

Jayantha Dhanapala – strong contender for top UN post

Jayantha Dhanapala was instrumental in taking the peace process where no Sri Lankan had taken it before. It was a pity his policy initiative was compromised by political expediency. Could his candidature for the post of Secretary-General of the United Nations also be subjected to similar forces, courtesy global politics? In LMD's latest issue, Dr. Jehan Perera, Executive Director of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, highlights Dhanapala's contribution to peace in Sri Lanka. And the business magazine's August edition, out now, underscores just why Dhanapala would be the most eligible candidate to hold the UN's top post.

When the diplomat with over four decades of experience took over the leadership of the government's Peace Secretariat in May 2004, the peace process was heading for disaster. The LTTE had pulled out of peace talks a year earlier – and it had commenced a vicious strategy of assassinating its Tamil political opponents and members of the government's intelligence apparatus. It had presented an ambitious document for regional self-rule sans the central government. Compounding this negative scenario, the general election of April 2004 had been largely fought on the issue of the peace process. The victorious United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) campaigned on a platform that was critical of the peace process. The alliance highlighted its deficiencies as being unilaterally beneficial to the LTTE. It also accused the former government of having betrayed the country.

As Perera, a highly respected peace Analyst, observes in LMD: "But two unexpected events turned the situation around. The first was the appointment of Sri Lanka's leading international diplomat to be the Director-General of the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP). This appointment provided a measure of hope that the government was putting forward the country's best intellectual resources to serve the cause of peace. Dhanapala's UN experience, combined with his professionalism and integrity, meant that Sri Lanka had a world-class negotiator taking on the LTTE. However, the hoped-for breakthrough in the peace process was not immediate."

The LMD writer also points out in the magazine's current edition that the international donor community pushed the Sri Lankan parties to work together towards a negotiated settlement. "It took nearly six months of hard work; but eventually, Dhanapala and his team of negotiators succeeded in reaching an agreement with the LTTE on a joint mechanism for tsunami relief: the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS). This was only the second agreement ever to be signed between the government and the LTTE, the first being the (Ceasefire Agreement) CFA of 2002. The signing of the P-TOMS agreement heralded a possible new phase for the peace process," Perera comments.

"Another major achievement was the marked shift in the attitude of the LTTE, which occurred in the course of the negotiations with Dhanapala and his team of negotiators. A comparison between the P-TOMS and the LTTE's proposed ISGA proposal showed a vast difference," expounds LMD.

Source: <http://www.island.lk/2006/09/05/business11.html>