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UNHRC should play a critical role in Sri Lanka - Zeid

(FT.LK) - The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has urged the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to continue to play a critical role in encouraging progress in accountability and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. In his report on "Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka" to the 37th session of the Human Rights Council, which will be held from 26 February to 23 March in Geneva, the High Commissioner also called on Member States to explore other avenues, including the application of universal jurisdiction, that could foster accountability in Sri Lanka. Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 34/1, the report is an update on progress made in the implementation of resolution 30/1 on promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka during the period from March 2017 to January 2018, in particular with regard to the Government's commitment to put in place transitional justice measures. In the present update, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights also looks at the general human rights situation in the

country, including with respect to accountability. In his report, the High Commissioner while reiterating his appreciation for the constructive engagement of the Government of Sri Lanka with OHCHR and United Nations human rights mechanisms since January 2015 noted that this constructive collaboration must be accompanied by the implementation of key commitments. He said the fulfilment of the transitional justice commitments made under Human Rights Council resolution 30/1 has been virtually stalled for more than a year. "Progress with some confidence-building measures has often been insufficient and inconclusive, and the structures set up to coordinate implementation have not consolidated enough or did not receive sufficient political support to move things forward," Zeid noted in the report. In statements and reports issued since 2015, the High Commissioner, while expressing concern over the lack of progress on accountability and reforms, was encouraged by the positive improvement of the general human rights situation. However, 2017 was

marked by intermittent inter-ethnic tensions and attacks on minorities which are unlikely to dissipate completely, the report said. "While the Government has managed to steer many of these worrying events in a positive direction, this type of violence in a country that has experienced cycles of extreme violence roughly every 10 years is deeply troubling, particularly when accompanied by hate speech, misinformation and agitation through social media and political manipulation," the report emphasised. The continuing allegations of torture and surveillance and the lack of sufficient progress in implementing critical confidence-



Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein

building measures, such as the release of land, the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the solution to the pending cases under the Act, have antagonised key constituencies that could be instrumental to the Government's reform efforts, the High Commissioner's report pointed out.

UNP reshuffle

(Colombogazette.com) - Several key Ministries changed hands in the much anticipated cabinet reshuffle which took place on Sunday. The cabinet reshuffle took place at the Presidential Secretariat today and included changes only in members of the United National Party (UNP). A cabinet reshuffle of members of the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) is set to take place in two weeks. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was appointed the new Minister of Law and Order taking over from former Law and

Order Minister Sagala Ratnayake. Sagala Ratnayake was appointed as the Minister of Youth Affairs and Southern Development. Lakshman Kiriella was appointed as the new Minister of Public Enterprises and Kandy Development while Kabir Hashim was appointed Minister of Higher Education and Highways. Harin Fernando was appointed Minister of Digital Infrastructure and Foreign Employment. Ravindra Samaraweera was appointed the new Minister of Wildlife and

Sustainable Development replacing senior UNP member Gamini Jayawickrama Perera. Meanwhile, Piyasena Gamage was appointed the State Minister of Youth Affairs and Southern Development, Ajith P Perera - State Minister of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation and Drug Prevention and Harsha de Silva the State Minister of National Policies and Economic Affairs. J.C. Alawathuwala was appointed the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs. Expressing his views at this event, the

President said that in future subject areas of some Ministries will be changed and will come under the purview of more appropriate institutions. He also said that necessary changes will be made in State institutions and Corporations in the future to enhance efficiency. President Sirisena said that the future plans of the government will be implemented successfully for the betterment of the public.

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Shops, mosque damaged in Ampara



(FT.lk) - At least five people were wounded and several shops and a mosque damaged in a clash between Sinhalese and Muslims in eastern Sri Lanka, police said on Tuesday. The incident had first taken place at the restaurant in the vicinity of temple junction in Ampara on Monday night. The attack took place after a group of people accused a Muslim owned shop of mixing some pills in the food. A video was posted on social media by a Buddhist organisation where a man is forced to confess to mixing the pills in the food. A mob later set fire to the shop and other property and also attacked a mosque nearby. Following the incident, the Police had taken steps to maintain law and order in the area while the Police Special Task Force (STF) was deployed to tighten the security in the area. The Muslim Council of Sri Lanka (MCSL), an umbrella body that

includes most Muslim organizations in the country, condemned the attack and requested the government to conduct an impartial inquiry into it and arrest the perpetrators. "The government has the sole responsibility to ensure the safety and security of all its citizens irrespective of religious belief, caste or ethnicity," the Council said in a statement. "This form of mob violence is continuing to grow and Muslim business establishments are targeted." Last year, diplomats condemned violence against Muslims and urged the government to uphold minority rights and freedom of religion after more than 20 attacks on Muslims, including arson at Muslim-owned businesses and mosques. President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe have promised to protect minorities, but attacks against Muslims have continued.

Muslims comprise about nine percent of Sri Lanka's population of 21 million. Buddhists make up about 70 percent and Hindus about 13 percent. "Strict, immediate action on Ampara anti-Muslim rioters": Rishad Minister of Industry and Commerce Rishad Bathiudeen has severely condemned attacks that took place in Ampara town last morning. The attacks targeted a mosque and Muslim-owned businesses in Ampara town and began spreading early last morning. Bathiudeen during the Cabinet meeting yesterday called on the Government to take "immediate and strict action" on the Ampara wrongdoers. He also said that the Ampara Police personnel were idly standing by and looking on as the attacks continued to rage and condemned the inaction. He said the Government should compensate for the losses.

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