

Historic opportunity for peace in Sri Lanka

Parties concerned better carefully steer the process to positive outcome

AFTER nearly two decades of a separatist war in Sri Lanka waged by the LTTE against the majority Sinhalese establishment, a process of national reconciliation has begun in earnest.

What distinguishes the present deal between the LTTE and the government from the ceasefire agreements struck earlier on is obviously the emphasis being laid on political negotiation in place of militaristic or tactical approach to conflict resolution.

Since this got entangled with military campaigns against the separatist Tamils in the north and the east the ethnocentric conflict grew virulent by the day.

At the same time, it must be stated that a war fatigue had set in across the board so that an undercurrent of a popular urge for peace was raring to surface at the right moment.

The gains achieved on the peace mission should not be allowed to fritter away through any inter-party stand-off between the UNF, led by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and the People's Alliance headed by President Kumaratunga.

After 64,000 deaths, blighting of some sparkling social indicators of progress, a few billion dollar in lost tourist revenue, and an enormous stifling of the national talent for excellence in various fields, Sri Lankans across the board should be wised to embrace peace and reconstruction.

Indian state elections verdict

Performance mattered more than ideology

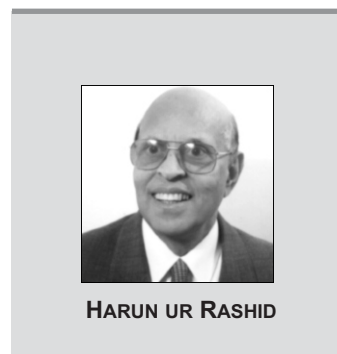
THE elections in India indicate that the ruling BJP has experienced a relative setback and other parties have gained at its expense.

In Uttar Pradesh, it was also noticed that caste and communal groupings play a major role in electoral make-ups.

Uttar Pradesh is also the state which is home to the "Ramjannabhumi" issue and that issue is again resurfacing in earnest.

Public opinion is always more concerned about bread and butter issues and one wishes the politicians would learn this lesson.

President Bush's Asian tour: Its significance



THE dominant underlying feature of the US President's visit to Japan, South Korea and China appears to seek co-operation in its unfinished task of eradicating global terrorism.

Added to this fight against terrorism, the President is anxious to sell his idea why he called Iran, Iraq and North Korea to constitute an "axis of evil".

The itinerary of the President seems to be perfect as he first went to the US's strongest ally in Asia, Japan, then to another ally, South Korea and finally to a nation which the US considers as a "strategic competitor", China.

The visits to these countries conveyed a strong message of virtues of free market economy, democracy and human rights.

Japan as the dominant economic power in the region. In the existing world of competition and globalisation, a country's prospects depend increasingly on what it makes of the opportunities and challenges confronting that country.

If past practice is any indication, Koizumi's ability to undertake reforms seems to have been diminished by the mishandling of a popular Foreign Minister Tanaka, daughter of a former Prime Minister.

and stick" policies towards North Korea were enunciated during the visit, it is doubtful whether North Korean leadership would respond positively to the US' proposal.

Incidentally the President's tense visit to South Korea coincided with the long birth day party (60th birthday) of the North Korean leader

Russia and China do not wish to see American supremacy in an essentially "multi-polar" world.

Although China has earned praise from the US for its support of war on terrorism, it does not endorse alleged repression of Muslim Uighur activists in Xinjiang as a measure of counter-terrorism.

breaking trip to China, President Bush hoped to extract a commitment from the Chinese that would have explicitly prohibited the export of military-sensitive equipment to nations that Washington regards as threats to international security.

However for the time being "national interests" propelled both the US and China to a policy of peaceful co-existence and dialogue.

During the visit, one may discern from the statements of President Bush that US policy towards North Korea and China continues to oscillate between toughness and sweetness.

Barister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladeshi Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

BOTTOM LINE One may discern from the statements of President Bush that US policy towards North Korea and China continues to oscillate between toughness and sweetness.

Koizumi to undertake economic reforms and in South Korea and China he tried to soothe their concerns of the tough direction of the US foreign policy in Asia.

Bush and Koizumi have known each other in other earlier meetings and are reported to be getting on well personally.

Kim Jong-il. About 10,000 young people in Pyongyang staged what the North Korean media described as a gymnastic display "under the banner of armed-based policy".

In Seoul, the President's visit was welcome with dampened spirit as his "axis of evil" phrase has seriously damaged the reconciliatory mood between South and North Korea.

remains to the US a "strategic competitor" in the region. It seems in the eyes of most of the US Congress, China has supplanted the former Soviet Union and they fear that a rising and assertive China may acquire military muscle to threaten US' strategic interests in the Far East.

Furthermore the US does not seem comfortable with China for sale of arms and other sensitive equipment to States in the "axis of evil".

Bringing government closer to the people

WAHIDUDDIN MAHMUD

ARTICLE 9 of our Constitution, as amended in 1977, says: "The State shall encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women."

It is therefore encouraging that the newly elected government has set up a cabinet committee to look into the matter of local government.

It is generally agreed that, for genuine empowerment of local government, the local authorities must have more resources and more involvement in local development activities along with full control over their own finances and person-

nel. So far, they have been denied this by the central government. One concern is that the empowerment of local elected bodies will only shift the undesirable traits of our national-level politics to the local level.

Truly representative local government bodies are likely to be better positioned not only in ensuring improved quality of service delivery (such as primary schooling, primary healthcare, sanitation, etc), but also in charging user fees according to ability to pay.

interacting directly with local authorities on behalf of the poor. Another means of ensuring accountability of local government is to find mechanisms for enhancing transparency and people's right to information.

The risks may be thus mitigated to some extent if a way can be found to better articulate the "voices of the poor", say, by encouraging community-based civic organisations to track the performance of the local bodies and hold them accountable - a kind of 'social auditing'. By using

resources in the rural works programme, is the result of the above system.

On the current debate regarding the establishment of elected Upazila councils, one of the contentious issues is about the role of the MP and the envisaged tension

between him and the Upazila chairman. In theory, MPs should be mostly concerned with national policies and programs, and local councils with local matters for which they are responsible.

On the recent years, however, organisations like Khan Foundation have done commendable work in imparting training to UP councilors.

the local government agencies are very limited. Nonetheless, there is room for resource mobilisation by increasing fees collected at the bazaars and from businesses, and by leasing Khas land and water bodies.

training even if he/she has an excellent command in both spoken and written English. I have seen a few Bangladeshis in USA who have gotten excellent job offers within a week after their arrival because of their excellent training in math and computer programming even if their English skills were poor.

development projects are to be planned and implemented by local government bodies, then a substantial chunk of the spending under the Annual Development Plan will have to be put at their disposal.

Similarly, truly representative local government bodies are likely to be better positioned not only in ensuring improved quality of service delivery (such as primary schooling, primary healthcare, sanitation, etc), but also in charging user fees according to ability to pay.

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Wahiduddin Mahmud is Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka. The article is based on his comments made at the Round Table Conference entitled "Ensuring Local Governance at Grassroots Level" organised by Khan Foundation, February 17, 2002.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Calling a spade a spade

The Finance Minister talks in real term. Perhaps this is so because he is more of a technocrat than a politician. He speaks from experience of having held this post a record number of times.

Some questions

What's wrong with remaining in 'power' as the opposition for five years and serve the public interest and check the services of the regime? The house is a neutral place, according to the speaker, and

an official platform for airing public grievances.

Why is the image of political leadership is so low in Dhaka? Why don't the two ladies bury their egos and work mutually? This personality cult has become a national bug, and the sycophants simply love it carrying the pedestal on their shoulders.

Shopping bag-- free

The manufacturers and distributors of consumer goods have a unique opportunity to boost their advertisement by giving away free of charge as a gift, different sizes of bags (with hand straps) with the products.

different locations. This is the cheapest way to make the ads travel and the consumers happy.

2-stroke phase out

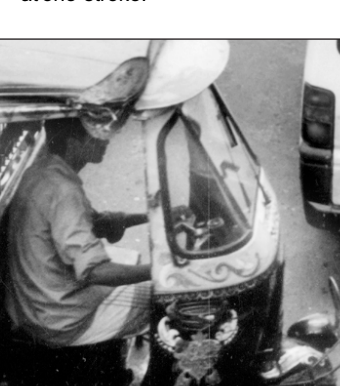
The disposal of the 2-stroke engine



Going, going and going on...?

vehicles would be easier if some second-hand market can be found for acceptable, stationary (not mobile) open, outdoor use outside the city limits, during its remaining short lifetime of a couple of years.

industries could use this motive power for small mills and water pumps; buying the discarded engines at throwaway prices. The pollution factor outside the cities for isolated single use would be tolerable for a couple of years.



The exchange proposals should be viable enough to break down the mental resistance to violate the regulations. Nobody is mentioning if there is a helpful role, which can be played by the former huge machine tool factory which, is now operating under the defence wing.

each and every item when we can make some components here?

Maulana Sayeedi's secularism

Maulana Sayeedi gave a Fatwa stating secularism as kufr. Where did he get this idea? Is it mentioned in the Holy Quran or in the Hadith? If it is not anywhere of these two, then I must say that he is misleading the nation in the name of Islam.

Prophet (SM) practised co-existence. He made treaties with others. The Surah Ka'feru clearly states 'La'kum Din'ikum Waliala'din' meaning 'your religion is yours and mine is mine'. Secularism only allows the spirit of what is described in the Surah. Bangladesh is an example of religious harmony.

English as second language

In his letter (February 18) Mr. Akbar Hussain has attributed the "lower quality of education in Bangladesh is directly responsible to the Bengali medium education system". His conclusion is totally wrong and misleading.

However, we should not mix up quality of education with one's competence in English. The languages are the vehicles with which we communicate.

There are more than 200,000 Bangladeshis in USA. Very few of them have problem in finding job because of their poor English skills. The main obstacle in finding a good job for the new immigrants from Bangladesh in USA is that they don't have the required technical skills in demand.

Abdul Jalil Pramanik

Pearl River, USA