LATE S. M. ALI

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Peace in Sri Lanka

Heartening breakthrough

F 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-rayaged islandnation 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. As Rauf Hakeem, the cabinet minister who represented the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in the talks, has pointed out, the warring parties "are not even a quarter of the way to an interim settlement and even further away from a final settlement". Overtly conservative though, he is spot-on nevertheless.

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. That the Wickremesinghe administration is "giving highest importance to this committee" is endorsed by the nomination of defence secretary Austin Fernando to head it. On its part, the LTTE has articulated its wish to go for military de-escalation and "to enter the political mainstream". Better even, the Tamil Tigers are willing "to accept other political groups".

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. At this juncture, the president's support would be of crucial significance.

The third round of talks is scheduled for December this year. In the interregnum, we hope, both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE will sincerely pursue the commitments they have made in the second round of talks. The 200-year sentencing of the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran could still cast a shadow over the process. The sooner it is removed the better.

A cheery story

More needy women becoming self-reliant

HE 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. Or is it?

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 loanees 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. That is, almost all the 1,30,134 recipients of micro credit under WEDP put their money to best use thereby helping themselves to a self-reliant status.

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'?



T 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 raison de'tre of the dramatic appearance of the army in the civil domain is well understood. The deterioration in the law and order situation dipped to its lowest ebb ever with the killing of four elected ward commissioners within a very short span of time. Besides, crimes like extortions, rapes, murders, attack on minority communities, kidnappings, etc. have painfully been pervasive in both urban and rural areas over the last one year or so. Police and BDR allegedly failed to stem the rot despite some of the desperate moves by the government. Ipso facto, people got panic, politicians were perturbed and even donors were driven to put law and order as number one agenda in their dialogues with the government.

The deterioration in the law and order situation is not a new concern. It is a continuous event that crisscrosses different governments in power. Hence, according to the supporters of the current regime, it would be unfair to lay the total axe of anguish on the regime in power without any reference to the past. We partly agree with this view because people like to live little with

the past but largely with the present. And so the regime in power has to bear the full brunt of the allegations. Common people, who voted politicians to power, expected nothing but peace and only peace for peaceful pursuits -- be they social, religious, economic, political or cultural. People wanted economic and political freedom to produce goods and services for the economy, to generate employment and to alleviate poverty. Such freedom

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? We are quite aware of the inefficiency, corruption and other lapses plaguing the police force in our country. But with all the odds in mind we also noticed a trend of using the force as a pawn by the party in power, whoever it might be. It is

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. The number of deaths under the custody of the army has been growing as grave concern. Arrests of the political leaders -- especially from the opposition camps without conformable complaints -- stand to serious questions. A leading newspaper. The Daily Star, in a recent editorial and sound businessman turned politician. His contribution to the cause of cricket of this country is also widely confirmed. Selim holds the credit of being elected for five times in the parliament. Even if one assumes that they were involved in activities that irked the present government, the ways the arrests were made could be a suspect to show it as political vendetta. After all, who on earth, are going to

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 Amartay 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. The relatively well off have alternative coffers to cope with the crisis.

However, the said freedom is said to have been forfeited due to the pervasive presence of terrorism. The demand for peace and freedom, apparently, was not matched by the supply so much expected from the regime that came to power just one year ago with the commitment to contain terrorism. curb crimes and thus provide more freedoms to the people. And as noted earlier, attempts by police and BDR allegedly failed to contain crime. Finally army -- also called 'savior of the last resort'-- was called in to help the civil administration in its pursuits.

Has police failed to bring the culprits to book? The answer by and

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. Even thana level activists of the party in power are alleged to be involved in rentseeking devices around promotions and postings of policemen. Allegedly again, policemen are being used to punish political opponents with little time left for catching the criminals. Given this syndrome, we tend to hypothesize that police fails to find the terrorists because they are not allowed to perform duties independently and judiciously without any fear or favour. Unless we make them function as truly professional like army, we could be caught by the vicious circle: policearmy-police-army... Reports from newspapers revealed that a sigh of relief reigns among businessmen, traders, investors, and commoners as a result of the

aptly 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 (The Daily Star, 29 October). The expectation is that army would be hundred per cent neutral in its drive to clean up the crimes and drive out the devils. Nothing short of that could be considered as success. The country cannot simply afford to see a failure in this regard.

En passant, particular mention may be made of two incidents. The arrests of Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim seem to have instantly ignited concern in the public mind. Both of them held ministerial positions during the earlier regime. The way they were treated ex-ante and ex-post the operation could, unfortunately, taint the image of a neutral army and ingenuity of its drive.

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.

Secondly, it is reported that more than a dozen of those put under custody had already died, allegedly, through torture. The argument that people in the custody died of heart attack does not tend to be tenable Even if it was true, person(s) involved in the operation should have been extra-cautious beforehand because people do not expect unfortunate incidents like these to happen in the hands of the 'savior of the last resort'. The country continues to be run by constitutional norms where every citizen has the right to defend himself through lawful channels.

Thirdly, the drives till today could be dubbed as heartening with the arrests of a number of criminals and improvement in the overall law and 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. There are suspicions hovering around the use of the army for political vendetta. Some of those arrested are alleged to have been freed under political pressures. All of these allegations, if true, should be investigated to clean the slate We think that the operation 'Clean Heart' should be clean, accountable and transparent so that misgivings do not mount in the minds of the

More often than not, we tried to tell our policy makers and politicians that terrorism, by and large, is the product of paranoiac politics and political patronisation. Without tacit support from the pinnacle of political power, criminals can hardly escape Admittedly, in a country where politics is based mostly on muscle and money, substantial improvement in the law and order is hard to come by since terrorism is the basic input to the growing need of money and muscle. However, in between, the presence of a professional police force --above fear and favour-- could partly stem the rot Unfortunately, we have failures in both fronts and that is why terrorism tends to reign high in the given situation.

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Abdul Bayes is professor of economics,

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

The opening in Kashmir: Turning over a new leaf



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

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

The maturity, and one might say, grace, with which the Congress has acted in the larger interests of Kashmir and of India, reduces the damage from J&K's fortnight-longjockeying for power.

It also conveys the seriousness with which the Indian political system can sometimes respond to certain issues

The deal between the Congress, PDP, Democratic People's Front led by Mr Yusuf Tarigami, and other, falls in the same class as the Rajiv-Longowal (Puniab) Accord, or the Mizoram and Assam agreements. These had the potential to create a political breakthrough in a situation of great social turmoil, administrative chaos, popular alienation and

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.

raids by the army. The law and order

situation is reported to have sub-

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

The CMP recognises this. Seventeen of its 31 points are welcome peace-restoration measures including putting POTA on hold, rehabilitation of violence-affected families, establishment of an ehtisab institution to enforce accountability, and abolition of the 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 seaments of public opinion ... The CMP drops the PDP's promise of investigating allegations against SOG/security forces relating to disappearances/custodial killings. It leaves a dialogue with Pakistan entirely to the Centre.

to break with clichéd "pro-active" (read, hardline) strategies. Equally crucial will be tackling unemployment among J&K's educated youth. Here, ironically, the Jammu region is as important as the Valley. It's in Doda, Rajouri and

> So, J&K will need an extraordinarily imaginative development plan -- not a souped-up version of the announces, nor a replica of earlier plans for Punjab and Assam, such as setting up an Institute of Technology or big public project. Only a plan which takes into account the state's endowments and people's skills,

Poonch that the militants are recruit-

and targets their needs, will work. Without such an initiative, there is a danger that the window of opportunity in J&K will slam shut -- as in the Northeast, in the past, If, on the other hand. India's leaders show wisdom and foresight, things could change dramatically. India's appeal to Kashmir's people will grow if they feel assured of the representative character of its democratic system That's worth fighting for.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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.

The onus here falls squarely upon the Centre. It also holds the key to the success of Mr Mufti Mohammed Saveed's attempts at reconciliation. India's national leadership must seriously reconceptualise its entire understanding of Kashmir and radically rethink strategy.

J&K's electoral verdict was a resounding rejection of the National Conference, and in the Jammu region, of the BJP. The NC was punished for its opportunist

J&K's categorical "integration" with

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. Going by opinion polls and field

reports, including this writer's recent visit, the Kashmiris regarded this as the most credible and fair election since 1977. They voted without prejudice to their views about a long-term Kashmir solution. They want an administration more alive to their immediate needs related to water, jobs and roads.

The elections were undoubtedly fair, if not entirely free. But that doesn't mean the "Kashmir probSTF-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

These wounds will take long to heal, but the process must begin with a demonstration of good faith.

The CMP is somewhat overcautious -- reflecting the Congress' sense of vulnerability to the BJP's criticism that it is "compromising" with pro-azadi opinion. Instead of an unconditional dialogue with all currents of opinion, as promised by

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). That's what the international

Some of this caution may restrain

pro-Jamaat-i-Islami elements in the

community too wants. It is in India's own interest to start a dialogue. however tortuous -- without conceding anything to Pakistan in advance

India's greatest asset lies in the credibility of the democratic process and the moral case against terrorist violence. There is no substitute for peaceful, patient diplomacy and engagement with the international

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

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"Saluting the Nation **Builders of Tomor-**

row" 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. This is indeed a great achievement for our nation. Naturally one can count on these young students with "O" and "A" level certificates as nation builders of the future. And a front-page 6column wide photograph of these bright young students with a lead story in the esteemed The Daily Star is fully justified.

The Daily Star might do even better by undertaking a study of the contribution of those who had achieved similar feats in the past to our nation-building and publish it, and recognise these contributions by holding similar functions. This

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 educa-

tional 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. Why should it not be possible? The awardees in your functions and their teachers are Bangladeshis. What they could collectively achieve, can also be achieved by the students and teachers of Bengali medium schools. What is needed is the necessary investment, and the necessary will.

Let it be recognised that quality education costs, and that the society is prepared to pay for quality education. The private sector has recognised this. Will our government recognise the same? M. M. Rahman

"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.

Dr. Zaman says that during a seminar of their International politics and policies department, a scholar spoke about the recent army crackdown and the human rights violations. Dr. Zaman and some other deshis, by his own admittance were embarrassed. In response these learned deshi gentlemen questioned the authenticity of the presentation and accused the speaker of disgracing our nation. With people like these to defend us, we don't need enemies.

Dr. Zaman and his colleagues don't seem to have read a single Bangladeshi paper in almost the last three weeks. If they had, they would have seen that almost every paper has been reporting on the gross violations of human rights,

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.

Furthermore, Mahfuz Anam is at the end of the day only the editor of this paper. Sheikh Hasina, despite her shortcomings, is a former Prime Minister and as such carries more weight in the media. It is about time that she should learn how to criticise constructively rather than maligning our country as she typically does.

I think I can safely assume, Dr Zaman, that you are some sort of an NRB academic. Then it is doubly saddening because you probably have a great responsibility to disseminate a balanced view of our country to your students.

Dhaka

I was deeply shocked to read the letter of Dr. Zaman from USA (No-

vember 4). His letter appears really biased. If an educated person like him try to present one-sided argument, it looks really bad. Tanvir Islam

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.

The editorial "AL and Terrorism in Bangladesh" was indeed timely. Sheikh Hasina should have behaved responsibly when delivering her speech at Brussels. How could she ruin the image of Bangladesh saying that the present government is helping the growth of fundamentalism?

We have never seen any leader of a foreign country speaking about internal ills in a foreign land. Already the image of Bangladesh, being the number one in corruption, is deteriorated to a great extent. It is high time the leader of the opposition changed herself and spoke cautiously especially when she is abroad

Has Sheikh Hasina ever thought about the fate of hundreds of Bangladeshi visa seekers, the students in particular? Being citizens of a country with the alliance government "open about their

support for the religious fanatics" (as she has mentioned in her Brussels speech), it will definitely be a bit difficult for them to manage

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

Md. Áshegul Islam IBA, University of Dhaka

Sheikh Hasina's com-

ments on army Sheikh Hasina's remarks were quite different from most of her

previous comments. She does pose two important questions, first what will happen after the army crackdown and second why no Jamaat cadre has been arrested. In answer to the first I imagine we'll either veer towards a presidential system or go back to more of the same.

In answer to the second it is impossible that the LIST does not name any Jamaat people when it includes BNP's

Emile

"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

"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 I would request Mr. M.K to kindly read Mr. Akku and Mr. Ornob's comments (October 31). When the terrorists/criminals and murderers

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 gov-

Now can you tell Mr. Editor what is the solution of this problem which was inherited from the past governments? Is it not worth to let some terrorists and criminals die of heart attack for the sake of so many innocent people's life and security? If the majority people of the country feel safe and secured then where is the problem? Did the past govt. ever arrest a single criminal or terrorist belonging to the ruling party and brought them to justice? Let the court decide whether Mr. Saber. Mannan or others are innocent or quilty.

Nasir Dhaka