- **Scientists 'grow' edible insects in Costa Rica**
- **Bhutan's Royalists Fear Christianity Will Create Tension**
- **Global warming leaves LDCs in the cold**
- **Grenade found and defused in Gelephu**
- **Come down harder on culprits: ACC to MoIC**
- **Avail calling plans for making cheap international plans**

ECONOMIC

- **Bhutan Telecom outlines investment for 2010-2014**

- Bank gives Bhutan lifeline to the world
- Tourism policy already happening
- DHI's Nu 52 billion investment plan
- Open season for bank employees
- Rising trend of tax evading goods

GEO-STRATEGIC

SRILANKA

POLITICAL

- Sri Lankan president vows to build nation with discipline
- Sri Lanka leader calls for unity after poll win
- Sri Lanka purges military amid coup fears
- On Goldstone, UN's Ban Files Only 4 Paragraphs of Observations, on Sri Lanka, Nothing
- IMF's Strauss-Kahn Coy on Opposing Sarkozy and Intervening in Greece, Denials
- Sri Lankan minister denies election rigging
- Pay hikes for Sri Lanka security forces
Northern Sri Lanka reawakening after 30 years' war
- British-based Tamils vote for independent state in Sri Lanka
- Sri Lankan minister resigns on health reason

SOCIAL

- Sri Lankan court revokes its order to seal the newspaper office
Sri Lankan fighting leaves a gruesome legacy

ECONOMIC

- India gives \$2.7 million worth material to war-hit Sri Lanka
- Sri Lanka's Cabraal Open to Higher Bank Reserve Ratio
- Sri Lanka shares gains on earnings expectations
- Sri Lanka in new tea marketing drive
- Sri Lanka gets more German aid for water supply

GEO-SRATEGIC

- **Pakistan attaches importance to ties with Sri Lanka**
- **Sri Lanka and 11 other countries taking part in Indian Navy's biggest war game in Andaman**

MALDIVES

POLITICAL

- **Maldives says it won't allow its land for terror activities against India**
- **Maldives - Weekly address: President discusses economy**
- **People of 2009: Ian Fry and Mohamed Nasheed**
- **Climate Change/ Quebec continues to shame Ottawa: Canada has become an International Pariah**

SOCIAL

- **Maldives seeks CBI help to deal with narcotic smuggling**
- **Over 2,700 expatriates deported**
- **Police denies allegations made by opposition MP**
- **Information department collects DhiFM recording**
- **June Debut For W Retreat Koh Samui**
- **Don't confuse weather, climate**

ECONOMIC

- **Abu Dhabi Ship Building explores Maldives' expanding marine industries sector**
- **Further business coop with Maldives sought**
- **Maldives in privatization drive**
- **Big nations set out emission cuts targets**
- **Expats in the Gulf are a force for good**
- **Aitken Spence Q3 profits up by 14%**

GEO-SRATEGIC

- **Lashkar threat brings Maldives closer to India**
- **Travel: UK suspends student visas from India, Nepal, Bangladesh**
- **SLIIT to enrol South Asian students**

BANGLADESH

POLITICAL

- **Bangladesh SC declares illegal amendment allowing religion in politics**
- **Bangladesh hunts for fugitive Mujib killers in Libya**
- **A 'black chapter' closes in Bangladesh**

- **Wanted ULFA leader could be handed over, hints Bangladesh**
- **Bangladesh's Apparel Leaders Seek More Orders From Wal-Mart**
- **Bangladeshis staying illegally in India should be sent back: Mohan Bhagwat**

SOCIAL

- **Celebrating Citizenship and Rights in Bangladesh**
- **Study Aims to Test Corporate Attitudes to Climate Change in Bangladesh**

ECONOMIC

- **Bangladesh seeks \$7 bln foreign investment for power**
- **There's a market to tap in neighbourhood - Bangladesh**
- **Bangladesh tea yields rise, exports fall - traders**
- **Bangladesh's Remittance Flow Records Over 20 Percent Growth**
- **Machinery suppliers see better prospect for Bangladesh apparel**
- **"Bangladesh now in million tonnes edible oil importers club**
- **Bangladesh needs \$9.5b annually, says expert**

GEO-SRATEGIC

- **New chapter for India & BD**
- **From Vision To Action**
- **STOCKS NEWS EUROPE-GCM Resources up; Bangladesh deal hope**

NEPAL

POLITICAL

- **Race against time to rebuild Nepal**
- **Nepali PM says Nepal needs to improve its economy**
- **Nepal Maoists seek Koirala's help for new coalition govt: Sources**
- **NC president Koirala assures PM Nepal HLPM not formed to topple govt**
- **Indo-Nepal relations in 2010**
- **Manipuri UGs in Nepal: GOC 3 Corps**
- **A View From Katmandu: Nepal's Fight for Democracy**
- **Kobad Ghandy confirms Maoists link to Nepal**
- **Trying times for inactive Nepal Vice President Jha, Oath in Nepali must:Lawyers**

SOCIAL

- **UK visa suspension affects genuine Nepali students**
- **ADB adds climate change agenda in CPS for Nepal**
- **Scholarships worth Rs 6.6m to Nepali students**

ECONOMIC

- **Nepali PM says Nepal needs to improve its economy**
- **Indian Oil's monopoly in Nepal to end**
- **Rana's largesse for Help Nepal**
- **Nano coming Nepal in March**

GEO-STRATEGIC

- **China too has a role to play in Nepal: US**
- **Nepal's president Yadav to visit India from February 15-18**
- **PBC to air programmes in Nepali, Sinhala, Tamil**
- **Singapore signed a new air services agreement with Nepal**
- **KOICA Helps to Set up Korea-Nepal Institute of Technology**

- **US: Aid to Nepal Army conditional**
- **Malaysia demands 100,000 Nepali workers**

DETAILED NEWS:

Indo-Bhutan friendship car rally flagged off

Sunday, January 31, 2010 Kolkata, Jan 31 (ANI): To promote motor sports and strengthen ties between the two neighbouring countries, the third edition of the India-Bhutan Friendship Car Rally was flagged off from Kolkata on Sunday. The rally has been jointly organised by Indo-Bhutan Friendship Car Rally Association and India-Bhutan Foundation, in association with JK Tyres and Industries Ltd. The theme of this year's rally is 'Connecting People' and it is being organized as a part of a friendship program that began in 2007, to build strategic relations between India and Bhutan. "This rally has catered to the friendship at the grassroots level. The slogan of our event is 'Connecting People', so through this car rally we are trying to further the friendship and brotherhood between the two countries," said P Majumdar, chief organiser, Indo-Bhutan Friendship Car Rally. Dasho Tshering Wangda, the Consul General of the Royal Consulate of Bhutan further said that the event would help develop amiable relations among people of the two neighbouring nations. The rally that started from Siliguri city in West Bengal will cover a total distance of 800 kilometres in three legs. The first leg will be from Siliguri to Phuntsholing, the border town of Bhutan. In the second the motorists will travel from Phuntsholing to Gelephu, a town located on the Indo-Bhutan border and the final leg will be from Gelephu to Bhutan's capital city of Thimpu. The rally will last till February 6. Over 28 participants from India and 12 from Bhutan are taking part in the rally. (ANI)

Founder and CEO of Joie de Vivre Hospitality

What Business Leaders Can Learn From Bhutan

Having spent the past 32 years in the Silicon Valley/Bay Area region, I guess I've grown accustomed to start-ups wreaking havoc in mature industries. Hewlett-Packard, Apple, Google, Facebook -- they all were launched within a 15-mile radius of my alma mater, Stanford University, and they went on to revolutionize not just their industry, but they changed our relationship with technology and, frankly, in Facebook's case, our relationships with each other. So, it's no surprise that I'm fascinated with a little, almost-mythical country in the Himalayas that is revolutionizing how world leaders are looking at the definition of success. Like *The Mouse That Roared* (a popular book and film from the late 1950s about an imaginary, bucolic country situated between France and Switzerland that becomes the admiration of modern society when it declares war on the United States), Bhutan is getting the kind of attention an off-off-Broadway play gets when you know it's destined to be a hit. In 1972, the 17-year old King of Bhutan asked the blasphemous question, "Why are we so focused on Gross Domestic Product? Why aren't we more concerned with Gross National Happiness?" For nearly 40 years now, Bhutan has been reinventing itself based upon the premise that the ultimate public good a leader can provide his or her people isn't material possessions, but instead it's happiness or well-being.

This "beginner's mind" idea has found fertile ground in the 21st Century as more than 40 countries are now studying their own GNH (Gross National Happiness). Nicolas Sarkozy recently announced what some are calling a "joie de vivre index" in France based upon an 18-

month study of two Nobel economists who recommended that the largest countries of the world end their obsession with GDP and consider some new intangible metrics. In essence, they're suggested that GDP -- which focuses exclusively on tangible production and consumption -- no longer should be our sole definition of global success especially at a time when 64% of the world's GDP now comes from the intangible service industry. In other words, GDP measures outputs which might have made sense in a more mechanized, industrial era. But, given the knowledge era we now live in, measuring those inputs that influence the output is a more holistic method of evaluating whether we're creating sustainable success. This may seem abstract, but it's extremely relevant to business leaders who have come to realize that a myopic focus purely on the bottom line can have the same effect as driving a car at full speed all the time without doing occasional maintenance and refueling. Here are three important lessons for business leaders to learn from Bhutan: (1) Leaders don't create happiness for people. The Prime Minister of Bhutan told me his goal is "to create the conditions in which happiness can flourish." Abraham Maslow once suggested business leaders "can set up the conditions so that peak experiences are more likely, or one can perversely set up the conditions so that they are less likely." Great leaders create healthy habitats. From those healthy habitats sprout the outputs we're looking for whether it is happy citizens or a profitable business. Silicon Valley has an eco-system that is primed for innovation, but as many regions of the world have learned, you can't easily replicate the intangibles that create such a cultural habitat. So, first brainstorm with the leaders in your company about what cultural "conditions" would help your company flourish and what kinds of specific things you can do to create that habitat.

(2) Leaders value and measure the intangible. The Bhutanese have created a science behind the art of happiness. They measure four (4) pillars, nine (9) key indicators, and 72 various metrics to help them understand whether they are creating fertile conditions for happiness. The Gallup organization has developed 12 questions that help leaders measure employee engagement like "At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?" or "Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?" It's time for leaders to distinguish between what they can easily count ("Are you being paid enough?") with what employees most value. The intangibles of mission and meaning are powerful fuel for knowledge-driven industries, so find ways to measure these vital inputs.

(3) Leaders are willing to deviate from the norm. Most world leaders didn't take notice when the teenage King of Bhutan asked his impertinent questions about GDP. Those that did notice chuckled and chalked this idea of GNH up to "Buddhist economics." But, if you're a small country or a small company, your best strategy to compete with the big boys is to find a niche and own it. In my case when I started my company 23 years ago by purchasing an inner-city motel, I went after rock 'n roll bands as our core customer, even though conventional hoteliers told me I was crazy to want these party animals. Yet this target customer was perfectly suited to my funky motel and this was an untapped market (bands) that was growing and recession-proof. Similarly, it took 30 years for the world to embrace Bhutan's approach to GNH, yet this "happiness niche" has turned out to be much larger than the King of Bhutan ever imagined. Find a niche, embrace it wholly even if it's unconventional, and deliver on your promise better than any of your competitors.

Scientists 'grow' edible insects in Costa Rica SANTO DOMINGO DE HEREDIA, Costa Rica — The day when restaurants will serve garlic grasshoppers or beetle larva skewers is getting closer in Costa Rica, where scientists are "growing" insects for human

consumption. Entomologist Manuel Zumbado's research into this alternative food source is inspired by practices in Africa, where insects have long been part of people's diet. With its rainforests playing host to countless insect species, including thousands that have yet to be identified, Costa Rica is a perfect breeding ground for the work. From leaf-cutting ants to rhinoceros beetles and a dizzying flurry of butterflies, the Central American nation is also a haven of ecotourism. But is it the next hotbed of mouth-watering bugs? The food diversification program at the National Biodiversity Institute in Santo Domingo de Heredia, a small city close to the capital San Jose, looks into indigenous insect species. But it also examines mushrooms, inspired by their importance in diets from the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. At the institute, Costa Rican scientists mingle with Bhutan mycology expert Ugyen Yangchen and Elisabeth Zannou, an entomologist from Benin. Costa Rica and Benin share historical ties, as many slaves were taken from the western African country to Central America during the colonial era. "Benin knows a lot about insect consumption and Bhutan about eating mushrooms, while Costa Rica is bringing its experience in managing biodiversity," Marianella Feoli, who manages the foundation coordinating the research program, told AFP. In Benin, termites, grasshoppers and crickets, as well as butterfly and moth larvae are a common part of people's diet, explained Zumbado, who traveled with his colleagues to explore the phenomenon in the coastal country. "In other countries, gourmet restaurants serve insects," he noted. "In the beginning, people thought we were a bit crazy, but I think this is an alternative, not only as a survival food, but also as a cultural concept." *Esperanzas*, a large grasshopper species with long antennae that abound in Costa Rica's forests and rural areas are "far more savory than shrimp" when seasoned with garlic, according to the researcher. Zumbado should know -- he has consumed scores of insects during his travels in Costa Rica and Benin. "It's worth the effort to taste them," he added. "You can fry them, grill them on skewers with onions." Insects a la fish were a favorite of Benin locals. As part of his effort to convince a skeptical public not particularly enthused at the thought of munching on crunchy creepy crawlies, the entomologist suggested first adding insect delicacies to the menus of the best restaurants in town. A boutique hotel in the northern province of Guanacaste -- the country's top tourist destination -- was tempted, an accompanying wine oblige. "I would recommend a big pricetag for the entree, so that clients appreciate it," Zumbado said with a malicious smile.

Bhutan Telecom outlines investment for 2010-2014 5 feb.

State-owned Bhutan Telecom has revealed that it plans to invest around BTN2.03 billion (USD43.99 million) in its networks over the next four years, local daily Kuensel writes. The report emerged after Druk Holding and Investment (DHI), the state-owned holding company which manages government-held assets, announced plans to invest a total of BTN52.61 billion in its operations in the same time-frame. Bhutan Telecom plans to use the funds to expand the networks of its B-Mobile subsidiary, while continuing work to upgrade the PSTN. As reported by CommsUpdate on 9 October 2009, B-Mobile is currently engaged in expanding its GSM network into rural areas and recently completed expansion projects in the Paro, Samdrupjongkhar, Samtse, Chukha and Haa dzongkhags

Bank gives Bhutan lifeline to the world

In the tiny Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan, the first commercial bank has just opened its doors -- and the entrepreneurial Bhutanese are delighted. Bill Radke talks to Lisa Napoli, who is in the country's capital of Thimphu

Bhutan's Royalists Fear Christianity Will Create Tension *February 2, 2010*

THIMPHU, Bhutan (CDN) — Bars, pubs and discos have become legal in Bhutan - a cause of concern for the older generation - but construction of worship buildings other than Buddhist or Hindu temples is still prohibited. The prohibition remains in force even though Christians abide by Bhutan's codes of conduct speaking the Dzongkha language as well as the Nepali language at church gatherings, and wearing the national dress. The National Assembly of Bhutan banned the practice of non-Buddhist and non-Hindu religions through edicts in 1969 and in 1979. But Christians do meet for Sunday worship, with attendance of more than 100 Christians in an underground church not unusual. Why are Christians seen as a greater threat to the culture of the nation than the "democracy disco culture," as one government official described the emerging subculture among the Bhutanese youth? It is believed that Christianity will create religious tensions in the country. "There are reasons why Christianity is not being tolerated in the country," said a former high government official who requested anonymity. "Look at the communal tensions in India and Nepal. Christianity can divide the Bhutanese society as well." He mentioned two incidents that appeared in the Bhutanese press last year, one in which 13 Christians allegedly hanged a woman they had accused of being a witch, and a suicide by a Hindu man who reportedly left a note saying his Christian wife and children were pressuring him to convert. Christians here said these were isolated incidents that they strongly condemned. "A majority of believers in Bhutan are not educated and are from lower economic backgrounds," said the pastor of an underground church. "When open preaching is not allowed, this is what happens." Sound Christian teaching remains lacking, he said. There is a tremendous need for good Christian teaching and general education among the Christians in Bhutan, said the pastor. "But little can be done given the restrictions we face here." Christians are only allowed to pray if someone is sick among their acquaintances, he added. The government also fears that Christianity could cause societal tensions because of the general misconception that Christians lure others to the faith with money; converts are viewed with suspicion, said a government official on condition of anonymity. "There should be one religion in one nation," said the official, adding that religious freedom should be allowed only after educating people.

Threat from Within

Bhutanese officials are no strangers to religious conflict. "You must also understand that the kind of Buddhism practiced in Bhutan is a minority sect within the two Buddhist divisions," said the former government official. A majority of Buddhists in Bhutan practice Vajrayāna Buddhism, also known as Tantric Buddhism, and belong to the larger Mahayana sect, one of the two major divisions of the religion along with the Theravada sect. Theravada Buddhism has a widespread following in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries, including Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Mahayana is practiced in a few East Asian countries, including Japan. Unlike Theravada, which is more individualistic in its motivation, Mahayana Buddhism involves an aspiration to achieve enlightenment not only for one's own sake, but for the sake of all "sentient" beings. "There is a perceived threat to the Buddhist sect in Bhutan from the more powerful Theravada division," said the source, without divulging more about the clash within Buddhism. "In such a scenario, how can you expect the government to willingly open doors to Christianity, which too is a threat?" Of Bhutan's more than 670,000 people, Christians are estimated to range in number between 3,000 and 6,000. Around 75 percent of the people practice Buddhism, and roughly 22 percent are Hindus, mostly of Nepali origin.

Every day is a learning day”

3 February, 2010 - Despite missing ema datshi and shakam paa, choosing to work in the information technology enabled services (ITES) sector in India was the right decision and is paying off, say the small number of Bhutanese, who opted for jobs with Infosys and Genpact last year. “Every day is a learning day out here,” said Jigme Thinley, who has been working the past two months as a content development editor for Yahoo search marketing. “Earlier I used to think that working in a BPO company is boring, but I was wrong.” Jigme Thinley, was one of 37 graduates selected for recruitment by multinational IT services company, Infosys, in September last year and one of the few that took up the offer. There are 11 Bhutanese graduates working in India, three with Genpact. They represent the government’s first attempt at creating an experienced IT workforce that, it hopes, will manage ThimphuTech Park when it opens mid-2011. The government has predicted that the park will directly employ 700 Bhutanese at the managerial level. For the past few months, the 11 Bhutanese have been experiencing working in a corporate environment that most of them will try to implement once back in Bhutan. Describing her experience, Dorji Lham, 24, a process executive, who reviews advertisements on the Yahoo search engine, said, “In one word: equality.” All the others reflected the same observation: “Although I’m new everyone treats me equally,” said Norbu Yangden, who reviews content for Yahoo. “There’s no partiality.” Karma Dorji, 25, who has been working with Genpact for the past five months, said, “Even if the person has a high post, they always try to mingle with us and ask us for new ideas.” He added, “You get rewarded for your performance.” Karma, who works the night shift, puts in nine hours a day for five days a week, said, “I’m living in India, but following American timing.” Although not exactly enjoying his night shift job, he said it allowed him to gain confidence, especially in communicating, and so opening employment opportunities. On skills they are gaining, they pointed out that besides communications, their analytical, business, computer, English, and even behavioural skills are being enhanced. “I’ve learnt to adapt to new changes,” said Sonam Tshomo, 22, who works for Infosys British telecom data process. She said that initially she was reluctant to leave Bhutan. “But as time went by, I got used to it and now I don’t feel like going back,” she said. “Time is changing and I gave myself a chance to face challenges.” She said she would eventually return to Bhutan and implement what she learns at Infosys. Getting paid a monthly salary of around Nu 10,000, most of the Bhutanese graduates said this amount was enough when managed properly. The graduates do not receive any government stipend although they did receive a security deposit and joining allowance of Nu 7,000. They pointed out that good constant performance would net them better pay on a monthly basis. “It can go up to Nu 50,000 if you perform well,” said Karma Dorji. But he added that, for now, “we’d definitely love a little help from the government.” Other graduates differed. Referring to past government support, Chimi Euden Tshering, a process executive with Infosys, said, “It’s sufficient (basic pay), I don’t expect anything from our government.” On the reluctance of Bhutanese graduates, or rather their parents, to venture abroad and experience the ITES sector, the employed graduates pointed out that they had made sacrifices but that it will pay off. “Away from my family, my country, but when I go back to my room after work, there’s a sense of satisfaction,” said, Sonam Tshomo. “I’ve made the right choice.” “There’s a vast pool of knowledge here if you’re willing to broaden your horizons,” said Jigme Thinley. Norbu Yangden said new graduates should “grab” the opportunity to work abroad before the chances are lost.

“It’s time to step out.” Most of the employed graduates expressed their desire to return and work at ThimphuTech park. “I’m planning to come back and work for the IT park as soon as it’s ready,” said Yangchen Zangmo, 24, a process executive with Yahoo for four months. “And I’m hoping to bring back with me a good amount of experience.”

Tourism policy already happening

3 February, 2010 - The government has already identified more than 100 acres of land across Bhutan for the creation of tourism infrastructure like quality hotels, spas, wellness centers. In total the government would acquire 500 acres with 180 acres in the centre, 120 acres in the south, 110 acres in the west and 60 acres in the east. “The government last month invited expression of interest from any interested parties for the development of tourism infrastructure in these places,” said gross national happiness commission (GNHC) secretary, Karma Tshiteem. This is part of a series of executive orders issued in late 2009 by the cabinet, based on a McKinsey plan for tourism centred around the nine initiatives (see box). Another move is that, after getting autonomy for the tourism council of Bhutan, the TCB secretariat is now in the process of becoming a corporate entity. The secretariat’s employees will not be civil servants but recruited from the civil service, private sector and international experts, who would be compensated on the basis of their performance. There would also be a performance management system for the staff. Budget for the secretariat will also be based on the performance and results given by it. “This autonomy will enable TCB to function in an agile manner so that it can be much more dynamic to get things done,” said Karma Tshiteem. The online credit card system is expected to be functional by April 2010. “We expect this move to make a significant impact since Bhutan till date didn’t have a credit card system, which inhibited tourists from spending more.” Tourists will also soon face no road permit restrictions to travel across Bhutan, except for a few monuments and areas drawn up as a negative list by the home ministry. Visa processes are also expected to be online by March 2010 as compared to the manual processing done by home ministry right now. TCB is also being allocated Nu 26 mn for destination marketing this year. As part of this, the government is close to finalising the election of an international advertisement agency to brand and market Bhutan. It is also in the process of getting in touch with reputed international tour companies that handle premium or high paying tourists.

DHI’s Nu 52 billion investment plan

5 February, 2010 - The Druk holdings investment (DHI) and its companies are planning a Nu 52.614 bn investment for various projects and plans in four years, from 2010 to 2014. The respective boards of the companies have already given their approval, while the DHI board recently gave an ‘in principle approval,’ now to be followed by consultations with the finance ministry. With Nu 28.464 bn, Bhutan power corporation (BPC) has the largest investment outlay. Of this Nu 15.677 bn will go towards construction of transmission infrastructure for Punatsangchu I and II and Mangdechu. “Under the Tala project this responsibility lay with the Tala hydroelectric project authority, but now BPC will be in charge of arranging for the infrastructure, which will help with capacity development,” said DHI senior analyst, Kinzang

Tobgay. BPC will also be constructing a 20 MW Begana hydroelectric plant in Thimphu and a 13 MW Druk Bindu hydropower plant in Samtse. Druk Green power corporation with a Nu 10.556 bn outlay will see the bulk of the investment in two new hydropower plants outside the 10,000 MW with the 208 MW Nikachu and 100 MW Gamri. The former is located on the Nikachu tributary of the Mangdechu between Wangdiphodrang and Trongsa, while the latter is on Gamri, a tributary of the Drangmichu in Trashigang. These power plants are aimed at providing power to a data centre being planned by DHI and also supply power to the 10,000 MW construction sites that could require around 5 to 20 MW per project. The long terms cost of both the project beyond 2014 is seen at Nu 24.023 bn. DGPC has also set aside Nu 500 mn to make Bhutan's first hydropower construction company, with the aim of making it capable to execute major works, as DGPC is expected to take on joint venture projects with Indian PSUs. "The bulk of the money will be used for buying heavy machinery and already 60 engineers are being trained," said Kinzang.

Global warming leaves LDCs in the cold

Climate Change Funding³ February, 2010 - Unanswered questions threaten to breed mistrust in the promises of climate-change funding that governments made in the Copenhagen Accord at December's UN summit, says a paper published yesterday by the international institute for environment and development (IIED). In the Copenhagen Accord, developed countries pledged USD 30 bn over the three years from 2010 to 2013 and USD 100 bn a year from 2020, to help developing and poor countries cope with the impacts of climate change. Bhutan and other the least developed countries' focus is on preferential treatment for adaptation fund. However, channel of fund flow and disbursement is not clear and many countries, including Bhutan, have no idea how they will benefit. The LDCs in Copenhagen demanded financial benefits through a special separate window, so as to get an equal share by all, because the mitigation and adaptation fund flows through only one window and, as a result, most LDCs did not get the fund they were supposed to as per the convention, said national environment commission officials in an earlier interview. If Bhutan gets the fund, then the government priorities would be on adaptation and long term plans and strategies. Bhutan's long term adaptation plan would be in the education sector, assessment of health consequences, improve human settlements, which are threatened by climate change and prevent glacial lake outburst and depletion of forest in the long run. Other targets are creating a knowledge-sharing forum, sharing experience and physical green technical transfer in energy and industrial sectors and implement waste management and re-cycling activities. "However, it's far from clear where the funding will come from, if it's genuinely new and additional, and how it'll be allocated and channelled?" says co-author Saleemul Huq, a senior fellow in IIED's climate change group. "The paper raises six key questions that will need to be answered." Huq's co-authors are Timmons Roberts, who is director of environmental studies at Brown university in the United States, and Martin Stadelmann, a researcher at the centre for international and comparative studies, ETH and university of Zurich, Switzerland. "Critics are claiming that much of the promises made at Copenhagen will be met with 'recycled aid,' says Roberts. "Too many treaties have faltered as promises go unmet, and we can't afford this to happen with climate change," he adds. "To meet these criticisms, there needs to be much broader discussion of what should count as climate finance, and how it'll be monitored and tracked."

Open season for bank employees

Competition makes established banks take steps to retain staff

5 February, 2010 - With Druk Punjab national bank (DPNB) now open, the country's first two commercial banks have lost a number of customers both old and new. But a few employees from both BoB (bank of Bhutan) and BNB (Bhutan national bank) also joined the migration to DPNB, causing one bank to step up measures at retaining its staff. BoB, a Druk holding and investments subsidiary, recently introduced an education scholarship program for its employees in a move to bond them to the company. The company lost 10 employees last year, some of them to DPNB, at both the executive and junior management levels. BoB's CEO, Kinga Tshering, said he was not concerned at the moment about more losses. But he added it could become a problem. The bank is taking steps to ensure a core group of employees "will always be with us," he said. Over the next ten years, BoB will spend Nu 120 mn to send 60 of its employees abroad to obtain master's degrees. Six employees, each receiving Nu 2m each, will go for their master's every year, during the next decade. After returning, these employees will be bonded to the company for triple the duration of the study period ensuring their retention. On whether the bond period might be excessive, the bank's human resources (HR) head, Tshering Namgyal, said that returns on the investment had to be ensured and that, according to the bank's calculations, the bond period "is very fair." Tshering Namgyal also pointed out that this is not only a retention strategy, but one at upgrading staff capacity. He said, "Keeping in mind the competition, we also want to achieve the same level of competency, the same kind of customer service and eventually make it even better." He added that it was a move to also reward and recognise the "loyalty and dedication, hard work and contributions," of employees, motivate young employees, and attract graduates. Meanwhile BNB, which lost six employees last year, two to DPNB and four to the upcoming T bank, is also taking measures to mitigate the situation. The bank recently revamped its employee performance management system to be "more objective and quantitative than subjective." This will ensure that employees, who are doing well, are eligible to a faster rise in the ranks and more pay. But BNB's CEO Kipchu Tshering said that, while incentives at his bank is better than most companies, "there's no way to stop them leaving, especially at the executive level". He pointed out that "when you can make 65,000 in DPNB rather than 30,000 in BNB, it's only natural that they'll go." BNB, as a retention strategy, also introduced staff schemes for both housing and vehicle loans at only 5 percent, last year.

Grenade found and defused in Gelephu

2 February, 2010 - The bomb disposal squad of the royal Bhutan army (RBA) defused a highly explosive grenade kept under a culvert bridge about four kilometres from Gelephu towards the Lodrai highway yesterday. The bomb was first spotted by a student after which he informed Gelephu police. The police investigation team, along with the RBA bomb disposal squad, visited the site and found the grenade under the culvert bridge. The bomb disposal team removed and defused the bomb.

Gelephu police is investigating the case.

Come down harder on culprits: ACC to MoIC

3 February, 2010 - The anti corruption commission (ACC) has asked the ministry of information and communications (MoIC) to take stronger action against 13 employees of the department of civil aviation in keeping with existing laws. The 13 employees were charged last year for taking bank loans they were not entitled to. The mastermind, Thinley Namgay, a fire and rescue crew member, had forged the signature of the assistant finance officer and manipulated loan application forms, enabling him and 12 other colleagues to take loans in excess of what they were entitled to.

“According to last week’s Kuensel story, the 13 individuals were charged with resorting to paying commission, deceptive practices and forgery, all of which constitute criminal offences and that are not within the purview of the MoIC’s administrative mandate,” said a senior ACC official. The official said that criminal actions must be taken to court where the judicial system would decide on the outcome. “It’ll be adequate if MoIC takes up the issue as per the rules, but we’ll be forced to take up the case under the ACC Act, if there’s no satisfactory action on the issue,” said the ACC official. Giving the example of the dismissal of the education ministry official for forgery and the ministry of labour corruption case, the ACC official said that there must be uniform application of the law, though it would be up to the court to adjudicate on the issue. “The danger with this case is that there could be scenarios where junior employees in government service commit criminal offences and then, in collusion with the head of the department, get off lightly with only administrative action,” said the ACC official. The MoIC disciplinary committee in early 2009 had recommended that, apart from the compulsory retirement of Thinley Namgay, the 12 others be demoted by a grade each. The action in the end was to withhold promotions of the 12 for a year and give compulsory retirement to Thinley Namgay with benefits. As per the ACC Act, things like deceptive practices, forgery and paying commission constitute corruption and the penalty for these are outlined in the penal code of Bhutan,” said the official. “Under deceptive practices, the staff managed to get loans from even the Bank of Bhutan, which must also be looked into,” the official added. MoIC minister Lyonpo Nandalal Rai said, “I’m studying the facts of the case. I’ll respond only after knowing the details.”

Avail calling plans for making cheap international plans

With the growing demand of cheap international calls, service providers has introduced lots of cheap calling schemes that are helping users to make cheap calls worldwide within their budget. The ease of internet phone service has prevented all the barriers of communication by offering umpteen value added services to users. The growing scope of digitalization gives people a complete comfort zone in terms of telecommunication. Earlier, things are not much advanced due to the absence of digital technology but nowadays, the concept has been changed. Today, we have number of ways to make cheap international calls. The advantage of internet phone service has given people a chance to interact with their near and dear ones at affordable rates. It is like a thaumaturgy that internet phone service connects long distance people at low rates along with a chance to be a member of VoIP family in order to avail the benefits of various communication features.

People work hard to earn more and more money for their family's wellbeing as well as for raising

the standard of their living, It is the most necessary requirement of people through which people can easily buy the happiness and comfort of lives. But when it comes to international calling, generally the user avoid making international calls due to uneconomical rates. Such great expensive calling rates are one of the main concern of people which they really want to get rid of. The introduction of internet phone service has changed the whole telecommunication world by proving a solution to the problem of expensive calling. It allows user to make calls from computer as well as mobile phones at cheap rates. Even, the user can also have fun with lots of features including caller id, call waiting, call conference, call waiting, video calling, instant messenger etc. Moreover, umpteen service providers are offering number of attractive calling plans which are making huge profits. Such reasonable international calling plans offer users attractive deals and cheap calling rates to different destinations. With the growing competition, the calling rates are also sinking down which gives people an opportunity to keep in touch with loved ones at any corner of the world. For instance, service provider 'Youtring' offers various cheap calling plans without any hidden charges. The user can select any of the calling plan as per his requirement. There are numerous calling plans available on Youtring for various destinations including Asia calling plans, cheap India calling plans, Bhutan calling plans, Pakistan calling plans etc. Everyone want that they get the best services and to cope up with such growing needs, service providers are putting their efforts to fulfill their needs. A number of websites are offering internet phone service, calling plans etc. The user need to subscribe on such VoIP devoted websites in order to avail the valuable services of making cheap international calls. So, now eliminate all your worries and grab internet phone service to communicate with your friends and family without any hassle. Enjoy the hassle free communication and stay connected to your close ones.

Faster

and

friendlier”

1 February, 2010 - Obtaining a security clearance certificate (SCC) within 24 hours or sooner will soon become possible when the procedure goes online next month, according to the home ministry. SCC, essentially a criminal record check, is required when applying for citizenship, employment, various licenses, higher education, promotions and travel documents. Introduced in the 1970s as the no objection certificate (NOC), the process has remained a manual and lengthy affair for applicants. Recognising the inefficiency of the process, the government issued an executive order in March last year to update the system. “Faster and friendlier,” said Karma T Namgyal, the director for law and order, describing the new online system. The director said a minimum of a day would be required to process an application with the new system. He added that work is still underway to cut even more time, which until now could take a week or more, to within a day. The ability to apply, track, and follow up the process from anywhere in the country will be another significant change the online transition will create for applicants. Applicants will receive a unique identification number that will allow this capability. Once cleared, this number can simply be presented to, for instance, an employment officer, who enters it into the online system to verify the clearance. Until the home ministry partly decentralised the system in 2008 by authorising bureau officers to sign SCCs in 2008, certificates had to be directly obtained in Thimphu. “It was a herculean labour,” said Karma T Namgyal, on the effort to develop the online system, which took nearly a year. He pointed out that digitalising the physical records of Bhutan’s entire population, “took a very long time.” On how secure the online system is, the director said, “99.99 percent”. Jigme Tenzin, the project officer for the department of

information and technology (DIT), which developed the online system, explained that additional measures had been taken to ensure security. The database, on which personal records are stored, is physically separated from the online system, rendering it inaccessible to any unauthorised persons trying to gain entry, he said. As an added measure, no international consultants or experts, or the private sector were involved in the system's development. To further beef up security on the personnel front, the home ministry also conducted several "sensitisation" meetings with relevant agencies. "More strategies are being developed on not only the modalities but on security," said Karma T Namgyal, adding, "we can't take chances, security is the most important underlining of this project." "The system of requiring security clearance wasn't designed with the intention of harassing people," said the law and order director. "It's only to make sure criminals aren't serviced." The electronic system will next week undergo a trial by concerned agencies and selected officers, before being formally launched by the end of February.

Dredging, energy to top agenda

2-day meeting with donors start Feb 15 Rejaul Karim Byron The government is going to raise its plans to dredge rivers, enhance cooperation in cross-border trade, increase investment in transport, energy and power sectors at the February 15-16 Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting in Dhaka. The meeting of the BDF, a consortium of donor agencies, is going to be held after four years since 2005. In the run up to the meeting, the government yesterday held a preparatory meeting chaired by the finance minister. The meeting discussed the draft report to be placed at the meeting. In the draft report the government mentioned a good number of plans for marching forward in the times to come. "Increasing regional integration, especially in cross-border trade, transport and energy" was cited. Finance ministry sources said the government is thinking of taking different regional integration efforts involving India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh and cooperation of the development partners would be taken in this regard. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) already conducted a study in 2008, the sources said. The government also plans to promote gender equity and increase the number of parliament seats reserved for women to 100 in future. The present government increased the number to 45 from previous 30. The report says the number of parliamentary seats occupied by women has seen a sharp rise. At present the number of women MPs -- both elected and from reserved seats -- stands at 64, which is 19 percent of the total seats. The government also said election to all local bodies will be completed by 2010 to strengthen the local government system. It is also planning to set up 18,000 more health service centres throughout the country in phases to reach the healthcare to the doorsteps of the people. Besides, the government has plans to promote better governance and introduce performance based career planning to reform the civil service. After yesterday's meeting, Finance Minister AMA Muhith told journalists the BDF meeting would be held in six sessions. The issues of governance, corruption, energy, power, agriculture, digital Bangladesh, water resources and river dredging will be discussed at the meeting, the minister said. Muhith added the matters relating to the government's plan for future development will be presented before the development partners and their assistance would be sought. According to the draft report, the government's resource gap would be \$12.5 billion in three fiscal years. The government expects to receive \$2-\$2.5 billion in foreign assistance per year from the development partners. The rest would be collected from public-private partnership, foreign direct investment (FDI) and increased government revenue.

Rising trend of tax evading goods P/ling Customs Seizures 2 February, 2010 - Doma, sugar, edible oil, shoes and garments are some of the major items that were seized for tax evasion at the

Phuentsholing checkpoint last year, apart from tobacco products, the sale of which is banned in the country, according to custom officials. Records maintained by the Phuentsholing regional revenue and customs office show that the trend of evading tax by non-declaration, under-declaration and under-invoicing is on the rise. Joint collector of customs and excise Wangchuk Thayey said, "The increase could be because of the weak enforcement in the past or the increase in the volume of business." Consignments are detained in three categories - seizure, confiscation and detention, said custom officials. In 2008, the total value of goods seized at the main entry gate into Phuentsholing amounted to about Nu 2.26 mn of which Nu 0.19 mn was collected as Bhutan sales tax (BST), Nu 0.44 mn as customs duty and Nu 0.89 mn as fine. The total value of confiscated goods stands at Nu 1.42 mn with tobacco products being the biggest contributor on the list. Last year, it was Nu 5.96 mn of which 0.48 mn was collected as BST, Nu 0.87 mn as customs duty and Nu 3.01 mn as fine. The total value of confiscated goods was Nu 2.09 mn, with diary products topping the list of goods. Customs officials said that non-declaration of goods mostly occurred with goods imported from India, Bhutan's largest trading partner. Disposal of the confiscated or seized good is carried out through auctions in the presence of a committee, usually with approval from the revenue and customs headquarter in Thimphu, according to custom officials. "When it comes to disposal of seized or confiscated goods, besides tobacco, we can't simply dispose off the goods but follow the customs Act," said Wangchuk Thayey. In the case of restricted goods, like arms and ammunition, the concerned agencies are informed and they take them, he said. Perishable items like vegetables and cheese are auctioned within 24 hours in presence of a committee. "In summers, even cement comes under perishable goods, as it can't be stored for long," said Wangchuk Thayey. In case of non-perishable goods, the list of goods is compiled after which an auction is conducted in presence of a committee with approval from the revenue and customs headquarter.

2012 deadline set ILCS Relocation 4 February, 2010 - After missing a whole plan period, the relocation of the institute of language and cultural studies (ILCS) in Semtokha to Trongsa is showing some pace with the move expected to be complete by 2012. Construction work, like building the approach road, site development and water supply in the first package has already been completed, according to officials from the engineering section of the royal university of Bhutan (RUB). The second package, which will include the construction of academic and administration buildings, has also started about six months ago. The buildings will host the library, auditorium and administration offices. "Construction of residential buildings in the third package had been tendered out," said the deputy chief engineer of RUB, Kuentshse. "The work will commence soon and should be completed in the next two years." According to Kuentshse, over Nu 470 mn was committed by the government of India (GoI) to assist the relocation project, but the cost has gone up to over Nu 500 mn. "The extra cost happened because bidders were bidding high for the constructions work. Some of the construction will have to be cut, if additional budget isn't approved," he said. Once relocated in Taktsi, about 20 km away from Trongsa on the Trongsa-Zhemgang highway, the institute will have the capacity to accommodate 360 students, according to Kuentshse. However, he said that the Taktsi ILCS will be built with a capacity to accommodate 1000 students gradually. The project was initially planned for the 9th Plan with assistance from the government of India, but was later deferred to the 10th plan. Established in 1961, the ILCS in Semtokha is one of the oldest institutions in the country. Its development or expansion was hampered by the lack of infrastructure. The institute could not expand because of the plan to move to Taktsi.

Hon'ble Lyonpo returns from the First Asian Ministerial Conference (AMC) on Tiger Conservation

Wild tigers are the top predators that keep our ecosystem machine running smoothly so that ecosystem services continue to flow. This makes them the single most important species for rendering sound livelihood opportunities for humans especially those living in natural resource dependents areas. They are also cultural and religious icons of millions of people especially in the range countries. However, with 3 of its sub species gone extinct, this magnificent icon is heading for extinction unless the global conservation community unanimously takes aggressive actions. Once widespread wild population of over 100,000 animals has plummeted to a mere 3500 today with its habitat reduced to only 7%of its original habitat. If tigers became extinct, it will be the strongest evidence or our natural heritage for the benefit of communities

The first Asian Ministerial Conference (AMC) for tiger conservation: enforcement, trade and innovative financing held from 27th – 30th January,2010, at Hua Hin ,Bangkok, was part of an ongoing process to form an international alliance to revert the decreasing tiger populations in the 13 Tiger Range Countries (TRC). It reviewed priorities and the draft regional and national wildlife protection program that emerged from the two proceeding workshop held in Pattaya (April 2009) and Kathmandu (October 2009) and laid important stepping stone towards Global Tiger Summit to be held in Vladivostok, Russia sometime this fall.

His Excellency, Dr. Pema Gyamtsho, the Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture and forests led a 5 member delegation consisting of Mr. Karma Dukpa, the Director of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS); Mr. Karma Dorji, Executive Director of Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA); Mr. Rinchen Wangdi, Chief Program Officer from the Gross National Happiness Commission; Dr. Sonam Wangyel Wang, Chief Forest Officer of the Nature Conservation Division under DoFPS who is also the National Focal Person for tiger conservation) and Mr. Lhendup Tharchen , Carnivore Conservation program NCD. His Excellency briefed the AMC participants on Bhutan top priorities for tiger conservations as follows: 1. Securing Bhutan's Tiger habitat fragmentation through strong policy and management. Such policies will be geared towards: ensuring all smart infrastructures that comply with EIA; Recruiting additional staff, developing ,capacity and strengthening the institution of nature conservation; Mitigating human/wildlife/tiger conflict; Involving local communities and national and international conservation advocates; Generating baseline estimates for tiger and prey in Pas and Government Reserved Forests) 2. Establish trans-boundary ecological and administrative linkages to maintain a tiger meta-population in the Manas complex, Toorsa complex by closely collaborating with authorizes in India to curb illegal trade. 3. Create sustained funding by: engaging international donor and conservation communities in supporting tiger conservation ;generating immediate funds to continue tiger works while long term funding mechanisms are being sorted out; In the long run create a dedicated trust fund for tiger conservation; exploring innovative financing from REDD/PES; Build Community based enterprises (eco-tourism) H.E made a special request to tiger range countries to invest in tiger conservation and work seriously on sustainable funding mechanisms so that TRCs can become donor free. H.E. also informed the distinguished gathering that while Bhutan is a small country, when it comes to commitment to conservation Bhutan is not smaller than any other country. This, H.E. mentioned is clearly manifested in declaring 51% of Bhutan as protected areas with Bhutan's constitution requiring 60% forest cover for all times to come. Bhutan is the best available wildlife linkage between East and West Asia. H.E. was also

requested a side meeting by the World Bank's team for development of smart infrastructure, which resulted in development of a smart infrastructure framework for Bhutan by the World Bank. This framework will then used as model for other countries. The outcomes from the first AMC and Pattaya pledge and Kathmandu declarations will be summated to the heads of the TRG Governments for their endorsement.

SRILANKA

Sri Lankan president vows to build nation with discipline

COLOMBO, Feb. 4 (Xinhua) -- Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa on Thursday vowed to build an efficient, advanced nation through commitment, discipline and elimination of corruption. According to the president's office, Rajapaksa said in addressing the island's 62nd Independence Day celebration in the central hilly town of Kandy that he was proud that the nation could celebrate the anniversary of independence without the threat of Tamil Tiger rebels as they had been defeated by the troops. "And now in the nation building process, I will protect the honest and skilled people who work for the betterment of the country. The country can not be developed with harassment, gross punishments or by the gun. Discipline is not revenge. The nation can only be built through commitment, discipline and elimination of corruption," stated Rajapaksa. He said an efficient, advanced nation needs to be built to replace a country which is lazy, lethargic and lacks energy. "It is meaningless to blame our nation for its inefficiency whilst referring to the efficiency and progress of other countries. We proved at the recent overwhelming victory that our people could overtake them," said Rajapaksa. Rajapaksa said he will use his remarkable victory at last week's presidential election to re-establish all that was lost for the past 30 years due to the war. He said the private sector has a responsibility similar to that of the public sector for developing the country and there is a better environment for the private sector investments which was at a standstill during the war. "This is the time when the benefits of unifying the nation begin to show results. Now that the war has ended, the nation is saving more than the cost of the war. Sri Lanka is second only to China among Asia's fastest growing economies. Sri Lanka is also listed among the best countries for investment. We cordially invite investors here," said the president. The move by President Mahinda Rajapakse is one of the biggest shake-ups of Sri Lanka's top brass in decades. (AFP: Lakruwan Wanniarachchi Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse has sacked a dozen senior military officers as part of a crackdown after last week's presidential election. The senior commanders who have been forced into compulsory retirement are accused of breaching military discipline and siding with opposition candidate and former army chief General Sarath Fonseka. The move is one of the biggest shake-ups of Sri Lanka's top brass in decades. The government says General Fonseka and his former military comrades were plotting to assassinate Mr Rajapakse and stage a coup. Some of the men who are accused of involvement were arrested after a stand-off at a hotel in the

capital Colombo last week. Troops surrounded the hotel, claiming there were army deserters inside. General Fonseka, however, has accused the government of hounding his supporters, and opposition activists are threatening to stage a mass rally. Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama told Sri Lanka's Daily Mirror newspaper that General Fonseka was seeking international attention. "This was a pre-empted act on his part and a pre-designed act on their part to have got into a hotel just before the election results were announced," Mr Bogollagama said. "In my opinion, what they were trying to do was to invite attention associated with army deserters trying to occupy premises in the city. This is not done in a democracy." The debate over the standoff at the hotel is still headline news in Sri Lanka. "This country is being run like a place where we never had law and order," General Fonseka said. "They are scared of me. They are trying to confine me to a corner." Last week, police shut down the pro-opposition Lanka newspaper for publishing material critical of the government. But yesterday a court ruled investigators did not have enough evidence and ordered the paper be allowed to reopen. Opposition groups are threatening to stage public demonstrations against the Government in the capital tomorrow. Police have already warned they will not tolerate any illegal rallies. Despite General Fonseka's claims that the election was rigged, there has been no mass display of support for the opposition on the streets. Jehan Perera, executive director of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, says opposition activists are waiting for direction from their leaders. "If this actually materialises and if they do bring a large number of people out onto the streets, then we could witness some sort of confrontation and crisis," Mr Perera said. "People who didn't support the government are kind of stunned - the ones that I have moved around and met with, but they are still not decided what to do." Security is expected to be tight for the next 72 hours as the nation prepares for independence day celebrations on Thursday.

ISLAMABAD, Feb 4 (APP): Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani has sent a message of greetings to Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ratnasiri Wickramanayake on their national day falling on February 4 (Thursday). In his message, the Prime Minister said that "I have great pleasure in extending warmest felicitations of the Government and people of Pakistan to you, the Government and the people of Sri Lanka on the auspicious occasion of the 62nd National Day of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka". He said Pakistan and Sri Lanka have enjoyed very close and friendly ties which have been nurtured over the years through active cooperation in trade, commerce, education, culture and tourism. "It is my sincere desire to further strengthen and deepen the bilateral relations between our two countries", he added. The Prime Minister said the Sri Lankan National Day celebrations also mark the beginning of an era of peace and prosperity for the people of Sri Lanka. "On my own behalf and on behalf of the Government and people of Pakistan, please accept my best wishes and prayers for Your Excellency's good health, well being and for the continued prosperity of Sri Lanka", he added.

Sri Lanka leader calls for unity after poll win

COLOMBO — Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse on Thursday issued an independence day call for unity and reconciliation after his victory in a bitterly fought election. Rajapakse in an address to the nation said the island's freedom day assumed great significance as it was the first since the defeat of separatist Tamil Tiger rebels by government troops last year. "The freedom from colonial rule that we gained 62 years ago is now more meaningful because we have been liberated from the forces of separatist terror that marred our freedom for nearly half that period,"

he said. Rajapakse said the armed campaign for an ethnic homeland waged by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had "gravely threatened the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country". The president, who last week easily won a second term in office, said he wanted to promote unity among the divided 20-million population, though many Tamils remain suspicious of his Sinhalese government. "It is necessary that we give priority to the tasks of national reconciliation and the building of trust among all sections of our people," Rajapakse said in a speech marking Sri Lanka's independence from Britain in 1948. He also called for improved ties with Western nations who criticised the military offensive that, according to the United Nations, may have led to thousands of civilian casualties. The US and the European Union stopped aid insisting that Sri Lanka should improve its human rights record while battling Tamil rebels. "We are entering into a new era of co-existence after finishing the period of some controversy," Rajapakse said. "I would like to say that we are now entering the golden era of international relations." Rajapakse allied himself with China, Iran, Libya and Pakistan for military and financial aid, causing deep unease among Western nations as well as neighbouring India. Tamil rebels' decades-long struggle for an independent state was put down by security forces in May last year, ending Asia's longest running ethnic conflict.

Sri Lankan court revokes its order to seal the newspaper office
Mon, Feb 1, 2010 Feb 01, Colombo: A court in Sri Lanka revoked its order to seal the Marxist party newspaper office today, an official said. Chief Magistrate Anura Herath of Gangodawila court took this decision when the Criminal Investigation Department presented its report and sought an extension of the Saturday's court order to temporarily shut down the office of the weekly newspaper Lanka. The police had not shown sufficient supporting evidence to seal the office, the court said. The Lanka office at Delkanda in Nugegoda was sealed by the police on Saturday. The CID claimed that an article published on the January 17 issue of the weekly related to the ongoing investigation of LTTE suspect Kumaran Pathmanathan was a threat to national security. The police arrested the editor of the newspaper, Chandana Sirimwalwate Friday. He remains in custody.

India gives \$2.7 million worth material to war-hit Sri Lanka

AP In this Jan. 8, 2010 photograph, a Sri Lankan soldier helps build a mud hut for a newly resettled Sri Lankan ethnic Tamil family at a village in the former administrative capital of LTTE in Killinochchi, Sri Lanka. Photo: AP India on Wednesday handed over a consignment of galvanised corrugated sheets worth US\$ 2.7 million to the government of Sri Lanka as part of its commitment to help Colombo in providing relief and re-settlement of the nearly three lakh war-displaced in the north and re-construction of the infrastructure badly damaged in the 26 year long military conflict which ended in May 2009. In his comments at the ceremony, to mark the distribution of the first lot of the second consignment of 2,600 metric tonne of galvanised corrugated sheets among 20,000 families being resettled in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaithivu and Vavuniya districts in the Northern Province, the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Ashok K. Kantha said, "We are with you as the closest friend and neighbour to help assist the conflict-displaced return to their normal lives." Mr. Kantha said the corrugated sheets would be distributed to more than 20,000 war displaced Tamil families. India would provide a further consignment of 2,65,000 sheets to Sri Lanka in the course of the next two weeks. The High Commissioner recalled the announcement made by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh weeks after the military defeat of the LTTE, that India would provide US\$ 100 million to help in the relief, rehabilitation and re-settlement of the civilians affected in the conflict and help in the

reconstruction of the infrastructure in the war ravaged north and east. “The money is being used for provision of food and non-food items.”

Mr. Kantha said very shortly 800,000 cement bags will be sent for distribution amongst 100,000 of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the north. Pointing out that reconstruction of the infrastructure is the focal point of the Indian assistance Mr. Kantha said New Delhi is already working on re-building the railway network in the entire Northern Province.

“India assistance covers a whole range of areas like health and education. We are already engaged in up gradation of the Palali air base which is the only civilian airport for the people of the Jaffna peninsula. Besides helping in rebuilding vital ports, India is committed to the development of Jaffna as a cultural centre”, he said.

ISLAMABAD, Feb 1 (APP): Interior Minister A. Rehman Malik Monday said, Pakistan attaches great importance to its friendly relations with Sri Lanka and said ties between both the countries are strengthening with the passage of time. He was talking to Sri Lankan High Commissioner in Pakistan Air Chief Marshal ® Jayalath Weerakkody who called on him here at the Ministry of Interior.

They discussed matters of mutual interest including the problems of Sri Lankan citizens in obtaining visa. Weerakkody informed the Minister about the services of National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) in Sri Lanka and appreciate the Authority’s role in help his government.

The Sri Lankan High Commissioner invited Rehman Malik to visit Colombo.

Sri Lanka and 11 other countries taking part in Indian Navy’s biggest war game in Andaman

The Sri Lankan Navy and navies from 11 other countries in the Asia-Pacific region are taking part in Exercise Milan 2010, the Indian Navy’s largest four-day naval war game, which began on Friday at Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar islands. This is the seventh edition of Milan, a biennial gathering of navies of the Indian Ocean region. India hosts the event for building friendship and mutual understanding between participating navies. This year’s multinational exercise concludes on Monday (February 8). The Indian navy is the world’s sixth largest navy with 155 vessels and 56,000 personnel on active duty. While its primary objective is to secure the country’s national maritime borders, India also uses its navy to enhance its international relations through joint exercises, port visits and humanitarian missions, including disaster relief. In recent years, the Indian Navy has undergone extensive modernization and expansion with an

intention to increase its capabilities as a recognized blue-water navy. The Indian Navy has been organising Milan at Port Blair since 1995. Participating in this year's exercise are nine naval ships from eight countries, and representatives from four others in table-top exercises. Naval ships of Singapore (two ships), Sri Lanka, Thailand, Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar, with representatives from navies of Brunei, Philippines, Vietnam and New Zealand are taking part in Milan this year. Representing India are five ships, including the Navy's largest Landing Ship Tank and a Fast Attack Craft. The Indian Coast Guard is also participating with its ships and officers. The focus of Milan 2010 is a passage exercise at sea, and a seminar on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In addition, it will promote understanding and cooperation in the areas of common interest and safeguard the sea lanes of communication from poaching, piracy and terrorist activities, promote inter-operability to the extent possible and engage in joint search and rescue and humanitarian operations. The Indian Navy's initiative provides opportunities to promote understanding and camaraderie amongst the navies of the Asia-Pacific region, and encourages ship visits, social interactions and cultural presentations by the participating countries. So far, six Milans' have been held: in 1995, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2006 and 2008. The event was not conducted in 2001 and 2005. In 2001, the Indian Navy was hosting a significant international event: the International Fleet Review. And in 2005, the region was recovering from the aftereffects of the Tsunami of December 2004.

On Goldstone, UN's Ban Files Only 4 Paragraphs of Observations, on Sri Lanka, Nothing

UNITED NATIONS, February 4 -- The Goldstone Report filing by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has been asked about for days at the UN. When it became available on the evening of February 4, it was a let down and, some say, a lie. The letdown part is easier to describe. Ban's submission is a mere 11 paragraphs, mostly boilerplate recitations, of which Ban's "Observations" comprise only four paragraphs. It is not even a cover letter, one involved source told Inner City Press. It is more like a fax cover sheet. The word "lie," when raised to Inner City Press, was directed at paragraph 9, which in full reads: "9. I believe that, as a matter of principle, international humanitarian law needs to be fully respected and civilians must be protected in all situations and circumstances. Accordingly, on several occasions, I have called upon all of the parties to carry out credible domestic investigations into the conduct of the Gaza conflict. I hope that such steps will be taken wherever there are credible allegations of human rights abuses." Despite this claim of belief that "civilians must be protected in all situations and circumstances," during the bloodier Sri Lanka conflict in 2009, when tens of thousands were killed by air assault by the Sri Lankan government, Ban has not similarly called for credible investigations. Most recently, when the UN's own Special Rapporteur on Summary Executions Philip Alston called on Ban to order an investigation of executions in Sri Lanka, Ban and his spokespeople went out of their way to say they have nothing to do with Alston. After Ban's 11 paragraphs are the submissions by Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Switzerland, each going up on the web site of the President of the General Assembly. Watch this site.

IMF's Strauss-Kahn Coy on Opposing Sarkozy and Intervening in Greece, Denials February 4 -- The managing director of the International Monetary Fund Dominique Strauss-Kahn bragged Thursday to radio station RTL in his native France that he might leave the IMF early -- and perhaps challenge Nicolas Sarkozy for the French presidency -- and that if asked by Greece, the IMF could "intervene" in the country. Questions about both comments were dodged later on Thursday by the spokesperson for Strauss-Kahn and the IMF, Caroline Atkinson. Strauss-Kahn is quoted that "As it stands... I am planning to see out my mandate. But if you ask me whether in

certain circumstances I could reconsider this question, the answer is yes, I could reconsider this question." This is consciously leaving open the door to reconsider and leave. But Ms. Aktinson emphasized only his "planning to see out my mandate" and called everything else "hypothetical. On Greece, Strauss-Kahn said regally, "I have a mission on the ground to provide technical advice requested by the Greek government. And if we're asked to intervene, we will." He added, "I understand that the Europeans don't want this for the moment." Inner City Press on Thursday morning asked Dimitris Droutsas, Alternate Foreign Minister of Greece, to describe his government's thinking about IMF help. Mr. Droutsas responded on the record, "Categorically may I state, any idea of the IMF... there is no idea about that." Still, at Thursday's IMF biweekly briefing, Ms. Aktinson emphasized the "the IMF" -- not just Strauss-Kahn -- "had a technical team in Athens because the Greeks are very interested in getting any help from us on the technical implementation of the plan." As with the wider UN, the rush to be relevant it was surprising, then, that when Inner City Press asked Ms. Aktinson about Yemen -- using as the lead in a quote by UK Foreign Secretary (Ivan Lewis) that "we address the economic problems that face Yemen, especially through the IMF program" -- Ms. Aktinson said she didn't have information about Yemen and would have to respond later to Inner City Press. Yemen is in the news, and one would expect the omnipresent Strauss-Kahn to be all over it. We'll see. Ms. Aktinson gave a pro-IMF spin in responding to Inner City Press' question about the IMF's new loan to Haiti, but we'll be writing about that later, along with the IMF's Yemen response. Watch this site.

Cargo Boat Development Company closed at 73.25 rupees, up 4.00. Ceylon Foreign Traders closed at 31.75 rupees, up 2.00, and Colombo Land & Development Company closed at 6.75 rupees, up 25 cents with 2.88 million shares traded. Lanka Cement, a retail investor favourite, closed at 30.50 rupees, down 50 cents, and LB Finance closed at 66.50 rupees, up 9.00 with 727,000 shares changing hands. Conglomerate John Keells Holdings closed at 173.00 rupees, down 2.25, and Distilleries Company of Sri Lanka, an alcohol producer, closed at 116.00 rupees, down 2.00. Commercial Bank of Ceylon closed at 195.50 rupees, up 50 cents, and Hatton National Bank closed at 176.25 rupees, down 75 cents. Sampath Bank closed at 225.25 rupees, down 4.00, and Seylan Bank closed at 46.75 rupees, down 1.00. Sri Lanka Telecom closed at 42.50 rupees, up 50 cents, and Dialog Telekom, a celco, closed at 6.75 rupees, down 25 cents.

Sri Lanka's Cabraal Open to Higher Bank Reserve Ratio (Update1)

Feb. 2 (Bloomberg) -- Sri Lanka's central bank said asking lenders to set aside more money may be an option after inflation accelerated to an 11-month high, signaling it may join policy makers across the region in withdrawing monetary stimulus. "We will not rule it out," Governor Nivard Cabraal said in a telephone interview today when asked whether the Central Bank of Sri Lanka will consider raising the statutory reserve requirement, or the amount of deposits that lenders must keep with the monetary authority. The ratio is now 7 percent. Consumer prices in the capital, Colombo, rose 6.5 percent in January from a year earlier. India on Jan. 29 left benchmark interest rates unchanged and instead boosted the ratio of deposits lenders must hold in reserve to 5.75 percent, emulating nations from China to the Philippines in taking steps toward higher borrowing costs without rushing to raise rates. "This is in line with what we are seeing across the region, with central banks choosing to first withdraw liquidity from the system with hikes in the main policy rate materializing at a later stage," said Prakriti Sofat, a Singapore-based regional economist at Barclays Capital. Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa swept to the biggest election victory in 16 years last week on a pledge to rebuild the \$41 billion economy after the

end of the island's 26-year civil war. Rajapaksa, who is also the finance minister, may need the central bank to keep interest rates low to encourage companies to invest and support the reconstruction.

Peacetime Growth

The government will maintain fiscal stimulus through to 2010 to stoke the economic recovery, Sarath Amunugama, the island's deputy finance minister, said in November. Peace lifted economic growth and helped make Sri Lanka's stocks Asia's best performing last year, buoyed by a construction spree and increased farm production in the former war zone. Sri Lanka's biggest companies including John Keells Holdings Plc, which is expanding to take advantage of a rebound in the economy, have said sustaining low inflation will help business planning. Sri Lanka's inflation rate exceeded 20 percent in the first 10 months of 2008, helping weaken the currency and deterring investment. "The rise in inflation is not unexpected," Cabraal said, referring to the January increase in consumer prices. "We expected inflation to rise until April and then moderate."

Bond Purchases

Cabraal has kept the benchmark interest rate at a five-year low of 7.5 percent since November to help boost economic growth to as much as 7 percent this year. The Sri Lankan rupee, which fell more than 1 percent against the dollar last year, was little changed at 114.66 at 11:37 a.m. in Colombo, according to Bloomberg data. The yield on the 13.5 percent bond due in February 2013 fell 5 basis points to 10.60 percent, according to Commercial Bank of Ceylon Plc. Cabraal, who on Jan. 4 announced plans to relax foreign-exchange controls, also said the central bank may consider raising the 10 percent limit it has on overseas purchases of rupee debt. "That is also an option," he said. "So far about 9 percent of the limit has been reached."

Sri Lanka shares gains on earnings expectations

Fri Feb 5, 2010 4:48pm IST COLOMBO, Feb 5 (Reuters) - Sri Lankan shares .CSE rose 0.24 percent on Friday, led by hopes of better earnings due to post-war economic recovery, dealers said. The All-Share Price Index .CSE of the Colombo Stock Exchange closed 8.92 points firmer at 3706.72 points. It hit a record high of 3735.86 on Tuesday. The bourse fell on Wednesday as concerns over continuous foreign selling led traders to book profits after a six-session rise. The markets were closed on Thursday for the island nation's 62nd Independence day celebrations. "Investors have started collecting shares, expecting better earnings," said Prasanna Chandrasekara, associate director at Asia Securities in Colombo. Analysts say local retail investors were pushing up the market too much with foreigners being net sellers. Foreigners, who sold net 785.3 million rupees worth of shares in 2009, have sold a net of 4.1 billion worth shares so far this year. Net foreign selling has recorded 2.3 billion rupees in the last seven sessions. Analysts, who expected offshore investors to buy after the presidential election on Jan. 26, said foreigners might be leaving the bourse with high profits to enter later after the market comes down. Traders and analysts said the market needs a correction sooner rather than later as heavy local buying cannot sustain the record high levels without fundamentals to support them. President Mahinda Rajapaksa last week won a new six-year term, after a bruising campaign and a poll aftermath fraught with opposition vote-fraud allegations and government accusations that his rival, General Sarath Fonseka, and his supporters may have been plotting a coup. Rajapaksa is expected to dissolve parliament shortly and call a legislative election after his landslide victory in the Jan. 26

Sri Lanka in new tea marketing drive

Feb 06, 2010 (LBO) – Sri Lanka's Tea Board has chosen MTI Consulting, a management consultancy, to develop a strategy to promote Ceylon tea, the island's main commodity export. The Sri Lanka Tea Board (SLTB) said it chose the firm after a year-long competitive evaluation process. Tea is Sri Lanka's second largest export earner next to apparel, contributing three percent of the country's GDP, with a global tea export market share of around 19 percent. "Tea is Sri Lanka's key export and critical to our national economy," SLTB chairman Lalith Hettiarachchi said. "In a highly competitive and branded global market, the marketing and branding function are key drivers of the industry's success. "The prime objective of the study is to enhance value addition for Ceylon tea and formulate pragmatic strategies to support Sri Lankan brands."

Sri Lankan minister denies election rigging

09:10, February 03, 2010 While Sri Lankan opposition parties are claiming the just concluded presidential election was rigged by the government, a senior government minister said on Tuesday that there was no any election misconduct happened in the election. Susil Premajayantha, education minister and general secretary of the ruling coalition United People's Freedom Alliance, told reporters that international election monitors as well as local observation groups declared the election was free and fair and opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe too agreed to it. "As a party secretary I met with elections commissioner several time as well as other party secretaries at the Election Department, but there was no evidence to say the election was rigged by the government," Premajayantha said. He said that about 200,000 public servants engaged in election duty, but they too did not say the election was rigged. Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa won last Tuesday's election for a second term by beating former Army Commander Sarath Fonseka with a resounding majority of 57.88 percent to the latter's 40.15 percent

Sri Lankan fighting leaves a gruesome legacy

It will be years before the landmines will be cleared from the ravaged country's battlefields, writes Matt Wade. The guns fell silent more than eight months ago but the brutal conclusion to Sri Lanka's civil war is still being felt by Tamils caught up in the conflict. Anthony Pillai, his wife and four children were among thousands of civilians who fled fighting in the north-east two days before the Tamil Tiger rebels were defeated last May. During the escape, disaster struck. Mr Pillai trod on a landmine hidden beside a lagoon. It blew off his right leg below the knee and sprayed his wife, Mary Josephine, with shrapnel. But worse was to come. When the couple's son, 26-year old Jayadevan, heard his mother's scream and turned to help he, too, trod on a mine that shredded his right foot. "It was so terrible; we couldn't tell where the mines were," Mr Pillai told the *Herald*. The rest of the family made bandages from their clothes and dressed the gaping wounds as best they could. Then, with the help of relatives, they carried the badly injured father and son for two hours until they found help. "I can hardly remember that time, the pain was so unbearable," says Mr Pillai, who also received a deep shrapnel wound to his hand. Mr Pillai and Jayadevan were eventually assisted by the military and taken to hospital, where both had amputations below the knee. Mr Pillai's wife, whose shrapnel wounds were not serious, and three of her children spent months separated from the injured pair in a refugee camp. Last September the family was reunited and taken in by relatives in the town of Jaffna. "We have been left with nothing and now that I've lost my leg things can never go back to normal," Mr Pillai says. Many Tamils displaced in the closing stages of the war have similar tales of tragedy

and loss. A few doors down from Mr Pillai, 14 more war refugees have crammed into a derelict house. One of them, R. Arulandan, a 38-year old father of two, also has a heartbreaking story. He lost his wife when shells rained on the family less than a month before the end of the war. "I was holding my children and running but my wife was hit," he says. "I was never able to find her body." More than 7000 Tamil civilians are estimated to have died in the last few months of the war. Mr Arulandan and his children, aged 10 and 13, were among nearly 300,000 war refugees interned in Manik Farm camp following the defeat of the Tigers. After six months living in a tent behind barbed wire, the family was taken by bus to Jaffna. "I lost my wife but there is nothing I can do to change that now," Mr Arulandan says. Since August almost 160,000 people like him have left the camps and returned home to try and rebuild their lives. Nigel Robinson, the Sri Lanka program manager for the international mine clearing organisation Foundation Suisse Deminage, says emergency clearing operations that will allow people to move safely around their villages could take another 18 months to two years. Several more years of mopping up will probably be required beyond that, he says. The Catholic Bishop of Jaffna, Thomas Savundaranayagam, believes many displaced northern Tamils will never return to their villages but instead move to other parts of Sri Lanka.

Pay hikes for Sri Lanka security forces: Feb 05, Colombo: The Sri Lankan government has decided to grant salary increases to the members of the security forces. Chief Government Whip Minister Dinesh Gunawardena revealed this in response to a question from an opposition member when the parliament met today for the first time after the presidential elections last month. The security forces have already been granted several pay raises, the Minister acknowledged. Tabling the motion to extend the state of emergency for another month, Prime Minister Rathnasiri Wickramanayaka said the emergency regulations are required for the security of the country. The security forces are still recovering the hidden weapons although the LTTE has been eliminated, he added. The PM said an environment conducive to hold the upcoming general elections is needed to be created. The PM pointed out that security has also been tightened in Chennai after arresting two LTTE cadres with equipment.

Northern Sri Lanka reawakening after 30 years' war

JAFFNA, Sri Lanka, Jan. 31 (Xinhua) -- As the 30-year-long civil war between Sri Lanka's government troops and Tamil tiger rebels ended in May 2009, the war affected northern Jaffna peninsula, the economic and cultural capital for the island's minority Tamils is reawakening after the endless suffering. According to Jaffna District Secretary and Government Agent K. Ganesh, there are hundreds of development projects launched by the government to enhance the livelihood in the district, about 390 km north of the capital Colombo. Agriculture is the major livelihood of the 550,000 people living in the peninsula with paddy, vegetables, fruit as its main crops. Ganesh said about 60 percent of Jaffna's population depends on agriculture and the cultivated lands are rich with red-yellow soil is unique in Sri Lanka. The resources of Jaffna have not been put to effective use for the past few decades due to the restrictions imposed on the peninsula during the war, said Ganesh. "We have been able to resettle about 26,000 families who were displaced by the recently concluded civil war and staying at welfare camps in the peninsula," Ganesh said. The government provided them with basic facilities while water and sanitation projects are being built with the aid of foreign funds, he said. The district secretary said pure drinking water is still a problem and the government has started a drinking and irrigation water project under the financial assistance of the World Bank. Ganesh said there were electricity

restrictions in the peninsula before eliminating the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but now Jaffna people could enjoy 24 hour electricity without any interruption. However, only 80 percent of people have access to electricity and the government plans to reach 100 percent capacity by 2011. Jaffna's fisheries industry, which had been under severe restrictions in the last 30 years, now had a new chance to develop as the fishing community can go fishing all 24 hours. K. K. Dharmalingam, assistant director of Fisheries Department for the Jaffna district said 9,000 fishing craft are being operated there by 6,000 fishermen, but all of craft are one-day ones, not suitable for deep sea fishing. He said that 50 percent of the fishing harvest in Jaffna is used for the consumption within the peninsula and the balance is sent to Colombo and other areas. "Now, the daily collection is being increased and the lack of harbor facilities and modern fishing vessels are the main problems of the fisheries industry," Dharmalingam said. Ganesh said the government has identified the problems and as a first step to increase the harvest, the government will set up a 20-million-rupee (about 174,000 U.S. dollars) worth ice plant in Jaffna. However, S. Thavalingam, a fisherman displaced by the war and stayed in a welfare camp in Jaffna, said the government should provide multi-day craft to the fishermen. Mary Victor, displaced by the civil war and now settled near Jaffna town, said the government is looking after them, but the drinking water and toilet problems still persist. She said the government provides them with dry rations and a daily allowance of 25 rupees (about 0.22 dollars). The government has opened A9 highway which is the road connecting the north and the majority Sinhalese dominated south after defeating the LTTE in May 2009. Now, the transportation through the A9 road is increasing and tens of thousand people are going to Jaffna through the highway to see the area which had not been touched by southerners for 30 years. Southern Buddhists have also started pilgrims to Jaffna. About 30,000 people from the south came in the weekend to worship the peninsula's famous Buddhist temple called Nagadeepa. Chief monk of the temple Nawandagala Paduma Kiththi Tissa said the number of visitors has increased heavily with the conclusion of the war and the opening of the A9 road. A pilgrim, H. Sumith from Panadura, a town close to the capital Colombo, said worshipping Nagadeepa temple had been a dream for him for years but they could not afford the air fare to fly Jaffna but now it has come true. "We came with 28 people by a bus along the A9 road and came to the island by a boat. There is a boat service and they charge just 30 rupees (about 0.26 dollar) for up and down trip," Sumith said. W. P. G. N. Wasantha, Officer in Charge of the Naval Base of Nainativu island near the temple, said they have ensured the security of the pilgrims who visit Nagadeepa temple by deploying over 100 naval personnel. K. P. Satyapalan, a trader in Jaffna town said the prices of essential goods in Jaffna had been very high, but now they are decreasing as transportation of goods to the peninsula by road was started several months ago. He said that racism has ruined the livelihood of the peninsula and now it is finally ended. "We can live in peace with the Sinhalese and Muslims here as our childhood days," Satyapalan said. Assistant Superintendent of Police in Jaffna Nihal Mendis said thousands of people are coming from the south not only to Buddhist temples but also to Hindu Kovils (shrines). A. Ketheswaran, Regional Director of Health Services in Jaffna said there are 38 government hospitals in his area including one teaching hospital in Jaffna town. "Lack of human resources in the health sector is the main problem. We have only 28 medical officers for 30 hospitals," Ketheswaran said. He said some hospitals were destroyed by clashes years ago and yet to be reconstructed. Drugs for the hospitals are provided by the Ministry of Health, he said, adding that there is a need for the rehabilitation of the damaged or destroyed hospitals. Ketheswaran said they have started an emergency ambulance service but they have only 18 ambulances. "We need five more", he said. Sri Lankan Foreign Minister

Rohitha Bogollagama promised to provide five ambulances and he directed Foreign Secretary Romesh Jayasinghe to do so. Bogollagama said he will take these health issues to international aid agencies and promised to negotiate with Sri Lankan expatriate abroad to invest in private hospitals in Jaffna too. The foreign minister, usually appears in the public with coat and tie, followed the style of his Tamil folks to be naked to the waist when he participated in a Tamil religious ceremony in a Hindu kovil during his short visit to Jaffna on Saturday. Jaffna was a city of intellectuals in early 1970s, but the education was later blocked by terrorism for three decades, Bogollagama said, adding that he will negotiate with the international community to get back the education to the past track. "After defeating the LTTE, we have a very good opportunity to enhance the tourism industry in the peninsula. There are lots of historical, religious sites as well as beautiful beach in the peninsula," Bogollagama said. The foreign minister invited tourists from all around the world to come to the peninsula and enjoy the untouched Sri Lankan northern beauty. He explained the need of enhancing the hospitality industry in Jaffna, including the establishment of a hotel school there and improve facilities in Palaly Airport in Jaffna. Bogollagama said the Foreign Ministry has decided to expand its consular services to Jaffna because thousands of Jaffna people live abroad and it is difficult for them to reach Colombo. Noticing the peninsula's fishing production has decreased from 4,000 metric tons per month in 1981 to the current level of 1,700 metric tons because of the war, the ministry vows to take all possible efforts to increase the production.

British-based Tamils vote for independent state in Sri Lanka

Poll shows 99% support for 1976 resolution calling for sovereign nation in north of country

1 February 2010 British-based Tamils have voted overwhelmingly in favour of the creation of an independent sovereign state in Sri Lanka, days after the man credited with crushing the Tamil Tigers's 26-year rebellion won a second term as the island's president. Nearly 65,000 members of the British Tamil diaspora turned out to vote in the weekend poll organised by the Tamil National Council. Voters were asked whether they endorsed the principles contained in a 1976 resolution that called for an independent Tamil state in the north of Sri Lanka. Polling took place in 65 booths across London and in major towns and cities throughout the UK. The final count revealed that 64,256 voters (99.33%) backed the resolution, 185 (0.29%) opposed it and there were 251 (0.39%) spoilt papers. Similar votes have already taken place among the Tamil diaspora in France, Norway, Switzerland, Holland, Germany and Canada. Suren Surendiran, a spokesman for the British Tamils Forum, said the vote underlined the Tamils' commitment to independence. "I think it is encouraging to see British Tamils showing their aspirations through the democratic process just as their compatriots around the world have," he said. "The same is not possible for their kith and kin back in Sri Lanka as the constitution prohibits people espousing separation." A spokesman for the campaign group Act Now, which was set up to draw attention to the plight of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, said: "Clearly the British Tamil diaspora believe that independence is the only solution to the Sri Lankan conflict." Last week Mahinda Rajapaksa called for national unity after winning a controversial presidential election, the result of which was immediately contested by his rival. Although Rajapaksa was declared the winner with 57.8% of the vote, General Sarath Fonseka, the former head of the army, who received 40%, said he would begin legal proceedings to have the result annulled. Fonseka has accused the government of wanting to kill him by removing his personal security detail. Last Friday his lawyer said police commandos had raided his client's office and arrested 15 members of his staff. The government denies trying to kill Fonseka and has in turn accused him of planning a

coup as well as plotting to kill Rajapaksa. Last Wednesday army troops surrounded a luxury hotel in the capital, Colombo, where Fonseka was staying. The opposition leader later walked out after vowing to go to court to challenge the election. The results of last week's poll demonstrate the gulf between Sri Lanka's Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority. Despite a resounding victory across much of the country Rajapaksa lost in areas hit hard by war and where Tamils are in the majority. With general elections coming later this year Rajapaksa has indicated he will wait until the next parliament is in place to deal with Tamil demands for greater rights and self-rule in areas where they form a majority. The UN says around 7,000 people died in the final months of the fighting that culminated in the defeat of the Tamil Tigers. More than a quarter of a million Tamils were interned in government-run camps, where some 100,000 remain. More than 11,000 are being held on suspicion of rebel links.

Sri Lankan minister resigns on health reason

February 01, 2010: Sri Lankan Agriculture Minister Hemakumara Nanayakkara resigned from his portfolio on Monday on the reason of bad health condition. "I have been given instruction by my cardiologist to get a long rest," Nanayakkara said. Nanayakkara told reporters that he is also resigning from active politics and will not contest for any future election. He said although he will not contest the forthcoming general election he will continue his support to President Mahinda Rajapaksa. He entered parliament in 2004 representing the Galle District in the Southern Province under the ticket of Sri Lankan main opposition United National Party (UNP). But later he crossed over to the Rajapaksa government and was appointed as the Minister of Agriculture. Nanayakkara is a brother of former legislator and trade union leader Vasudeva Nanayakkara, the leader of Sri Lankan leftist party Nawa Sama Samaja Party (means New Social Equality Party).

New MP takes oaths in Sri Lanka parliament Feb 5, 2010, 08:02 pm SL Time, Colombo Page News Desk, Sri Lanka. Sandanam Arulsamy of the Upcountry People's Front was sworn in today as a new parliamentarian before Speaker W. J. M. Lokubandara when the Sri Lanka parliament held its first session after the presidential elections last month. Arulsamy, who represents Nuwara Eliya district, was appointed for the seat left vacant by the death of UPF leader and Community Development and Social Inequity Eradication Minister P. Chandrasekera early last month. The new legislator accepting his position said all should act as Sri Lankans and prosperity could be achieved only through such action. MP Arulsamy pointing out the need to strengthen the President's hands in order to create a revival in the country, pledged to work for the well being of the people in his electorate in the upcountry

Sri Lanka gets more German aid for water supply

Feb 05, 2010 (LBO) - A water supply scheme in Galle district in Sri Lanka's south will get an additional 2.5 million Euros of financing from Germany to complete the project after costs escalated, a senior minister said. Germany had given a 15 million Euro grant on December 07, 2009 for the second phase of the water supply scheme for areas hit by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Germany will give an additional 1.258 million Euros as a grant and 1.966 million Euros as a loan from KfW (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau) development finance agency. An amount of 906,000 Euros will be repayable in 50 years with a grace period of 10 years and an amount of 351,000 Euros will be repayable in 40 years with a grace period of 10 years. The credit will carry an interest rate of 0.75 percent and 0.25 percent commitment fee on the undisbursed balance.

Maldives

Maldives says it won't allow its land for terror activities against India

PTI, 4 February 2010, COLOMBO: Maldives on Thursday vowed not to allow its territory to be used for terrorist activities against its neighbours as reports surfaced that Pakistan-based LeT is eyeing isolated islands in the archipelago to be used as bases. "The Maldives will not allow terrorists to operate in the country. We will not allow terrorists to put the Maldives' and our neighbours' peace and security at risk," Presidential Spokesman Mohamed Zuhair told PTI from Male. The assurance came a day after Maldives' Minister of Home Affairs Mohamed Shihab held a nearly an hour-long meeting with his Indian counterpart P Chidambaram during which the two decided to upgrade their cooperation on security matters. India will soon ink an agreement with its southern neighbour to combat terror threats jointly. A Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation on anti-terror measures and information sharing will be signed by the two countries by April, according to officials. The move by India and Maldives to address threats emanating from terror groups like LeT bears significance in view of reports that Lashkar-e-Taiba, that was responsible for the Mumbai terror attack, has been trying to make Maldives a hub to take advantage of its geographical location and isolated and sparsely populated islands. Indian government is also reportedly worried about the efforts of Pakistan-based terror groups to recruit jihadis from Maldives. India is already helping Maldives by regularly patrolling its territorial waters and there is also a plan underway to set up a network of ground radars in all its atolls. Defence Minister A K Antony had visited Maldives in August last year. During his visit, Antony had expressed confidence that the defence forces of the two countries would continue to work closely together to ensure a peaceful maritime environment in the seas. This will be achieved through joint mechanisms to effectively challenge the common scourge of terrorism, drug trafficking and piracy, it was agreed. Maldives, a favourite tourist destination, is endowed with has a chain of 1192 coral and white sand islands

Abu Dhabi Ship Building explores Maldives' expanding marine industries sector

February 02 - 2010 **Abu Dhabi Ship Building (ADSB) is looking at various opportunities within the Maldives' rapidly growing marine industries sector. In line with this, company Chairman Homaid Al Shemmari recently met H.E. Mohamed Nasheed, President of the Maldives, during the latter's official visit to the UAE capital, and discussed ADSB's building capacity and potential areas for future opportunity.**

Al Shemmari, who also serves as the Associate Director of Mubadala Aerospace, was accompanied by ADSB General Manager Mohammed Al Junabi during the interaction with President Nasheed. During the meeting, Al Shemmari outlined the company's capabilities in constructing, repairing and refitting Naval, Military and Commercial vessels, while also reiterating ADSB's keen interest to cater to the current and future needs of Maldives in this regard. The talks are expected to foster closer cooperation between the UAE and the Maldives in the area of marine industries and services.

Maldives - Weekly address: President discusses economy

In his weekly radio address, broadcast on Friday, President Nasheed discussed the unsustainable economic policies of previous years. The President said, "While three to four years ago, the budget stood around 7 to 8 billion rufiyaa, we suddenly saw an inflated 12 billion budget... Back then, the idea would have been to finance the budget through inflows from the 60 newly leased islands for resort development. "Now we all know the State doesn't get any revenue from those resorts." The expansionary budgets of the recent years coupled with lack of sufficient revenue

bases forced the government printing money that resulted in high inflation, the President added. "The government's economic and fiscal policy," he said, "therefore, was based on reducing cash flow and increasing revenue." President Nasheed outlined measures for increasing revenue from fisheries and tourism sectors, including mid-market resort development and diversifying and improving fisheries sector. He said the government had plans to develop fisheries sector products for export.

Further business coop with Maldives sought

Newly appointed High Commissioner of Maldives in Dhaka Ahmed Sareer has laid emphasis on cooperation between the business communities of Maldives and Bangladesh. The Maldivian envoy made the observation when he called on Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni at her office in the city Wednesday to discuss issues on trade, business, education and tourism, reports UNB. The envoy said it is "one of his high priorities" to introduce Bangladeshi products in Maldivian markets and to help enhance interaction between the business communities of the two countries. Mr Sareer said he would work for the formation of a business council comprising two countries. On climate change issues, he said both Bangladesh and the Maldives are frontline states and put emphasis on working together on these issues. Underlining the importance of formalising the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers in Maldives, Ms Moni mentioned about signing of an MoU. She also expressed her interest in sending more skilled and semi-skilled Bangladeshi workers to Maldives.

Maldives seeks CBI help to deal with narcotic smuggling

New Delhi, Feb 4 (PTI) Maldives has sought the help of CBI to help tackle attempts by international drug cartels to smuggle in contraband using Indians, especially those from down south. A Maldivian delegation headed by Minister of Home Affairs Mohamed Shihab, Commissioner of Police Ahmed Faseeh and Deputy Head of Strategic Development Department Yoonus Sobah visited the CBI headquarters and Central Forensic Science Laboratory on Wednesday. The delegation then held a meeting with CBI Director Ashwani Kumar during which, sources said, the delegation discussed its concerns on the narcotics front. It has come to light that narcotics cartels were trying to use Indians, especially those from down south, as human carriers to smuggle in the contraband, a source said. The delegation has also sought the help of CBI in setting up Maldivian Police Academy besides seeking training and consultancy in investigating corporate and white collar crimes.

Lashkar threat brings Maldives closer to India

Sat, 2010-02-06 The Maldives will formalise its counter-terrorism agreements with India after renewed fears that Pakistan-based group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is trying to establish a base in remote parts of the Maldives. Indian intelligence bureau sources have been quoted as saying that the LeT "has nearly 1,000 operatives active in the Maldives", and that there was no way the group's operations "can be curbed unless there is very good intelligence sharing with the Maldives." The sources claimed that in the last three months "there has been an increase in LeT activities in the Maldives, and several persons from [the LeT's] Kerala group have slipped into the country and are busy setting up operations there." India could ill-afford a slip in its Maldives policy, given the "extreme aggression" of the LeT group, the sources told a news agency. The notion of a thousand LeT operatives active in the Maldives "may be an exaggeration", said the Maldivian president's press secretary Mohamed Zuhair, "but there may be some truth in it." Minister for Home Affairs Mohamed Shihab is currently in India meeting his counterpart P

Chidambaram to draw up a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two countries that will be signed in April. First Secretary at the Indian High Commission to the Maldives, Naryan Swamy, has said the agreement would formalise existing arrangements with the Maldives but the details would have to wait until Shihab returned to Male. Zuhair said the MoU was "very important because it gives notice that the Maldives will not allow terrorist operations." "The Maldives is very important to India's security – the Mumbai bombers attacked via sea," Zuhair said. "The sea is India's vulnerable underbelly because there are so many entry points, and the Maldives can be very helpful with that because every day we have 1,500 fishing vessels sometimes 70-100 kilometres out to sea. If they see any suspicious vessels they can coordinate the information through various centres in the Maldives."

India was already assisting the Maldives to establish a chain of coastal radars stations across the country's atolls, he said, which will be networked with India's own radar network. Zuhair acknowledged that such defence cooperation might "concern" countries like China, but he noted that "of all our neighbours, India is the natural country of choice to assist the Maldives."

Maldives in privatization drive

MALE: Maldives will privatize its airport but could also sell down other state enterprises and bring private capital to a domestic bank, the International Monetary Fund has said. "A central plank will be the privatization of the airport, but stakes in the telecommunications company have already been sold and other enterprises and services (such as electricity, water and sewage) could also be divested," the IMF said in a report. A stake in the telecoms firm has been sold for 40 million US dollars and "a majority stake in the airport is expected to be sold in the coming months", the IMF said in a report issued after the economic watchdog's annual consultations. The IMF has a program to rescue the economy and boost its foreign reserves after the islands ran into balance of payments troubles due to monetization of debt, which was worsened during the recent global economic downturn. The government would also like to sell off its stake in the Bank of Maldives, which has been hit by politically motivated loans. The bank also had less access to international credit lines unlike other banks which are part of foreign banks. IMF said authorities had already replaced the management and the bank was on a loan recovery drive. In the future the bank may look for a strategic partner to get fresh capital. Maldives hotels have been hit by the global economic slump which in turn has hurt government revenues, expanding the budget deficit. The privatization drive was not a core part of the IMF backed rescue program, but a structural benchmark and would improve economic efficiency in the long term and boost revenues in the short term. Expanding government expenses, partially due a higher public sector wage bill and falling revenues had increased the budget deficit which had been financed with central bank credit (printed money) causing foreign reserve losses. The Maldives Monetary Authority has a peg with the US dollar at 12.8 local units, or rufiyaa. The IMF says the peg can be maintained if excess local money is withdrawn and the fiscal house set in order. "Monetary policy has been constrained by fiscal dominance-the government had been able to borrow without limit from the MMA-and the fixed exchange rate regime" the IMF report said. "In the absence of open market operations (introduced only in August 2009), any excess money supply from deficit monetization had ultimately been reabsorbed via reserve losses" report noted. Direct deficit monetization has been stopped from September 2009 and existing government loans at the monetary authority would be converted and sold down to absorb excess liquidity. Domestic deficit financing would be limited to Treasury bills sales to entities other than the central bank. Global turmoil had brought the economy to the 'brink of a crisis' the IMF said. In 2009 the

economy was expected to shrink by 4.0 percent but rebound to a 3.5 percent growth in 2010. The program estimates a budget deficit of 28.8 percent for 2009 which will fall to 17.8 percent in 2010 with cuts in the public sector salary bill averaging 14 percent, staff reduction with some activities being converted to state corporations.

Big nations set out emission cuts targets

January 31 2010 Most of the world's big economies on Sunday filed their targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions with the UN, meeting the deadline set in Copenhagen. The news was described as a very significant step forward by a senior UK government official. He said: "This makes the Copenhagen accord a very substantial agreement." But the targets have been overshadowed by allegations about errors and flimsy data in the key 2007 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Many countries submitted their official targets in the form of a range. Australia, for instance, will cut its emissions by between 5 per cent and 25 per cent by 2020, depending on what other countries agree. In contrast, the Maldives, the island state in the Indian ocean threatened by rising sea levels, has pledged to go carbon neutral by 2020, cutting its net carbon dioxide emissions by 100 per cent. This means diplomats will spend much of the next year trying to persuade countries to move to the upper end of their ranges. If all the big economies did so, then the world would be within striking distance of meeting scientific advice on climate change targets. The next step is for governments to transform the Copenhagen accord into a full legal treaty, which they hope to do in a series of meetings this year, culminating with a conference in Mexico in November and December. But even as governments heaved a sigh of relief that targets had been officially filed, in spite of fears that some nations might try to renege on previous promises, they were forced on the defensive as the IPCC came under renewed fire. Claims first arose in mid-January that a prediction in the IPCC report that the Himalayas' glaciers could disappear by 2035 were unsubstantiated. There have also been claims that some of the data used by the IPCC came from "grey" sources, which had not been fully subjected to the peer review processes scientists rely on. Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the IPCC, faced fresh allegations at the weekend in Indian and British media, which claimed that an institute he runs in India, TERI, benefited from grants given partly on the basis of the commission's reports on Himalayan glaciers. In the past few weeks some experts have also privately criticised the manner in which Mr Pachauri has defended the IPCC and suggested that he could be replaced. But many scientists and officials have defended the IPCC. The UK's senior government official said the fact that doubt had been cast on "a small number" of the IPCC's findings did not affect the overall import of climate change science, which rests on many years of research by tens of thousands of scientists. He urged the IPCC to do more to reassure the public that its processes were "robust" and "rigorous". Ed Miliband, the UK's energy and climate minister, said it was "profoundly irresponsible" to suggest that the allegations undermined climate change science

Expats in the Gulf are a force for good: by Damian Reilly This email address is being protected from spam bots, you need Javascript enabled to view it on Thursday, 04 February 2010 **The Bahrain Labour Minister believes there are too many foreigners in Gulf countries and that their presence threatens the very "existence" of local people. Beyond cultural dilution - which many would argue is a good thing, for any culture, but we'll come to that - it is hard to see his point.** "No one would believe that the GCC countries, which employ seventeen million foreign workers, have more than one million unemployed citizens... This influx of foreigners poses a threat to our existence," Dr Majeed Al Alawi told the 15th Emirates Centre for Strategic

Studies and Research annual conference last week. He said the GCC need only look as far as Singapore or the Maldives for examples of places "where foreign workers had been brought on temporary contracts and are now ruling." Forget the fact that it is the avowed aim of almost every GCC country to emulate almost exactly the Singapore business hub model - one that has made it a fantastically successful centre of international commerce, punching far above its apparent weight in natural resources - and consider what unemployment actually means in the GCC. Where in most countries unemployment denotes oppressive poverty, here, to a large extent, it signifies wealth.

Over 2,700 expatriates deported

The statistics of department of immigration and emigration revealed over 2,700 expatriates were deported in 2009. Ahmed Waheed, chief officer of the department said many expatriates were deported for working in the Maldives illegally. "We have deported over 2,200 expatriates for working in the Maldives illegally," he said. "All of them were from Bangladesh. "If employed illegally, we deport for a period of two years." Waheed said some of the expatriates were deported for committing crimes like drinking, burglary, violence and for prostitution. Sri Lankans were deported for drinking alcohol and burglary; he said adding Thai women were involved in prostitution. Statistics reveal 34 expatriates were deported for prostitution

Police denies allegations made by opposition MP

Police made a statement on Monday, denying the allegations made by Thoddoo MP Ali Waheed that the police had taken part in the protest held outside the president's palace and Maldives National Defence Force headquarter (MNDF) on Friday morning. In an interview at DhiTv studio on Friday evening, the police statement read, Waheed from the largest opposition Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP) has said the police had taken part in the protest adding it was a false statement. "As police shall be sincere to the nation when performing the responsibilities, this service wants to clarify that the statements made by MP Ali Waheed was untrue and he made the accusations to lose the respect and dignity of the police," it read. The statement also said the protesters have protested outside the Maldives police service headquarters, president's palace and banged the main gate of MNDF headquarters. Waheed responded the police statement calling to professionalise the institution adding the police should be sincere to the nation. "I feel there is a distinction made by the police officials in meaning the assembly act when protecting the residence of a dictator, parliament and MPs," he said. He also alleged the police have failed to investigate the actions of the government affiliated MPs adding the police are influenced politically.

People of 2009: Ian Fry and Mohamed Nasheed

February 4, 2010 WASHINGTON, Feb 3: While the final outcome of the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit may not have been what the people of the world's most vulnerable nations had hoped for, Tuvalu's Ian Fry and the Maldives' Mohamed Nasheed used the global platform to shake the geopolitical power structures in ways that may ultimately save millions of lives -- and entire cultures. Speaking elegantly and in stark terms, the tag-team climate evangelists put the world on notice: the survival of their and many other nations is now at risk, and only a fair, ambitious, and legally binding agreement to reduce the world's greenhouse gas emissions can save them. During the first week of the conference, Tuvalu and the Maldives led a coalition of small island nations that stood against the traditionally powerful countries, offering an alternate draft declaration that would have publicly recognized the catastrophic consequences of global

temperature rise of even 2 degrees Celsius -- the target most wealthier nations are currently proposing -- and commit the world's nations to holding temperature rise "well below 1.5 degrees Celsius." An agreement that mandated anything less, they said, would be "a suicide pact"

Information department collects DhiFM recording

Department of Information collected an audio recording of DhiFm on Sunday, which consist the live coverage of the protest which sparked outside the president's palace and Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) head quarters. Mahsood Hilmy, Dhifm manager said "information department said they want the three hour audio recording urgently". He said it was the coverage from 12am to 3am on Friday. "Yet, department has not informed anything about it," he said. An official from the department said the recording was collected after receiving a complaint. Under the agreement, he added, the department has the authority to claim two weeks recording. DhiFm radio has said earlier, the police have disrupted their live coverage on Friday by demanding to halt the transmission. Maldives Journalist Association has condemned the actions of the police explaining intimidating the media was against the media freedom obtained under the constitution. Mean time, the police made a statement against DhiFm alleging the radio station had taken part in the protest and had presented the live coverage in an irresponsible. "We call upon, not to repeat such actions," the statement said.

Aitken Spence Q3 profits up by 14%

Thursday, 04 February 2010 Aitken Spence PLC released its third quarter financial results to the Colombo Stock Exchange today, showing a 10 per cent rise in pre-tax profits to Rs 914 mn and a 14.3 per cent rise in profit attributable to shareholders to Rs 541 mn over the same quarter last year. Aitken Spence is among Sri Lanka's leading and most respected corporate entities with interests in Hotels, Services, Logistic Solutions and Strategic Investments in South Asia, the Middle East and Africa. The diversified conglomerate reported Rs 2.14 bn as pre-tax profit and Rs 1.3 bn as profit attributable to shareholders for the nine months ended 31st December; an increase of 3.3 per cent and 3.1 per cent respectively over the previous year. Performance from the Group's resorts in the Maldives which operate as Adaaran Resorts, showed signs of recovery despite being lower than last year. With seven resorts under its portfolio, Aitken Spence is the largest international resort operator in islands, which was sharply affected by a slump in tourist arrivals due to the global recession. During the quarter under review, Adaaran Prestige Resorts was acclaimed as "The Indian Ocean's Leading Water Villa Group" and Adaaran Prestige Water Villas at Meedhupparu won the award for "The Maldives Leading Water Villas" for the second consecutive year at the World Travel Awards ceremony held in London during the 2009 World Travel Market. "Increased tourist arrivals due to the end of the armed conflict in the country has improved income from our resorts in Sri Lanka during the quarter. An outstanding rebound in tourism is imminent for the next season. With a focused and robust destination marketing strategy that builds a strong country brand internationally, we believe that the private sector is capable of making tourism a key engine of sustainable economic growth for Sri Lanka," said Mr. J M S Brito, Deputy Chairman and Managing Director of Aitken Spence PLC. Aitken Spence is the largest resort operator in Sri Lanka with nine award-winning properties across the island. The company has announced plans to expand its hospitality portfolio in the island with proposed resorts in the South, North and the East. Aitken Spence opened the newly-rebranded Heritance Tea Factory in December, which joins Heritance Kandalama, Heritance Ahungalla and Heritance Madurai under the up-market Heritance Hotels & Resorts umbrella. The company also

announced that it will be managing the 130-roomed Ramada Hotel & Convention Centre in New Delhi, which is due to open in March this year. Aitken Spence currently operates five hotels and resorts in India, including the eco-friendly Barefoot at Havelock in the Andaman Islands. During the quarter, the Group saw a lower contribution from the Aviation sector, which comprises of the Singapore Airlines and Kingfisher Airlines agencies, as a result of reduced frequency of flights and prices. With the global economy recovering, the Maritime division showed an improved performance over last year during the period under review. Post-war opportunities in the field of domestic transport and logistics management contributed strongly to the performance of the Cargo Logistics sector. Renegotiated prices and improved production has helped the company's garment manufacturing arm to post positive results during the quarter.

Climate Change/ Quebec continues to shame Ottawa: Canada has become an International Pariah

PEJnews Joan Russow - Global Compliance Research Project: At COP 15, Quebec was singled out, by the President of the Maldives, as an indication of hope because he thought that the Province would influence the Federal Government. But the flawed Canadian Constitution gives the Prime Minister sole power to bind Canada even in the face of majority opposition from Members of Parliament and from Provinces.

At COP 15, the Harper government was not willing to face the international media, and was cowering in a corner of the Bela Centre, with Minister Prentice giving a contrived press conference. In contrast, Quebec was singled out by many states as being at the forefront. The Harper government was however singled out for receiving the 'colossal fossil award' for its obstruction during the talks. On February 2, 2010, The Montreal Gazette reported Quebec has adopted tough environmental standards, calling for a 30-percent reduction in vehicle greenhouse-gas emissions by 2016.; and that ³Prentice stated Canada should align its greenhouse-gas cuts with the United States, indirectly criticizing Quebec's [more] ambitious goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent in 2020, from 1990 levels.; and the Gazette quoted Prentice as saying : "One of the most glaring examples of the folly of attempting to go it alone in an integrated North American economy is the new, and unique, vehicle regulations introduced by Quebec," and "These ensure consumers will basically have to leave that province to buy vehicles, to avoid levies of up to \$5,000, because 75 percent of the latest car and truck models don't conform to the new rules."

On January 30, Harper submitted to the UNFCCC, Canada's underwhelming Commitment of 17% below 2005 baseline by 2020.

Serious questions arise about Canada's notion of Confederation.

Since there was such a discrepancy between what Quebec was willing to agree to, and what the Harper government had agreed to, questions were raised about the relationship between the Federal and Provincial Government in Canada.

At COP 15, there was considerable discussion about the fact that Obama could not enter into a legally binding agreement because it would have to pass it through Congress. Attention was also directed towards the mechanism in Canada for entering into a legally binding agreement.

When I admitted that I was a Canadian, I was often asked to explain the mechanism in Canada for entering into a legally binding agreement. I explained that a Canadian Prime Minister, even one like Harper leading a minority government, has the power to bind Canada without even taking the agreement to Parliament.

I also mentioned that Harper, who was leading a minority government, could ignore majority votes in Parliament, could defy majority votes in a Parliamentary Environment Committee, and could disregard the wishes of the provinces members of the Confederation.

The question arose: Is he not required to form a coalition? Why is he not required to go to Parliament before signing and ratifying an international instrument? A member of the international media even queried: isn't Canada a democracy? I tried to explain further the system in Canada and responded that it is a constitutional monarchy, and the monarchy is represented by the Governor General who is appointed by the Prime Minister. When asked about the role of the Governor General, I mentioned that under the Article VI of her Lettres Patent she had the power to summon, dissolve and prorogue (close down) Parliament, and under Article V of her Lettres Patent she had the power to remove Members of Parliament, including the Prime Minister, if there were sufficient cause. [one would think as Bill Rees has argued that Climate negligence or Criminal negligence would be a "sufficient cause"]

I was then asked, is the Governor General only a figurehead or does the Governor General exercise powers under the Lettres Patent? I pointed out that actually since Harper was elected in 2006 the Governor General has definitely used some of the powers under the letters patent, and has used them twice [of course this was a conversation before the 2009 prorogation]. I told him that in 2008, Harper was being investigated, by a Parliamentary Committee on Ethics and Access to Information, for a funding scheme, in the 2006 election, that violated the Elections Act. Harper asked the Governor General to dissolve Parliament and to call an election, which she did. (She could have called on the Opposition Parties, which represented at that time over 62 percent of the Members of Parliament, to form a government, but she didn't).

I then mentioned that in 2008, the Opposition Parties agreed to put a motion of non-confidence on the floor of the House of Commons and that two of the Opposition Parties had agreed to form a Coalition with the support of the third Opposition Party. Harper fearing a non-confidence vote, and the possibility of losing power to the Coalition, went to the Governor General and asked her to prorogue Parliament, which she agreed to do.

The reporter then asked about what sort of threat does the Prime Minister have over the Governor General's head? I responded that the current Governor General was appointed by the previous government for a period of five years, and that while Harper could not replace her, he could contact the Queen and request that the Queen recognize the appointment of a new Governor General. The reporter just shook his head, and indicated that he was in a state of disbelief.

It was now midnight, and we went to hear Jim Prentice speak in the plenary to the General Assembly. Harper was probably the only head of state that was at COP 15, and did not speak for Canada. He argued that the reason was that he was dining with the Queen of Denmark.

Fundamental changes needed in the Constitution

1. Moving away from the antiquated First Past the Post Electoral System, which itself violates key sections in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
2. Requiring international agreements to be brought to Parliament.
3. Drawing upon the strongest legislation from each province, and if the strongest legislation is less than the international standards, the international standards should prevail.
4. Proposing that the legislation of each province be examined and the Federal Government would adopt the strongest legislation related to guaranteeing human rights, preventing conflict, ensuring social justice and protecting the environment, thus the Federal position would be continually harmonizing upwards. For too long in Canada provincial /corporate self-interests have aimed as harmonizing to the lowest common denominator.
5. Addressing issues related to the Governor General, and to the Senate.

But the Constitution in Canada is almost impermeable to change (see Annex)

As an example of how complicated and difficult it is to change: here is the amending Formula

The present Constitution of Canada contains not one but five amending formulae.

First, sSection 38 of the Constitution of Canada sets out the general amending formula for changes to the Constitution. This formula requires the approval of the Senate and House of Commons and of the legislative assemblies of at least two-thirds of the provinces with at least 50% of the population of all provinces. The two--thirds 50% formula [colloquially referred to as the 7-50 formula] at present requires the approval of 7 provinces, representing at least 50% of the population of all the provinces. Among the features of the Constitution that may be changed in accordance with the 7-50 formula is perhaps the most important element in it, namely, the distribution of legislative powers between Parliament and the provincial legislatures. This is the very substance of the federation.

Second, the Constitution of Canada then sets out other amending formulae, all of which are exceptions to the 7-50 formula. Section 41, which applies to a limited number of matters, requires the *unanimous* consent of the Senate and House of Commons and the legislative assembly of each province. The matters requiring unanimous consent are the following:

(a) the Office of the Queen, the Governor General and the Lieutenant Governor of a province;

(b) the right of a province to a number of members in the House of Commons not less than the number of Senators by which the province is entitled to be represented at the time this Part comes into force;

(c) subject to Section 43, the use of the English or the French language;

(d) the composition of the Supreme Court of Canada; and

(e) an amendment to this Part. Third, another exception to the 7-50 formula is found in Section 43 and concerns any provision that "applies to one or more but not all,

provinces", including alterations to boundaries between provinces and language within a province. Amendments in respect of these matters require the consent of the Senate and House of Commons and the legislative assembly of each province to which the amendment applies.

Fourth, Section 44 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* authorizes amendments to the Constitution of Canada in relation to the executive government of Canada or the Senate and House of Commons, other than those matters referred to in Sections 41 and 42 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The amendments authorized by Section 44 are within the exclusive power of the Parliament of Canada. Fifth, and the last exception to the 7-50 general amending formula, is to be found in Section 45 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. This provision empowers the *legislature* of each province exclusively to make laws amending the constitution of that province. This amending formula, like the formula set out in Section 44, discussed above, must be read subject to Section 41 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*---the unanimous consent formula.

June Debut For W Retreat Koh Samui:Conferences in Thailand will take a hip twist from June 2010, when the W Retreat Koh Samui opens for business. The 75-villa property will be the second W Retreat to open in Asia-Pacific after the Maldives and comes ahead of the highly-anticipated W Retreat and Spa Bali in Seminyak, scheduled to be completed in late 2010. An all-villa beachfront resort set on the north shore of Thailand's famed Samui island, W Koh Samui will bring an alluring new dimension of cutting-edge design, contemporary lifestyle, and exhilarating experiences to Thailand. "W Retreat Koh Samui will redefine the way we live and play, delivering a fully integrated contemporary lifestyle experience with the signature W twist," said W Retreat Koh Samui general manager, Coetzer Deysel. "We are delighted to bring our world of 'Wow' to Koh Samui, one of the coolest islands in Southeast Asia," he said. A modern paradise of vibrant foliage, unspoiled golden sand and warm island breezes, W Retreat Koh Samui will offer panoramic sunrise and sunset views of the Gulf of Thailand from its exceptional beachfront location. The Retreat will feature 75 private villas equipped with modern lifestyle innovations, including a private pool, daybeds, an outdoor shower, Yamaha sound system, 47-inch plasma screen TV, wine refrigerator, and the signature W bed. W Retreat Koh Samui's signature services and amenities will bring a new level of indulgence to a renowned Thai island. Exclusive experiences will include W's signature Whatever/Whenever concierge service, providing guests and residents with whatever they want – from a Champagne brunch on a deserted beach or an intimate sunset wedding on a stretch of Koh Samui's glistening sand to an impromptu island-hopping excursion. W Retreat Koh Samui will be a scintillating playground for the discerning leisure traveller and conference delegate alike. W's signature Living Room, a magnificent indoor/outdoor lounge rich with stunning ocean vistas and swank lounge seating on the water, will welcome stylish island guests and bring an irresistible new highlight to Koh Samui's vibrant nightlife scene. Guests of the Retreat will be able to enjoy preferred dining reservations and seating at The Kitchen Table, which will serve food from the heart, including freshly baked treats, gourmet pizzas and inspirational buffets, as well as at W Retreat Koh Samui's signature Japanese restaurant, Namu. Before dinner, guests may spice up their evenings with one of W Retreat Koh Samui's signature cocktails at the see-and-be-seen lounge, Sip. aWay Spa, the signature spa at W Retreat Koh Samui, will offer guests and in-the-know locals an exceptional wellness escape with signature treatments including massages, facial and body treatments, manicures and pedicures, as well as a range of treatments incorporating local Thai influences – whether it be ingredients, massage techniques or design details – in a cool and

playful way. Guests will also be able to enjoy the WET pool, SWEAT state-of-the-art fitness facility, water sports center and tennis court, Style Lab and much more. The Great Room function area at W Retreat Koh Samui will serve as an ideal island venue for business gatherings and creative meetings. Creative in approach and innovative in design, the Great Room can be divided into two areas and serves 60 people with the latest in meetings technology.

Don't confuse weather, climate: Our very young new year certainly has gotten off to a frigid start. Atlanta experienced below-freezing temperatures every night of 2010 through Jan. 12. Snow and ice made a mess of the roads, forced businesses and schools to close, and strained state, county and municipal budgets. It sure seems that we could use a little global warming right now, huh? There is a lot of confusion about global warming. How can it be occurring when it is so cold? The answer, in part, lies in separating "weather" from "climate." What we just experienced was weather: short-term, day-to-day occurrences, major air masses from the North bringing arctic air to the normally more temperate South. Climate is the longer-term, bigger-picture setting. Along with confusing weather patterns, there are many commentators who seem to be intent on creating as much confusion and doubt as possible around the scientific discussion of global change. A recent Rasmussen poll suggests that an alarming number of Americans believe that scientists have falsified their data in order to sell global warming to the public. Add this to some embarrassing (and inappropriate) comments made in e-mails stolen from the Climate Studies Unit at East Anglia University, and 2009 was a long, hot year for climate scientists. Why is there so much confusion and consternation surrounding the simple question of whether or not the planet is warming? A big part of the problem centers on the use of Earth surface temperature data as a direct measure of global warming. A side note: While Atlanta has been experiencing below-average low temperatures so far this year, Rio de Janeiro has been experienced slightly-warmer-than-average high temperatures. Remember, it's summer in the Southern hemisphere right now — again, weather vs. climate. We would hate to be part of any team charged with measuring temperature trends over the last few years or decades. Where do you stick the thermometer? What matters most? Daytime highs? Nighttime lows? Summer temperatures? Winter temperatures? Trying to determine if the planet is warming (or cooling) in this fashion seems fraught with peril. One doesn't need to measure thousands of temperatures to find conclusive evidence that the planet is warming. The Earth does the averaging for us. There are many physical and biological characteristics of our planet that clearly indicate the Earth is warming, and has been for decades. Studies from both hemispheres indicate that 95 percent of the world's alpine glaciers are retreating. Glacier National Park in Montana is down to 26 named glaciers from 150 in 1850. If this trend continues, the park is expected to be ice-free by 2030. Glaciers in the Himalayas are shrinking so rapidly that the summer flow of the major rivers (Indus, Ganges, Mekong, Yellow, Yangtze) they feed may eventually be seriously affected. Permafrost regions are thawing in high northern latitudes, causing buildings to sink, roads to crumble, and a variety of other troubles for human infrastructure. The great ice sheets are retreating. The Greenland ice sheet melting began to accelerate in the 1990s. Now the margin of the entire ice mass is melting even in its northernmost reaches. The West Antarctic ice sheet has begun extensive melting, mostly since 2000, and the rate of melting has increased since then.

Sea level is rising, and the rate of rise has accelerated over the last century. A tide gauge on a concrete, open-ocean pier in Duck, N.C., indicates the sea level is now rising at a 1 1/2-foot-per-century rate. In the Pacific, atoll nations such as Tuvalu already are being abandoned because of the rising sea. Soon the Maldives must follow. The summer sea-ice cover of the Arctic Ocean is shrinking and thinning, and may disappear altogether. So, one can argue for hours regarding

whether this year was warmer or colder than last. It really doesn't matter. We should be reading the planet, not thermometers. The Earth is clearly warming and sea level is clearly rising. The scientific and political debate over who is causing this global warming should not be used as an excuse to avoid dealing with the warming that is happening today, or planning for the impacts of future warming. This is particularly true on the coast, where cities such as Savannah and all the resort communities along Georgia's barrier islands must begin planning for the inevitability of rising sea level — regardless of what we decide to do as a nation regarding potential causes of global warming. David M. Bush is professor of geology at the University of West Georgia in Carrollton. Rob Young is professor of coastal geology at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, N.C.

Travel: UK suspends student visas from India, Nepal, Bangladesh

Monday 01 February 2010: The UK Immigration Service, now known as "UK Borders Agency" has suspended the applications process for student visas from northern India, Nepal and Bangladesh after a dramatic upsurge in numbers and allegations of fraud.

Bangladesh SC declares illegal amendment allowing religion in politics

Bangladesh's Supreme Court on Tuesday declared as illegal a Constitutional amendment that had allowed religion-based political parties to flourish in the country, paving the way for the government to ban such groups. The Supreme Court's order came on two writ petitions challenging an earlier High Court verdict that had declared the 1979 Fifth Amendment to the Constitution as illegal. A six-member bench of the apex court's Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Md Tafazzul Islam upheld the High Court verdict after six days of hearing on the two leave-to-appeal petitions filed by opposition BNP Secretary General Khondker Delwar Hossain and three lawyers from its key ally Jamaat-e-Islami. The amendment declared illegal had also legitimised the governments that came to power following the coup of August 15, 1975 in which Bangladesh's founder president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with most of his family members was killed. The then deputy army chief general Ziaur Rahman had subsequently emerged as the strongman of Bangladesh and ascended to presidency, floating the BNP as a political party. His regime had also scrapped an earlier Constitutional ban on religion-based politics through the Fifth Amendment. The August 2005 High Court judgement had also rendered illegal the regimes of Khandaker Moshaque Ahmed, Abu Sadaat Mohammad Sayem along side that of Ziaur Rahman between August 15, 1975 and April 9, 1979. Law Minister Shafique Ahmed had recently said the government was awaiting the apex court verdict to take a decision on banning religion-based political parties. The Fifth Amendment was carried out during late president Ziaur Rahman's BNP government in 1979 that had allowed the religion-based political parties and added the Arabic 'Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim' or in the name of God, the most merciful, benevolent in the preamble of the Constitution. Ahmed, however, said the words 'Bismillahir-ar-Rahman-ar Rahim' would remain intact in the preamble. The original Constitution of 1972 had embodied four fundamental principles of nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism.

Bangladesh hunts for fugitive Mujib killers in Libya: Libya, or Benghazi to be precise, is the destination the Bangladesh government is looking at to nab the fugitive killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. "We have specific information about the fugitives and are working to bring them back to face justice," Bangladesh law minister Shafique Ahmed said. He added that diplomatic channels were working overtime to ensure the arrest and extradition of the absconding Mujib killers. Once brought back, they would face the gallows in Bangladesh. Out of the 12 convicted

for Mujib's killing, five were sent to the gallows on Thursday, while one, Aziz Pasha, died in Zimbabwe in 2002. Rest of the six are absconding. Sources said the Bangladesh government did not have the exact locations of at least four fugitives, though they were believed to be holed up in Libya or Pakistan. A worldwide hunt led by Interpol is underway to track down the condemned six. Various other intelligence agencies, including RA&W, Mossad and Bangladesh's own NSI, are also part of the team looking for the absconding killers of Mujib.

A 'black chapter' closes in Bangladesh: DHAKA - Bangladesh has vowed to bring to justice the fugitive killers of the country's founder president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, now that five of his assassins have been executed 35 years since his murder. Six of the killers who were tried in absentia are still on the run and hiding out in other countries, a top police officer in Dhaka told local media. Another had previously died in Zimbabwe. Around midnight on Thursday at the Dhaka central jail, five of the 12 former army officers who killed Sheikh Mujib - as the country's founding father is popularly known - were hanged. The charismatic leader was killed in a military coup staged by the junior officers on August 15, 1975. "The absconding convicts will face the same fate," declared Law Minister Shafique Ahmed over the weekend, even as he guaranteed that they were entitled to appeal their case - as did the five others. "The six condemned convicts [who remain alive] will be brought back home for execution," said Ahmed. "Six convicts are hiding in Canada, Libya and other countries," he said, adding that the Bangladeshi government was coordinating with these countries' governments and had sought the help of Interpol, the world's largest police organization. On hearing of the execution of five of the convicted killers of Mujib, hundreds of cheering people thronged the streets of the capital to celebrate the long-awaited moment. "We heave a sigh of relief as the perpetrators have finally been brought to book ... It's a milestone for the nation ... the black chapter is over ... the rule of law has been established," Salauddin Ahmed, a businessman, told Inter Press Service as he joined the street celebration early on Thursday. Mujib, who led Bangladesh's fight for independence from Pakistan in 1971, was murdered by a group of military officers in 1975, or three-and-a-half years after the South Asian nation gained its independence. At least 20 others were killed in the military putsch, including Mujib's wife, sons and daughters-in-law. His two daughters were in Germany at the time. One of them, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, is now the country's prime minister. "After 35 years, the nation today has been purged of its stains or vile creed that sought to justify the killings and disrupted the trial process for years," said Dhaka University student Abul Hasem, who was among the hundreds of people who jammed the streets of the capital, near Dhanmondi, Mujib's residence (now a museum), where he was killed. "The government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, daughter of the slain Mujib, has a political obligation to meet," said Nurul Kabir, editor of the leading English-language national daily New Age, adding that she had repeatedly claimed in the past that the extrajudicial murder of Mujibur Rahman initiated the politics of murder and vengeance in this country. He added that the failure of the state in the past to hold the perpetrators of Mujib's death to account for their crime "had stood in the way of the establishment of the rule of law" in Bangladesh. "Now that the trial has ended and the murderers executed, it is Hasina's turn to take political moves that will effectively help put an end to such politics and establish the rule of law in the genuine sense of the democratic ideal," Kabir said. Bangladesh has endured a succession of army-run regimes and dysfunctional democratic rules marred by corruption and partisan bickering since the assassination of Mujib. After leading Bangladesh's war of secession from Pakistan in 1971, the popularity of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, known as *Bangabandhu* (meaning "a friend of Bengal"), waned, owing to what analysts described his "failure" to resolve perennial

political and economic crises and curb corruption. Mujib had expressed deep concern over the extent of corruption plaguing the country, saying he had been "surrounded by thieves". Less than a year before he was killed, Mujib, having grown impatient over plodding progress and growing anarchy, pushed parliament to pass a law authorizing a shift to a presidential system, which would have given him enlarged powers. He consequently abolished the parliamentary system and installed himself as an absolute ruler, suspending all political parties, right or left, except his own. The move surprised some and saddened others. "True, the one-party autocratic rule was not the people's objective when they fought the liberation war, but the extra-judicial murder of Mujib and the extra-constitutional takeover of power by Mujib's old political comrade, Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed, did not facilitate democracy in the country," Kabir said. "Rather, it paved the way for a series of martial law regimes that ruled the country, with the fundamental rights of the citizens remaining suspended for years - regimes that distorted the country's political process in many ways," he said. This, among others, allowed the lateral entry of businessmen, civil and military bureaucrats into various rungs of the political ladder, the journalist added. "The experience proves, once again, that democratic resistance, with people's active political participation in it, remains the only constructive solution to autocratic governance of any ideological orientation," Kabir continued. Mushtaque Ahmed's government, installed after the 1975 coup, issued an Indemnity Ordinance granting impunity to the killers of Mujib. Lieutenant General Ziaur Rahman, Lieutenant General Hussain Muhammad Ershad and Khaleda Zia, who were successively in power from 1975 up to 1996, made no attempt to bring the slain leader's killers to trial. When Hasina Wajed assumed the post of prime minister in 1996, she scrapped the Indemnity Ordinance, paving the way for the trial of her father's assassins. A Dhaka court handed down the verdict in 1998, imposing death sentences to 15 individuals, three of whom were later acquitted by a high court. The trial process was again disrupted and remained almost suspended when Hasina Wajed's party, the Bangladesh Awami League, lost in the 2001 polls. It resumed when the Awami League won a landslide victory in the 2008 general elections.

On January 27, the Supreme Court rejected the petition of the convicted criminals for a review of their death sentences. On the same day, too, President Zillur Rahman dismissed their appeals for clemency, effectively removing all stumbling blocks to the execution of the five assassins

Wanted ULFA leader could be handed over, hints Bangladesh

IANS, 3 February 2010, GUWAHATI: Bangladesh on Wednesday hinted at handing over a top jailed Indian separatist leader, but wanted New Delhi to reciprocate by deporting some of its wanted terrorists allegedly hiding in India. Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Tariq Ahmed Karim said this in response to questions at a press conference in Guwahati on whether Dhaka would hand over jailed ULFA general secretary Anup Chetia, arrested in Bangladesh in 1997. "I cannot comment on whether Anup Chetia would be handed over. But let me say, if you have got back some of the terrorists (meaning the recent handing over of ULFA chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa and three more top leaders and their family members to India), I see no reason why you cannot get others also," Karim told journalists, a direct hint that moves are afoot to hand over the ULFA leader, now in protective custody in Bangladesh. Although Bangladesh never officially acknowledged handing over of the four top ULFA leaders, it is now an open secret that Dhaka facilitated their arrests by capturing them and later handing them over to Indian authorities. Besides Rajkhowa, ULFA deputy commander-in-chief Raju Baruah, self-styled foreign secretary Sasha Choudhury, and finance secretary Chitraban Hazarika, are in jail after they were shown as arrested by Indian authorities. The Bangladeshi envoy, however, wanted a

reciprocal gesture from India. "We also should get what we want. There are a number of people whom we want and could be living somewhere in India... those people who were involved in attacking political rallies in 2004... we want them back," Karim said. "We have made a formal plea to India to hand them back to us. The process has already started and is moving in the right direction." Karim stressed on the need for improved bilateral and economic ties with India, especially in the northeastern region with which Bangladesh shares a common border. "We want broader economic relations, including increasing air connectivity and trade," the envoy said.

SLIIT to enrol South Asian students

Student enrolment increased last year: Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT) has planned to enrol students from India, Bangladesh and Maldives. Initially the students will be from the region according to proximity and then SLIIT will cater countries such as Pakistan and the Middle East in the next phase, Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT), President/CEO, Prof. Lalith B. Gamage told the Daily News Business. He said a large number of students in India migrate to countries like Australia and the UK. The middle class of those countries is the customer we have targeted since they are large in numbers. Education institutes in those countries will not cater to all the sectors of the country but a specialized segment of society, that is the upper class. Some of the institutes do not have partnerships with foreign bodies. "Hence, our involvement fills that gap and students have to arrive in Sri Lanka to gain education. We will establish branches in those countries at the latter phase of our involvement in their education," he said. SLIIT has also increased new student enrolments to 2,000 in 2009. This is compared to 1,500 students in year 2008. SLIIT has been providing services to large number of IT companies in Sri Lanka. SLIIT will have its presence soon in Jaffna by the end of this year. At present, there are 5,000 students in SLIIT and we came up the idea of expansion. Therefore, SLIIT constructed a building in Malabe and expanded the Metro-Campus in Merchant Tower, Colombo. He said that the Matara centre has been upgraded and relocated with a new building to cater to a wider sphere of students. "We need to expand the range of degree programs into multimedia and computer gaming, business management specialization and new areas such as electrical engineering, mechatronics and telecommunication. Apart from that, SLIIT has taken measures to conduct several MBA degree programs as well," he said. Prof. Gamage said SLIIT has introduced new degree programs in Business Management apart from the three IT specializations in Information Technology, Information System and Computer System Network and Electronic Engineering. In addition, students can follow foreign university degree programs locally at SLIIT. SLIIT is involved in 15 partnerships with international Universities in the UK, Australia and Canada that students can complete two years of the degree in Sri Lanka and transfer to a University.

New chapter for India & BD: All eyes in Bangladesh are focused on New Delhi to see if and when it begins to implement the steps listed in the joint communiqué that the prime ministers of the two countries signed last month. Since independence Bangladesh has been unhappy with the violation of promises. Talking to people in various fields, I found that the response to the joint communiqué was jubilant. One editor commented: "Bangladesh has put all its trust in India and if relations between the two countries get clouded, it would be India's doing." Bangladeshis were willing to give six months for the assurances to fructify. The disillusionment will begin if the Indian bureaucracy sits on the files. Positive feelings may give way to a negative mood. Fundamentalism which has been defeated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed who fought and won the polls on the plank of pluralism may reappear. Water is the

litmus test. Before Sheikh Hasina's visit, Bangladesh expected India to be generous enough to give an undertaking that it would not touch any river flowing into Bangladesh without its consent. Now the expectation has come down to the assumption that the river Teesta will not have any dam, barrage or the likes which may lessen water for Bangladesh in any way. The joint communiqué is not so categorical because it only says that the discussions on sharing Teesta waters between India and Bangladesh should be "concluded expeditiously". The joint river commission is scheduled to meet in March after a lapse of seven years. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's assurance that India would not take steps on the Tiparmukh project that would adversely impact Bangladesh should have been adequate. He has even allowed a parliamentary team from Bangladesh to visit the dam. Yet I found people apprehensive. Commerce is another sore point with Bangladesh. The balance is substantially in India's favour. If unofficial trade is counted, the deficits may well be around \$6bn. True, New Delhi has removed tariffs on all except 47 items. But the earnings from them may not be more than \$10m to \$15m. Had India allowed zero-tariff access to whatever is manufactured in Bangladesh it would have been a gesture which could have dented even the hard opposition lobby. No doubt, Sheikh Hasina has shown courage in accepting something which should have been done long ago: facilitating India's access to the Mongola and Chittagong seaports. The fallout in the shape of trade will benefit Bangladesh. India will have a shorter and quicker way to reach the northeastern states. In exchange, Bangladesh has got access to Nepal and Bhutan. In fact, both Nepal and Bhutan have been wanting free contact with Bangladesh but New Delhi was dragging its feet. We owe our gratitude to Bangladesh, particularly to Sheikh Hasina who said in the joint communiqué that she would not allow her soil to be used by terrorists. Compare it to what Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said: how could Islamabad assure India that Pakistani soil would not be used against it? She has handed over United Liberation Front of Asom leaders operating from Bangladesh. In contrast, Islamabad has indicated that it cannot hand over any of a number of offenders in Pakistan who have committed crimes in India. However, the Bangladeshis have not forgiven India for some 400-odd people killed on the border some time back. India's Border Security Force was reportedly checking the infiltration. Should there be firing straightaway on the nationals of a friendly country? The killing of so many people smacks of uncontrolled anger. On the other hand, Bangladesh should realise that nearly 20 million of its nationals are living in India illegally. Assam has been affected the most. Had India agreed to issue work permits to Bangladeshis, the infiltration would have come down drastically. They come to India to work and earn money for their families back home. They do not want to settle in India. The proposal to build flyovers in Dhaka is practical. The joint communiqué mentions the possibility. Traffic is bad enough in Delhi, Mumbai or Kolkata. But it is worse in Dhaka where it takes hours to go from one point to another. I have seen the birth of Bangladesh and its steady growth. When it parted company with West Pakistan, not many people bet on Bangladesh. Today, after nearly four decades of independence, not many people are pessimistic. Remittances from Bangladeshis working abroad and earnings from the garment industry have given Bangladesh an annual growth rate of a little more than five per cent. Small farmers have made the countryside more or less self-sufficient. True, the Bangladeshis are still unsure of themselves. They are yet to reconcile themselves to the fact that theirs is a small country with limited resources. Yet their fortitude is impressive. But what is dejecting is the increasing concentration of power at the prime minister's level. That Bangladesh is a unitary polity goes without saying. However, if real power and funds could be transmitted to the local bodies, the off-and-on democracy in Bangladesh could acquire depth.

India should feel encouraged that another democratic, pluralistic country is taking root in the region. In Bangladesh the liberal world has a nation which has waded through a pool of blood to stay independent and democratic. A liberal, democratic Islamic state is something which may show the way to the entire Muslim world. Sheikh Hasina's style of governance has a touch of authoritarianism. Mrs Indira Gandhi had the same trait and India had to pay the price during the two-year-rule of emergency. At times, the Bangladeshi prime minister appears too impatient, too impressionable and too impetuous. She has only herself to fear, not the hapless opposition

Bangladesh seeks \$7 bln foreign investment for power

Thu Feb 4, 2010- Bangladesh is seeking \$7 billion of foreign investment to boost its electricity generation, a shortage of which has slowed the country's economic development, a government adviser said on Thursday. "We invited foreign investors during a four-day road show in Singapore and New York as we need huge direct foreign investment to spur our economy," said Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, energy and power adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The two-day show in Singapore was held from Jan. 25, followed by another in New York from Jan. 28. "About 25 globally reputed companies like Morgan Stanley (MS.N), Siemens (SIEGn.DE), AES Corp (AES.N), ConocoPhillips (COP.N), Caterpillar (CAT.N) and HSBC (HSBA.L) participated in the road show and showed keenness to invest in Bangladesh," Tawfiq told a news conference. Bangladesh also held a similar show last month in London. Due to technical constraints and shortfalls of natural gas supply, Bangladesh can produce only around a maximum of 3,700 MW of electricity while peak hour demand reaches more than 5,500 MW, officials said. Electricity demand has been growing by 7.50 percent annually since 1990. Around 40 percent of Bangladesh's 150 million population has access to electricity, one of the lowest levels in the world. "Augmenting electricity generation is a key priority of the present government and we are committed to generate 5,000 MW by 2011, and 7,000 MW by 2013 and that will require an investment of \$7 billion," Tawfiq told reporters. The government will float a pre-qualification international tender this month to set up four natural gas or diesel fired power plants with total capacity of 800 MW, he said. He said another pre-qualification international tender would be floated in July this year for four coal-fired plants. Tawfiq said foreign experts would visit Bangladesh in March to discuss liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports. "We feel that it would not be difficult as the private sector investors both at home and abroad, along with our development partners including the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, expressed desire to play a major role in this, while the government will play the role of the catalyst," he said. Bangladesh also plans to import up to 1,200 MW of electricity from India by the middle of 2012.

There's a market to tap in neighbourhood - Bangladesh

3 Feb 2010 Touchdowns can get bumpy. Landing in Dhaka through a maze of coconut groves and midrises is one thing. Getting bombarded by the local press with in-the-face headers like "Khaleda rejects Delhi deals as bond of slavery" or "Tigers torment 'ordinary' India" is quite another. It takes time to sink in. Naturally, the scars of time haven't healed and India continues to arouse a fair amount of suspicion in Bangladesh. Products and services from India should be no different, right? Maruti Altos zip through Dhaka streets. The Rs 480-crore Marico Bangladesh has just been ranked by Bangladesh Brand Forum as the second most vibrant brand in the country after Nokia. Its subsidiary, Kaya, has piggybacked on the 14-year success of Marico to open its 101st skin clinic in Dhaka — a market it claims to be its 'second skin'. The Delhi-based Dabur's Vatika hair oil is now giving goose pimples to local brands as it jostles for shelf space

with Marico's top-selling Parachute. Ditto CavinKare's fairness cream. At number two, Asian Paints is long in the black as it surges ahead confidently notching up market share from Berger, the market leader. After acquiring a 70% stake in the fourth largest mobile operator, Warid Telecom, Bharti Airtel is aggressively targeting the youth and rural folk in the six-operator mobile market. While imports of a particular hair dye brand from a sizeable Indian FMCG company dot the retail scene, speculation is rife that the company is forging a tie-up with a local manufacturer to have a permanent presence with its swathe of products in Bangladesh. The fashion fraternity from India is also out there — Ritu Beri, Ashish Soni, Satya Paul have grabbed boutique space in Dhaka's snob zones and Bollywood DVDs come here even before they're released in India. Bangladesh is a market punctuated by contradictions. Never mind the political divide, Indian brands thrive in this environment. "About 20% of the population (of Bangladesh) is so affluent that they virtually control the entire market. As this class grows, the catchment is large enough to peg a 15-20 % premium over the goods sold in India," says Suvodeep Das, head-marketing at Kaya. A couple of years ago when Das looked after the Bangladesh market for Western Union, he saw \$7 billion coming into the country through remittances. This has now grown to \$10 billion, or 20% of the country's GDP, largely through money coming in from the Gulf and the UK. Says Rakesh Pandey, CEO of Kaya, "Owing to the success of Marico in Bangladesh, we knew how to do business in Bangladesh. Moreover, the end-consumer is willing to spend a premium on beauty and skincare, a completely new category here." He avers that in the past, the top-end of the market used to go down to India, Dubai or even Bangkok for a facelift. "Kaya Skin Clinic is here to reverse that trend," he says. The launch of the new Kaya Skin Clinic and the first in Bangladesh at Dhaka saw unprecedented attendance from the Joneses of the city.

From Vision To Action

2 February 2010,|The history of mutual suspicion, petty bickering on trade negotiations, cavalier attitudes on border killings, dangerous gamesmanship with arms smuggling, etc, of the last three decades of Bangladesh-India relations would not normally justify the agreements that Sheikh Hasina penned sometime ago in Delhi. Only vision would. A vision of a South Asia doing what ASEAN did several decades ago, of trusting neighbours rather than of subverting them, of fighting poverty and not using it to justify other failures, of a thriving marketplace of goods and services rather than of counting items in the negative list. In the latest agreement, Bangladesh has moved towards such a vision. Has India responded? For us, the jury is still out. Take the two biggest concerns of the two sides: for India they are security and connectivity with the north-east; for Bangladesh water sharing and trade imbalance. There is a feeling that the clarity and precision with which Bangladesh responded to its neighbour's concerns were not reciprocated in equal measure by India. On Indian security concerns, Bangladesh's commitment was unequivocal: it will not permit the use of Bangladeshi soil for activities inimical to any other country, basically meaning India. It was in dramatic contrast to the past when India's worries about terrorist links and arms transit fell on deaf ears. India desperately needed friendly borders in the east that Bangladesh has now assured and is following up by decisive deeds. Sheikh Hasina has launched the most determined and widespread actions against internal militants and extremists and is systematically dismantling the terrorist infrastructure. The permission for the use of the Chittagong and Mongla ports for shipment of Indian goods to the north-east is a very important step forward. With Bangladesh's present position on Asian highway and railway routes, the regional and sub-regional connectivity scenario is set to undergo a fundamental change. On Bangladesh's priorities water sharing and trade imbalance there is no dramatic

progress. On Teesta water sharing, the positive development is that the ministerial level joint river commission meeting will be held within March, 2010. But it still leaves us with an uncomfortable ambiguity about the outcome. On the Tipaimukh dam issue, sadly, there was nothing new. The Indian prime minister reiterated his government's earlier stand that India will do nothing that will harm Bangladesh's interest. Such broad and generalised expression of good intention is definitely welcome. However clearer wording that further activity on Tipaimukh would only be undertaken after consultation with Bangladesh would have helped assuage remaining worries. On enhancement of economic and trade relations, especially giving Bangladeshi exports (which are meager to start with) zero tariff access, the issue remained mired in the politics of an ever narrowing negative list which will now come down by 47 from 260 items, which earlier was higher still. The absurdity is that India earns a meagre \$10 to \$15 million in taxes from exports from Bangladesh of around \$300 million. That is what it would have cost India to give Bangladesh zero tariff. The promise of rebuilding of our railways, roads, bridges including the two ports, is welcome. The \$1 billion credit line will serve to stimulate early action. However, all these are ancillary to both the functionality and efficiency of connectivity, which is a euphemism for 'transit'. The offer of 250 MW of electricity is of extreme relevance and among the most significant gains Bangladesh stands to make. Another hopeful sign is the agreement to amicably demarcate our maritime boundary. Predictably, the Bangladeshi opposition, led by Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party and supported by Jamaat-e-Islami, have called the agreements a total surrender of Bangladesh's interest to India. They have called for opposition unity and are clearly marking time for an appropriate moment to strike against Sheikh Hasina's government. Manmohan Singh's government must guard against the agreement getting entrapped in a bureaucratic maze, implementing its provisions soon. As a first step, India should formally assure that, as an upper riparian state, it will always consider Bangladesh's interest and display maximum openness and transparency on water sharing. Killings on the border must immediately stop and the promised 24-hour access to Tin Bigha implemented. On maritime boundary, it should go for a liberal interpretation and allow Bangladesh access to all available hydrocarbon and fish resources. Zero tariff access must be granted to all Bangladeshi exports. This must be followed by elimination of all inter-state taxes and non-tariff barriers. We must institutionalise annual summit and informal meetings in-between, for a few hours on one-day trips, as EU heads of governments have done. Such a step will do wonders for our relations. The moment is opportune for India and Bangladesh to lay the foundation of a durable, mutually beneficial relationship that will transform the region's strategic and security scene. Now is the moment for grand visions and grander actions. If Bangladesh was guilty of being shackled to the mindset of the past, let India not be accused of having failed to think outside the box when opportunity beckoned.

Bangladesh's Apparel Leaders Seek More Orders From Wal-Mart

February 5, 2010 Dhaka, Bangladesh (AHN) - The country's apparel leaders have sought more import orders from the Wal-Mart to expedite trade relations between Bangladesh and the United States. The appeal was made at a meeting with a five-member high-powered delegation, headed by C. Douglas McMillon, President and Chief Executive Officer of Wal-Mart International, held in the capital, Dhaka on Friday. "We've sought more import orders from the world's largest retailer to keep continue our business growth," Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) President Abdus Salam Murshedy told AHN Media in Dhaka after the meeting. During the meeting, the BGMEA also sought cooperation from Wal-Mart to strengthen their education programs for the garment worker's children, Mr. Murshedy added. The

Wal-Mart authorities assured the BGMEA leaders that it would extend their support to facilitate the education programs, saying that they consider Bangladesh as an important source of manufactured apparel. The Wal-Mart chief executive has suggested setting up special economic zones for the apparel sector exclusively to attract foreign buyers as well as foreign investors, the BGMEA chief noted. "Definitely, we'll recommend the government shortly to establish such economic zones," Mr. Mushedy said while replying to a query, adding that the Wal-Mart has also suggested improving infrastructure particularly power and gas to facilitate the country's industrial sectors. Doug McMillon is the president and chief executive officer of Wal-Mart International, a fast-growing segment of Wal-Mart's overall operations, with more than 3,970 stores and more than 680,000 associates in 15 markets outside the continental United

Bangladesh tea yields rise, exports fall - traders

Exports expected to decline as well in 2010

Most trade handled by local brokers DHAKA, Feb 1 (Reuters) - Bangladesh tea exports sank by slightly more than two thirds in 2009 as most of the crop produced was consumed locally, a trend expected to continue this year, traders said on Monday. Production rose by one percent to 59.24 million kg but exports fell 68 percent to 2.53 million kg in 2009, according to broker figures. "Despite an increase in yields, exports are likely to fall further as the internal consumption is rising," Rafay Nizam, a director at National Brokers Ltd, a leading tea broking firm, told Reuters. By comparison, Bangladesh tea exports peaked at 31 million kg in 1980 when production was 40 million kg. Tea grown in Bangladesh is mainly sold at the country's lone auction centre in the port city of Chittagong in weekly sales with overseas traders increasingly scarce and most of the business now handled by local traders, Nizam said. The average auction price in 2009 rose 23.40 percent to 136.94 taka (\$1.98) per kg, following stiff competition among buyers at auctions over the period. On Jan. 26, the average auction price touched 158.83 taka per kg. A total of 54.25 million kg of tea was sold at the auction centre in 2009, compared to 55 million kg in the previous year.

Bangladesh's Remittance Flow Records Over 20 Percent Growth

February 3, 2010 Dhaka, Bangladesh (AHN) - Bangladeshi workers abroad sent home a record \$6.48 billion as remittances in the first seven months of the current fiscal year, registering a 20.89 percent growth over the same period in the last fiscal year. The remittances from Bangladeshi nationals working abroad were estimated at \$950.92 million in January, up by \$77.06 million from the previous month. In December 2009, the remittance was \$873.86 million, according to the central bank statistics, released on Wednesday. "The inflow of remittances is still at a satisfactory level," a senior official of the Bangladesh Bank (BB), the country's central bank, told KAHN Media in Dhaka, adding that most of the Bangladeshi expatriates sent higher amount of remittances to their relatives during the period under review to facilitate the current Boro cropping. Bangladesh received \$6.484 billion during the July-January period of the fiscal 2009-10 against \$5.363 billion in the same period of the previous fiscal, the BB's data showed. The latest figure shows that despite the slowdown of overseas jobs, inflow of remittances has maintained an upward trend --- a continuation of last fiscal year when remittances grew 22.41 percent, the central bank officials said. The BB earlier took a series of measures to encourage expatriate Bangladeshis to send their hard-earned wages through formal banking channels instead of the illegal "hundi" system in order to boost the country's foreign exchange reserves. Four state-run commercial banks and dozens of private commercial banks have also stepped up efforts to increase remittance flow from the Middle East, the United Kingdom,

Malaysia, Singapore, Italy and the United States."We are establishing new contacts with foreign exchange houses so that our overseas workers can find it easy to send money home. We're also trying to set up our own exchange houses in different parts of the world," Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Agrani Bank Limited Syed Abu Naser Bukhtear Ahmed told KAHN in the capital, Dhaka. The country's foreign exchange reserves stood at \$10.13 billion on Wednesday due to the robust growth of remittances, the BB officials confirmed.

Machinery suppliers see better prospect for Bangladesh apparel

Wednesday, February 3, 2010 brighter future for Bangladesh in global apparel business is ahead, as international textile machinery suppliers observed yesterday. Pointing to the significant decline in demand for high-end garment products amid financial crisis worldwide, Denise Lee, vice-president of Flying Tiger, a Taiwan-based knit machinery supplying company and a participant, told the inaugural of an international fair: "Bangladesh can supply garment items at a low price due to some advantages like cheap and available labour besides the capacity of making basic items." The annual seventh Dhaka International Textile and Garments Machinery Exhibition 2010 will continue for four days at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre. Like Lee, many a participant points to the fact that countries like China, Turkey, India and Pakistan are losing competitiveness for higher wages to workers and shifting of production to the high-end garment items. Pointing her finger at the exhibition, Lee also said such a mega event is also a reflection on how Bangladesh's garment makers are progressing. The speakers, particularly representatives from the firms participating, said Bangladesh, being the third largest supplier of garment products, followed by China and Turkey, has a chance to be second in near future if the potentials could be properly tapped. But, the government should create an investment-friendly environment and build infrastructures for smooth running of business, they added. Chan Chao International Company Ltd, a Taiwan based event management company, organised the fair where 570 companies from 30 countries are showcasing their machineries in 750 stalls. In his inaugural speech, Abdul Latif Siddique, textiles and jute minister, asked the apparel manufacturers to shift their focus to production of value added items from the basic items to create more profit and more employment. Dilip Barua, industries minister, said a wider scope for more investment has been enshrined in the upcoming industrial policy. Abdul Hai Sarker, president of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, also the co-organiser of the fair, said the industrial sector is now hit hard by the low pressure of gas. "As a result, we could not exploit the potentials of the sector," Sarker added.

Celebrating Citizenship and Rights in Bangladesh *Research from the Citizenship Development Research Centre, based at IDS, is shedding new light on the gap between the theory and realities of citizenship in Bangladesh.* When researchers from the BRAC Development Institute asked people the meaning of rights, they were surprised to find that more than a fifth of female respondents referred to their right to shongshar - a word often translated from Bengali as family, though with wider implications. 'That's not something we were prepared to hear,' said Kabita Chowdhury, a researcher at the BRAC Development Institute. 'Why is it so important to have a right to your household? Because they are so vulnerable to being kicked out - your property, your house, your life, your family.' The research - carried out for the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability, based at IDS, - was intended to explore how the practices of mobilisation and mediation of eight grassroots development organisations were cultivating an awareness of rights and a sense of citizenship among beneficiaries. The findings shed light on the ways that certain practices of mobilisation and

mediation shape people's perceptions, conclusions that have been useful to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in the research. But the research has also underscored how important it is to have a conversation about the contradictions of citizenship - a term that legalistically implies equality, but in practice is rife with disparities, such as those in the household.

Citizen Rights Fair: To bring attention to the ways that NGOs contribute to grassroots political empowerment, and to raise awareness of the gap between the theory and reality of citizenship, BRAC Development Institute hosted a Nagorik Adhikar Mela (Citizens Rights Fair): a colourful two-day event that used a traditional form of sharing and celebrating. Nearly 600 grassroots members performed songs, dances and dramas during the programme. Hundreds of photographs and posters on the theme of rights and citizenship were displayed at the gallery, and 57 organisations showcased their efforts to raise awareness of citizen rights at their stalls: covering issues from human rights, labour rights, child rights, rights of ethnic groups, environmental rights and women's rights. The fair ended with a panel discussion of high-profile speakers on 'Fulfilling the promise of equal citizenship.' Participants included NGOs such as BRAC and Nijera Kori, human rights agencies such as Ain-O-Shalish Kendra, organisations promoting workers' rights such as BLAST, organisations raising awareness through cultural activities such as Rupantar, organisations working on child rights such as Aparajeyo-Bangladesh, those carrying forward the land rights movement for the landless like Samata, and associations fighting for the rights of indigenous groups. Nearly a quarter of the cost of the fair was covered through in-kind and small donations from the participating organisations themselves. 'It's an important opportunity for regional organisations to showcase their work at the national level,' said Sohela Nazneen, a former IDS Dphil and Research Fellow with the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium. 'The photos and videos and cultural events have really been energising.'

Most NGOs Per Capita: With approximately 22,000 NGOs, Bangladesh has the highest number per capita of all developing countries. These NGOs are partly credited with the country's recent progress on the Millennium Development Goals, yet their presence has not created similar improvements in governance indicators. Indeed, it was declared the world's most corrupt country for five years running by Transparency International's index. The research sought insight into this scenario by looking at different NGO models. Following the country's independence from Pakistan in 1971, many organisations in Bangladesh adopted a radical approach to social change, influenced strongly by the work of Paulo Freire. Over time, that focus has shifted to an emphasis on micro-credit and basic services. A recent World Bank study found that over 80 per cent of NGOs surveyed were engaged in the delivery of micro-finance while around 50 per cent provided social services. Few organisations remain that solely work to raise awareness of rights and mobilise the poor. **Strategies and Outcomes** The research was motivated by a notion that different organisational models have different outcomes and that the kinds of organisations that were better suited to deal with the problems of governance have been slowly transformed into, or displaced by, the kinds of organisations that may be better at dealing with development. A combination of studies have been conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. It reflects the findings of an earlier qualitative study of citizenship narratives among the working poor in Bangladesh which suggested that such outcomes than those narrowly tailored to the provision of microfinance.

Nuanced Findings Findings from the research indicate that organisations that were purposively designed to promote the identity and practice of citizenship among the working poor and that utilised methods of social mobilisation do contribute to political empowerment and voice, which in turn raises peoples' expectations from the government. The expectations lead to a demand for accountability and thus provide an opportunity for collaboration between the government and the grassroots organisations to enable an effective mechanism for accountability and transparency of local institutions. But the picture is also quite nuanced and complex, with quantitative studies

demonstrating that the relationship between strategy and outcome is not always straightforward. Organisations concerned with rights have had unexpected impacts on developmental indicators such as food security and diversity of diet, while Grameen Bank, one of the organisations considered to be a minimalist micro-credit lender, appeared to have a larger range of positive impacts (including on the likelihood that members vote) than organisations with broader missions. The findings are now helping to promote a wider dialogue on these issues among stakeholders in Bangladesh.

Bangladeshis staying illegally in India should be sent back: Mohan Bhagwat

Panaji: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat today said Bangladeshis illegally staying in India should be sent back to their countries. Bhagwat, addressing a gathering of swayamsevaks in Goa, said the government should identify and pick up Bangladeshis staying without valid documents in the country and cancel their names from ration cards and electoral roll, if required. "There is provision in the law to form internment camps for these illegal people to shelter them before being deported to their parent country," he said. Referring to issue of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, Bhagwat termed it as a political plot of Bangladesh government to add the territory to their mainland. "The vision document prepared by Bangladesh after its separation from Pakistan itself has mentioned that since the country is short of land, it will try to acquire more land from neighbouring areas," he said. "The government should at least now act against illegal migration by keeping aside their vote bank politics or else the day will come when they will get muscles in the political system," he warned. Bhagwat is down in Goa for the first time after taking over as RSS chief. "Join RSS and be the part of groups, who are ready for self sacrifice for the country," Bhagwat appealed. The RSS chief said that RSS cadres rushes for the rescue in any kind of natural calamities or tragedies before even police or other government machinery can reach. "This is because of the strong feeling to serve the country, which is nurtured in the heart of swayamsevak," he said. "Bangladesh now in million tonnes edible oil importers club The country's palm oil import in 2009 crossed the million tonnes mark to a total of 1,023,128 tonnes including crude and refined palm oil, reports BSS. Malaysian Palm oil marketing sources said in Dhaka the country saw a record growth in import of edible oil last year, mainly palm oil joining the million tonnes' importers club. Import grew by a record 25.39 per cent from January to December last year compared to that in previous 2008, sources said further. Meanwhile, the offer of a new credit line announced during a conference of Malaysian Palm Oil Council held recently in Dhaka to support further market expansion of palm oil in Bangladesh is likely to bring a new boost to its imports.

The commerce minister of Bangladesh is expected to visit Malaysia soon, the source said adding detailed might be worked out on this credit line issue centring the forthcoming visit.

Bangladesh needs \$9.5b annually, says expert

February 3, 2010 Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury yesterday rejected climate change experts' view that the government lacks capacity to absorb the huge amount of fund for climate change mitigation and adaptation. "We liberated the country in nine months ... and are mitigating so many problems. That means we can do things. I don't like this kind of helplessness," she said at a discussion titled Post-Copenhagen Summit: Way Forward for Bangladesh. Her remarks came following some climate change experts' observations that the ministries concerned have serious lack of coordination and the government almost regularly fails to spend the money allocated in the Annual Development Programmes (ADP). Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and European Union jointly organised the

discussion at BISS auditorium in the capital. Dr Asaduzzaman of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies said Bangladesh needs 9.5 billion dollars annually both for the mitigation and adaptation programmes. This is almost three times the ADP size, he said, adding that when the government machinery fail to implement the ADP there is surely a question mark over its efficiency. Referring to the agreement of the Copenhagen Summit, Asaduzzaman said it was agreed that the least developed countries would be provided with 10 billion dollars yearly and by 2020 it would stand at 100 billion dollars. In Bangladesh water, agriculture, local government, health and disaster management are the core areas and works on these involve a number of ministries, he said, adding: "But who is to do what is not decided yet. How to integrate activities is a big challenge." Dr Ainun Nishat, senior adviser on climate changes to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, said: "Our ministries work like separate islands. Those who provide funds will surely want to see some sorts of capacity. Therefore Bangladesh should take preparation that way."

Referring to the cyclone Aila he said that people are still suffering there. Matia Chowdhury, however, said Bangladesh is much more efficient than other countries. Even the developed countries get puzzled during natural disasters, she said, adding that the government of Bangladesh had efficiently managed the aftermath of cyclone Aila that had resulted in fewer casualties. Matia came down heavily on some donors and NGOs saying that they blindly supported unplanned irrigation schemes in the country's northeastern part, which is suffering from depleting underground water levels. "Due to that, arsenicosis has become widespread in the country. Interestingly enough, the generous donors and NGOs are now spending money on arsenic eradication," Matia said. Dr Stefan Frowein, ambassador of the Delegation of European Union, said the EU is committed to helping Bangladesh to cope with many challenges ahead. BISS Director General Maj Gen Sheikh Md Monirul Islam, Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim also spoke at the discussion chaired by BISS Board of Governors Chairman Maj Gen Muhammad Firdaus Mian

STOCKS NEWS EUROPE-GCM Resources up; Bangladesh deal hope

Tue Feb 2, 2010 Shares in coal miner GCM Resources (GCM.L), the renamed Asia Energy, jump 10 percent after a local press report boosts hopes that the firm could be close to a deal with the Bangladesh government. The Dhaka-based New Age daily newspaper, on its website, says the Bangladesh government "is considering 'positively' a new proposal of the UK-based Asia Energy which offered the government only 10 per cent stake in the Phulbari coal field for operating an open-pit mine, said sources in the government." One trader, noting the New Age report, says although there has been previous talk of a deal being close, the fact that some details of a possible proposal have been seen might make investors a little more upbeat on a positive outcome.

Study Aims to Test Corporate Attitudes to Climate Change in Bangladesh.

aston.ac.uk" Aston Business School (ABS) has embarked on a three year research project to gauge corporate attitudes to climate change in Bangladesh – one of the world's most at risk countries. International Strategic Partnership in Research and Education) Scheme have funded the research project, led by Aston University and Dhaka University. They aim to increase awareness amongst Bangladeshi corporate managers on the importance of climate change and more significantly, influence the future corporate social responsibility (CSR)* policy of the Bangladeshi Government. Bangladesh, a low lying country with a vast coastline, could see large areas of land go under water as sea levels continue to rise, potentially displacing millions of

people. The impact of higher temperatures and extreme weather events is already felt in Bangladesh and is expected to continue to intensify. Results from the first stage of the study concluded that only 10% of companies identified climate change as an important factor that may affect future business decisions. An even smaller 5% of companies disclosed that they had an effluent treatment plant (ETP) despite this being mandatory in Bangladesh. ETPs are being implemented across Bangladesh as a mechanism to treat wastewater that has been contaminated by commercial activities prior to its release into the environment or its re-use. Further stages of the project will analyse the views of both corporate managers and stakeholders. Key researchers from project partner Dhaka University, Prof Taiabur Rahman and Dr Mohobbot Ali, paid a visit to Aston University last month to discuss progress of the study. During the visit, which was hosted by ABS, they discussed the possibility of establishing a partnership agreement between the two universities. Dr Ataur Rahman Belal, finance and accounting lecturer at ABS, is leading the project. His recent research has focused on CSR practices across developing countries. He commented, "It is an excellent research collaboration between Aston Business School and Dhaka University, Bangladesh. For the first time in Bangladesh, the project will examine corporate responses to the critical issue of climate change. It is expected that this project will lead to further collaborations with Dhaka University and we are pleased to have them as our research partner in this project."

NEPAL

UK visa suspension affects genuine Nepali students

The Himalayan Times has reported that the UK Border Agency decision to suspend the UK Tier 4 student visa applications in Nepal has affected a number of genuine students. UK immigration officials suspended Tier 4 applications from northern India, Nepal, and Bangladesh earlier this week due to an extremely steep rise in student visa applications, which the UK Border Agency believes is suspicious and needs further investigation before the program can reopen. Salil Khadka, who recently completed his Bachelor of Business Administration from Don Bosco College told The Himalayan Times that the UK Visa suspension would further discourage students to apply for UK, particularly as many colleges in the UK had been affected by the changes in college recognition under a tightening of immigration rules. "I have heard that recognition of over 100 colleges in UK has been suspended. This is very disheartening. The decision to suspend visas is a double blow," he said. "A lot of my friends are in UK. I wanted to join them under the Tier 4 package but the visa suspension has dashed all my hopes." He plans to continue his studies in another country. Uttam Prasad Pant, president of Educational Consultants Association of Nepal, said up to 1,500 Nepali students may be directly affected by the suspension of visa application and suspension of recognition to more than 100 colleges in the UK.

Race against time to rebuild Nepal A bickering group of politicians have less than four months to remake Nepal's government, write a new constitution and integrate thousands of former Maoist rebels into the army they battled for a decade. The interim constitution must be replaced by May 28 and extending that deadline requires the support of the opposition Maoists. The difficulties stem partly from the tasks facing the fractious nation. It is trying to turn itself into a republic following centuries of royal rule; it is reorganising the very structure of the country, creating new states to empower marginalised ethnic groups; and is hoping to cement peace by bringing the Maoists into politics and integrating them into the military. The king of the poor mountain nation was gunned down in 2001 in a royal massacre that is still the subject of lurid

speculation. His successor briefly seized absolute power before he was overthrown and the monarchy abolished. Meanwhile, a Maoist rebellion raged, eventually killing 13,000 people before a peace agreement was signed in 2006 and an interim constitution adopted. In 2008 elections, the Maoists won 40% of the seats in the constitutional assembly, formed a government and then resigned last May in a power struggle with the largely ceremonial president. After smaller parties banded together to form a new government, enraged Maoists repeatedly shut down Katmandu with protests, blocked the roads where fuel is imported from India and ground parliament to a halt. Now the rival parties have to find a way to work together to merge the former insurgents into the security forces before a United Nations monitoring mission leaves on May 15 and to pass a new constitution before the interim document expires later that month

China too has a role to play in Nepal: US

Though Nepal has traditionally looked towards India but China too has some role to play in this Himalayan nation, Ambassador-nominated to Nepal has told US lawmakers. "I think that traditionally in many ways they have looked south where the border is more open and their engagement, their trade relationship and other relationships with India have always been fairly robust, but certainly the Chinese have played a role there as well," Scotte H DeLisi, the US Ambassador-nominated to Nepal, said in his confirmation hearing before the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee. A career Foreign Service officer, DeLisi has served in the US missions in Mumbai, Islamabad, and Colombo and headed the Nepal desk at the State Department in Washington. The hearing was chaired by Senator Jim Webb, Chairman of the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs. "I think for us in our engagement in Nepal we certainly want to work closely with the government, but in doing that I think we have to recognise that we also have to talk to the other regional actors and that Nepal has the ability to play a role within the region," DeLisi told lawmakers in response to a question from Senator Webb.

Nepali PM says Nepal needs to improve its economy

February 03, 2010 Nepali Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal said here on Tuesday that the country needs to improve its economy, to remove poverty and to get rid of the unemployment crisis. Speaking at an interaction program on "Current economic condition of the country and its impacts on economy" organized by the Federation of the Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI), the prime minister said that there is a serious of discussions on the country's economy in the political circle to be needed. The government has given emphasis on the development of water resources, tourism, industrial sector, transportation and physical infrastructures, he said, adding that the load-shedding problem could be resolved within the next five years. "The government is very serious towards the private sector and its stakeholders", said the PM, underscoring the need to hold the discussions on the uncontrolled trade, monetary policy, investment- friendly environment, trade unions' problems and the problems seen in loan investment of the banks. The rising of shutdowns, strikes should be ended through talks in the political circle, he added.

Nepal's president Yadav to visit India from February 15-18

Kathmandhu: Nepalese president Ram Baran Yadav will pay a maiden four-day official visit to India from February 15 during which he will hold talks with his counterpart Pratibha Patil and prime minister Manmohan Singh on issues of mutual interest. Yadav will be accompanied by his daughter Anu, press advisor Rajendra Dahal, private and office secretaries besides minister for

tourism and civil aviation Sarat Singh Bhandari, according to the sources at the presidential office here. The president will meet his Indian counterpart Pratibha Patil and prime minister Manmohan Singh during the visit. He is also expected to meet Congress president and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and opposition leaders. The president's team will comprise 27 members including government officials and journalists. Cabinet meeting on Wednesday made the decision that the president will pay an official visit to India from February 15 to 18 leading a 27 member delegation. President Yadav is also planning to visit Haridwar of India where he will meet Yoga Guru Ram Dev, according to president's press advisor Dahal. It is worth recalling here that CPN-UML chairman Jhalanath Khanal had recently visited Haridwar to meet Ram Dev.

PBC to air programmes in Nepali, Sinhala, Tamil

Tuesday, February 02, 2010. A ceremony was held here on Monday to mark the inauguration of South Asian Broadcast Services by the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) that would air its programmes in three languages — Nepali, Sinhala and Tamil. Inaugurating this broadcast service of Radio Pakistan, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Nawabzada Malik Ammad Khan said Pakistan has good neighbourly relations with South Asian countries and seeks to expand them for peace and economic prosperity in the region. "The Service is a major milestone for the promotion of relations with neighbouring countries," he said. The minister said Pakistan's foreign policy focuses on strengthening relations with South Asian countries and Radio Pakistan has been playing a significant role in this regard. "Media should play its due role in the country's image building abroad to counter the menace of terrorism and extremism, and establish peace," he urged adding that Pakistan is facing the scourge of terrorism and extremism, and hoped that it would be eliminated with the cooperation of the people. Speaking on the occasion, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka Jayalath Weerakkody said Pakistan and Sri Lanka enjoy close political, economic and cultural relations. He acknowledged Pakistan's role in the war against terrorism in Sri Lanka. Deputy High Commissioner of Nepal DP Bhandari said the Broadcast's launch is a very important initiative by PBC that would further improve relations with the countries in the region. He said Radio Pakistan is playing an important role in spreading the message of peace and friendship. Secretary Information & Broadcasting Mansoor Sohail said the launching of programmes in three more South Asian languages by PBC is vital in building bridges with respect to enhancing close cooperation with Saarc countries. He lauded the role of PBC in projecting Pakistan's policy objectives at the international level. Director General Radio Pakistan Murtaza Solangi while speaking on the occasion said it was PBC's effort to reach out to our neighbours in the dissemination of information, focusing on the message of peace and cooperation.

Nepal Maoists seek Koirala's help for new coalition govt: Tuesday, February 2, 2010

Kathmandu: Political parties in Nepal have set in motion a key process to end the deadlock that has stalled the 2006 peace process, amid reports that the Maoists have asked former prime minister GP Koirala to take the initiative to put in place a new coalition government. Maoist supremo Prachanda raised the issue of forming a Maoists-led national government during yesterday's meeting of the High Level Political Mechanism (HLPM), which has been set up to push forward the stalled peace process, according to a party source. The political parties are deadlocked over the Maoists' demand to rectify the decision of president Ram Baran Yadav, who reinstated general Rukmangad Katawal, the then army chief dismissed by Maoists prime minister Prachanda in May last year. The Maoists, who have around 40 percent of the seats in parliament, argue that the president's move was unconstitutional and has compromised "civilian supremacy"

over the military. The Maoist party, which has threatened to launch a fresh round of protest programme for the enforcement of "civilian supremacy" in the country, were ready to bury the old issue if they are allowed to lead the new government, the source said. In response to Prachanda's proposal to bring about change in the CPN-UML-led government, Koirala told the former rebel leader that it all depends on the decision the CPN-UML in the matter, Nepali Congress party sources said. A senior Nepali Congress leader, however, said that the present 22-party coalition led by prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal will last till the drafting of the constitution in May end. It is not possible to change the government even if Koirala and his daughter Sujata Koirala, the deputy prime minister, wanted to do away with the present government leadership, a Nepali Congress office bearer underlined. Sujata, also the foreign minister, been targeted by senior political leaders in the party amid speculations that she was being pushed by her father for the top post. The HLPM will meet again to discuss various other proposals at its next sitting, according to a senior Maoists leader. Political tensions have been high in Nepal since a government led by the Maoist resigned in May last year amid a dispute with the president over the reinstatement of Gen Katawal. Prachanda had blamed Katawal for trying to resist the integration of former rebels into the military as stipulated under the 2006 peace agreement. The standoff has put new stresses on Nepal's reconciliation efforts amid fears that the stalled peace process may be derailed if the Maoists begin a fresh round of agitation.

Singapore signed a new air services agreement with Nepal SINGAPORE, Feb 2 (Bernama) -- Singapore signed a new air services agreement with Nepal at the sidelines of the Singapore Airshow which began at the Changi Exhibition Centre here on Tuesday. Under the agreement, air carriers of Singapore and Nepal are entitled to operate 28 weekly passenger services between both countries, of which 14 weekly passenger services can be operated via some intermediate points and a few beyond points in third countries. Air carriers of both countries are also entitled to operate 14 weekly cargo services between both sides, of which seven weekly cargo services can be operated via any intermediate points and to any beyond points in third countries. Singapore Transport Ministry Permanent Secretary Choi Shing Kwok and Nepalese Tourism and Civil Aviation Ministry Secretary Nagendra Prasad Ghimire signed the agreement. Currently, SilkAir operates six weekly passenger services between Singapore and Kathmandu, Nepal.

NC president Koirala assures PM Nepal HLPM not formed to topple govt

Thursday, 04 February A Nepali Congress president and coordinator of the High Level Political Mechanism Girija Prasad Koirala has assured Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, the HLMP was not formed to topple the government, reports say. PM Nepal had gone to meet Koirala at the latter's residence in Maharajgunj Thursday morning. At a time when reports about the change of government is doing rounds in the media, NC president Koirala told the PM, the HLPM was formed to facilitate the logical conclusion of the peace process and constitution drafting rather than changing the govt. At the meeting, PM Nepal and Koirala also discussed the role of the HLPM, the efforts undertaken to end the current political deadlock and the progress made on army integration, among other contemporary political issues. Koirala also expressed concern on the PM's absence at the HLPM meetings and requested him to attend it regularly. The Special Committee on Supervision, Integration and Rehabilitation of Maoist combatants had asked the PM to discuss key issues of army integration with parties and also at the HLPM Wednesday.

Indian Oil's monopoly in Nepal to end

New Delhi, Feb. 2: The government may end Indian Oil Corporation's monopoly in supplying petroleum products to Nepal, enabling the other state-owned refiners and private players to enter the Indian kingdom. "We are considering the issue ... so far no decision has been taken," a senior petroleum ministry official said. Nepal's commerce and supplies minister Rajendra Mahato has recently written to the Indian government seeking revision in the agreement between IOC and Kathmandu's state-run Nepal Oil Corporation Limited so that others from India can also do business. Nepal is estimated to have an annual demand of 720,000 tonnes of diesel and 140,000 tonnes of petrol. On the need to revise the agreement, Mahato said the Nepal government has decided to open up both the LPG and oil sectors. While regulations have been drafted for the import and sale of LPG by the private sector, the government is working on similar regulations in oil. Indian oil ministry officials confirmed that they have received a request from Kathmandu for a revision. From its formation in 1970, Nepal Oil had an agreement with IOC to buy petroleum products. According to the pact, Nepal Oil cannot buy from any other Indian company, while IOC can only sell to Nepal Oil. IOC has reported a steep decline of 76.45 per cent in net profit at Rs 696.59 crore for the third quarter ended December. Entry plea. Both state-owned refiners and private players such as Essar are lobbying the government for entry into Nepal. Essar has also approached the Nepalese government. Sources in the company said, "Discussions for both direct sales to refiners and retail business opportunity were held." Sources said BPCL was keen to enter the Nepal market and was lobbying the oil ministry to amend the present notification that gives IOC a monopoly in the Himalayan kingdom. BPCL is also keen to do away with the condition that restricts relationship only with Nepal Oil. BPCL feels that as Nepal is opening up its economy, the requirement to deal only with one company should be done away with, and it should be free to carry out trade with any party in Nepal.

KOICA Helps to Set up Korea-Nepal Institute of Technology

KATHMANDU — Nepal's Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal laid the foundation stone for the Korea-Nepal Institute of Technology (KNIT) in Tamnagar, Butwal, Friday. In a press statement, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) said that KNIT will be established with the financial support of \$5 million from the South Korean government. It aims to enhance and upgrade the quality of technical education and vocational training in Nepal. Among those present at the ceremony were Minister for Education Ram Chandra Kishawaha, Minister for Irrigation Bal Krishna Khand, Minister for Forests and Soil Conservation Dipak Bohara, senior Nepali officials, Korean Ambassador Hong Sung-mog and resident representative of KOICA Doh Young-ah. It further stated that KOICA would support the construction of the institute, provide equipment and educational materials, and support capacity building through invitational training in Korea and the dispatch of experts for institute management, as well as training for teachers. The institute will be established as one of the core centers for advanced vocational training in Nepal and will provide diploma courses and short-term training in three major areas — mechanical engineering, automobiles and electronics — based on the needs of industry, the statement said. The Korean government will impart education and training to produce better qualified technicians who can contribute to the industrial development of Nepal as well as bringing useful opportunities to Nepali workers who want to work in international labor markets through learning advanced skills, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) states. The project construction period is set for 2008 to 2011. KNIT is expected to be in full operation by the beginning of the fourth quarter of 2011. During the inauguration, Nepali Prime Minister Madhav Kumar said the country's unemployment problem could only be solved with the development of technical education. He claimed that technical studies according to the country's

needs, desires and environment would provide jobs for the young and develop infrastructure. He also hailed Nepal-Korea relations, saying that Nepal attaches its highest priority to Korea, as it is one of its major development partners

Indo-Nepal relations in 2010

Despite the so called January 2010 successful visit of Indian Army Chief Deepak Kapoor to Nepal, things seem out of proportion between the two countries, especially after New Delhi's venom-campaign against Nepal before the international community. Although Katmandu has taken an impressive and bold step by allowing the Nepalese Maoists to join the main stream including Nepalese Army but India is much perturbed over the latest developments especially Maoist cadres joining the Army. In fact India was using this triumph card by patronizing Naxal movements inside Nepal to divert Naxal's wrath against Indian policies outside Indian boundaries. However, India remained quick enough to blame Nepalese for all the adverse activities. The latest Nepalese move has exposed the Indian hostile designs against Katmandu. For the first time, not only the Nepalese but also the world community is able to see the real face of India without a mask. In the past Indian government and its Army had very accommodative views regarding integration of PLA cadres into the Nepal Army. In the same regard, last month General Deepak Kapoor reportedly said that the Indian Army is apolitical and secular, and as far as the Nepalese Army is concerned, it's for the people and government of Nepal to decide. But recent statements of Indian Army Chief are indicative that he is against the integration, which means that New Delhi desires that Maoists should always remain hostile to Nepalese government. On the other hand Indian Intelligence agencies are trying their level best to get Indian illegal workers in Nepal inducted in Nepalese Army. As a sort of bribe Indian President Pratibha Patel conferred the rank of "Honorary General" on the chief Nepal Army General Chhatraman Singh Gurung but this failed to bear results because Nepal has for one reason or the other distanced from the Indian dictatorial policies. It is interesting to note that Peking has geared up to further improve its relations with almost all the South Asian countries including Nepal. Recently, an understanding has been reached between the two countries according to which China will train the Nepalese Army. China has also pledged Rs.220 million as military assistance for procuring "non-lethal", and logistics to Nepal. After the meeting between Chinese military delegation led by Major General Jia Jialing and Nepal's Defence Minister, India and China are entangled in a new row of undeclared fight over helping Nepal. However, the Nepalese people are not interested in maintaining any sort of link with India other than limited economic assistance and want to give a chance to China. Generally speaking the Nepalese people are deadly against the Indian Army and its Intelligence, especially Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Same can be judged from the anti-India statement by Chairman United Nepal National Front (UNNF), Phanindra Nepal, who said in the recent past, "India has been taking Nepal's friendly behaviour as a weakness, inferiority and humility. It is clear that India has been taking Nepal as number one enemy though Nepalese people have always maintained good relations with India." The UNNF leader said "Unlawful activities of Indian Embassy Katmandu include provocation of some Madheshi parties of Nepal's Tarai to raise the demand for 'One Madhesh One Province.' This has made the entire world community and the Nepalese people clear about the Indian mal intent in Nepal." He said, "Indian government through Embassy of Katmandu is using its intelligence agency RAW to provoke the Indian immigrants living in Nepal to destabilize the country and to push country to disintegration. The Indian intelligence is also involved in disintegrating Nepal's age old communal harmony by dividing various communities living in Nepal." The UNNF leader requested the Indian government to create a favourable

atmosphere for the Indian immigrants in Nepal to return to their motherland so that the indigenous communities of Nepal such as the Tharus and others live a peaceful and harmonious life in their homeland. Phanindra Nepal warned Indian government "Any further interference in Nepal internal affairs could jeopardize the already strained relations between New Delhi and Katmandu and if India does not abide by the Geneva Convention and the diplomatic conduct between the nations, India will be solely responsible for any retaliatory step taken by the Nepalese people, which would also ruin the centuries old relations with India." India has ambitions in Nepal and its past record is clearly indicative of the mal intent. However, in today's world we must act civilized and instead of interfering in others affairs we need to consolidate own roots. Nepal is a sovereign country which is desirous of maintaining good relations with New Delhi. Many Indian leaders too want to settle disputes with its neighbouring state but for doing this we must give a try to mend our fences by not repeating our past mistakes. India has taken some good steps to improve bilateral relations but to bring real change in this region; India needs to end its imperialist and capitalist approach. India should allow Katmandu to make its own independent decision as regard to its internal issues. Nepalese people are full of fine qualities and are pride of South Asia. As a country Nepal is full of resources and opportunities. We, the people of Asia should try to resolve our difference and work to achieve harmony and regional cooperation. It is high time that we must start confidence building measures and harness our energies for a better tomorrow.

Rana's largesse for Help Nepal

Tuesday, 02 February Siddhartha Rana, a Nepali industrialist and Chairman of Tara Management Private Limited, has donated Rs 10 million to Help Nepal Network, a charity organisation. The network runs '100 Rupees a Month Fund for Nepal,' a global charity primarily supported and run by Nepalis. Rana, whose business ventures include Siprodi Trading Private Ltd and its several associates like the Bhotekoshi Power Company and Surya Nepal, donated the money particularly to Help Nepal's Administrative Fund, states a press release by the Network. "Unlike various international charities, Help Nepal Network has a unique policy of not using a single penny from the charitable donations on administrative purposes," the release adds. The Network says it established a separate Administrative Fund, which helps run the charity's office and accomplish other administrative tasks. "Rana is the latest and the biggest donor to the Fund to which twenty-five other Nepalis have already donated 7.5 million rupees in the past. Help Nepal Network was established in 1999 with an objective to encourage Nepalis and those who love Nepal around the world to contribute to charitable causes in Nepal." "Rather than seeking funds from international donors, the charity encourages every Nepali to forego a can of beer or a plate of Momo a month and donate the savings to Help Nepal Network." "The Network is a registered charity in the UK, the USA, Australia, Sweden and Nepal. It has eight other groups working in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Ireland, Canada, New Zealand, Russia, Italy and Austria. Help Nepal has helped build over 15 small-size school buildings, established 15 electronic libraries, run several health camps and supported various other projects. Help Nepal's other major undertakings include the construction and operation of a health post at a remote Murma village in Mugu district, the under-construction health post in Sarlahi district and the under-construction orphanage in Dhulikhel, near Kathmandu, at the cost of eight million rupees. The orphanage is almost ready for operation." "It is very rare in Nepal to donate such a huge amount of money to a charity which has no connection to the donor or that of the donor's family," said Arun Singh Basnet, the President of Help Nepal Network's Nepal chapter. "Though Rana had insisted on anonymity, we tried very hard to

convince him to let us make the donation public so that it could inspire a lot other people into philanthropy,"

Manipuri UGs in Nepal: GOC 3 Corps

Imphal, February 04 2010: Declaring that there are approximately 40 to 50 camps of the North East based underground groups in Myanmar, GOC of 3 Corps Lt Gen NK Singh has informed that movement of the UGs from Manipur have been detected in Nepal. Interacting with journalists from the North East at Rangapahar Cantonment yesterday on the occasion of the 25th Raising day of 3 Corps, the GOC 3 Corps Lt Gen NK Singh revealed that out of these camps, 25 to 30 have been identified as bigger camps or of established nature while the remaining are of temporary nature. With regard to movement of UGs from Manipur in Nepal, the Army officer observed that although this is almost like setting up base camp there, no activities would be possible without the support of the Nepal Government. Presenting an over all scenario of the situation of the north eastern states, the GOC said in Nagaland, the FNR initiative for Naga reconciliation has gathered momentum and the political dialogue is taking place at various levels in several different ways. "Though violations of Ceasefire Ground Rules do occur, they are of minor nature and manageable and resolved as per the rules and the provisions of the law," he stated. The GOC also said Dimapur has become a common hunting ground for a large number of UGs belonging to the North east, particularly those operating in Nagaland, Manipur and some from Assam. Responding to a query, he said the numerous UGs are by and large involved in extortion, mainly from business establishments and outsiders and also on contracts and bigger deals. He, however, stated that UGs from outside were not indulging in violence so as to keep the area free from too much of actions of security forces. "We are aware that approximately 10-15 groups from outside have some kind of floating population in Dimapur," he added. With regard to the fencing of border areas in Nagaland, the GOC said the Government has not shown any keenness in fencing the Nagaland-Myanmar borders so far. However, work on border fencing in Manipur has already begun (north of Moreh), while border work south of Moreh will hopefully start in another few months. "Mizoram will also get a border fence, perhaps once the fence bordering Bangladesh is finished, then the effort will get moved this side," he informed

A View From Katmandu: Nepal's Fight for Democracy. February 4, 2010 "The Nepali public hasn't had experience in democracy, but they understand it and they have been fighting for it." I would like to add some nuance to the quote. Indeed, the people of Nepal have been fighting for democracy since the 1940s, when the Rana autocracy was in power. There was a flicker of democracy under the leadership of Bisheswar Prasad Koirala in 1960, to be snuffed out in favor of 30 years of royal autocracy known as the Panchayat. This regime fell in 1990, and for 12 years Nepalis had a loud, raucous, full-fledged democracy, in which the political parties made their mistakes but pluralism delivered the foundations for future governance. For different reasons, this multiparty system of a dozen years was not to the liking of the Maoists, the royalists and the old nobility of Katmandu. The Maoists picked up the gun in 1996 not against the monarchy, but the fledgling democratic polity. The last king of Nepal, Gyanendra, sought to demolish democracy on the excuse of fighting the insurgents. The great people's movement of April 2006, participated in by millions of citizens from all walks, was at once a campaign that destroyed Gyanendra's ambitions and forced the Maoists to submit to open politics. The Maoists are currently in the Constituent Assembly as the largest political party, a testament to the unique peace process in Nepal, but one that is as yet incomplete. This is so because, while the Maoists are now a legitimate force, they are not yet one that is completely given over to pluralism and democracy.

They retain their own fighting force, in United Nations-supervised cantonments. We are asked to write a democratic constitution, based on the desires of a people who understand pluralism, when the largest party in the Constituent Assembly is still converting to democracy. That is the challenge.

US: Aid to Nepal Army conditional

KATHMANDU, FEB 02-The US government has proposed that no military aid be made available to Nepal unless the secretary of state certifies that Nepal Army is cooperating fully with investigations related to violation of human rights by its officials. Budgetary proposals to the US Congress floated by the Obama administration, states that funds appropriated under the 'Foreign Military Financing Programme' should be made available for Nepal if the US secretary of state certifies that Nepal Army is cooperating fully with investigations of violations of internationally recognised human rights. The secretary of state will have to certify that Nepal Army is working constructively to redefine its mission and adjust its size accordingly in order to give any military aid to Nepal. The secretary of state also needs to certify that Nepal Army is implementing reforms, including strengthening the capacity of the civilian ministry of defence to improve budget transparency and accountability, and facilitating the integration of former rebel combatants into the security forces consistent with the goals of reconciliation, peace and stability. However, these conditions will not be applicable to assistance to support the deployment of the Army in humanitarian relief and reconstruction operations in Nepal, says the budgetary proposal. It has stressed the need to investigate human rights violations by both Nepal Army and UCPN (Maoist) perpetrators. Action against the culture of impunity is high on the US agenda. Time and again, it has been suggested that the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Disappearance Commission will be important starting points in addressing outstanding cases of human rights violations -- it remains at the top of the US agenda. "We have not received any formal information regarding the US policy," said Nepal Army Spokesman Ramindra Chhetri. "The national army is the government's entity, so the government can say what impact the policy will have." NA officials, however, have it that currently there is no lethal support to Nepal Army from the US and the current ties are mostly focused on training of soldiers of the two countries on each other's territory

Kobad Ghandy confirms Maoists link to Nepal New Delhi, Jan 31 (ANI): The interrogation of top Maoist leader Kobad Ghandy, currently in custody of Delhi Police's Special Cell, on Sunday confirmed the Nepal link to the Maoist movement. According to sources, the interrogation of Ghandy has revealed the close ties the Maoist leadership has developed with their counterparts in Nepal. In his statement, Ghandy talks of four visits he made to Nepal along with some other CPI (Maoist) leaders between 2002 and 2006. He also refers to a visit in 2002 by two persons from the Philippines, who provided arms training to Maoist cadre in jungle warfare. Ghandy has also revealed details of a 12-day meeting held in November 2007 in a Jharkhand forest, attended by all top Naxal leaders, where resolutions were passed to create large-scale violence throughout India, target VIPs and to lead a mass movement in and around Lalgarh, Purulia, Bankura. Arrested on September 20, 2009, he has been booked under various sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2008. Ghandy is a politburo member of the banned Communist Party of India-Maoist and worked for the party in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh. He also played an important role in fostering the development of the front's organisations. In 1994, he was allegedly active in floating a forum named the All India People's Resistance Forum.

Trying times for inactive Nepal Vice President Jha, Oath in Nepali must:Lawyers

Permananda Jha-Nepal's former vice president whose post had been made inactive by a Supreme Court ruling some months back appears to have landed in a fresh trouble once again. Though the major parties together with the main opposition through a commitment proposal have tried to activate Jha's post, however, some legal complications still bar him to bounce back to his original post of the Nepal Vice Presidency. Nepal's Attorney General, Professor Bharat Bahadur Karki after consulting some noted senior advocates of the country very freshly told the Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal that "if the Vice President yet again ignored the oath taking in Nepali language then some interested Nepali national may file another writ petition against Jha's oath taking in any language other than Nepali and thus the post may land in yet another legal trouble which could, in that eventuality, be very much similar to what happened in the past". The Attorney General, Prof. Karki informed the Nepal PM about this likelihood only upon having long and meaningful consultations with senior Advocates like Bishwa Kant Mainali, Harihar Dahal, Yagna Murti Banjade, Badri Bahadur Karki and Sambhu Thapa. "If the inactive Vice President doesn't take the oath of office in Nepali language then some legal complications may crop up once again", is what the AG told the Prime Minister, Wednesday, February 3, 2010. "Says Mainali, "Now the case of VP Jha can only be decided by the CA body". He, however, maintained that "inactive" VP Jha even after the oath taking ceremony can not enjoy the facilities and salaries of the period when his post remained inactive. The Law Minister Prem Bahadur Singh thus clarifies the total scenario. He says, "First the VP must take the oath of office in Nepali language and later he is free to chose any language that he wants". If so then there would be no legal complication, Minister Singh added. This does mean that Jha will have to honor the language he hates most or else the post may remain vacant for an indefinite period.

Nano coming Nepal in March RISHIKESH DAHAL KATHMANDU, Jan 31: Tata Motors is planning to launch the much talked about Nano - the cheapest car in the world - in Nepal. Sipradi Trading - the authorized distributor of Tata motors in Nepal - is bringing five Nano cars to Nepal in March. Since Tata Motors sell vehicles only after testing it locally, Sipradi will accept bookings of Nano only after studying feedbacks from persons who test drive the car for six months. Tata will offer test drives of Nano to interested persons from mid-March. According to sources at Sipradi, the car will be easily available to customers from early 2011. Tata is also planning to launch Nano in Bhutan. Tata is getting a huge demand for Nano but is facing difficulties in supplying the car to eager customers due to production constraints. Tata hopes the situation to ease significantly after its starts production of Nano from its new factory in Gujarat from March. Production from the new plant would help Tata cope with the huge demand for the car. At present Tata Motors is selling Nano through lucky draw due to low production. The compact car has won the best car of the year 2009. Tata Motors also exhibited Nano in US two weeks ago. The 624 cc Nano gives a mileage of 23.6 km per liter. Nano grabbed headlines across the world due to its cheap price. The starting model of Nano costs IRs 100,000 in India. Though the price of Nano has to be fixed in Nepal, sources at Sipradi said the price could be near to Rs 700,000 due to high customs duty.

ADB adds climate change agenda in CPS for Nepal

KATHMANDU: Asian Development Bank (ADB) has added climate change as a primary concern in Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) for Nepal along with strengthening peace and good governance. Climate change, peace filter and government risk assessment are the main features of the new CPS, said country director Barry J Hitchcock. CPS has added climate change

as a growing concern and ADB's support will be based on it. However, ADB's priority areas for the next three years — from 2010 to 2012 — are agriculture and natural resources, education, energy, finance sector, transport and municipal infrastructure and services. ADB will work in those sectors through the government, civil society and non-governmental organizations. Major focus of ADB programme will be on enhancing the livelihood of people through supporting the government in building peace and good governance, Hitchcock said. ADB has proposed \$833.2 million assistance for the next three years starting from 2010. It has approved projects worth \$347 million in 2009 and its total support — both loan and grant — in Nepal has reached \$1.13 billion. The ADB contribution between 2010 and 2012 will be borne from the Asian Development Fund (\$671.4 million), ordinary capital resource (\$45 million), regional cooperation (\$92 million), technical assistance grant (\$15 million) and Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (\$9.8 million). ADB is happy with the performance of the government. "Despite uncertainties, we are getting better results in our projects," said Hitchcock. "The government's commitment and performance are better in the last three years." ADB's operating programmes are emergency flood damage rehabilitation in eastern and western region, education sector cluster programme, energy access and efficiency improvement project, air transport capacity enhancement projects and others.

NEPAL: Shanta Karki, "I don't need rehabilitation

SINDHULI, 5 February 2010 (IRIN) - Shanta Karki was barely 13 when she volunteered to be a child soldier for the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the Maoists' military wing in Nepal, in 2003. She was one of around 3,000 soldiers who were disqualified from the PLA for being an underage combatant when the Maoists signed a ceasefire agreement with the government in 2006, ending a decade-long conflict. Now 20, Shanta was part of the first batch of former child soldiers to be released from Maoist army cantonments in January 2010. Returning home for the first time since joining the PLA, she will participate in government and UN rehabilitation programmes (87704"see earlier report), but told IRIN she was unsure of her prospects: "After seven years of my life with the PLA, I feel very bad for being expelled like this. I have been deprived of helping to liberate my people from this ongoing repression. "I don't know whether my family or village will accept me or not. I have yet to find that out. "I joined the war when I was still in school. I witnessed a lot of repression of the poor [and] this provoked me to do something when I was still a young girl. I have been to the battlefield with a gun. I will continue my life with the Maoists until we have total liberation. "I'm not keen on rehabilitation. I don't need rehabilitation. I'm already standing on my own two feet. The UN rehabilitation package is not going to make things better for me. They want to train us to weave baskets and make candles. They want to sponsor my schooling, but I am already educated. "I don't want to spend my life making baskets. My ambitions are in politics and in the security sector. After fighting for my people, how can I just weave baskets now?" "The government should do more to help in the welfare and future of soldiers like us by nationalizing the Nepal Army, and integrating Maoist soldiers into the establishment. They say we're not qualified, since we work with a Maoist ideology. "I will continue working as [a] political cadre for my party."

Scholarships worth Rs 6.6m to Nepali students

KATHMANDU, Feb 5: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on Monday between the Binary University College (BUC), Malaysia, and three Nepali colleges namely, Don Bosco, Gyanodaya Bal Batika and Xavier Int'l College for scholarship to Nepali students. The Binary University College is offering five scholarships annually - 1 full, 2 half and 2 quarter

scholarships. The total worth of the scholarships is Rs 6.6 million. Gilbert, representative of BUC, Malaysia, says that they are planning to offer more scholarships in the future. His Excellency Dato' Ilankovan Kolandavelu, Ambassador of Malaysia to Nepal said, "Nepal and Malaysia have close ties, and this exchange of MoU will further enhance the existing friendship between the two nations." The ambassador also pledged support to Nepal in promoting Nepal Tourism Year 2012. Dipankar Sherpa, the regional manager for Nepal and a graduate from BUC, said that Malaysia was the best second option after UK for Nepali students adding that Malaysia was a commonwealth country and it had followed the British system in education and lifestyle. The scholarships are currently available only for graduate and post graduate degrees in Management and IT faculties. The classes are scheduled to begin early July. <

Malaysia demands 100,000 Nepali workers

KATHMANDU, Feb 4: After more than a year of slack, Malaysia has placed a record high demand for 100,000 Nepalis for blue collar jobs within the next six months. This has come as welcome news for unemployed Nepali youths as well as for the government that has been reeling under a high balance of payments (BoP) deficit amid sharp drop in the remittance growth rate. If the manpower agencies manage to meet the fresh demand for workers, that will instantly push monthly remittance receipts by an average of US\$ 15 million, said experts. Even more good news for overseas job aspirants is that to fulfill the demand on time manpower agencies have lowered the expenses the job seekers were otherwise required to bear before leaving for Malaysia. "We are sending workers without levying broker's commission," said Kumud Khanal, co-coordinator of manpower agencies sending workers to Malaysia. This has directly halved the prior-departure cost for workers to around Rs 40,000 from Rs 80,000 in the past. Orders mainly started to flood in about two weeks ago, a highly elated Khanal told Republica. Manpower agencies said that the Malaysian government has already approved around 100,000 visas for Nepali workers for the six months. This is far more than the roughly 25,000 visas that Nepal used to get in the past. "The demand is so huge we are now facing a tough time arranging workers and managing the sending process," Khanal stated. Malaysia - the Asian hub for multinational companies and second largest destination for Nepali migrant workers - was hard hit by the global economic downturn. It had even laid off a significant number of foreign workers and announced it would not receive migrant workers in the manufacturing and service sectors, to deal with rising domestic unemployment. It had also announced it would not receive new Nepali workers as security guards - a sector where Nepali workers were enjoying exclusive opportunities. However, Khanal said his own agency - Fusion International - has already received demands for over 1,000 workers, including an order of 200 workers from a single company. There are some five dozen manpower agencies involved in sending workers to Malaysia, where around 400,000 Nepalis are estimated to be working. Agents concerned attributed the sudden rise in demand to the restriction that Malaysia imposed on Bangladeshi workers, who are the main competitors for Nepali workers. Improvement in the overseas business of multinational companies - the major employers - and gradual end of the adverse impact of the global financial crisis also contributed to the spurt in demand for workers. "Demands have mainly come from the manufacturing sector. Offers from other sectors like agriculture and services are going up also," said Khanal. With the improvement in the economic situation, workers are also being offered a higher salary than in the past. Although the government-fixed minimum wage for Nepali workers is around Rs 11,000 (546 Ringgit), employers are presently paying them as much as Rs 17,000 per month. According to a rough estimate, every Nepali sends home an average of US\$ 150 per month from Malaysia, making for a substantial contribution to remittances.

