Cricket to build bridges between North and South

Thursday, 14 May 2009
Last Updated Thursday, 14 May 2009

As part of its continuing efforts to build a sustainable peace, the Government with the coordination of the Peace Secretariat has initiated a number of innovative programmes to build ‘Peace Through Sports’. The goal is to promote integration and unity under the banner of education and sport, recognizing that sport is a basis for connectivity between the youth of the North and South.
The initial programmes have focused on cricket, and plans are underway to involve other sports. The Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat has said that more sports must enter the Jaffna peninsular such as Basketball, Badminton, Track and Field. He also indicated that more facilities need to be provided for the youth of Jaffna, so that interaction with the youth in the South can take place for the attainment of sustainable peace in the country. One outstanding aspect of the 'Peace Through Sports' initiative is that the Government and the Security Forces are now making a focused effort to engage the private sector to collectively provide important opportunities for youth development in the North and East. A Rs. 9 Million investment in cricket equipment (April) and the 'Cricket pathway' (March) are the latest exemplary instances of the success of these public-private ventures. Rs. 9 million investment in cricket equipment for Jaffna In April this year, the Sri Lanka Cricket Board under the leadership of D.S. De Silva on the instruction of H.E. the President invested Rs. 9 million to develop cricket in Jaffna by providing cricket equipment, including 18 matting pitches to schools. This is reflective of the commitment that the administrators in Colombo have to ensure that the same facilities available to young people in the South are available to Jaffna youth. 'Cricket Pathway' programmeThe ‘Cricket Pathway’ programme is an ongoing initiative led by Coca Cola and supported by the International PR agency Ogilvy Outreach, where the best cricketing talent across the country is identified for a Super Camp to be staged later in the year. At this camp the best young cricketers will be picked for training in the national cricket squad. Launched in March, seventy five schoolboy cricketers were selected for the first coaching camp held at the St. John's College Jaffna. It was conducted by former Sri Lanka captain Aravinda De Silva, together with a top Australian coach, Steve Nell and his team. The cricket camp received high praise from the people of Jaffna, as they have never had an opportunity to expose their children to a top level professional coaching camp before. It was a memorable event for the seventy five young cricketers also, who underwent extensive training in batting, bowling, fielding and fitness under the guidance senior national coaches. Coach Nell and his team used sophisticated visual monitoring equipment to scientifically identify the most promising young cricketers.The boys spent two nights in the school with the support of the Principal Rev. Jameson Gnanaponrajah. The highlight was a final 20-20 match that was played amongst the teams at St John’s College. At the end of the camp, Aravinda along with other coaches selected the seven best players, to be included in a super camp in Colombo alongside other talented cricketers from across the country.Vision for ‘cricket as a peace-builder’Jaffna Town Commandant Brigadier Ruwan Kulatunga, the chief organiser of the event, said, 'I am extremely happy that we achieved this with lots of praise from the people of Jaffna. I personally believe that if we could help the next generation in Jaffna through such programmes, it will definitely help towards building national unity, while bridging the North and South of Sri Lanka.' The Bishop of Jaffna, Rev. Fr. Saundaranayagam, who graced the occasion said, 'This is one of the first attempts made in recent times to build bridges between the North and South of Sri Lanka and we hope more events will follow in the near future where the talent of the Jaffna youth can be highlighted.'

Mr. N.A. Vimalendran, the President of the Jaffna Cricket Association along with other members, school principals, Jaffna district cricket coaches and umpires helped considerably in this event. Economic Affairs Unit Government Peace Secretariat Courtesy: SCOPP