

## 'Indian military to protect Manmohan during SAARC summit'

Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapaksa has approved a 'heavy Indian military presence' in Colombo to provide security for Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in the upcoming SAARC summit in Colombo, said a media report here Sunday.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit is scheduled to take place from July 27 to August 3 in the capital city of Colombo.

'The formal request to have Indian troops, helicopter gun ships, bullet-proof vehicles and related security arrangements was made by the three-member Indian delegation that visited Sri Lanka June 20,' the Sunday Leader newspaper reported, referring to the visit by a top Indian delegation led by National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan.

Claiming that the presidential approval was granted following a request made by India in view of the current security situation in the country, the media report said that Sri Lanka had also 'agreed to allow the Indian Navy to patrol and carry out surveillance in Sri Lankan territorial waters during the summit to ensure there are no terrorist attacks from the sea'.

The Indian delegation that included Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon and Defence Secretary Vijay Singh called on President Rajapaksa and met senior government officials, including Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, army commander Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka and navy commander Vice Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda during their previously unannounced visit.

They held talks on a wide range of issues, including the current situation with regard to the ethnic conflict and the upcoming SAARC summit in Colombo.

Quoting informed sources, the media report said India also wanted to set up special radars in Colombo. 'The skies in Colombo are to be taken under the control of a special Indian Air Force team in order to prevent any possible LTTE air attack'.

'The Indian prime minister and his officials along with his security personnel are to be transported in bulletproof vehicles and trucks that will be brought to Colombo from India. Another special Indian helicopter and attack aircraft are also to be brought for him,' the Sunday Leader report said.

Sri Lanka's military spokesman, Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara, said Sri Lanka's tri-forces along with police and elite police personnel would naturally provide security for the summit while the leaders of the SAARC would bring in security personnel from their respective countries to look after their own security.

'Not only India, all the other leaders will also bring their own security personnel for their own security. This is a common practice everywhere. But we have our own special security arrangements for the SAARC summit as a whole,' Brig. Nanayakkara told IANS.

( © IANS / India eNews)