

Peace in Sri Lanka

Heartening breakthrough

IF the first round of Norwegian-brokered talks in Sattahip, Thailand between the Sri Lankan government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) made peace in the civil war-ravaged island... a possibility, the second round has certainly taken it closer to reality.

After the four-day talks at the Thai resort of Nakhon Pathom, with both sides making unexpected concessions, the civil war, which claimed some 64,000 lives over the last 19 years or so, finally appears headed for a peaceful resolution. However, there are miles to go and hurdles to cross before peace in the emerald island does take a concrete shape.

Indeed, agreements to "start grappling with the most contentious matters" may not mean an early resolution. Still, the talks have given the sides a footing to start on, a solid footing beyond doubt. While the LTTE has dropped two of its crucial demands - first for an independent state and then for autonomy, the government has been forthcoming on formation of a political affairs subcommittee that will decide how to share power to address ethnic questions.

Encouragingly, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who had reacted strongly to the withdrawal of the ban on the LTTE before the first round of talks, appears to be changing her position on the Wickremesinghe government's handling of the peace process.

The third round of talks is scheduled for December this year. In the interim, we hope, both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE will sincerely pursue the commitments they have made in the second round of talks.

A cheery story

More needy women becoming self-reliant

THE contributions of some NGOs towards engaging women in self-employing micro-credit projects are well-known. But here is a success story attributable to a public sector organisation: Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation. The BSCIC, as it is known for short, has drawn more flak than praise for its loan management failings over the years. But this seems to be changing in one particular area at least.

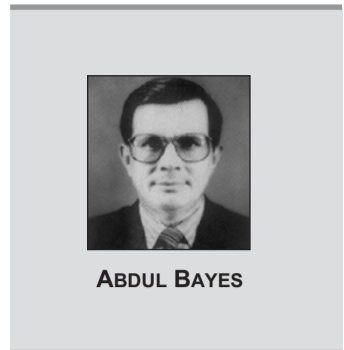
The corporation's project under Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme (WEDP) has been an unqualified success as far as loan recovery from the beneficiaries went. Out of Tk 82.85 crore disbursed to rural women between 1981 and 2002, Tk 77.87 crore has been repaid by them representing a 96 per cent loan recovery rate.

This is not surprising though, given the established knowledge that small loanes have been the best repayers among all recipients of credit. The big ones have been the worst defaulters. Good repayment or recovery of loans can only mean successful utilisation of the same.

The Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme has thus become a powerful public sector instrument for poverty alleviation in rural areas. The extent of its success is amply illustrated by the creation of employment opportunities for 2,29,486 under the programme. Moreover, it has helped train up 3,300 destitute women for some gainful employment.

The project, funded by USAID earlier on, has been financed by the government since 1997. So, it puts government's own self-reliance to test as well. That's why this year's delay in funding the project has been regrettable. The project must be carried forward without any let-up whatsoever. In tandem with NGO micro-credit programmes, WEDP can work wonders by expanding women entrepreneurship in rural Bangladesh.

How heartening is 'Operation Clean Heart'?



ABDUL BAYES

IT is by now more than two weeks that army has been deployed in the country to stamp out terrorism, curb crimes and drive the devils into a corner. The operation is named 'Clean Heart' and is in the aid of the civil administration. We are told that it is a short swoop down on the criminals and the army would soon be back to the barracks.

the past but largely with the present. And so the regime in power has to bear the full brunt of the allegations. Common people, expected nothing but peace and only peace for peaceful pursuits - be they social, religious, economic, political or cultural.

large is that yes it did. We beg to partially differ with this answer. The pertinent question to pose is: does police force actually fail or they are forced to fail in their drives to get the devils by their necks?

stantially improved following the operation. We also agree with this perception. But concerns seem to loom large elsewhere and we would point out a few of them.

Saber is widely known as a sober and sound businessman turned politician. His contribution to the cause of cricket of this country is also widely confirmed.

the move, we also would like to sound the disconcerting note that those most listed criminals are still at large. There are allegations that innocent citizens are being harassed and abused in the name of searching for and catching the criminals.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

There is no denying the fact that deployment of army in the pretext of failures of the civil instruments could solve the problem for a short period. It is like suspending the pain for a while. In the long run, the solution lies elsewhere: purifying politics, upholding the spirit of the rule of law and sustaining a democratic system. These are the basics upon which freedom fares well and development dawns. Today or tomorrow, the army would go back to barracks and we shall have to lean on the basics to survive.

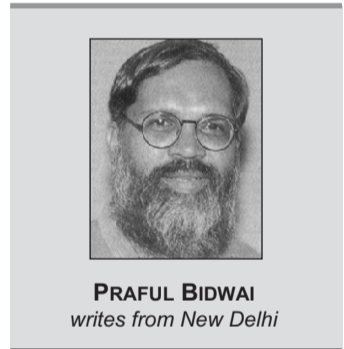
is a sufficient condition for development, any time and anywhere in the world. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen saw development as freedom. And we also know that it is always the poor who are generally hit hardest by these kinds of hardships e.g. lack of economic freedom.

alleged that transfers and prestigious postings of the policemen are no more a function of efficiency, honesty and dignity. Unfortunately it has principally become a function of political patronisation.

aply and emphatically pointed out the pitfalls and their implications in terms of the army's image. The learned editor of the newspaper, Mahfuz Anam, in a commentary recently raised a number of relevant questions on the various aspects of the operation, which, we think, should provide sufficient food for thought.

believe that they were terrorists or were rearing terrorism? Such an assumption could do more harm than good for the government in power. It is our lesson (unfortunately not of politicians) that one is paid back in one's own coins.

The opening in Kashmir: Turning over a new leaf



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

THE Congress has done something unusual. It has agreed to share power with another party in a coalition with a negotiated agenda. It has even handed over the leadership of the Jammu and Kashmir alliance to the People's Democratic Party (PDP). This is something its instincts militate against.

tive chaos, popular alienation and militant violence. The central issue in J&K is how to convert today's opportunity into a solid, enduring gain. This needs a three-pronged approach: roll back the damage wreaked by 13 years of violence; establish responsible governance to win the people's hearts and minds; and engage the world on the J&K issue to bring about a peaceful settlement.

national-level alliance with the communal BJP, for its monumental corruption, betrayal of "autonomy", and unresponsiveness to people's needs. The BJP was virtually wiped out from Jammu.

lem" has gone away, and popular alienation has ended. The problem has only acquired a less malignant, more manageable shape.

Ms Sonia Gandhi, it limits itself to "requesting" the Centre to "hold ... wide-ranging consultations and dialogue, without conditions, with the members of the legislature and other segments of public opinion ..."

The verdict was overwhelmingly against New Delhi's Kashmir policy, of which the NC was seen as an uncritical representative. It was not an endorsement of New Delhi's "anti-terrorist" measures, or of J&K's categorical "integration" with India... The Kashmiris long for a return to more peaceful, less violent, life and to human rights. They also voted for an unconditional dialogue with all shades of opinion and scrapping of draconian laws, including POTA.

The Congress-PDP alliance's Common Minimum Programme outlines this approach's domestic component. This must be supplemented by the international component, including a dialogue with Pakistan.

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STF-Special Operations Group of former militants. Implicit in the promise to heal "emotional wounds" is acknowledgement that such wounds were indeed inflicted by hawkish policies which involved cheating on India's own Constitution, rigging elections, imposing unrepresentative governments, and committing large-scale human rights violations.

Some of this caution may restrain pro-Jamaat-I-Islami elements in the PDP's support-base. However, for the people, any realistic solution to the Kashmir problem must involve Pakistan. They include the vast majority, not just supporters of the Hurriyat (which has lost much credibility).

Domestically, the litmus test will be how soon the new government can end state and militant violence, and restore the people's faith in the possibility of elementary justice. Here, it needs the full backing of the Centre, whose leadership will have to break with clichéd "pro-active" (read, headline) strategies.

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

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

"Saluting the Nation Builders of Tomorrow"

I wish to express my profound appreciation to The Daily Star for "Saluting the Nation Builders of Tomorrow". As reported, The Daily Star has been performing this for the past four years. Education is the backbone of a nation. Those young students who have performed so well in "O" and "A" level examinations have shown that they are capable of competing with their counterparts in the whole world.

would keep the mouth of those critics shut, who complain about brain drain, discrimination and exploitation by the ruling elite, etc. Let there be more private educational entrepreneurs to open English medium schools such that more of our young students may study for "O" and "A" level examinations. The other alternative target would be a system in which there will be no English medium schools, no "O" and "A" level examinations, and the SSC and HSC certificates awarded by our boards will be recognised throughout the world.

"AL and terrorism in Bangladesh"

This is in regards to the letter by Dr. Zaman (November 4) on the editorial about Hasina's remarks painting Bangladesh as a terrorist harbouring nation. My first comment is I'd like to know which university Dr. Zaman teaches at in the US. I'll make it a point never to send my kids there.

alleged death under torture and the very legality of the army crackdown. Dr. Zaman, before you start criticising Mahfuz Anam for his belated commentary, I'd suggest you come down from your ivory tower and read up on what's happening in your own country. If you can't find the time to stay well informed about our country then don't bother trying to defend it amongst better read people.

vement 4). His letter appears really biased. If an educated person like him try to present one-sided argument, it looks really bad. Tanvir Islam Japan *** The editorial "AL and Terrorism in Bangladesh" was indeed timely. Sheikh Hasina should have behaved responsibly when delivering her speech at Brussels.

support for the religious fanatics" (as she has mentioned in her Brussels speech), it will definitely be a bit difficult for them to manage visa. We do not understand how her speech will help our country. The people of Bangladesh in recent days have been much more conscious and she should remember it always. Md. Ashequl Islam IBA, University of Dhaka

Emile Dhaka "PM asks army not to harass innocents" I see that the PM has asked the army not to harass innocents. This begs the question, why does she think that the army has harassed innocents in the first place? By the way, amazingly, your November 3 issue for the first time doesn't report another custodial death due to heart attack. Shonku Dhaka "Will our elected govt. tell us what is happening?" A lot of comments/opinions are being expressed in you newspaper on Mr Mahfuz Anam's commentary.

killed so many people (many of them are innocent) and made almost the entire nation hostage to them, we saw The Daily Star relentlessly criticising the present government like the opposition party for its failure to address the issue and when the govt. took and initiated some bold and concrete steps to curb it, again the same newspaper unleashed its criticism on the government.