

Commonwealth team to watch Lankan polls

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Commonwealth has sent an expert team to observe the Sri Lankan presidential election scheduled for November 17.

Former president of Mauritius Cassam Uteem is leading the team which started working on November 9.

Sent by the Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon, the experts will be briefed in Colombo by the election commissioner, representatives of the presidential candidates and their parties, Commonwealth diplomats, international and domestic observers, representatives of civil society, and the media. The decision to send the Commonwealth expert team follows an invitation from the commissioner of elections of Sri Lanka.

According to a release by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the team will observe preparations for the election, polling, counting and result process as well as the overall electoral environment.

The other experts are-- Head of the department of Government, Sociology and Social Work of University of the West Indies Cynthia Barrow-Giles, Secretary General of the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance in Bangladesh Feroz Hassan, Chair of Trinidad and Tobago Coalition against Domestic Violence Senator Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, Deputy Secretary of Independent Election Commission of Botswana Martha Sayed and Electoral Commissioner of UK Karamjit Singh.

The Commonwealth observed the parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka in October 2000 and in May 2004.



South Asian Children's Federation of Bangladesh took out a colourful procession in the city yesterday wishing success of the Saarc Summit.

INDIAN EXPRESS REPORT

Only Manmohan can make a fresh start in Dhaka-Delhi ties

BSS, New Delhi

In his all too brief bilateral engagement with the Bangladesh leadership on the margins of South Asian Summit in Dhaka, Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh has a small window of opportunity to begin dismantling of the huge psychological barriers that have emerged between India and Bangladesh.

By delinking trade and security issues, offering a "composite dialogue" on all issues of bilateral concern and promising result-oriented negotiations, Singh can make a fresh start in the troubled relationship, said C Raja Mohan in his report published in the influential Indian Express yesterday.

Above all, lending an empathetic ear to the many accumulated Bangla grievances and a personal commitment to bring back dignity and equality into bilateral relationship might allow him to scale the wall of mistrust in Dhaka, he

pointed out in the report headlined "Delhi-Dhaka ties: Only PM can break impasse."

Although expectation about Indo-Bangla relations are low, analysts here say it would be a pity if the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Dhaka in five years does not even make an attempt to loosen the knotted bilateral relationship, argued C Raja Mohan.

In January 2004 when prime minister AB Vajpayee visited Islamabad to attend the 12th Summit of the Saarc, it became an occasion to transform the ties with Pakistan. But with Bangladesh, a fair friendlier terrain than Pakistan, bilateral ties have drifted into an impasse, the report said.

Thanks to the small-nation syndrome in Dhaka and a lack of vision in Delhi, a frustrating paralysis has taken hold of bilateral ties. To break the gridlock, Singh will have to shore up what the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Veena Sikri

recently called the "psychological infrastructure" of bilateral relations.

Pointing to the problem of attitude in Dhaka, Sikri in a recent speech, said a negative mindset "often colours every discussion, sometimes making the mindset more important than the reality in any situation."

That applies to Delhi as well, where episodic attention and a tendency to paint Bangladesh in dark colours have prevented a more sensitive approach to Dhaka. Worse still has been Delhi's decision to hold back from the economic concessions, if needed to offer by demanding security gestures from Bangladesh first.

In setting up a false linkage between two major but separate Indian interests in Bangladesh, The Indian Express said Delhi has allowed obstreperous elements in Dhaka to prevent progress on both.

The leading Indian English daily said Singh could help recast the relationship by delinking trade and security while pursuing issues on both fronts with equal vigour. He should also try and insulate ties with Dhaka from the deeply divisive domestic politics in Bangladesh.

An agreement between Singh and Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to start a composite dialogue and a public commitment by the Indian prime minister could provide an impetus for Indo-Bangla relations, the Indian Express suggested.

US Senate demands report on 'CIA prisons'

REUTERS, Washington

The US Senate demanded a classified account on Thursday of whether the CIA was running a secret prison system as it debated a bill that would regulate the Bush administration's treatment of military detainees.

The call was made following a newspaper report of such a prison network abroad, including facilities in Eastern Europe, that added to concerns in America and overseas about the fate of those held in the US-declared war on terrorism.

Senators also moved to deny detainees at the US Guantanamo Bay prison the right to challenge their detentions with habeas corpus petitions in federal court, a step critics said could undermine efforts to secure their humane treatment.

Lawmakers said they could revisit the Guantanamo issue next week when they hope to complete a \$491.6 billion package of defence and nuclear weapons programmes.

The White House has threatened to veto the legislation because of an attached measure requiring humane treatment of terrorism suspects and

setting rules for their interrogation.

The Senate voted 82-9 for director of National Intelligence John Negroponte to provide Congress' intelligence committees with a classified "full accounting" on any clandestine prison or detention facility run by the US government at any location where terrorism suspects were being held.

The Washington Post reported last week that the CIA had been holding and interrogating al-Qaeda captives at secret facilities in Eastern Europe, part of a global covert prison system established after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

Sen. John Kerry, a Massachusetts Democrat, said most lawmakers learned about the covert prisons from the newspaper and said his amendment was to "reassert congressional oversight."

The administration has not publicly confirmed or denied the newspaper's account and the House of Representatives said on Thursday it would investigate that disclosure and a number of other recent leaks of national security information.