

The External Affairs Minister of India, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, arrived in Colombo this afternoon, bearing with him the letter from Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India inviting President Mahinda Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka to the forthcoming SAARC Summit to be hosted by India in New Delhi in April 2007.

After reaching Colombo, Minister Mukherjee called on President Rajapaksa, Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayaka and Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera.

President Rajapaksa conveyed through Minister Mukherjee his acceptance of the gracious invitation extended to him. The President added that Sri Lanka is looking forward to the forthcoming Summit which will importantly coincide with the member countries launching new initiatives to bring economic progress to the South Asian region. The President pledged the full support of Sri Lanka towards the efforts of the host and Chair of the April Summit in New Delhi, for the achievement of the objectives of SAARC.

During Minister Mukherjee's meetings with the President and other Sri Lankan senior leaders, issues of mutual interest pertaining to the bilateral relationship were discussed. The areas covered included trade and economic cooperation, the promotion of cultural and people to people contacts, and the peace process in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan leaders shared with the Indian Minister the measures taken to ensure security while pursuing the peace process. President Rajapaksa reiterated his steadfast commitment to a negotiated political solution to the national issue. The President emphasized the high priority his administration assigns in this regard to the mechanism of the All Party Conference (APC), and his confidence that the deliberations within this forum would contribute to a national consensus on devolution. Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera and Science & Technology Minister Professor Tissa Vitarana, who also chairs the All Party Conference Representatives Committee (APRC), joined President Rajapaksa for his meeting with the Indian External Affairs Minister.

Minister Mukherjee will be departing Colombo on 10th January 2007.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Colombo.

9 January 2007