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BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

South Asia

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DETAILED NEWS:

Refugees 'starve' in Bangladesh

An international rights group has accused Bangladesh of "violating human rights" in its crackdown on thousands of unregistered Burmese refugees, many of whom have lived in the country for decades. In a report released on Tuesday, The Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), said that tens of thousands of Rohingya, a Burmese Muslim ethnic group, had been forced into makeshift camps, facing starvation. "It is unconscionable

To leave this vulnerable population stateless and starving," said Richard Sollom, the PHR director of research and investigations. "Haiti after the recent earthquake had an acute child malnutrition rate of six percent, in the Rohingya camps the rate is 18.2 percent - three times higher but with no aid," Sollom said. Violating human rights' Up to 300,000 Rohingyas, who have been described by the United Nations as one of the most persecuted minorities in the world, have fled across the border to Bangladesh since the 1970's. The report said the country's authorities were waging a campaign of "arbitrary arrest, illegal expulsion, and forced internment". The police are "systematically rounding up, jailing or summarily expelling these unregistered refugees across the Myanmar border in flagrant violation of the country's human rights obligations," it said. Baseless and malicious' The report follows two other reports: one by Arakan Project, a lobby group, and another by Doctors Without Borders, a humanitarian NGO, which also criticised the crackdown. The Bangladeshi government has dismissed the accusations as "baseless and malicious". It views the Rohingya as illegal immigrants and maintains they must be repatriated. "We are arresting illegal Rohingya and pushing them back over the border. It is an ongoing operation," said Rafiqul Islam, a Bangladeshi police chief.

Myanmar refugees left to 'starve' in Bangladesh Refugees from Myanmar are starving to death in Bangladesh - that's the claim made in a new report from US aid organisation Physicians for Human Rights. It says thousands of people from Myanmar's minority Rohingya ethnic group have fled persecution in their home country, only to face gross mistreatment at the hands of neighbouring Bangladeshi authorities. Bangladesh officially recognises 28,000 of the Muslim Rohingya as refugees, but the PHR report says the true, unofficial, figure is more likely 200,000. Many of them had been living in communities but gradually began to find themselves marginalised and sought refuge in UN camps. PHR says police are: "systematically rounding up, jailing or summarily expelling those unregistered refugees across the Burmese (Myanmar) border in flagrant violation of the country's human rights obligations."

Indo-Bangladesh border talks begin

New Delhi, Mar 8 (ANI): The six-day conference between the Directors General of Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) began at the BSF headquarters here today. Raman Shrivastav, BSF Director General, welcomed his counterpart, the BDR chief Major General Mainul Islam, who has come down with a 19-member Bangladesh delegation for border talks at the conference. The conference began with discussion on the developments related to the Joint Border Management Plan and issues related to maintenance of boundary pillars along Indo-Bangladesh border. Cross-border trafficking of illegal weapons and drugs are likely to be

discussed in the ongoing meeting. The conference is also likely to discuss measures to be adopted to develop force-to-force relation. The nearly 4,096 kilometres long India-Bangladesh border is one of the most difficult to patrol owing to reasons of topography, riverine patches, dense forested hills, agricultural lands and human settlements. The porous nature of the border has led to numerous transborder problems including infiltration, smuggling, of arms and drugs, contraband goods, illegal movement of persons, and crimes such as kidnapping for ransom, cattle lifting, extortion etc. The bilateral mechanism to coordinate between forces of both the side would help to counter such problems. (ANI)

Bangladesh ranks 67 for women in politics

Bangladesh, one of the few countries on the planet where both the ruling and main opposition parties are headed by women, surpasses its neighbour India when it comes to participation of the fair sex in politics.

Bangladesh is ranked 67th with 18.3 per cent female participation in national politics, according to the data revealed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, an international organisation that promotes democracy, peace and co-operation among people in the world.

The disclosure comes as the country as well as the rest of the world observed the 100th International Women's Day on Monday.

A total of 63 women lawmakers - 18 of them elected directly and the rest on reserved seats - occupy the country's 345-seat single chamber parliament.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia lead Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) respectively.

With only 10.8 per cent of women representation in the Lok Sabha and 9.0 per cent in the Rajya Sabha in India, the world's largest democracy, ranks 99 in the world, according to the comparative data of the Geneva-based body.

At present India has 59 women representatives in the 545-member Lok Sabha, while there are 21 female MPs in the 233-member Rajya Sabha.

India ranks 50 places below Pakistan which is placed at 49 in the list with 22 per cent women representation in its Lower House and 17 per cent in the Upper House.

China has also much higher representation of women in national politics compared to India and Bangladesh.

The Communist country is placed at 55 in the list with 21.3 per cent women representation.

Alico takeover to firm up Bangladesh foothold: Official

Alico's takeover by MetLife will strengthen the international life insurer's capacity and operations in Bangladesh, said the top Alico official in Bangladesh yesterday. Insurance giant American International Group Inc (AIG) on Monday agreed to sell its American Life Insurance Co (Alico) division to another insurance powerhouse, MetLife, for \$15.5 billion. It was AIG's second big asset sale in two weeks. On March 1, AIG agreed to sell Asia-based life insurer AIA Group to Britain's Prudential for \$35.5 billion. Akhlakur Rahman, chief operating officer of Alico in Bangladesh, considers the MetLife deal a "positive move" for Alico and said it will benefit all stakeholders. "The combination of Alico and MetLife will make the company's operations stronger in Bangladesh," said Rahman. He expects the move to increase the company's earnings in Bangladesh. Rahman also assured Alico policyholders that there will not be any changes in the insurer's operations in the country. "Things will remain unchanged here." Founded in 1921, Alico is a leading international life insurer that provides consumers and businesses with products and services for life insurance, accident and health insurance, retirement and wealth management solutions. The sale agreement includes all of Alico, including the company's approximate 60,000 points of distribution, agents, brokers and financial institutions, 12,500 employees across more than 50 countries and 20 million customers worldwide. MetLife Inc is the largest life insurer in the US and Mexico. The deal will give MetLife a larger presence in Japan as well as high-growth markets in Europe, the Middle East and Latin America, according to MetLife officials. The transaction has already been approved by the boards of directors of both MetLife and AIG, and is expected to close by the end of 2010. The transaction is subject to certain regulatory approvals and other customary closing conditions. Both AIG and MetLife are based in New York, USA.

Alico is by far the largest life insurer in Bangladesh. The company's market share was 20.7 percent in 2008 and it has nearly 10 lakh policy owners in Bangladesh.

Alico Bangladesh earned premiums worth Tk 898 crore in 2009, up from Tk 811 crore a year ago.

"The move will bring together two profitable and well-established businesses with superb track records and strong long-term growth potential," said the Alico Bangladesh's COO. AIG owed to the Treasury and Federal Reserve Bank of New York nearly \$130 billion as on December 31. Officials said the funds to be received from the recent two sales will be used for repayment of billions of bailout dollars the company still owes to the US government.

Bangladesh banking talks commit to fighting poverty

Leaders of a world group on sustainable banking said on Saturday they had committed to building different and positive financial future for the banking industry across the globe. "Fighting poverty will remain the first priority for the banking sector in the foreseeable future," Fazole Hasan Abed, co-founder of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV), told reporters. As the world grapples with a financial crisis, GABV, an independent network of 11 banks has been meeting in Bangladesh. The alliance, which says it represents 7 million customers in 20 countries with a combined balance sheet of more than USD 14 billion, said it supported the expansion of USD 2 billion in lending to communities not served by banks and green projects around the world. "Climate change is the other growing global threat that the banking industry has to commit itself to," said Abed, who is also chair of the BRAC, the world's

largest non-government micro-financing agency. The Dhaka meeting aims to raise USD 250 million in new capital. "Raising this money will result in USD 2 billion in new lending, at a time when credit continues to be scarce," said Peter Blom, chair and co-founder of the GABV and chief executive officer of Triodos Bank in the Netherlands.

BDR, BSF agree to halt killings of innocent civilian

NEW DELHI, March 11 (BSS): The paramilitary border forces of Bangladesh and India agreed to halt killings of innocent civilians on both sides of Bangladesh-India borders. They, however, admitted that the cases of killings of innocent people took place during nighttime. The six-day director general-level conference of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Border Security Force (BSF) of India ended Thursday at the BSF headquarters with signing of the agreed minutes. Visiting BDR Director General Maj Gen Mainul Islam and BSF Director General Raman Shrivastabha signed the minutes at the conclusion of the conference. "We have arrived at a good understanding and could know each other's concerns," Shrivastabha was briefing the journalists at a joint press conference after the conclusion of the meeting. He expressed his hope that the outcome of the conference would have "very good influence on the Indo-Bangla relations."

"We got very positive response from the BSF side on matters of our major concerns and we focused on ground realities during the meeting and we are sure to implement the decisions," Maj Gen Islam said. He said the Prime Ministers of the two countries had signed a strategic document during Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit in January. "We will follow the wishes of the two leaders who gave us a vision of friendship and cooperation," he added. Responding to a question on the BDR carnage in February last year, the BDR chief said that it was a mutiny followed by murders of many high-ranking officers. He said the persons responsible for the killings would be brought to justice as per the country's law.

The BDR chief further said that Bangladesh was 'upset' at the killings of innocent civilians in the border areas. We have decided to show utmost restraints in this regard limiting the visits of civilians in the zero line areas. He referred to Bangladesh government's firm resolve not to allow its territory for carrying out subversive activities against India and said in a lighter vein: "We have not enough resources to harbour terrorists." Shrivastabha said the responses from the Bangladesh side on all issues have been "extremely positive." Responding to a question whether Delhi has submitted any list of 'wanted persons' to Dhaka during the conference, the BSF chief answered in the affirmative, saying, "We have only asked them to see whether those persons were in Bangladesh or not." He said, "It is very difficult to find out wanted persons from either countries. It is a very difficult job, if you do not know their exact locations."

Bangladesh cyclone victims face humanitarian crisis: EU

More than 200,000 people made homeless by a cyclone last year face a "catastrophic" humanitarian crisis because river embankments have not been repaired, the European Union said Tuesday. Cyclone Aila, which tore through southern Bangladesh in May last year, killed 300 people and destroyed 4,000 kilometres (2,500 miles) of roads and river embankments, which prevent the flooding of low-lying areas.

The breached embankments led to villages and fields being flooded, forcing 200,000 people from their homes, "many of whom are still living in appalling conditions on strips of raised land," the EU said in a statement.

"If the embankments aren't repaired urgently, the humanitarian consequences will be catastrophic," added Stefan Frowein, the head of EU's delegation to Bangladesh.

Since the 1960s, the government has built up a network of embankments along rivers and canals in southern Bangladesh to prevent salt water flooding low-lying areas, allowing millions of people to cultivate the land.

The statement from the EU came less than a month after 18 charities criticised the government for not building the embankments quickly, forcing the victims to remain homeless indefinitely.

The government maintains that reconstruction will be finished before the rainy season begins in May.

Remittance to Pakistan Jumps Almost 18 Percent, Over 19 Percent In Bangladesh

Karachi, Pakistan (AHN) - Pakistanis working abroad sent home a record US\$5.78 billion in the first eight months of the current fiscal, marking a nearly 18 percent growth over the same period last year.

The remittances from Pakistani nationals working abroad were estimated at \$588.89 million in February, a fall of 8.2 percent from the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year, according to central bank statistics released Wednesday.

The monthly average remittances for the July-February period of fiscal 2009-2010 rose to \$723.3 million from \$614.8 million in the same period of the previous fiscal, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), the country's central bank said.

During the same period, Bangladesh received a total of \$7.329 billion as remittances, a 19.22 percent growth over the same period of the last fiscal.

The remittances from Bangladeshi nationals working abroad were estimated at \$844.07 million in February, a decline of \$108.32 million from the previous month. In January, remittances were worth \$952.39 million, according to bank data released last week.

"The total amount of remittances dropped slightly in the month of February over that of the previous month due mainly to fewer working days," a senior official of the Bangladesh Bank (BB), the country's central bank told AHN Media.

Bangladesh to tender for 50,000 tonnes of rice

DHAKA, March 9 (Reuters) - Bangladesh's state grains buyer will tender this week to buy 50,000 tonnes of parboiled rice to replenish food reserves, a food official said on Tuesday.

Bangladesh, the world's fourth biggest rice producer, plans to import 300,000 tonnes of rice in the current fiscal year to the end of June.

"We are going to issue an international tender soon to buy 50,000 tonnes of rice to shore up our stocks," said an official of the Directorate General of Food who declined to be quoted because he is not authorised to speak to the media.

Market sources said it could be part of a government move to build food reserves after failing to procure enough rice locally. Rice prices have risen over the past few months despite good crops and healthy levels of stocks.

Bangladesh is buying 25,000 tonnes of white rice at \$395 per tonne from the Singapore-based Indo-Sino Trade Pte Ltd in an international tender.

Indo-Sino also made the lowest offer at \$388.92 a tonne in another Bangladesh tender to buy white rice that closed on Sunday. [ID:nSGE62707X]

In January, the government extended a ban on rice exports until June to curb price increases and ensure availability of the staple in the domestic market.

At that time, the government also started open market sales of rice in the capital and adjoining districts to hold down prices.

The south Asian country produces around 30 million tonnes of rice, normally enough to feed its 150 million people, but often requires imports to cope with shortages due to natural calamities such as floods and droughts.

Bangladesh had to import rice worth \$800 million in 2008. (Reporting by Ruma Paul)

Bangladesh GDP growth to slow to 5.5 pct in 09/10 – ADB

DHAKA, March 8 (Reuters) - Bangladesh's economy is poised to slow to 5.5 percent growth in the current fiscal year through June from 5.9 percent last year, the Asian Development Bank said on Monday, and urged greater government efforts to encourage investment."The global economic recession belatedly affected the Bangladesh economy in the first half of the 2009/10 fiscal year," the ADB said in its Quarterly Economic Update on Bangladesh. Export earnings in July-December fell 6.2 percent to \$7.27 billion, reflecting subdued demand for readymade garments, which account for 80 percent of total overseas sales. Net foreign direct investment in Bangladesh in July-December was \$197 million, a 67.3 percent decline from the same period of 2008. The industrial sector continued to be affected by power and gas shortages, the Manila-based ADB said in the report. "The government needs to ... improve the country's investment climate to encourage domestic and foreign investments. It also needs to develop the capacity of key agencies to boost public sector investment and encourage higher private sector investment," the ADB said.

It said the country's farm growth is likely to slow to 4.1 percent in 2010 from 4.6 percent in 2009 while industrial sector growth is set to slow to 5.6 percent from 5.9 percent.

The service sector is projected to grow 5.9 percent from 6.3 percent in the last fiscal year due to the slowdown in trade flows and weaker industrial performance.

The government said it was hoping to achieve 6 percent growth in the current fiscal year

Bangladesh shows interest in Bengal madrasa system

After Pakistan and Turkey, neighbouring Bangladesh has expressed the desire to emulate the example of West Bengal in modernising and upgrading its madrasa system.

Minister for Madrasa and Minority Affairs Abdus Sattar has received an invitation from Bangladesh requesting him to apprise them of the steps taken by the government, particularly those related to upgrading its madrasa system.

Sattar is scheduled to go for a weeklong visit to Bangladesh in the first week of April after it received the invitation from Rashed Khan Menon, chairman of standing committee on education in Bangladesh Parliament.

Earlier Pakistan and Turkey had sought advice from the West Bengal government on how they could upgrade their madrasa system. Sattar even got an invitation from Turkey last year but he could not go there.

The state government keeps aside Rs 500 crore for 581 recognised madrasa, the highest in the country

Bangladesh 'ignoring plight' of starving Burma refugees

An American medical charity has warned that thousands of Burmese refugees in Bangladesh are facing starvation. Physicians for Human Rights said government authorities are preventing the Rohingya, a Muslim minority, from receiving adequate care. It accuses Bangladesh of obstructing efforts to help the Rohingya, who have fled Burma to escape persecution.

The government has dismissed the allegations as it did similar reports by MSF last month.

Aid blocksThe new report by the Physicians for Human Rights, "Stateless and Starving: Persecuted Rohingya Flee Burma and Starve in Bangladesh," says children will starve if aid is not allowed to be delivered. It blamed the Bangladesh authorities for "arbitrary arrests, illegal expulsion and forced internment" of Burmese refugees, as neighbouring Burma prepares for elections later this year. The report described the makeshift camps for unregistered refugees - where an estimated 200,000 Rohingya are living - as "open-air prisons". "The government of Bangladesh is absolutely ignoring it. They are sweeping it under the rug," said Richard Sollom, director of research and investigation for the group. Denials

"Basically, it's the policy of the government that they simply want [the refugees] to disappear," he said. Abdul Momen, Bangladesh's representative in the United Nations, said this was "totally false". "Government officials just have to make sure that any aid isn't coming from terrorist groups," he said.

"We are the victims. The Burmese people have been kicked out of their country and we gave them shelter.

"We are an impoverished country, and in spite of that, we tried to help them as best we can."

Apart from one or two "sporadic incidents" he denied that there was widespread abuse.

Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said that claims of abuse were baseless and malicious and she asked the international media to stop reporting them.

Desperate

She also called for the UN to send the Rohingya back to Burma as soon as possible.

The BBC's Mark Dummett, in Bangladesh, reports that life must be dreadful in Burma for these people to choose to stay in Bangladesh - one of Asia's poorest countries.

Last month, another medical aid group, Medecins Sans Frontieres, also warned of a humanitarian crisis unfolding in a squatter camp where a growing number of Rohingya refugees now live.

Another report, released by the Arakan Project, a Bangkok-based lobby group, made similar claims.

UK-based aid group Islamic Relief Worldwide pulled out of Bangladesh last month because the government did not permit them to work with nearly 13,000 unregistered Rohingyas in the south.

The Rohingyas are Muslims from north-west Burma who speak a dialect of Bengali.

They are among the world's least wanted and most persecuted people.

Burma denies them citizenship and refuses to let them own land. It does not allow them to travel or marry without first seeking permission.

-Bangladesh tenders to buy 50,000 tonnes of rice

Bangladesh is world's fourth biggest rice producer (Adds details)

Bangladesh's state grains buyer on Wednesday issued an international tender to import 50,000 tonnes of parboiled rice from any origin as part of an effort to hold down domestic prices, an official said. The last date for submission of bids is March 22 and shipment must take place within 60 days of contract signing, the official said.

Bidders may offer a minimum quantity of 10,000 tonnes on a cost and freight, or C&F, basis.

Bangladesh, the world's fourth biggest rice producer, plans to import 300,000 tonnes of rice in the current fiscal year through June.

Market sources said it could be part of a government move to build food reserves after failing to buy enough rice locally, despite good crops and healthy levels of stocks.

Bangladesh is buying 25,000 tonnes of white rice at \$395 per tonne from the Singapore-based Indo-Sino Trade Pte Ltd in an international tender.

Indo-Sino also made the lowest offer at \$388.92 a tonne in another Bangladesh tender to buy white rice that closed on Sunday

charges against Bangladesh premier quashed

Supreme court Tuesday quashed corruption charges against Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed involving the purchase of warplanes during her previous 1996-2001 administration, officials said. The High Court bench dismissed the case on a petition by Hasina. Led by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led alliance government of Khaleda Zia immediately after Hasina lost power in the 2008 elections, members were accused of incurring financial losses to the state of 129 million US dollars in the purchase of eight Russian MiG-29 fighter jets. The Bureau of Anti-Corruption, the predecessor of the current Anti-Corruption Commission, had lodged the corruption case. The former Bureau of Anti-Corruption filed the case under the influence of the then BNP-led four-party alliance government to target the evidence of irregularities in the purchase of the warplanes, according to the court ruling. On March 4 quashed three other corruption cases against Hasina that accused her and former cabinet ministers of graft in the course of her previous stint in office. The court ruled that the proceedings were illegal and the cases were filed to harass Hasina.

<http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/313198,corruption-charges-against-bangladesh-premier-quashed.html#ixzz0htd6xi9F>

Factor from collapse: PTA asks FBR to continue with exemption of ST

Pakistan Tanners Association (PTA) asked the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to continue the present exemption of Sales Tax and continued to save the 5 exporting sectors and the leather industry in particular, which is facing continued decline. The exemption given by FBR officials that exporting industry would enjoy zero rating. In fact, the status of zero rating has been around for decades in the same all over the world", Chairman PTA Gulzar Firoz said on Tuesday.

FBR officials have proposed to pay the VAT and then get the refund. PTA's proposal is to avoid refund hassle and to avoid liquidity crisis. The system should continue, as no payment means no refund. He said if VAT is levied on exporting industries specially on the 5 sectors, it will be an unscrupulous business mechanism to obtain flying invoices and will get the refund of VAT, thus leading to un-healed wounds.

Export figures of leather products for 7-months period are \$480 million as compared to \$613 million in the same period of last year.

The decline of 22 percent in the total exports of leather sector industry and this situation needs a bailing out package to get out of the current crisis. Chairman PTA, Agha Saiddain said, to save leather industry from calamity and disaster, we need to announce immediate relief package. The leather industry is facing a situation much worse than allowed in India, China and other countries.

In 2007-08 the exports of leather sector were \$1220 million and we were losing ground to India and Bangladesh in a global market.

FBR should form a special committee, two-members from each of the 5 sectors to discuss and thrash out this matter before the National Assembly.

The government should bear in mind incentives given to leather industry of China, India, Bangladesh as compared to Pakistan's, besides, leather industry should be allowed to export at a 5 percent rate.

The leather industry may as well be allowed 25 percent subsidy on electricity and gas bills as allowed in Turkey, and it may be allowed to pay export tax and Export Development Surcharge for 2 year, Agha Saiddain said.

should urgently meet representatives of the leather industry to consider proposals in order to curb the declining trend in exports of leather industry in the ultimate interest of the

current exports, the expected exports by the end of the fiscal year will be approximately \$850 million, which will overall decline. The cumulative decrease in the last 3-years would be about 35 percent, he said

27,465 T wheat to Bangladesh

DHAKA, March 8 (Reuters) - The government of Japan has donated 27,465 tonnes of wheat to Bangladesh to help stiffen relief infrastructure in a nation vulnerable to natural disasters, the Japanese embassy said on Monday.

"The food assistance will be provided through the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to assist 300,000 ultra-poor people of the country to reduce disaster risk through building community infrastructure," it said.

The consignment was handed to the food and disaster management ministry.

"We hope this Japanese contribution will help to improve household- and community-based infrastructure, minimising the negative impact of natural hazards", the statement said.

The government of Japan has been one of the key donors to WFP-supported programmes in Bangladesh, giving approximately \$20 million since 2007

WHO to help Bangladesh develop vaccines locally

BANGLADESH: The World Health Organization (WHO) Tuesday committed Bangladesh to provide technical support for developing vaccines locally and strengthen comprehensive service through one-stop community clinics.

"WHO has sent three teams of experts to Bangladesh last year and gave a roadmap to the Bangladeshi government how to develop vaccines locally," WHO Director General Margaret Chan said on Tuesday before she leave Bangladesh's capital Dhaka after a two- days official visit, national news agency BSS reported.

"You have to meet international requirement and provide quality assurance before you think of exporting vaccine made in Bangladesh," Chan said, adding that Bangladesh has every facilities to develop vaccines. However, she said the country would be required high investments for it and WHO would try to woo international agencies to fund for such projects.

The WHO chief executive said that the A/H1N1 vaccines would reach Bangladesh by this month under WHO's technical supports program, but warned Bangladesh that it should not be complacent against A/H1N1 flu virus. DHAKA, Wednesday, Xinhua

Bangladesh's Banks Asked To Be Careful About Business With "PEPs"

Dhaka, Bangladesh (AHN) - The central bank of Bangladesh has asked banks and non-banking financial institutions (NBFIs) to be more careful while opening and maintaining accounts of certain prominent public officials. These officials, known as "politically exposed persons" (PEPs), are persons "who are or have been entrusted with prominent public functions in a foreign country, for example heads of state or of government, senior politicians, senior government judicial or military officials, senior executives of state owned corporations, important political party officials," according to a circular issued by Bangladesh Bank. Business relationships with family members or close associates of PEPs also involves reputation-linked risks similar to those with PEP themselves, according to the circular.

"We've asked the banks and NBFIs to comply with the instructions for operating such accounts to avoid any financial risk," a BB senior official told AHN Media Tuesday. The official also said the instructions will be effective for account holders who have become PEPs or the real beneficiaries of the accounts--who also have turned PEPs.

The central bank's guidelines include:

- Having a risk management system in place to identify PEPs
- Obtaining senior management approval to establish a business relationship with such customers
- Taking reasonable measures to locate the source of wealth and source of funds
- Monitoring of the business relationship.

The banks and NBFIs should comply with all formalities as detailed in the guidelines for foreign exchange transactions while opening accounts of non-residents, the circular added

Japan to see Bangladesh graduate from aid-dependence

Japan, the largest bilateral donor to Bangladesh, suggested on Monday that the country should choose its core industry after RMG, strengthen social infrastructure and investment in sectors like transportation, stop the brain-drain and consider coal as an alternative fuel in its efforts to graduate from a position of dependence on foreign aid. "After World War II, Japan was an aid recipient country...Japan would be really happy to see Bangladesh's graduation from foreign aid-dependence, achieving further prosperity with a poverty-free society in the near future," Japanese Ambassador Tamotsu Shinotsuka told a seminar on "Contribution of Japan for Development of Bangladesh." JICA Chief Representative Takao Toda, JETRO Representative Takashi Suzuki, former Vice-Chancellor of BUET Prof Dr. Anwarul Azim and Chairman of Bangladesh-Japan Friendship Association Aminul Islam Khan Bulbul also spoke at the seminar held at the National Press Club. Explaining his 5-point suggestion, the Ambassador felt that more skilled workers are needed in Bangladesh to achieve further industrialization. He said vocational training and secondary education should be prioritized to enhance quality education in Maths and Science subjects in primary schools being conducted by JICA. On his second point, Shinotsuka said the Bangladesh government should make a bold decision in choosing the core industries after huge success in RMG. "Moreover, once the policy is set, it should be pursued consistently even when

the government changes. It has remained as a major problem in Bangladesh," he observed. Citing examples from Japan, the Ambassador said investment is needed in basic infrastructure like transportation, telecommunications and industrial equipment. He said the effect of investment in infrastructure on economic development is very telling, as infrastructure strengthens business opportunities by increasing efficiency in production and transportation. Stressing the need for talented workers, he said both Japan and Bangladesh have been developed on the strength of labor-intensive industries, and only skilled and talented workers ensure further development. For Bangladesh, he said nurturing more labor-intensive industries could be the engine for massive economic growth. Once again referring to China, the Ambassador hoped young and talented Bangladeshis abroad would come back in the future to contribute to the prosperity of their own nation. On current scarcity of gas and electricity as a major concern for Bangladesh, he said that in Bangladesh, coal could be considered as an alternative energy fuel alongside hydropower. However, he said cooperation with India and other neighboring countries would be important in this respect. On bilateral trade and investment, the Ambassador said that though Bangladesh's exports to Japan have been increasing after 2001, if Bangladeshi products cannot meet the requisite quality expected by Japanese consumers, its exports to Japan would not keep increasing. Bangladesh's annual imports from Japan are worth around USD 550 to USD 690 million, while exports amount to around USD 96-150 million only. Around 75 percent of Bangladeshi exports go to the US, Canada and European countries, whereas exports to Japan accounted for only 1.4 percent of Bangladesh's total exports in 2008. Shinotsuka said Chinese companies made strenuous efforts to meet the standards of the Japanese market. Nevertheless, he noted, as the labor cost of Chinese products has increased in recent years and Chinese companies seem to be losing their competitive advantage in the RMG sector, Bangladesh has an opportunity to take advantage of this trend.

Calling for the instilment of an investment-friendly environment here, the Ambassador hoped that the government would prioritize improving the business environment, so businesses could successfully nurture competitiveness of export products. The overall sum of Japanese investment in Bangladesh registered with the Board of Investment is USD 1,207 million on a cumulative basis, which is the 6th largest overseas investment in the country. Besides that, the overall sum of Japanese investment in BEPZA is USD 171 million.

On Japan's official development assistance (ODA) to Bangladesh, the Ambassador said the Japanese government has this year pledged a new Yen Loan Package of US\$ 433 million to Bangladesh. The package includes four concrete projects relating to construction of a new power plant, improvement of electricity distribution in rural areas, improvement of roads and bridges in the South-West region of the country and construction of part of a ring road in Chitagong. "One of the fundamental principles of Japan's development cooperation is to support the ownership and self-help efforts of Bangladesh," the Ambassador said, adding that his country will continue to lend Bangladesh support with the aim of implementing Bangladesh's Poverty Reduction Strategy and achieving the Millenium Development Goals

Qatar to help in Bangladesh's dev sector

Qatar will intensify its cooperation in the development sectors of Bangladesh, including river dredging, construction of road infrastructures, community health clinic and power stations. The assurance came when a 7-member Qatari delegation led by the visiting Qatari Minister for State and International Cooperation Dr Khaled Bin Mohammad Al Atiyah called on Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina at Ganobhaban here on Thursday morning. During the meeting, they discussed various bilateral issues and cooperation between the two Muslim countries including Qatar's assistance to Bangladesh's development endeavours, trade and business and export of Bangladeshi manpower to that country. After the meeting, Prime Minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad briefed newsmen at Ganobhaban. The Prime Minister said Bangladesh attaches great importance to its brotherly relations with the State of Qatar based on commonality of history, culture and region and expressed the hope that the relations will reach newer heights in the days ahead. She thanked Dr Atiyah for leading the delegation to Bangladesh to assess the need for Qatari assistance. The visit would pave the way for a meaningful cooperation and would add significantly in further strengthening the bonds of fraternity between the two countries, she added.

Laying emphasis on further strengthening the cooperation in trade and business specially in the private sector, the Prime Minister said frequent exchange of visits in the fields of education, art and culture and trade and commerce between the two countries should be expedited for the benefit of two peoples. Mentioning Bangladesh's commitment to the UN Charter and OIC, NAM, D-8 and other international and regional forums, she said Bangladesh and Qatar would continue to work together for peace, progress and stability of the world as well as the Muslim Ummah and for the prosperity of the two peoples. About Bangladeshi manpower working in Qatar, Sheikh Hasina said they are significantly contributing to the socio-economic development of both the countries. In this context, she highlighted her government's successful programmes in developing human resources by imparting a proper education and training them. Calling upon the Qatari government and entrepreneurs to import more skilled and semi-skilled personnel from here, she said the Bangladeshi manpower have internationally standard experiences in construction, civil aviation, power, water, petro chemical and gas, automobile, health and hospitality sectors. According to statistics, at present more than one lakh Bangladeshi workers are working in Qatar. Inviting Qatari private sector investment in the country's banking, agro-based industries, road infrastructure, tourism, power generation, oil, gas and mineral exploration, education and IT sectors, the Prime Minister said her government has formulated an excellent investment friendly policy for foreign investors. During the meeting, the Prime Minister sought Qatari cooperation in establishing a school in Dhaka for the autistic children. In reply, the Qatari minister assured of his government support to this end as well as Bangladesh's development sectors. Appreciating the Prime Minister's visionary leadership and forward looking role, he hoped that Bangladesh will reach its targeted goal for socio-economic development of the country under the able leadership of Sheikh Hasina. Ambassador of Qatar Abdul Rahman Yousuf A. Al-Mulla was with the minister during the meeting. Ambassador At Large M Ziauddin, Secretary to the Prime Minister's Office Molla Waheeduzzaman and Press Secretary to the Prime Minister Abul Kalam Azad were present on the occasion

Bangladesh High Court throws out PM corruption case

Bangladesh's High Court quashed a two-billion-dollar corruption case against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Thursday, her fifth legal reprieve in a month, a state prosecutor said. The 2007 case, involving Hasina's awarding of three offshore gas fields to Canadian firm Niko Resources during her first term as prime minister, is one of dozens lodged during two years of army-backed

emergency government rule."The High Court today threw out this case against her. It ruled the charges were politically motivated and filed to harass her," State Prosecutor Khurshid Alam Khan told AFP.

The case, in which Hasina was accused of "damaging state assets" worth 136 billion taka (two billion dollars), is the fifth corruption case to be thrown out by the High Court in a month, he added.Hasina was sworn in as prime minister for the second time in January last year after leading her party, the Awami League, to a landslide victory in the December 2008 elections that ended two years of military rule.Since coming to power, the country's courts have thrown out scores of cases against Awami League senior officials and ministers.Hasina was detained for a year by the army-backed emergency government, which seized power to carry out a massive crackdown on graft.She was released as part of a deal with the outgoing authorities so that she could run in the elections that brought her to power.There are several charges still outstanding, but government officials have said they expect them to be dropped.

BSF, BDR to check cross-border movement of criminals, insurgents

NEW DELHI: The border guarding forces of India and Bangladesh - Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) - on Thursday agreed to increase mutual cooperation in restricting cross-border movement of criminals/insurgents and help in identifying 'suitable patches' even within 150 yards of the border for erecting fences.

The contentious issue of border fencing was discussed during the BSF-BDR parleys here within the framework of the in-principle decisions taken in this regard during the home secretary-level talks in November last year. At that time, though Bangladesh did not fully agree to India's demand for erecting the fence close to zero line, it had given some assurance about jointly identifying 'suitable patches' where the fence can be erected even close to border. Bangladesh on Thursday also promised action against Indian insurgents who may be operating from its soil -- a list of whom was handed over to it by BSF director-general Raman Srivastava

Bangladesh blocks 1.5 million mobile phones

DHAKA — Bangladesh has blocked 1.5 million mobile numbers and tightened regulations for buying and selling SIM cards following a spike in cellphone-related crime, an official said Thursday.Under new rules, children under 18 will be barred from buying a SIM card and adults will have to show their national identity cards to register new mobile numbers, Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Shikdar told AFP."Police have disconnected over 200,000 phones which were being used in cases of extortion and harassment," he said, adding that a further 1.3 million numbers were blocked because they lacked full registration documents.SIM cards, the unique data card for each phone, can currently be purchased without providing any identification which has led to a spike in abusive or criminal calls that are hard to trace, he said.Under the new rules, which have been approved by the home ministry, licensed SIM card retailers must also obtain police clearance.The move follows a string of reports in local media about death threats -- issued on hard-to-trace pay-as-you-go mobile phones -- to political leaders and high-profile businessmen.Bangladesh's mobile phone subscriber base has grown from 1.5 million in early

2003 to around 54 million in January this year, thanks to a price war among operators and a booming economy growing at an average six percent a year.

Bangladesh Cracks Down on Terror

Unwilling host to jihadis gets serious. The breakup of a Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist cell in Dhaka two weeks ago has reinforced is the latest manifestation of the growing counter-terror cooperation between India and Bangladesh and confirms what was earlier only alleged – that Pakistan-based terror groups have been using Bangladeshi territory to launch terror operations against India.

After years of suspicion between the two nations, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed has been steadily reducing tensions. She visited New Delhi on a maiden three-day visit late December in what India called a "historic opportunity" to build "a new and forward-looking relationship" amid hoped that security concerns would be addressed.

Bangladesh also recently pushed the United Liberation Front of Assam top brass, including its chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, across the Indian border from where they had sheltered for more than a decade. Last year, Bangladesh also broke up a Lashkar-e-Taiba cell which included members from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The close counterterror cooperation between Indian and Bangladesh has also led to other arrests. On Jan. 18, Hyderabad police in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh arrested an alleged terror operative belonging to Bangladesh-based Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami and the outfit's chief of operations in south India.

The arrested terrorist, Shaikh Abdul Khawja alias Amjad, was said to be planning attacks in south India during Republic Day celebrations. According to Hyderabad Police, Khwaja was working "under the guidance of the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan to destabilize the Indian economy and devastate internal security of the nation." Police also said they had established Khawaja's links with Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Jaish-e-Mohammed, founded by Maulana Masood Azhar, was launched in 2000 in Karachi after he and two other top militants were released by India as part of a deal to secure the release of Indian hostages in Kandahar. The terror group was subsequently responsible for the December 13, 2001 attack on Parliament House in New Delhi which killed six policemen, five Jaish members and a bystander. After the parliament attack, Pakistan government banned the organization and the US State Department listed it as a terrorist outfit.

The most recent arrest of the five members of the cell was by Bangladesh's Rapid Action battalion on Feb. 28 in a busy area in Dhaka. One of those arrested was a Pakistani national while four others were locals. According to officials the Pakistani, Rezwan Ahmed, had been coordinating operations in Bangladesh and recruiting local Bangladeshis for training in Pakistan to launch operations against India and had been freely moving between India and Bangladesh.

The rapid action force also recovered the passport of another Pakistani who is suspected of having fled to India.

Two of the locals are sons of Mohiuddin Mian, the president of the Hajiganj union Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in Chandpur, who had earlier been involved in the activities of Jamaat-e-Islami. The Rapid Action Battalion claims that Mohiuddin and Salahuddin sheltered the militants in both Dhaka and their village home in Hajiganj in Chandpur.

After the arrest of the five, Mohiuddin and his brother Salahuddin disappeared. Both were in Pakistan till 2005, Salahuddin working at a garment factory in Karachi for around five years, Mohiuddin visiting Pakistan and India on business. The Bangladesh police say their evidence suggests Rezwan was trying to conduct operations in Bangladesh as well as India.

The interrogation of Nannu Mian, alias Belal Mandol alias Billal, a member of the Jaish cell, turned up evidence that he had helped 12-13 militants to enter India from Bangladesh. The arrest of these operatives also indicates that the extremists groups either of Pakistani or Bangladesh origin are trying to regroup despite suffering losses due to the determined joint offensive by India and Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh the jihadi network has been growing over the years. In recent times, the two prominent local groups have been Harkat ul-Jihad-e-Islami Bangladesh and the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh. Though there has been a crackdown on JMB and its top leaders were hanged during the regime of the caretaker government headed by Fakharuddin Ahmed, the outfit's links to the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish remain quite strong.

Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh was founded in 1998 by Saudi Arabia-educated Sheikh Abdur Rahman, who had met the top leadership of the Lashkar in Pakistan, including its chief Hafiz Mohammad Saeed. Rahman was trained at Lashkar camps in Pakistan, before he returned home to found the JMB in 1998. The political patronage received by the outfit it access to substantial resources. The outfit also managed funds from various western and gulf charities.

It is now believed that Billal was raising funds by running weapons between the Malda district of India and Bangladesh, which led to his arrest. Many members of the JMB's current shura, or leadership council are now thought to be working closely with the Lashkar and Jaish.

Khwaja Amjad of Harkat ul-Jihad-e-Islami Bangladesh was believed to be a close associate of Shahed Bilal, the former South India commander of Harkat, allegedly recruiting Hyderabad and Bangladesh youth for training in Pakistan. In 2005 Khwaja underwent training in Lashkar camps in Pakistan and organized a terror cell of Harkat. After the killing of Bilal and his elder brother Samad in a shootout in Karachi in 2007, Khawja was put in charge of the Shahed Bilal group and started acting as a recruiting agent for several terrorist organizations in addition to conducting operations.

In 2005, Khwaja was involved in a bomb blast at Police Commissioner's Task Force office in Hyderabad which killed one policeman when a Bangladesh national blew himself up inside the Task Force office. Khawja allegedly had close links with those who were involved in Hyderabad

in 2007 as well as blasts in other Indian cities. Khawja was also involved in the supply of arms and ammunition to various terror cells operating in India through Bangladesh.

The expanding terror network of Pakistan based Jihadi groups in Bangladesh is a cause for concern. Though the modules of Jaish-e-Mohammed and Laskhar-e-Taiba have been busted in Bangladesh, it is possible that other Pakistani groups could also be active and have not yet been detected. Clearly, now there is a need for closer cooperation between security agencies of south Asia as terror groups have expanded their network in many countries.

Rezwan, the Pakistani national, for instance managed to work freely from Bangladesh for many years. His delayed arrest also underlines the need for improvement in working of intelligence agencies in the region. Finally, the governments of South Asian countries will also have to work to dismantle the local support structure of the extremists so that they do not get shelter. Only a multi-pronged and concerted action will help to eliminate them

BHUTAN

Women still playing catch-up

Although Bhutanese men and women enjoy equal inheritance rights, men still continue to lead in the political sphere and labour force participation, states the Asia-Pacific human development report 2010, launched yesterday coinciding with the international women's day. With about 60 percent of rural Bhutanese women holding land registration titles, the report praises Bhutan's equal inheritance rights for men and women. However, male labour force participation remains significantly higher than that of women, especially in the urban areas, states the report. Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck, launched the report - Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific - that calls for action across three areas supporting the economic empowerment of women, promoting women's political voice and advancing women's legal rights, at the College of Business Studies in Gedu.

"Female unemployment rose from 3.8 percent in 2006 to 5.4 percent last year, while male unemployment remained constant at 2.6 percent in 2006 and 2009 as well," said the deputy UNDP resident representative in Bhutan, Bakhodir Burkhanov, in his introductory remarks.

Bakhodir Burkhanov also said that Bhutanese women remain under-represented at all levels of government. "Women comprise only eight percent of the national assembly members and 24 percent of the national council members. Women's representation in judiciary is six percent and 31 in the civil service with a lower proportion still at top levels," he said.

The UNDP resident representative further said that, through these three dimensions of economics, politics and the law, the report takes a closer look at what holds women back and how policies and institutions can be transformed and mindsets changed to move towards gender equality. The report states that regional experiences show that promoting women's political voice could be achieved by instituting quotas for women representatives, as is the case in India,

in local government by training first time leaders to improve the quality of participation, recognising women's vote in political parties and by adopting gender-friendly budgets.

In her statement on the International Women's Day, Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck, president of RENEW and goodwill ambassador of UNFPA, urged the government and the people of Bhutan to take personal responsibility to embrace this year's theme, "Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress For All".

"Wisest among the leaders are women, who teach us to recognise the phenomenal treasures of versatile capacity endowed upon us that could be utilised meaningfully," said Her Majesty's statement. Meanwhile, the UNDP administrator, Helen Clark, subsequently launched the 2010 Asia-Pacific human development report in New Delhi yesterday.

"In developing countries, women consistently lag behind men in formal labour force participation and entrepreneurship, earn less than men for similar work, and have less access to credit as well as lower inheritance and ownership rights than men do," reads her message on the day. "Women's health, particularly reproductive health, remains a serious issue. More than half a million women die every year —or one woman every minute— from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth." UN representatives, non-government organisations (NGO) and dzongkhag officials celebrated the international women's day celebration along with students and people of Gedu. The ceremony at the Gedu college concluded with public of Gedu and students performing cultural programmes, followed by a luncheon with Her Majesty the Queen Mother and officials

Bhutan's Buddhists keep eye on 'Gross National Happiness'

THIMPHU, Bhutan (RNS) The Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan is the only nation that puts happiness at the core of public policy. But its thrust on a "Gross National Happiness"(GNH) index is not just a warm-and-fuzzy inheritance from Buddhism, but also integral to the nation's cultural and political security. Bhutan's fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, coined the phrase GNH in 1972 on the belief that people's happiness did not depend on the nation's economic wealth, said Tshoki Zangmo, information officer at the Center for Bhutan Studies. It was, Zangmo said, "a notion of wholeness that is embedded in Bhutan's authentic Buddhist culture." Ever since, all manner of government policies have centered around GNH in this landlocked Himalayan country — about half the size of Indiana — that's sandwiched between India to the south and China to the north.

In 2006, the king abdicated the throne in favor of his son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who in his first address as monarch said his main responsibility would be focusing on GNH.

Two years later, when Bhutan held its first democratic elections after centuries of absolute monarchy rule, GNH was the main agenda of the ruling, royalist Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party. GNH indicators — as opposed to more traditional measures like a nation's Gross Domestic Product based on economic activity — recognizes nine components of happiness: psychological well-being, ecology, health, education, culture, living standards, time use, community vitality and good governance. It's all tracked twice a year through a survey of 1,300 people conducted by

Zangmo's agency. Many of the GNH indicators find their roots in Buddhism. Psychological well-being, for example, includes measures of meditation, prayer, nonviolence, and reincarnation. The country's GNH secretary, Karma Tshiteem, said Buddhism is key to people's happiness. "Happiness is about one's outlook on life, and Buddhist values help people appreciate and focus on what they have rather than what they do not," he said. "Values such as compassion and respect foster greater social interaction." In addition, belief in karma — "a force that unifies past and future through the present" — also figures into GNH, Tshiteem said. Buddhism also had a "tremendous influence" in creating Bhutan's unique culture and traditions, which he said are "the most important source of our identity."

The Western notion of separation of church and state is, well, foreign to Bhutan. Here, the government and clergy operate from Buddhist monasteries, such as Home and Culture Minister Minjur Dorji's office in the palatial, whitewashed Tashichho Dzong monastery in the nation's capital.

Bhutan is perhaps the only country where culture is part of the interior ministry's portfolio. Dorji said preservation of culture is crucial for our nation's security, and Bhutanese culture, in turn, "is rooted in Buddhism."

One tangible way of preserving culture is a national dress code in schools and government buildings. Men wear the gho, a knee-length robe tied at the waist by a cloth belt, and women wear the kira, an ankle-length dress clipped at one shoulder and tied at the waist.

Bhutan also mandates use of the national language, Dzongkha, and has strict architectural standards throughout the country.

Government officials say it's not just about looking nice in public, but fostering a physical sense of identity to distinguish Bhutan from its larger neighbors. "Bhutan is a tiny nation between two giants, India and China, and therefore it has to have a distinct culture to reinforce its identity as an independent nation. Otherwise, how is Bhutan different from India?" asked Dorji.

Such distinctions are deeply embedded in Bhutanese DNA. The Indian state of Sikkim, on Bhutan's western border, was once a separate Buddhist kingdom ruled by descendants of an Indian Buddhist saint who, according to tradition, brought Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan and Tibet in the 8th century.

Sikkim was gradually outnumbered by Nepalese Hindus and merged with India after a referendum in 1975. And Tibet, on Bhutan's eastern border, was incorporated into China in 1950. Neither is it simply a matter of history. "Our little country, once blissfully isolated in a remote corner of the Himalayas ... is now buffeted by powerful forces," Prime Minister Jigme Thinley said at a recent workshop on GNH. "Though some have brought benefit ... some of them threaten not only our profound heritage but even our lives and land." Dorji, the culture minister, said Bhutanese leaders plan to integrate GNH, and its Buddhist underpinnings, into school curriculum, in part to help maintain the country's religious demography of three-quarter Buddhists and one-quarter Hindus. "It's a small country with less than 700,000 people, so why do

you need more religions?" he asked, alluding to a few churches, which operate underground fearing persecution.

Indeed, Bhutan's cultural and religious coexistence is fragile, and Bhutan has little patience for threats to that delicate balance. In the 1980s and the early 1990s, around 100,000 people from southern Bhutan — mainly Hindus of Nepalese origin or Christian converts — fled to Nepal after Bhutanese security personnel crushed a rebellion against the government's "one nation, one people" campaign to strengthen Bhutan's identity. "Unlike India, where tensions between Hindus, Muslims and Christians are commonplace," Dorji said, "Bhutan is not resilient."

US sees some rights progress in S.Asia

WASHINGTON — The United States said Thursday it saw progress in human rights in parts of South Asia last year, as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal all solidified democracy. The positive signs belied a grim situation in much of South Asia, where the US State Department found widespread rights problems in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

In its annual report, the State Department said that the human rights situation "improved somewhat" in Bangladesh as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took office in January 2009, ending nearly two years of military-backed rule.

The report said Bangladesh witnessed a "slight increase" in extrajudicial killings but that religious discrimination ebbed. There were no protests against the Ahmadiya, a sect many Muslims consider heretical.

The State Department reported widespread concerns in Nepal about extrajudicial killings, human trafficking and impunity for perpetrators of violence. But it said that overall respect for human rights "improved slightly" thanks to a multi-party government, which gave access to international human rights monitors and tried to better enforce anti-trafficking laws. The State Department said human rights were improving in Bhutan after the Himalayan state transformed into a democracy in 2008, ending a century of absolute monarchy. But the report said that some discrimination remained against the Nepalese minority in the predominantly Buddhist country. Similarly, the State Department reported progress in Maldives since former political prisoner Mohamed Nasheed won elections in the archipelago in 2008. "The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens and upheld civil liberties," the report said. It said, however, that concerns remained about religious freedom and the treatment of women in the Islamic state

Bhutan keen to strengthen ties with North-East

Bhutan with which the North Eastern states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh share considerable geographical boundary, is keen to have direct flight service between Thimpu and Guwahati, besides improving bilateral economic ties.

Bhutan's consul general in Kolkata, Dasho Tsering Wangda, who was in the city yesterday, expressed the willingness of his government to further strengthen the bilateral ties with "the next-door neighbour" - Assam and North-East. "There is a great degree of stability in Assam. As a result thousands of Bhutanese come everyday for doing business in Assam especially in Chirang district. We want to foster our centuries-old relationship between the people of Bhutan and Assam. We want our next door neighbour to prosper and grow. Therein lies our prosperity too," he said. He said that Bhutan was considering to launch flight operations with Assam on the Bhutan-Guwahati-Bangkok route, and would later extend to Patna. Wangda said that being next door neighbour, Assam would benefit from any projects taken up in Bhutan, especially along the borders and the river Manas. Later, Wangda had a meeting with Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi at the latter's official residence and discussed issues of mutual interests. He said that he had come to Assam to have people to people contact and to explore the opportunities in which Bhutan can be a partner in progress. Wangda urged Gogoi to take up the matter with the government of India on repairing of the 40-km stretch of road from Samthebari near Dhalgaon in Assam to Bhutan. "The repairing of the road will enable Bhutan to move goods at a faster level by cutting down huge business losses," he said

Bhutan for boosting ties with Assam

Bhutan Consul General in Kolkata, Dasho Tsering Wangda has met Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi at the latter's official residence and discussed issues of mutual interests. The top Bhutanese official revealed that Bhutan would start flight operations with Assam on the Guwahati-Bhutan-Bangkok route subsequently to Patna.

Wangda, while conveying his greetings on behalf of the King of Bhutan and the Prime Minister to Gogoi, said that Bhutan wanted to strengthen further the relationship with its next-door neighbour. He said that the law and order situation had improved a lot with insurgency on the wane. "There is a great degree of stability in Assam. As a result thousands of Bhutanese come everyday for doing business in Assam, especially in Chirang district. We want to foster our centuries-old relationship between the peoples of Bhutan and Assam. We want our next-door neighbour to prosper and grow. Therein lies our prosperity too," he said.

Wangda said that being next-door neighbour, Assam would benefit from any projects taken up in Bhutan, especially along the borders and Manas river. He requested the Chief Minister to take up the matter with Government of India on repairing of the 40-km stretch of road from Samthebari near Dhalgaon in Assam to Bhutan. "The repairing of the road will enable Bhutan to move goods at a faster level by cutting down huge business losses," he said. Gogoi assured him that he would take up the matter with the Centre.

The Bhutanese official told the Chief Minister about the 10,000-MW hydro-electric project coming up at downstream of Manas river and said the project to be commissioned in 2020 would open up avenues for employment for people living on both sides. He disclosed that Bodos and Adivasis were being engaged in building electricity towers and installation of transmission lines. Wangda said that he had come to Assam to establish people-to-people contact and to explore the opportunities in which Bhutan can be a partner in progress

ADB help sought to assess benefits

Giving Transit to India

Bangladesh has sought Asian Development Bank assistance in carrying out a study on the economic benefits of providing transit facility to India. Dhaka also sought ADB help for a project for importing electricity from India. The ADB has already indicated that it would provide \$97.63 million for the power import project and also assist in conducting the transit-related study, Economic Relations Division (ERD) sources said. Meanwhile, a delegation led by the prime minister's economic adviser Mashiur Rahman went to Manila on Wednesday to seek ADB assistance for different projects for regional cooperation, including transit facility. The communications ministry last month sent a proposal to the ADB seeking assistance for the study **Economic Analysis of the Introduction of Transit between Bangladesh and India.**

And the Power Division sought ADB assistance for the project 400 KV Grid Interconnection between India (Baharampur) and Bangladesh (Bheramra). During its stay in Manila, the team led by Mashiur would discuss the two proposals with the ADB president and other top officials. They would also have talks on sub-regional cooperation among Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan on railway network and several corridor projects, sources said. In January, during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India, the two countries reached consensus on several issues of regional cooperation including transit, according to the joint communiqué on the talks in Delhi. "It was agreed that Bangladesh will allow use of Mongla and Chittagong sea ports for movement of goods to and from India through road and rail. Bangladesh also conveyed their intention to give Nepal and Bhutan access to Mongla and Chittagong ports," said the joint communiqué. At the Bangladesh Development Forum meet in Dhaka last month, Bangladesh sought cooperation from the donors for materialising regional cooperation. A World Bank Pre-Identification Mission for the Proposed North East Regional Trade and Transport Facilitation Project, now in Dhaka, is discussing issues relating the project.

In 2007, the ADB proposed to provide \$1 million to promote economic cooperation and integration between four South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) countries -- Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan. It also offered help to prepare an investment project that will facilitate unhindered movement of goods, services, and people across these countries. For this, the ADB proposed SASEC Transport Logistics and Trade Facilitation Project having three components -- road corridor, rail link and modernised cross border regime

Bhutan - Bird flu strikes again

There has been one new outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in the border area with India. The veterinary authority in Bhutan sent Follow Up Report No. 1 dated 2 March to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). It describes one outbreak of HPAI at Pasakha in Chhukha, close to the border with the Indian state of West Bengal. The outbreak started on 20 February, and involved a flock of 1,200 village poultry. Of these, three birds died and 1,091 were destroyed. The presence of the H5N1 subtype of the virus has been confirmed.

Curbs on Media, Internet Rise Worldwide, U.S. Says

March 11 (Bloomberg) -- Crackdowns on the media and on Internet use rose last year in China, Iran, Russia and other nations in an effort by governments to clamp down on dissent, according to the annual U.S. report on human rights. "Restrictions on freedom of expression, including on members of the media, are increasing and becoming more severe," the State Department report said. A prominent example is China, which employs "thousands" of people in expanding efforts to monitor Internet use, control content and block access to sites, according to the study.

"New technologies have proven useful, both to oppressors and to those who struggle to expose the failures and the cowardice of the oppressors," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told reporters as the report was released today in Washington. Clinton has drawn attention to efforts by authoritarian governments to prevent democracy activists from organizing online and challenging the actions and policies of regimes. The Chinese government cut access to sites operated by international news organizations, health groups, educational institutions, social networking sites and other governments, the U.S. said.

Iranian Actions

Iran blocked access to Facebook and Twitter after the disputed re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad last year, the U.S. noted. The government's "poor human rights record degenerated" during 2009, the report said. The information constraints extended to Latin America, according to the U.S. "Government officials in Venezuela, including the president, used government-controlled media outlets to accuse private media owners and reporters of fomenting antigovernment destabilization campaigns and coup attempts," the report said.

At the end of the year, 32 radio stations and two television stations had been closed and 29 other radio stations were under threat of being shut down, the U.S. said.

Venezuela issued an e-mailed response through its embassy in Washington, quoting Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez as saying the U.S. assessment was "selective, political and narrowly written." Venezuelans under President Hugo Chavez now have wider rights of political participation and most of the media in the country is independent and critical of the government, the embassy said.

Russian Media

In Russia, authorities "weakened freedom of expression and media independence" by controlling the editorial policies of government-owned media outlets, pressing them to refrain from critical coverage, the State Department said.

The Chinese and Russian missions to the United Nations didn't immediately respond to requests for comment on the report.

Even in Iraq, where the U.S. is supporting the emergence of an Arab democracy and still has tens of thousands of troops deployed, threats to expression persist. Iraqi media workers are practicing self-censorship because of violence against them, the U.S. said.

The State Department also highlighted restrictions on free expression in Belarus, Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, North Korea, Vietnam and Uzbekistan.

About 25 countries have imposed “often draconian” new restrictions on civic groups since 2008, affecting their ability to operate freely and receive international funding, the U.S. said.

“We find ourselves in a moment when an increasing number of governments are imposing new and crippling restrictions on the non-governmental organizations working to protect rights and enhance accountability,” Clinton said.

Anti-Semitism

In other findings, the State Department assessment pointed to rising anti-Semitism, especially in Egypt and Iran, and said discrimination against Muslims in Europe has been an “increasing concern.” “New forms of anti-Semitism took the form of criticism of Zionism or Israeli policy that crossed the line into demonizing all Jews, and, in some cases, translated into violence against Jewish individuals in general,” the State Department said in the report. Progress was found in other countries. Liberia issued a report on past abuses “that ought to be a model,” said Michael Posner, assistant secretary for democracy, human rights and labor. Georgia, Ukraine and Bhutan also were bright spots in the State Department report, he said. The work of about 1,000 people, the report surveyed 194 countries, said Posner, who called it the “single most exhaustive study of human rights in the world

Maldives

Mind the water hazard...floating golf course to be built in Maldives

Cutting-edge development in pipeline as islands plan for effects of climate change
The Islands of the Maldives, confronted by rising oceans and a landscape that is just a few feet above sea level, is poised to build a floating golf course and convention centre in what could be the first of a series of futuristic off-shore developments designed to counter the threat of global warming. The country's government has signed a deal with a Dutch firm to investigate the feasibility of developing facilities that would be located among the 26 main atolls. It is likely the company, Dutch Docklands, which has built floating islands in Dubai, will also look into the possibility of floating homes in the Maldives.

"The methods and procedures developed by the company for floating developments reduce the impact on underwater life, and minimise the changes to coastal morphology," said a statement issued by the office of President Mohamed Nasheed. Since coming to office in late 2008, Mr

Nasheed, a former political prisoner, has been quick to prioritise climate change as one of the most pressing threats to his nation, which is made up of a total of 1,200 islands.

One of his first announcements after defeating former dictator Maumoon Abdul Gayoom was a plan to try to buy an alternative homeland – possibly in Sri Lanka or India – because of the threat to his nation, more than 80 per cent of which is no more than a metre above sea level. Parts of the capital, Male, are protected by a 3m-high wall that cost more than £30m and took 14 years to build. The UN has forecast that the oceans are likely to rise by up to 60cm by 2100.

After the Asian tsunami in 2004, up to 40 per cent of the Maldives was under water. A hundred people died, which spurred the authorities to think about relocating people from the lowest-lying islands. In Kandholhudhoo, about 60 per cent of residents have volunteered to evacuate within 15 years.

Ahead of last year's Copenhagen climate change summit, the President drew attention to the likely fate of the Maldives by holding an underwater cabinet meeting at which he and his ministers used scuba equipment. Mr Nasheed has also announced plans to turn the islands carbon-neutral in 10 years. No agreement was reached in Copenhagen, to the bitter disappointment of the Maldives and many other leaders of smaller nations.

"We're trying to send our message, let the world know what is happening, and what will happen to the Maldives if climate change is not checked," he said at the time. "If the Maldives cannot be saved today we do not feel there is much chance for the rest of the world"

Georgia and the Republic of Maldives established diplomatic relations

Georgia and the Republic of Maldives signed a joint communiqué on the establishment of diplomatic and consular relations. According to the joint communiqué, Georgia and Maldives will develop bilateral relations on the principles of the United Nations enshrined in the UN Charter, including the principles of territorial integrity and equal sovereignty. In a joint letter the sides informed H.E. Ban-ki Moon, UN Secretary General on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The communiqué was signed by H.E. Ambassador Abdul Ghafoor Mohamed, Permanent Representative of Maldives to the United Nations and from the Georgian side by H.E. Ambassador Alexander Lomaia, Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations. The communiqué signing ceremony was held in New York, at Georgia's permanent mission to the UN. Maldives is the tenth country with which Georgia has established diplomatic relations in 2010. Earlier, the diplomatic relations were established with 4 Latin American (The Dominican Republic, Saint Lucia, Peru and Paraguay), 3 African (Botswana, Cape Verde and Liberia) and Asia and Pacific Rim (Brunei and Marshall Islands) states.

Georgia has established diplomatic relations with 132 states among the 191 member states of the United Nations.

Maldives seeks German assistance to amend Sharia Law: Report

President Mohamed Nasheed has sought assistance from German government to amend 'Sharia law' enforced in the Maldives, a German newspaper has said.

Earth Times claimed on Monday that President Nasheed sought German scholars' expertise in Islamic law "to help consolidate the young democracy in the Maldives" after meeting German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on Thursday. "I have done my homework and I am quite aware of the amount of German discourse in Islamic jurisprudence," he said. "German universities had led this area during the early 20th Century." The paper quoted President Nasheed as saying that he would "welcome German assistance in building up their own version of Sharia law in the Maldives". Press Secretary, Mohamed Zuhair said President, during his visit to Haa Alif Atoll three days prior to his departure to Europe, spoke to a German journalist about seeking Germany's assistance in amending Sharia Law established in Maldives. "Germany has a large Muslim population," he added. He also said Germany had prominent Islamic scholars, adding government did not believe differences between sects were a major issue

President seeks German support to train Maldives police

President Mohamed Nasheed who is on a four nation European tour sought German police assistance to train the Maldives police force, on Monday. Nasheed who met with Chief Director of German Police, Günther Freisleben said "German experience could help the Maldives build a qualified police force and sought assistance to train Maldivian police," Nasheed's office said. Nasheed further said the "main areas of concern in the Maldives were religious radicalism and drug related offences as well as juvenile delinquency." The President also spoke on the importance of making the Maldives police force more people and community friendly. Discussions at the meeting were held on how German Police can work with the Maldives in providing assistance.

Tax Administration Bill passed in Parliament

The Tax Administration Bill aimed at establishing a proper tax regime in the country was passed in Parliament on Monday. Of the 70 parliamentarians who were present, 67 voted in favour whilst 2 voted against and one member abstained, Miadhu news reported. According to the bill, an Inland Revenue Authority will be set up with a board of directors. The bill also includes penalties for tax evasion, it said.

Maldives to set up a floating golf course

Giving a major boost to the country's money-spinning tourism industry, a floating golf course along with a hotel will be developed in the Maldives. The government has signed a contract with Dutch Docklands of the Netherlands to develop the project, Minivan news reported

The Maldives Buys a New Island that Floats

Sea level rise creates new business opportunity and "green jobs" that we'll see more of, borne from the effects of climate change, as sea levels rise. The first floating island has just been commissioned this week by the sinking island nation of the Maldives, from Dutch Docklands, whose past work includes part of the artificial islands comprising The World off the coast of Dubai. Humanity is faced with possibly its worst problem in all of its history, in climate change. It takes political imagination to make the changes needed to turn around the disaster bearing down on us. Half of us have an IQ under 100, so making this change and convincing all of us

that we can do it (by switching to renewable energy sources) will be very much harder than just inventing fire was (perhaps our last comparable climate change challenge). Perhaps we can't save ourselves, and adaptation may be our only chance. Dutch Docklands is predicated on solving one result of this failure; rising sea levels – by inventing and engineering floating islands. Like inventing imitation glaciers, it's an example of the kind of lateral thinking that we'll need more of. The company specializes in solutions for places where sea levels are rising, land is sinking or where sand shortages make traditional erosion control reclamation prohibitively expensive. Underneath one of its artificial islands, marine life can adhere to the floating platform. The floating island can be moored to land so that it is somewhat stable. In very rough seas (like when there's cyclones) there would be some movement but most of the time it would feel like a solid island, not like being on a boat covered in sand. The beach is completely floating and just as comfortable as a normal beach, ecologically sound and erosion free. Under the sand would be a foam and concrete platform, gradually sloping down underwater, that to some extent cups the sand in the container shape. The company tries to use methods and procedures that reduce impact on underwater life and minimize changes to coastal morphology. Dutch Docklands claims to be able to retain the natural interconnection between tides, waves and current intact while creating miles of new beaches for permanent coastal expansion. The CEO Paul van de Camp moved to Dubai from Holland because of the "anything is possible" spirit in Dubai, where he engineered the Australasian section of The World. The design for the floating beach design is essentially the same as for some new floating islands Dutch Docklands is building to indulge the sheik in Dubai, in the shape of a rather cryptic phrase in Arabic. By the end of the century, quite a bit of Dubai itself will also be underwater due to rising sea levels as a result of climate change. The floating island commissioned by the Sheik should ensure the survival of a home for the 22nd century princely offspring

Maldives campaigning for Human Rights Council membership

Foreign Minister Dr Ahmed Shaheed has inaugurated a campaign in Geneva, to promote Maldives' decision of competing for a seat in the UN Human Rights Council. According to the Ministry's website, Maldives is campaigning for one of the four Asian seats in the Council. Shaheed, who is in the Swiss capital to deliver a speech at a meeting of the heads of the Human Rights Council member states, distributed brochures with information on the Maldives and its candidature. "The Minister urged the members to base their decisions on not just words, but on actions carried out by the candidates to establish and strengthen human rights," the website read. Shaheed also said that despite 20 percent of the UN's total membership consisted of small states they have not been fully represented in the Council. He said views of small nations would be represented in the Human Rights Council, if Maldives gets elected.

The Maldives intends to get involved more in the progress of human rights, and the Council could be "a powerful agent of change and development," Shaheed added

Maldives Shark Sanctuary

The Maldives' nation continues to be a frontrunner in environmental activism with their latest announcement that they are turning 90,000 sq.kms (34,750 sq.miles) of their territorial waters into a shark sanctuary for the more than 30 different species that make their home in the region.

The island nation's ban on fishing for sharks, as well as the trade in shark fins, is being applauded by shark conservation groups around the world.

“The Maldives were one of the first countries to recognize that sharks were a key reason tourists went to dive there,” said Matt Rand director of *Global Shark Conservation* for the *Pew Environment Group*. “Today’s announcement protects the Maldives’ tourism industry – the largest segment of their economy – from the ravages of the shark fin trade. It is a bold and farsighted move on the part of the government of the Maldives.”

Sharks are worth much more to the Maldives as a live tourist draw than as meat or shark fin exports. *Pew* estimates that the Maldives beaches and coral atolls contribute to more than 28% of the Maldives’ GDP

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Judges Association condemns Chief Judge

Maldives Association of Judges has sent a letter to Chief Judge, Abdulla Saeed, condemning his “lack of action or words against people who are trying to influence the judiciary.” The letter signed by Ahmed Naeem, President of the Association and judge of Civil Court, read that some of the political parties have been accusing the judiciary ever since the separation of powers under the new constitution. The Association is concerned about the Chief Judge being silent, while politicians criticise the judiciary, which might lead to loss of confidence in the judiciary, the letter read. It also accused “some of the parties” of attempting to ruin the judiciary’s dignity. “It requires us to think about the future of the judiciary, as the public is losing confidence, trust and hope in us, while believing that the order of the judiciary is lost in the country,” the letter said. The letter also said the judiciary has to reveal the details of its objectives and goals, noting that failure to do so could weaken the judiciary in the future. Judge Naeem, who

is also the President of the Association, said the judiciary's appeal to Chief Judge was "to hand over the post to another person, if he is unable to do his responsibilities." "If he [Abdulla Saeed] cannot take the responsibility, that means he does not want it. If that is the case, he should hand over the post to another person. Our [Judges Association's] aim is to reveal that to [the public]," he said. "This is the word of the whole judiciary. The answer of every judge will be the same, if you ask them

Rajapaksa appoints Courts Martial to try Fonseka

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who is also Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, on Thursday appointed two Courts Martial to try the former Army Commander, Gen.Sarath Fonseka, on two separate sets of charges under the Army Act. One Court Martial will try him on three charges relating to participation in politics - while being in service. The other Court Martial will try him on four charges - relating to violation of laid down procedures for the purchase of military hardware, according to Army spokesman, Maj.Gen.Prasad Samarasinghe.

The charge of indulging in political activity while being in service has been filed under Sec 124 and 102(I) of the Army Act. The charge of violating tender procedures are filed under Sec.109 (E). The judges of the two Courts Martial will be the same. The Courts Martial will be presided over by Maj.Gen.H.L.Weeratunge. The other judges are Maj.Gen.A.L.R.Wijetunge and D.R.A.V.Jayatilleke. Rear Admiral W.W.J.S.Fernando will be the Judge Advocate. The Court Martial on Fonseka's political involvement will begin its hearings on March 16. The second Court Martial will begin its proceedings on March 17. The two Courts Martial will be functioning concurrently. Fonseka will be allowed to use a defence lawyer of his choice. The trials will be held at the naval headquarters in Colombo. The proceedings of the two courts will be recorded and videoed. But they will not be open to either the media or the public. However, every two or three days, the military spokesman will brief the media on the proceedings.

Fonseka will have the liberty to appeal against the verdict of the Courts Martial in the Court of Appeal and then the Supreme Court

Encountering Extremism: Biographical tracks and Twists One's academic trajectories and journeys are invariably subject to vagaries and contingencies. The events and researches leading to my interest in "communal violence" and "zealotry" in the 1990s, and thereafter to what I have called 'sacrificial devotion' (embracing the topics of "terrorism," suicide bombers and Tamil Tigers),[1] were shaped by such contingencies. Since my web site will present some short essays on both these topics in the course of this month, let me detail some moments during my research work that resulted in the journeys that produced such outcomes. In 1986-87 I spent about 14 months in Sri Lanka on research work during my sabbatical year. I was completing my research and writing on the history of Colombo in British times and the associated rise of a Westernized middle class-cum-bourgeoisie – work that resulted in the book *People Inbetween* (Sarvodaya, 1989).[2] The island was still under the clouds cast by the attacks on Tamils in the southern parts of the island in July 1983. Following the British colonial lexicon this momentous and tragic set of events was generally described as the "1983 riots." But such politically-aware scholars as Newton Gunasinghe and Shelton Kodikara were among those who depicted the event as a "pogrom." This was a sensitizing revision that I accepted. The lesson crystallised when a chance event, one of those "contingencies" that I spoke of in my opening sentence, cut into the lines of research that had dominated my focus in the 1980s. Neelan Tiruchelvam buttonholed me and asked me to provide a broad overview on the event

known as the “1915 riots” (marakkala kolahalaya in Sinhala) for a conference that was being organised in the Maldives by the International Centre of Ethnic Studies, a gathering that encompassed South Asia writ large and included several scholars from the subcontinent.

Apart from the attractions of the enterprise, the Maldives as place of meeting made the offer irresistible to a beachcomber such as me. As matters turned out, the event was held in Kathmandu in February 1987, but that location was no less attractive. In effect my research direction took a U-turn in the sense that my existing field of research now had an additional field alongside it. This terrain of research was not entirely new. Neelan approached me because he was aware of my earlier articles on the “1915 riots,” one that was initially a Ceylon Studies Seminar paper at Peradeniya in 1972 and then appeared in print after revision in 1981.[3] Both versions were moulded by an approach directed by the British empiricist tradition of historical research, albeit leavened by some sociological threads. When I took up this particular baton once again, however, both my reflections and my subsequent explorations of additional bodies of source material were leavened by my experiences in teaching and reading social anthropology. One of my presentations at Kathmandu was a summary overview of the 1915 pogrom directed at the Sri Lankan Mohammedans (as the Muslims were called then), with some reflections thereon. This presentation was point-form and never re-written as such. But I also presented a written draft of another paper that eventually saw print under the title “Noise as Cultural Struggle” in a book edited by Veena Das which assembled some of the papers presented at Kathmandu (Mirrors of Violence, Delhi, Oxford). With *People Inbetween* bedded as a book, from 1989/90 my research work was now directed towards a study of communal violence as well as nationalism in the modern world. My intent was to produce a book on the anti-Moor pogrom of 1915, a work that would run alongside research on another book on Sinhalese nationalism in the British period. The latter field was informed by the literature on South Asia, notably “subaltern studies.” It was also directed by my questioning of some lines of argument within this literature that were influenced by Edward Said’s “Orientalism.”[4] These lines of interest were not without the impact, emotional and otherwise, of the July 1983 pogrom. During my long sojourn in Lanka in 1986/87 and other visits I had gathered anecdotal data on the 1983 pogrom that deepened my reflective thoughts, and indeed, my anger about that cluster of events.[5] This material, moreover, had led me to conjecture that in their minds the stirrers and assailants behind the atrocities in 1983 as well as 1915 were moved by a sense of ‘legitimate’ vengeance so that their awful actions were deemed righteous. They were teaching the Moors (1915) and the Tamils (1983) a lesson.

I did not, however, wish to be submerged by the local particularities of empirical detail and my local particularity as a Sri Lankan. Comparative studies of ethnic violence in Europe, USA and India seemed advisable in order to preclude tunnel-vision. Short six-month sojourns at the University of Virginia in 1991, Delhi (1995) and Leiden (1996) rendered feasible by Fellowships secured as well as Australian research grants enabled me to broaden my vision. The considerable bodies of data from these fields that I collected remain on the shelves — mostly unanalysed. However, these explorations provided perspectives and raised useful questions.

Furthermore, they yielded photographs, startling photographs at times. I still have in my mind’s-eye an image of Nazi men and women clambering among a mound of Jewish bodies searching for booty – a newsprint photograph of poor quality that I saw at the Weiner Foundation in

London. My quest for photographs had been inspired by two of the shocking scenes from the atrocious mayhem at Borella Junction, Colombo, on 24/25th July 1983 that had been reproduced in the Tamil Times.

Culled from the poor-quality reproductions in that periodical these images were reproduced in my literary essay, a personal statement of protest, entitled "The Agony and the Ecstasy of a Pogrom: Southern Lanka, July 1983" when it was reprinted in the anthology entitled Exploring Confrontation: Politics, Culture and History (Reading, Harwood Academic Publishing, 1994).

Both the limits and incisiveness of visual imagery surround the embellishments attached to these pictures. One reveals a mob of jubilant looters and assailants and indicates that ordinary people participated in the pogrom (as indeed confirmed by numerous witnesses — from Karen Roberts in her July to the research work on the July 1983 pogrom undertaken by Naren Kumarakulasingham[6]). The other is even more shocking, but also highlights how a picture can sometimes mislead.

WIEF: Global Acceptance Of The Islamic Brand Growing

KUALA LUMPUR, March 11 (Bernama) -- Global acceptance of the Islamic brand is growing at a rapid pace based on the keen interest shown by international firms to participate in the World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF) 2010. The proven success of the event over the past five years has already attracted over 40 countries for the WIEF this year, said WIEF Foundation chairman Tun Musa Hitam said at the event launch here on Thursday. The confirmed countries included Brunei, Indonesia, Senegal, Syria, Maldives, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Bangladesh, Netherland, Canada and Mauritius, he said. To be held here from May 18 to 20, the forum is expected to be attended by about 2,000 participants, comprising country leaders and members of the global business community. Musa said most of these countries joining the forum, especially the Muslim countries, needed special attention and opportunities to share ideas and promote possible business ventures. "In this environment, where the global economy seems to be stabilising, among most Muslim countries, the situation is still bad simply because when we talk about economic improvement, it always depends on the world's leading economies such as the United States, China, Europe and other advanced countries," he said. "The developing countries of the Muslim world have totally been neglected. They have been forced to look after themselves and look for opportunities during uncertain economic conditions," he said. "So, these countries need special attention and opportunities and this is why a forum like this will help them." According to Musa, those countries don't even know where to start and so that is why they are keen to participate in the Islamic economic forum. "Many of them are in need of a much more constructive approach to develop themselves and that's why they are coming here to exchange views," he said. "And out of this, you can be sure that there will be a lot of ideas coming out, either at government level, government-to-government or more important, within the context of ordinary businesses from the countries concerned." Musa said Malaysia, which has always been at the forefront of the Islamic brand, is well-positioned within the Islamic world and able to facilitate those Muslim countries that needed help. "Malaysia is performing better as compared to other OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) countries and this is simply because we are blessed with natural resources," he said. With theme of "Gearing for Economic Resurgence", the WIEF 2010 will be opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak at the Kuala Lumpur

Convention Centre. The highlights will include a leadership panel to discuss leadership challenges in the new era, the global chief executive officer panel, a special leaders dialogue on climate change, a signature "Countries in Focus" session showcasing investment opportunities in selected developing OIC countries, and eight parallel sessions.

It will also be preceded by the Businesswomen Forum, the Young Leaders Forum and an exhibition to be opened by Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Mohd Yassin.

NEPAL

Ailing ex-Nepal PM Koirala shifted to daughter's house

Former Nepal Prime Minister and Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala has been moved to his daughter Deputy Prime Minister Sujata Koirala's residence in Mandhikhatar. Koirala left his Maharajgunj residence for Sujata's house, as it has better facilities, including a cabin that will be handy during medical emergencies, the Nepal news reports. The octogenarian has been unwell for several days, but had expressed a desire to stay with his daughter. Koirala, 87, had been staying at the rented bungalow since July 2008. Doctors involved in his treatment, have said there is no immediate need to take him abroad for treatment. They believe he is stable for now. Koirala is suffering from lung-related complexities caused by Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). He is being given oxygen round the clock. Sujata Koirala has been advised to return to Kathmandu immediately to take a final decision on Koirala's future treatment. She is likely to arrive this evening or early tomorrow.

Tibetans deported from Nepal face torture by Chinese authorities: US State

Tibetan refugees deported by Nepal for illegally entering its territory suffer torture at the hands of the Chinese authorities, the US State Department said Thursday. "Tibetans repatriated from Nepal reportedly suffered torture, including electric shocks, exposure to cold and severe beatings, and were forced to perform heavy physical labor," the report said, adding that the Chinese government's human rights record "remained poor and worsened in some areas". The report further said that China also imposed "tight government controls" on Tibetans, who faced restrictions on practicing their religion and severe repercussions if they tried to escape to Nepal. In the past two months, 36 Tibetans have been arrested while sneaking into Nepali territory through the open Tibet-Nepal border in Dolakha district. Following their arrest, the border police have handed them over to the Immigration Department in Kathmandu. The Tibet asylum-seekers face either deportation to Tibet, imprisonment in the country or are handed over to United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). In July 1, 2003, the US blocked Nepalese garment exports after Nepal deported 18 Tibetan asylum-seekers to China in May that year. The US also lodged a protest with the Nepal's ambassador to US over the incident. According to independent estimates, on average 2,500 Tibetans flee to India via Nepal each year to meet their Tibetan spiritual Guru Dalai Lama who heads a Tibetan

government in exile in India's hill station Dharmashala. Nepal is home to around 20,000 exiled Tibetans who began arriving in large numbers after the Dalai Lama fled Tibet following a failed uprising in 1959. Following pressure from Beijing, Nepal has tightened security along its border with Chinese autonomous region Tibet in an attempt to prevent influx of Tibetans in Nepal. Angry with the Tibetan exiles continuing with their anti-China protests in Nepal, the government had last year begun investigating the cases of Tibetans living in Nepal and said the ones without proper documents will be deported. The government has been saying that it will not allow its territory to be used for anti-China activity. Nepal supports 'One China' principle according to which Tibet and Taiwan are inalienable part of China

Pakistan, Nepal to translate literatures

PESHAWAR: Nepal Academy of Letters and Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) have decided to translate literatures of both the sides and initiate a programme of writers' exchange, said a PAL release issued here on Thursday. It said that PAL Chairman Fakhar Zaman is back home after attending SAARC Award 2009 meeting in Nepal. He was nominated for the meeting by the prime minister. Fakhar said that in Nepal he met a number of scholars and writers whom he briefed about PAL. He also met with Nepal Academy of Letters vice chancellor and they decided to translate literatures of both sides and initiate a programme of writers' exchange. They also decided to promote literature, culture and folklore. Fakhar Zaman also informed the Nepali writers about PAL's future projects of literary channel and FM radio. He also briefed them about the International Conference on Sufism and Peace. He explained that the conference would be held to fulfill Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's wish she had expressed in her inaugural speech on the occasion of last international conference in 1995. The conference will be inaugurated by President Asif Ali Zardari in which writers and scholars from Pakistan and abroad will participate.

Nepal DPM Sujata firm on printing MRPs in India

Nepal Deputy Prime Minister Sujata Koirala today said that the contract of printing the Machine Readable Passports (MRPs) should be granted to Government of India. Talking to reporters here, Koirala said the situation had become shameful due to weaknesses on the part of Nepal government and that the passport deal should be given to India. She further said she wonders why the proposal she took to the cabinet two months ago has not been approved yet. She said she chose the Indian company for the job as it had presented the proposal first. There is no risk of information leakage as the tasks of printing and photo numbering will be carried out in Nepal. India would even construct a building here for the printer, Kantipur quoted Koirala as, saying. Koirala also said the country has not been developed due to unnecessary suspicion over India. "If there is a security threat from giving MRP printing job to India, there will be equal threat from giving the job to any other company, Koirala said. As per the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) deadline, Nepal has to implement MRPs from April 1. Earlier, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) had directed the Nepal Foreign Ministry to revive the bidding for the MRP supply saying that imports from India would undermine the national security issues

Cervical cancer in Nepal: The prevention strategy

Half a million women worldwide develop cancer of the cervix every year of which 50 per cent die. Of the cancers reported every year, 80 per cent are in the developing countries. A recent multi-institution hospital-based cancer incidence data reveals cervical cancer as the most common cancer among women in Nepal. The cancer toll in our country is due to the fact that the majority of the cases are detected in the last stages. The patients report for treatment at a very advanced stage when the pain and misery to the patients are extreme. Furthermore, it also causes an economic impact on the family which is already devastated. Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer and a leading cause of cancer mortality among women worldwide. In most instances, cancer cervix can be prevented but is killing millions of woman worldwide. The majority of women with cervical cancer die in our country as screening and optimal treatment are not adequately available. However, screening awareness has begun even in our country, especially in institutions where proper screening is done as in the Gynae /Obs Deptment in Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital and other major hospitals. NGOs are also lending support for screening cancer cervix and one such NGO is Nepal Network for Cancer Treatment and Research (NNCTR) with its office in Banepa. This has helped in screening thousands of women, which helps a long in detecting cervical cancer at the very onset. A method to prevent this form of cancer in women is providing vaccination against Genital Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection to them before they become sexually active. HPV infection is the most common sexually transmitted infection among sexually active women. Around seventy five per cent of sexually active men and women have been exposed to HPV at some time or other of their lives. In the majority of cases, HPV 16 and 18 infections are observed. This clearly leads to the fact that if HPV infection is prevented, cervical cancer can be prevented. At Georgetown University Medical Center's Department of Pathology, the long research on HPV research led to a major breakthrough. The vaccine against HPV was developed in the late 1980s. HPV vaccine efficiency in preventing cervical dysplasia and cancer has been recommended globally on population based studies. The HPV vaccine has been approved by the

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The first step in the prevention of cervical cancer is to make a strong impact through screening 90 per cent of women who are sexually active in the risk age group of 30-55. That can do much to reduce the incidences of the form of cancer. However, taking up screening all the sexually active women in Nepal is a big challenge, and it is another matter to have the school children vaccinated with HPV vaccination before they become sexually active is another demand. Now vaccination is complementary to screening, so that our women do not develop cancer. It also aids in early detection if any so that the number of women who come for treatment at the last moment would decline. It would also help in checking the spread of this form of cancer among women. And, it would save the women from the pain and misery that the women have to go in the advanced stages of the cancer. As or the vaccination, three doses have been recommended: the second dose is given a month after the first dose, and the third one month after the second dose.

NNCTR received 3,300 vials of quadrivalent human papilloma virus (types 6, 11, 16, 18) recombinant vaccine (Gardasil,) as a gift by Australian Cervical Cancer Foundation (ACCF). ACCF aims to provide HPV cervical cancer vaccine for women in developing countries who cannot afford the relevant vaccination. HPV vaccine was offered to 1096 girls between the ages of 10 and 26 years, attending secondary schools. In total, 1091 (99.5%) received the second dose

and 1089 (99.3%) received the third dose of the vaccine. No serious vaccine related adverse events were reported except mild pain at the injection site in 7.8 per cent of the vaccine recipients.

With the progress done by NNCTR in vaccinating school going children, the government of Nepal has given permission to allow free of cost HPV vaccination to children. There are also plans to making this vaccination a part of the national immunization programmes. High cost and lack of awareness are the main reasons for difficulties in the implementation of the HPV vaccination program in a low resource country like Nepal.

HPV vaccine has been found to be safe with high acceptability in Nepalese school girls. However, a large population study with longer follow up is needed. It will really be a feat when all Nepalese school going girls will be vaccinated with HPV vaccination which could eventually lead to very few cervical cancer cases in the country. The prevention strategy through the vaccination programme backed up by proper screening on a regular basis would do much to fight the cancer that takes a heavy toll of women lives globally.

Nepali State Home Minister Steps Down

KATHMANDU, March 11 (Bernama) -- State Minister for Home Affairs of Nepal government Mohammad Rizwan Ansari has tendered his resignation to Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal on Tuesday, reports China's Xinhua news agency cited a local media as saying.

PM Nepal had on Wednesday demanded the resignation from Ansari. According to Thursday's The Himalayan Times, Ansari has mentioned "lack of appropriate working environment" and "no appropriate responsibility in the capacity of a state minister" as the main reasons of his resignation. Ansari's resignation has been accepted by Prime Minister Nepal. The Himalayan Times reported, citing Lilamani Paudyal, secretary at the Prime Minister's office. Ansari is the only minister from the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) in the Cabinet elected from direct voting in the CA election. While Madhav Kumar Nepal is senior leader of CPN-UML.

One-ninth of Nepal faces starvation, UN warns

One-ninth of Nepal's nearly 27 million population face starvation, the UN warned Wednesday.

Nearly half of Nepal's 75 districts, mainly in the west and mountain regions, are grappling with food shortages. An additional \$123.5 million is urgently needed to assist more than 3.4 million vulnerable people in Nepal, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said. Besides acute food shortage, Nepal is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters including floods, landslides and earthquakes. In 2009, nearly 152,000 people were affected by monsoon floods and landslides. OCHA said water, sanitation and hygiene measures were needed following a severe diarrhoea outbreak in western Nepal last year. 'As a country emerging from conflict, Nepal needs sustained international humanitarian support to see it through this fragile period of transition,' said John Holmes, UN under secretary-general for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

'Black' woman's tale drives Nepal rights campaign

'An estimated 28,000 children die every year from preventable diseases, some of them the consequences of severe malnutrition. Most of these problems can be solved with adequate donor support.' Rural households in Nepal are particularly vulnerable as their dependence on subsistence agriculture remains high. Inadequate funding for agriculture in 2009 compounded the effects of a severe winter drought. Appealing for funds, OCHA said it will be used to improve food security, fund nutrition projects, strengthen disaster preparedness and assist refugees.

Currently, Nepal hosts about 89,000 refugees from neighbouring Bhutan

Nepal's young lawmakers want more say

Nepal's young lawmakers are unhappy. They want more say in constitution drafting and also their seniors to complete the task at hand before May 28 — the deadline to adopt a new constitution. Cutting across party and ideological barriers, many of the new generation Constituent Assembly members have formed an informal group to pressurise senior leaders of all parties to draft the constitution soon. "We feel excluded from the key processes of constitution drafting. The new group would try and ensure a bigger role and pressurize seniors to work fast," said Sunil Babu Pant (37) from Communist Party of Nepal (United).

Following failure of the Constitutional Committee to submit first draft of the constitution on March 5, there's growing uncertainty on whether Nepal would be able to meet the deadline. This had led to a feeling of restlessness among the new generation lawmakers who have started a signature campaign of all CA members below 50 years of age seeking completion of the constitution drafting process on schedule. One third of the total 601 CA members are below 40 and over 430 of them (nearly two-third of the total members) have not crossed the age of 50

LIC (Nepal) launches new scheme

Issuing a press statement on Friday, the company said that the new scheme is probably the cheapest individual life insurance plan available in the country.

If a person aged 20 years took this policy for 20 years term for a risk cover of Rs 100,000, his premium will come to less than Re 1 a day. He can also enjoy accident benefit of up to Rs 300,000 on payment of additional Re 1 per thousand sum-assured

Nepal's young lawmakers want more say

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constitution drafting process on schedule. One third of the total 601 CA members are below 40 and over 430 of them (nearly two-third of the total members) have not crossed the age of 50.

More Focus On Reaching MDGs Needed, Development Officials Say

During a conference in London Thursday, development officials urged world leaders to "accelerate efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and [said] rich countries must make good on promises to boost aid to poorer nations," Helen Clark, the head of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), said while some progress has been made in the targets to reduce the numbers of people living in poverty and extreme hunger, more efforts would be needed to cut child mortality by two-thirds and maternal mortality by three-quarters, Reuters AlertNet reports. "UNDP says only eight out of 30 countries are on track to meet the MDGs on improving maternal health – the goal that the United Nations says has seen the least progress," the news service writes. To meet the development goals, Clark said governments would need to step up efforts to address gender inequalities: "If you're systematically excluding 50 percent of the population from the main benefit (of the goals) you're not going to get there." The article examines additional topics discussed during the conference, such as developed countries not following through on aid promises they made in 2005 (Rowling, 3/11). Britain's International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander announced several measures to help developing countries during the conference, including a \$228 million investment to GAVI Alliance, "for vaccines in the developing world, which could help prevent 4.2 million deaths over the next five years by protecting against diseases including pneumonia and diarrhoea," the U.K. Press Association reports (3/11). He also announced a strategy that will target 12 million children worldwide in an effort to fight global malnutrition, according to a Department for International Development press release (3/11).

"Alexander urged countries to use a U.N. summit in September to get aid efforts back on track," Mirror.co.uk News reports. "We need leaders to endorse an action plan which will benefit hundreds of millions of people in the developing world," Alexander said (3/12).

Such an action plan, Alexander said, should call for developed countries to double aid commitments for "basic education in low income countries from \$3 billion to \$6 billion a year" and "maternal, newborn and child healthcare from \$4 billion US dollars to \$8 billion a year," the Press Association writes. He also discussed a U.K. initiative "to help provide free healthcare in Nepal, Malawi, Ghana, Liberia, Burundi and Sierra Leone, and a fight against malnutrition in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Nepal, Nigeria and Zimbabwe

Former Nepal monarch backs Hindu state bid

The former monarch of Nepal, Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah backed the call for his country to be declared as a Hindu state, three years after his ouster and the Himalayan nation attaining the tag of being secular. He said this on the sidelines of religious function that was held at the Pashupati Bankali

temple here on Monday. Shah and his wife Komal attended the ongoing Rudrachandi Akhanda Mahayagnya, a Hindu fire ritual, organised for Nepal being reinstated as a Hindu nation. Speaking to reporters, Shah said that he would support the people if they have the desire to restore the country as a Hindu nation. "It does not matter as to who is in the government, but peace is needed and for that Hindu nation is required and long-live Hindu nation," said Shah. Kali Baba, a self-styled Hindu mystic has organised this Mahayagnya since March 1 for the establishment of peace and also for the Nepal having the status of a Hindu nation by contending that he is ready to sacrifice his life for Nepal being once again declared as a Hindu country.

Earlier, former Nepali Congress leader Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, also took part in this Mahayagnya, and expressed their support to the ritual's objective

Group seeks to restore Hinduism as secular Nepal's State religion

The marquee near Nepal's Pashupatinath temple in the Himalayan country's capital resembled a carnival with people trooping in from morning to night. But for some members of minority religions, including people among about 700 000 Christians who were given the privilege of religious freedom in 2006, the Hindu gathering has been a cause for concern. The group Christian Solidarity Worldwide has warned that Nepal's new constitution, which will go into effect in May, may not allow people to convert from one religion to another. Kalidas Dahal, a Hindu who claims to have supernatural powers, on 1 March began a nine-day prayer meeting aiming to show the coalition government the public support Hinduism still enjoys in Nepal. Besides ministers and lawmakers, the deposed king, Gyanendra Shah, also attended on 8 May. Once the only Hindu kingdom in the world, Nepal was declared a secular State by its parliament in 2006 and the monarchy was abolished two years later to punish the king for seizing power. Now, with a new constitution due in May, Hindu groups are pressuring the government to reinstate Hinduism as the State religion.

Dahal's demand is backed by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal, the only party in the country's parliament to support the monarchy and Hinduism. Though it won just four out of 601 seats during the 2008 election, the RPP-Nepal members are determined to show it is a force to be reckoned with.

On 22 February, the pro-Hindu party paralysed the Nepalese capital with a general strike and the next day it blockaded the prime minister's office and other ministries. It has warned of more protests unless its demands are met.

"We want a referendum before the new constitution is promulgated on May 28," RPP-Nepal chief Kamal Thapa told *Ecumenical News International*. "The people should be allowed to decide if monarchy and Hinduism should return." Thapa, the deposed king's home affairs minister, said his party conducted a signature campaign for the referendum. Despite opposition by the former Maoist guerrillas, whose decade-old armed uprising led to the abolition of the monarchy and State religion, more than two million of Nepal's 27 million people supported the call. In a nation where nearly 75 percent of the people are Hindus, Thapa says Hinduism is needed to preserve Nepal's cultural identity. "If the new constitution is enforced without the

referendum, people will not obey it and there will be no peace," Thapa warns. Some of the ruling parties may also support the bid for a Hindu nation. "The huge turnout sends out a signal," says Hridayesh Tripathi, a lawmaker from the ethnic Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party, whose ministers attended Dahal's ritual. Senior leaders from the Nepali Congress, the biggest party in the government, have also been at the ritual gathering. "Religion is a matter of private faith and remains above the constitution," Tripathi asserts. "As long as people want religion, the government can't oust it." But Nepal's Christian community is not showing any signs of panicking yet. "There will always be some opposition to secularism," says Anthony Sharma, Nepal's first Roman Catholic bishop, who was appointed by the Vatican in 2007. "We don't want to speculate on what's going to happen in future. The [previous] constitution of 1991 was a progressive one; we hope the new one will be even more so."

PABSON gets new executive body

Private and Boarding Schools' Organisation Nepal (PABSON) today made public its 14-point Rupandehi Declaration, five days after wrapping up its three-day national convention which unanimously elected a 53-member executive committee led by Rajesh Khadka. Organising a press meet in the Capital, the professional union of institutionalised schools stated that it would make every effort not to pay the one per cent service charge, which the incumbent government revised in its budget for the current fiscal year. The Maoist-led government had announced to levy the same five per cent. "The impractical and irrelevant charge should be immediately revoked respecting the children's fundamental rights and international practices," read a statement issued by Khadka. "The government should put an end to pressures exerted on schools on the pretext of not paying the tax while running higher grades, transferring students and holding examinations." PABSON has sought a constitutional guarantee of the right to operate private educational institutions. It has asked the government and political parties to commit to making schools free of bandhs, strikes and politicisation. Scholarships provided by the state and non-state providers have been sought even for students studying in private schools. The organisation has demanded its representation in all committees and bodies concerned formed by the government. Chairman Khadka asked the government to urgently introduce Institutional School Education Act, reasoning that there was no specific law to govern 8,000 plus private schools operating across the country while there is one to govern each university.

PABSON has also sought training, seminars and foreign visits for private school teachers on the government expenses on par with their public school counterparts. Relief for schools victimised during the decade-long Maoist insurgency and halting permissions to conduct new schools where they are not feasible are other demands. Soft loans as well as support on building educational and physical infrastructure for private schools have been sought as well.

Former chairman Umesh Shrestha said unity will be forged among organisations promoting cause of private educational institutions. He added that the new team will make efforts to purchase land and construct a building for its central office. "Ninety per cent private schools are facing financial crunch. They have not been able to pay the teachers adequately," Khadka told The Himalayan Times on Wednesday. "The remaining schools are ready to assist the government by helping public schools in other reasonable ways. We have expertise in managing educational institutions which the government can cash on."

On the talk of nationalising private educational institutions by some political outfits, he

dismissed the idea as unproductive. “The government is unable to manage public schools, the schools show poor performance every year. I don’t think it can take extra burden by acquiring private schools. Even if it were to do so, it will not be productive,” he clarified

Nepal reshuffles constitution schedule for 10th time

KATHMANDU: With just 80 days left, Nepal’s interim parliament on Tuesday reshuffled the schedule for the new constitution for the 10th time after its 601 members failed to keep the first major date in drafting the new statute. Though the first draft of the new constitution, regarded as the cornerstone of the peace agreement that ended a decade of Maoist insurgency in 2006, was to have been completed by March 5, Nepal’s squabbling parties are yet to begin the task. The Constitutional Committee, that has the mandate of drafting the preliminary version, can start its task only after the 11 committees that have been asked to address the different issues submit their recommendations. However, so far, only two of the committees have done so. With growing fears that the leaders, concentrated only on power, would miss the May 28 deadline for enforcing the new constitution and would try to extend it, public pressure has doubled on the major parties to get back on track. The major 25 parties subsequently met on Tuesday to pledge for the benefit of the public that they would speed up the work and implement the new constitution in time. However, it remains to be seen if the promise is kept. Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda said after the meeting that the new constitution could be promulgated in time if the parties reached an agreement on the restructuring of the state as well as the form of government. The Maoists are pushing for a presidential form of government and the restructuring of Nepal into 14 autonomous states. But the two other biggest parties, the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and Nepali Congress (NC), want the prime minister to head the government and are asking for different numbers of states. Given the past record of the parties, it is doubtful if the disagreements would be patched up within the new deadline. Now the Constitutional Committee has been given a month more to pen the first draft of the constitution.

Let alone reach an agreement with the Maoists, the UML has not even been able to see eye to eye with its biggest ruling partner, the NC. The post of the governor of the central bank, the Election Commission, the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority and other critical constitutional posts have been vacant for nearly two months since the two parties have failed to reach an agreement on power-sharing

IM has shifted to Nepal after Bangladesh crackdown

KOLKATA: The terror threat to Kolkata seems to be getting stronger. Indian Mujahideen (IM) operatives from Nepal had conducted a recce of the city around four months ago, say intelligence officers who are grilling Salman Ahmed alias Chhotu, an IM terrorist wanted in several terrorist attacks across India. Security agencies started tracking Salman, a native of Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh, after the September 18, 2008, serial blasts in Delhi that killed 30 people and injured 100. He was arrested near the UP-Nepal border a few days ago. According to sources in various agencies that are grilling Salman, he has revealed that most IM operatives have shifted base from Bangladesh to Nepal after the massive crackdown by Bangladesh Rapid Action Battalion in the past few months. Another suspected IM operative, Shehjad Ahmed, who was nabbed in the first week of February from UP, has corroborated this, saying IM has strengthened its Nepal unit for

operations in eastern India. Salman has told police that Kolkata is very much on the terror radar, say sources. A few weeks ago, IM operatives had visited Kolkata to activate their sleeper cells.

Cultural King? Politics has suddenly slipped out from the hold of the Nepali politicians. With the remaining eighty days left for the new constitution draft, the muscle men of the republican order too appear to be in a mood to hide them for fear of being shoved by the common men for having failed to draft the constitution on time as the “heroes and builders of new Nepal” beamingly promised some twenty two months back, if one were to recall.

The politics thus is set to take several nasty swings in the remaining eighty days.

But what after the eighty days expire and the nation doesn't get a constitution as promised? This is what has been bogging the minds of the leaders manning the republican order and also of the population. No less apprehensive is the international community which too in some way or the other remained instrumental in fracturing the previous order which not only sidelined the Nepali Monarchy but distributed dreams and bouquets of assurances to the Nepal's silent majority here that things will “improve” in a new set up called the Republican order.

However, things remained the same or even went down and the international community's “secret” assistance provided to Nepali parties all went to the dogs which too appears to have not worked but instead their “tacit” alliances with the subservient Nepali parties have, all put together, boomeranged thus exposing the international community's real intents and motives as well. Accept the share of the blame that the community deserves. Yet, charging the international community off the cuff will not be a solution to the sort of politics that has already deviated from its regular course and is expected to go berserk immediately after the expiry of the date of the draft of the new constitution-May 27, 2010, late evening. The Nepalese leaders are solely to be blamed for all this unnecessary delay that they could have avoided had they been “sincere and honest” to what they promised May 28, 2008 while declaring Nepal a republican and secular state. High places sources predict that a sort of political blizzard will grip the nation come May 28, 2010, for obvious political reasons. Panic stricken Indian establishment in the mean time has been organizing several meets inviting key Nepali leaders, media men, informers and convincing them all to accept the revival of a sort of “cultural monarchy” should the country defer from the constitution writing date as declared some two years ago. The idea is to revive the Nepali monarchy but with its wings cut. The proposition is that the Monarchy can survive in Nepal without harming the existence of the republican order which is now in force. The idea is not that bad but how can two “tigers” be told to remain in the same cage? This is a Himalayan question.

If the Indian idea worked then the national population will observe regular tussles in between the cultural monarch and the titular country's Head. In such a regular brawl, the majority of the Hindus in Nepal will by compulsion or by choice prefer the prevalence of the Monarchy as a dominant force as it did in the past. The religion factor and nothing more than that. The Republican Head of the State will thus be sidelined by the population which may definitely contain the seed of yet another revolt in the *country*.

But what is more important here is to guess as to what would happen to this country if the Constitution is not drafted on time? The chaos is for sure to grip the nation. Political uncertainty too will be at its peak which may be of advantage to some interested political parties to cash in upon from the prevailing chaos and uncertainty. The Maoists will definitely wish to take full advantage from the prevailing frenzied situation then. Given the fact that most of the sagacious leaders of this country have been saying in blunt words that the CA tenure can't be extended which means that the CA will cease to exist beginning May 27, 2010 late evening.

In such a possible event, what will happen to the post of the country's President who is himself a CA elected political personality?

Constitutional experts differ. A tougher section of the experts from this domain claim that since the President is elected from the CA body, he would be the first one to get discharged from his duties. Others put it otherwise in a somewhat responsible manner. This section claims that since the country can't remain in a political vacuum for long thus the nation needed the presence of the President to handle the situation thereafter. Or else, say this section of the constitutional experts, the Nepal Army will have to jump into the political scene. And if the Nepal Army once takes the charge of the nation then what will happen to the country and its population is anybody's guess. South Asian experience is there for all to see and learn from.

Whether the President's position remains intact or becomes redundant or even the Army stages a coup d'état, things in Nepal will not improve but instead deteriorate in a dramatic way to the extent that there is the fear of "foreign army intervention" to take the Nepali Himalayan turmoil under control. By the way, if foreign army enters into Nepal, per chance, then that would even escalate the hotchpotch more for obvious reasons. The rumor that Nepal's ex-King is shortly visiting China too, if true, will have some political connotations underneath. The sidelined monarch recently visited New Delhi and his talked visit to China may mean, analysts infer, to convince the annoyed Beijing officials that China will remain safe in Nepal if his Institution is revived. Needless to say, both New Delhi and Beijing have already felt the brunt of the absence of Nepali monarchy in Nepal. By extension, high placed sources claim, if the ex-monarch is to visit China then he is doing so as per the wishes of the Indian establishment. The Beijing invitation has already come to him; however, Beijing is confused on how to greet the Nepal sidelined King. The protocol factor. Others even claim that both New Delhi and Beijing stand now convinced that in order to preserve their respective security interests in Nepal, both the giants in the South and North need this now sidelined institution. Enough has already enough for both Indian and China. Finally, if so, then will the major parties accept the imposition of the monarchy once again even if it is in the cultural garb? By and large, the country is heading towards a political disaster whose careful handling is needed or else Nepal as a nation-state may or may not exist. The likelihood for both remains kicking and alive

Market reverts to bearish mode

The secondary market reverted back to the bearish mode this week, which was temporarily uplifted by the revised stipulations on margin lending and promoter shares last week. The Nepal Stock Exchange (Nepse) index (-5.40 percent) closed at 486.25 points, its three-week low point. The market also experienced significant decrease in turnover (-30.02 percent), which can be attributed to the news that the overall economy of Nepal will remain stagnant and the growth rate will further stumble to 3.5 percent. Standard Chartered Bank (+Rs 74) registered the highest turnover for the week and accounting for 10 percent of the total volume. Despite Nepal Credit and Commerce Bank (+Rs 12) regaining its losses from last week, the Commercial Banking sub-index (-3.87 percent) ended the week in the red zone with Global Bank (-Rs 32) and Citizens International Bank (-Rs 49) declining.

Nepal Aawas Bikas Beeta (-Rs 32) dragged down the Development Banking sector (-1.56 percent) despite Malika Bikas Bank (+Rs 18) topped the gainers chart. Likewise, the Finance sector (-0.82 percent) did not fare too well as Pokhara Finance's (-Rs 74) price readjustment process hit the index. Similarly, the 'Others' sector (-10.51 percent) posted the biggest losses amongst the sub-indices as the stock price of Nepal Doorsanchar Company (-Rs 83) readjusted

post-book closure. Conversely, the Hydropower sector (+0.28 percent) managed to defy the market trend due to the appreciation in the share price of Chilime Hydropower (-Rs 35) which was one of the top gainers. Likewise, the Insurance sector (+0.25 percent) made marginal gains with the climb in the share price of Life Insurance Company Nepal (+Rs 20) and Lumbini General Insurance (+Rs 5). Promoter Shares of Bank of Kathmandu (-Rs.260) and Annapurna Finance (-Rs 325) accounted for 11.75 percent of the market volume. Amongst other highlights, NMB Bank (-Rs 2) is issuing ordinary shares worth 715,000 units as further public offering. Nepal Housing and Merchant Finance is giving out 20 percent cash dividend and 19 percent bonus shares. Mahalaxmi Finance has extended its 1:3.3 right shares issue date till March 14. Capital Merchant and Finance is giving out 8.42 percent cash dividend. Prudential Finance is closing its book on March 16 for 10.52 percent cash dividend. Infrastructure Development Bank (-Rs.25) is closing its book on March 22 for 5 percent cash dividend and 10 percent bonus shares. On the IPO front, Nilgiri Vikas Bank started issuing ordinary shares from March 12, while Prime Life Insurance and Surya Life Insurance closed its IPO issuance this week. Shares have also started trading from Narayanghat. However, the weakened economy outlook has impacted investors' confidence and technical analysis shows a lot of volatility indicating that the market will witness a lot of uncertain movements in the coming weeks.

SRILANKA

Sri Lanka gives green light to Indian consul office in Jaffna

The Sri Lankan government has given the go ahead to set up an Indian Consul office in Jaffna. The decision follows high level talks between Sri Lankan authorities and Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao, *Lakbima* reported yesterday. Discussions have been held on ways and means up supporting Jaffna development projects through the new office, it said. Besides the Indian High Commission located in Colombo, India has a consul office in Kandy too.

The new office in Jaffna would be the second to be set up regionally

Sri Lanka's ex-army chief ends fast

Colombo: Sri Lanka's former army chief General Sarath Fonseka, arrested over the charges of conspiring to topple the government, has called off his hunger strike after being allowed to speak to his daughters via his wife's mobile phone. Fonseka suspended his fast unto death on Tuesday after the military granted him permission to talk to his two daughters in the US, his wife Anoma Fonseka said. She said that the military had contacted her late Monday evening, asking her to visit her husband immediately with her mobile phone.

India worked against Sri Lankan president: minister

"I went to see my husband at around 11 in the night after the military called me. He spoke to his daughter's through my mobile phone and now he is a bit relieved," she was quoted as saying by Daily Mirror Online. The military had earlier provided telephone facilities to Fonseka which he had refused insisting that he would stop his fast only if he was given his wife's mobile phone. Meanwhile, the army has said that the former general, who has been detained since February after being defeated in the Jan 26 presidential election, will be court martialed in the next few

days. The summary of evidence over the charges against Fonseka has already been completed and handed over to army commander over the past weekend.

German police arrest six Tamil separatists

Fonseka will be tried on over five charges under the Army Act and will face a court martial within the next few days, Army spokesman Major General Prasad Samarasingha told Daily Mirror Online. Samarasingha said that legal officers in the Army Directorate of Legal Services are now in the process of reviewing the contents and maintain that there is a prima facie case against Fonseka on more than five charges. The Army Commander, in receipt of legal consultations, was expected to appoint the court martial for trial in the next few days, He added.

The summary of evidence, recorded by Army Chief of Staff Major General Daya Rathnayaka, was completed within a period of 22 days after obtaining evidence from 35 individuals, including 22 army personnel, seven police officers and six civilians, he said

Canada asks Sri Lanka to start talks with Tamil groups

Canada has asked Sri Lanka to start talks and the reconciliation process with the Tamil groups, saying such a step is crucial for lasting peace in the country. "After 30 years of war, reconciliation is crucial for lasting peace in Sri Lanka. Canada awaits to see what steps the Government of Sri Lanka will take towards this reconciliation," Deepak Obhrai, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, told Sri Lanka's new High Commissioner Chitranganee Wagiswara during a meeting. "Canada urges the government of Sri Lanka for an early safe return and resettlement of the approximately 100,000 individuals who remain displaced," Obhrai said. He said: "Canada is encouraged by the return of close to 160,000 internally displaced persons to their homes." Obhrai pointed out that Canada encourages the government of Sri Lanka to allow access by NGOs and the media to camps and resettlement areas and to continue to pursue effective coordination with humanitarian agencies and donors. "It is high time that the government of Sri Lanka lift the state of emergency as that the conflict is over," he said. Obhrai told the High Commissioner that Sri Lanka remains a priority for Canada

Jaipur foot for Sri Lankan amputees

Amputees in Sri Lanka, who lost their limbs during the prolonged civil war in the country, will now be able to lead a near normal life with the help of the Jaipur foot - artificial legs made in Rajasthan that are known for being cosmetically and functionally close to the human limb. A team of 19 skilled technicians of the Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti (BMVSS), the makers of the famous Jaipur foot, is holding a camp in Sri Lankan capital Colombo to provide about 1,000 amputees with artificial limbs.

The team, led by A.B. Sharma, would provide the artificial limbs, considered to be the most inexpensive and cost effective in the world, at

the camp at Vavuniya, starting Friday. It will end April 10. The team would provide the Jaipur foot and the Jaipur knee free of cost to the victims who lost their limbs during the civil war in the northern part of Sri Lanka. D.R Mehta, the founder and chief patron of the BMVSS, said that so far the organisation has fitted more than 370,000 artificial limbs around the world, including in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan and Sierra Leone. 'The mobility earned through the artificial limb helps amputees to change their lives and earn their livelihood,' he said. He said the Jaipur foot fitment has been provided to landmine victims and others in foreign countries. The BMVSS has so far conducted 36 such camps in various parts of the world, particularly those countries that witnessed wars in which thousand of people became disabled. The beauty of the Jaipur foot is its lightness and mobility. Those who wear it can run, climb trees, pedal bicycles and drive a car - all without the aid of a stick or any other support

UN Secretary General's Expert Group to assess Accountability in Sri Lanka

It is reported that the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) had expressed "...concerns over the lack of progress on political reconciliation, the treatment of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the setting up of an accountability process in Sri Lanka." The report adds that the UNSG "...intends to move forward on a group of experts which will advise....on setting broad parameters and standards on the way ahead on establishing accountability concerning Sri Lanka" (The Island, March 10, 2010).

The joint statement signed between the UN and the Government does not set out a time frame to assess "progress" on these three issues, and very correctly so in view of their very nature. For instance, political reconciliation involves not only the Government but the other political parties including minority parties, since reconciliation of any kind is not unilateral. And with the alignment of political forces in readiness for the forthcoming Parliamentary elections, political reconciliation must necessarily await the emergence of fresh political leaderships with new strengths and new agendas with which to forge solutions that would foster political reconciliation. Therefore, "moving forward on a expert group" to advise the UNSG until the needed dynamics are in place, is premature.

With regard to the second issue of IDPs, India's Foreign Secretary, Nirupama Rao on her recent visit just last week said she was satisfied with the "progress" made by Sri Lanka. In fact she is reported as stating that Sri Lanka had "made considerable success in resettling IDPs and that "this issue had now gone away from the attention of the international community"(Daily Mirror, March 8, 2010).

Therefore, of the three issues of concern to the UNSG, the issue of political reconciliation would have to await new political formations in Parliament, and the issue of IDPs is a non-issue, an assertion coming from an international diplomat whose credentials surpass those of experts sent by the UN, judging from past experiences. This leaves only the single issue of an "accountability process in Sri Lanka".

Issue of accountability

The obvious question is: "Accountable to whom or what"? Is it to the community of nations represented by the UN, or to its Secretary General? If it is to the latter, the UNSG has no authority to do so unless it is the wish of the entire assembly, which incidentally is not the case. In the case of Sri Lanka the UNSG has decided to be selective and pick Sri Lanka for reasons best known to himself. This is what makes it unacceptable because the UNSG has no authority to be selective. If on the other hand, he is initiating action on behalf of the UN assembly, he has to initiate action in respect of other countries for actions in Iraq and Afghanistan since the UN Charter is based on the "principle of equality of all its Members".

This concept is recognized in Article 2 (1) of the CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS (1945) which states: "The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members". Furthermore, Article 2 (7) states: "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII".

The issue of enforcement under Chapter VII has no relevance because this Chapter relates to "Action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression" none of which exist at this point in time in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, acts of aggression exist in Afghanistan. Therefore, the UNSG has every right to invoke the provisions of the Charter in regard to this conflict. However, this is not the case with Iraq.

Aggression in Iraq was initiated on false premises, by invading a member state during which over a million men, women and children perished and over four and a half million persons were displaced. If an assessment of accountability is to be initiated there is no case more deserving of such an investigation by the community of nations, than Iraq. But since some states are more sovereign and equal than others no such action would be initiated by any UNSG. Under the circumstances, the only protection the rest that are numerically more, such as Sri Lanka possess is to initiate a resolution to prevent the UNSG from resorting to unilateral action without the sanction of the entire Assembly when it comes to accountability issues relating to matters within a nation's domestic jurisdiction.

In the meantime, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is reported to have presented a report to the Council stating that "she is convinced that Sri Lanka should undertake a full reckoning of the grave violations committed by all sides during the war, and that the international community can be helpful in this regard" (The Sunday Times, March 7, 2010). Whether such an investigation would be helpful to Sri Lanka is a matter for Sri Lanka to decide. Furthermore, the High Commissioner should realize that Sri Lanka has the capability to handle such a "reckoning" without international help, should Sri Lanka decide that it would be in her best interest to do so.

There is however a role for the international community with regard to containing violations during conflicts of a non-international character, particularly because such conflicts are what threaten global peace as recognized by US Defense Secretary Gates. Conflicts of a non-international nature are governed by Additional Protocol II of 1977. Such conflicts do not have guidelines similar to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. Just as much as Article 3 in these Conventions was expanded due to the inadequacy of one

article to cover non-international conflicts resulting in the formulation of Additional Protocol II of 1977, there is much valuable work to be done by the international community to provide guidelines concerning the conduct during non-international or unconventional conflicts which come within the domestic jurisdiction of member states.

For instance, the Geneva Conventions give guidelines in the case of combatants surrendering to an opposing army. But no such guidelines exist in the case of suicide bombers, as it was the case with the LTTE; a practice that is being copied by others engaged in non-international conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. If a suicide bomber decides to hide behind a white flag is he/she entitled to the same treatment as a regular soldier, even if a weapon is surrendered? And even if a weapon is surrendered, what guarantee is there that a suicide device is not kept hidden? What additional precautions can be taken in the case of a suicide bomber, and how can a suicide bomber be identified from a regular soldier. Another is the forcible use of civilians as a human shield; a practice that was exploited by the LTTE in Sri Lanka, and is now practiced in Afghanistan/Pakistan. It is evident from the foregoing that there is much productive work that the UNSG, UN High Commissioners and other international experts could engage in, such as developing guidelines in order to prevent violations and protect civilians during conflicts, without engaging in accountability exercises after the fact.

Another issue is the confusion as to what constitutes "crimes against humanity" versus "war crimes". Neither is specifically addressed by the Geneva Conventions or the Protocols to the degree it is addressed in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Therefore, the High Commissioner and his/her staff supported by experts would be making an invaluable contributions bring clarity to these issues instead of responding to pressures brought on by parties motivated by parochial interests.

Conclusions

Instead of attempting to set up an accountability process in Sri Lanka we wish to urge the UNSG and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to use experts to develop guidelines for the benefit of member states to use in the case of conflicts of a non-international nature. Such guidelines should cover the issues relating to civilians in conflict, 'safe zones' and how they are to function, etc., so that they are not abused, as well as how to deal with suicide bombers and their rights as an absolute minimum.

The fact that the UN has failed to address these pressing issues reflects poorly on the priorities set by the UN and its staff. This is evident from the fact that after the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Protocols of 1977, no meaningful action has been taken in the last 33yr to provide guidelines to member states. If sincere and credible efforts are to be exerted to make the world a safer place, the UN has to stop catering to pressure groups and their narrow agendas, and set itself an accountability process within the UN itself in its pursuance of contributing towards improving the human condition

Sri Lanka gives green light to Indian consul office in Jaffna The Sri Lankan government has given the go ahead to set up an Indian Consul office in Jaffna. The decision follows high level talks between Sri Lankan authorities and Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao, *Lakbima* reported yesterday. Discussions have been held on ways and means up supporting Jaffna

development projects through the new office, it said. Besides the Indian High Commission located in Colombo, India has a consul office in Kandy too.

The new office in Jaffna would be the second to be set up regionally

Sri Lanka says UN war crimes panel 'unwarranted'

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka's president Saturday rejected a proposed panel by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to look into alleged war crimes during the island's civil war as "unwarranted and uncalled for." President Mahinda Rajapakse views Ban's plan for the panel to advise him on "accountability issues" involving the final phase of fighting with Tamil rebels last year as interference in Sri Lanka's internal affairs, his office said. Rajapakse was "emphatic" in his objections when Ban, in a telephone conversation Friday, disclosed his intention to set up the panel of experts, the president's office said in a statement. The president had "pointed out that the intention of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to appoint a panel of experts to advise him (Ban) on Sri Lanka is totally uncalled for and unwarranted," the statement said.

"No such action had been taken about other states with continuing armed conflicts on a large scale, involving major humanitarian catastrophes and causing the deaths of large numbers of civilians due to military action." Rajapakse told Ban the appointment of such a panel would compel Sri Lanka to take "necessary and appropriate action," the president's office said, without disclosing details.

There was no immediate comment from the UN office in Colombo. The United Nations has repeatedly called for investigations into alleged rights abuses and war crimes said to have been committed in the last weeks of fighting that culminated in May with the killing of the top rebel leadership. Sri Lanka has resisted calls for any investigation, saying no civilians were harmed by government forces in its fight. Sri Lanka insists it carried out a "humanitarian operation" to free Tamil civilians from rebel control. However, the United Nations has reported that at least 7,000 civilians perished during the last four months of fighting, with many more wounded. The UN has also accused Tamil Tigers of holding civilians as human shields

Sri Lanka urged to end witch hunt against the media and NGOs

The Sri Lankan government should end its harassment of journalists and activists and take steps against those making threats, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International said in a joint statement. Since the January 2010 presidential election, the government has engaged in a campaign to silence and discredit journalists and nongovernmental organizations. A recently leaked document, which appears to be a government surveillance list of more than 30 journalists and activists, significantly raises concerns about the safety of the people on the list, the organizations said.

“The Sri Lankan government is conducting a carefully coordinated witch hunt aimed at discrediting critics of the government,” said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. This is extremely dangerous and irresponsible in a country where journalists and activists have often been threatened and killed. On March 4, the directors of two highly respected Sri Lankan organizations, the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) and Transparency International

Sri Lanka (TISL), wrote a joint letter to President Mahinda Rajapaksa expressing their grave concern about a press report of the government's apparent surveillance list. The list places the directors of the CPA and TISL among several people in the top category, presumably meaning that they are under particularly close surveillance. News about the government surveillance list emerged amidst a government campaign in the media to discredit nongovernmental organizations. In several statements since February 20, government officials have made vague and unproven accusations against various groups, claiming that they have attempted to destabilize democracy in Sri Lanka. Concerns about the safety of individuals on the alleged government surveillance list are heightened because of previous death threats and attacks, the organizations said. In September 2008 unknown persons threw two grenades at the TISL director's house. In August 2009 the director of the CPA received an anonymous death threat by mail. The authorities have failed to hold anyone accountable for either of the incidents. Both the CPA and TISL played a crucial role in monitoring the January presidential election, reporting on electoral violations and the government's misuse of state resources to campaign in favor of the incumbent, Mahinda Rajapaksa. This smacks of retaliation for reporting on violations during the presidential election," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific director. "Despite the elections and the end of the war against the Tamil Tigers, the government seems to have a hard time getting rid of the habit of repression

Sri Lanka to get third LPG supplier: official

The Sri Lanka Ports Authority is in talks with suppliers of liquid petroleum gas to introduce a third player in the local market once a storage terminal is built in a new port, an official said. SLPA chairman Priyath Wickrama said the LPG storage terminal would come up in the new port of Hambantota now under construction on the south coast for which foreign investors are being invited.

"We hope to introduce another LPG supplier," he told a news conference. "There are now two players in the market. The government has got three requests and we're already in talks with a couple of players." Royal Dutch Shell and Laugfs and the two local suppliers at present. Wickrama said a formal request for proposals, inviting investors for a free trade zone in the new port, is expected to be issued by April. The RFP has been delayed by months. The SLPA was already holding talks with foreign investors keen to invest in the new port complex which would be a 'free port' with no taxes charged. "Twenty-four foreign investors have already asked for land near the Hambantota port," Wickrama said.

The port was attractive given its location just off the main East-West trade route and would give investors access to the south Asia region, he said.

The government wants to invite investments for cement and fertilizer bagging, vehicle assembly and transshipment, ship repair and ship supply services, apart from LPG, Wickrama said.

The Prime Minister says a new march of Sri Lankan economic development will commence after 8th of next month Prime Minister Rathnasiri Wickremanayake says a new march of Sri Lankan economic development will commence after 8th of next month. The Prime Minister explained that to achieve this target the government cannot be confined to circulars anymore. It is vital to have a stable parliament to implement rapid development programme. The Prime Minister requested the general public grant two third majority to government in upcoming general election. The Prime Minister was speaking at a ceremony held at Thakshila Junior School in Horana. A new

computer laboratory was vested in students at the occasion. Migrate Australia funds for the computer laboratory project. The Prime Minister further said that Sri Lanka will be upgraded as a one of developed nations in Asia in coming years according to the government plans.

SRI LANKA TOURISM IN TRANSITION

Sri Lanka Tourism declared 2011 as 'Visit Sri Lanka Year,' in June last year. Former Tourism Minister, Milinda Moragoda, took this forward-looking decision, well before Sri Lanka's return to normalcy following the end of the decades-long armed conflict in mid May 2009. That decision was a calculated one, and certainly was not based on flimsy anticipation of changes to occur, for the minister fully recognized the difficult ground situation during the first quarter of 2009 resulting from the world economic crisis. But, for him, the need to revive Sri Lanka's long-suffering tourist industry, hamstrung by the conflict, was of highest priority.

In June 2009, a jubilant President Rajapaksa, in his message to mark the launch of Sri Lanka Tourism's new brand and logo, set an ambitious target of 2.5 million tourists by 2016, said, "I trust the new direction of Sri Lanka Tourism will position Sri Lanka as a premier tourist destination of Asia." Following that he declared 2011 as 'Visit Sri Lanka Year.'

Minister Moragoda's choice of the year 2011 is totally fitting, and in hindsight, amazingly visionary. It was clear to him that Sri Lanka's conflict that had raged for nearly three decades, would end sooner than later. Against that background, he thought it was prudent to prepare the ground for a promotional campaign to rebrand and reposition Sri Lanka as the premier tourist destination of Asia, as the president later pointed out. There were other compelling reasons as well. One was the 'Cricket World Cup' scheduled to take place in 2011, with Sri Lanka been chosen as a location for several games. Needless to say, the World Cup would, not only bring to Sri Lanka, tens of thousands of cricket fans from all over the world, but also provide a vicarious opportunity to millions of cricket fans glued to their televisions throughout the series, to feast their eyes on the paradise island in the Indian Ocean, and get lured to visit.

That is not all. Year 2011 has particular significance for Sri Lanka Tourism. Sri Lanka's cautious entry into the world of tourism took place in 1966, with the passage of Tourism Act No. 10 of 1966. That was exactly 45 years earlier, and five years short of a half a century.

Both president Rajapaksa and Minister Moragoda shared a common view. That was that Sri Lanka is a unique tourist destination, with immense potential for development, but stymied by factors beyond the control of the industry or the country. Despite the attractions the country has to offer tourists, since 1983, the arrival figures were short of half a million, with the exception of 2004, when the country recorded more than 550,000 visitors. Yet, that figure was much less than the natural growth, if one was to take 1983 figure as the base. On the other hand, countries such as Cambodia and Laos had recorded impressive tourist arrival figures since the wars in those two countries ended. Sri Lanka, blessed with natural beauty, history and monuments that go back to pre-Christian era, and bewitching diversity in fauna and flora, certainly has better tourist potential than many countries in the region.

The popular view was that a booming tourist industry serves only a handful of well-established conglomerates. Others think that tourism is synonymous with bright lights in five star hotels, cocktails and canapés. In essence, they thought that tourism is a rich man's pastime, with no

benefits trickling down to the man on the street. However, Minister Moragoda was clear on tourism's role in the economy. In an interview published in the July 2009 edition of 'Business Today,' the Minister made him clear. He said, " As a whole, it comprises a wide variety of business in a variety of sizes from blue-chip to micro -enterprises, including business, services and operators such as airlines, railways, coaches, and cruise ships, tour operators, hoteliers, guides, destination management companies, conference organisers, events planners, restaurateurs, retailers, street vendors, king coconut vendors- to name only a few."

This view runs parallel to that of Amitabh Khan, chief architect of 'Incredible India,' who voiced his thoughts in his book 'Branding India- An incredible Story': 'The chasm between potential and performance was widened as a result of various factors, the worst being the perception that tourism was an elitist activity set in the background of five-star hotels, recreation and pleasure. Somehow the actual benefits of tourism- its multiplier effect on employment, infrastructure, and community growth-all seemed to have been miserably lost.'

Yes, Minister Morogoda did mention among the many who would benefit from tourism, the king coconut vendors, who would display bunches of golden- hued nuts to the delight of visitors. The list is endless. The reference to king coconut sellers perhaps better explains the trickledown effect of tourism and its positive impact on lives, from marble- floored ballrooms in five star hotels, with glittering chandeliers in the city, to simple wattle and daub abodes of vendors selling handicraft to lace products in rural Sri Lanka.

There are 125,000 Sri Lankans who directly or indirectly make a living from tourism. This figure does not take into account the informal sector that provides exotic fruits, fresh vegetables, harvest from the sea, flowers from the hill country, and, of course, the inimitable king coconut to quench the thirst of tourists with tanned skins and parched throats. If the average number of persons depending on one breadwinner is taken as four, we are talking in excess of 600,000 people who depend on tourism for a living. If we achieve the target of 2.5 million people benefiting from tourism, which is close to a fivefold increase from the current figure, we are talking of three million people depending on tourism by 2016. In fact, those who are currently in the trade and understand it know that this is a rather conservative figure, and that the real numbers should be well above this.

Minister Moragoda, who had a vision for the tourism industry, understood reality. "In a glamorous industry such as tourism, the temptation can be to focus on the PR, rather than the substance," was his conclusion after a thorough study of the industry to address this tendency, he concentrated on policy- making as well as institution and capacity-building. That he did by giving effect to the Tourism Act No 38 of 2005, which, though adopted by parliament, was not implemented for nearly two years, until October 2007. In doing so, he set in motion four institutions to charter the course of the industry, viz. Tourism Development Authority, the apex body; Tourism Promotion Bureau, the promotional arm; the Convention Bureau, responsible for promoting MICE related activities; and the Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management, to provide formal training for young men and women with an aptitude for the hospitality industry.

It is true that splitting up the former Ceylon Tourist Board that had endured for over four decades was not an easy decision. In fact, more than two years later, there are debates, still, whether it was indeed a prudent decision. However, rather than trying to put Humpty Dumpty back together again, what needs to be done is to transform those institutions into cutting edge establishments to serve an increasingly competitive industry. The tourism industry is dominated

by big international players with massive budgets in comparison to the meagre one billion rupee budget; Sri Lanka Tourism's four institutions have to share. For instance, India's budget for promotional work was IRs. 15.71 crore for 2002-2003. The allocation was increased to IRs. 220 crore for 2008-2009, a phenomenal expansion of 14 times, with half of that figure earmarked for the 'Incredible India' campaign!

An important feature of Minister Moragoda's tenure as head of Sri Lanka Tourism was his hands-off policy on day-to-day work. While focusing on how to prop up a waning industry during a crisis time, he concentrated on the macro-vision and policymaking, to breathe new life to the industry. While doing so, he gave free rein in decision-making, to the senior officials of the ministry and of the four institutions. Explaining his policy, he said, "I believe, the spotlight should not be on the Minister, but on the team of professionals, who do the hard work. It is for this reason that I allow the officials to carry out the Ministry media briefings, make official announcements, and speak to the media - while I concentrate on the macro-vision and policy making." In short, his policy was let the experts do what they have been hired to do, without political interference from the minister or his inner cabinet.

"Think big" was President Rajapaksa's message to the industry. Thinking big was not a big deal for those who were well experienced in the trade and had been engaged in it for decades. However, thinking big, by itself, was not good enough; the industry also had to act big. But that was not possible in the backdrop Sri Lanka's tourism industry had been operating in for decades. In fact, having gone through three decades of conflict, the global economic crisis resulting from 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004, the second world economic crisis in 2008 (not second to the Great Depression in the 1930s), and the escalating armed conflict since the second half of 2006, the industry was virtually tottering, and was on the verge of collapse by 2009. The big issue for some establishments was whether to close down temporarily, and how to retrench service personnel, whose livelihood depended on the health of the industry.

Tourism, in its entirety, is a private sector driven industry, which was Sri Lanka's fourth largest foreign exchange earner in 2008, but slipped to sixth position in 2009. While the state had an important role to play in the industry, it was limited to developing strategy. The delivery of services was solely in the hands of the private sector. It did not take time for Minister Moragoda to understand the symbiotic relationship between these two crucial sectors. "if the two aren't working together or agreeing on a common way forward, then we have a problem." That was how he saw the critical role of the private sector. He cemented this collaborative effort by bringing in the best in the private sector to serve in the management boards of the four institutions functioning under the ministry. Indeed they were not only experts in their fields, but represented different industry related trade associations. What's more, with the exception of the Tourism Development Authority, the private sector represented the majority of boards of management, bringing in knowledge and expertise to these crucially important institutions. Further, Minister Moragoda thoughtfully appointed an Advisory Committee consisting of senior personalities with wide experience and exposure to tourism related sectors, to advise him as well as the institutions functioning under the ministry.

His devotion to detail could be observed by a novel step he took to seek advice from different quarters. This he did by setting up a Maha Sangha Advisory Council to guide the ministry in its activities. The Council met on a regular basis during the tenure of Minister Moragoda, and at its

last meeting held in Anuradhapura, in early 2009, discussed many issues relating to the industry, including the launching of a new brand to promote the island as a desired tourist destination.

Minister Moragoda's transition from tourism to justice came at a time when the industry that was in doldrums, was making a gradual recovery, with the end of the separatist conflict that had sapped the lifeblood from the economy of the country. More than three-quarters of a year has passed since that momentous event. It is time for us to ask ourselves, "How close are we to the target set by President Rajapaksa in June 2009, and what needs to be done to realize that objective and make tourism the top foreign exchange earning industry?"

Specific and quantifiable targets indeed matter. There was a time, when a president in the United States gave a target to NASA to put a man on the moon, and that institution met that target. But target setting by itself means next to nothing, unless those responsible for the task are facilitated to achieve what is expected of them. To meet the target of 2.5 million arrivals for 2016, it is calculated that Sri Lanka needs additional 36,000 rooms. Hotels cannot materialize from thin air. We need capital to build hotels, and the cost of a three, four and five star hotel room is in the range of Rs. 7.5 million, Rs. 10 million and Rs. 15 million respectively, making an average of US\$94,000/ per room. That is an investment of \$ 3.4 billion, without taking into account, inflation in the years to come. Surely, the Sri Lankan private sector does not have access to that kind of resources. To realize our dream or to achieve the target given, we have to attract foreign investors, particularly hotel chains, back to the country.

The question is, are we geared to undertake this stupendous task? Is our country investment-friendly enough, to attract three and half billion dollars in six years just for one sector? Can the bureaucracy and red tape involved in obtaining dozens of the permits be minimized, rather than driving investors from pillar to post over a period of a year, if not more, to begin construction? Can we have a fresh look at the policy restricting the sale of liquor in tourist hotels and restaurants involving specific days and times, in keeping with our competitors in the neighbourhood, so that a visitor to the country could enjoy his holiday, without violating the government policy of not encouraging its citizens to imbibe? Should we not take steps to improve our infrastructure such as roads, which demands ten hours of bone-jarring journey, from the international airport to Arugam Bay in the east, for an experience of a lifetime in surfing? Good roads will also ensure that a tourist would not have to take the same amount of time to reach Arugam Bay from the airport that he took to reach the island in the sun from a European destination. How do we put distant places in the country as the Deep South, the east and the north, within less than an hour's travel, if we do not develop our regional airports such as Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara, Anuradhapura, Putlam etc? Should we not focus on these as top priority during the course of this year, before the 'Visit Sri Lanka Year' dawns in 2011? Is our priority the number of arrivals in a specific year, or the quantum of foreign exchange we earn during the course of that year, and if the latter is the case, how do we attract high spenders in place of back packers? These are the questions we should not only ask ourselves, but also find answers to.

We have a president who has made tourism a priority. We had three ministers in charge of tourism within a short space of six months. We have an industry served by well-experienced and dedicated personnel. We have officials in the Ministry of Tourism and related institutions, who can turn the industry around, provided there are concentrated efforts involving all parties concerned. To get the industry moving, we need a cohesive body of officials at decision-making

level representing various government institutions. A preliminary step was taken in this regard by the Presidential Secretariat last year. If that mechanism is made operational and empowered, there is a fair chance of achieving the set target. We have less than nine months for the D-Day, in the form of 'Visit Sri Lanka Year'. Enabling steps to make Sri Lanka the most preferred destination in Asia should have been taken months ago, and not months from now

Former rebels, paramilitary troops get aid in Sri Lanka

Former Tamil rebels and ex-paramilitary troops were given fishing gear, carpentry tools and agricultural equipment as part of a rehabilitation programme, officials said Tuesday. Some 500 ex-combatants received the aid in the eastern Batticaloa district under a programme funded by the US Agency for International Development with the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), the officials said. The programme plans to reintegrate up to 1,000 former members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and a paramilitary group known as the TMVP, which was made up of a breakaway faction of the rebels. 'Reintegrating former combatants into society, retraining them and helping them to find jobs and generate income is not easy, but is an essential first step towards stabilisation, peace and economic recovery,' IOM chief of mission Mohammed Abdiker was quoted as saying in a statement. Some 10,000 former rebels need to be re-inserted into the society since they were defeated in the civil war in May

US says Iran rights worsen, cites Sri Lanka abuses

Iran's human rights record "degenerated" with a crackdown after its disputed June election while Sri Lanka and Tamil Tigers committed abuses against civilians last year, the United States said on Thursday. In the State Department's annual human rights survey, China, Cuba, North Korea, Russia and Sudan were harshly criticized, with Chinese authorities were faulted for restricting the flow of information on the Internet and Russia for the killings of rights activists and journalists.

Sri Lanka trade union makes headway in fight for wage increase

After much lobbying and campaigning, War on Want partner the Free Trade Zones & General Services Employees Union (FTZ&GSEU) has won government support for a 40% salary increase in free trade zones. The FTZ&GSEU, a leading campaigner for workers' rights in Sri Lanka's free trade zones (FTZs), mobilised thousands of workers to push for private sector wages to be increased to levels in line with those in the public sector.

In recent years the wages of Sri Lanka's 250,000 private sector workers have fallen well behind their public sector counterparts. Currently the minimum wage for the private sector is RS 6,700 per month (approximately £37), compared to Rs 11,630 (£65) for the public sector. The FTZ&GSEU has spearheaded a campaign targeting the Sri Lankan Board of Investment (BOI), the government body responsible for carrying out wage increases in the private sector. They are demanding that salaries in the public sector be made equal to public sector wages, with no

exception for FTZs workers. Given Sri Lanka's rapidly increasing inflation rates, the growing gap between public and private sector wages is a particular cause for concern.

The FTZ&GSEU's campaign has included educating FTZ workers on the importance of demanding a fair wage increase. In early February 20,000 FTZ workers signed a letter rejecting the meagre Rs 500 (approximately £3) wage increase offered to them by factory owners and calling on the BOI to meet their call for a salary increase that at a minimum equals rates in the public sector. Workers also protested by arriving at work dressed only in white, generating widespread media attention across the country.

As a result of their efforts the FTZ&GSEU was granted a meeting with the Chairman of the BOI at which trade union leaders voiced the concerns of workers and pushed for a fair increase in wages. Earlier this month the Sri Lankan Ministry of Labour publically recommended increasing the private sector minimum wage by Rs 2,500 (approximately £14) and has ordered wage boards across the country to convene. These wage boards, which are made up of factory owners, worker representatives and government officials, will now enter into negotiations over salary increases.

Though the struggle for a fair wage will undoubtedly continue, the tireless campaigning of FTZ&GSEU has helped workers win a crucial first victory in a long process

UK's Hi Tech Miliband Is Asked of Somalia and Sri Lanka, by Twitter, Yes or No UNITED NATIONS, March 10 -- It's all the rage in diplomatic spin: UK foreign secretary David Miliband is taking questions by Twitter today, during his two day stay in Boston. The UK consulate there has been soliciting questions, saying they will be answered throughout the day. At the UN in New York, Inner City Press has asked Miliband questions at the Security Council stakeout, several times receiving wordy answers the meaning of which was not entirely clear. Perhaps the format of 140 characters -- less with all the hash marks -- in the questions and especially the answers will make Miliband's meaning more clear. Here are two questions tweeted to the UK consulate as per their instructions on Wednesday morning by Inner City Press:

- 1) Has UK cut aid to WFP in #Somalia, and if so what is required for the aid to hungry Somalis to be resumed? #askfs
- 2) If #SriLanka refuses to investigate war crimes does UK think the UN should name a panel of inquiry as in Guinea? #askfs

The background to the first question is that while the UN and its Mark Bowden have publicly questioned the restrictions on aid by the U.S., which says funds are being diverted to Al Shabaab, the UK's position is less clear. And with the UK's John Holmes in charge of the UN's humanitarian operations, some wonder if his office would point the finger at the UK.

In the past week, Inner City Press has asked the UN's spokesman Martin Nesirky, himself a Brit, for an update on restrictions on UN system operations and funding in Somalia, and to explain UN envoy Ould Abdallah's call for the UN to return to Mogadishu when, apparently, he can't. Still there have been no answers. At least on the first question, perhaps Miliband can

answer On the second question, Miliband's then-UN Ambassador John Sawers, before he returned to London and spy-hood, told Inner City Press that the UK had "had the votes" to put Sri Lanka on the Security Council's agenda during the blood bath on the beach stage of the conflict in the Spring of 2009, but chose not to, in the name of Council unity, perhaps on other issues.

Politicians clash in Sri Lanka election run-up

An opposition candidate was arrested while two ministers accused each other of perpetrating violence on Thursday in the campaign for Sri Lanka's parliamentary election to be held next month. Dunesh Gankanda, the main opposition candidate at Pelmadulla in south eastern Ratnapura district was arrested Thursday, said the police. Gankanda, a legislator in the last parliament, was accused of assaulting a policeman. In the central hilly country area of Passara, two ministers Arumugam Thondaman and Vadivel Suresh were involved in an intra-party clash for preference votes, said the police. Thondaman's supporters said Suresh attacked them while Suresh claimed that an electoral office of his was destroyed by Thondaman's supporters. Thondaman and Suresh are fellow candidates of the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance from the central district of Nuwara Eliya. Meanwhile, the police election chief Gamini Navarate appealed to party leaders and candidates to refrain from intra-party violence. In Sri Lanka, it is common for candidates from one party to vie each other for preference votes. Each voter is eligible to mark three preference votes for three candidates of their choice. Candidates with highest number of preference votes are appointed based on the proportional representation system of elections. The police said more than 50 complaints had been recorded on election related violence and most of them have been incidents of intra-party violence

Sri Lanka: Dengue Outbreak DREF Operation No. MDRLK001

The International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) is a source of un-earmarked money created by the Federation in 1985 to ensure that immediate financial support is available for Red Cross and Red Crescent response to emergencies. The DREF is a vital part of the International Federation's disaster response system and increases the ability of national societies to respond to disasters.

Period covered by this update: 16 November to 31 January 2009

History:

- On 4 September 2009, CHF 99,412 (USD 94,343.2 or EUR 65,959.6) was allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society in delivering immediate assistance to some 300,000 beneficiaries. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are encouraged.

- On 16 November 2009, the operational timeframe was extended to 1 April 2010. Summary: Sri Lanka faced one of its worst dengue outbreaks in years in late 2009. The National Dengue Prevention Unit of the Ministry of Health reported 33,856 cases of dengue and 277 deaths.

With the DREF approved, the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) has been implementing an operation to assist the government in addressing the problem through raising community awareness on dengue and promotion of improved sanitation and waste management practices. SLRCS has been working in a total of 14 districts (out of which three districts are covered by DREF), providing training to the staff and volunteers, developing and distributing the information, education, and communication (IEC) materials, conducting baseline assessments, and organizing community-based awareness as well as clean-up and waste management campaigns. The DREF is being used to support acti

The operation is expected to be completed by 1 April 2010; a Final Report will be made available three months after the end of the operation (by 1 July 2010).

The major donors and partners of the DREF include the Danish Red Cross, Irish Red Cross/ Irish government, Japanese Red Cross, Monaco Red Cross/ Monaco government, Netherlands Red Cross/ Netherlands government, Norwegian Red Cross/ Norwegian government, Swedish Red Cross/ Swedish government, Italian government, United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), ECHO, OPEC Fund for International Development, and corporate and private donors. The International Federation, on behalf of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, would like to thank all donors for their generous contributions