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Iran, Lanka to strengthen economic cooperation

(Dailynews.lk) - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and President Maithripala Sirisena met in Tehran to confer on ways to expand economic and trade ties between the two sides.

Following the signing of five MoUs on

Sirisena focused on the sale of Iranian crude oil, petrochemicals, building blocks, as well as technical and engineering services. He went on to express hopes that the agreements reached in all sectors of economy and trade would be followed up



President Maithripala Sirisena greeting Iranian President Hassan Rouhani at the Saadabad Palace. (Picture by Sudath Silva)

economic and cultural cooperation, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his Sri Lankan counterpart Maithripala Sirisena attended a joint press conference on Sunday in Tehran.

Speaking at the press conference, President Rouhani noted that the talks with President

during the upcoming Joint Economic Commission's meeting of the two countries in Tehran. Rouhani also added that the two sides called for establishment of a direct flight between Tehran and Colombo to boost tourism.

Iranian President Rouhani talked about Iran's nuclear deal which once again made headlines in the wake of US withdrawal, saying "it is with great pleasure that I can say the Islamic Republic of Iran has lived up to every

agreement it has signed, and it is of much regret that the US as one of the signatories of the JCPOA that was approved by the United Nations, has violated the agreement." "The US has announced that it has pulled out from the nuclear deal, which means a clear violation of ethics, politics and the correct



diplomatic ways," he added.

President Rouhani further welcomed President Sirisena's invitation for a state visit to Colombo.

President Sirisena, for his part, stressed the need for development of bilateral ties between the two countries, describing Iran as one of the major purchasers of his country's tea, and a key exporter of crude oil. He added that his government has put in a request for the import of more crude oil from Iran.

Elsewhere, he referred to Iran and Sri Lanka as the oldest and most senior members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), saying that his country is committed to follow in the footsteps of NAM.

"Our policy is to consider all nations of the world as our friends," he said. "Therefore our foreign policy is based on neutrality." President Sirisena also called for more investment from the state and private sectors of Iran, and voiced appreciation at Iran's assistance to Sri Lanka ... **SEE P8**

Sanga on light at the end of the tunnel for Sri Lankan cricket

(Island.lk) - Former great Kumar Sangakkara delivering a lecture on cricket organized by the Colombo Club on Friday has come up with some interesting observations.

A much-respected speaker on a whole range of subject not just cricket, the 40-year-old elaborated eloquently on the rich history of Sri Lankan cricket and the high esteem Sri Lankans involved in the sport are held globally.

Asked whether there is light at the end of the tunnel for Sri Lankan cricket, the former Test captain came up with an interesting answer. Sanga said that there will be light at the end of the tunnel on the day when Sri Lankans can't recall the

name of the Minister of Sports or President of Sri Lanka Cricket. The highly respected former Sri Lankan captain also pointed out that the onus was on Minister of Sports as he had the authority make necessary changes to the constitution of Sri Lanka Cricket. When asked to intervene to help revamp the sport by previous Sports Minister Dayasiri Jayasekara, one of the suggestions that Sanga provided was to restrict the number of votes at the AGM of Sri Lankan Cricket. Sadly, Jayasekara took little effort to usher in the necessary changes and instead curry favoured with his political colleague Thilanga Sumathipala. Both crossed over to the

opposition last week having been part of the government for three years.

In 2011, Sanga was invited by the late Christopher Martin-Jenkins, then President of MCC, to deliver the Colin Cowdrey Lecture at Lord's. His highly intellectual lecture on how Sri Lankan cricket evolved over the years received a standing ovation. The speech was hailed all over the world, but then Sports Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage wanted the former captain probed. Currently, Aluthgamage is on bail



having been earlier arrested on corruption charges.

China nod for \$1.1 b Central Expressway loan

(FT.LK) - China's Ambassador Cheng Xueyuan during a meeting with Prime Minister Ranil Wickeremesinghe yesterday has assured the Chinese Government had approved the \$1.1 billion loan for the construction of the first phase of the Central Expressway, the Prime Minister's Office said.

The statement was issued following reports that loan disbursement had been held up, despite the expressway being in the works for the better part of two years and being one of the flagship projects of this Government. The loan was obtained from the China Exim Bank. "The Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka met Prime Minister Ranil Wickeremesinghe to break the good news of the Chinese Government approving \$1 billion for phase I of the Central Expressway construction. Instructions have been given to Chinese EXIM Bank to process the loan. The Ambassador requested that the Sri Lankan side expedite administrative and legal formalities," the

statement released by the Prime Minister's Office said.

The first part of the Central Expressway project from Kadawatha to Mirigama - a stretch of 37.09 km - had been delayed due to lack of funds, prompting the Road Development Authority (RDA) to call on the Government to intervene in securing loan disbursements, reports over the weekend said. RDA officials had also raised concerns that unless the funds were obtained speedily, the expressway may not be able to meet its 2020 completion deadline. Ambassador Cheng had also discussed the Hambantota port and investment zone, as well as the Colombo Port City project, the statement added.

Both ventures are expected to bring in significant revenues of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). "With regard to Hambantota Port, Ambassador Cheng mentioned that they encourage investors to set up factories for... **SEE P8**



Chinese Ambassador Cheng Xueyuan with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe

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