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Summary:

Bangladesh The principal architect of Bangladesh's 1972 constitution, Kamal Hossain, has said that the government should not amend the constitution 'in haste, without building consensus'. The constitution is sacred. In a far-reaching move, Bangladesh's Supreme Court has restored 'secularism' in the country's constitution. It has also denounced the declaration of martial law in the past and sought safeguards to end 'extra-constitutional adventures. Bangladesh's Supreme Court has reinstated a ban on Islamic political parties in the latest blow to religious hardliners in the impoverished South Asian country, a minister said Thursday. Bangladesh's war crimes tribunal, which is investigating the country's 1971 liberation struggle against Pakistan, has issued its first arrest warrants. Court officials told the BBC the war crimes indictments targeted four leaders of Islamist political party Jamaat-e-Islami, already in custody. Thousands of garment workers in Bangladesh blocked roads and vandalized buildings in the capital, Dhaka, Friday after a recent wage hike offered by the government fell short of their demands. THERE is still time to donate a pack of basic school equipment to underprivileged children in Bangladesh. For the third year the Coventry Telegraph has teamed up with city charity Global Care for their successful School Packs campaign. Bangladesh Sunday announced that in the first half of this year the country has detected 298 cases of A/H1N1 flu. The latest statistics of the country's Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research under the Health Ministry released here on Sunday showed 298 cases of A/H1N1 flu were confirmed during January-June period of this year. It is reported that Bangladesh government is going to undertake a pilot project to produce

coal from Jamalganj coalfield using underground coal gasification and coal bed methane technologies.

India will sell 300,000 tonnes of wheat and rice through diplomatic channels to Bangladesh and Nepal, Farm Minister Sharad Pawar said on Wednesday, as revived monsoon rains have boosted crop prospects.

Nepal: Nepal faces a deepening political crisis as political parties fail to reach a consensus on who should head a new government. The collapse of two governments in two years and a failure to choose a third one have raised fears about the future of a peace process that brought Maoist rebels into the political mainstream. The Madhesi Parties that have so far raised issues exclusive to Madhesh which has limited their credentials of being **Madhesh centric parties** also cannot afford the government formation and providing a solution to the deadlock that is continuing in Kathmandu. , Nepal – CPN UML chairman Jhala Nath Khanal's proposal for withdrawal of the candidacy for the post of Prime Minister has been rejected by the UCPN (Maoist) and the Nepali Congress (NC). chairman Jhala Nath Khanal has on Thursday urged the candidate for the post of Prime Minister from Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Nepali Congress vice president Ram Chandra Poudel to withdraw their candidacies. CPN UML chairman Khanal has urged to this effect stating that withdrawal of the candidacy will create ground for national consensus.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sujata Koriala has indicated that her party Nepali Congress can withdraw from the prime ministerial race for the sake of national consensus. The government in Nepal has lifted a ban that prohibited Nepalis from seeking work in Iraq. The ban had left 30,000 Nepalis already in Iraq at risk of losing their jobs because of a demand by the US for contractors to prove that their staff were in Iraq legitimately. Nepal and India inked a key pact to curb illegal trade in animal parts and other conservation initiatives to boost wildlife in the two neighbouring states. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will continue to strongly support the country as it undertakes efforts to overcome economic challenges amidst political transition, Nepal has forcibly repatriated three Tibetan refugees, the United Nations said on Wednesday, adding it was "extremely concerned" by the move. Nepal and Bangladesh have finalised the draft agreement on Operation Modalities for the Carriage of Transit Cargo. Though the two South Asian countries have signed a transit agreement more than three decades ago, after ratification by both the governments, Nepal's transit trade will get a boost as Nepal can use Bangladesh's second seaport, Mongla, for its foreign trade.

Srilanka: Sri Lanka Rehabilitation Commissioner Brigadier Sudantha Ranasinghe says that 3,000 surrendered cadres of the defeated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been released so far. Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) has decided to suspend its Kandy District parliamentarian Abdul Cader from the party's working committee for supporting the government in parliament. Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) is ready to support the government at any stage for the benefit of the country's people,

party's General Secretary Tissa Attanayake has said. Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) has commenced discussions on several proposed constitutional amendments with the government. Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa today presided over the progress review meeting on development in Central Province, the first such meeting at provincial level, held at the President's House in Kandy. An unidentified gang set fire to a Sri Lankan broadcaster owned by a businessman who had backed the opposition in a presidential election, destroying its main control room, police said. Sri Lankan government has appointed a committee to examine the allegations of labour rights violations made by an American trade union petitioning to revoke the GSP trade concessions granted to Sri Lanka by the United States. Sri Lanka's Minister of External Affairs Prof. G.L. Peiris and Minister of Economic Development Basil Rajapaksa are currently in Japan on an official visit from 26th to 30 July, the government announced. Sri Lanka Cabinet of Ministers has granted permission to the Central Bank to provide a guarantee of Rs. one billion to People's Bank to open letters of credit worth for importing coal to Sri Lanka. recent survey has found that the loss to Sri Lanka economy due to traffic congestions in Colombo city is Rs. 32 billion per year. It is 2% of the value of entire economic activities in Colombo city. Japan is willing to consider a request by Sri Lanka for a free trade deal between the two countries, a foreign affairs ministry statement said. " Japanese Cabinet ministers yesterday urged visiting Sri Lankan External Affairs Minister Gamini Lakshman Peiris to allay international concerns over alleged war crimes committed last year by Sri Lankan forces in the country, Japanese officials said.

Detailed News

Bangladesh

`Don't amend Bangladesh constitution in haste'

The principal architect of Bangladesh's 1972 constitution, Kamal Hossain, has said that the government should not amend the constitution 'in haste, without building consensus'. 'The constitution is sacred. The government should not add anything to the constitution suddenly without unanimity,' said Hossain. The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) did not nominate a lawmaker on the 15-member committee announced earlier this week, citing procedural reasons and calling the exercise 'a conspiracy'. BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed Saturday said his party would join the parliamentary special committee for review of the constitution if the panel was recast with equal number of members from the treasury and opposition benches. The BNP has 31 seats in the 345-member house that includes 45 seats reserved for women. Moudud castigated the way the ruling party chief whip and not parliament secretariat had sent a letter to the BNP asking it to nominate a representative for the committee. 'A single member on the committee can do little,' he was quoted as saying by New Age. Moudud said he found 'no rationale' for going back to the constitution as many years had already passed since it was adopted in 1972 and the amendments were brought to it 'to meet the requirements of the time'. Even the prime minister herself is against restoring the 1972

constitution as she has already said that 'Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim' will not be removed from the constitution and the religion-based parties will not be banned.'How could the constitution be secular with Islam as the state religion and Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim remaining in its preamble,' he asked.Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced the committee with overwhelming representation for the treasury benches that have more than two-thirds of parliamentary strength, leaving a seat vacant for the BNP.The exercise is aimed at undoing the radical changes brought about when the country was governed by military-led governments.

Court restores `secularism' in Bangladesh constitution

In a far-reaching move, Bangladesh's Supreme Court has restored 'secularism' in the country's constitution. It has also denounced the declaration of martial law in the past and sought safeguards to end 'extra-constitutional adventures'.Responding to the ruling, Bangladesh's top law officer, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, said the country would, however, continue to be an Islamic republic. Bangladesh has a 90 percent Muslim population.'Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim', which is not in the original 1972 constitution, but introduced subsequently by a military-led regime, would be retained, he said Wednesday after the apex court's 186-page order was made public, The Daily Star reported.

Although the restored portion of the constitution disallows functioning of religion-based parties, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last week said she had no intention of banning Islamist parties recognised by the Election Commission.The appellate division of the apex court said: 'Preamble and the relevant provisions of the Constitution in respect of secularism, nationalism and socialism, as existed on August 15, 1975, will revive.'The reference to Aug 15, 1975 was to the date when the country's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated. After Mujib's killing, Bangladesh witnessed radical political and constitutional changes introduced by a series of military-led governments.The apex court's verdict upheld a 2005 high court ruling that annulled the constitution's fifth amendment that validated declaration of martial law and changes in the statute book brought about by military rulers.The court ruling said: 'We are putting on record our total disapproval of martial law and suspension of the constitution or any part thereof in any form.'The perpetrators of such illegalities should also be suitably punished and condemned so that in future no adventurist, no usurper, would dare to defy the people, their constitution, their government, established by them with their consent.It also said military rule was wrongly justified in the past, and it should not be justified in future on any ground.'Let us bid farewell to all kinds of extra constitutional adventure forever,' it observed.Media reports Thursday carried comments that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina could face a political problem in acting against former military ruler Gen. (ret'd) H.M. Ershad, whose Jatiya Party is a key member of the alliance.The court's ruling on military takeovers was Thursday hailed by Suranjit Sengupta, lawmaker and co-chair of a parliamentary committee tasked to review the constitution.

'A law should be enacted to ensure punishment. The committee will be considering recommending that the house introduce a law to this effect,' Sengupta said as the 15-member committee began its task.

<http://sify.com/news/court-restores-secularism-in-bangladesh-constitution-news-international-kh3p4cfijeh.html>

Bangladesh court bans religion in politics

DHAKA — Bangladesh's Supreme Court has reinstated a ban on Islamic political parties in the latest blow to religious hardliners in the impoverished South Asian country, a minister said Thursday. In a detailed, 184-page verdict released late Wednesday, the Supreme Court scrapped the bulk of the 1979 fifth amendment, including provisions that had allowed religious political parties to flourish and legalised military rule. "Secularism will again be the cornerstone of our constitution," law minister Shafiq Ahmed told AFP on Thursday. After independence from Pakistan in 1971, Bangladesh's first constitution made secularism a key pillar. Following a 1975 coup, the army-led government amended the constitution's guiding principle to "faith in Allah" in 1979. Religious parties, which were banned in the original 1971 constitution but legalised by the 1979 amendments, are now banned again as the "faith in Allah" provision has been thrown out, said Ahmed. "Islamic parties cannot use religion in politics any more," he said. In 1988, a second military-led government made Islam the state religion in the Muslim-majority nation and incorporated Koranic verse into the constitution. Neither of those changes are affected by the court verdict.

"But following the scrapping of the fifth amendment, these later amendments can now be challenged in court," Ahmed said. In the verdict, which was issued in January but became trapped in an appeals process until Wednesday, the Supreme Court also declared the 1975-1990 military rule illegal, and recommended punishing military dictators, Ahmed said. "This means that, in theory, any Bangladeshi citizen could initiate a lawsuit against a former military dictator," he said, adding that the repeal of the amendment would also limit the possibility of a future military coup. "It is a landmark verdict," Supreme Court lawyer Shahdeen Malik, who is also dean of law at the private BRAC university told AFP, adding that lawmakers would now have to clarify how the verdict would be applied by law. Since the Awami League's landslide election win over the Islamist-allied Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in 2008, the government has cracked down on Islamic groups and parties. BNP founding father, Ziaur Rahman, put the 1979 amendments in place during his 1975-1981 rule. The party, now led by his widow, Khaleda Zia, appealed the Supreme Court's first ruling on the amendments in January. "We are now studying this verdict," BNP spokesman, Khandaker Delwar Hossain, who is also secretary general of the party, told AFP. The government outlawed one Islamic party in October last year, accusing it of destabilising the country. Four other Islamist organisations, including the Jamayetul Mujahideen Bangladesh, were earlier banned after they carried out a series of nationwide bombings that left 28 people dead in 2005. This week, four leaders of the country's largest Islamic party, BNP-allied

Jamaat-e-Islami, were arrested by the country's fledgling war crimes court, set up to try those responsible for atrocities during the 1971 independence war.

Bangladesh indicts Jamaat-e-Islami four on war crimes

Bangladesh's war crimes tribunal, which is investigating the country's 1971 liberation struggle against Pakistan, has issued its first arrest warrants. Court officials told the BBC the war crimes indictments targeted four leaders of Islamist political party Jamaat-e-Islami, already in custody. The tribunal was set up in March to try people accused of atrocities. Bangladesh was part of Pakistan until the nine-month war of secession, which left up to three million people dead. The four accused - Jamaat leader Motiur Rahman Nizami; his deputy Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid; and two other senior leaders, Muhammad Kamaruzzaman and Abdul Quader Mollah - were detained last month on unrelated charges. A senior court official, Mohammed Shahinur Islam, told the BBC on Monday the four would not be able to apply for bail under Monday's warrants. Jamaat-e-Islami accuses the government of using war crimes charges to try to curb the opposition party's activities. The next hearing in the case will be on 2 August. The Awami League-led government set up the war crimes tribunal in March this year to investigate those Bangladeshis who, at the time, collaborated with Pakistani forces - and are accused of killing many civilians.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10758267>

Bangladesh Garment Workers Protest Recent Wage Hike

Thousands of garment workers in Bangladesh blocked roads and vandalized buildings in the capital, Dhaka, Friday after a recent wage hike offered by the government fell short of their demands. The country's garment workers are among the lowest paid in the world. The government announcement that nearly three million workers in the garment sector will have their monthly wages nearly doubled from about \$25 to \$43 was expected to calm workers who have led months of protests demanding higher wages. But it has triggered more violent protests. On Friday, a day after the government formally announced the wage increase, thousands of workers blocked highways and traffic in the capital Dhaka. They pelted garment factories with stones, and vandalized buildings. Riot police used tear gas and baton charges to disperse the protesters. The workers are angry because the 80 percent raise is less than the nearly three-fold hike they had demanded. They say the wages recommended by the government would still be too inadequate, and are demanding a better offer. Bangladesh has more than 4,000 garment units making clothes for major Western brands such as Wal-Mart, and Zara. Economist Mustafizur Rahman, director of the Center for Policy Dialogue in Dhaka, says the huge rise in living costs in the last four years is hurting workers. "The workers real wages had gone down because of the price hike, and so there was a genuine demand," Rahman said. "Although what has happened is below their demand, so there may still be some discontent on that side." The garment industry says a massive increase in wages will increase production costs and make it less competitive. The low wages had helped Bangladesh's industry compete effectively with other major garment

producers in Asia, such as China and Vietnam. But it was widely acknowledged that the workers wages are too low. Earlier this month, the country's Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, told parliament wages in the sector were not only inadequate but also inhuman. The government had hoped that nearly doubling the wages will improve matters. Bangladesh's garment industry is the country's main export earner, and earned \$12 billion last year.

Donate school packs to help poor children in Bangladesh

THERE is still time to donate a pack of basic school equipment to underprivileged children in Bangladesh. For the third year the Coventry Telegraph has teamed up with city charity Global Care for their successful School Packs campaign. This week Paul Rowell, the charity's operations manager for Bangladesh, collected the first batch of packs donated by generous readers. In previous years packs have been sent to Uganda but this year they will be given to children in the poor rural district of Khulna, Bangladesh. While primary education is free in Bangladesh, parents have to supply all their children's equipment, which can be an impossible task. Without the equipment many are unable to go to school or continue their education – often the only way to escape poverty. Paul said: "When we hand the packs out the children are so proud of them and it is such a thrill to see their faces." "A lot of our focus is on education and we really believe it is a key aspect of getting people out of poverty and the packs are essential for the children to access education and the equipment they need to learn."

Bangladesh workers in rampage over death

Thousands of Bangladeshi garment workers went on a rampage, ransacking a factory after a worker died on duty on Monday, allegedly due to negligence on the part of the factory owner, police said. The protesting workers claim that a 28-year-old male quality inspector collapsed and died at a Vertex Group factory in northwest Dhaka after the owners refused to give him leave for hospital treatment, police inspector Haris Shikder said. "They ransacked the factory, broke the windows and sewing machines. They also blocked a key highway, bringing traffic to a halt, which forced us to take action," he said. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas shells to disperse more than 3000 rampaging workers, Shikder said. Police said only six people were injured but a local English-language paper said the injury-toll stood at around 50. No charges have been filed against the owners of the factory. Police have launched a probe into the death, Shikder said, adding the owners have told police that there was "no foul play" and the worker died as he was being rushed to a hospital by factory officials. The death is the second in a week at a factory owned by the Vertex Group, one of the country's leading clothes manufacturers.

On Friday a female worker was found dead at a Vertex factory, having apparently fallen off a factory roof, triggering protests in the capital Dhaka. The father of the victim has filed a case with the police, claiming that five employees at the Vertex Garment Factory in the city's Mirpur district pushed her off the roof. The deaths come at a time when the Bangladesh garment industry, which accounts for 80 per cent of the country's annual exports, is already plagued by unrest and violent protests over low wages. Bangladesh's 4500 garment factories employ 2.5 million workers or around 40 per cent of the industrial workforce, the majority of whom are

women. Bangladeshi workers toil in sweat-shop like factories for 10-16 hours a day, often without the overtime. A worker gets \$US25 (\$A28) as the basic monthly minimum wage.

<http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/bangladesh-workers-in-rampage-over-death-20100727-10st7.html>

Bangladesh detects 298 A/H1N1 flu cases in January-June period

Bangladesh Sunday announced that in the first half of this year the country has detected 298 cases of A/H1N1 flu. The latest statistics of the country's Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research under the Health Ministry released here on Sunday showed 298 cases of A/H1N1 flu were confirmed during January-June period of this year, raising the overall figure to 1,183. Of total flu cases in the first six months of this year, the official data showed, 61 cases were detected in June, 55 cases in May, 98 cases in April, 73 cases in March, 10 cases in February and 1 case in January. The official data also showed that during the same period a 34-year-old woman died of the disease. With the latest death case this year, the number of flu death toll in the country has so far risen to 7 since recording its first A/H1N1 case on June 18 last year.

Bangladesh to undertake coal pilot project in Jamalganj

It is reported that Bangladesh government is going to undertake a pilot project to produce coal from Jamalganj coalfield using underground coal gasification and coal bed methane technologies. Dr Tawfiq e Elahi Chowdhury, prime minister's energy adviser, said that Jamalganj is the deepest and largest coalfield with deposits at a depth of 500 to 1,000 metres, having a reserve of 1 billion tonnes of coal. The presence of aquifer is a challenge to both underground and open pit mining in Bangladesh. He added that "We will discuss the pilot project with the experts and then take it up the government is looking for sources of alternative energy rather than gas." To ensure adequate gas supply to the power plants, Mr Tawfiq urged the industrialists to shut their factories during peak hours in the month of Ramadan. He said if the gas supply remains sound, load shedding would be in a tolerable level during the holy month. Mr Tawfiq said that the government is thinking of load management of gas during the peak hours. Dr Badrul Imam professor of Dhaka University Geology Department explained the technologies presenting a keynote paper at the seminar. He said CBM, which remains in absorbed state, is produced by lowering water pressure and by extracting water from the coal. Dr Imam said that with UCG technology, oxygen and water are injected into coal. The coal is burnt and it

produces hydrogen, methane, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide gases. He added that of the gases, only methane is extracted from the coal and used after purification.

India to sell grains to Nepal, Bangladesh: Sharad Pawar

India will sell 300,000 tonnes of wheat and rice through diplomatic channels to Bangladesh and Nepal, Farm Minister Sharad Pawar said on Wednesday, as revived monsoon rains have boosted crop prospects. India holds surplus stocks of wheat and rice, but it has severely curtailed grain exports in recent years to ensure steady domestic supplies. A strong wheat harvest this year and growing expectations that rice output would be much higher than last year, when a severe drought damaged the crop, have encouraged the government to consider exports. Pawar told reporters that a panel of ministers had approved exports of 100,000 tonnes of grain to Nepal and 200,000 tonnes to Bangladesh. India's monsoon rains, which irrigate 60 percent of the country's farms, were 16 percent below average in June, but have improved in July. Bangladesh signs power transmission deal with India Energy-hungry Bangladesh will begin importing power from India by late 2012 after the two countries signed a landmark electricity transmission deal, an energy official said Tuesday. India will export up to 500 megawatts under the 35-year deal signed by the state-run power companies of both nations, the head of Bangladesh's Power Development Board, Alamgir Kabir, told AFP. "It's a landmark deal as far as we are concerned. It will help ensure energy security for our country and ease the acute power crisis," he said.

Bangladesh has long suffered severe power outages because of demands from its fast-growing economy. The power shortfall is especially acute in the hot summer months from April to October. Years of under-investment mean Bangladesh's power plants generate around 4,000 megawatts of electricity a day, while demand totals 6,000 megawatts -- a figure growing by 500 megawatts a year due to rapid industrialisation. Just 40 percent of Bangladesh's 146 million people have power while peak-time shortages force some factories -- including in the country's key garment sector -- to halt production. India also suffers from a chronic lack of electricity, depriving tens of millions power in rural areas, though the country has ambitious plans to increase generating capacity. In February, Dhaka also signed a 1.7 billion dollar agreement with India's state-run National Thermal Power Corp to build two coal-fired power plants with a combined capacity of 1,320 megawatts in southern Bangladesh.

The deals highlight Dhaka's improving ties with New Delhi under its new secular government led by Sheikh Hasina's Awami League party, analysts say.

Nepal

Nepal Faces Political Crisis as Parties Fail to Agree on New Government

Nepal faces a deepening political crisis as political parties fail to reach a consensus on who should head a new government. The collapse of two governments in two years and a failure to choose a third one have raised fears about the future of a peace process that brought Maoist rebels into the political mainstream. Nepal's former Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal

resigned last month after Maoists led massive protests demanding that he make way for a power sharing government. But despite weeks of negotiations, the three main political parties – the Maoists, the Nepali Congress, and the Communist Party known as UML have failed to reach a consensus on who should head a new government. Lawmakers have voted twice to elect a prime minister. But neither the Maoist leader, popularly known as Prachanda, nor the Nepali Congress candidate, Ram Chandra Poudel, could win a majority.

2008 election brought peace

The situation is in stark contrast to 2008, when elections were held after a peace deal ended a 10-year violent insurgency and drew Maoist rebels into the political mainstream. The polls, billed as historic, brought the former guerrillas to the helm of government. Although the Maoists did not win a clear majority in a hung parliament, they easily secured support from other parties. A hopeful mood gripped the nation as it looked ahead to peace and stability. But the charisma of the former guerrillas soon faded and the Maoist-led government collapsed in less than a year.

No cooperation

Political analyst and editor of Nepal's Samay magazine, Yuvraj Ghimre, says their efforts to form a government for the second time are not succeeding because they have been unable to work in cooperation with other parties. "The Maoists is also in a way isolated or cornered, because when it was heading the government in the past, it basically refused to take suggestion, from any of the coalition partners," Ghimre said. "That is why they are not very willing to support the Maoists."

One of the main points of contention between the Maoists and other political parties is the future of about 20,000 former Maoist fighters, who are currently confined in U.N.-supervised camps. The Maoists want them integrated into the army, but other parties are refusing. The infighting among the main parties has held up the main task with which parliament was entrusted – the writing of a new constitution for the country. Parliament's tenure was extended by a year after it missed the May 2010 deadline for writing the constitution.

New constitution

But the continuing political impasse has raised worries whether the constitution can be framed by next year. Kunda Dixit, editor of Nepali Times, says the three main parties are refusing to step aside because they want a decisive say in the writing of the new constitution. "This is especially true of the Maoists, who feel that if they are not in power, then the constitution will not be according to what they want," said Dixit. "This is why there is a real scramble for leadership and there is a real power struggle, which is reflected in the deadlock in the election in parliament." "The lack of political consensus has led to a virtual political paralysis in the country.

Parliament has not functioned for almost six months. The national budget has not been passed, the economy is stagnant, and development is at a standstill in one of the world's poorest nations.

Frustrating

situation

Kunda Dixit says anger, outrage, and frustration are rising among ordinary people as political parties fail to sink their political ambitions, and resolve the deadlock. "They feel like the parties are so selfish they can't even work together," Dixit added. "There are these radio talks shows where people calling in from all over the country, and every one of those callers is abusing the politicians like anything." Parliament is now scheduled to meet next week for a third time to choose a new leader – but this round too is widely expected to end in a deadlock. Political analysts say if that happens, the two present candidates for the prime minister's post are likely to step down and make way for others who might be able to build a consensus.

But there are fears that even when a new government does get eventually elected, political differences and bickering could endanger the fragile peace process.

Leaders confident: Will Madhesi Alliance support Nepal-Maoist?

The Madhesi Parties that have so far raised issues exclusive to Madhesh which has limited their credentials of being **Madhesh centric parties** also cannot afford the government formation and providing a solution to the deadlock that is continuing in Kathmandu. Say sources close to the Unified Democratic Madhesi Front, if the United Marxist Leninists prefers to stay neutral in the third round of voting as already declared, the Madhesi parties could support the Unified Maoists' Party candidate Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Because, the Madhesi alliance knows it well that if the UML does not vote in favor of Nepali Congress, Ram Chandra will not win even if they vote in his favor. Yet, if Madhesi Alliance votes in Maoists' favor the latter may win. The Unified Maoists' party has 237 parliamentarians and the Madhesi Front has 82 members in the parliament. The Unified Maoists' Party thus needs 63 more votes in its favor for the formation of a majority government under its command. The Madhesi Front constitutes four Madhesh based parties – MJF-Yadav, MJF-Lokatantrik, Terai Madhesi Loktantrik Party and Sadbhavana Party-Mahato. In the meantime, talking to one of the national dailies, Secretary C.P. Gajurel of the Unified Maoists' Party hopes that if Madhesi Front takes part in the Monday voting, it is likely that they will vote in favor of our-Maoists-candidate. "The issues that they have been raising now have well been propounded by our party", also claims Gajurel. "As far as their demands are concerned their votes will come into our fold", he said and added, "If there are other internal issues then it is altogether a different matter."

http://www.telegraphnepal.com/news_det.php?news_id=8041

Nepali congress and Maoist turns down UML proposal

Kathmandu, Nepal – CPN UML chairman Jhala Nath Khanal's proposal for withdrawal of the candidacy for the post of Prime Minister has been rejected by the UCPN (Maoist) and the Nepali

Congress (NC). Khanal had proposed for withdraw the prime ministerial candidacy for forming a national consensus government. Nepali congress spokesperson Arjun Narsingh KC has said that withdrawing of the prime ministerial candidacy is impossible as it is against the parliamentary procedure. Likewise, Maoist Spokesperson Dinanath Sharma has also rejected the proposal.

UML chairman Khanal urges for withdrawal of candidacy

Kathmandu, Nepal -- CPN (UML) chairman Jhala Nath Khanal has on Thursday urged the candidate for the post of Prime Minister from Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Nepali Congress vice president Ram Chandra Poudel to withdraw their candidacies. CPN UML chairman Khanal has urged to this effect stating that withdrawal of the candidacy will create ground for national consensus.

Maoist influential leader underlines for consensus government

Kathmandu, Nepal -- UCPN (Maoist) Vice Chairman Dr. Baburam Bhattarai underlined the need that only the consensus government would be able to resolve the problem ahead of the country. Dr. Bhattarai has made such a comment in the mean time when political parties including the UCPN Maoist are hell- bent to form a consensus government. Maoist ideologue Dr Bhattarai has made such a comment while talking with United Nation Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) chief Karin Landgren on Thursday. Political parties should be engaged on forming a national consensus government rather than majority government, Bhattarai said there is only option before ahead is consensus. In his meeting with United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) Chief Karin Landgren at his residence in Shantinagar today, Bhattarai said that a consensus government is necessary for concluding the twin task of peace process and statute drafting. During the meeting the duo have also discussed about army integration process including other contending issues ahead of nation.

NC may sacrifice PM post for consensus: Sujata

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sujata Koriaha has indicated that her party Nepali Congress can withdraw from the prime ministerial race for the sake of national consensus. Collaboration and consensus is the need of the hour at a time when the country has become the prison of indecision, she said talking to reporters at her residence in Morang this morning. "The Congress has nothing to do with the prime minister post, it has only to do with the country and the people," she said. "Not a majority government, a consensus government is what needed now. The past 13 months of period has proved majority government can do deliver." Two crucial points of the three-point signed among the three major parties—extension of Constituent Assembly deadline and resignation of the government—were already fulfilled, she said, adding that it is the turn of the Maoists to forge consensus. "If the Maoist party comes up with an agreeable solution in the integration of its army combatants, all parties can accept Prachanda ji as the new prime minister," she said. Asked about the UNMIN's mandate, the deputy prime minister said all parties will discuss and reach a conclusion. Nepali gov't to open new diplomatic

missions If everything goes as planned, Nepal will open diplomatic missions within a year in six countries where the population of Nepalis is increasing, which is also expected to bolster trade and investment, local media reported Friday. According to a report by The Kathmandu Post daily, while Nepal has 32 diplomatic missions currently, it has a policy of opening one in a country where the population of Nepali nationals crosses the 5,000 mark. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) is holding talks with the Ministry of Finance (MoF) in this regard. The MoF's prior approval is a must when opening a mission abroad. According to officials, talks are headed for the right direction. Three countries of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) -- Bhutan, Maldives and Afghanistan -- top the priority list. "The Nepalese population in Afghanistan is increasing and we are planning to open missions in some countries within SAARC," a MoFA official told the daily. Last year, Nepal opened diplomatic missions in Kuwait, Brazil, South Africa and Canada.

Nepal government lifts Iraq working ban

The government in Nepal has lifted a ban that prohibited Nepalis from seeking work in Iraq. The ban had left 30,000 Nepalis already in Iraq at risk of losing their jobs because of a demand by the US for contractors to prove that their staff were in Iraq legitimately. The ban was introduced in 2004 when 12 Nepalis working in Iraq were killed.

Correspondents say the comparatively high wages made tens of thousands defy the ban. The government said it took the decision to protect the interests of migrant workers in Iraq after the US Central Command directed all companies working for it to remove workers not in compliance with local, international and US laws. It is estimated that most of the 30,000 Nepalese working in Iraq got there through illegal channels.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10795646>

Nepal, India ink pact to curb illegal trade in animal parts

Nepal and India inked a key pact to curb illegal trade in animal parts and other conservation initiatives to boost wildlife in the two neighbouring states. Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with India at ministry of forest and soil conservation today to combat illegal trade in animal parts. "After the MoU with China in June, we were working hard to enter into a similar agreement with India and the time has finally come for that," forest minister Deepak Bohara was quoted as saying by the myrepublica online, the news website of Republica daily. The MoU was signed by Satya Prakash Yadav, Deputy Inspector General of National Tiger Conservation Authority, Ministry of environment and forests of India, and Nepal's director general of national parks and wildlife conservation, Gopal Prasad Upadhyay, the report said. Nepal has stepped up steps to combat wildlife conservation and illegal trade in animal parts, which are treasured for commercial and medicinal purpose in China. There are 13 tiger range

countries in the world including Nepal, India, China and Myanmar. The tiger range countries have been working together to conserve the endangered wild animal tiger, to double the number or around 7,000 by next Year for Tiger 2022. Bohara said Nepal is committed to double the tiger population to 250 by the year 2022. The government is committed to control poaching, increase tiger habitat and prey animals with a view to double the tiger population in the next 12 years, he said. In a bid to intensify the conservation efforts, Nepal government has recently announced a new Banke National Park near Bardia National Park in the western Nepal, the minister said. As a result of various steps, the number of adult tiger has reached 155 in Nepal, an increase of 28% over last year's population, according to Bivash Pandav, an Indian national, who is working under World Wildlife Fund Nepal office in Kathmandu. Last year only 91 tigers were found when the census was carried out only in the lowland of the tiger reserve. WWF Nepal has provided the government more than \$50,000 to carry out the tiger census. It means Nepal is home to nearly 5% of tiger in the wild worldwide which is estimated to be 3,200.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/environment/flora-fauna/Nepal-India-ink-pact-to-curb-illegal-trade-in-animal-parts-/articleshow/6233283.cms>

ADB Prez assures continued support for soci-economic development of Nepal

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will continue to strongly support the country as it undertakes efforts to overcome economic challenges amidst political transition, ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda said today. Speaking at the conclusion of a four-day visit to Nepal, President Kuroda said the country has made significant gains in poverty reduction and several key human development indicators over the past decade, despite a lengthy civil conflict that only ended in 2006, compounded by Nepal's challenging topography and landlocked geography. President Kuroda said he is confident Nepal can overcome them. "I strongly believe that Nepal has the potential to transform the current challenges into opportunities by staying the course on economic reforms, and ensuring equitable and inclusive growth by focusing on progressive social and human development," he said. To help the government carry out its development program, ADB is more than doubling its country assistance to Nepal from \$ 258 million in 2007-2008 to \$ 559 million for 2009-2010, and is targeting about \$287 million annually from 2011 to 2013. "Our assistance includes a grant component of 50%, and will allow the Government of Nepal to focus on priority capacity building and social reforms," Kuroda added.

UN 'concerned' over Nepal's repatriation of Tibetans

Nepal has forcibly repatriated three Tibetan refugees, the United Nations said on Wednesday, adding it was "extremely concerned" by the move. The UN refugee agency said it had written to the Nepalese government about the incident in early June, details of which were published in a

report by the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT). Two of the refugees -- a Buddhist monk and a young woman -- are now in jail in Tibet after they were detained in western Nepal and taken by helicopter to the border, where they were met by Chinese security forces, the ICT said. Theirs is the first such case to be reported since 2003, when 18 Tibetans, some of them children, were detained by Nepalese police and sent back to China in a move that sparked international condemnation. "Three Tibetans were forcefully returned to China from Nepal in early June 2010. It is a very serious issue and we are extremely concerned," Nini Gurung, spokeswoman for the UN refugee agency in Kathmandu, told AFP by email. Thousands of Tibetans used to make the difficult and dangerous journey to Nepal every year, fleeing political and religious repression in China. They have traditionally been given safe passage through Nepal under an informal agreement between the government and the UN refugee agency put in place in 1989, when Nepal stopped giving them refugee status. They are then given UN assistance to travel on to India, where the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama lives in exile. But their numbers have fallen sharply since March 2008 riots in Tibet led China to strengthen border security and increase pressure on authorities in Nepal to stem the flow of refugees. "Nepal is duty-bound under its own agreement with the UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) to ensure the safe transit of Tibetan refugees through its territory," said ICT president Mary Beth Markey.

"We urge the Nepal government and the UNHCR to work together to investigate this incident, including China's extra-territorial role, and to adopt remedies that prevent future occurrences of refoulement (forced return) from Nepal." A spokesman for the home ministry in Nepal declined to comment, saying he had no information about any such incident, which involved two Tibetan monks living in a monastery near the border and a 22-year-old woman. China is a major donor to Nepal, and news of the forced repatriations followed reports of a new aid package designed to help its impoverished neighbour improve border security. The governments of the two countries will set up a joint mechanism to help share intelligence on "anti-China activities" in Nepal, the Kathmandu Post daily reported, following a meeting of security officials in Kathmandu.

Nepal can now use BD's Mongla port

Nepal and Bangladesh have finalised the draft agreement on Operation Modalities for the Carriage of Transit Cargo. Though the two South Asian countries have signed a transit agreement more than three decades ago, after ratification by both the governments, Nepal's transit trade will get a boost as Nepal can use Bangladesh's second seaport, Mongla, for its foreign trade.

The land-locked Nepal has been using the Kolkata port in the Indian state of West Bengal. "The talks regarding port was quite positive," said Surya Prasad Silwal, joint secretary at the Ministry of Commerce and Supplies (MoCS). Though the transit agreement was signed between Dhaka and Kathmandu back in 1976, there had been no progress on its implementation because of a number of reasons. When former Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral visited Nepal in 1997, he agreed to provide the transit facility to Nepal to access the Mongla port. "Nepal has agreed on the final transport modality whose final procedure will be completed in the next meeting in Kathmandu," Silwal said adding that transport modality is different in process, procedure and

documentation process for Nepali vehicle used during export. Nepal-Bangladesh secretarial meeting was held on July 15 in Dhaka. The two-way trade between Nepal and Bangladesh is not that big with Nepal importing goods worth \$8.0 million against export of goods worth \$70 million. Since the financial benefit out of the proposed transit deal is yet to be seen, Nepali exporters might find it an alternative to the current export route. However, without access through India, the prospect of increased exports of Bangladeshi goods to Nepal does not appear that bright because of the higher cost of freight, according to the Bangladeshi officials. There should not be any reservation against such connectivity, they said.

Srilanka

Sri Lanka government rehabilitates and releases 3,000 ex-Tiger cadres

Sri Lanka Rehabilitation Commissioner Brigadier Sudantha Ranasinghe says that 3,000 surrendered cadres of the defeated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been released so far. The Rehabilitation Commissioner said that 11,698 LTTE cadres were identified for rehabilitation. Among the 3,000 released ex-LTTE cadres there were university students, children, ill and disabled cadres, pregnant women, mothers with children, minor offenders and those who were acquitted by courts, Brigadier Ranasinghe said. The government has released 363 boys and 231 girls most of whom were forcibly recruited by the LTTE as combatants, says the Rehabilitation Commissioner.

Sri Lanka main opposition suspends member from working committee for supporting government

Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) has decided to suspend its Kandy District parliamentarian Abdul Cader from the party's working committee for supporting the government in parliament. UNP General Secretary Tissa Attanayake in a letter has informed Cader that the party has taken a decision to suspend him from the working committee at the last committee meeting for voting with the government. Cader voted in favor of the budget proposals along with the government earlier this month. He has also voted with the government for extending Emergency Regulations. Attanayake has reportedly informed Cader that he may have to face a disciplinary committee in the future.

Sri Lanka's main opposition ready to support government for the benefit of the public

Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) is ready to support the government at any stage for the benefit of the country's people, party's General Secretary Tissa Attanayake has said today. The UNP parliamentarian has said that it is important to implement an executive Prime Minister post in this country like the other countries in the world. Most other countries have adopted the executive Prime Minister system in their administrations, he has explained. It is

important that the leader of the country has the responsibility and would be able to answer to the questions raised in the parliament and executive Prime Minister will allow that, Attanayake has pointed out. The opposition party has decided to discuss on constitutional amendments with the government at any time and has agreed to support the government to bring the necessary changes, he has said. A UNP parliamentary group headed by the Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe met President Mahinda Rajapaksa recently to discuss the constitutional amendments that are to be brought soon. The party also met with External Affairs Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris last Thursday to discuss the implementation of the 17th Amendment to the Constitution.

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10B/Jul24_1279984954CH.php

Sri Lanka opposition party continues with discussions on proposed constitutional reforms

Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) has commenced discussions on several proposed constitutional amendments with the government. UNP Secretary Tissa Attanayake told ColomboPage that discussions on the implementation of the 17th amendment to the Constitution and the electoral reforms have already been commenced with the government.

The discussion on the abolishing of the Executive Presidency and establishing an Executive Prime Ministerial post is to be taken up for discussion after UNP Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, who is currently touring overseas, returns to the country. The discussion on the 17th amendment is carried out between External Affairs Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris and a group of UNP members led by Deputy Leader Karu Jayasuriya while Economic Development Minister Basil Rajapaksa and a party delegation led by Attanayake conduct discussions on the electoral reforms. Attanayake said it has been agreed with the government to commence discussions on the proposed Executive Prime Ministerial post when Wickremasinghe returns. The discussions were a result of the meeting between the UNP and the government led by President Mahinda Rajapaksa earlier in the month. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's major Tamil and Muslim constituencies also have entered into a dialogue regarding the constitutional reforms. Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) have scheduled to meet for talks on Thursday July 29. TNA leader R. Sampanthan and SLMC leader Rauf Hakeem will lead the delegations of the two parties.

President reviews progress on development in Sri Lanka's Central Province

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa today presided over the progress review meeting on development in Central Province, the first such meeting at provincial level, held at the President's House in Kandy. The President reviewed the progress on development in the Central Province with parliamentarians, provincial councilors, and government officials of the Province to streamline the development. The development issues discussed at the meeting included the

highways, irrigation, water supply, electricity, the tourism industry, and improvements to infrastructure. Governor of Central Province Tikiri Kobbekaduwa, Chief Minister Sarath Ekanayaka and other ministers of Central Province, Secretary to the President, Lalith Weeratunga, secretaries of several ministries and other senior officials were present at the discussions.

Gang torches Sri Lanka broadcaster's office

An unidentified gang set fire to a Sri Lankan broadcaster owned by a businessman who had backed the opposition in a presidential election, destroying its main control room, police said on Friday. The arson attack on the Siyatha media group forced broadcasting to stop and hurt at least one person, police and a witness said. Siyatha has a TV channel and three radio stations. A witness said the gang held one journalist and a news editor at gunpoint before burning the control room. "Once the gang left, I saw the security guard had fallen unconscious with blood on his head," said a Siyatha journalist who requested anonymity out of fear of reprisal. "They just came, attacked, burnt and went within 15 minutes." The attack echoed one that destroyed the main control room of the island nation's largest private broadcaster MBC/MTV, viewed by the government as a pro-opposition outlet.

Siyatha was a pro-government media channel, but its owner backed the opposition at the last presidential polls, in which President Mahinda Rajapaksa was overwhelmingly re-elected. The owner has since left the country and his brother was at the time the head of the country's Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, but was replaced soon afterward. Later, the government stopped all advertising from state institutions to the broadcaster, forcing financially-hit Siyatha to close down a weekly newspaper. Rights group blame Sri Lanka's government for tolerating or orchestrating attacks on media institutions and the harassment, assault or even the murder of journalists deemed critical of it. Rajapaksa has vowed to bring perpetrators to justice, but so far no one has been held accountable for dozens of attacks.

<http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-50527120100730>

Sri Lanka appoints a committee to examine US union's allegations of labour law violations

Sri Lankan government has appointed a committee to examine the allegations of labour rights violations made by an American trade union petitioning to revoke the GSP trade concessions granted to Sri Lanka by the United States. The government has appointed the committee in preparation for a public hearing to be held next month by the US to discuss the worker rights issues raised by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) petition. The committee is headed by the Secretary to the Ministry of Labour Mahinda Madihahewa and includes officials from the ministries of External Affairs and Industries and Commerce, the government said. The Committee is also to consult the ministries of Defence, Education, Ports and Aviation and prepare the government's response to the AFL-

CIO allegations. The AFL-CIO initially filed a petition in 2008 with the US Government requesting a review of worker rights in Sri Lanka. The organization resubmitted an updated petition last year asking the US Trade Representative (USTR) to remove Sri Lanka from the list of eligible developing countries to receive Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). The petition alleged that the "Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) is not taking steps to afford internationally recognized worker rights, including 1) the right of association, 2) the right to organize and bargain collectively, 3) freedom from compulsory labor, 4) a minimum age for the employment of children, and 5) acceptable conditions of work with respect to minimum wages, hours of work and occupational safety and health." The AFL-CIO alleged that the worker rights in the country have deteriorated in recent years. The labor law although amended from time to time (most significantly in 1999), still fails to adhere to the internationally recognized worker rights, the American union argued. "The government has also failed to effectively enforce its laws, let alone the international minimum set of labor rights. An inadequate labor inspectorate, together with a hostile Board of Investment (BOI), which is responsible for the administration of the Export Processing Zones (EPZs), contributes to ongoing labor violations in this sector," the petition read.

Trade Union Confederation, a leading trade union in Sri Lanka recently said the pathetic labor situation in the apparel industry was the main reason for the US government to accept the petition from AFL-CIO. Following the acceptance of the petition by the USTR, there will be a public hearing, likely to be held in August, to discuss the worker rights issues raised by the AFL-CIO petition. The GOSL will be invited to participate in the hearing, USTR has said.

However, acceptance of the petition is not a decision to revoke GSP nor does it set a deadline for a decision on action on GSP privileges and GSP privileges will continue throughout the process, USTR says. Under the U.S. GSP program which is designed to promote economic growth in the developing world, 131 countries including Sri Lanka receive preferential duty-free treatment for over 3,400 products. Sri Lanka in 2009 has received GSP benefits of approximately \$116 million of goods. Products covered under the GSP program included machinery, electrical goods, chemical products, agricultural products, jewelry and much more but not most textiles and apparel.

Ministers in Japan discussing investment opportunities in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's Minister of External Affairs Prof. G.L. Peiris and Minister of Economic Development Basil Rajapaksa are currently in Japan on an official visit from 26th to 30 July, the government announced. The two ministers yesterday met with Japan's Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Seiji Maehara and former Prime Minister of Japan Yasuo Fukuda and held discussions on a wide range of issues including the Japanese assistance for post-war development in the country. The duo have pointed out to the Japanese officials that since Sri Lanka is now in the post conflict era, the Japanese investors could play a vigorous role in the development of infrastructure in variety of fields and the safety of the visitors is ensured.

"The Japanese companies have a vigorous role to play in the development of infrastructure in a variety of fields including highways, irrigation systems, power and energy, and the health sector" the ministers have emphasized. Maehara in return has assured that his government's Official Development Assistance (ODA) will be continuously extended to Sri Lanka in the fields of infrastructure and tourism. The ministers have extended an invitation for the Japanese Minister to visit Sri Lanka encouraging more Japanese visitors to tour the country. Rajapaksa and Peiris met with the Chairman of the Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA) on Tuesday to encourage more Japanese tourists to visit Sri Lanka. The ministers told the tourism official that the Sri Lanka Tourism Authority is now concentrating on new areas of interest for tourists visiting Sri Lanka, which are mainly, eco tourism, religious tourism and certain specialized areas such as ayurveda. The ministers have also met with Ambassador Yasushi Akashi, Special Representative of the Government of Japan on Peace Building, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction. The ministers have briefed Mr. Akashi on the current developments in Sri Lanka. During their stay, the two Ministers will also hold talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan Katsuya Okada to exchange views on bilateral relations and international issues and will also exchange views with Japanese Diet members, government officials, economic leaders, and others, the External Affairs Ministry reported.

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10B/Jul27_1280245091CH.php

Sri Lanka to import coal for power generation

Sri Lanka Cabinet of Ministers has granted permission to the Central Bank to provide a guarantee of Rs. one billion to People's Bank to open letters of credit worth for importing coal to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka expects to import 65,000 metric tons of coal in the first consignment by November this year. The value of this consignment is US \$ 7 million. Sri Lanka wants coal for power generation in Norochcholai coal power plant located in the Northwestern Province. Coal is supplied to this power plant by a state company named Lanka Coal. (Private) Ltd. was set up in January 2008, and its shares are held by Sri Lanka's Treasury, Ceylon Electricity Board, Sri Lanka Ports Authority and Ceylon Shipping Corporation Limited. In July last year, Lanka Coal Company (Private) Ltd. invited bids through an advertisement in The Daily Mirror newspaper to supply 2.4 million metric tons of coal for the country's first coal power plant. According to the company the annual requirement of the 300 Mega Watt plant is 2.4 million metric tons.

Loss to economy due to traffic congestions in Colombo city is Rs. 32 billion per annum

A recent survey has found that the loss to Sri Lanka economy due to traffic congestions in Colombo city is Rs. 32 billion per year. It is 2% of the value of entire economic activities in Colombo city. The loss to the economy includes fuel wastage and loss of labor. Air pollution is another effect of traffic congestion. These facts were revealed by a research conducted by a team led by the senior professor of Moratuwa University Amal Kumarage. Prof. Kumarage has pointed

out that the steps such as building flyovers etc. are insufficient to overcome the problem of traffic congestion. He highlighted that the public transport systems are needed to be improved to fight traffic on roads.

Sri Lanka-Japan free trade deal possible: statement

July 30, 2010 (LBO) - Japan is willing to consider a request by Sri Lanka for a free trade deal between the two countries, a foreign affairs ministry statement said. "The government of Japan will be prepared to engage in the necessary consultations with regard to a Free Trade Agreement between Sri Lanka and Japan," it quoted Masayuki Naoshima, Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry as saying in Tokyo. Naoshima was responding to a request by visiting Sri Lankan external affairs minister Gamini Peiris and Basil Rajapaksa, minister of economic development. The visiting ministers asked Japan to consider entering into a Free Trade Agreement with Sri Lanka given the "vast opportunities" now available in Sri Lanka for investment and trade, the statement said. Sri Lanka's 30-year ethnic war ended in May 2009, resulting in an immediate economic revival with economic growth forecast at seven per cent this year. Japan has also been one of Sri Lanka's biggest donors and lenders, helping to fund infrastructure like ports and highways.

<http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/fullstory.php?nid=775636249>

Japan urges Sri Lanka to allay human rights concerns

Tokyo, July 30 (Kyodo) Japanese Cabinet ministers yesterday urged visiting Sri Lankan External Affairs Minister Gamini Lakshman Peiris to allay international concerns over alleged war crimes committed last year by Sri Lankan forces in the country, Japanese officials said. Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada and Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Tetsuro Fukuyama separately told the Sri Lankan minister that Colombo should be accountable about the human rights issue, which has raised concerns in the international community. The United Nations has reported that at least 7,000 Tamil civilians were killed in the final months of fighting between Sri Lankan troops and Tamil Tiger guerrillas last year. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has set up a panel to look into the alleged war crimes. But Sri Lanka has repeatedly resisted international calls to investigate allegations of crimes against humanity and gross human rights abuses while battling the Tamil rebels who were defeated in May last year. The defeat ended more than 25 years of conflict between the Sri Lankan government and ethnic Tamil insurgents. Earlier this month, Ban decided to close UN offices in Colombo following protests led by a Sri Lankan Cabinet minister against the world body. Okada urged Sri Lanka to cooperate with the United Nations to settle the matter, while Peiris said his government is maintaining dialogue with the world body and hopes to improve the situation. Fukuyama also expressed hope that the resettlement of internally displaced people in Sri Lanka will be completed at an early date. Peiris said Sri Lanka has been strongly promoting national reconciliation and expects Japanese companies to invest in his country, claiming that peace and stability have been restored. He said the number of

internally displaced people sank to 35,000 from 300,000 a year ago. Okada, meanwhile, expressed gratitude to his Sri Lankan counterpart for the planned donation of two elephants to Japan. Separately, Japanese Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Masayuki Naoshima met with Basil Rajapaksa, Sri Lankan minister of economic development. While the Sri Lankan minister proposed that Japan and his country launch preparatory talks on the possibility of signing a bilateral free trade agreement, Naoshima said he will discuss the matter with other Cabinet members, a Japanese official said. Sri Lanka has a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India and Pakistan. (Kyodo) DBP <http://ibnlive.in.com/generalnewsfeed/news/japan-urges-sri-lanka-to-allay-human-rights-concerns/186070.html>