

SHUMAILA RAFIQ

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Contents

Bangladesh

Political

- **Bangladesh constitution to retain 'Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim'**
- **Bangladesh forms parliamentary panel to amend constitution**
- **The depth of 5th amendment**
- **'Jamaat will be banned if '72 charter revived'**
- **Bangladesh unlikely to ban religious parties**

Social

- **Bangladesh prime minister says wages paid to country's garment workers are inhumanly low**
- **Bangladesh has 60mn mobile users**
- **'Visit Bangladesh 2011' targets to attract one million tourists**

Economic

- **After China, Bangladesh wants higher wages**
- **Bangladesh Business Forecast Report Q3 2010, provides detailed company analysis**

Geo-strategic

- **Bangladesh to implement 14 projects with Indian loan**
- **Bangladesh Seeks Japanese Assistance In Disaster Management**

Nepal

Political

- **Nepal fails to elect PM; Set for 3rd round**
- **Nepal election stalemate, a setback for Maoists**
- **Nepali House again fails to elect PM, House session postponed**
- **US hopes Nepal government formed quickly**
- **NC picks Poudel as prime ministerial candidate**
- **Nepal CA member attempts suicide; blames party, family**

Social

- **Rains wreak havoc in eastern Nepal**
- **NT to introduce DTH hub service**

Economic

- **Nepal intends to sign FTA with Pakistan in JEC meeting**

Geo-strategic

- **UK partially lifts Tier 4 visa suspension in Nepal**
- **China's Tibet, Nepal to promote Himalaya tourism**

Srilanka

Political

- **Former Sri Lankan president denounces the government**
- **No change in Sri Lanka's stance on UN panel**
- **Sri Lanka Buddhist Monk Party Slams US**
- **Sri Lanka President Opens SHILPA 2010 Trade Exhibition**
- **'PM, Karunanidhi's letters on Sri Lankan Tamils' plight a drama'**

Social

- **WHY NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN SRI LANKA IS NOT POSSIBLE**

Economic

- **Record Sri Lanka Stock Rise to Boost Initial Share Sales, NDB Bank Says**
- **Sri Lanka on track for record tea crop**
- **Sri Lanka to sell billion-dollar bond: government**

Geo-strategic

- **US urges Sri Lanka to improve rights, media freedom**

- **UN aid programs in Sri Lanka will continue uninterrupted, Buhne assures**

Summary

Bangladesh: Bangladesh tonight formed a 15-member parliamentary committee to amend the country's constitution in line with an earlier plan to restore the "spirit" of the post independence constitution of 1972. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said the phrase 'Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim' would not be excluded from the constitution that will be reviewed by a parliamentary committee formed last Wednesday. Changes made to the constitution in around four years after the August 15, 1975 changeover altered the fundamental principles of state policy, destroyed the secular character of the constitution and allowed politics based on religion. 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). Hundreds of protesting garment workers blocked streets in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka on Friday after a female worker was found dead, having apparently fallen off a factory roof, police said. Bangladesh added 13.29mn new cellphone subscribers during July 2009-June 2010, taking the total number of users to 59.98mn. The government has targeted to attract one million tourists next year by implementing an aggressive tourism promotional campaign-'Visit Banglaesh-2011'. Economic Recovery To Be Gradual ; We expect Bangladesh to enjoy a sustained but very gradual economic recovery in FY 2010/11 (July-June), with GDP growth coming in at 5.6%, after an estimated 5.2% expansion in the preceding fiscal year. The country has the lowest labour costs in the world, with a minimum wage of just \$25 per month, a fact that has helped exports to surge to around \$12bn, up from just \$5bn eight years ago. But much like Chinese workers of late, Bangladesh's estimated 2m garment industry workers are becoming highly restive, and they have gained an unlikely supporter: the prime minister. Bangladesh's prime minister Wednesday blasted the garment industry, a mainstay of the impoverished country's economy, for paying inhumanly low wages — a burning issue that has fueled unrest and crippled production. India and Bangladesh have finalised 14 infrastructure projects, including those that will enhance connectivity between the two countries, which will be implemented with an Indian loan of \$1 billion. Bangladesh has sought Japanese assistance in the construction of the Padma Bridge as well as power sector and disaster management, an official statement said on Friday.

Nepal: In Nepal, the Parliament has decided to go for a third round of election to elect a new Prime Minister as both the contestants. Nepal's failure to elect a Prime Minister on Wednesday is being seen as a setback to the Maoists, who had paralyzed the country earlier this year by organizing strikes and blockades to force the resignation of former Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal. Speaker of Nepali House Subash Nemwang Friday announced to hold another round of election on Aug. 2 to elect new executive Prime Minister out of two candidates who failed to gain simple majority votes during the second round election. Nepal intends to sign Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Pakistan in the next meeting of Joint Economic Commission (JEC),

scheduled in October this year, The United States voiced hope Thursday that Nepal will quickly form a government to get to work on pressing concerns including the drafting of a new constitution. The Nepali Congress 'unanimously' selected vice president and parliamentary leader Ram Chandra Poudel as its prime ministerial candidate. A harried woman lawmaker from the CPN-UML party in Nepal attempted suicide by consuming phenol, complaining of pressure from her party and family. The death toll and number of missing continued to rise as the monsoon caused havoc across Nepal, local media reported yesterday. Ten people from a single family went missing in Nepal's far-western Dolpa district in flash floods of a nearby river caused by five days of continuous rainfall. Nepal Telecom (NT) is planning to provide direct-to-home (DTH) service with the coverage spanning the entire South Asian region. NT, the state-owned telecom monopoly, is working to set up a shared DTH hub at its Sagarmatha Satellite Earth Station at Balamba, Kathmandu. The UK has partially lifted the Tier 4 visa application suspension in Nepal to be effective from July 22, the UK Border Agency announced in a statement on Thursday. Southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region will work closely with Nepal to boost the tourism industry in the Himalayan region, officials said Friday."

Srilanka: Former Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has launched one of her most outspoken attacks against the government. She accused it of "completely forgetting the legacy" of her mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the world's first woman prime minister. A senior government minister said Sri Lankan government has not changed its stance on the Panel of Experts appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General and stressed that it will not be changed. Sri Lanka defense authorities say that the state intelligence agencies have unearthed many important information on several hardcore Tamil Tiger terrorists who are involved in international activities of the defeated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Sri Lanka's ruling coalition party Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), led by a Buddhist monk Omalpe Sobhitha Thero and a layman, Minister of Power and Energy Champika Ranawaka, charges that the US and the Tamil Diaspora are behind the UN Secretary-General's panel on the accountability issues of Sri Lanka, and the questioning of country's human rights. Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa yesterday (22) opened the 'SHILPA 2010' National Handicraft Exhibition and Trade Fair at the BMICH. The exchange of letters between Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the problems faced by Sri Lankan Tamils is a 'drama turning out to be a mega serial,' AIADMK chief J. Jayalalithaa Thursday said. There is much talk of "National Reconciliation" in Sri Lanka – essentially between the Sinhalese-dominated Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Tamil people. As a Sinhalese who has supported the struggle of the Tamil people to live with equality, dignity and without discrimination, and now, to live at all, in the country of their birth, Sri Lanka, one of the world's biggest black tea exporters, produced nearly 30 percent more tea in the first half of the year and is on track for a record crop, an official said Friday. Sri Lanka's stock market, the world's second-best performer this year, may see a near threefold rise in share sales in the second half from the first six months amid rising investor demand, according to National Development Bank Plc. Sri Lanka plans to sell a billion dollar sovereign bond this year to offset expensive short-term

foreign loans, the government said Thursday. Media Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said the cabinet approved the move this week, but did not announce a formal date or the tenure of the proposed bond issue." The United States pressed Sri Lanka on Wednesday to improve human rights and media freedoms amid charges that security forces committed war crimes during the last days of the island's civil war. During a one-day visit, US Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake said reconciliation must play a key role in peace building, a year after troops crushed the 37-year Tamil separatist conflict that claimed 100,000 lives." The United Nations will continue its aid programs in Sri Lanka uninterrupted, especially on the resettlement of the Internally displaced persons in the North and East, the world body has assured.

Detailed News:

Bangladesh constitution to retain 'Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim'

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said the phrase 'Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim' would not be excluded from the constitution that will be reviewed by a parliamentary committee formed last Wednesday. She did not elaborate during her address in parliament Thursday. This would mean that 'secularism' will not be restored as one of the basic tenets of the 1972 constitution, political observers said. On continuation of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamist party and other religion-based political parties, the premier said her government 'has no intention to ban politics of any party', The Daily Star newspaper said. The government would not 'allow anyone do politics using religion as a tool', said Hasina, who heads the government of the predominantly Muslim majority nation that was declared an Islamic Republic by a past military-led government. The constitution, enacted after Bangladesh became independent in 1971 on separation from Pakistan, had four basic tenets: nationalism, democracy, secularism and socialism. Socialism was dropped and secularism was replaced by Islamic republic. The parliamentary committee has no representation from the opposition, as main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had declined to name a lawmaker for the 15-member committee. Sajeda Chowdhury, deputy leader of the house, said: 'The door is still open. If they nominate a lawmaker, he will be included in the committee.'

<http://sify.com/news/bangladesh-constitution-to-retain-bismillahir-rahmanir-rahim-news-international-khxlubeajcd.html>

Bangladesh forms parliamentary panel to amend constitution

Bangladesh tonight formed a 15-member parliamentary committee to amend the country's constitution in line with an earlier plan to restore the "spirit" of the post independence constitution of 1972. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina proposed the committee which was passed unanimously by voice vote in the absence of her arch-rival Khaleda Zia's main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) as it has been abstaining the House. "We must amend the

articles, in line with the High Court directives, which were inserted or amended through the military orders if we want to return the power to the people and continue the democratic practice," Hasina told the parliament while proposing to the committee. Hasina referred to the protracted direct and indirect military rules and coups and counter coups in the country and said military personnel paid the price of the army rules as many widows cried in the barracks, and the development process was obstructed in countries which were ruled by the military. "The constitution's amendment is an utmost necessity to assert that no immovable heavy stone (military rule) can be imposed on the people again," she said. The ruling Awami League, which assumed power with three fourths majority in the landmark December 2008 general elections, last week sent a letter to BNP seeking names of their nominees for an "all party parliamentary committee" for the constitutional amendment. But BNP in an emergency meeting of its senior leaders with Zia in chair last night decided to propose any party nominee to the committee as "objectives of the amendment was not clarified" in the letter. Deputy leader of the House and veteran Awami Leaguer Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury was made the chairperson of the committee also comprising members of the left leaning Workers Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and Jatiya Party of ex-military ruler HM Ershad. The three parties are partners of Awami League-led grand alliance. The committee was asked to submit a report in the House after "necessary examinations on amendment" if needed taking expert opinions for the 15th amendment of the constitution. The development came as senior government officials sought to "update the constitution" under an amendment to restore the "spirit" of the post independence constitution of 1972 that had stated secularism to be a crucial state principle. Analysts said if the major articles of the original constitution were amended, BNP's crucial ally Jamaat-e-Islami would be banned from politics. The High Court in a verdict in 2005 had declared illegal the crucial Fifth Amendment to the constitution that legitimised the military governments which came to power following the August 15, 1975 coup when Bangladesh's founder and Hasina's father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with most of his family members were killed. The then Deputy Army Chief General Ziaur Rahman subsequently emerged as the strongman of Bangladesh and ascended to presidency floating the BNP as a political party while his regime scrapped an earlier constitutional ban on religion-based politics. The past BNP regime challenged the verdict by the High Court at the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.; However, after assuming office following the December 29, 2008 elections, the Awami League-led government sought to lift the government petition against the High Court judgement. BNP, however, decided to contest and its secretary general and three other lawyers appeared as "interveners" in "public interest." President Ziaur Rahman's BNP government carried out the Fifth Amendment in 1979 also adding the Arabic "Bismillah-Ar-Rahman-Ar-Rahim" or "in the name of God, the most merciful, benevolent in the preamble." The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in February this year rejected the BNP plea upholding the 2005 High Court judgement. The apex court, however, is yet to come out with a full judgement which is expected to carry some crucial and critical observations, legal experts said. Law Minister Shafique Ahmed earlier, however, said the words Bismillahir ar Rahman ar Rahim

in the preamble of the constitution would likely to remain intact as the High Court verdict did not say anything about it and those were part of the constitution's preamble, not of the "main body".The original constitution of 1972 embodied four fundamental principles of nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism. Bangladesh had its original constitution as the then Constituent Assembly, a forum of people's representatives elected in pre-independence 1970 elections in erstwhile Pakistan, enacted it on November 4, 1972. It presented the People's Republic of Bangladesh with a written set of political principles in less than a year since its December 16, 1971 victory after nine months of Liberation War with crucial Indian support.

<http://www.zeenews.com/news642701.html>

The depth of 5th amendment

Changes made to the constitution in around four years after the August 15, 1975 changeover altered the fundamental principles of state policy, destroyed the secular character of the constitution and allowed politics based on religion. Besides, the changes replaced Bangalee nationalism with Bangladeshi nationalism, and provided political right to anti-liberation forces including Jamaat-e-Islami and war criminals that resulted in an alarming growth of political parties and organisations based on religion.All those amendments, modifications, substitutions, omissions and additions to the constitution were indiscriminately made during the martial law rule that began immediately after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.And the constitution's fifth amendment bill passed in the second parliament during the rule of Ziaur Rahman in 1979 ratified all the actions that also made the supreme law of the land subordinate to martial law proclamations, orders and regulations.The August 29, 2005 High Court verdict that declared the fifth amendment illegal also said it undermined the very sovereign character of the republic.The Supreme Court on February 2 this year upheld the landmark HC verdict with 'modifications' and 'observations'. Copy of the apex court judgement might be released soon.Article 8 of the original constitution, which speaks of the four fundamental principles of state policy--nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism -- was amended to omit secularism and insert the words "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah".The principle of socialism was also given a new explanation, saying, "socialism would mean economic and social justice".Socialism and freedom from exploitation in articles 9 and 10 were substituted by the concepts of promotion of local government institutions and participation of women in national life.The amendment omitted article 12, which contained secularism and freedom of religion."These changes were fundamental in nature and changed the very basis of our war for liberation and also defaced the constitution altogether," the HC observed in its watershed verdict. The changes transformed secular Bangladesh into a "theocratic state" and "betrayed one of the dominant causes for the war of liberation of Bangladesh".Trial of war criminals stopped and their political rehabilitation began with the scrapping of Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunal) Order 1972 by Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed, who assumed presidency and put the country under martial law following the killing of Bangabandhu.By the second proclamation on May 3,

1976, Justice AM Sayem, who became president later, omitted the proviso to Article 38 of the constitution, which banned politics based on religion. In the light of the proviso, the Special Powers Act provides for punishment for use of religion for political purpose. But omission of the proviso radically altered the nature of political activities in the country. It led to the rise of religion-based political parties, which were constitutionally banned immediately after the independence for their anti-liberation role. The constitutional bar on war criminals convicted under Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunal) Order 1972 from becoming voters and contesting parliamentary elections was also lifted during the rule of Zia. During his military rule, Zia brought some fundamental changes to the constitution by a proclamation on April 23, 1977.

The preamble to the constitution was preceded by "Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim" (in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful). The preamble also underwent two changes--the words "a historic struggle for national liberation" were replaced with "a historic war for national independence", and "nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism" were replaced with "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice"

<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=147758>

'Jamaat will be banned if '72 charter revived'

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>

Bangladesh unlikely to ban religious parties

Bangladesh is unlikely to ban religious parties or drop the Islamic verse "Bismillahir Rahmani Rahim" from the preamble of the constitution that will be reviewed by a top parliamentary panel in a bid to restore the "secular" spirit of 1971 'Liberation War' Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina told party lawmakers that she was personally opposed to the idea of banning any political party, sources said today. "I am not in favour of banning any political party," Hasina was quoted as saying by the private *Bdnews* news agency after parliament constituted a special committee to amend the constitution two days ago.

"We want to revive the spirit of Liberation War and enable people to reap the dividends of democracy," Hasina told parliament yesterday. A senior Awami League MP told *PTI* that the ruling party lawmakers and the prime minister also agreed not to delete 'Bismillahir Rahmani Rahim' from the preamble of the constitution. He said Hasina told the lawmakers that no amendment should be made to the constitution which could hurt people's religious sentiment. The parliamentary initiative came as senior government leaders have said they supported "updating the constitution" under an amendment to restore the "spirit" of the post independence constitution of 1972 that had stated secularism to be a crucial state principle. Law minister Shafique Ahmed earlier told *PTI* that Islamic verse "Bismillahir Rahmani Rahim" is likely to remain intact in the preamble of the constitution. "Secularism would automatically be restored in the constitution (in line with the Liberation War spirit) if the 2005 high court verdict could be upheld on the amendment," he said. The original constitution of 1972 embodied four fundamental principles of nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism. Socialism was dropped and secularism was replaced by Islamic republic. Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, chairman of the 15-member special parliamentary committee and deputy leader of the House, outlined six objectives of the planned amendment to the constitution. Several religious political parties, including the largest Jamaat-e-Islami, have threatened to take to the streets amid speculation that they could be banned.

Bangladeshi garment worker death sparks

Hundreds of protesting garment workers blocked streets in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka on Friday after a female worker was found dead, having apparently fallen off a factory roof, police said. The father of the victim has filed a case with the police, claiming that five employees of the Vertex Garment Factory in the city's Mirpur district pushed her off the factory roof, local police chief Kazi Wazed Ali said. "The father, in his statement, named the persons responsible but did not mention any reason why they would kill her," Ali said.

Bangladesh has 60mn mobile users

Bangladesh added 13.29mn new cellphone subscribers during July 2009-June 2010, taking the total number of users to 59.98mn. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission's data, released on Tuesday, showed that the six top mobile operators added 1.52mn new subscribers as on June 30 this year. An executive of a mobile company claimed that the number of subscribers would have been greater if the government had not imposed the tax of 800 taka that they have to pay for each SIM. Mobile operators claim that they gave 'subsidy' to each new subscriber by selling every SIM at a price much below 800 taka (\$12), mainly because of the fierce competition between mobile companies, New Age newspaper said. The largest operator, Grameenphone, added 5.3mn subscribers in the just concluded financial year, and added 0.91mn consumers in June to take its total subscriber base to 26.46mn

http://www.gulftimes.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=375997&version=1&template_id=44&parent_id=24

'Visit Bangladesh 2011' targets to attract one million tourists

The government has targeted to attract one million tourists next year by implementing an aggressive tourism promotional campaign-'Visit Banglaesh-2011'."We are taking huge preparation for conducting promotional campaign at home and abroad next year targeting those foreign tourists, who are looking for new destinations of making holidays," Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister G M Quader told BSS on Thursday. At present on an average four lakh foreign travelers visit Bangladesh in a year. The government has chosen the year 2011 to observe tourism year as one of the mega events of the earth - cricket world cup - will be hosted in the country this year, he said. "Initially, we have set a target of receiving one million foreign tourists during the tourism year 2011 and expecting more than two million afterwards," he said. The Minister said Parjatan Corporation, the national tourism facilitating body, has already chalked out lots of events for round the year blending with traditional, cultural, tribal and religious festivals, he said. The year-long programme which will initially cost Taka 150 crore also includes staging of road shows and Bangladesh week in different countries as well as inviting foreign renowned international travel writers and journalists to visit Bangladesh. The promotional campaign for the tourist year would be conducted as public private partnership. "We are looking for private organizations for holding international standard events as well as conducting overseas promotional campaign," he added.He said the tourism ministry has already selected more than 750 places as tourist spots and taken initiatives to develop infrastructure facilities there with the help of local government division. The ministry is actively considering for building some special tourist zones only for the foreigners with foreign investment, the minister added. The country has lots of tourist tempting treasures in terms of both natural beauty, culture, heritage and archeological aspects, he said, adding but "we have never conducted such huge international promotional campaign to attract travelers." "We have to spread the message among the foreigners that Bangladesh is enriched with many resources attractive to travelers," Quader said. Detailing the government's plan to boost up tourism sector, the Minister said the

government has already formulated a national tourism policy and enacted two laws styled 'Bangladesh Reserved Areas for Tourism and Special Tourism Zones Act-2010' and 'Bangladesh Parjatan Board Act-2010'. The policy and the two laws will help us to establish a world standard planned and eco-friendly tourism in the country which could be served as one of the major foreign exchange earning sources of the country, he said. Sources with the ministry said revenue earning from the sector was Taka 449.38 crore in 2005, Taka 553.6 crore in 2006, Taka 526.51 crore in 2007, Taka 612.45 crore in 2008 and Taka 573.79 crore in 2009.

<http://nation.ittefaq.com/issues/2010/07/24/news0179.htm>

Bangladesh Business Forecast Report Q3 2010, provides detailed company analysis

Economic Recovery To Be Gradual ; We expect Bangladesh to enjoy a sustained but very gradual economic recovery in FY 2010/11 (July-June), with GDP growth coming in at 5.6%, after an estimated 5.2% expansion in the preceding fiscal year. Further ahead, we believe weaker remittance growth and sluggish demand for Bangladeshi textiles in G3 markets will result in real GDP growth averaging 5.8% in FY 2011/12 to FY 2014/15, with a still volatile political situation and a poorly capitalised banking sector constituting the main downside risks. Improvement of the business environment via battling corruption and increasing power output will be key in improving Bangladesh's growth prospects. Bangladesh has emerged as a key player in the increasing struggle for influence in South East Asia between China and India. We expect China to use its vast investment funds to expand its influence in Bangladesh in spite of the traditionally more pro-Indian Awami League currently being in power. On the domestic front, the upcoming trials of alleged war crimes during the war of independence in 1971 are likely to increase tension between the government and the opposition, with the lingering threat of Islamist terrorism also bringing downside risks to our short-term political risk ratings of 65.0. Remittances remain key to economic growth, by driving private consumption, and Bangladesh's balance of payments position. We expect Bangladesh's current account surplus to shrink, in percentage of GDP terms, in FY 2010/11 (July-June) and FY 2011/12 as the trade deficit widens and remittance growth slows. With foreign currency reserves currently at US \$10bn in June 2010, equivalent to approximately six months of imports, the risks to Bangladesh's balance of payments are limited. We expect stagnant remittance growth to have a larger impact on economic growth by reducing private consumption growth. Bangladesh's scores 30.9 in our revised business environment ratings, placing it in 135th place among 167 countries surveyed. Bangladesh's main weakness lies in its poor institutions, which score a mere 21.8, putting it on par with Afghanistan and a number of African countries. Worryingly, the progress made in battling corruption under the caretaker administration in office between January 2007 and January 2009 has been abandoned under the civilian government of Sheikh Hasina Wajed and the Awami League. Moreover, with investment in the power sector still far from adequate, we expect electricity shortages to continue to hamper

Bangladesh's business environment for the foreseeable future.
http://www.officialwire.com/main.php?action=posted_news&rid=187875

After China, Bangladesh wants higher wages

With Chinese labour costs rising fast, international clothing companies like H&M, Wal-Mart Marks & Spencer, Gap and Zara have looked to up their sourcing from other, lower cost producers like Bangladesh. The country has the lowest labour costs in the world, with a minimum wage of just \$25 per month, a fact that has helped exports to surge to around \$12bn, up from just \$5bn eight years ago. But much like Chinese workers of late, Bangladesh's estimated 2m garment industry workers are becoming highly restive, and they have gained an unlikely supporter: the prime minister.

Bangladesh's garment workers, mostly women, have been arguing they cannot survive on their current wages. Sheikh Hasina Wajed, Bangladesh's female prime minister, agreed publicly this week. "The wages the workers are paid ... is not only insufficient but also inhuman," the prime minister told Parliament this week. The prime minister's tough talk spells bad news for Bangladesh's thousands of garment factory owners, mainly local entrepreneurs, who have prospered through their trade with multinational buyers. Dhaka is currently considering a revision of the minimum wage, and factory owners are nervous. They have rejected workers' demands for an increase in the minimum wage to around \$75, saying their low labour costs are offset by high costs of power, due to a major shortage, and other infrastructure bottlenecks, but such a drastic hike will push them over the edge. Yet the prime minister appears unsympathetic to the manufacturers' tales of woe. "They [the manufacturers] should feel that they make profit from exports at the cost of the labourers' hard work," she said. That hard work, Sheikh Hasina has made clear, will soon be more generously rewarded.

Bangladesh prime minister says wages paid to country's garment workers are inhumanly low

Bangladesh's prime minister Wednesday blasted the garment industry, a mainstay of the impoverished country's economy, for paying inhumanly low wages — a burning issue that has fueled unrest and crippled production. In recent months, thousands of garment workers demanding higher wages have protested on the streets, attacked factories and blockaded highways in and outside the capital, Dhaka. The country's garment workers are paid the least in the world and are unable to buy food and arrange shelter on their monthly earnings, according to the International Trade Union Confederation, a Vienna-based labour rights group. The official minimum wage is 1662 takas (\$25), and the government is negotiating a new minimum that it plans to announce by the end of this month. "The wages the workers are paid ... is not only insufficient but also inhuman," Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told Parliament, as she fielded questions from lawmakers. "They (the manufacturers) should feel that they make profit from

exports at the cost of the labourers' hard work," she said. Workers and labour rights groups have pressed for a monthly wage of 5,000 takas (\$73), but Hasina said manufacturers were not willing to meet the workers' demand. In June, about 700 garment factories in a major industrial hub near Dhaka were shut for two days after days of violent protests by tens of thousands of workers demanding better wages. Bangladesh has some 4,000 garment factories that export mainly to the United States and Europe. Garment exports earn the country \$12 billion a year. The industry employs 2 million people, mostly women. International clothing companies Wal-Mart, Tesco, H&M, Zara, Carrefour, Gap, Metro, JCPenney, Marks & Spencer, Kohl's, Levi Strauss and Tommy Hilfiger all import in bulk from Bangladesh. The manufacturers say they're being squeezed by a slump in prices on international market because of global economic crisis. They also say higher production costs due to an energy crisis and poor infrastructure are pushing them to the edge.

Bangladesh to implement 14 projects with Indian loan

India and Bangladesh have finalised 14 infrastructure projects, including those that will enhance connectivity between the two countries, which will be implemented with an Indian loan of \$1 billion. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced a line of credit of \$1 billion during the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in January for a range of projects including railway infrastructure, supply of broad gauge locomotives and passenger coaches and dredging of rivers. Bangladeshi officials said Tuesday that Dhaka submitted 29 projects for utilising the \$1 billion loan. Of them, the two sides at a recent meeting held in New Delhi reviewed the 29 projects and finalised 14 for implementation, Daily Star reported Wednesday. Most of the projects are for development of railway infrastructure in Bangladesh. Officials say the projects have been sent to the planning ministry for final approval. After the ministry's clearance, the finance ministries of the two countries will sign a loan agreement to utilise the loan. These projects include: procurement of six high-powered dredgers for \$71.7 million. One of the dredgers will be used for dredging at Mongla Port, three for Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority and two for Bangladesh Water Development Board.

--an internal container port at Ashuganj at a cost of \$36.2 million. Bangladesh and India have signed an agreement under which Ashuganj in Bangladesh and Silghat in India have been declared ports of call.

-- 10 locomotive engines will be available to Bangladesh Railway at a cost of \$35.5 million. Dhaka will also purchase 125 broad gauge passenger coaches for \$53.6 million.

-- India will construct a railway bridge on river Titas costing \$120 million.

-- Dhaka will buy 300 double-decker buses for \$30 million and 50 luxury buses costing \$6 million.

-- A power gridline will be set up for \$158 million; a 400 KV inter-connector will be set up from Bahrampur in India to Bheramara in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Seeks Japanese Assistance In Disaster Management

Bangladesh has sought Japanese assistance in the construction of the Padma Bridge as well as power sector and disaster management, an official statement said on Friday. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina always emphasizes on attracting more foreign investment in these sectors to build up the future Bangladesh, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said when she met Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada on the sidelines of 17th ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial Meeting in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, on Thursday. Indicating communication a vital sector for the overall socio-economic development, the foreign minister sought Japanese cooperation for the construction of the Padma Bridge as it did for the Bangabandhu Bridge. Expressing Japanese positive indication regarding the Padma Bridge, Okada said that they would like to work together with Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. He further informed that they have already signed the exchanged notes regarding the Bheramara Cycle Power Generation Plant and hoped for its quick implementation. Japanese foreign minister sought the cooperation to work together in various regional and international fora with Bangladesh. Emphasizing the importance of Sheikh Hasina's visit, Okada said Bangladesh is one of the close comprehensive economic partners of Japan. "Japanese businessmen are taking interest to invest for developing the socio-economic infrastructure of Bangladesh," he added. Read more: <http://www.allheadlinenews.com/articles/7019375791#ixzz0uaYNqK5c>

NEPAL

Nepal fails to elect PM; Set for 3rd round

In Nepal, the Parliament has decided to go for a third round of election to elect a new Prime Minister as both the contestants - Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda of the Unified CPN(Maoist) and Ram Chandra Poudyal of Nepali Congress failed to muster the simple majority in the re-poll held on Friday.

Nepal election stalemate, a setback for Maoists

Nepal's failure to elect a Prime Minister on Wednesday is being seen as a setback to the Maoists, who had paralyzed the country earlier this year by organizing strikes and blockades to force the resignation of former Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal. UCPN-Maoist party's Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, Nepali Congress party's Ram Chandra Poudel nor Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist)'s Jhalanath Khanal -the three major candidates - won the necessary majority vote from the parliamentary members in the 601-member Constituent

Assembly. In demanding Madhav Kumar's resignation, the Maoists had insisted that a government led by Prachanda, the Maoist prime minister from August 2008 to May 2009, would inject momentum into the process in the Himalayan nation. Some analysts believe that the election's outcome was the result of infighting between the Maoists. "The days leading to the election also exposed fissures in the Maoist party with several senior Maoist leaders openly saying that as Prachanda is unacceptable to rival parties as prime ministerial candidate, his more popular deputy Baburam Bhattarai should be nominated as candidate," The Christian Science Monitor quoted Kiran Nepal, editor of Himalkhabarpatrika, a fortnightly newsmagazine, as saying. "In the eyes of the public, the Maoist party is no longer a solidly unified party. This is another area where the Maoists have lost," he added. A runoff between Prachanda and Paudel is now set for Friday, as Khanal withdrew from the voting process after he failed to secure support of two-thirds of the Parliament. <http://news.oneindia.in/2010/07/22/nepalelection-stalemate-a-setback-formaoists.html>

Nepali House again fails to elect PM, House session postponed

Speaker of Nepali House Subash Nemwang Friday announced to hold another round of election on Aug. 2 to elect new executive Prime Minister out of two candidates who failed to gain simple majority votes during the second round election. Nemwang made this announcement after two candidates -- Chairman of the largest party Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (UCPN-M) Prachanda and another candidate from the second largest party Nepali Congress (NC) Deputy President Ramchandra Paudel got rejected by majority of negative votes. Out of 572 CA members presented at the House, Prachanda got only 241 votes in his favor while 113 voted against him. Similarly, 218 remained neutral. Likewise, Paudel got only 123 votes in his favor while 241 voted against him and 214 remained neutral. According to Speaker Nemwang, House will again hold election on Aug. 2 at 04:00 p.m. local time to decide on these two candidates. The first round election was held on Wednesday and failed to elect new prime minister as no one of the candidates got simple majority votes -- 300 votes out of 599 Constituent Assembly (CA) members as per Interim Constitution of Nepal-2007. During the first round election, three candidates had proposed their nominations for the election -- Prachanda, Paudel and the third candidate Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) (CPN-UML) withdrew his candidacy. Amid political turmoil in Nepal, PM re-election is also witnessing standoff after caretaker Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal resigned from his post on July 30 following the pressure from single and the largest opposition UCPN-M to form national consensus government under its leadership.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-07/23/c_13412492.htm

Nepal intends to sign FTA with Pakistan in JEC meeting

Nepal intends to sign Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Pakistan in the next meeting of Joint Economic Commission (JEC), scheduled in October this year, Daily Times learnt on

Friday. "Nepalese side has desired to finalize FTA for the two countries in the next JEC which will be held on October 19-20 this year in Islamabad", Pakistan embassy in Kathmandu communicated to Ministry of Commerce (MoC) recently. According to sources, a taskforce comprising of representatives from ministry of commerce of both countries has been established for the finalizing the next FTA. Sources said that work on FTA had been sped up during a visit of Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani to Nepal on his way to Thimpu Bhutan to attend the SAARC conference. If FTA signed between the two countries, Nepal will be the second country in South Asia to enter in this trade arrangement with Pakistan after Sri Lanka entered into FTA with Pakistan some years back. Nepal and Pakistan are signatories to the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) and members of the South Asian Economic Union. Over the years, the volume of bilateral trade remains very small (a few million dollars). Pakistan's total exports to Nepal are worth \$1.631 million while Nepal's exports to Pakistan tally \$3.166 million. Although, work on FTA between Pakistan and Nepal has begun, officials concerned don't see any benefit for the country to sign FTA with Nepal. Nepal, being a landlocked country, does its external trade through the transit route of India, which would be unlikely to allow Pakistan to get access in Nepalese market like Pakistan denying the same facility to India to penetrate in Afghanistan, which, too, is a landlocked country. Officials said that also in the presence of SAFTA, there is no need to enter into a FTA with any member of SAARC. "If SAFTA, covering whole of South Asia, could not benefit the countries concerned because of acrimony between Pakistan and India", officials said, "then how it is possible that FTA between Pakistan and Nepal could be a success venture when its fate would entirely depend on India." Officials said that if signed, the FTA would be an exercise in futility because country would gain nothing from this bilateral trade agreement. Apart from SAFTA, a regional trade agreement, Pakistan has so far signed FTA with Malaysia, China and Sri Lanka as well as Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Iran and Mauritius.

http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C07%5C24%5Cstory_24-7-2010_pg5_3

US hopes Nepal government formed quickly

The United States voiced hope Thursday that Nepal will quickly form a government to get to work on pressing concerns including the drafting of a new constitution. Lawmakers in Nepal, which is recovering from a decade of war, will meet Friday in a fresh attempt to elect a new prime minister amid a three-week political vacuum. "We urge Nepal's political leaders to reach agreement on a government that will move forward quickly on the issues that are essential for Nepal's stability and economic development, completion of the peace process and drafting of a new constitution," US State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said. Maoist former rebels, who put down their arms in 2006, are pushing to return to power and have put forward a candidate. Nepal's major parties missed a self-imposed May 28 deadline to draft a new

constitution amid squabbling on basic issues on the structure of the state in the land of Mount Everest.

NC picks Poudel as prime ministerial candidate

The Nepali Congress 'unanimously' selected vice president and parliamentary leader Ram Chandra Poudel as its prime ministerial candidate on Saturday. A meeting of the NC central working committee (CWC) held at the central office, Sanepa, reached this decision after a lengthy discussion. At the meeting, senior leader Sher Bahadur Deuba proposed Poudel as the prime ministerial candidate and general secretary Kul Bahadur Gurung supported it before the CWC formally endorsed his name. Deuba was being projected as a prime ministerial candidate along with Poudel while Gurung had also described himself as a possible candidate. Poudel had beat Deuba in the election for the parliamentary leader. The CWC started discussion to select its prime ministerial candidate after concluding that the possibility of a national unity government was over. The parliament is to elect the new prime minister on 21 July. The nominations for the prime minister's post will be registered on July 20 <http://www.nepalnews.com/main/index.php/news-archive/1-top-story/7629-nc-picks-poudel-as-prime-ministerial-candidate.html>

Nepal CA member attempts suicide; blames party, family

A harried woman lawmaker from the CPN-UML party in Nepal attempted suicide by consuming phenol, complaining of pressure from her party and family. The incident happened on Wednesday a few hundred meters away from the Parliament where the Constituent Assembly was voting to elect a prime minister. Sharda Nepali, a 39-year old CA member from the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist Leninist), consumed phenol at her residence at Naya Baneshwor and was rushed to a hospital where she is being treated. The mother of six children later spoke to reporters and blamed pressures from party and family for the extreme step she took. She alleged that out of her monthly salary of Rs 60,000 she receives only Rs 20,000 from her party. She had had a heated discussion with her party leaders on Tuesday. She alleged her husband Ravi Lal has been making false allegations against her that she was pocketing all salaries and allowances. In Nepal, the Communist parties take a large portion of the salaries from the CA members for party funds. However, the party denied the charges that any pressure was put on her. "We have been asking her to learn read and write, which she took as pressure," said party's president C P Mainali. He said the party was providing her money for her personal needs.

Rains wreak havoc in eastern Nepal

The death toll and number of missing continued to rise as the monsoon caused havoc across Nepal, local media reported yesterday. Ten people from a single family went missing in Nepal's far-western Dolpa district in flash floods of a nearby river caused by five days of continuous rainfall. Survivors said the waters had raged 9m high, the newspaper Kantipur reported. Police

discovered two bodies of family members on Wednesday. Landslides swept away parts of the Karnali highway in western Nepal. Vehicles carrying supplies to the Kalikot and Jumla districts, which suffer from food shortages, were stranded. One person was reported dead and scores missing in flash floods in eastern Nepal yesterday. Hundreds of families were displaced in the eastern districts of the Himalayan nation as the monsoon rain caused flashfloods and landslides. Some 700 families were displaced in the eastern district of Sunsari due to incessant rainfall since early Wednesday. People fled after the water from the Sunsari River swept into houses. Police, who have been assisting with rescue operations, evacuated some families. Nearby Dharan continued to reel under the downpour. Dharan recorded 150mm of rain on Wednesday, the highest this month, according to the Meteorological Forecasting Division of Nepal. A number of bridges in parts of eastern Nepal have collapsed due to the torrential rainfall, disrupting transport and leaving passengers stranded. The death toll is expected to rise as the police continue search and rescue operations. Hundreds die and thousands are displaced every year due to monsoon rain in Nepal.

http://www.gulftimes.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=375829&version=1&template_id=44&parent_id=24

NT to introduce DTH hub service

Nepal Telecom (NT) is planning to provide direct-to-home (DTH) service with the coverage spanning the entire South Asian region. NT, the state-owned telecom monopoly, is working to set up a shared DTH hub at its Sagarmatha Satellite Earth Station at Balamba, Kathmandu. According to NT, it is set to invest an estimated US\$ 2.75 million for DTH hub and it has also plans to lease 72 MHz transponders to two carriers. Birendra Prasad Pradhan, manager of the NT's Satellite Service Directorate told a local daily newspaper that the NT board has directed them to prepare the specifications for leasing satellite transponders "We have also found two carriers interested in it, but the contract is yet not signed", he added. Pradhan said that CG TechnoDreams, one of the operators of DTH service in the country, has shown interest in subscribing to NT's hub station service and it will use the hub to transmit 60 channels in the initial phase and later others interested could join it. NT's hub also would be able to transmit the highest of 120 channels, he added. Bishwo Nath Goyal, NT's deputy managing director, told local media that they have aims to start DTH service in the rural areas also. They have also expected some four operators to use their service because with the increase in the operators, the cost of the transponder leasing plunges which would be beneficial to the customers to watch quality television only at Rs. 150-200 per month. The Ministry of Information and Communications has permitted nine firms, namely Satellite Channel, Dish Media Network, M Vision, CG Techno Dreams, Telko Investment, Marigold Entertainment, Cosmic Telecommunications Service, Biswabinayak Network and Clean Communications, to operate DTH services in the country

UK partially lifts Tier 4 visa suspension in Nepal

The UK has partially lifted the Tier 4 visa application suspension in Nepal to be effective from July 22, the UK Border Agency announced in a statement on Thursday. The statement, released by British embassy in Kathmandu, said the suspension will be lifted for students who want to study higher education courses namely foundation degrees and degree and post graduate courses, and for child students. It also said the UK authority will lift the suspension on the remaining courses, with the exception of English language courses effective from August 12, adding that the suspension on English language courses, however, will remain under review. The statement said the UK authority will introduce a secure English language test requirement for Tier 4 (General Student) visas worldwide on August 12. "Applicants, who are studying courses below degree level, excluding a foundation degree and an English language course, need to pass a secure English language test. This test must be taken with a UK Border Agency-approved provider before the applicant applies for a CAS from the sponsor," the statement read. The statement further said all applicants who make Tier 4 (General Student) visa applications to study the above courses from 12 August and using a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) issued from this date will need to pass a new secure English language test. Tier 4 applicants are required to make an appointment at the visa application centre in order to submit their Tier 4 visa applications. Appointments are free of charge. Guidance on how to schedule an appointment is available on the website: www.vfs-uk-np.com. Information about secure English language tests and the list of test providers of English language tests are available at <http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/aboutus/newsroom/?view=News&id=22573942>. In the statement, the UK authority has noted with importance that applicants follow the current Tier 4 guidance carefully, complete their applications fully and submit the correct supporting documents. If applicants submit fraudulent documents or false information, their visa applications will be refused, it stated adding that the applicants also have to face an automatic ban on entry to the UK for the next 10 years for any category of visa. The temporary suspension of new Tier 4 applications was implemented in Nepal on 1 February 2010.

<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=UK+partially+lifts+Tier+4+visa+suspension+in+Nepal&NewsID=250600>

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

SRILANKA

Former Sri Lankan president denounces the government

Former Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has launched one of her most outspoken attacks against the government. She accused it of "completely forgetting the legacy" of her mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the world's first woman prime minister. She said it was also wrong to ignore her accession to power 60 years ago. No-one from the government was available to respond to her allegations. Ms Kumaratunga said the government have an "obsession against" the Bandaranaike family. "She was not remembered except by ordinary people," Ms Kumaratunga told BBC Sinhala. "Yet neither her party nor the government did anything at all to remember her achievement. I think it is very petty-minded and it is disgusting." She put us on the world map. She was a prominent leader of the Non Aligned Movement and took leadership in many other international negotiations. "Correspondents say that while Ms Kumaratunga has attacked the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa before - she backed his rival Sarath Fonseka in the January presidential elections - Friday's denunciation was one of her most outspoken since the president came to power in 2005.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10745424>

No change in Sri Lanka's stance on UN panel

A senior government minister said Sri Lankan government has not changed its stance on the Panel of Experts appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General and stressed that it will not be changed. The Government Spokesman and the Minister of Mass Media and Information Keheliya Rambukwella addressing the media said the government has communicated its strong protest about the appointment of this Panel and it is waiting for the response from the UN Secretary-General. Rambukwella said that many friendly nations of Sri Lanka have expressed

their objection to the illegal Panel. "The UN Secretary-General rather than acting on his own wish should have come through the UN General Council or the Security Council with the approval of the members States when handling the issues like this," the Minister said. Sri Lanka has vehemently protested the appointment of the three-member Panel which according to the UN Chief Ban Ki-moon is advisory in its function and not investigatory. However, the chairman of the panel, Marzuki Darusman, a former Attorney General of Indonesia has expressed desire to visit Sri Lanka in search of truth. According to Ban the Panel will look into the modalities, applicable international standards and comparative experience with regard to accountability processes, taking into account the nature and scope of any alleged violations in Sri Lanka during the last stages of war with the Tamil Tigers. Sri Lanka, calling the Panel unwarranted and unnecessary, says the panel is a precursor to bring war crime charges against the government and its armed forces. Sri Lanka strongly opposed the idea of appointing the expert panel to advise the UN Chief saying that the allegations are an internal matter and the government has already set in motion a mechanism to address the accountability issues. Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa has appointed an eight-member 'Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission' to report on the lessons to be learnt from the events in the period between 21st February 2002 to 19th May 2009. The United States Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake who visited Colombo Wednesday (21) said the US believes the Panel can play an important advisory role with Sri Lanka's commission and it is only an advisory panel and does not have an investigatory or judicial role of any kind.

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10B/Jul23_1279869769CH.php

Sri Lanka recovers vital information on international Tamil Tiger operatives

Sri Lanka defense authorities say that the state intelligence agencies have unearthed many important information on several hardcore Tamil Tiger terrorists who are involved in international activities of the defeated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The Ministry of Defense says these suspects have been identified as cadres involved in many illegal activities including arms smuggling, financial fraud, and humans trafficking. These rebels have been active in eastern Asian, European as well in African countries. The Ministry of Defense says the information regarding them have been revealed from an overpowered LTTE camp at Visuamadu area in Mullaitivu district. The Intelligence Agencies of the Army have also recovered several diaries and secret documents that belong to the head of the international activities of the LTTE "Castro" . Vital information regarding investments and marine activities of the LTTE has also been uncovered from these documents. The Intelligence Agencies are jointly carrying out investigations with the Interpol to apprehend these Tamil Tiger leaders.

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10B/Jul23_1279893346KA.php

Sri Lanka Buddhist Monk Party Slams US

Sri Lanka's ruling coalition party Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), led by a Buddhist monk Omalpe Sobhitha Thero and a layman, Minister of Power and Energy Champika Ranawaka, charges that the US and the Tamil Diaspora are behind the UN Secretary-General's panel on the accountability issues of Sri Lanka, and the questioning of country's human rights. Issuing a press release, the monk leader of the JHU Ven. Omalpe Sobhitha Thero points out that the US attempt to take Sri Lanka into their road map and agenda via punishing and diplomatic acts. JHU protested the US Assistant Secretary on South Asia Robert Blake's statement that Sri Lanka needs to implement 13th and 17th amendments to the Constitution. The 13th amendment to the Constitution introduced Provincial Council system to Sri Lanka in 1987. But the government of Sri Lanka hesitates to vest in full powers to the Provincial Councils. The 17th amendment to the Constitution has formed a Constitutional Council which is empowered to appoint independent commissions to govern vital bodies such as judiciary, police, elections, and public service. The JHU leader highlights to the US that the implementation of these constitutional amendments is Sri Lanka's sovereign task.

Sri Lanka President Opens SHILPA 2010 Trade Exhibition

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa yesterday (22) opened the 'SHILPA 2010' National Handicraft Exhibition and Trade Fair at the BMICH. The four-day national exhibition, organized by the Ministry of Traditional Industries and Small Enterprises Development will be open for the public from 10 AM to 10 PM until July 25th. SHILPA 2010 is the main national level exhibition of handicrafts and small and medium industries held in the country. The trade fair with 156 stalls displays the best products selected from the provincial fairs held throughout the country earlier. According to the Chairman of the National Craft Council out of 8600 products exhibited in the provincial exhibitions held earlier, 1200 high quality products have been selected to be exhibited at this national fair. Prominent businessmen, industrialists, exporters, and diplomatic representatives have been invited to attend the fair. Industrial Development Board industrialists have been provided the necessary certifications required for exporting their products, the Chairman informed. Minister of Traditional Industries and Small Enterprise Development Douglas Devananda, Deputy Minister Weerakumara Dissanayake, Secretary to the Ministry Sivagnanajothi and Chairman of National Craft Council Buddhi Keerthisena were also present.

'PM, Karunanidhi's letters on Sri Lankan Tamils' plight a drama'

The exchange of letters between Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the problems faced by Sri Lankan Tamils is a 'drama turning out to be a mega serial,' AIADMK chief J. Jayalalithaa Thursday said. 'On the 3rd of July, he (Karunanidhi) penned a letter to the prime minister asking him to do something to save the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

On the 9th of July, the prime minister sent a reply to Karunanidhi assuring him that the centre was ready to do whatever was necessary to resolve the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka,' she said, according to a party statement here. Citing Karunanidhi's letter to the prime minister last week, Jayalalithaa termed it as an 'open admission that the Sri Lankan Tamils are still in a state of acute distress'. She said Karunanidhi, in his letter, had urged the rehabilitation of the internally displaced Tamils of Sri Lanka as of paramount importance and had suggested sending an envoy to assess the ground level situation in the island nation on rehabilitation measures. She said Karunanidhi has now admitted that the assessment of the parliamentary delegation comprising of members from DMK, Congress and VCK sent earlier to assess the Tamils' condition in Sri Lanka was untrue.

WHY NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN SRI LANKA IS NOT POSSIBLE

There is much talk of "National Reconciliation" in Sri Lanka – essentially between the Sinhalese-dominated Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Tamil people. As a Sinhalese who has supported the struggle of the Tamil people to live with equality, dignity and without discrimination, and now, to live at all, in the country of their birth, I simply do not think that 'national reconciliation' is possible. I have been closely involved with the problems faced by the Tamil people since 1948. This was when a million Plantation 'Indian' Tamils, (one seventh of the total population of Ceylon at that time), were disenfranchised and decitizenised in one of the most outrageous acts of political barbarism anywhere in the world. It was followed by a series of highly discriminatory measures adopted since 1956 by a succession of Sinhalese governments against the Sri Lankan Tamils. These included numerous Government organized pogroms of the Tamils. I have been witness to all these and other major human rights violations of the Tamil people, and am convinced that 'national reconciliation' is totally unrealistic. The most serious recent slaughter of Tamils (June 2006 - May 2009), with features of Genocide^[2], and done under the guise of "wiping out 'Tamil terrorism'", has made national reconciliation virtually impossible.

The necessary conditions

For national reconciliation to occur there are some fundamental requirements.

1. There must be a genuine **intention** to do so.
2. There must be **regret** for all that has happened to make national reconciliation necessary.

3. The **fundamental problems** that caused the rift must be addressed.

4. There must be a determination to wipe out all the **obstructions** to this process.

Since none of these are present in Sri Lanka, national reconciliation is not possible. It is as simple as that. The *pretence* of 'national reconciliation' is nothing but a myth propagated by the GoSL with the sole intention of obtaining international support to keep a totalitarian regime going. Before these fundamental requirements are discussed in detail, three crucial points must be appreciated.

1. There has been a complete dismantling of Democracy.

2. There is a clearly stated aim to make Sri Lanka into a Sinhala-Buddhist nation.

3. There is an international dimension with foreign governments getting involved for their own geopolitical and economic gains.

A dismantling of Democracy

The "Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka", as it likes to call itself, is neither democratic nor socialist. It is a ruthless fascist dictatorship which has created a 'Crisis in Democracy'. In addition, there is a 'Crisis in Capitalism' in Sri Lanka. It is arguable whether Democracy ever existed in Sri Lanka (Ceylon, or Lanka). What existed in pre-colonial Ceylon (before 1505) was Feudalism. This was replaced by Colonialism, which was replaced by (Sinhalese) Majoritarianism, and then a Presidential Dictatorship. This drifted into Politico-Military Fascism, and now, Totalitarianism under one family – essentially a return to Feudalism - under Rajapaksa, his brothers, relatives and stooges. Whatever vestige of Democracy that existed was constitutionally dismantled by the then President, J.R. Jayawardene in 1978 with the establishment of an Executive Presidency - with sweeping powers, above the Law and Parliament, and not answerable to Parliament or even the people. This drifted (in 2005) into a politico-military fascist state, run by 'President' Mahinda Rajapaksa, his brothers and the military. In 2010, it has now become a Rajapaksa Autocracy. Mahinda Rajapaksa is (erroneously) referred to as the 'President'. He has gone well beyond this. He is a 'King', appointed by himself and his brothers. When the ruler is a king, there are no citizens; only subjects. And subjects are bound to obey the king unquestionably since monarchical infallibility was a belief that premised absolute monarchies. The clear intention of this megalomaniac family is to rule Sri Lanka for decades. This will be achieved by manipulating the Constitution, by eliminating any opposition, silencing criticism, and unleashing whatever State violence is necessary on the populace, irrespective of ethnicity.

Making Sri Lanka into a Sinhala-Buddhist country

Sri Lanka is a multiethnic, multicultural, multireligious, multilingual country, and it on the understanding that that it remains so that in 1948 Britain granted Independence to what was then colonial Ceylon. The country was handed over to Sinhalese politicians from the majority community on the assurance given by them that the minorities will be treated fairly without discrimination. The *only* Constitutional safeguard that protected the Tamils and other minorities from discrimination was Section 29(2). This critically important clause was dropped in the 1972 Constitution. Sinhala was made the Official Language and Buddhism given “pride of place”, which was a clear discrimination of 30% of the population who were non-Sinhalese and non-Buddhists. In a famous case *Bribery Commissioner v Ranasinghe* which was taken to the (British) Privy Council in 1964, (which I will not detail here), the Privy Council declared that Section 29(2), (a),(b),(c) and (d), which prohibited the making of any law discriminatory against any community or religion was an unalterable and entrenched provision in the Constitution i.e. it could not be altered. Dropping Section 29(2) was therefore unconstitutional and hence illegal. The name of the country was changed (illegally – because the 'Constitution' itself was illegal), from “Ceylon” to the "Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka". It was anything but ‘Democratic’. "Sri", the Sanskrit for “Resplendent”, it certainly was not. Amidst protests at obvious discrimination in the Official Language, the 6th Amendment to the Constitution was passed making Sinhala and Tamil the Official Languages of Sri Lanka. In reality, this is a farce. In practice, Sinhala remains the only Official language of Sri Lanka – whatever is stated in the Constitution or its Amendments. Examples are just too numerous to recount. A couple will suffice. In a recent Court case in Colombo where some Tamils were tried, the entire proceedings were conducted in Sinhala, a language which none of the accused understood. A Tamil friend of mine in Colombo was recently the attesting witness at a wedding where the bride and bridegroom were also Tamils. The official document to be signed and attested was in Sinhala. When my friend pointed out that the bride, the groom and the attesting witness could not understand what they were signing, he was told that the document was 'not available' in Tamil. So much for the 6th Amendment. The Constitution is viewed by Sri Lankan politicians as a useful exhibit to be shown to the outside world as something that makes Sri Lanka a ‘Democracy’. In reality it is a play-thing for majoritarian politicians to ignore, bend, or break at will, to suit the political or ethnoreligious chauvinism of those in power. Tamils politicians not being ‘majoritarian politicians’, have no say. They can take it or leave it, the Government (which has been, is, and will for ever be, Sinhalese), could not care less. Constitutions can only achieve so much. They can specify a system of checks and balances, and what Governments can and cannot do. Constitutions cannot do these things. That is left to the decency, integrity, sincerity and commitment of those who wield power. If those who wield power are tyrants, tyranny will be the result, Constitution or no Constitution. The most compelling evidence that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist nation came from Sarath Fonseka, then the Army Commander. In an interview to the *National Post* newspaper in Canada on 23rd September 2008, he said:- "*I strongly believe that this country belongs to the Sinhalese but there are minority communities ... We being the*

majority of the country, 75%, we will never give in and we have the right to protect this country... They (the minorities) can live in this country with us. But they must not try to, under the pretext of being a minority, demand undue things."If the country "belongs to the Sinhalese", to talk of 'national reconciliation' is a joke. Incidentally, the Tamils do not need to be a minority as a "pretext". They *are* a minority. When Fonseka was running for the Presidency, and trying to woo Tamil votes in the Tamil areas (North and East), he was asked about this interview. He said he had been "misunderstood". There was no misunderstanding. It was in straightforward English. It can be argued that this was Fonseka speaking, and not President Rajapaksa. However, Fonseka was Rajapaksa's military commander. If Rajapaksa did not agree with this he should have ordered his army commander to withdraw the statement. Moreover, Fonseka's immediate boss was Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Defence Secretary and the President's brother, and above him is the President himself, who is the Minister of Defence and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Neither can now try to distance themselves from the statements clearly and emphatically made by Fonseka. The *only* conclusion that can be drawn is that all of them agreed with what was said i.e. that Sri Lanka 'belongs' to the Sinhalese. If this is the belief, to talk of 'national reconciliation' is nonsense. Much has been made of the fact that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been destroyed. The LTTE was not the problem but the *result* of the problem. The 'problem' was Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-religious chauvinism - to make multiethnic, multireligious, multilingual, multicultural Sri Lanka, into a Sinhala-Buddhist nation. What has been destroyed is not only the LTTE but the possibility of Peace with Justice. Some 40,000 Tamils in the North and East were slaughtered by the Sri Lankan (Sinhalese) Armed Forces, international aid groups and observers having first been expelled from the area ("genocide without witnesses"). Some 280,000 Tamils who escaped the slaughter were locked up in concentration camps, in absolute contravention of several Human Rights Conventions, signed by Sri Lanka. Under immense international pressure, some 200,000 were released, most of them to a land that was totally destroyed and heavily mined, making them internally Displaced People (IDPs ie refugees). Thousands have been driven out of the country as asylum-seekers. 60,000 remain in the camps in June 2010, more than an year after they were put there. So much for 'national reconciliation'. If Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist country (which it is - whatever the rhetoric), I cannot see how there can be 'national reconciliation', given the fact that some 30% of the people are not Sinhala-Buddhists. To talk of 'national reconciliation' in this setting is patently absurd.

International games

It is not possible to make sense of the mess in Sri Lanka and the absolute impossibility of "Peace and Reconciliation" or of "Peace with Justice" without an appreciation of the international games being played to keep a corrupt, incompetent, and ruthless regime in power. Just as oil is the problem in the Middle East, the geographical position astride the Indian Ocean is the 'problem' in Sri Lanka. Just 36 km (20 miles) from India, it is in India's backyard. The Indian Ocean is not the largest ocean in the world but by far the busiest. 40% of the world's oil production occurs in

countries which share *India's* Ocean. It carries 70% of the world's oil shipments and 50% of the container cargo. US Admiral Alfred Mahan said a hundred years ago, "*Whoever controls the Indian Ocean, dominates Asia*" Trincomalee, in the Tamil North East, is the world's 4th largest natural harbour, and has attracted foreign powers for centuries. It continues to do so. Sri Lanka is one of China's "String of Pearls", the chain of military bases to guard its oil supply from the Middle East and its exports to Europe. Rather than fight (India) to get a foothold in Trincomalee, China chose a small fishing port in Hambantota (in Mahinda Rajapaksa's home area) in the deep South, to set up a major harbour (for China's use) and an international airport. A delighted Rajapaksa used this as a bargaining chip to build his massive military machine to crush the Tamils. The violation of human rights has never been a problem for China which supplied all the military hardware requested by the ruthless Sinhala military. America concerned with China's involvement, tried to woo Rajapaksa back to the western camp. The IMF[3] is not just *in* America, it **is** America. Sri Lanka is a peripheral but integral part of the global capitalist network, which now includes even supposedly 'Communist' China. This is why members of the US Foreign Policy Relations Committee warned that Washington could not 'lose' Sri Lanka, which I strategically located in the Indian Ocean. India, concerned with Chinese and American involvement in its backyard, got into the act. Its agenda is, and has been, to make Sri Lanka into a colony of the Indian empire, keep China and the US out, and exploit the considerable resources in the country – as all colonial powers do. What happens to the Tamils in Sri Lanka is of little concern except to South Indians in Tamil Nadu with some 75 million ethnic Tamils. However, India is not run from Tamil Nadu. It is run by big business in Delhi in close collaboration with international capitalists. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is just a figurehead – a 'pretence leader'. That is why he told a visiting delegation of Tamil MPs from Sri Lanka who took their concern to him on July 8, 2010, that they should "continue to hold talks with the Lankan government in a constructive way."! If the expatriate Sri Lankan Tamil community is looking to India for help in getting justice for the Tamil people, they are not in the real world. It is this international meddling in Sri Lanka that makes the outlook for the Tamils so poor, and 'national reconciliation' so impossible. I firmly believe that without this international meddling, the IMF included, left to the Sri Lankans, there might well have been a negotiated settlement and national reconciliation. The fact that this international powerplay and meddling will go on, and support for a brutal murderous chauvinistic regime in Colombo will continue, makes any hope of a 'Just Peace' or 'National Reconciliation' most unlikely. It is now possible to set out in detail the essential requirements I listed for 'national reconciliation' to be possible.

1. There must be a genuine intention to do so.

Across the entire political spectrum, be it the Governing party or the Opposition, there is not the slightest intention, let alone a *genuine* intention, to include the Tamil people. In November 2005 I published an article, *The Political Ideology in Sri Lanka: Anti-Tamil*[4], in which I pointed out that the entire Sinhala polity was anti-Tamil. It is far more politically rewarding to marginalize, exclude, and discriminate against the Tamils than to adopt an inclusive policy. There are simply

too many votes to be lost if an inclusive policy is adopted. To embrace Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-religious chauvinism is the vote-getter, in a country where 74% are Sinhalese and 26% are Buddhist. This has been the policy, admitted to or denied, by *every* Sinhalese government since 1956. This is not about to change. The only, and I stress *only*, exception is the genuine Left, which I have detailed below. Their abysmal showing at the 2010 Presidential and General Elections is clear evidence that ethnic tolerance – to be fair to the Tamils – has no place in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is a virulently polarized country – “**we** the Sinhalese, **they** the Tamils”. The Tamils are ‘the enemy’, even worse, ‘Tamils are ‘terrorists’ or people bent on dividing and destroying Sri Lanka. If this is the Sinhala mind-set, to talk of ‘national reconciliation’ is nonsense. I will cite two examples. In April 1986, Lalith Athulathmudali, the Minister of National Security, in President J.R. Jayawardene’s government, addressing new (Sinhalese) recruits to the National Auxiliary Force said:- “*By joining the Security Forces to defend the nation in its biggest crisis in history, each one of you have secured a place in your country’s history, like your forefathers, who have shed their blood on this very soil, fighting against the foreign invaders*”. If the Minister for National Security sees the Tamils as ‘foreign invaders, we should not have any illusions about a negotiated settlement coming from this group of politicians in Colombo. President Jayawardene’s statements were similar. In an interview with the Canadian *Globe and Mail*, when presented with Canada as a model of devolution of power, he said:- “*It is easy for Canada to settle its problems because all your people are Canadians*” If the President of Sri Lanka does not see the Tamils as Sri Lankans, what chance is there of a negotiated settlement or reconciliation with the Tamils? That was in 1986. The situation now is worse, *much* worse. Anyone who is even vaguely familiar with the Sri Lankan scene can recognize these statements as the authentic voice of Sinhala chauvinism which is the single factor that has prevented any meaningful offer being made to the Tamils. Statements such as this are evidence of a very strong current of ethnic chauvinism which is destroying Sri Lanka. In such a context we cannot have any illusions of a negotiated settlement which makes a genuine accommodation of Tamil problems, or ‘reconciliation’ with the Tamils, taking place in the next year, ten years or fifty years. This was back in the mid 1980s. Today the situation is far worse, the Sinhala rhetoric not withstanding. The evidence is presented below.

2. There must be genuine regret for what has happened

It has been erroneously claimed that there has been an ‘ethnic conflict’ in Sri Lanka. There has been no ‘ethnic conflict’. What there has been for five decades, are a series of increasingly virulent pogroms against the Tamil people by a succession of Sinhalese-dominated government, assisted by Sinhalese political opportunists and ethno-religious chauvinists, and conducted by the Sinhalese Armed Forces (99% Sinhalese), with a degeneracy of Sinhala society and its rapid descent to barbarism. These anti-Tamil pogroms have been to crush the Tamil people into submission – to accept Sri Lanka as a Sinhala-Buddhist nation. I have maintained that unless/until the Sinhalese apologise to the Tamils for what has been done to them, there can neither be peace nor ‘normalcy, and certainly no ‘reconciliation’. Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe, a Sinhalese

like myself and with the same view, put this better than I can. In his final Pastoral Letter (15 November 1983), deeply disturbed by the 1983 massacre of Tamils he wrote:-

“Shame and apology”

The massive retaliation mainly by Sinhalese against defenceless Tamils in July 1983 cannot be justified on moral grounds. We must admit this and acknowledge our shame. We must be ashamed because what took place was a moral crime. We are ashamed as Sinhalese for the moral crime which other Sinhalese committed. We must not only acknowledge our shame, we must also make our apology to those Tamils who were unjustified victims of this massive retaliation. He goes on to state why this should be done.

“...when a section of the Sinhalese does what is morally wrong or bad, we share in it. As members of the whole group we share in the evil they have done....it is a mark of moral maturity to acknowledge a moral crime on behalf of those closely knit to us (he was a kinsman of President Jayawardene whose thugs committed this crime, as I am a kinsman of President Chandrika Kumaratunga who bombed Jaffna with half a million Tamils) who do not realize that they have done this and an apology on their behalf.....It is only by an apology of this kind that we shall recover our proper moral and religious values. Then we can begin the process of what went wrong with our relationship with the Tamils.... The true basis of reconciliation is admission of wrong and an appeal for forgiveness”That was written after the murder of some 3,000 Tamils just before his untimely death. I am not sure what he would have written today after the murder of some 40,000 Tamils.Archbishop Desmond Tutu whom I met in Cape Town two years ago, should know all about reconciliation. He chaired the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” in post-apartheid South Africa, at a time when there was an absolute need for reconciliation. He will testify that it is mandatory to have an open, honest and transparent process to deal with the past if there is to be national reconciliation. Not to have such a process is to throw away any possibility of moving forward. Unfortunately, the Sinhalese people, much less their politicians, are unable or unwilling to appreciate this. As such, the window of opportunity will close, if it has not done already.I, a Sinhalese, did not slit any Tamil throats, but I have a sense of collective responsibility for the insensitive and barbaric behaviour of my people – the Sinhalese, in uniform and not in uniform.At one of the anniversaries of the 1983 Tamil massacre in Colombo, Kumaratunga, then the President, was asked about an apology to the Tamils. She said, “*We should all apologise to each other*”. I could not figure this out. Why should the Tamils apologise to the Sinhalese – for what? For the crime they have committed being born Tamil so that the Sinhalese could murder them? As for the Rajapaksa regime that followed Kumaratunga’s ‘bogus apology’, let alone an apology, there was obscene rejoicing at the dreadful mass slaughter of people whose only crime was that they were born Tamil, and had a right to be were they were, the North and East of the island. The Rajapaksa regime demanded that the people in the South, Sinhalese, and even Tamils and Muslims, celebrate with them or be labeled ‘terrorists’ and be treated as such.If this was not bad enough, the attitude and stance of

President Rajapaksa a year later was worse. The first anniversary of the slaughter was declared a public holiday and the 'national victory' celebrated with greater fanfare than the day the country got its Independence from Britain. The triumphalistic tone and tenor of Rajapaksa's speech made no allowance for the collective human and material losses of the Tamil people, their present abysmal existence and their future uncertainties and fears. Rajapaksa presided over the celebrations. His speech was a combination of militarist triumphalism, a whitewash of his government's war crimes, and a call to working people to "sacrifice" to build the nation. On show on Galle Face Green (opposite the old Parliament) was a huge array of artillery, tanks and multi-barrel rocket launchers; helicopter gunships and war planes flew overhead; warships were roaming off the coast. The invitees were foreign diplomats, MPs, Ministers and government officials. Ordinary people facing deepening attacks on living standards and democratic rights, showed little interest. Nor were they impressed with Rajapaksa's demand from working people, already groaning with an astronomical cost of living, for a "sacrifice to build the nation". Public servants were specifically targeted. Here is what he said: "*More than 200,000 in our armed forces have given Sri Lanka a victory through their commitment through day and night in good weather and bad. If our public servants make a commitment for four years similar to that by our heroic forces, we will make this country the Wonder of Asia.* Far from being a new Asian wonder, the country is heavily in debt, with more problems to follow. I will deal with the escalating economic problems later in this article, since it has the potential to do just the opposite of 'reconciliation'.

Getting into 'comedy mode', Rajapaksa absurdly declared: "*Our armed forces comprise those who went to battle carrying a gun in one hand, the Declaration of Human Rights in the other, as well as taking food for the liberated people in of the North and East and full of human kindness in their hearts. Our guns were not fired at a single civilian*". Referring to the final months of the war, when the military mercilessly bombed a small pocket of land in which there were more than 300,000 Tamil civilians crammed, Rajapaksa said that it was "*a great humanitarian operation only to eliminate terrorism*". As for his claim that not a single civilian was shot, the International Crisis Group had a different view. In a report published in May 2010, it stated that between 30,000 and 75,000 civilians had been killed, and accused the Sri Lankan military of deliberately targeting hospitals and aid supplies. I have recorded all this (and more) on a dvd which I will be glad to send disbelievers. Gordon Weiss, an Australian, has been in the UN for 14 years, and was the UN Spokesman in Sri Lanka. In early 2010, he resigned and returned to Australia. Interviewed by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on 9 February 2010 he said, "*The Sri Lankan government said may things which were either intentionally misleading or were lies*". The important point is that the GoSL has absolutely no regret at what its Armed Forces did to the Tamils. Indeed, it boasts about it. As such, I cannot see how there can be 'national reconciliation'.

A bogus Commission

Under international pressure, the GoSL announced a **“Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission”**. Like all previous human rights investigations, it is certain to be a whitewash. Rajapaksa has bitterly opposed any international inquiry, no matter how limited, despite a call from the UN Secretary General, and the Head of the UN Human Rights Council. With the White House welcoming this phoney inquiry, two senior Obama officials - Samantha Power, Special Assistant to the President on Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, and David Pressman, National Security Council Director for War Crimes and Atrocities, visited Colombo. It was mainly to advise Rajapaksa how to make this phoney Commission appear more credible, and more importantly, to cement closer ties between Washington and Colombo, and sideline rival China, which provided substantial financial and military support for Rajapaksa's genocidal war. One thing is certain; there is absolutely no regret in the Sinhala South at what has been done to the Tamil people. The question is even being asked, *“why was this not done earlier?”*. Worryingly, other tyrannical regimes are using Sri Lanka as a role model to settle political problems by unleashing State terrorism, the mass slaughter of civilians being just an ‘unavoidable feature’. The United States should know all about this. Madeline Albright, then the US Ambassador to the UN, when asked by Leslie Stahl[6], *“We have heard that half a million children have died [as a result of sanctions]. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?”* Albright replied: *“I think this is a very hard choice, but the price — we think the price is worth it.”* Albright did not lose her job – indeed the opposite. She went on to Co-Chair the *“Genocide Prevention Task Force”* created by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the American Academy of Diplomacy, and the United States Institute for Peace! God forbid.

3. The fundamental problems must be addressed

There is absolutely no evidence that the fundamental problems that resulted in the conflict are being addressed or will be. Indeed there is a lot of evidence to the contrary i.e. very definite steps are being taken to increase the problem and create new and irreversible ones.

The initial problems are too well known to need expansion. A brief mention will suffice.

1. Discrimination against the Tamils in the status of their language (Tamil).

It has been claimed that the 1956 Sinhala Only Act (which clearly discriminated against the Tamils) has been reversed and that Sinhala and Tamil are the Official Languages of the country.

As I have gone into earlier, in practical terms, this is simply untrue. Whatever the legislation, official government business, for one, is in Sinhala. That is not an opinion, but a fact.

2. Discrimination in education is still very much there.

In 1972, the bar was set higher for Tamil students to enter the University – clear anti-Tamil discrimination. This might not be so now, but the damage done to education in the Tamil areas is

worse. For a start, the entire educational structure in the Tamil North and East has been destroyed by bombing schools, preventing children from going to school and a range of other measures. To claim that this is being corrected is not true. *That* is why as many Tamil parents who can afford to leave the country are taking their children abroad for their education. The vast majority who cannot afford to do so, can do nothing to give their children a proper education in the Tamil areas. Major educational institutes which the Tamils have built up over decades, have not only been damaged, but have been partly occupied by the Armed Forces. The Sinhalese government knows full well that for the Tamils, education is the top priority in life. As such, if there was a genuine intention at national reconciliation, to restore the shattered education system in the Tamil areas, the Jaffna Peninsula, in particular, should have been the top priority. Let alone a priority, there is no evidence that there is even an intention to do so. Nor will it be, given the long held paranoia among the Sinhalese that the Tamil educational system was ‘too good’ and was the result of favored treatment given to the Tamils by the colonial British – however false this is. In short, no meaningful steps are being taken to repair the extensive damage that has been done and restore what is so precious to the Tamils. A recent absurdity was that with much fanfare, Rajapaksa announced a project to build a swimming pool in Jaffna Central College. He handed over the project to his son, Namal, a student who had no idea of what he was doing. The result is that instead of a swimming pool, the students have been left with a huge mosquito breeding hole. It is a warning to all people (Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims) what to expect from the Rajapaksa dynasty.

3. Discrimination in **job opportunities** and employment in the government sector, the forte of the Tamils for decades. Merely claiming that there is now no discrimination in employment or job opportunities is not good enough. There simply is no evidence – because it does not exist. 99% of the Armed Forces and 95% of the Police are Sinhalese. Has that changed a year after the end of the conflict? No it has not. Tamils are not being appointed to the Police force even in the Tamil areas.

Rehabilitation and re-settlement of the Tamil people in the North and East

The GoSL claims that rehabilitation and resettlement of the Tamils in the North and East are proceeding apace. There is overwhelming evidence from several sources, including from Sinhalese who have visited the area, that this is a downright lie.

The International Crisis Group (ICG)[7] put this bluntly:- *“the resettlement process has failed to meet international standards for safe and dignified returns. There has been little or no consultation with the displaced and no independent monitoring; many returns have been to areas not cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance; inadequate financial resources have been provided for those returning home; and the military continues to control people’s movements. Sri Lanka has made little progress in reconstructing its battered democratic institutions or establishing conditions for a stable peace. Eight months later, the post-war policies of President*

Mahinda Rajapaksa have deepened rather than resolved the grievances that generated and sustained LTTE militancy.”

More concerns were expressed by the **United States**[8] about land seizures by the government:-
“...in the north and east. Significant amounts of land were seized during the war by the military to create security buffer zones around military bases and other high-value targets which the government called HSZ[9]. The declaration of HSZs resulted in a number of displaced persons, particularly in the Jaffna Peninsula, and rendered inactive approximately 40 square kilometers of agricultural lands. While the government discussed reducing the size of these HSZs towards the end of the year, there was no action taken by year's end. Paramilitary actors were often cited as being responsible for other land seizures. While a legal process exists for private landowners to contest such seizures, in practice it proved very slow, and many victims did not take advantage of it for fear of violent reprisals by those who had seized the property in question.” In one of the most irresponsible reports ever published by an important international organisation, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), has recently published an extensive report that the human rights situation in the Tamil areas had improved markedly. The UNHCR states that the Report was “intended for the use of UNHCR and State adjudicators in the assessment of claims by Sri Lankan asylum-seekers.” It is, in fact, a collection of half-truths, untruths and frank lies based on hearsay not from direct observation by visiting the Tamil areas and collecting reliable data. Almost every claim made can be challenged. This I will do when time permits. The actual situation on the ground recently published by a group of journalists from the South, almost all of them Sinhalese, who took the trouble and the considerable risks to visit the North stated:-“One year after the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Sri Lankan government claims that life is returning to normal in the war-ravaged Vanni[10] region. But as our reporting team found during their recent visit to Kilinochchi, that is far from the case. Tens of thousands of civilians who lost everything during the fighting have been “resettled” in the area with little government assistance. Many of the resettled people live in 10-by-10 feet huts with tin sheets provided by some non-government organisations. Other people are living in tents that are the same size. There are no separate rooms for sleeping or getting dressed. The floors have been leveled with mud. As there are no toilet facilities, people are using open spaces. Some families have used tin sheets to make roofs for their damaged houses. The large Iranaimadu tank (artificial lake) mainly supplied irrigation for several thousand acres of agricultural land. The tank is now under the military's control. Water has not yet been fully released for farmers. A few farmers have begun cultivation but they do not have tractors or other basic equipment. Many do not have even a mamoty (a type of spade). Fishermen are not allowed to fish in the tank.” A summary of their findings was that the Sri Lankan government was lying. This critical report is reproduced in Appendix 1. What is abundantly clear from this and other reports, is that no national reconciliation or reconstruction in the Tamil areas is happening and what the government claims it is doing, is a diabolical lie to avoid international criticism. __

Rehabilitation of the Tamil Tigers

The handling of the (former) LTTE cadre, fighters and non-fighters, is one of the most important problems in 'national reconciliation'. The GoSL is simply too stupid to realize this. There are two crucial points. First, the parents, relatives and friends of these people are in the Tamil community in the North and East. Any ill-treatment of them will result in serious hostility against the government and make 'reconciliation, impossible. Secondly, these are the people who were prepared to lay down their lives (as thousands did), for a 'cause'. Whether one accepts this 'cause' as legitimate or not, is irrelevant. Their absolute commitment is beyond doubt. If they are now mistreated (as they are being), it is from this group and their sympathizers that will arise the next group of Tamil militants, even more determined to pursue the 'cause'. The GoSL has learnt nothing from the militant *Sinhala* youth uprising in 1972 – the JVP uprising of rural youths. They had a 'cause' – an entirely justifiable reason that they were being disadvantaged because they came from the rural poor. Instead of addressing the underlying problem, the Sinhala State unleashed massive violence on the Sinhala youths, slaughtering some 78,000 of them, many in cold blood. Repression never makes a problem go away. The evidence for this is that in 1988 there was another uprising of the Sinhala youths, which was even more serious than the 1972 one. This was crushed with even greater State violence. An estimate is that some 60,000 were slaughtered. Despite this, they are now back again, now in parliament (and the streets) stirring the pot again. It is more a question of 'when' rather than 'if' another revolt will take place. The Sinhala poor, facing grinding poverty, is a disaster waiting to happen. The same *could* happen with the Tamil youths. I repeat, *suppression and repression never make a problem go away*. Those who do not know history (the GoSL), are destined to repeat it. I will now deal with this critical problem of the way the (former) LTTE are being treated – an abject lesson in stupidity.

Alleged Tamil Tiger (LTTE) 'terrorists' in a special camp

The government is currently detaining some 11,000 young Tamils, without trial as "LTTE[11] suspects" at unknown locations. Here are the observations of Human Rights Watch[12]:- "*The government detained more than 10,000 displaced persons at checkpoints and from the camps on suspicion of LTTE involvement, in many cases citing vague and overbroad emergency laws still in force after the end of the war. Many arrests were carried out in violation of domestic and international law. The authorities failed to inform families of their relatives' fate and whereabouts*". Some of them are as young as 8 years. When a visiting (Sinhalese) MP asked the army officer why someone as young as that should be in detention, he was told that those were his orders. Sri Lanka has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child!

Slave labour under the guise of "Rehabilitation"

The GoSL has now announced plans to use these detainees as a cheap labour force under a program initiated by the Justice Minister to "rehabilitate" alleged Tamil Tiger cadres. A government-sanctioned newspaper reported on March 13, 2010, that more than 10,000 LTTE suspects will be "settled" in various prison labour camps including in the districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Jaffna. According to the Justice Ministry, the spouses and children of the cadres will be free to move in and out of the camps, but the detainees will be subject to

strict security measures to ensure the “*smooth functioning of the facilities.*” The government has already announced the establishment of a dairy farm at Suriyawewa near Trincomalee, involving about 500 former “LTTE cadres.” Ceylon Cold Stores, a large company manufacturing beverages and milk products, will invest in the project, but the army will be in charge. The involvement of the army and air force in these projects points to the further militarisation of all aspects of life in Sri Lanka, including the economy. Far from there being any demobilisation, the country’s huge military - one of the largest per capita in the world - is being kept in place and entrenched as a permanent feature, particularly in the North and East.

The Tamil people are his problem – claims Rajapakse

President Rajapaksa boasts that world does not need to be concerned about the Tamils because they are his problem. However, he did not show this concern when ‘his’ Tamil people were massacred, starved and denied medical help, or when those who survived (some 280,000 Tamil men, women and children) were illegally incarcerated in outrageous concentration camps which he laughably calls “welfare villages”. The world *does* need to worry when data from a Demographic and Health Survey by Sri Lanka’s health ministry, published in the state-owned *Daily News* on 29 May 2010, revealed that acute malnutrition is rife among Sri Lanka children and women. Child malnutrition is more than 50% in the North and East, with a national figure at 29% (which itself is staggering). In Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Amparai in the Tamil East, child malnutrition was 53, 45 and 44%, in Vavuniya and Jaffna in the Tamil North, 51% and 43%. There are not only media reports but, what is more important, well documented and thoroughly reliable report (which I have referred to) from Sinhalese journalists from the South who visited the North and interviewed the ‘liberated’ Tamil people. They confirmed that food and assistance was being provided, not by the Rajapaksa government, but from WFP (World Food Program), housing and agriculture and other necessities by International NGOs such as Caritas (a Catholic organization). To deny these people, citizens of the country, essential help for them to survive, is bad enough. To lie about it is even more damaging to ethnic relations. Those who talk of ‘national reconciliation’ have no idea of the ground realities.

War mentality

What is going on right now is more serious than it has ever been. The war is over but the ‘war mentality’ dominates the Sri Lankan (Sinhalese) rulers. The Tamil Tigers (the ‘enemy’) has been crushed, but the search for new ‘enemies’ continues apace. These include those of us who are critical of what this dreadful regime is doing, the European Union and even the UNHCR that has asked for an independent inquiry into the serious human rights violations that have occurred. The Sea Tigers have been wiped but the Sri Lankan Navy is to be expanded. So is the Army that has dramatically *increased* from 170,000 during the war, to 200,000, and then 230,000, with a demand to push it up to 300,000 after the war. This is, and has been, by far the largest army, per capita, in the world.

This being the reality, to talk of ‘national reconciliation’ is absurd.

4. ‘Sinhalsation’ of the Tamil areas

This is more serious than it has ever been. The agenda of a series of Sinhalese governments since Independence has been to translocate Sinhalese from the South to the Tamil areas to make the Tamils a minority even in the areas where they are a majority. The electoral consequences are obvious. The agenda of the Rajapaksa regime is far more serious. Large areas of land belonging to the Tamil people have been taken away from them and given to the Sinhalese. This is being done on a massive scale. Using all sorts of excuses, “High Security Zones”, “Special Economic Zones”, Tamils have been denied access to the land they owned, depriving them of their homes and income.

Disturbingly, the Army commander has stated[13] clearly and unequivocally that the (Sinhalese) army will be entrenched in the North and East permanently:- “*Army personnel arriving in those areas for duty will be provided permanent houses and allowed to engage in cultivation work*”. Unlike earlier, the Tamil North and East will be colonized, not by Sinhalese civilians but by Sinhalese soldiers.

4. A determination to wipeout (or even control) obstructions to national reconciliation

The major obstruction, indeed the most virulent ones are the politically active Buddhist clergy and Sinhalese ethno-religious chauvinists. There has been no action to control these disruptive elements who are now more vocal and virulent than they have ever been. If the Buddhist clergy are told clearly and unequivocally that their place is in Buddhist temples and not on the streets stirring up Sinhala supremacy and demanding the establishment of a Sinhala Buddhist country, then there might be some optimism of a national reconciliation. There has been no such move and these bigots are doing what they have done since Independence in 1948, destroying any possibility of a united country. No government in the past, present or the foreseeable future, will have the courage to confront these dreadful people who are not only doing irreparable damage to the country and its future, but bringing disrepute to one of the greatest teachers of peace and nonviolence the world has ever known, Gautama Buddha. (My mother was a Buddhist –not that this matters). So also the Sinhalese extremists and political opportunists, not only at large but even in government, in particular the all-powerful Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the power behind the throne. On 12 June 2007, he ordered the mass deportation of Tamils from Colombo to the Tamil North, claiming that they had “*No business to be there*”. He claimed that there was ‘insecurity’ in Colombo, and they were the suspects! Do those who talk of ‘national reconciliation’ know all this? I doubt it, despite the fact that I have given the evidence, including the eviction order, in the DVDs I have recorded and distributed widely.

The Christians

If Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist country, there is no place for non-Sinhalese and non-Buddhists. The same violence that has been unleashed on the Tamils, is being unleashed on Christians. Scores of Christian Churches have been attacked and destroyed by Sinhalese hooligans led by the Buddhist clergy. My dvds document some, indeed a very small, amount of this. Just a month ago, a 25 year old Christian Church in Rajagiriya, Colombo, was declared an 'unauthorised structure' and destroyed on Poson Poya Day – a sacred day in the Buddhist calendar! More than a dozen Christian clergy have been murdered and many more beaten up. This being reality, I need hardly stress the absurdity of 'national reconciliation'.

The Sinhalese divide

This article deals, as it should, with Sinhala-Tamil ethnic reconciliation. Unknown to many, there is an increasing divide among the Sinhalese – the 'have everything' and the 'have nothing'. This division has already seen two armed uprisings (1972 and 1988) when disadvantaged rural Sinhalese youths picked up arms to overthrow a Sinhala-dominated government. These were militarily crushed with a loss of some 60,000 lives. The divisions between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in the Sinhala South is increasing. The GoSL that prosecuted the war using the young lives of the Sinhala poor, is now asking them to 'tighten their belts even tighter, to 'rebuild' the nation.. The rich are most certainly getting richer; the poor are spiraling down to grinding poverty. I am talking of the *Sinhalese*, not just the Tamils. Let alone national reconciliation between the Sinhalese and the Tamils being impossible, reconciliation between Rajapaksa's dynastic (Sinhalese) government and the Sinhalese poor is equally impossible. The responsibility for this must rest, not just on the ruling cabal, but with the IMF, India, China, the US and others that will demand neither transparency nor good governance. It is this that makes the long term (or even medium term) outlook for Sri Lanka so poor and what makes any suggestion of 'national reconciliation' a joke.

The economic crisis

The economic crisis and its flow through have a critical effect on 'National Reconciliation' – be it reconciliation between the Sinhala people and the Tamils, or the reconciliation between the increasing divide between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' among the Sinhala people. It therefore merits careful scrutiny. The country is heavily in debt for years, with more problems to follow. The Rajapaksa government (elected November 2005) went on a spending spree to finance the war on the LTTE, crushing it, and also slaughtering upward of 40,000 Tamil and Muslim civilians – a massacre that ended in May 2009, and the President announced "victory" and the end of the war. Despite this, a year later, (June 2010), the Armed Forces have gone from 175,000, to 200,000, to 230,000 with a declared intention of getting this up to 300,000. The question is why the military should be substantially increased when there is no war. The Defence budget in 2010, a year after the end of the armed conflict, to 'defend' the country from a non-existent

enemy, is Rs 202 billion (\$US 1.8 billion), 21 % of the total expenditure of Rs 974 billion to government ministries. In July 2009, with the government facing bankruptcy, Sri Lanka was forced to beg for an IMF loan of \$US 2.6 billion, to ward off a balance of payments crisis, having earlier boasted that it never will! The IMF released two installments but withheld the third in February 2010 because the government failed to indicate how it would rein in the budget deficit, which reached 9.7% of GDP in 2009. The IMF demanded a reduction to 7% in 2009, 6% in 2010, and 5% in 2011. There has been a marked increase in public debt with repayments in 2010 of Rs 767 billion, 44 % of the total budget expenditure of Rs 1,780 billion. Last year (2009), government debt reached an incredible Rs 4.1 *trillion*, of which Rs 1.8 trillion was foreign debt, a 22% rise. Sri Lanka's Central Bank annual report stated: "*The ratio of debt service to government revenue increased further to 117.5% from 90.5%*". Total debt servicing rose by 39% to Rs 825.7 billion in 2009, including a massive interest payment of Rs 309.7 billion which comprised 26% of total expenditure.

Recently, (June 2010), Ernesto May, the World Bank Director of South Asia launching the *Economic Update 2010* in Colombo said that Sri Lanka's debt was the second highest^[14] in South Asia, increasing from 81% of GDP in 2008 to 86% in 2009. The country's public debt rose 86% of GDP last year – the second highest in any Asian country^[15]. Debt repayments is 44% of overall expenditure. The largest budget allocation is, and has been for years, for debt service repayments. In 2010, interest payments alone account for Rs 337 *billion*, 26% of total expenditure. In addition, the government has to find Rs 565 billion for debt repayments this year, raising its gross borrowings to Rs 980 billion (\$US 8.5 billion). Unable to implement the IMF austerity measures without facing a massive anti-government backlash from voters, Rajapaksa repeatedly delayed the budget for 2010 (due in November 2009) till he was safely re-installed as President (January 2010), and his government re-elected (April 2010). Finally in early June 2010, the government presented to Parliament the expenditure estimates as part of an Appropriation Bill for 2010. The two largest budget items were Defence and Debt repayment. The necessary cuts will be made elsewhere, in particular, a freeze on wages, cuts in pensions and welfare benefits, and a slashing of funds for health and education. The budget is finally brought down on 29 June, 2010. the day before it was, a copy of the budget was sent to the IMF to show the massive assault on the working people that the government was going to unleash. The IMF was 'impressed' and released the third instalment of the \$US 2.6 billion! The allocation for the Rehabilitation Ministry was slashed from Rs 4 billion to Rs 2 billion. The result will be that thousands of refugees in the North and East will continue to lack homes and essential services.

As is obvious, national reconciliation with the Tamils in the North and East is simply impossible if they lack homes and essential services. Allocations for Health and Education were Rs 52 and 46 billion respectively, a total of Rs 10 billion less than for 2009. (The allocation for 2009 was itself Rs 12 billion less than for 2008). In May 2010, Sri Lanka gave an undertaking to the IMF that it would considerably reduce recurrent spending by cutting government subsidies to the Ceylon Electricity Board, Petroleum Corporation, Central Transport Board, Railways, and Postal services. This can be achieved only by axing jobs, cutting wage and increasing prices. Well

aware that such measures will provoke massive opposition and even strikes by working people, Rajapaksa has retained the huge Police State apparatus to crush any form of opposition. This is what a Police State does to its people irrespective of ethnicity. In addition to the Government's fiscal profligacy, there is rampant corruption all the way to the very top, waste and absolute incompetence in governance. All of this is important since the allocation for rehabilitation has been slashed by nearly 50%. Facing an economic collapse, large areas of Sri Lanka are 'up for sale' to foreign investors, especially from China and India. Most of these areas are in the Tamil North and East, whose rightful owners are in detention centres or are refugees, who are, as a consequence, unable to return home.

Sri Lanka, in particular the Tamil North and East, is being divided up and sold

Unknown to many, there is a 'fire-sale' in Sri Lanka, particularly the Tamil lands in the North and East which international economists have stated, has the highest developmental potential. The buyers are China, India, and the Arab States, to name but a few. This is exactly what is happening in India which that outstanding Indian writer, Arundhati Roy, says in her outstanding book *The Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*. Here she is: - "*The two arms of the Indian government have developed the perfect pincer action. While one arm is busy selling India off in chunks, the other, to divert attention, is orchestrating a howling, baying chorus of Hindu nationalism and religious fascism*". So also in Sri Lanka. While one arm is selling off the country or borrowing heavily from international lenders i.e. the IMF and China, getting the country deeper and deeper into debt, the other is cheering the 'victory' over the Tamil militants and how the country has at last been freed from 'terrorism'.

Arundhati Roy goes on :-

"The dismantling of democracy is proceeding with the speed and efficiency of a Structural Adjustment Program. While the project of corporate globalization rips through people's lives in India, massive privatization and labour 'reforms' are pushing people off their land and out of their jobs. Hundreds of impoverished farmers are committing suicide by consuming pesticide. Reports of starvation deaths are coming in from all over the country.

While the elite journeys to their imaginary destination somewhere near the top of the world, the dispossessed are spiraling downwards into crime and chaos. This climate of frustration and national disillusionment is the perfect breeding ground, history tell us, for fascism"

That is precisely what is happening in Sri Lanka. Democracy is most certainly being dismantled at an alarming rate. (Tamil) people are being pushed off their lands into concentration camps or just into the jungle, and out of their jobs (fishing and agriculture). Hundreds (of Tamils) are committing suicide (I gather Sri Lanka has the 2nd highest suicide rate in the world). Starvation (of Tamils in the North, and now the Sinhalese poor in the South) is being increasingly reported. The elite (in particular the Rajapaksa family) are journeying to the top of the world (it is

not an imaginary destination), the rest are in grinding poverty with an inflation rate of nearly 30%, and fascism has already been established, proving that history repeats itself. The less fortunate are certainly “*spiraling downwards into crime and chaos*”. Unfortunately, they do not have a powerful vocal expatriate community to jump up and down for them. That is the problem of being poor which I have seen, and sympathized with, for years.

Assault on the poor (in Colombo) in the Sinhala South

President Rajapaksa put the Urban Development Authority (UDA) and the Reclamation of Land Development Corporation (RLDC) under the Defence Ministry(!) as part of the City of Colombo Development Plan to attract investors and tourists. On 28 June 2010, an order was issued for a survey of all shanties and huts on government land, reservations and waterways. In an unbelievable violation of basic human rights, on 10 July 2010, the Sri Lankan military and police attacked thousands of slum dwellers – the poorest of the poor – in Colombo. More than 1,000 Security personnel, including soldiers and police riot squads, attacked, and later rounded up thousands of residents in Mattakkuliya in northern Colombo. Next morning, some 8,000 residents were marched to an open field where hooded men pointed out more than 200 people, who were taken into police custody. They had done nothing, except to be born poor, just as the Tamils in the North and East who were locked up in concentration camps had done nothing except to be born Tamil. This and other military-police operations mark a new and very worrying stage of repressive measures against ordinary people, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, by Rajapaksa’s government – evidence of an emerging police-state in Sri Lanka. The capitalists, both local and foreign, will now move in to buy this dreadfully acquired land.

Destructive capitalism, lack of accountability, rampant corruption and absolute power

It is the combination of destructive capitalism, a complete lack of accountability, thuggery, rampant corruption, and absolute power in the hands of one family, (Rajapaksas’ today, preceded by members of my family, the Bandaranaiques, preceded by Jayawardene, and all the way back to the Senanayakes who took over from the British). This nepotism has now reached ‘epidemic proportions’ and unprecedented barbarism. These irresponsible and increasingly ruthless ‘leaders’, if they can be called that, have been backed by foreign powers for their own geopolitical and economic gains, with money supplied by them and the IMF.

The role of the IMF

The IMF and World Bank have never had a problem supporting and propping up some of the most ruthless dictators and those who have been guilty of extensive human rights violations. When the GoSL asked for a US\$ 1.8 billion loan to finance, among other things, a country with the largest army per capita in the world to murder and crush its people, the IMF gave more than what was requested – ‘generously’ lending US \$ 2.6 billion. No IMF loan has ever been given without crippling conditions which have a disastrous impact on the living conditions of the

people. It is those at the bottom of the pile who are crushed by the IMF conditions which include reducing budget deficits, overhauling the tax system and cuts in social spending and essentials such as food, oil prices and electricity. To be specific, in Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka, the IMF had no problems financing a regime which maintained 'defence' expenditure at astronomical levels at the expense of social development and development projects. As would be expected of any capitalist set-up, the IMF had no objections to Rajapaksa having the world's largest Cabinet of Ministers, tax breaks for luxury vehicles, and wasteful extravaganza such as the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA)[16] 'celebration, as long as there was a freeze on wages, and cuts on subsidies and essential commodities. The IMF has never interfered with regime's 'sovereign right' to violate democratic and human rights. In fact, the IMF knows full well that implementation of these loan conditions will result in just that.

All of the IMF conditions have been implemented by the GoSL. Any protests by those who are affected, will be crushed by the government with the same ruthlessness with which the Tamils were crushed.

The media

The media are heavily censored or self-censored through fear. They merely regurgitate government propaganda. Those who dare to defy this are quickly silenced. The founder-editor of the *Sunday Leader* who dared to question the government using military force to settle a political problem, Lasantha Wickrematunga, was quickly silenced – murdered in broad daylight in a suburb of Colombo on 8 January 2009. So have been nearly two dozen media people, Sinhalese and Tamils. Scores have fled the country. Sri Lanka was ranked 165 out of 173 countries in the *Reporters without Borders 2008* Press Freedom Index. This was the lowest ranking of any democratic country. It is one of the most dangerous places in the world for independent journalists.

A dreadful country

Victor Ivan, one of Sri Lanka's most respected journalists, a Sinhalese like me, has this to say in his 'must-read' book[18]. The first sentence in the Sinhalese version of the book reads:-

"I have never considered Sri Lanka to be particularly civilized country. It has instead appeared to me to be a particularly immoral country, whose leaders embodied iniquity and baseness".

It is these iniquitous and base people holding political power in Sri Lanka, that Australia and the rest of the world support. In the earlier edition of the same book, published in Sinhala in 2006, Ivan wrote:-

"From now on, the People's Alliance (the Party led by President Rajapaksa) can no longer speak of democracy.....It cannot speak of transparency, or claim to be a regime as pure as a white

lotus (The previous President did). It has lost the right to speak of creating a society governed by benevolence and humanity.”

Just four days before the 2010 General Election, the editorial in a leading Sri Lankan newspaper[19], set out the options facing Sri Lankan voters. In one of the most accurate descriptions of the vast majority of Sri Lankan politicians, the editorial was blunt:-

“None of the individual contenders, political parties or opportunistic coalitions are worthy of our respect or our vote. Together they comprise the most mind-boggling array of crooks, thugs, conmen, hypocrites, unprincipled racists, rapists, drug dealers, money launderers, and general all-round scum that is without parallel elsewhere in the world. Other nations have their share of such undesirables, no doubt, but among them are a handful of honest, sincere, principled folk who have distanced themselves from the corrupt majority. Not so in miserable Sri Lanka.”

One of them, “Colonel Karuna”, a former Tamil militant commander, who had assassinated 130 Sinhala policemen who had surrendered to him in the East, was appointed a Cabinet Minister in Rajapaksa’s government. Amnesty International in a press release[20] *“Sri Lanka: Karuna’s presence in Parliament is a travesty of justice”* wrote:-

“Karuna should stand trial, The fact that a suspected war criminal should be entering Parliament sends an appalling message – that war crimes, rather than being investigated and punished, are actually rewarded”.

Referring to President Rajapaksa, the editorial said:-

“To vote for a man who is in the process of establishing a dynasty is to vote for the replacement of democracy with monarchy”.

These are the people who are expected to deliver ‘national reconciliation’ in Sri Lanka. The *only* politicians of integrity in Sri Lanka, **all** of them Sinhalese, who have campaigned for justice for the Tamils are those from the Left. They are the outstanding Wije Dias (Socialist Equality Party), Siritunga Jayasuriya (United Socialist Party), and Dr Vickremabahu Karunaratne (Left Front). All three were Presidential candidates at the Presidential election (26.1 2010). The fact that they got 0.04%, 0.08% and 0.07% of the votes cast, while two mass murderers, knee-deep in Tamil blood, Mahinda Rajapaksa, Executive President, Minister of Defence and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, and Gen Sarath Fonseka, Army Commander who carried out the genocide, got 57.8% and 40.1% of the votes speaks volumes. The General Election (8 April 2010) showed the same, with those who stood for justice for the Tamils getting less than 0.2% of the votes. What this means is that the vast majority of Sri Lankans are in favour of the continuing injustice for the Tamils – some 18% of the population. In a country such as that, to talk of ‘national reconciliation’ is nonsense.

“Returning to Normal”

If Sri Lanka is ‘returning to normal’ (as the GoSL, and even some international groups such as the UN Human Rights Commission, have claimed), then it is mandatory to ask why internationally renowned human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, are not allowed free access to all parts of the country. To focus on the ‘here and now’, the GoSL has just (7 July 2010) deported two members of a well-known NGO (non-government organization)[21], “Nonviolent Peaceforce”, that has been working in Sri Lanka since 2003. On 24 June 2010, the Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration informed Nonviolent Peaceforce – Sri Lanka (NPSL), that visas for Ms. Tiffany Easthom (Country Director, NPSL) and Mr. Ali Palh (Coordinator Human Rights Defenders Project, NPSL) were being cancelled and that they would have to leave the country on or before 7 July 2010. Nonviolent Peaceforce is an international organisation that tries to improve security for civilians at risk of harm and to prevent attacks and other human rights violations. Their focus is on prevention and change rather than on investigation and the attribution of blame. There is only one conclusion that can be drawn – that the GoSL feels threatened by such activity.

The facts

Let us face some stark facts and not smudge them over with fiction and imagination. Sri Lanka is a pathetically polarized country. The problems are Sinhala majoritarianism, Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-religious chauvinism, and after the end of the war, Sinhala triumphalism with no consideration of the (Tamil) civilian cost of achieving this ‘victory’. This is not going to change, indeed there is every indication that it will get worse, despite international concerns. The arrogant GoSL could not care less. The divisions between the Sinhala majority and the brutalized Tamil minority is deepening. So are the divisions between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ in the Sinhala South. This division is set to get worse as a totally corrupt, ruthless and despotic regime implements the inhuman conditions demanded by the IMF. Any protests by the helpless Sinhala poor will be crushed by the military and police in what is a Police State. There is neither any international pressure or any incentive to change its policies, its extravagant and limitless expenditure maintaining a massive and increasing Army and Police, abysmal governance by the Rajapaksas, of the Rajapaksas, for the Rajapaksas, for the foreseeable future, manipulating or ignoring the Constitution of the country and trampling on human rights of all its people – Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Anyone who dares to challenge this can be prosecuted and persecuted as an enemy of the nation. The future for Sri Lankans, irrespective of ethnicity, is bleak. The Sinhala poor will be second-class citizens, the Tamils in the North and East, non-citizens, as were the Plantation (‘Indian’) Tamils in 1948, disenfranchised and decitizenised by the first Government of the newly independent country. History is certainly repeating itself. These are not opinions to be debated, but facts to be faced. Rather than preach to the converted, the role of the expatriate Tamil community is to get the facts across to the international community that the Sri Lankan government is lying and has no intention of national

reconciliation. To do this, the facts must be known, which is why I have put these together in this publication.

Sri Lanka on track for record tea crop

Sri Lanka, one of the world's biggest black tea exporters, produced nearly 30 percent more tea in the first half of the year and is on track for a record crop, an official said Friday. Tea is Sri Lanka's biggest cash crop and is sold in overseas markets as "Pure Ceylon Tea". The industry suffered a setback last year due to a drought and fall-out from the global commodities crash of 2008.

But this year tea output for the six months to June rose 27.8 percent compared to the same period last year to 166.9 million kilos (367.18 million pounds), the Sri Lanka Tea Board said. Favourable weather, better fertilizer use and an absence of labour unrest all helped, said the board's director general, H.D. Hemaratne. Strong demand from key buyers in Russia and the Middle East helped Sri Lankan tea exports earn 399 million dollars for the four months to April, compared to 300 million dollars earned in the same period in 2008. Tea production in June 2010 alone was up 18 percent at 29.5 million kilos (64.9 million pounds) compared to the same month a year earlier, board figures showed. "If things continue, our total crop is on track to exceed 320 million kilos (704 million pounds) this year," Hemaratne told AFP. In 2009, total output fell nine percent to 289.7 million kilos (637.34 million pounds), after hitting a record 318.6 million (700.92 million pounds) in 2008. Colombo, which stages the world's largest weekly tea auction, has seen prices rise to an average of 3.37 dollars a kilo due to supply shortages in neighbouring India, brokers said. India's tea exports rose by 20 percent in the first five months of the year to 71.2 million kilos but overseas sales may slow due to heavy rains hurting output in the main tea-growing area, Assam, Indian tea industry officials say.

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jCOvr8p4-ra0eeJSdZAHinlofH9Q>

Record Sri Lanka Stock Rise to Boost Initial Share Sales, NDB Bank Says

Sri Lanka's stock market, the world's second-best performer this year, may see a near threefold rise in share sales in the second half from the first six months amid rising investor demand, according to National Development Bank Plc. "The recent high oversubscriptions of new issues show the liquidity that is available," Vajira Kulatilaka, head of investment banking at NDB Bank, the nation's largest non-government corporate lender, said by telephone today. "Now that the war is over, there is a lot of hope and good sentiment." The South Asian island's Colombo All-Share Index has climbed 45 percent this year and is the best performer after Mongolia among benchmarks tracked by Bloomberg as the end of the island's civil war spurred an economic recovery. Five Sri Lankan companies announced plans to raise \$7.6 million in initial share sales in the first half. Colombo-based retailer Odel Ltd. this month received demand for 63 times the

250.5 million rupees (\$2.2 million) offered. Kulatilaka said he's working with companies in finance, power, engineering and agriculture industries that may seek listings worth about 2 billion rupees this year. NDB Investment Bank Ltd., the lender's investment banking unit, is arranging the 630 million rupee initial share sale of Sri Lanka's PC House Ltd., a computer distributor. The firm in 2005 arranged the country's biggest IPO for Dialog Axiata Ltd., the biggest mobile-phone operator. Sri Lanka is aiming to accelerate economic growth to 7 percent in 2010, the fastest pace in four years. Gross domestic product rose 7.1 percent in the three months ended March 31 from a year earlier, after gaining 6.2 percent in the previous quarter.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-07-23/record-sri-lanka-stock-rise-to-boost-initial-share-sales-ndb-bank-says.html>

Sri Lanka to sell billion-dollar bond: government

Sri Lanka plans to sell a billion dollar sovereign bond this year to offset expensive short-term foreign loans, the government said Thursday. Media Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said the cabinet approved the move this week, but did not announce a formal date or the tenure of the proposed bond issue. "We have taken short-term loans on high interest and we want to set off those," Rambukwella said. Sri Lanka issued a 500-million-dollar five-year bond in 2007 and another 500-million dollar bond in 2009. The island has raised money through short-term loans, supplier credit and syndicated loans to meet its budgetary needs. In February, Central Bank Governor Nivard Cabraal said the government hoped to issue a 10-year post-war bond towards the third quarter of this year, to help defray mammoth post-war rebuilding expenses. Cabraal said the island needed about 2.7 billion dollars for the next three years to build new roads, utilities, hospitals and schools in the war-ravaged north. The northern province, which was the stronghold of the separatist Tamil Tiger guerrillas, is picking up the pieces after troops last May crushed the revolt and ended decades of bloodshed. The northern province accounts for just 3.3 percent of the island's 40-billion-dollar economy. Sri Lanka is also eyeing a higher credit rating to allow the island to borrow at cheaper interest rates on the international market. Sri Lanka's is currently rated a 'B' grade by global ratings agency Standard and Poor's, while rival Fitch rates it as B-plus. A "B" rating is five notches below investment grade. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka this month picked HSBC, Merrill Lynch and Royal Bank of Scotland as rating advisors for its bond sale. Sri Lanka wants to lift its credit rating to investment grade or at least 'BBB' by 2014.

US urges Sri Lanka to improve rights, media freedom

The United States pressed Sri Lanka on Wednesday to improve human rights and media freedoms amid charges that security forces committed war crimes during the last days of the island's civil war. During a one-day visit, US Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake said reconciliation must play a key role in peace building, a year after troops crushed the 37-year Tamil separatist conflict that claimed 100,000 lives. "There should be accountability to redress

past wrongs," Blake told reporters, referring to allegations by the United Nations that at least 7,000 ethnic Tamil civilians were killed in the final months of fighting last year. The UN chief Ban Ki-moon has appointed a three-member advisory panel to probe alleged rights abuses during the last stages of the conflict despite heated opposition from Sri Lanka. Many observers view the UN panel, headed by Marzuki Darusman, a former Indonesian attorney general, as a precursor to a full-blown war crimes investigation. During discussions with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse, opposition leaders, businessmen and civil society, Blake said he urged all sides to improve the human rights situation in the country, particularly media freedom. Blake, who served as the US ambassador in Colombo until his new assignment last May, said reporters continue to work in a climate of fear. Government figures show nine journalists have been killed and another 27 assaulted in the past four years, while activists say over a dozen journalists have been killed. Blake praised the government's efforts to resettle some 288,000 war displaced people, even though about 37,000 civilians still live in state-run welfare camps. "Sri Lanka has the unique opportunity to forge a lasting peace, for reconciliation, to develop a market-oriented economy, an ethnically diverse democracy," he added.

UN aid programs in Sri Lanka will continue uninterrupted, Buhne assures

The United Nations will continue its aid programs in Sri Lanka uninterrupted, especially on the resettlement of the Internally displaced persons in the North and East, the world body has assured. The UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka Neil Buhne has given this assurance to the External Affairs Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris when he met the Minister at the Ministry Tuesday. Buhne returned to Colombo yesterday with a message from the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon after being recalled to New York by him in protest of Minister Wimal Weerawansa's protest campaign against the UN Chief's advisory panel. The Resident Coordinator informed the Minister that the UN hopes to work with Sri Lanka collaboratively and its aid programs in the north and will be continued. The spokesman for the UN Chief last Friday (16) said Buhne will also convey the Secretary-General's strong expectations for a better treatment of the UN family in Sri Lanka, as well as for progress on the range of commitments covered in the Joint Statement of May 2009 including resettlement of internally displaced persons, political reconciliation, and accountability. The Sri Lankan government has assured that it has taken measures for the UN staff to continue their work without hindrance. Buhne also has assured the Minister that UN Secretary-General has appointed the advisory panel on Sri Lanka only to obtain instructions on Sri Lanka's situation.