



Former President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe greet each other at yesterday's meeting in Colombo. Kumaratunga, who heads the South Asia Policy and Research Institute (SAPRI) presented its report on ways to forge religious harmony in Sri Lanka.

(Pic. by Nimal Dayaratne)

Chandrika seeks support of political parties to forge religious harmony

● Hands over SAPRI recommendations to Ranil, expects to meet President Rajapaksa

By ZACKI JABBAR

Amidst frequent attacks allegedly backed by forces within the government on Hindu, Muslim and Christian religious places of worship, former President Chandrika Kumaratunga has sought the support of all political parties and civil society to end the menace and forge religious harmony.

Having discussed the issue with leaders of all religious denominations earlier, Kumaratunga met Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe and four members of the UNP Leadership

Council in Colombo yesterday, to hand over the South Asia Policy and Research Institute (SAPRI) commissioned report on measures that need to be implemented to ensure respect and tolerance of each others religions in Sri Lanka. Also present on the occasion were members of the UNP Leadership Council Tissa Attanayake, Ravi Karunanayake, Mangala Samaraweera and Ruwan Wijewardene.

Continued on page 2

Chandrika seeks...

From page 1

The report points out that religious intolerance has reached alarming proportions, brought about by the radicalisation of society in recent years. It notes that there is an urgent need for concrete action to stem the menace, before it destroys the very fabric of society.

Kumaratunga, who is a representative of SAPRI, said that she was seeking the cooperation of all political parties, clergy and civil society, to implement the SAPRI recommendations, which were apolitical and brought about by a genuine desire of achieving peace and harmony among all sections of Sri Lankan society.

She said she had sought meetings with other political parties, leaders of all religious denominations and civil society to obtain their support in implementing the SAPRI recommendations. Kumaratunga was scheduled to meet President Mahinda Rajapaksa yesterday, but there was no confirmation if the meeting would take place, at the time this edition went to press.

Ranil Wickremesinghe, welcoming the SAPRI Report, said that the first step towards dealing with religious intolerance was to come to grips with the rapid radi-



A smiling Mrs. Kumaratunga with senior UNP representatives led by its National Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe (pic by Nimal Dayaratne)

calisation of society in the post war era.

The Rajapaksa regime's failure to speedily deal with violent attacks on minority places of worship and indifferent and lethargic response to accusations leveled against elements within its ranks for being responsible for the attacks had led to a proliferation of such incidents, Wickremesinghe said.

He said that the UNP for its part, would do its utmost and cooperate in any initiative aimed at propagating religious harmony.

The report is the outcome of a series of meetings by SAPRI's Forum for Inter-Faith Dialogue, which comprised members of civil society, clergy and professionals.