Lanka president begins Nepal visit

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KATHMANDU: Amidst unprecedented security, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa Monday began his three-day state visit to Nepal, the highest-level visit ever to the Himalayan republic by a foreign government dignitary since 2002, when Kathmandu had hosted the 11th SAARC Summit.

The 63-year-old, who is accompanied by his wife, Shiranthi Rajapaksa, Lankan foreign minister Rohitha Bogollagama and Minister for Export Development and International Trade G L Peiris, was accorded a state welcome at the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu where he arrived on a chartered flight by the national airline Sri Lankan, kicking off direct air services between his country and Nepal. The tight security arrangements include deploying over 1500 personnel from Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and Nepal Army while traffic police have been instructed to halt or divert all traffic along the routes the visiting president’s motorcade will take. Traffic has also been curbed around the Soaltee Crowne Plaza hotel, where Rajapaksa is staying with his delegation. It is also where he is meeting Maoist Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda and other Nepali ministers and government officials due to the high security threat from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.Rajapaksa started his visit by paying a courtesy call on Nepal’s President, Dr Ram Baran Yadav, at the latter’s office in Shital Niwas. The media was kept at bay and allowed to take photographs only from a distance. The Sri Lankan Embassy said there would be no interaction with the press due to the security situation.Rajapaksa, who is the current chairman of SAARC, will visit the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu as well as Buddhist shrines and a monastery. On Tuesday, he is scheduled to meet Prachanda and ink two agreements.

The Sri Lankan Embassy in Kathmandu said the direct air services agreement will see Colombo-Kathmandu flights by Sri Lankan and Nepal’s national carrier Nepal Airlines. There will be three flights a week. The second agreement will provide for a joint commission of concerned ministers of both countries to enhance educational, cultural and agricultural cooperation. The presidential visit will wind up with a flight to Lumbini in southern Nepal, where the Buddhist president will see the Buddha’s birthplace and the monastery built by his government. Courtesy: timesofindia.indiatimes.com