No deal yet on prisoner Lanka to hold early swap with Hamas

Says Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

meeting said.

FROM PAGE 1

Israel said yesterday there was no deal yet on a prisoner swap with Hamas, as efforts appeared to gather pace on an accord that could see a Gaza-held soldier exchanged for hundreds of Palestinians.

"There is no deal yet," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told deputies from his right-wing Likud party, an official present at the

"The question will be decided by the government and there will be a debate in the Knesset." he said, referring to Israel's parliament.

He spoke as rumours grew in Israel, Gaza and Egypt that the two sides were on the verge of sealing a deal in German-mediated talks to exchange Gilad Shalit, seized by Gaza militants in 2006, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

A day after the Israeli president spoke of "progress" in the negotiations, Shalit's parents met senior government officials and a Hamas delegation arrived in Egypt, which has been a key player in the months of indirect talks.

"I can't give any details of this morning's meeting," Noam Shalit, the 23-year-old Israeli prisoner's father, told AFP. "I will be reassured when my son is by my side, not before."

In Cairo, a senior Egyptian official said a deal has yet to be nailed down and signalled that a final list of Palestinian prisoners has not yet been

"We in Egypt think that more time is needed, said the official, who asked to remain anonymous. "It's a complicated business. There is no agreement yet on the list of names of Palestinian prisoners whose release is demanded by

Israeli military censors have imposed a blackout on information about the indirect talks.

Hamas has kept mum as well, with senior officials in Gaza telling reporters they were under strict orders not to talk to the press about the issue.

March 17 now public holiday

hold early presidential election

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka will hold early presidential elections within months, media minister Anura Yapa told reporters yesterday, after government forces defeated the Tamil Tiger rebels six months ago.

President Mahinda Rajapakse would shortly announce the exact date of the vote, the minister said, with local press reports predicting January 23 as polling day.

"This morning the president met with all party leaders (of the ruling People's Alliance coalition) and decided that the president election will be held soon, "Yapa said.

He said Rajapakse wanted a fresh mandate, despite his sixyear term not ending until November 2012.

The day will also be

observed as the National

Children's Day as it was

observed in Awami League's

previous term from 1996 to

holidays would not increase,

as Hindus will celebrate

Janmashtami, the birthday of

Lord Krishna, on August 15

are general holidays while

eight holidays are given by

executive order, prime minis-

ter's Press Secretary Abul

Kalam Azad told journalists

its satisfaction over the

Supreme Court's verdict in the

Bangabandhu Murder Case

and observed that executions

of the verdict would end the

politics of killing in this coun-

premier on her receiving the

Indira Gandhi Peace Prize for

her contributions to the estab-

lishment of peace and efforts

It also congratulated the

The cabinet also expressed

after the meeting.

In the holiday list, 13 days

next year.

However, the number of

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Commerce Minister Faruk Khan told The Daily Star last night that instead of trade union, the workers will have the right to form welfare committees in the EPZ. "Since the workers don't have the right to trade union, we at the meeting proposed

some amendments in the act to give them the opportunity," he added. Talking to The Daily Star at her office, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said, "The government earlier approved in principle an amendment proposal. Finally we approved it today (yesterday] keeping in mind the

workers' welfare." She said the move would She made the directive also help Bangladesh attain Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) facilities. She said a bill would be placed in the upcoming session of the Jatiya Sangsad for approval of the amendment.

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"If there is any discrepancy in the bill or wording, the lawmakers will discuss and fix that," Matia added.

Prime Minister Sheikh of freedom fighters by two included. Hasina, who presided over the years from 57 to 59, the meeting, asked her cabinet Bangladesh Medical and colleagues to immediately Dental Council Act 1980 in the parliament, marking the completion of the government's one-year in office.

At the meeting, Hasina advised her cabinet colleagues to remain "utmost alert" against any conspiracies to destabilise the country till execution of the verdict in the Bangabandhu murder case and ploys to create unrest in to UN Office for project serthe garment industries, some senior ministers told The Daily

while addressing ministers, advisers and state ministers after the meeting at the cabinet division of the secretariat. Hasina also held a short discussion with her colleagues after the meeting.

The cabinet also gave final approval to the Public Servants (amendment) Bill 2009 extending the service age

assess performances of their (amendment) and the Fishery ministries and submit the Hatchery Bill 2009. findings so that those can be It okayed a proposal of 2001. put in the president's speech appointing the upazila vicechairman as adviser to the Upazila Coordination Committee on temporary programme to involve the youths, both male and female, in nation building activities. The cabinet, however, sent back to the foreign ministry a proposal for the appointment

of a permanent representative

vices in Dhaka and discarded

communication Control

(amendment) Act 2009.

the Bangladesh Tele-

BIRTHDAY HOLIDAY

The cabinet also approved try forever. -birthday of Father of the Nation as a public holiday.

birthday of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman,

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which is March 17, has been to uplift people's lives.

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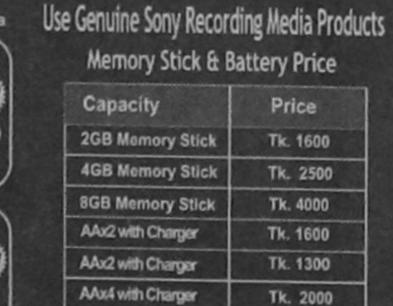
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