

# Sri Lanka strengthening democratic reforms

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** The Sri Lankan Government, which is negotiating a peace settlement with rebel forces, is strengthening democratic reforms by transferring more powers to the people.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said the government was establishing policy reforms and various new legislation in a bid to create a more active civil society in the strife-torn island nation.

A Freedom of Information Act, Community Council Act and Women's Rights Act were among the major reforms introduced, he said, adding that efforts were also being made to create a freer press.

"These are only some of the actions that we have taken so far. More changes are in store by the end of the year to further reduce the powers of the government," he told a press conference here yesterday after holding discussions with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Putrajaya.

Wickremesinghe is here on his first official visit since being elected prime minister in 2001.

Under his leadership, a ceasefire was negotiated with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam early last year and peace talks to secure a comprehensive political settlement, which have been stalled, will resume soon.

Wickremesinghe said he was hopeful that peace for Sri Lanka's 20 million people could be restored following almost 20 years of conflict.

To a question on the stalled peace talks, he said such negotiations were "never going to be easy."

"The next phase will be more difficult. But we expect these things in matters of this nature," he added.

On his controversial relationship with President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is from an opposing party, Wickremesinghe said he did not have a problem working with her.

On his meeting with Dr Mahathir, Wickremesinghe said he wanted to personally thank the Malaysian Prime Minister before his retirement next month.

"Dr Mahathir has been a great leader and friend of Sri Lanka," he added.