

# Convincing? Well, Not Quite!

PAKISTANI Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's much awaited address to the nation has not deterred opposition parties from going ahead with their protest plans against his government for asking the Mujahideen to withdraw from Indian territory. The main opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP) rejected Sharif's address, saying his explanation of the Kargil debacle does not mitigate the shame, humiliation and isolation Pakistan had suffered in the international community.

The PPP therefore rejects it outrightly, a spokesman said and asked Sharif to quit. The party also demanded a national government to steer the country out of the present multi-faceted crises. Its spokesman said Sharif has still not come clean on why he undertook such a 'foolish exercise' in the first instance from which he had to retreat in an extremely embarrassing manner.

He said Sharif's claim that the Kargil operation had 'internationalised' the Kashmir issue was the biggest self-deception of the decade. 'Instead of internationalising the Kashmir issue, it resulted in the diplomatic and political isolation of Pakistan in the world,' the PPP spokesman said.

'Like it or not, the Kashmir issue was relegated into the background as the world refused to accept the regime's explanation and almost unanimously demanded withdrawal from Kargil,' he added. The Jamaat-e-Islami also announced that it would hold demonstrations in Lahore and Karachi against the agreement between Sharif and U.S. President Bill Clinton which it sees as a 'sellout' of the national interest.

The Jamaat chief, Qazi Hussain Ahmad, who is in the United States, held a rally in

PM Nawaz Sharif's address fails to soften hearts in Pakistan, reports Muhammad Najeeb from Islamabad



A soldier of the Indian Army takes a rest 13 July 1999 in Mukshoh Valley in Indian held Kashmir. The soldiers will have a good rest after a gruelling one and a half months of battle on the hills till 16 July 1999 as the ceasefire between both sides is in effect till then to facilitate the withdrawal of the Islamic infiltrators from the region.

New York against the Sharif-Clinton agreement. The party's acting chief, Munawwar Hassan, told IANS that Ahmad would be back by Friday when the Jamaat plans to hold a big demonstration in Lahore, Sharif's hometown.

Hassan said disregarding Sharif's disloyalty to the Kashmiri people, the entire Pakistani nation would continue to support their 'jihad' (holy war) till the Kashmiris get

their right to self-determination. The women's wing of the Jamaat on July 12 held a protest demonstration in Karachi.

'We were waiting for Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's address, but he has failed to give reasons for the withdrawal,' Tehrik-e-Insaaf leader Ahmad Zaman said after the address was broadcast by state-run television and radio on Monday night. Zaman said his party's

chief, former cricketer Imran Khan, would lead rallies in Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi and Peshawar next week.

Sharif, in his address, had said the Mujahideen had 'responded positively' to a government appeal to withdraw from Kargil to avoid major conflict between India and Pakistan. But his assertion was contradicted by several of the guerrilla groups which said they were still entrenched in

Indian territory and would not withdraw.

'We will not stop our struggle against India and we will not vacate the peaks in Kargil. Any agreement between India and Pakistan may apply to the Pakistan Army, but not on the Mujahideen,' Fazlur Rehman Khalil, head of Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, was quoted as saying by the Nation. 'The Mujahideen are free to take their own decisions and not bound by the agreement (between Sharif and Clinton). Our battle will continue till the last Indian soldier is in Kashmir,' Khalil added.

Syed Salahuddin Ahmed, chairman of the United Jihad Council (UJC), an alliance of 15 Kashmiri separatist organisations, had earlier said the Mujahideen could readjust their positions in Kargil and Drass but would not agree to a withdrawal. 'Withdrawal from our present positions is out of the question, but we can readjust our positions due to climatic conditions and enemy tactics,' he said.

Fahim Ahmed, a spokesman for the Al-Badar Mujahideen, also dismissed the chances of a withdrawal on the Pakistan government's request. In an interview with the Urdu daily 'Kainaat', he said hundreds of Indian artillery guns and jet fighters were bombing Mujahideen positions and it would amount to suicide if 'we vacate our strategic positions'. However, one group, called the Tehreek-e-Jehad, said it would help the government's appeal for 'help'. 'We are disengaging Indian forces in the Kargil sector. We have achieved a lot out of it, we inflicted heavy physical and material losses to the Indian troops,' said Salim Wani, the group's chief organiser.

— India Abroad News Service

## The Highlights of Pak PM's Speech

PRIME MINISTER Muhammad Nawaz Sharif said on Monday it was in the interest of both Pakistan and India to resolve Kashmir problem by holding sincere dialogue and invited his Indian counterpart to come to the negotiating table. Addressing the nation over national hook-up, he said, 'its already too late, there should be no more delay. Our decision to give diplomacy another chance has not been taken out of any pressure, haste or worry. Let's talk. Let's give a life of peace and security to our people by protecting them from the dangers of war.'

Nawaz Sharif said the basic objective of the Mujahideen to capture Kargil heights was to invite the attention of the international community towards the Kashmir issue, which has been showing indifference to it for long. Mujahideen, he stated, have been successful in the realization of their objective. Their action has vindicated our stand that Kashmir is a nuclear flash-point.

He dismissed the impression by certain quarters that Kargil's occupation could have led to an advance towards Srinagar. There is no path leading to Srinagar from there. Those who think that we have lost a chance of liberating Kashmir are not aware of the factual situation. However, by vacating the heights on our appeal, the Mujahideen have created another opportunity which will, Insha Allah, lead to the freedom of Kashmir.

He said that this opportunity is efforts for solution of Kashmir problem through bilateral talks, adding, 'attention, interest and pressure of the international powers are necessary for the success of these efforts.'

Nawaz Sharif said, 'the United Nations had given right of self-determination to Kashmiris by passing resolutions fifty years ago. These resolutions were not passed by Pakistan but by the United Nations. Why doesn't India act upon those resolutions,' he asked. 'Are disputes resolved in this manner?' he questioned. Due to this intransigence India

has lagged behind in progress, and also Pakistan. It was in the best interest of India and Pakistan that we should give up stubbornness and resolve Kashmir issue through talks based on sincerity and good faith.

'Let's sit on the negotiating table to search ways for a better future,' said the Prime Minister. 'How long will we continue to buy cannons by snatching morsels of bread from mouth of the people? How long will we continue to manufacture artillery shells by selling out the future of our children?' he questioned. Nawaz Sharif said that India should learn a lesson from history.

No independence movement in the world had ever been quelled through use of military force. Bullets do shed blood, but ultimately, sink in the same blood,' he said. 'How long will India be telling the world that Pakistan is interfering in held Kashmir?' he asked. 'No other country can carry out freedom movement from outside for eleven long years,' he added.

Nawaz Sharif said that he remained in touch with US President Bill Clinton. When the U.S. President's representatives visited Pakistan, they were told that by extinguishing the lurking flames on the icy Kargil heights, the real problem would not be solved. As the lava continues to boil, it continues to find points of its eruption. Unless Kashmiris are given their right to self-determination, there will be one Kargil after another. Neither India nor we can stop it. 'Justice and realization of the pledges made to the Kashmiri people alone can stop recurrence of such a situation,' he said. This was the stance, he pleaded, when he went to the United States.

The Prime Minister said that he was happy that the US President Bill Clinton acknowledged that unless the basic dispute of Kashmir is resolved, the war clouds will continue to hover on the Sub-Continent.

It was in this backdrop, the joint statement following his

talks with Clinton was prepared. It has been clearly spelled out in this statement that soon after normalcy on the Line of Control, there should be bilateral talks between India and Pakistan for solution of all outstanding disputes including Kashmir.

He said that Pakistan was fully capable of countering any aggression. 'Pakistan is not a wall of sand or house of clay. If war is imposed, then aggressor will be dealt a Zarb-e-Haidri.' But, the Prime Minister observed, 'We do not wish war, neither do we pray for it since no victor can be singled out in a war between two nuclear powers.'

The Prime Minister said that it was his firm opinion that Pakistan and India can only aggravate their problems through war instead of resolving any problems. 'I have said many times that Kashmir issue should be resolved through peaceful means.'

Nawaz Sharif said that not only the people of Pakistan and India but the international community had also entertained hopes after the February's Lahore declaration that the two countries, with record of world's most longstanding tension, will now move on the path of peace.

Especially, he said, the views uttered by Prime Minister Vajpayee at the Minar-e-Pakistan were appreciable and expressed his desire to bury the past bitterness and attitudes and enter into a new era of mutual relations. 'I also welcomed this. Even as we were preparing to hold talks under the Lahore declaration, the Indian Parliament was dissolved and fresh elections announced', the Prime Minister said.

On the other hand, the struggle for Kashmir liberation, which had been gaining momentum over the last 11 years, got accelerated as Kashmiri Mujahideen reached the heights of Kargil. The Prime Minister said when Vajpayee phoned him to express concern over the situation, he proposed to his Indian counterpart a meeting between regional

commanders of the two countries. 'I told him that we should settle this matter locally so as not to spread the fires of conflict.'

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that his Indian counterpart agreed with him and the very next day commanders from both sides talked to each other. However, the very next day of this contact the Indian cannons started firing and the Indian aircraft started bombing the Mujahideen positions. 'These attacks came as a surprise to me. True that Mujahideen were present at the Kargil heights but it was a continuation of their long liberation struggle,' the Prime Minister said.

Nawaz Sharif said it had been his constant effort to save the two peoples from nuclear war. 'Only someone with intention of collective suicide can start such a war but I have no such intention. I also figure out that Prime Minister Vajpayee also has no such intention,' the Pakistani Prime Minister said but added that the Indian attitude gave the feeling that it was rapidly heading towards a war.

The magnitude of Indian land and air forces use at Kargil sector was on the level of a large-scale war, the Prime Minister said.

He said the Indians also fired at Pakistani territories from across the line of control, hitting the innocent citizens and those on military duty on this side of line of control. India, also made war-level deployments on Pakistan borders and sent its naval forces close to Pakistan's territorial waters. The missiles with nuclear warheads were directed towards us and the air force was put on alert.

The Prime Minister eulogised the Pakistan armed forces for making preparations to counter this sudden threat with surprised efficiency and rapidity. He also paid his tributes to all those who were martyred in the wake of Indian firing and sympathised with those who suffered losses during Indian firing. 'We will help

them as soon as possible in their rehabilitation.' The Prime Minister also saluted the armed forces personnel who embraced shahadat or were wounded while serving on the line of control. The Prime Minister also paid tributes to the valour of Kashmiri Mujahideen who stunned the many-times numerically stronger enemies on the war. 'This is a high and difficult battlefield of Kargil and thwarted the enemy's concerted aerial and ground attacks. They proved that they can go to any extent to crown their struggle with success.'

Prime Minister said the real leadership had its eye not on power but on the security of the country and weal of the masses. If it has to risk its popularity or power for the safety of the country and its masses, it should do so, without any wasting any moment. 'Whatever decision, I have taken, it is for the protection of the interest of the country and the people,' he said.

'If your faith is firm, then without caring for the opposition of any one, you should take the decisions which you consider are, fair, just and based on the truth,' he said.

He reiterated that Kashmiris spirit of freedom just could not be crushed by force. 'They will continue their struggle. Freedom is their right. Pakistani masses will be with them as long as they get their right. We will never leave them alone,' said Nawaz Sharif. He also mentioned that it was his dream to take Pakistan to the dizzying heights, he said. He had never given importance to any interest or fear in his drive for the realization of this objective.

Nawaz Sharif reminded the people when India was testing one missile after another and the world, instead of stopping it, was pressuring Pakistan to keep it from entering the race. However, he had rejected every pressure and decided to test Ghaury and Shaheen missiles. 'May pressures came following it, but he had not budged his steps, he added.

Courtesy: The Dawn/APP of Pakistan

## The Land of the Survivors

Despite all their hardships and deprivation, Bangladeshis manage to survive and still have time to smile at strangers, marvel the writers. Why can't the rich of the earth survive on the excesses which they demand and expect? ask

Md Kamal Uddin and Jeremy Seabrook

BANGLADESH appears in the world as a place of doom, a mixture of natural and human-made catastrophes makes it into a dependent country, incapable of providing its people with a sufficient living and of rising above the contingencies of geography and climate.

Every year, 21 per cent of the land mass is regularly flooded. In 1998, this rose to 57 per cent. As though this disaster were not enough, opposition parties seek to cripple the work of government. The brutal, used now by the Bangladesh National Party against the ruling Awami League to bring the country to a standstill, was the weapon of preference of the Awami League when the BNP was in power. Political violence carried out by paid members of the main parties is routine.

So much groundwater has been used by tubewells, that most of the country's water is seriously contaminated with naturally occurring arsenic. Twelve per cent of the population own 60 per cent of the land. More than 15 per cent are completely landless. The garments industry has drawn one and a half million young women into factory work for which they earn less than a dollar day.

Dhaka is now among the most polluted cities in the world: A deadly metallic fog hangs over the city, choking the lungs of its impoverished slum-dwellers. The shrimp industry is displacing thousands of small farmers and contaminating the coastal zone.

Bangladesh depends upon external aid for more than 10 per cent of its budget, while even more comes in from remittances from Bangladeshis working abroad — a diaspora in the Gulf, Europe, North America, of people humiliated, overworked, victims of racism and discrimination, but who contribute \$1.2 billion to the country each year.

There is, of course, some truth in the negative view of Bangladesh. But it all adds up to a harmful and one-sided view of a country which issues plaintive postcards saying 'Visit Bangladesh Before the Tourists Come'. In reality, Bangladesh is a far softer place than any of this suggests; and its people retain, through all the epic disasters, a stoicism, an innocence and hospitable concern for others that can astonish and delight the cynical Westerner who comes to help, to bring aid and succour, to condescend, to instruct and to inform.

Anyone who comes with an open mind will find that she or he is the one who receives much instruction from the conduct of people whose civility and humanity have been less impaired by their poverty than those who have been the beneficiaries of having grown up in the richest societies in the world. If the people of Bangladesh have been less brutalised by poverty than the people of the West have been brutalised by their form of wealth, this is neither to justify poverty, nor to offer the western way of wealth as a blueprint for the future of Bangladesh.

Here is a strange paradox. While there is nothing worse than hunger, insufficiency and want, how does it come about that is the people from the North who are always complaining about the money they don't have, the things they can't afford, the amenities they are denied, while the people of Bangladesh, in a desperate struggle to survive, still have time to smile at strangers? The liberation struggle itself was a war in the largely unarmed against the power of the Pakistani army. The people went out with bamboo staves, poor indigenous weapons, against those they had come to see as an occupying force.

At independence the economy was shattered — centuries of extraction of the Moguls, by the British Raj, by West Pakistan. The new country was overwhelmed by the drought of 1973, the floods of 1974, the famine in which thousands died; floods again in 1988 and the disaster of 1998.

Yet through the creativity and endurance of the people, they survive; in spite of the fact that many births are not registered, more than 90 per cent of the population have no access to government services, health-care, pensions; while education is nominal for half the population, forced out of school to work in fields, factories, domestic service, for the sake of family survival.

There seems to be so little curiosity in a world community which has so much time to monitor the affairs of an Iraq or a former Yugoslavia, as to why and how Bangladesh lives. Many Bangladeshi intellectuals ask why no one wonders how the people survive. A hundred and twenty million people on 56,000 square miles of land — it looks like a hopeless situation.

If the people of western world were excluded from health care, social and government services, they would either make a revolution or they would perish. Do they not ask themselves why this has not been the fate of Bangladesh? Of course people have large families. Where there is no security, the only certainty lies in networks of flesh and blood. If parents have six or seven children, they do so in the certainty that at least one or two will perish. The ties of blood remain stronger than any assurance of livelihood. Loyalty to kin helps the helpless.

The pooling of poverty makes it a less cruel visitation. This is not to say that poverty is noble; at 45 people are old. A cycle-rickshaw driver may no longer be able to work after 35. Indeed, the floods of 1998 presented a characteristic image to the world: people clinging to the exposed rooftops of their broken houses; weeping women and men bereft of everything. Passivity, fatalism, waiting for help from outside.

It wasn't actually like that. People did not wait for others to help them. They mobilised themselves, developed their own strategies for survival, intensified the efforts they make each day to come through.

The waterways of Bangladesh are full of useless water hyacinths, whose momentary lilac-coloured blooming is no consolation to the poor. In 1998, people uprooted them, made rafts on which they could float to preserve either themselves or their livestock — ducks or chickens. Even when their roofs were under water, they kept afloat on platforms of hyacinths.

At the time, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) forecast that 20 million people would die, that another 50 million would starve. In the end, the death toll was less than a thousand. Doubts that Bangladesh would overcome the disaster, fears that law and order would break down — all the experts and commentators were confounded.

That isn't to say that there was not an unprecedented disruption. Doctors were displaced, hospital flooded; some people did die of snakebites, some succumbed to shock and loss of their homes.

After the floods epidemics were widely forecast by the same experts. These didn't happen either. But the same experts showed no remorse over their false, apocalyptic predictions.

It is some credit to the government that they cooperated with non-governmental organisations to distribute food to vulnerable groups, and a feeding card was given to 4.2 million of the poorest families. The poorest got rice at 13.5 taka a kilo against the 20 taka of the open market.

But it was the people's own ingenuity that saved them. Boats were used instead of rickshaws. People waded up to their chest in water to get to work. Thousands of boats were made overnight, furniture-makers rapidly changed production to make them. Earthenware jars which floated were used to preserve such valuables as the people possessed.

People took loans. The garment workers whose factories were flooded went into debt. Of course, private money-lenders made fortunes. People are still paying back loans they took during the floods.

There is a good reason why Bangladesh always appears in the international media as a hopeless case: the real question should be, not why is Bangladesh so poor, but why is it that if so many can survive here on so little, why can't the rich of the earth survive on the excesses which they demand and expect? Bangladesh is a re-proach to the world. Corruption, violence, incompetence — these must be used as a diversion for the greed of the rich.

The elite grab what they can while they are in office; the long-serving members of Parliament and bureaucrats can make even more. They take money to set up industry, a college, in their constituency, to secure votes; then these close down two years later. They buy the allegiance of the people with a bridge, a road, a college, a factory.

They use the resources of the land for their own private convenience. A Minister wants to go by car to his home, so he will build a road that goes 50 kilometers out of the way for his convenience.

Women are exposed to new technology, they will not want to return to the ancient utensils, the grinding machines and pots of the village. They are now subject to new influences. They see the power of the factory-owners, the cruel living and working conditions. Women meet hostile forces all around them, and must use their inner resources to deal with life. They are helped by the existence of hundreds of other young women in the factories.

No one can calculate the effect this has upon their consciousness. Women now prefer to labour in garment factories than to work as domestic servants. They share their sorrows and little joys in the slums and shanties. There is no going back.

Dhaka itself is both a monstrosity and a miracle. More than 10 million people live within 400 square miles. It is a distortion to insist upon the population growth of Bangladesh, for that is to turn the people into a problem rather than see them as the immense resource they are. The 'aid' that comes to Bangladesh does not tap the potential resourcefulness of people who survive flood, injustice, typhoon and poverty.

Indeed, the people pose the most uncomfortable of questions to the rich world. If so many can survive on so little, why do the rich of the earth declare themselves dissatisfied, complain about the impossibility for them to live on the excess which they demand for themselves? How can the rich monopolise the wealth of the world, without, for all that, deriving from it any other happiness than the sense of power it gives them over the life or death struggle of the poor?

— Third World Network Features

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## Will the Lessons Ever be Learnt?

Inder Malhotra writes on the failure of Indian intelligence in Kargil crisis

NOW that the Kargil war is winding down to a close — amidst Pakistan's wild rhetoric, random shelling presumably to 'cover' the invaders' retreat, and the horrific act of terrorism at a BSP camp that might not be the last of its kind — it is time to ask questions that have been forbidden so far. On the specious ground that to ask them during the military operations would be 'less than patriotic' because it would 'demoralise' the valiant armed forces. The most crucial of these, which can no longer be evaded, is: How and why was the country taken by the kind of surprise that has been rare since Pearl Harbour? Hordes of regular Pakistani soldiers out of uniform, assisted by a band of Islamist jihadists of the Afghan-war vintage, take over some of our most strategic mountain peaks, and no one is wise about it.

According to the *Time* news-magazine's superbly documented account, corroborated by other sources, the Pakistani intruders, mostly from the Northern Light Infantry belonging to the 10 Corps, had started scaling the heights in the Dras-Kargil-Batalik sector in November 1998, and this brazen violation of the Line of Control (LoC) had continued all through the winter and early spring. It is also known that the US military observers, still functioning though only on the

Pakistani side of the LoC, had been 'specially' informed their superiors in distant New York of the 'massive Pakistani infiltrations' into Indian territory.

In New Delhi and Srinagar, however, such blissful ignorance had prevailed that even in mid-May, after Indian Army patrols had been ambushed by Pakistani troops on Indian soil, no one seemed to have a clear idea of what exactly had hit us. Otherwise, the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, could not have boasted that the infiltrators would be thrown out 'within 48 hours'.

Later, in keeping with the penchant of Indian politicians to make contradictory statements, he declared that the invaders could not be driven out before October. Nothing better may be expected from Mr. Fernandes who has earned the dubious distinction of gratuitously making ill-timed and unwise statements. But sadly even the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, with all his sagacity and shrewdness, allowed himself to declare emphatically that there had been 'no failure of intelligence in Kargil'.

In course of time this laughable statement will take its due

place, alongside the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton's equally forceful assertions 'I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.' It is the Prime Minister's reasoning for his untenable claim — 'there was no failure of intelligence in Kargil because nothing had happened in this sector for 22 years' — that is more disturbing.

This, indeed, brings me to the main and melancholy point that even in this penultimate year of the millennium, in this country national security and matters military continue to be handled exactly as they were in 1962.

There is, to be sure, a world of difference between the almost complete collapse of the national morale at the time of the brief but brutal border war with China and the legitimate national pride today over the performance of the Army and the Air Force against very heavy odds. Their brave fight, combined with Pakistan's diplomatic isolation, especially the relentless American pressure on it, has forced Mr. Nawaz Sharif to cut his losses, ask his forces to withdraw and sugarcoat his humiliating climbdown as best he can. However, fundamentally speaking,

the politico-bureaucratic ways of dealing with problems of defence remain as casual as they were 37 years ago.

In July 1962, perhaps as an indication of what was to follow, Chinese soldiers menacingly surrounded a newly established Indian post in the Galwan valley of Ladakh but refrained from overrunning or demolishing it. From this 'behaviour pattern' policy makers in New Delhi convinced themselves that wherever an Indian post was successfully established, the Chinese would not use force to get rid of it. It occurred to no one to ask whether, and if so, in what circumstances, the Chinese behaviour pattern could change. Exactly on a par with this is Mr. Vajpayee's logic that a sector left undisturbed for 22 years would remain in that happy state for ever.

To his credit, the Prime Minister did correct himself subsequently. The principal lesson of the Kargil operation, according to his latest pronouncement, is that 'eternal vigilance' is the price of security. What is needed is a credible guarantee that this lesson will not be forgotten as so many others have been after various

armed conflicts.

Failure on the intelligence front was not the only bane of the situation. No less shocking was the paucity of men on the spot (some formations had been sent to the valley for counter-insurgency duty). Even more inexcusable was the grave shortage of equipment and ammunition when the crunch came. For this deplorable state of affairs it would be wrong to blame the Vajpayee Government alone. All governments that have held office since 1991 are culpable, that run by the Congress for five years most of all. During this decade, the defence budget was cut mercilessly and deliberately.

Ironically, the Bofors gun, which has given an excellent account of itself, was starved of ammunition for an additional reason. Because some crooks had made money from Bofors, imports and manufacture under licence of the ammunition produced by that firm was banned.

No wonder huge orders had to be placed in a tearing hurry, and some ammunition had to be airlifted. The market, so enthusiastically extolled these days, went by its inexorable laws and upped the prices four times.

Is there a lesson in all this somewhere?

Courtesy: The Hindu of India

## A Waive of Peace Education

Sri Lanka is 'arming' its children with peace education, writes Vijita Fernando from Colombo

FROM the debris of death, dislocation and despair that has been the lot of Sri Lankans in the 18 years of civil war and strife, a new wave of peace education has emerged in Sri Lanka today, reports the Women's Feature Service.

The idea behind this is to 'arm' school children with skills of conflict resolution at home and outside, without resorting to unending cycles of violence.

The Education for Conflict Resolution Project for primary school children seeks to create in them a compassionate weave of understanding and tolerance while looking at 'other' cultures in a multi-ethnic society. A part of the Education Ministry's school programme, the project, which commenced in 1992, is being directed by the National Institute of Education (NIE), the arm of the ministry. Already a part of the primary school curriculum, the project is due to be integrated into the secondary school syllabus this year.

'Since the project began, more than a million primary school children have been reached. The project has trained more than 75,000 administrators and 30,000 student leaders,' says M. Hamid, coordinator for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

which supports this innovative project.

Another non-governmental organisation, NGO, the World Association of Girl Guides, has devised a kit which has been distributed through the local association to all Girl Guides in schools. As a part of the schools' extra-curricular activities, the kit provides games which reflect true life situations. On its part, Marga, a prestigious research and development institute in Colombo, has distributed a series of booklets for children which portray the idea of cultural pluralism and tolerance.

There are also stories of men and women of various ethnic groups and religions bonding as a family during sickness or emergency. Easy readability and a vibrant visual style is the hallmark of the booklets, aimed at catching the attention of small children.

'Through a well told tale, with interesting and easily identifiable characters and colourful illustrations, any message can be got across to a child,' says international award-winning author and illustrator Sybil Wettasinghe, who has created the luminous series of booklets.

'Education for peace has great appeal in a world where many countries are affected by internal strife. Our goal is to

promote peace and a culture of reconstruction and reconciliation with emphasis on attitudinal changes while being mindful of the rights of the child and child development through conflict resolution,' says educationist Jezima Ismail.

But there are other kinds of conflicts too, such as within families which also have to be dealt with. In many Sri Lankan homes, children are affected by the absence of migrant working mothers, absent or abusive fathers and the indifference or active hostility of extended families which have been given the care-giver role.

'It is this kind of conflict resolution that we deal with everyday,' says Sunetra Taldena, principal of a school in a Colombo suburb. There are no trained counsellors in this school attended mainly by children from poor homes, nor is it a rigid part of the school curriculum. The task of the counsellor is performed by teachers sensitive to such issues.

The existence of the project is a tacit admission that old ways of looking at conflicts have failed thoroughly and that more than hate-infested arms, enlightened minds hold the key to such problems.

— India Abroad News Service/Victoria/Women's Feature Service