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Summary

Bangladesh: Bangladesh Supreme Court will decide in less than 15 days, as to whether religion based politics including Islamist politics and political parties can continue in the country. The court will decide on the fate of the 5th Amendment in the Article 38 of Bangladeshi Constitution. Awami League lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta says reverting to the original constitution of 1972 will lead to ban on the politics of Jamaat-e-Islami, the weapons and financial supplier and biggest patron of the banned Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). A continuous inability on the part of for example major political parties of Bangladesh to capture, retain and harness adequate people's power in pursuits of better governance in the country has inter alia been instrumental in enhancing, enlarging, and sustaining - in varying degrees, though - dependencies of above parties, particularly ruling parties at any given time, on for example power of bureaucracies and power of justice systems beyond acceptable limits, and vice versa. The chairman of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council called on activities and volunteers to monitor the political situation in Bangladesh and blamed the government for the lack of improvements in the circumstances of the CHT Leading vernacular daily newspaper in Bangladesh, Kaler Kantha has published a front-page news report on July 14, 2010, stating that, editor of Prothom Alo, a Bangla daily newspaper will be interrogated by the local intelligence

agencies about his connections with notorious separatist outfit in India named ULFA. Bangladesh's highest court has banned punishments handed down by fatwa, or religious edict, after a series of cases of Muslim women who were beaten or caned for religious offenses. Three East-Asian nations namely, Japan, China and South Korea, are keen on improving their ties with Bangladesh. Bangladesh's government on Wednesday arrested two of the country's leading Islamist politicians, charging them with committing mass murder during Bangladesh's liberation war from Pakistan in 1971. BP said that amid last year's decline in global primary energy consumption, Asia Pacific countries led by China and India recorded 4.4% increase in consumption as a result of energy intensive stimulus packages

Nepal:Major political parties in Nepal failed yet again to arrive at a consensus on forming the next government even as the second deadline given by President Ram Baran Yadav expired on Monday. Nepal is to have a majority government, with the election of a new Prime Minister slated for July 21. Nepal's Terai-based Madhesi parties on Friday decided to come together to seek a better deal amid the deadlock over power sharing in a new government. Nepal's Terai plains are home to about half of the country's 30 million people, and the residents of the region, are known as Madhesis, who are of Indian origin. Shankar Pokharel, the spokesperson of the now defunct government of Nepal and minister for information and communications demanded while addressing a program in Butwal of Rupandehi district, July 14, 2010, that the current government led by Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal should be revived with honor and dignity.“ The wrangling in Nepal over forming an interim coalition to replace the government that quit on June 30 has projected some of the country's politicians as small-minded, and seemingly unwilling to take the country out of its tension-fraught transition. To make matters worse, some politicians have picked a quarrel with the United Nations, accusing its field mission of taking sides with former Maoist insurgents on the question of integration into the Nepal army. Southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region will work closely with Nepal to boost the tourism industry in the Himalayan region, officials said Friday. Kathmandu: United Nations has clarified that its political mission — United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) — has been working as per its mandate in Nepal. Finance Minister of the caretaker government Surendra Pandey has on Monday presented the advance budget of Rs.110.21 billion for the fiscal year 2010/11. Minister Pandey presented one third of the total budget as an advance budget at the parliament. UN rights agency OHCHR-Nepal on Friday expressed concern over threats by Maoists to human rights defenders, saying it must respect the rule of law and keeps its commitments to put an end to impunity and bring those responsible for abuses to justice. Nepal Army has given a clean chit to a controversial military commander, who was sent back from a UN peacekeeping mission for his alleged role in human rights violation linked to the torture and subsequent murder of a 15-year-old Nepalese girl during the country's civil war. Controversial Major Niranjana Basnet was sent back from a UN peacekeeping mission. Bangladesh and Nepal have revived a deal signed more than three decades ago to work out a

transit route through which landlocked Nepal can access the Mongla port. The Nepali Congress acting President Sushil Koirala has alleged that the United Nations' Political Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) is trying to prolong its stay in Nepal by unnecessarily interfering in matters internal to Nepal. Nepali government has sent invitation to 51 mountainous countries for a meeting on climate change scheduled for October 4-5 in capital Kathmandu. Tourist arrivals in Nepal increased by 1.9 percent in 2009, however, their average length of stay has declined, local media reported on Friday. Nepal has asked New Delhi to lift the ban on the transaction of Indian Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 500 currency notes in the country so as to boost business and ease the hardship of travellers from India. Nepal and neighboring country China are all set to hold talks on bilateral relation including security matters at the end of July.

Srilanka: Sri Lankan police have filed a new case against former army chief and defeated presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka for allegedly employing military deserters, his party said Tuesday. A Sri Lankan minister has ended his fast aimed at forcing the UN to abandon a probe into crimes allegedly committed during the final months of the country's civil war. Last week, while Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa visited the Maldives to help that country's ruling and opposition parties settle their political disputes, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met six members of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) in New Delhi and advised them to engage constructively with the Rajapaksa government so that long-standing political and ethnic issues could be sorted out. A ship full of Tamil migrants — including members of the Tamil Tigers — is headed to Canada, a Sri Lankan newspaper reports. According to the Sunday Observer, Sri Lanka's English newspaper, about 200 migrants are aboard the MV Sun Sea, a ship previously known as Harin Panich 19. Some important qualities for heads of state to have include leadership and steely resolve, said Sri Lanka's president who also congratulated the newly installed Philippine leader Benigno "Noy" Aquino 3rd. "Best wishes to the new [Philippine] President," Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) is to hold talks with other opposition political parties represented in parliament on the government's proposed constitutional amendments and the abolishing of the Executive Presidency. Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa said today that the government has given the priority to protect the dignity of war heroes and each Sri Lankan citizen who enjoys the benefit of peace and harmony is responsible to create an environment within the society for war heroes to live in dignity. A senior minister in the Sri Lankan government said the authorities were busy making necessary arrangements for the first Cabinet meeting to be held in the outskirts of capital Colombo. : Sri Lanka's Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne has left for China on a six-day official visit from 16th to 21st July to participate in the Expo 2010 Shanghai commerce and cultural forum, the government announced. Sri Lankan government has announced that it will take strict measures to control the spreading of dengue epidemic amid reports that a 31-year-old female doctor has become the latest victim of the mosquito-borne disease. Sri Lankans have gained enormous experience, talents and fortitude which no other country has even thought of in the course of eliminating a terrorist outfit in the country and time has arrived to make use of them to win the

world, said President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Two studies on children in Sri Lanka, who survived the 2004 tsunami and ongoing civil war, have found that it is not these stressful events alone that contributed to the youths' psychological health, but also daily stressors like domestic violence that are exacerbated by traumatic events and continue after the disasters. India and China have clinched two separate contracts to build railway lines and communication links in Sri Lanka, the government said Friday

Detailed News

Bangladesh

Bangladesh banning Islamist politics

Bangladesh Supreme Court will decide in less than 15 days, as to whether religion based politics including Islamist politics and political parties can continue in the country. The court will decide on the fate of the 5th Amendment in the Article 38 of Bangladeshi Constitution. If the 1972-constitution of the country will be replaced by the present amended constitution and its Article 38, religion based politics, including Islamist political parties will be banned in the country. On April 1979, Bangladeshi Parliament, by two-thirds majority passed the Fifth Amendment Act to the Constitution. It brought many changes: restored fundamental rights, multiparty democracy and among others, gave Bangladesh Constitution an Islamic character by deleting secularism and socialism from the Constitution. To give the Constitution an Islamic character, the Preamble of the Constitution was changed in: "Pledging that the high ideals of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the fundamental principle of the Constitution." It may be mentioned that the Islamic character to Bangladeshi Constitution was given in 1976 by the Second Proclamation [6th Amendment Order, 1976], which was later ratified by Parliament in 1979. By operation of the original Article 38 [of 1972], no citizen had the right to form or take part in the activities of any organisation which has been formed on the basis of religion with a view to pursuing a political purpose. On 29th August 2005, the High Court declared the Fifth Amendment unconstitutional. On that day, a Judge in Chamber of the Supreme Court stayed the operation of the judgment of the High Court upon an appeal filed by the Government of the day. The new Government headed by Bangladesh Awami League, which came in power in January 2009 and on an application submitted by the new Government on 3rd January 2010, the previous Government's appeal was withdrawn and the stay granted has been vacated. In the 1972 constitution of Bangladesh it is clearly mentioned that, formation of any religion based political party or organization or group will not be allowed in this country. If the 1972 constitution will be restored, Islamist and religion based political parties and groups like Jamaat-e-Islami, Nezame Islami, Islamic Oikya Jote [Islamic Unity Front], Khelafat Majlish, Khelafat Andolan, Hizbut Towhid, Khatmey Nabuat Andolan, Muslim League, Bangladesh Hindu League, Bangladesh Hindu Grand Alliance, etc will automatically become ineligible in continuing activities in Bangladesh. It may be mentioned here that, Hizbut Towhid has already been listed as one of the Islamist terror outfits in the country. Ruling secularist Awami League government in Bangladesh

on April 2009 blacklisted 12 Islamist militant groups. These are: Harkatul Jihad Islami [Huji], Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh [JMB], Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh [JMJB], Shahadat-e-Hiqma [SHE], Hizb-Ut-Towhid [HuT], Islami Samaj, Ulema Anjuman At Baiyinaat, Hizb-Ut-Tahrir, Islamic Democratic Party [IDP], Touhid Trust, Tamir Ud Deen and Allah's Dal. Of these groups, JMJB, Huji, SHE, and JMB were banned during the previous BNP-Jamaat Coalition government in Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina's government, which came in power in January 2009 so far, banned Hizb-Ut Tahrir only. Banning other notorious Islamist groups such as Hizb-Ut-Towhid is being delayed as it was already alleged that, some of the influential figures in the government were actively trying to save this group from being banned. Both Hizb-Ut-Tahrir and Hizb-Ut-Towhid are fanatic ultra Islamist, anti-Semitic and anti-West outfits in Bangladesh with huge number of militants as members. Good news is, by declaring the Fifth Amendment unlawful, the High Court has also interfered with the relationship of Bangladesh with other Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity. Article 25[2] of the Constitution provided as follows: "The State shall endeavour to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity." In such case, Bangladesh may not anymore incline in expressing undue solidarity towards Palestine and Jihadists like Hamas. Naturally this will turn Bangladesh as more acceptable ally for the West, especially those nations combating Islamist militancy. According to constitution experts, once the Supreme Court verdict will be declared, religion based parties and groups will not be allowed to continue activities in the country. Furthermore, there will also be some changes in the constitution of Bangladesh. Presently, in the amended version of the constitution, it is clearly written that, "Bangladesh will have full trust and dependence on Allah". The verdict will also decide the main ideology of the country. It may be mentioned here that, Bangladesh was created under secularist ideology. Former military dictator Hussain Muhammed Ershad, who leads a political party named Jatiyo Party in Bangladesh, and now one of the prominent partners of the present coalition government, established Islam as the State religion of the country, when he was in power [1982-1990]. In the electoral manifesto, Ershad declared to establish Sharia law in Bangladesh. It is not clear as to whether the ruling party will ignore such electoral pledges of its coalition partner, while enforcing the Supreme Court verdict. The ruling Bangladesh Awami League also signed a treaty with ultra Islamist party named Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish in 2006 for establishment of Sharia law in the country, once it is elected in power. This treaty was later scrapped by Awami League at massive reaction of intellectuals and secularist forces as well as strong criticism by some local newspapers, led by our newspaper, Weekly Blitz. Commenting on the possible replacement of the present constitutional provisions in Bangladesh, leader of religious minority group in Bangladesh, Govinda Chandra Paramanik said, "We fought the war of liberation in 1971 with the hope of seeing a secular Bangladesh, freed from the grips of Pakistani occupation regime. But, our aspiration and hope had never turned true. Since independence of the country, we are greatly deprived of various rights. Till date, no government took real initiatives in scrapping the Vested Property Act, thus returning properties of Hindus in Bangladesh. Abduction and forceful conversion of Hindus are continuing, while even during the present government, our

temples and deities are being attacked and demolished by the thugs belonging to the ruling party. We really want to see that, Bangladesh is completely freed from the grips of Islamist and fanatic religious notions."Though, personally I don't want to be over optimistic on the possible implementation of the much awaited verdict of the Supreme Court, but, truly it is aspired that, Sheikh Hasina, who now leads the government, will possibly, uphold the principles and ideologies of her father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

During his entire life, till being brutally assassinated by some derailed army officers in 1975, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman fought against Islamists and religious fanatics. For such heroic role of this man, he rightly deserves appreciation and admiration of Bangladeshis as well as people in the world. While we shall have to wait for few more days for this historic verdict from Bangladesh Supreme Court, here is a small piece of good news! The current government in Bangladesh is going to launch Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman International Peace Prize, which will be equally prestigious as various international prizes such as Nobel Prize, Gandhi Prize etc. This prize will also consider several figures in the world, who are contributing in establishing peace as well combating religious extremism. No doubt, this prize itself shows a positive sign for many. Hopefully, Sheikh Hasina's government will adopt policies in strong-handedly dealing the Islamists and religious fanatics in Bangladesh.

<http://www.weeklyblitz.net/862/bangladesh-banning-islamist-politics>

'Jamaat will be banned if '72 charter revived'

Dhaka, July 16 (bdnews24.com) –Awami League lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta says reverting to the original constitution of 1972 will lead to ban on the politics of Jamaat-e-Islami, the weapons and financial supplier and biggest patron of the banned Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). He also revealed that prime minister Sheikh Hasina on Thursday urged for speedy formation of a constitutional commission to revert to the original charter of the nation. Suranjit was speaking at a seminar titled 'War criminal trials and banning Jamaat's politics' organised by Bangabandhu Academy at Dhaka Reporters' Unity Auditorium on Friday. He said, "Anyone can practice politics keeping in line with the country's legislation as their own democratic right. However, those who publicly acclaim democracy and cultivate terrorism in the back cannot pursue politics." The veteran politician commented that the people were not content with the progress of the war crimes trial and said, "The less the ministers of the current government will speak, the more will the government be able to fulfil its electoral pledges. Even the war criminal trials will be eased." "More competent and honest people are needed in the prosecution panel for a faster and acceptable war crimes trial. Increased manpower is needed for the investigation," added Suranjit, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the law ministry. He also commented that senior politicians like Khandker Delwar Hossain and Moudud Ahmed of BNP are opposing the revival of the 1972 constitution and war crimes trials as they are more accustomed to practicing 'unconstitutional' politics. Krishak League's central organising secretary MA Karim, metropolitan AL health secretary Dr Dilip Roy also spoke at the

programme chaired by Bangabandhu Academy chief Hemayet Uddin.
<http://www.bdnews24.com/details.php?id=168101&cid=3>

Political parties and justice systems in Bangladesh

A continuous inability on the part of for example major political parties of Bangladesh to capture, retain and harness adequate people's power in pursuits of better governance in the country has inter alia been instrumental in enhancing, enlarging, and sustaining - in varying degrees, though - dependencies of above parties, particularly ruling parties at any given time, on for example power of bureaucracies and power of justice systems beyond acceptable limits, and vice versa - - for purposes say filling up of voids associated with insufficient people's power in the power grid of country's governance at varying costs to people of Bangladesh and people of world at large, per se. It will not be out of place to mention here: outcomes of interdependencies have so far been successful in inter alia sustaining and promoting - in varying forms and degrees - partisan politicisation of bureaucracies, as well as justice systems via the courtesy of say mindsets, philosophies and activities of successive political governments after the independence of Bangladesh. It implies inter alia factors such as and as appropriate: outcomes of constitutional inadequacies such as those relating to appointment, promotion and removal of superior court judges; the development of bureaucracies that are transparent and accountable - largely - to political parties and not to the people; the culture of partisan bureaucracies, aiming primarily at serving past and present political masters, facilitated by what I would call chain reactions of partisan loyalty regardless of requirements such as transparency and accountability in pertinent areas; an average failure of outcome of donor (such as the UNDP) assistance, so far, to good governance in pursuits of facilitating and help sustaining substantive improvements in relevant areas; and growing gaps between the demand and the supply of outcomes of people's overall empowerment against the backdrop of ever increasing competition for survival, continuity and growth in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world; are being instrumental in inter alia enhancement of governance related pollutions, promoting apparently party based and party driven developments and not all Bangladesh based and not all Bangladesh driven developments in the country, per cycle of political regime. As a result of above and other developments, displacements in several areas are evident. For example: bureaucrats, with the support of politicians, are attempting to transform themselves - fully - into masters and not servants of the people; the country's judiciary are increasingly becoming victims of judicial pollutions, affecting efforts towards affording all concerned the right justice at the right cost, irrespective of for example their power, position and belief in societies; politicians and political parties are apparently busy in, among other things, cultivating and sustaining constituencies in bureaucracies and justice systems in pursuits of protecting them and their interest during rainy days; outcomes of alliances between and among political parties, bureaucracies and other partners in governance - are being instrumental in inter alia putting up barriers to the development of fully operational bottom-up systems in the domain of country's governance; leadership by example is scarce in supply; a proper BMR (Balancing, modernisation and

rehabilitation) of the country's constitution is not in sight; political parties are apparently involved more in patching up daily problems than dealing with the big picture for improved competitiveness and image building; politics by dividing people in core areas are being instrumental in productivity losses, confidence losses in areas say justice, promoting initial conditions for conflicts, terrorism and extremism, and enhancing the real cost of maintaining Bangladesh and accelerate its development at a faster rate.

The bottom line is: the contemporary nature, level and outcome of politics in the country is not apparently conducive to promoting a competitive 21st century Bangladesh largely because of its internal weaknesses arising out of say division of people's power along political lines. One of the questions here is: how could you light up the entire Bangladesh with light of better governance when the supply voltage is low? Do not become pessimistic! One of the probable answers to the question could be: an aggregate amount of voltage, via uniting the country in areas say competing national priorities in a sustainable fashion, could bring about a significant improvement in the supply situation. The sooner it is done, the better it will be for Bangladesh. The last word: liberate the country's justice system from clutches of politicisation and revolving political ownership (use in a negative sense) of it (I mean, the system) - per political regime. Do not attempt to get exonerated on the basis of executive, as well as other power, by-passing the normal course of justice. Set examples in areas of anti-corruptions for others to follow. Rise to the occasion to ensure non-partisan supply of goods and services to people of all Bangladesh at all times - in that respect, do not make differentiations between for example an Awami League Poor and a BNP Poor. Share true data, information and statistics with people of Bangladesh and concerned others in the country's greater interest. Promote media freedom for say constructive purposes. Encourage and value meaningful participation of the people in solving problems and in harnessing opportunities for good of all concerned. Let us work towards those and other objectives for the betterment of people of Bangladesh and people of world at large - all, in an efficient, effective and sustainable manner. Let us not allow disunity, along say political lines, to grow to an extent that could be instrumental in inter alia transforming Bangladesh into a heaven of terrorism between now and the future. Let us improve, as soon as possible and in a sustainable manner, the per capita consumption of energy in Bangladesh in pursuits of economic growth, elimination of hunger, and reduction of poverty, as well as illiteracy, to mention a few.

<http://nation.ittefaq.com/issues/2010/07/16/news0523.htm>

Chittagong Hill Tracts: Bangladesh Government unwilling to implement Peace Deal

The chairman of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council called on activities and volunteers to monitor the political situation in Bangladesh and blamed the government for the lack of improvements in the circumstances of the CHT. Chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional

Council (CHTRC) Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma yesterday [July 14] said not a single clause of the CHT peace deal has seen implementation in last 19 months as the present Awami League-led grand alliance government is not sincere about this matter. The CHTRC chairman, also president of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), said this while speaking as chief guest at the opening ceremony of the two-day-long fourth conference of PCJSS district committee at Poursabha hall room in the town. Popularly known as Shantu Larma, the PCJSS chief said the CHT people are captive due to activities of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) and role of some security persons in the name of 'Operation Uttaran'. The armed cadres of UPDF have killed 96 leaders and activists of PCJSS, he said, adding that the ethnic people in CHT are still facing harassment, repression and torture. Communalism, fundamentalism and anti-progressive activities still prevail in the country, the PCJSS chief said. He recalled the role of PCJSS founder late Manobendra Narayan Larma in the struggle for achieving the rights of jummo people. Blaming state minister for CHT affairs ministry Dipankar Talukder for remaining 'silent' about the solution of CHT problems, the PCJSS chief urged the jummo people to be alert about any politics that is not favourable for them. Presided over by president of district unit of PCJSS Gunendu Bikash Chakma, the meeting was also addressed, among others, by member of CHT Regional Council Sneh Kumar Chakma, its district unit Secretary Bodhi Satta Chakma, Youth Affairs Secretary Suvas Basu Chakma, Chairperson of CHT Mohila Samity Madhabi Lata Chakma, central committee Secretary of Pahari Chhatra Parishad Nitol Chakma and district committee President of Hill Women's Federation Jonaki Chakma. The speakers called upon the PCJSS leaders and activists to be more united and dedicated to continue strive for full implementation of the CHT peace deal and establishment of the right of self-determination of the jummo people. Hundreds of leaders, activists and supporters of PCJSS from different upazilas joined the conference.

<http://www.unpo.org/content/view/11334/102/>

ULFA connection of Bangladeshi media

Leading vernacular daily newspaper in Bangladesh, Kaler Kantha has published a front-page news report on July 14, 2010, stating that, editor of Prothom Alo, a Bangla daily newspaper will be interrogated by the local intelligence agencies about his connections with notorious separatist outfit in India named ULFA [United Liberation Front of Assam]. Prothom Alo, a newspaper published by country's Transcom Group is one of the publications of English language newspaper The Daily Star. Veteran leftist writer Motiur Rahman is the editor of Prothom Alo, who earlier served as the editor of a periodical named Ekota published by Bangladesh Communist Party. Both Prothom Alo and Daily Star are known for their extreme anti-Semitic editorial policies and sympathies towards authoritarian rules. When army snatched power in Bangladesh on January 11 2007, executive editor of this media group was appointed as the Press Secretary to the President. During that time, both the editors of Prothom Alo and Daily Star were competing in publishing articles, editorials and commentaries blasting Bangladesh Awami

League leader Sheikh Hasina and Bangladesh Nationalist Party's leader Khaleda Zia. These newspapers were collaborating in the minus-two conspiracy of the military backed regime, which was aimed at excluding Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia from politics. Sheikh Hasina [current Prime Minister in Bangladesh] is the daughter of the founding father of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman while, Khaleda Zia [former Prime Minister] is the wife of former President, Ziaur Rahman.

The controversial "Minus-Two formula" of the 2007-08 caretaker government sought the expulsion and exile of Hasina and former prime minister Khaleda Zia from politics and the country forever. Military backed regime arrested Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia on numerous charges, including corruption cases. They were held in solitary confinement in so-called sub-jails created by the military backed regime. It is alleged that, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia were served poisoned food while in prison, and she was denied medical treatment. Awami League leader and eminent entrepreneur, Salman F Rahman, who also was arrested and tortured by the military backed regime, alleged on July 19, 2009 that top-selling dailies Prothom Alo and The Daily Star helped the military-installed caretaker government in its attempt to implement the 'Minus-Two formula' in the two years of emergency rule beginning in 2007. He further said that these two newspapers were now trying to execute 'Minus-One-Formula' in clear a hint at Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The vice chairman of Bangladesh's biggest business conglomerate, Beximco Group, read out a written statement and alleged that these two newspapers had been running a sustained campaign to destabilise the buoyant capital market and discouraging foreign investment. It may be mentioned here that, The Daily Star has been publishing articles by Dr. Fkharuddin Ahmed, who later was selected by the army for leading the military backed interim government. Dr. Fakhruddin was contributing articles on various issues from Princeton, USA. When he became the head of the interim government, it was already known to everyone that, The Daily Star was silently giving platform to this man in 'building' an image in Bangladesh and abroad through his opeds exclusively published in the English language newspaper.

<http://www.weeklyblitz.net/867/ulfa-connection-of-bangladeshi-media>

Bangladeshi High Court Prohibits Fatwas To Impose Punishment

CHENNAI, India (RNS) Bangladesh's highest court has banned punishments handed down by fatwa, or religious edict, after a series of cases of Muslim women who were beaten or caned for religious offenses. The July 8 ruling by two judges of the court, including a Hindu, resulted from petitions filed by human rights groups and lawyers in the nation that is nearly 90 percent Muslim. The petitioners said women were publicly whipped for "crimes" of adultery, having a child out of wedlock, or even talking to people of other faiths. In some cases, advocates said rape victims were reportedly flogged for being a "participant" in their assault. Deputy Attorney General Akram Hossain Chowdhury told journalists in Dhaka that the ruling means "extrajudicial" punishments issued in the form of a fatwa are "illegal and without lawful

authority."The court's ruling also imposes jail terms for clerics or any members of village courts who order such punishment by invoking Islamic Shariah law.Human rights lawyer Shadeen Malik hailed what he called a "landmark" ruling, saying it shows"clearly that nobody has the power to inflict physical and mental torture on any person in the name of religion."

Bangladesh attracts three East-Asian economies

Three East-Asian nations namely, Japan, China and South Korea, are keen on improving their ties with Bangladesh. For the same, Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, had already visited South Korea and China and will be visiting Japan in the month of October,Tamotsu Shinotsuka, Japanese ambassador in Dhaka said that Japan is interested in extending political, economic and social co-operation with Bangladesh. Moreover, Japanese investors are exploring opportunities in various sectors in Bangladesh such as textile, garment, leather, fishing and telecommunication, as for them Bangladesh is a country, which has the potential for both cheap manpower and profitable market. Dhaka expects that, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) President, Park Dae-won, will pay a visit to the country this year. Among all the other South Asian countries, Bangladesh has received top priority from South Korea in gaining support from the country, informed Lee Jung-Wook, Resident representative of South Korean aid agency KOICA. He added that, Bangladesh would receive around \$5 million from South Korea under its new Overseas Development Assistance Program. In addition, from this month on, China will import Bangladeshi goods without any duty. The Chinese Vice President, Xi Jinping, had visited Dhaka recently after Sheikh Hasina's visit to Beijing, in the month of March. Xi Jinping expressed interest in strengthening political, economical and social relations with Bangladesh, during his visit.

http://www.fibre2fashion.com/news/textile-news/newsdetails.aspx?news_id=88598

Bangladesh arrests are opening act of war crimes tribunal

Bangladesh's government on Wednesday arrested two of the country's leading Islamist politicians, charging them with committing mass murder during Bangladesh's liberation war from Pakistan in 1971. Both men are members of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, the country's largest fundamentalist party. Their detention comes after the government arrested three of Jamaat's top leaders, including the party's head, Motiur Rahman Nizami, in late June, sparking street riots that wounded more than 80 people.The arrests, which have effectively neutralized Jamaat's leadership, are the opening act in a tribunal that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed established in March to try war crimes committedduring 1971.**1971 Bangladesh atrocities**The government claims it has evidence that Jamaat-e-Islami collaborated with the

Pakistani Army, which killed, according to some figures, as many as 3 million Bangladeshis – most of them fellow Muslims - and raped more than 200,000 women. On the one hand, analysts say the trial could be a model for the world: a Muslim-majority democracy trying one of the modern world's worst acts of religious extremism. On the other hand, Prime Minister Hasina has harassed Jamaat-e-Islami with strong-arm tactics that undermine the rule of law, according to critics, as a result of which Jamaat has vowed to retaliate, possibly with violence. Fears already abound that the tribunal could now ignite a social explosion.

Starting a war crimes tribunal isn't easy

“The Jamaat leaders will make every effort to stop this trial. Will it be a political resistance? Will it be a hidden, violent resistance through terrorism? All possibilities should be taken into account, and we should be prepared accordingly,” says retired Bangladeshi Maj. Gen. Muhammed Abdur Rashid, an independent political analyst in Dhaka. Starting a war crimes tribunal in Bangladesh has not been easy. Past efforts have stalled or been swept aside for 40 years, given that a trial threatens to implicate many of those currently or recently in power. But Hasina won a landslide victory in 2009 on campaign promises that she would do just that. The stakes are personal for her Awami League party: the core of Bengali nationalists, they were one of the main targets of the brutality in 1971. Many questions still hover over Hasina's tribunal, including the extent of reliable evidence, the list of witnesses, and the number of accused. Last week, the government banned about 40 suspects from leaving the country, indicating that the proceedings would begin soon. But one thing seems certain, observers agree: Jamaat-e-Islami's leadership will come under scrutiny during the trial.

What does this mean for the political party?

It's a troubling moment for the party. Jamaat has been able to build a solid base as a legal, respected party, with some 12 million supporters here. It has managed to weather accusations – long held but never proven – that it secretly supports militancy. In 2001, the party even won 17 seats in Parliament, and took three ministerial posts. Hasina's tribunal threatens to dig up a past Jamaat would rather forget. International scholars and living witnesses have all accused Nizami and other Jamaat leaders of directing militias - known as Razzakars - that killed Bengali Muslims and Hindus in 1971. The fighting began after Bengali nationalists, accusing Pakistan's leadership of economic, cultural, and political exploitation, took up arms. Scholars point out, however, that the vast majority of crimes committed during the 1971 war, were not committed by Jamaat-e-Islami, but by Bangladeshis who sided with Pakistan.

Bangladeshi patients flock to India in search of better facilities

Kolkata: Eleven years ago, Mohammad Farid, then 22, came to Kolkata from Bangladesh's Faridpur district to be treated for complex nephrological and neurological problems. He has since

turned into a professional “guide”, assisting patients from Bangladesh in their quest for treatment—a booming business because, as he observes, people cross the border even for diagnostic tests. “Even for simple pathological tests such as blood sugar and lipid profile, Bangladeshis prefer laboratories in Kolkata,” says Farid. “I help dozens of people come to Kolkata for tests every year. Tests done here are seen as more credible.” Perhaps the most surprising thing about the Bangladeshis coming to India for treatment is this: Many of them arrive not for complicated procedures but for routine pathological tests. The more affluent medical tourists go to Singapore these days, but that still leaves an estimated 500 Bangladeshis entering India every day, seeking treatment. Nine out of 10 head for private hospitals in Kolkata, says Syed Masud Mahmood Khundoker, Bangladesh’s deputy high commissioner in the city. The remainder go to south India, mostly to Christian Medical College in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, where almost all doctors follow Bengali, at least when it comes to the description of symptoms. Part of the reason for this continuing flood of arrivals is the ease of entering India by road, even for people without the appropriate documents. “I have been coming to India for the last 15 years, and I have never had a passport,” says a patient at a private hospital in Kolkata, who did not disclose his name. He suffers from a neurological disorder and needs regular check-ups. “I bribe the security officers at the border. I have never had a problem. It’s the most convenient way of travelling to Kolkata.” At these private hospitals, the cost of treatment can be crippling for many Bangladeshis. When 15-year-old Almasuddin Paramanik, from the Rajshahi district of Bangladesh, fell and injured his hips, doctors determined that he needed a hip replacement—a complex surgery even in the developed world. His father, Tayeb Ali Paramanik, who used to till two-and-a-half bighas of land for a living, sold two bighas to rustle up cash for the surgery. (A bighais one-third of an acre.) Doctors in Kolkata, where Almasuddin is currently undergoing treatment, have estimated that the surgery will cost Rs1.5 lakh. “It’s a huge amount for us,” says Paramanik. “But it’s a question of life and death for my son. The economy engendered by this medical tourism goes beyond the building of new hospitals. Though restricted to a small locality on the south-eastern fringes of Kolkata, Bangladeshi patients have created jobs for hundreds of young people; dozens of money-changers and guest houses have sprouted in the past few years. “No one’s unemployed in this locality,” says Nilmoni Samanta, who runs a small roadside eatery near the Rabindranath Tagore International Institute of Cardiac Sciences (RTIICS), one of the more recent additions to the area. “If you want to cash in on the opportunity, there are so many things you could do—work as a guide, run an eatery like me, or sell (Dhaka-Kolkata) plane and bus tickets.” In this locality, anyone who has an extra room in the house rents it out to Bangladeshi patients, says Satyabrata Das, a money-changer who runs a small office opposite RTIICS. “You would earn at least Rs600 a day all year round,” he estimates. “Guest houses are more expensive. They cost at least Rs1,000 a day per room.” The smarter entrepreneurs ensure Bangladeshis feel at home. They name their guest houses after Bangladeshi towns or celebrities—Dhaka Lodge, for instance, or Bangabandhu Abashik (named after Bangladesh’s first president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman)— they serve authentic Bangladeshi cuisine, and they even arrange for Bangladeshi cable channels on television. Until the early 2000s, there were two

main private hospitals in Kolkata—Ruby General Hospital and Peerless General Hospital—that served Bangladeshi patients. Over the last 10 years, at least four others have sprung up, and more are in the pipeline, all eyeing the ever-expanding business from people across the border. Peerless Hospital, for instance, currently gets at least 10,000 Bangladeshi patients per year, according to its spokesperson; a decade ago, that number stood at 30,000. “We have five other competitors now and two more are under construction in Kolkata alone,” he says.

Medica Superspecialty Hospital, just five months old, relies on Bangladeshi patients for 5-10% of its revenues, according to Saumitra Bharadwaj, its medical superintendent. “This is crucial for any new hospital,” he says. “It could almost determine whether a hospital makes money or not.” Indeed, the revenue from Bangladeshi patients is so crucial that some start-ups, such as the year-old Desun Hospital, are planning to open marketing offices across the border. “We will launch a campaign to spread awareness about our facilities through seminars, video-conferences and contacts at clinics in Bangladesh,” says Pijush Dutta, executive coordinator at Desun. But as Bangladesh ramps up its own healthcare infrastructure, Bharadwaj thinks Kolkata’s super-specialty hospitals are likely to draw more patients than multi-specialty medical centres. “Going forward, only people in need of critical care would come to Kolkata.” Unsurprisingly, Indian firms are looking to dip their toes into the expanding pool of Bangladeshi healthcare as well. Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Ltd has already built a super-specialty hospital in Dhaka, and Peerless Hospital is hoping to tie up with a local partner to start clinics in Bangladeshi towns such as Chittagong, Rajshahi and Dhaka. And with good reason: Almost half the people who receive medical treatment at Peerless’ outpatient department (OPD) in Kolkata are Bangladeshis, according to the hospital’s spokesperson. “Most of them come for check-ups following major surgeries,” he says. “Once we’ve launched our clinics in Bangladesh, people wouldn’t have to come to the Kolkata hospital’s OPD.”

Asia Pacific maintains growth in energy use – BP

BP said that amid last year’s decline in global primary energy consumption, Asia Pacific countries led by China and India recorded 4.4% increase in consumption as a result of energy intensive stimulus packages. According to data from BP, the Asia Pacific region’s energy consumption reached 4,147.2 million tonnes of oil equivalent in 2009 up from 3,985 million tonnes of oil equivalent in 2008. In late 2008, the governments of China and India, as well as several other industrializing countries in the region, initiated major domestic infrastructure projects to avert impacts of the global financial crisis. Those projects successfully stimulated an increase in energy demand for energy intensive products such as cement and steel. BP data showed that China’s primary energy consumption grew by 8.7% from 2,007.4 million tonnes of oil equivalent in 2008 to 2,177 million tonnes of oil equivalent in 2009. Bangladesh’s consumption reached 22.9 million tonnes of oil equivalent in 2009, an 8.2 percent increase from 21.3 million tonnes of oil equivalent in the previous year. India’s consumption also increased by 6.6% from

441.1 million tonnes of oil equivalent in 2008 to 468.9 million tonnes of oil equivalent last year. Within the same period, Indonesia also recorded 3.1 percent growth, from 124.7 million tonnes of oil equivalent to 128.2 million tonnes of oil equivalent. The data showed that in 2009 global primary energy consumption fell by 1.1% to 11,164.3 million tonnes of oil equivalent from 11,315.2 million tonnes of oil equivalent the previous year, the first recorded decline since 1982. The decline was most severe in the Europe and Eurasia regions, where consumption dropped by 6% to 2,770 million tonnes of oil equivalent in 2009 from 2,955.8 in the previous year. Mr Christof Ruhl chief economist and VP of BP group said at the BP Statistical Review of World Energy that the North American region's consumption also fell by 4.7% to 2,664.4 million tonnes of oil equivalent last year from 2,804.1 million tonnes of oil equivalent in 2008. The decline in global energy consumption had been caused by the 2% contraction in the global economy in 2009. He said that geographically, energy demand fell in every region of the world, except the Middle East and Asia Pacific. Natural gas experienced the most severe decline last year, falling 2.1% or 64 million tonnes of oil equivalent. Oil consumption came second, falling by 1.7% or 78 million tonnes of oil equivalent. Mr Ruhl said that global coal consumption stayed flat but the aggregate hides unusually large movement in opposite directions. OECD member states, the European Union and former Soviet Union saw the largest declines in coal consumption. However, coal consumption grew only in China and India to support their infrastructure and industrial projects, whose growth, if combined, was more than enough to counterbalance the declines in the rest of the world.

http://www.steelguru.com/raw_material_news/Asia_Pacific_maintains_growth_in_energy_use_-_BP/155501.html

Fake currency notes racket busted in Bangalore

BANGALORE: An international fake currency racket was busted with the arrest of two people carrying Rs.15 lakh in counterfeit notes - printed in Pakistan, police said on Friday. "Anrool Shiekh alias Salim, 27, a native of West Bengal and Dubai Babu, 50 from Tamil Nadu have been booked under section 489A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for trading high-denomination fake currency notes," police commissioner Shankar Bidari told reporters. During preliminary interrogation, the duo confessed that the fake notes in Rs.1,000 and Rs.500 denomination were printed in Pakistan. The notes were brought to India through Bangladesh for circulation in various parts of the country. "I am writing to the state government to handover this case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) as it has international and inter-state ramifications with a deleterious impact on the Indian economy," Bidari said. The modus operandi of the accused was to exchange fake notes worth Rs.100,000 for Rs.40,000. "Circulating high denomination fake notes has become a cottage industry for anti-national elements with the involvement of their counterparts in Pakistan and Bangladesh through border districts," Bidari added. Investigations

into the fake currency racket revealed that the perpetrators have set up a chain of contacts on border districts like Malda in West Bengal. Their suppliers in Bangladesh ship the notes to India and distribute them through unsuspecting people. "The fake currency notes appear to be as good as legal notes with the missing water mark as the only exception. Even an expert will find it difficult to differentiate them from legal notes," Bidari said.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/City/Bangalore/Fake-currency-notes-racket-busted-in-Bangalore/articleshow/6176753.cms>

NEPAL

No consensus on Nepal govt

Major political parties in Nepal failed yet again to arrive at a consensus on forming the next government even as the second deadline given by President Ram Baran Yadav expired on Monday. The meeting of leaders of Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and UCPN (Maoist) held on Monday afternoon failed to bury their differences and end the deadlock over formation of a 'national unity government'. "Since no consensus has been reached within the deadline, we will try and form a majority government as per provisions of the interim constitution," said CPN-UML chairman Jhalanath Khanal after the meeting. Agreeing to a request by political parties, the President had extended the government formation deadline by five days for the second time last week. Earlier Yadav had given the parties a seven day deadline following resignation of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal last month. But the three big parties refused to budge from their stands. While Nepali Congress and CPN-UML want the opposition Maoists to spell out the exact number of former rebels to be integrated into security forces, UCPN-(Maoist) has refused to agree to the demand. On Saturday, Maoists had laid out the three-month plan to integrate or rehabilitate nearly 15,000 former rebels staying in UN-monitored camps. But the other two parties refused to accept the plan. Although leaders stated that efforts to forge a consensus would continue, it seems unlikely at the moment. And with that not happening, Nepal is headed towards formation of a majority government based on voting by members of the Constituent Assembly.

Despite enjoying majority, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal had resigned on June 30 as per a three-point agreement signed among the three major parties on May 28 to extend the CA tenure by another year. The agreement had stipulated formation of a 'national consensus government' in order to take the peace process to an end and to ensure drafting of the country's constitution within the extended period. Speaking at CA on Monday for the first time after his resignation, Nepal blamed the Maoists for the present stalemate and accused them of failing to fulfill past commitments.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/No-consensus-on-Nepal-govt/Article1-571432.aspx>

Nepal to elect new Prime Minister

Nepal is to have a majority government, with the election of a new Prime Minister slated for July 21. Though most political parties in the Constituent Assembly have said a consensus government

is needed to complete the peace process, differences between major political parties crushed such a possibility. The second deadline given by President Ram Baran Yadav to form a consensus government expired on Monday and he asked the House to form a majority government. Chairman of the Constituent Assembly Subash Chandra Nembang on Tuesday announced the date, July 21, to elect a new Prime Minister.

Prime ministerial candidates have to file their candidacy on July 20.

Madhav Kumar Nepal, who is now the caretaker Prime Minister, resigned from his post as Premier on June 30 as per an earlier deal made among the top political parties — the UCPN (Maoist), the Nepali Congress, and the CPN (UML). The deal also said his government would be replaced by a consensus government; however, that did not happen as these parties could not see eye to eye on issues such as the modality of integration and rehabilitation of the Maoists' army — the People's Liberation Army. The Maoists had presented a proposal to break the political deadlock, but the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) did not accept it saying it would not create consensus. Meanwhile, the Nepali Congress, the second largest party, is moving to lead the new government. Nepali Congress spokesperson Arjun Narsingh KC said his party was starting holding discussions with other parties. The Maoists are also making efforts to take the lead. Among others, the names of Pushpa Kamal Dahal “Prachanda” and Baburam Bhattarai from the Maoists and Sher Bahadur Deuba and Ram Chandra Paudel are being heard as prime ministerial candidates. However no official nominations have been made. On the other hand, more than a dozen other parties in the CA have expressed their disappointment with the major parties for being irresponsible and not forming a consensus government.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/article514028.ece>

Nepal's Madhesi parties agree on power sharing deal

Nepal's Terai-based Madhesi parties on Friday decided to come together to seek a better deal amid the deadlock over power sharing in a new government. Nepal's Terai plains are home to about half of the country's 30 million people, and the residents of the region, are known as Madhesis, who are of Indian origin. The four Madhesi parties -- Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Loktantrik (MJFL), Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) and Sadbhawana Party (SP) -- today agreed to reactivate their earlier alliance and form a common position during the new government formation. The Madhesi parties together form the fourth largest block in the 601-member Constituent Assembly, which functions as the interim parliament. A split in the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum had led to a faction supporting the 22-party ruling alliance led by caretaker Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, who quit on June 30. A joint meeting of the four parties agreed on a four-point resolution, including the right to lead a new government if the three major parties-- the main Opposition UCPN-Maoist, the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), the key ruling alliance

partners -- fail to put together a new government."Besides forming an alliance, Madhesi parties decided to remain committed towards statue (Constitution) writing within the scheduled deadline and submission of a common position on new government formation," Rajendra Mahato, the chairman of Sadbhawana Party, which is part of the CPN-UML-led alliance, was quoted as saying by the nepalnews online today.

They also decided to back one to the big three main parties which assures them to respect the sentiments of Madhesi people living in the plains bordering India.Mahanta Thakur, the chief of the Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party, said the Madhesi alliance would lead a new government if the major parties fail to do so. However, he underlined that their pact would always be supportive of one of the big parties if they promise to respect the sentiments of Madhesi people.

The pro-Terai parties argue that people in the Madhesi-dominated southern plains have long been treated as second-class citizens in Nepal, where hill-origin elites dominate politics, the security forces and business. They have demanded greater economic and political rights, including more representation in the state structure.The Terai-based parties also criticised the decision of the three major parties to form a seven-member State Restructuring Commission (SRC) without consulting them, the report said.Former Foreign Minister Upendra Yadav and Sharat Singh Bhandari represented MJF and MJFL respectively in today's meeting, it said.

Nepalese lawmakers will elect a new Prime Minister on July 21 following a direction by President Ram Baran Yadav to form a majority government after they failed to reach a consensus on a leader.After the end the second deadline set by the president to form a consensus government by July 12, political parties are now engaged in hectic consultations to form a majority government.The Nepal Maoists, who ended their decade-long civil war in 2006, have claimed the leadership of new government as it is largest party in parliament with nearly 40 percent of the seats.The key alliance partners in the caretaker government, Nepali Congress and CPN-UML, have ruled out the possibility of forming the next government under the Maoists' leadership as the former rebels have not yet laid down arms, managed their combatants and dissolved their paramilitary organization the Young Communist League.Nepal's second largest party, Nepali Congress, has stepped up efforts to head a coalition government, though it has failed to agree on a prime ministerial candidate.The Nepali Congress has argued that it is now their turn to lead a government after the Maoists and the CPN-UML failed to conclude the peace process and frame a new constitution by the stipulated deadline of May 28.The party decided to initiate dialogue with other political parties in order to garner their support for setting up a new government.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/Nepal-s-Madhesi-parties-agree-on-power-sharing-deal/Article1-573454.aspx>

Caretaker Nepal PM appoints his younger brother Saroj in lucrative Eng. Council

Shankar Pokharel, the spokesperson of the now defunct government of Nepal and minister for information and communications demanded while addressing a program in Butwal of Rupandehi

district, July 14, 2010, that the current government led by Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal should be revived with honor and dignity. "The Unified Maoists' Party needs to publicly apologize for having failed to garner consensus between parties for the formation of a new government", he said and asked, "they forced PM Nepal out of office claiming that they could unite parties within minutes, but where is the unity?"

Mr. Pokharel also claimed that no future prime minister could with ease run the country as did Madhav Nepal at the time of crisis. Nepal PM just Yesterday appointed his own "younger brother" Saroj Upadhyaya-Nepal the Vice Chairman of Nepal Engineering Council. Shame! Shame! Poppy Shame!!! Minister Pokhrel is talked to be the right hand of now redundant Nepal PM. Nepotism this. Blatant misuse of State authority that it is. Nepal PM must be penalised. But who will dare to do so?

http://www.telegraphnepal.com/news_det.php?news_id=7967

Nepal entangled with the United Nations

The wrangling in Nepal over forming an interim coalition to replace the government that quit on June 30 has projected some of the country's politicians as small-minded, and seemingly unwilling to take the country out of its tension-fraught transition. To make matters worse, some politicians have picked a quarrel with the United Nations, accusing its field mission of taking sides with former Maoist insurgents on the question of integration into the Nepal army. The United Nations Mission In Nepal (UNMIN) was set up in early 2007 at the request of political parties, including the Maoists, to facilitate the implementation of a peace process that entered into a decisive phase at the end of king Gyanendra's direct rule in April 2006. The mission helped with elections in April 2008; its remaining job is to provide assistance that might be required in work associated with monitoring the country's arms and armies, that is, the regular army and former Maoist guerrillas. The UNMIN's present mandate, which was initially renewed every six months, expires in mid-September. While the latest United Nations Security Council resolution to this effect was adopted in May, some political leaders and media outlets perceive that the UNMIN is looking for a pretext to prolong its stay indefinitely. Leading the vocal group is none other than caretaker Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, who resigned as premier in June. The group cites UNMIN's publication of a 60-week work plan on the integration and rehabilitation of former combatants as glaring evidence of the UN's real intentions. Two newspapers owned by one leading publisher printed the controversial work plan on July 9. Sushil Koirala, head of the Nepali Congress, a party in the outgoing coalition, has publicly criticized the UN's seeming "interference" in the peace process. He also used harsh words about the UN mission remaining tight-lipped over the "unabated violent activities" of the Maoists, even after their signing of a series of agreements aimed at ushering in an era of peaceful, competitive politics. True, there have been a couple of incidents in which former rebels sneaked out of their holding camps and carried out violent attacks on civilians. While the UNMIN issued statements condemning such activities, officials at the mission have argued that they do not have the mandate or the logistical support to handle problems of this nature. Theirs is a political mission,

not a full-fledged peacekeeping operation, they claim. Meanwhile, Peace and Reconstruction Minister Rakam Chemjong directed a senior official to send an urgent missive to Karin Landgren, UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon's representative in Nepal, telling her how "deeply concerned" the government was over the work plan for former combatants, who number 19,600.

Landgren swiftly sent her response, with a clarification that her mission did not push through any action plan or roadmap for integration and rehabilitation; whatever was handed over to the leaders of three major parties was a "non-paper" that could be construed as reference material aimed at helping the parties make a decision. A "non-paper", according to a dictionary definition, is an authoritative but unofficial document that is often used to test the reaction of concerned parties. The term is frequently used by such bodies as the UN and the European Union. The timeline mentioned in the document indicated that it was "hypothetical". Subsequently, the dispute reached UN headquarters in New York, where associate spokesperson Farhan Haq told a media briefing on Monday that prior consultations with the main parties of Nepal about the non-paper with a timeline in it "had taken place with the full knowledge of the government of Nepal". The completion of the UNMIN's arms-monitoring mandate, the spokesperson added, in large part was contingent on the parties agreeing on a plan to address the future of Maoist army personnel. Back in Kathmandu, officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appeared reluctant to talk about the issue as their ministry was not taken into the confidence of the political leaders. Independent observers unhesitatingly ridicule the government for its ineptitude, but they also do not have kind words for the UNMIN. Wittingly or otherwise, the UNMIN circulated a non-paper with a timeline of 60 weeks just eight or nine weeks before its own current term expired. Such an initiative was bound to create an impression that the UNMIN was keen to delay its departure. It could also be interpreted as a move to be sympathetic to the Maoists, whose desire is to have most, if not all, of their ex-combatants integrated into the Nepal Army - a proposition fiercely resisted by the army thus far. The UNMIN is also aware that the extended tenure of the Constituent Assembly requires it to issue a new constitution by May 28, 2011. The new statute cannot leave any space for a provision that would allow two armies in one country. At this point, the UNMIN would certainly have outlived its purpose. Some political parties perceived as pro-Indian believe the UN mission has already lost its relevance in Nepal. However, others want the UNMIN to maintain its presence until the ongoing peace process reaches its logical conclusion, believing it prevents interference by India. "By displaying intolerance and arrogance towards the UNMIN, the incumbent government as well as non-Maoist political parties are proving their diplomatic immaturity," said Kesharbahadur Bhandari, a retired army officer, in a comment printed in Kantipur newspaper on Thursday. It is an irony, he added, that these leaders tolerated the clear interference of diplomats from India but sought to humiliate UNMIN personnel. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LG17Df01.html

China's Tibet, Nepal to promote Himalaya tourism

Southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region will work closely with Nepal to boost the tourism industry in the Himalayan region, officials said Friday. "To start with, we'll jointly launch day tours along the China-Nepal border," said Wang Songping, deputy chief of Tibet's tourism administration, at "Welcome to Nepal," a briefing on Nepal tourism in Lhasa. Wang and his Nepalese counterparts are also exploring a cross-Himalayan route passing Kathmandu, in Nepal, and Tibet's Jilung and Zham. "Travel services in China and Nepal are encouraged to work closely to draw more tourists to the Himalayan region and promote package tours in the two countries," he said. Nepal had simplified visa procedures for Chinese tourists. Chinese passport holders who took the direct bus service to Nepal could get visas at land ports in Tibet, said Wang. China's three leading airline companies -- China Eastern, China Southern and Air China -- all operate passenger flights to Nepal. Chinese tourist arrivals in Nepal had been growing by 20 percent annually since Nepal became a tourist destination for Chinese citizens in 2001, Wang said. Last year, Nepal received 15,000 Chinese tourists, said Naindra Upadhaya, consul general of Nepal in Tibet. Large numbers of international tourists also visited Tibet by way of Nepal, he said. Upadhaya said his country would launch "Nepal Tourism Year" in 2011, a national tourism campaign expected to draw a million international tourists. "We hope 100,000 of them will be Chinese." Tourism authorities in Nepal and Tibet signed a memorandum of understanding on tourism promotion in 2003 and established a joint coordination committee.

To date, the committee has held three meetings. The fourth will be held in Lhasa in September.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-07/16/c_13401235.htm

UN defends its political mission in Nepal

Kathmandu: United Nations has clarified that its political mission — United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) — has been working as per its mandate in Nepal. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and some political parties have criticised UNMIN and questioned its mandate referring to 'the 60-week timeline for the Integration and Rehabilitation of Maoist Combatants that the UN body had provided to different political leaders. "UNMIN is acting clearly within its mandate and consistently with calls by the Security Council for the parties to take advantage of the UNMIN's expertise and readiness to support the peace process to facilitate the completion of tasks," said Farhan Haq, associate spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, at a press briefing at the UN Headquarters in New York yesterday. The United Nations has also claimed that the non-paper submitted to leaders of political parties by UNMIN some days ago was prepared in consultation with the major political parties of Nepal. "The issue dealt with in the non-paper containing the timeline is based on consultations by UNMIN, which has been consulting the main parties in Nepal for some time, and those consultations have taken place with the full knowledge of the Government of Nepal," said Haq. "This is not something new." The ideas it has shared with the parties are part of that discussion and are intended to facilitate advance thinking and planning of the implementation of integration and rehabilitation of former Maoist combatants once political decisions are made by the parties, said Haq.

“The completion of UNMIN’s arms monitoring mandate, in large part, is contingent on the parties agreeing on a plan to address the future of the Maoist army personnel,” added the associate spokesperson UNSG.

<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=UN+defends+its+political+mission+in+Nepal&NewsID=249660>

Advance budget to avert budgetary crisis

Kathmandu, Nepal -- Finance Minister of the care taker government Surendra Pandey has on Monday presented the advance budget of Rs.110.21 billion for the fiscal year 2010/11. Minister Pandey presented one third of the total budget as an advance budget at the parliament. The government has presented the advance budget in order to avert the interruption of regular administration, ongoing projects and salary of civil servants. Former Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat had presented an advance budget on 2008 of Rs. 73.54 billion as the country faced a political deadlock over new government formation. As per the legal provision regarding the advance budget, the government cannot spend on new projects except for ongoing development projects until the regular budget is passed by the parliament.

http://www.reviewnepal.com/detail_news.php?id=609

UN rights body want Nepal Maoists to end impunity

Kathmandu: UN rights agency OHCHR-Nepal on Friday expressed concern over threats by Maoists to human rights defenders, saying it must respect the rule of law and keeps its commitments to put an end to impunity and bring those responsible for abuses to justice. Richard Bennett, the chief of the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal, today met Maoist Chairman Prachanda and underlined the importance of respecting the professional freedoms of lawyers and human rights defenders. Bennett told Prachanda that OHCHR-Nepal is very concerned about recent information that some lawyers and human rights defenders, directly and indirectly, have been publicly castigated by Maoists for some of the work they carry out. "The UCPN-M must demonstrate that it respects the rule of law and keeps its commitments to put an end to impunity, bringing those responsible for abuses to justice," said Bennett after meeting Prachanda. "While any individual or party is entitled to voice their disagreement, this should not be expressed in a way that is perceived as threatening against individuals who work to provide a remedy and justice to the victims of human rights or international humanitarian law violations in Nepal," Bennett was quoted as saying in a statement released by OHCHR-Nepal. He said the Maoists must honour the commitments made in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, fully cooperate with Nepal’s justice system and not protect its members in cases like killing of business man Ram Hari Shrestha, journalist Birendra Shah, the Madi bus bombing and murder of Arjun Lama. The Maoists, who ended their decade-long civil war in 2006, are deadlocked with the key alliance partners in the caretaker government, Nepali Congress and CPN-UML, over the formation of a government. Though they are the largest party

in parliament with nearly 40 percent of the seats, the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML have ruled out the possibility of forming the next government under the Maoists' leadership as the former rebels have not yet laid down arms, managed their combatants and dissolved their paramilitary organization the Young Communist League. Nepalese lawmakers will elect a new Prime Minister on July 21 following a direction by President Ram Baran Yadav to form a majority government after they failed to reach a consensus on a leader.

Nepal Army absolves major accused of rights violations: Report

Nepal Army has given a clean chit to a controversial military commander, who was sent back from a UN peacekeeping mission for his alleged role in human rights violation linked to the torture and subsequent murder of a 15-year-old Nepalese girl during the country's civil war. Controversial Major Niranjana Basnet was sent back from a UN peacekeeping mission

in Chad last December for his alleged involvement in human rights violation in the Maina Sunar case. "Even going by the definition of the Military Act itself, it is clear that the Army was acting against a common enemy then and functioning under Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance 2002 (TADA)," Major General BA Kumar Sharma, chief of the the Nepal Army's Legal Department, was quoted as saying by the myrepublica online, the website of the Republica daily "Therefore there is no case against Basnet," he underlined, after a clean chit to Major Basnet after eight months of investigations. The Army Court of Inquiry has concluded that Basnet is "innocent" and that he was returned by the UN "against all international norms and regulations," the report said. According to the Nepali daily, a decision to this effect was endorsed by the Defence Ministry recently. The army had sent a letter to the ministry two months back defending Niranjana and requesting that his case be withdrawn immediately, it said. "The verdicts of our military courts are recognised internationally, so the UN has flouted all norms in sending Basnet back," an army source said. "This is also an attempt to discredit our institution, Basnet's case is a closed chapter," he underlined. Basnet served with the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in 2006 before returning to an assignment in Nepal. He was sent back from the UN mission for Chad and the Central African Republic (MINURCAT) in December last year.

Kavre District Court had ordered Basnet's suspension in September last year on the basis of a case filed by Sunar's mother.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/Nepal-Army-absolves-major-accused-of-rights-violations-Report/Article1-573324.aspx>

Bangladesh, Nepal revive transit deal

Bangladesh and Nepal have revived a deal signed more than three decades ago to work out a transit route through which landlocked Nepal can access the Mongla port. Trucks from Nepal will be allowed into Bangladesh territory to get to Mongla Port. There will be no entry fees for

cargo from Nepal. But Bangladesh will charge port fees, labour wages and other costs. The deal will need to be ratified by both governments and parliaments. Dhaka and Kathmandu worked on the deal at the meeting of the commerce secretaries here Thursday, The Daily Star reported. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Bangladesh-Nepal-revive-transit-deal/Article1-573120.aspx>

Listen Ban Ki-moon, UNMIN will not stay in Nepal for long: Sushil

The Nepali Congress acting President Sushil Koirala has alleged that the United Nations' Political Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) is trying to prolong its stay in Nepal by unnecessarily interfering in matters internal to Nepal. While he said that UNMIN was extending tacit support to the Maoists he also claimed that the UNMIN's stay in Nepal will not be extended under any circumstances. He made these remarks while addressing a journalist interaction program in Nepalgunj of Banke district, July 13, 2010. "I would like to tell UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon that under any circumstances the UNMIN's tenure in Nepal will not be extended", Koirala said. "It is the ploy of the UNMIN to continue stay in Nepal by forwarding 60 weeks long Integration and Rehabilitation plan", he also said.

http://telegraphnepal.com/news_det.php?news_id=7948

Nepal to host int'l climate change meeting in Oct.

Nepali government has sent invitation to 51 mountainous countries for a meeting on climate change scheduled for October 4-5 in capital Kathmandu. According to Wednesday's The Himalayan Times daily report, the cabinet on June 23 decided to host a ministerial-level meeting in Nepal. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal had announced the meeting at the Copenhagen summit on climate change held in December 2009. Countries having mountains over 4,000 meters high are included in this group. According to a source at the Ministry of Environment, there were a few rounds of talks with donor agencies working on climate change issues and they have shown interest in supporting the initiative. International Center for Integrated Mountain Development is technically assisting the ministry. This is the largest meeting ever in history taking place on the government's initiative.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/sci/2010-07/14/c_13399420.htm

Tourist arrivals in Nepal rise, stay duration drops

Tourist arrivals in Nepal increased by 1.9 percent in 2009, however, their average length of stay has declined, local media reported on Friday. According to the Economic Survey 2009/10, the average length of stay has gone down from 11.8 days in 2008 to 11.6 days in 2009. Tourists had started staying longer in the country in 2006 following the comprehensive peace accord ending the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) conflict. Since then, however, it has been decreasing constantly, The Kathmandu Post daily reported. Tourism entrepreneurs say that tourist stay in Nepal has been affected by political uncertainty, strikes and bandas. Hotels too suffered labor unrest in 2009 forcing visitors to cut short their Nepal tour. "One of the reasons behind the drop in tourist stay could be the global recession which prompted vacationers to opt for shorter

holidays," said Raju Bikram Shah, general manager of the Shangri-La Hotel. "We didn't see a drastic change in tourist stay," said David Yonjan of Yeti Travels. "The length of stay depends on the tour package."

Tourist entrepreneurs are hopeful of the length of stay increasing with the number of tourists coming for recreation growing. As per the Economic Survey, 34 percent of the arrivals in 2009 came for recreation compared to 29.6 percent in 2008. Tourism entrepreneurs say that if the political situation remains stable, the trend of taking longer holidays could increase. According to the Economic Survey, there has been a marginal increment in the number of visitors coming for pilgrimage from 9 percent in 2008 to 10.4 percent in 2009. Tourists putting down trekking and mountaineering as their purpose of visit amounted to 20.9 percent in 2009. Likewise, 4.7 percent came for trade, 7.6 percent for formal visit and 1.4 percent for meetings and seminars.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-07/16/c_111962624.htm

Nepal asks India to lift ban on Rs 1,000 and Rs 500 notes

Nepal has asked New Delhi to lift the ban on the transaction of Indian Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 500 currency notes in the country so as to boost business and ease the hardship of travellers from India. We have asked India to lift the restriction on transaction of Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000 denomination notes to allow tourists to carry money, said Yubaraj Khatriwada, governor of Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), the national bank of Nepal. He told mediapersons in the capital yesterday that he had asked the Indian Reserve Bank Governor D. Subbarao to lift the ban on transaction of the big denomination Indian currency notes for the convenience of tourists from India. The request comes ahead of 'Nepal Tourism Year 2011', which aims to attract one million tourists, including some 300,000 tourists from across its southern border. Most tourists and other Indian visitors to the country find themselves in legal problem as they are unaware of the currency ban. As per an agreement between the two countries, the Nepal government has banned the use of Indian currency notes of Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 500 denominations for more than a decade to check smuggling and pushing of counterfeit Indian currency into India. Pakistan's spy agency ISI is well-known to have been involved in routing money to fund terrorist activities through Nepal. Nepal Police on Thursday arrested three people, including one Indian and another Bangladeshi national from the capital with counterfeit Rs. 30 lakh Indian currency. Some two weeks ago, Nagaland home minister Imkong L. Imchen was detained here at the Tribhuvan International Airport for flouting the currency ban as he was travelling with Indian Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 500 notes totalling Rs. 9 lakh.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/Nepal-asks-India-to-lift-ban-on-Rs-1000-and-Rs-500-notes/articleshow/6155508.cms>

Nepal-China to talk on July end

Kathmandu, Nepal -- Nepal and neighboring country China are all set to hold talks on bilateral relation including security matters at the end of July. Senior officials of both the countries have

agreed to hold the talk. According to the officials Chinese security officials headed by Vice Minister for Public Security Chen Zhimin is arriving in Kathmandu to hold the talks.

According to the official of the home ministry home Secretary Govinda Kusum is going to lead the Nepali delegation. It is said that the meeting will be continue for three days.

SRILANKA

Playing local politics at the cost of global ridicule

Sri Lankan politics have evolved two ways of handling an issue of global magnitude. The first one is easy; just play to the gallery, ensure your local vote base is intact and come up a hero for the week. In other words, a death fast lasting all of three days! Certainly, the fiasco would do nothing to effectively handle the real issue or even open a responsible debate on it. But as far as the politicians are concerned their dying popularity ratings have been dealt with and in reality that is all that matters. The second way of course is hard, calls for political maturity and a responsible means to deal with an issue. It calls for a real understanding of international politics, of how global bodies like the United Nations work and an appreciation for the system before you declare war on it. And more importantly calls for a great deal of diplomacy. The results which are real and truly beneficial to a country in this manner are only to be obtained with subtle political overtures. The kind that the Jathika Hela Urumaya calls for seems to fall in to this second category. In an effective play of mature foreign policy dictate the JHU has recommended that the government reveal the real picture on the war to the international community with video clips and other available documentary evidence. Minister Champika Ranawaka said the security forces were moving at a slow pace during the latter stages of the war while the use of heavy weapons and shelling were suspended to minimize casualties and all details would be revealed to the international community. He also said there were no post war incidents after the conflict in Sri Lanka. The JHU had also proposed to the President to send delegations to 15 countries to block the re-election of UN Secretary General Ban ki-Moon at the 2011 UN elections. They seek a resolution in the UN Security Council against Moon to block a re-election bid by the present Secretary General whom the JHU charges had violated the UN Constitution with the appointment of the controversial panel to monitor Sri Lanka. Following this recommendation the President had decided to launch a campaign to get the support of 15 countries including China, Russia, India, Argentina, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Bolivia, Cuba, Kenya, Egypt, Iran, Japan and Indonesia to go against the re-election of Moon. Granted, the Experts Panel could be construed an infringement on the sovereignty of the country. If as alleged the panel's hidden agenda is to seek ways to trap the government in a war crimes charge, then the anger of the government is justified. But the question needs to be asked; are street dramas enacted the Weerawansa way the way to address such issues? Couldn't more be gained by ensuring a more mature political approach? The very fact that the Panel remains intact, despite the fast, is the best

evidence of this situation. According to the UNSG the panel is expected to advise him on the ground situation of post war Sri Lanka; a fact that the Sri Lankan government agreed to when they invited him to visit the camps. A fact they agreed to in a joint statement where the government pledged improvements in the resettlement of the displaced, seeking a political solution and look at any grave human rights violations. Certainly, on the part of the government it could be seen to have activated on its pledge on all three areas. The slow process again, a likely casualty in a developing nation just moving out of a war, is to be appreciated. These however the government must understand are the finer points of playing politics with international lobbies with vested interests. Much remains in the fine print, than we can address by death fasts played locally. What is important is that the government on its part remain committed to addressing the issue in a manner justifying the concerns of all communities as an effective means to address all international concerns. In this scenario the better way to address the charges of war crimes are to place the truth before the international community, in similar fashion to what the JHU suggests. Go before the international community with hard facts on the atrocities committed by the LTTE, how they trained and armed children, denied them of a basic education, how they were forcibly taken away from their homes in the dead of the night. Enlighten the world about how they tied suicide jackets on women, some even pregnant ones, to kill.

Show them photographic evidence of the way they carried out genocide. The hundreds of thousands of Sinhalese and Muslims who've been denied back to their lands, having chased away from their lands within hours lays ample evidence. LTTE's own video clippings on how they massacred entire Sinhala villages, slaughtered innocent Muslims and Buddhists in prayer should provide sufficient proof to this effect. Jolt their memories to the manner in which they held an entire country to ransom- remind them why a military end to the LTTE was necessary for this country to breathe free again. The UN is the home of rights- and the atrocities of the LTTE all fall within the violation of all the basic children's, women's and human rights that the UN holds dear. Question the UN and the international community why the innocent Tamils held hostage by the LTTE chose to run to the Sri Lankan forces' arms the first opportunity they got. There is sufficient facts before the government to place before those that question how the war was won, without having to go out of its way to prove otherwise. What is more necessary is for the government and its representatives outside to find an effective mechanism to fight the powerful Tamil Diaspora that needs for these probes and attention on Sri Lanka to continue for its own survival. The government must come to terms with the reality of global politics, if it is to succeed. It must remedy its own mistakes before it starts pointing fingers at the world. Much of the blame for this situation remain with the utter failure of their representatives to some of the key foreign missions in the world, together with the lack of resources the more genuine career diplomats face in fighting such a global mafia. Political appointees who do not know the first lesson in diplomacy cannot be expected to fight this war. The government must accept that it invited this trouble when it decided to take on the world, without assessing the ground reality or having its own safety network, by way of proper representatives in the necessary missions. Foreign policy is certainly an art; one that must be mastered. Its lessons are hard but the results

real and long lasting. Lessons that the present regime needs necessarily to learn, and fast. Lessons that can't be learnt at death fast fiascos playing petty local politics at the cost of global ridicule.

<http://www.dailymirror.lk/print/index.php/opinion1/15647.html>

Sri Lanka's ex-army chief faces new criminal charge

Sri Lankan police have filed a new case against former army chief and defeated presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka for allegedly employing military deserters, his party said Tuesday.

Fonseka, who is also now an opposition lawmaker, is accused of employing 10 army deserters in the run-up to the January presidential poll he contested unsuccessfully against President Mahinda Rajapakse. He was named as an accused in a criminal court hearing Monday and formal charges are expected when the court reconvenes on July 26. If convicted, Fonseka faces a possible 20-year prison sentence. On Monday, the government had also pressed 21 new charges against Fonseka in connection with another case in which he is accused of awarding irregular contracts while serving as army chief. "This a political vendetta against a war hero," opposition lawmaker Vijitha Herath, who is part of Fonseka's Democratic National Alliance coalition party, said on Tuesday. Fonseka is currently in military custody, facing two courts martial for allegedly dabbling in politics while in uniform and illegally awarding contracts to a company where his son-in-law had an interest. Fonseka led the Sri Lankan army to a spectacular victory against Tamil Tiger rebels in May last year, ending the island's 37-year separatist conflict. But he fell out with President Mahinda Rajapakse afterwards over who should take credit for the military success. He made an unsuccessful bid to unseat him in elections in January.

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iVMfyIPnOKK0VqsxsaDmbRsNOAA>

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Sri Lankan minister ends protest fast

A Sri Lankan minister has ended his fast aimed at forcing the UN to abandon a probe into crimes allegedly committed during the final months of the country's civil war. On Saturday, after three days, the official, Wimal Weerwansa, broke his "fast unto death" outside the main United Nations compound in Colombo. The Sri Lankan president gave him water and an ambulance rushed him to a hospital, the Hindustan Times reported. He had said he would go without food until UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon dissolves a panel looking into alleged rights abuses in the final stages of a decades-long war between the government and the Tamil rebels. On Friday, Ban Ki-moon decided to close the UN Development Program's regional center in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo and recall Neil Buhne, the UN's resident coordinator for Sri Lanka, for private consultations. In a statement, Ban's spokesman said he found it unacceptable that the Sri Lankan authorities had failed to prevent the disruption of the work of UN personnel in the country "as a result of unruly protests organized and led by a cabinet minister." Sri Lanka's 25-

year civil war ended in May 2009 with the defeat of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). The UN says 7,000 civilians were killed in the final months of the conflict. Last month, a three-member panel was appointed by Ban to report on whether any human rights abuses were committed during the final months of the civil war. Meanwhile, the three-member war crimes panel is to continue working. The Colombo government denies any war crimes were committed in the military operation, which resulted in the defeat of the Tamil Tiger rebels in May 2009. Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa has rejected calls for an international investigation into possible war crimes, calling it an infringement on the country's sovereignty. <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=134251§ionid=351020406>

The need for Tamil unity weaves its way

Last week, while Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa visited the Maldives to help that country's ruling and opposition parties settle their political disputes, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met six members of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) in New Delhi and advised them to engage constructively with the Rajapaksa government so that long-standing political and ethnic issues could be sorted out. Fourteen months after the end of civil war in Sri Lanka, resettling and rehabilitating around 300,000 war-displaced Tamils remain the TNA's main concern, the members are said to have told the Indian Prime Minister during their meeting with him on Thursday last. The TNA delegation comprising R Sampanthan, S Premachandran, M Senathiraja, M A Sumandhiran, S Adaikalanathan and A Vinayagomorthy is also understood to have communicated to the Indian leadership its concerns about the presence of large number of armed forces among the civilian population of the north, despite the end of war more than a year ago. Prior to their meeting with Dr Singh, the TNA members had met India's Foreign Minister S M Krishnan and Home Minister P Chidambaram. The Government of India which is keen on seeing a political solution emerge for Sri Lankan Tamils is also keen that the TNA and other political parties representing minorities here built a dialogue with President Rajapaksa so that the process of finding such a solution is expedited. Since the military defeat of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan armed forces last year, TNA leaders themselves have been hinting at the need for change. Apart from nudging the TNA to stay engaged with President Rajapaksa, New Delhi still remains concerned about this country's deeply fragmented Tamil polity. It is not difficult to understand that Tamil parties would enhance their bargaining power vis-à-vis a political solution if they got their act together. During the last 30 years politics in the north and east were dominated by the LTTE that virtually barred all other Tamil parties from operating in the two provinces. Now, it seems the time is ripe for such political parties to work towards a comprehensive understanding. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) which until the assassination of leader Appapillai Amirthalingam, was active in mainstream politics had to confine itself to the fringes with the rise of the LTTE. Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) leader Douglas Devananda who was a hate figure for the LTTE and continues to stay a figure of suspicion for the TNA due to his closeness to President Rajapaksa, is seemingly making his own

attempt to “unite” Tamil parties. “There is an urgency to bring the Tamil political parties under one alliance to address the grievances of the Tamils and also to identify the day to day problems to find an immediate solution,” Mr Devananda told the Sunday Times. The Minister of Traditional Industries added, “We cannot put the total blame on Velupillai Prabhakaran and get away from the problem.” Mr Devananda hosted a meeting of a few Tamil parties under the banner of the Tamil Party Forum (TPF) on Wednesday last. “The meeting was held with a view to discuss the present political situation of the Tamil people and the future initiatives that need to be taken,” a statement from the TPF said. Apart from Tamil politicians, civil society groups too are included in this forum, the TPF said, adding that discussions would be held on also bringing Muslim parties and up-country Tamil parties into the TPF fold. “It was also decided to obtain the contribution of Tamil people within Sri Lanka and abroad and the interactive organizations among them. Similarly, it was decided to seek assistance from the progressive forces in the South,” the statement added. “There is a basic need for Tamil unity and we should not make the same mistakes we made in the past. Because we were not united, the Tamils were displaced, some fled the country while over 100,000 live as refugees in India,” Mr. Devananda said. The formation of the alliance is seen as another move to build up for the provincial elections with Mr. Devananda himself expecting to run as the Chief Ministerial candidate, but the EPDP leader denies that he is preparing to contest the PC elections. An invitation had been extended to the TNA to join the TPF but according to sources, the TNA has decided to keep out of the forum, for the moment at least, due to its own preparations for the provincial elections. The move to float the forum comes at the time when the Sri Lankan government is trying to attract the Tamil Diaspora to return and invest in this country. As an initial step at least 12 members of the Tamil Diaspora were invited and taken to the north along with former LTTE’s arms procurer, Kumaran Pathmanadan. Former Chief Minister of the North-Eastern Province, Varatharaja Perumal who had fled to India after making a Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1990 is now back in this country and has joined the TPF. The leader of the Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (Pathmanabha Wing) told the Sunday Times, “There are only two options as a solution to the ethnic problem. One of them is the full implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution and the other is to implement a federal set-up.” “We should talk to the Government to amend the Constitution to give the rights to the minorities based on the ethnic ratio. Particularly, recruitments to the public service and the armed forces and the police on this basis could help improve goodwill,” he added. “Today we find that there is a shortage of Tamil speaking officers. Even in the Tamil populated areas you do not find sufficient staff speaking in Tamil to carry out duties,” Mr Perumal said. “From 1958 State sponsored colonization has been taking place. The Government should also look into this issue. We can use the Forum to present the case,” he added. According to him, the task of bringing all Tamil parties together was difficult because each party was trying to protect its own sense of identity. “Some parties fear they will lose their identity as usually these types of alliances end with elections,” Mr Perumal said. Dharmalingam Siddarthan, leader of the Democratic People’s Liberation Front (DPLF) told the Sunday Times, “We have seen alliances coming up and fading away. But this is a good

initiative and is a timely move.” According to him, the idea of the forum was to arrive at a collective understanding on issues of concern to Sri Lanka’s Tamils. “We can correct the mistakes of the past if we stand united. If we try to go on individually we will not be able to achieve anything as seen in the past,” he explained. N K Sivajilingam, a Presidential candidate in last January’s elections also joined the new forum. “We will be able to find a respectable solution to the ethnic conflict through this path. If we fail in this attempt we will never be able to find a solution to the Tamil problems,” he told the Sunday Times adding that he was “trying to bring the TNA also into the process.” With the TNA maintaining its direct links with New Delhi, the Rajapaksa Government probably thinks it will be wise to have a parallel forum of Tamil parties. That the TPF may have been formed at the behest of the Sri Lankan Government appears obvious as at least three of its members have already been provided Government houses although they are not Parliamentarians or any other public office-bearers.

Tamil Tigers reportedly head for B.C.

A ship full of Tamil migrants — including members of the Tamil Tigers — is headed to Canada, a Sri Lankan newspaper reports. According to the Sunday Observer, Sri Lanka's English newspaper, about 200 migrants are aboard the MV Sun Sea, a ship previously known as Harin Panich 19. The vessel was reportedly headed to Australia originally, but the boat changed route after Sri Lanka's foreign ministry warned the Aussies. It's now believed to be headed to British Columbia. Some passengers are reportedly members of the Tamil Tigers, a violent arm of the Tamil separatist movement, which Canada has listed as a terrorist group. Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Ambra Dickie said Canada is aware of the media reports about the vessel. “The Government of Canada's strategic approach with respect to migrant vessels includes efforts abroad that involve stopping illegal migrant-smuggling ships that are destined for Canada at their points of departure,” said Dickie. The ship, however, is reportedly already en route. Dickie said Foreign Affairs doesn't know the vessel's whereabouts, but it is readying for its possible arrival in Canada. “Those responsible for migrant smuggling will be pursued, investigated and prosecuted to the full extent of Canadian law and in accordance with the provisions of international conventions and protocols,” she said. The Sri Lankan army crushed the Tamil rebellion in May 2009 after a 26-year civil war. The Canadian Tamil Congress said the conditions on the ground are leading many desperate people to take dangerous risks. “Although the Sri Lankan government declared that war is over, there is no peace... (Tamils) are still a persecuted minority,” said David Poopalapillai, national spokesman for the congress. “When you are subject to various forms of torture... you try to get out of the country at any cost,” he said. “(But) we strongly feel that our people should not take these types of treacherous voyages and put their lives at risks.”

Poopalapillai said Tamils, like many other persecuted minorities, look upon Canada “as the safest heaven” in the world.

Sri Lanka offers ‘advice’ to RP president

Some important qualities for heads of state to have include leadership and steely resolve, said Sri Lanka’s president who also congratulated the newly installed Philippine leader Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino 3rd. “Best wishes to the new [Philippine] President,” Sri Lanka’s President Mahinda Rajapaksa told The Manila Times in an exclusive interview on July 5 in Temple Trees, his office in the capital Colombo. “The Philippines has always been a friendly country to us,” he said, adding that he had met former President Gloria Arroyo. When asked what advice he can offer President Aquino, Rajapaksa said: “You never give advice to leaders.” Afterwards he smiled and laughed. After pausing, the Sri Lankan leader cited two qualities—the first being leadership. He added that being a good leader also means being decisive, noting that a good leader should “not break down to other pressures.” “If he thinks that this [a decision] is right for your country, if it is right for your people, then you must do it,” Rajapaksa told The Times.

Independence

proved

Rajapaksa is not speaking theoretically when he gave the advice to President Aquino. The Sri Lankan leader defied international pressure—from the US, Canada and Norway—when he withdrew from the negotiating table with separatists Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2008. The Tigers, tagged as a terrorist group by more than 30 countries, were not serious about peace, Rajapaksa explained to The Times. The Tigers had control of the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka for decades. When government troops successfully regained control of the east, Rajapaksa again brushed aside international pressure not to hold local elections there soon after the victory. But he did it anyway. In the end, his decision proved to be right. In May 2009, Rajapaksa defeated the Tigers, who were notorious for assassinations and were well equipped with a navy and an air wing. The victory ended 30 years of strife in Sri Lanka. Rajapaksa was also rewarded in the polls recently, winning a second six-year term with nearly 58 percent of the votes against his former Army chief who is now leading the opposition. And with peace realized, Sri Lanka is poised for an economic take-off. Terrorism was brought to a “comprehensive end,” and Sri Lanka’s GDP was forecast to grow up to 7 percent this year and around 8 percent next year, Dr. Sarath Amunugama, Sri Lanka’s deputy minister for Finance and Planning, said during a business and economic conference in Colombo last week. GDP, or gross domestic product, is the sum all goods and services produced in a country in a year. President Rajapaksa told The Times that taking care of the soldiers was also key to his success. He explained that his support for them included equipping them properly, giving ammunition to those who were issued arms, providing them supplies like combat boots and supporting the families of the slain troops.

Pulse

of

the

people

Most important of all, Rajapaksa said, he gave importance to the welfare of ordinary people—not so different from President Aquino declaring in his inaugural address that the Filipinos are his

boss. Rajapaksa also told The Times he was able to end three decades of fighting with terrorists because he enjoyed wide public support. Sri Lankans were basically tired of the conflict, which starved the island country of economic development, he explained.

Rajapaksa said that he wanted to be remembered as “a man who loves the people and the country. Nothing comes first.” “What I want is to develop the country and to keep the people happy,” he told The Times, adding that the gap between rich and poor needs to be bridged. He said later, “People must be able to live a peaceful life, a happy life. And there must be a future for them. People must feel they have a future—for their children.” He added that he stays connected with people by being accessible. “Anyone can give me a call. I answer the phone.” “I give calls to various people,” he added, noting that he monitors newspapers and even calls journalists and trade unionists to find out what is going on. Sometimes he said that he even gets intelligence and other information ahead of the police. A leader must listen to others, Rajapaksa told The Times, adding that it was not a problem having several advisers who tend to deluge the president with ideas and information. In fact, it’s very easy to make a decision in that situation, he said. “When you have so many ideas, then you can [more easily] decide on your own idea.” Just get the best advice, he added, noting that in the end, the president was the sole person accountable to delivering what he believes to be the people’s wishes.

Open for business

Like several business leaders and officials, Rajapaksa said that Sri Lanka was open to business. He told The Times that he hoped that Filipinos and others from Southeast Asia would visit Sri Lanka and invest there. Like the Philippines, Sri Lanka is looking to boost its tourism sector. The island nation also wants to attract industries that will give Sri Lankans employment and provide value added to its basic commodities—rubber, tea, cinnamon and spices. The island country is also famous for its gems—nearly all sorts of precious and semi-precious stones, except diamonds. Countries in Asia should help each other develop, he told The Times. It’s not good to have uneven development among countries in a region, because the poorer nations become prone to security threats that can spread to its more developed neighbors, Rajapaksa explained. The defeated Tigers of Sri Lanka had reportedly trained a number of other terrorist organizations around the world, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf group in the 1990s, according to an Internet source citing Westminster Journal. The MILF, like the Tigers before, are fighting to secede, while the al-Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf is notorious for kidnapping. “So it’s much better that we help the other countries to develop also,” Rajapaksa told The Times.

<http://www.manilatimes.net/index.php/component/content/article/42-rokstories/21432-sri-lanka-offers-advice-to-rp-president>

Sri Lanka's main opposition to initiate dialogue with other opposition parties on proposed constitutional amendments

Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) is to hold talks with other opposition political parties represented in parliament on the government's proposed constitutional amendments and the abolishing of the Executive Presidency.

The UNP's initiative is to be led by Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe. UNP General Secretary Tissa Attanayake told a press briefing in Colombo today (13) that the discussions with opposition political parties will be aimed at building a common consensus on the constitutional amendments. Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the UNP leaders yesterday (12) agreed in principle to the need to abolish the Executive Presidency and create an Executive Prime Minister post that will be responsible to parliament. A UNP parliamentary group headed by Wickremasinghe met President Rajapaksa and the ruling party group yesterday to conduct a special discussion centered on the constitutional amendments. Attanayake said that the UNP was ready to support the constitutional amendments if they were based on abolishing the Executive Presidency, implementing the 17th amendment and are beneficial to the country.

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10B/Jul13_1279028528JR.php

Priority is to protect the dignity of war heroes, says Sri Lanka President

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa said today that the government has given the priority to protect the dignity of war heroes and each Sri Lankan citizen who enjoys the benefit of peace and harmony is responsible to create an environment within the society for war heroes to live in dignity. The President made these observations in a special message issued to mark the event of vesting 700 new houses that were constructed with the financial support given by the public for the families of war heroes. The President expressed gratitude towards the public for the donations they made. President Rajapaksa presented the ownership of 25 houses built in Kandy district this morning to the veterans as a part of the 700 houses that are being constructed for the war heroes under the Api Wenuwen Api housing project. The President symbolically handed over a house built at Senarathgama area in Kandy to the wife and daughter of M.D. Samith Karunawansa of the Special Forces of the Army who sacrificed his life for the nation at the battle front in Pudumathalan. The value of a house built under the Api Wenuwen Api housing scheme is 1.4 million rupees. Ministers Keheliya Rambukwella and Mahindananda Aluthgamage, Central Province Governor Tikiri Kobbekaduwa, Chief Minister Sarath Ekanayaka, Secretary of Defence Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, Commanders of the tri-forces and the Inspector General of Police were also present.

Sri Lankan authorities prepare for first Cabinet meeting in former LTTE capital

A senior minister in the Sri Lankan government said the authorities were busy making necessary arrangements for the first Cabinet meeting to be held in the outskirts of capital Colombo. The Cabinet Secretary, government officials and the Presidential and Ministerial Security Division are reportedly making the necessary preparations to facilitate the Cabinet meeting scheduled to

be held in Kilinochchi on Wednesday (14). Ruling party United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) General Secretary and Petroleum Minister Susil Premajayantha said that for the first time the Cabinet meeting will be held in the former LTTE stronghold, Kilinochchi. The decision to hold the July 14th Cabinet meeting in Kilinochchi was arrived at last month.

"The Cabinet a few weeks back decided to hold the July 14th Cabinet meeting in Kilinochchi and to hold the Cabinet meeting once a month in different districts," he said. The Minister added that all the Cabinet ministers have already made the necessary arrangements to attend the Kilinochchi Cabinet meeting. When asked if the necessary infrastructure has been put in place to facilitate a Cabinet meeting in Kilinochchi, Premajayantha said that not many facilities are needed to hold a Cabinet meeting that would be attended by over 40 people. The government has also decided to hold Cabinet meetings in every district in future. The Cabinet usually meets once a week at the Temple Trees in Colombo.

Sri Lanka Prime Minister leaves for China

July 16, Colombo: Sri Lanka's Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne has left for China on a six-day official visit from 16th to 21st July to participate in the Expo 2010 Shanghai commerce and cultural forum, the government announced today. During his visit the Premier is expected to hold discussions with the high ranking Chinese officials on bilateral economic development. He is also scheduled to meet investors in China to discuss ways to develop Sri Lanka's export sector and attend several business forums. Among the business items to be discussed is the possibility to increase the frequency of national carrier, SriLankan Airline flights to Beijing to meet the increasing demand. The Prime Minister will discuss matters regarding signing of several agreements in the fields of Education, Tourism, Energy and Agriculture with Chinese leaders and in addition, he will also discuss on areas of technology transfer and training between the two nations, the Government Information Department said. Jayaratne will also deliver a speech on the possibilities of Asian Approaches to Poverty Alleviation. However the main event of the visit will be the Expo 2010 Shanghai held under the theme "Better City, Better Life." Sri Lanka is among the 246 countries and international organizations participating at the event.

Sri Lankan government takes strict measures to control dengue as female doctor becomes latest victim

Sri Lankan government has announced that it will take strict measures to control the spreading of dengue epidemic amid reports that a 31-year-old female doctor has become the latest victim of the mosquito-borne disease. Sri Lanka's Health Ministry warned that people who neglect to keep the environment clean to prevent breeding of dengue mosquitoes will be liable for a six-months prison term. The 31-year-old lady doctor who had been receiving treatment in the intensive care unit of Badulla General Hospital in the hill country died on Sunday from the disease, the director of the hospital said. The disease has spread in alarming proportions in the country totaling 19,838 with 140 deaths so far in the year. Despite numerous programs launched by the health authorities the Colombo district recorded the highest number of deaths. There were 2,893 cases reported

from Colombo district and 33 people have died. According to the Epidemiology Unit of the Health Ministry Gampaha and Jaffna districts recorded over 2,300 cases each. The government meanwhile has enacted the Mosquito Breeding Control Act and sought the support of the Defence Ministry to strictly enforce the law.

A task force appointed by President Mahinda Rajapaksa to mitigate the dengue threat recently met at the President's office to discuss immediate measures and unveil a comprehensive program throughout the island. The task force which includes Health Minister Maithripala Sirisena, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, Chiefs of the Armed Forces, the IGP and the head of the Civil Defence Force is entrusted with strictly enforcing the Mosquito Breeding Control Act.

SRI LANKA OFFERS LESSONS TO RP PEACE ISSUES

If the Aquino administration is to deliver on its promise to crush the decades-long insurgencies in the Philippines by 2013, it might be worthwhile to study Sri Lanka's success in defeating terrorism. On July 3, newly appointed military Chief of Staff Ricardo David Jr. said the Aquino government hopes to crush the communist New People's Army and the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front by 2013. Three years may appear overly ambitious given the experience of former President Gloria Arroyo in 2006, when her government vowed—but failed—to end the twin insurgencies before her term ended on June 30. In an exclusive interview in his Colombo office at Temple Trees, Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapaksa told The Manila Times how he ended 30 years of fighting against fierce and well-armed separatists in just three years. He said that he would like the world to perceive Sri Lanka as “a country that had defeated terrorism.” And having realized peace and stability, the country was “looking forward to a developed and better country.” So how did President Rajapaksa do it? His formula for success may sound like common sense rather than a secret—treat the military well, don't allow foreign forces to fight local battles, win the support of the people, and most important of all, be decisive. More than a year after the government defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009, businessmen and others in Colombo seem to glow with a sense of optimism. “Our nation is on the path of rapid growth,” Dr. Anura Ekanayake, chairman of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, said on July 5. He spoke at the recently concluded Conference of the Asia Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Sri Lanka Economic Summit in Colombo. “Sri Lanka has become a great place of investments, not just tourism,” he added.

First, try peace
When Rajapaksa was first elected president in 2005, Sri Lanka was struggling to maintain a shaky ceasefire with the separatist Tigers, which controlled the northern and eastern parts of the island nation. The Tigers were branded as a terrorist organization by 32 countries, including India, the US, Canada and members of the European Union. The group was notorious for carrying out assassinations, which included fellow Tamils and even India's former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. The Tigers were also well armed, and even had its own navy

called the Sea Tigers and an air wing, the Air Tigers. Rajapaksa's successful military campaign against the Tigers did not begin with an offensive, however. He tried but failed three times to bring the Tigers to the negotiating table, even declaring that he was willing "to walk the extra mile" to talk peace in their controlled territory, the President said.

But in mid-2006, when the Tigers closed the sluice gates at a reservoir in eastern Sri Lanka and cut off water supply to some 15,000 villages in government-controlled areas, Rajapaksa seized the opportunity to deploy soldiers. After successfully entering the rebel-held area in the east, the soldiers held their ground despite retaliatory attacks by the Tigers. From there, the military continued its campaign. The people in the strife-torn areas were "starved" for development, which could not take hold because there was no peace, President Rajapaksa said. In fact, the locals themselves wanted government troops to remain in the rebel-held territories because they feared the Tigers, he added. "People were suffering," he said. "There was no development at all." His government eventually withdrew from the negotiating table in 2008, much to the dismay of donor countries, including the US, Canada and Norway. "One thing is certain," he told The Times. "There are people you can negotiate and get nowhere."

Treat the military well

When Rajapaksa came to power, it was apparent that Sri Lanka's Army was also going nowhere. "The morale of the [armed] forces was weak," the president said of the military then. Many soldiers did not have weapons, and those that did had no bullets. Many also did not even have combat boots, he added. He appointed his brother—retired Army Lt. Col. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa—as Defense secretary. The brother remains in that post today and is among those credited with the Sri Lanka's victory over the Tigers. Not only did government properly arm and take care of the soldiers, President Rajapaksa said that they also took care of the families of those killed in action, even giving them the slain soldiers' salaries. He was also particularly proud of Sri Lanka's Navy. "We built [up] the Navy," he told The Times. "We used those small boats concept." Initially, the government also had problems recruiting soldiers, but the president said that when he allowed one of his sons to join the Navy, all of a sudden other Colombo boys also enlisted.

Fight your own battles

President Rajapaksa said that he also took lessons from the history of Sri Lanka, which like the Philippines has a colonial past. The Portugese colonized the island state in the 15th century, followed by the Dutch in the 17th, and finally by the British in the early 18th. The president said that he was particular about using Sri Lankan troops in the campaign against terrorists. The country, meanwhile, received humanitarian assistance from abroad and bought weapons from foreign countries, including China. Using local state forces gave government a psychological advantage, the president explained. If they had allowed foreign soldiers to fight in Sri Lanka, "the people will think that they have come to invade the country," he explained. "That feeling is

there,” he said. “It happened in Sri Lanka. It is happening in Afghanistan. It happened in Iraq.” “They are our people, the terrorists,” Rajapaksa added. “They are not outsiders. We don’t want to kill all these people. You can’t. What you want to do is change them.” And as the fighting went on, the government conducted a propaganda program.

President Rajapaksa said that they air-dropped leaflets that contained messages urging the rebels to lay down their arms, and they even distributed small radios so that people and the terrorists could tap into government broadcasts. He added that as soon as the government had controlled the eastern part of Sri Lanka, they held local elections—despite pressure from the international community not to rush into it. Also, the president said that they launched on a massive development program, building infrastructure. This was conducted as the military campaign shifted to the rebel-controlled north. When people in the north saw what the government was doing in the east, the troops had an easier time winning over the locals there.

Alleged rights abuses

As in any conflict, the fight against terrorism in Sri Lanka was not without collateral damage. The final stages of the conflict left as many as 300,000 Sri Lankans displaced, according to Amnesty.org. Recently, the European Union had pressed Rajapaksa’s government to address allegations of human rights violations. And on July 16, United Nations (un) Secretary General Ban Ki-moon created an expert panel to investigate the alleged abuses. The following day, Sri Lankans led by a government minister protested in front of the UN office in Colombo—forcing them to shut down. Also on Tuesday, President Rajapaksa told The Times, “I’m not worried because we have nothing to hide. I have nothing to hide.” “We know our Army when they fought,” he added. “They fought, on one hand they had the gun. The other hand, they had the Human Rights Charter.” He stressed that the military was instructed not to harm civilians, but the problem was that it was not always easy to identify terrorists, who mixed in with civilians and posed as noncombatants. Even the political opponent of Rajapaksa, retired Army general and now leader of the opposition Democratic National Alliance (DNA) Sarath Fonseka told the Colombo newspaper Daily Mirror that “the war was carried out in line with international conventions and covenants.” Fonseka, who was the Army commander in the campaign against the Tigers, lost in the recently concluded elections against Rajapaksa, who won nearly 58 percent of the votes. The general had a falling out with the president and had filed an election protest charging that Rajapaksa had cheated. Fonseka is awaiting trial for allegedly organizing a coup. Government officials, who refused to be named, told The Times that they were also looking at alleged anomalies regarding arms sales to the Sri Lankan military during Fonseka’s tenure.

Reconstruction, rehabilitation

Meanwhile, President Rajapaksa said only the military campaign was finished and the work to address the root cause of their 30-year problem was still ongoing. “Without peace there is no development. And without development there is no peace,” he said. Earlier, he created the

Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, an eight-member panel that includes two Tamils. The president said that he formed the commission to “heal the wounds” of conflict. Lucien Rajakarunanayake, director of the government’s Policy Research and Information, explained that the commission was similar to the Truth Commission established in the Sout Africa after it dismantled apartheid and to the Iraq Commission set up not long ago by the United Kingdom. He also told The Times that some 4,000 former Tigers were undergoing “rehabilitation” in addition to another 4,000 who had completed that program, which includes teaching them livelihood skills. He stressed, however, that participating in the rehabilitation program did not exempt the former terrorists from criminal liabilities. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka’s economy seems to be humming a year after the Tigers’ defeat. Sri Lanka projected a gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of between 6.5 percent and 7 percent this year, said Dr. Sarath Amunugama, deputy minister for Finance and Planning. He noted also that the country’s economy has always been resilient, even growing between 3 percent and 3.5 percent during the conflict. In 2011, the GDP growth rate was projected at 8 percent, the deputy minister added. GDP is the total cost of final goods and services produced in the country in a year. Sri Lanka is looking to develop its tourism industry and to build more infrastructure to make it a regional hub for logistics and technology-related industries. “People can use this [Sri Lanka] as a hub,” President Rajapaksa said. Even Colombo’s envoy in the Philippines, Ambassador N. Bennet Cooray, earlier told The Times that he was keen on establishing air links with Manila. He explained that this would be beneficial to the millions of Middle East-bound Filipino overseas workers, because the route via Colombo would be shorter, if not cheaper. “The country is open for business—long and short of that,” Director Rajakarunanayake told The Times, adding that the country was looking for sustainable industries that would add value to its primary products—rubber, tea, cinnamon and spices. “Several years of helplessness and despair has changed,” he said.

Next: ‘War on poverty’
Deputy Minister Amunugama said, “We are now in the second war—the war against poverty.” President Rajapaksa agreed. As he prepares for his second six-year term to begin in November, he told The Times that he wants to focus on the closing the gap between rich and poor. He added that he wanted to accelerate development in the former territories of the Tigers, making the quality of life in those depressed areas at par with the rest of the country. Director Rajakarunanayake said that many children in the former Tiger territories have not even seen trains, because terrorists had blown up the railway tracks a long time ago. Sri Lanka has a success story to tell the world, said the president’s brother, Defense Secretary Rajapaksa. He added that not long ago, his country was often in the news for the wrong reasons—for bombings and other terrorist attacks. “That era is now over, no more,” the secretary said in a speech at the economic summit in Colombo last week. “Sri Lanka is poised to exploit its latent strengths,” he added. And like President Benigno Aquino 3rd in his inaugural address, President Rajapaksa said that the people were his main concern in plotting the Sri Lanka’s

future. "What I want is to develop the country and make people happy," he told The Times. He also said that he would like to be remembered as a "man who loved the people and the country."

Students should protect, promote Sri Lankan identity - President

Sri Lankans have gained enormous experience, talents and fortitude which no other country has even thought of in the course of eliminating a terrorist outfit in the country and time has arrived to make use of them to win the world, said President Mahinda Rajapaksa. The President was of the view that the student population should be encouraged to protect and promote the Sri Lankan identity in face of various opinions, attitudes and criticism that are coming into the Sri Lankan society. The President was addressing the special general assembly of Royal College, Colombo to mark its 175th anniversary at the College Sports Complex yesterday. President Rajapaksa was accorded a Guard of Honour by the college cadet platoon on arrival at the venue. The cancellation of the first day cover and a new postage stamp also took place as a part of the program to celebrate the College's 175th anniversary. The President opined that children should not confine themselves to academic studies. He added that they should focus on vocational skills and linguistic knowledge. The students of many communities and religions and social status are studying in this college, he said. He said that the students of Royal College should ensure that they make best use of resources that have been made available to them. President Rajapaksa stressed the need of making the country a nerve centre of naval, trade, tourism, air and knowledge. He added that the Royalists should be proud of their Alma mater for producing outstanding personnel who brought international reputation to the country in their respective fields. "Outstanding Royalists who showed numerous achievements in their respective fields, have spent their student life in a meaningful way. The President stressed that the students of the Royal College have unparalleled opportunities to pursue many fields ranging from Information and Communication Technology to agriculture. "Learning is a cumbersome process and all learned people laboured thorough many hardships to gain knowledge", he added. He said that Royal College, Colombo as the first State school in the country should guide the nation. President Rajapaksa said that Royal College proved itself that it is capable of guiding the nation during the recent past. The President also commended the achievements made by the college in the sphere of IT sector. He added that the parents of Royal College students can check the arrival and departure time of their children to and from the school through the Internet. He opined that the ICT should be utilized to propagate the country's centuries old heritage to the world too. "We can disseminate information our indigenous medical system, local industry, Buddhism and the country's rich history to the world through the ICT, he added. President Rajapaksa emphasized that the people of this country should not think that our country is very small. "It is the duty of the people to prove themselves that Sri Lanka holds an important place in the world. Royal College Principal Upali Gunasekera, Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, Urban Development Minister Dinesh Gunawardena and Deputy Economic Development Minister Ranjith Siyambalapitiya were among those present.

Sri Lankan children affected by war, tsunami, daily stressors: Study

Two studies on children in Sri Lanka, who survived the 2004 tsunami and ongoing civil war, have found that it is not these stressful events alone that contributed to the youths' psychological health, but also daily stressors like domestic violence that are exacerbated by traumatic events and continue after the disasters. The studies appear in a special section on children and disaster in the July/August issue of the journal *Child Development*. The first study, by researchers at California State University, Los Angeles, Harvard School of Public Health, and Claremont Graduate University, looked at more than 400 Sri Lankan youths ages 11 to 20 who survived the tsunami. Researchers who work in areas where people have been harmed by disasters often focus solely on the impact of direct exposure to the disaster, but this study argues that it is important to consider the role of everyday stressors that continue after a disaster. The study also found that while war and disaster have had a direct effect on the youths' psychological health, poverty, family violence, and lack of safe housing also represent major sources of continuing stress. "By making sure not to miss the importance of ongoing stressors in youths' daily lives, our study highlights the need for holistic policies and programs that focus on reducing these current stressors," said Gaithri A. Fernando, Associate Professor of Psychology at California State University, Los Angeles, who led the study. The second study was conducted by researchers at Bielefeld University, the University of Minnesota, the Vivo Foundation, and the University of Konstanz; Bielefeld University and the University of Konstanz are in Germany. This study looked at almost 1,400 Tamil children aged nine to 15 living at home or in a temporary shelter for refugees. Children in this study had been affected by both armed conflict and a natural disaster, and many also coped with domestic violence. It also found that all of the adverse experiences contributed significantly to the children's difficulties adapting. (ANI)

India, China to build rail links in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO — India and China have clinched two separate contracts to build railway lines and communication links in Sri Lanka, the government said Friday. Indian Railway Construction International Ltd has won an 86.5 million dollar deal to reconstruct rail lines in the island's northern region of Wanni, a former war zone, the government said in a statement. The northern rail-track was destroyed during the 37-year ethnic conflict that ended in May last year when

government forces defeated the separatist Tamil Tiger rebels. The government also awarded a 290-million dollar contract to China National Machinery Import and Export Corp to build a railway line in the south of the island, which was largely unaffected by the ethnic strife.

"The contract will also include signals, telecommunications, ticketing systems and their maintenance," the government statement said. It was not immediately known when the projects would be completed.