



tv supplement

PROSPERITY THROUGH UNITY

Jayantha Dhanapala stresses the importance of a sense of unity and common purpose to create a stable and prosperous Sri Lanka

The way in which democratically elected governments exercise authority is very important. There must be a certain degree of governance which understands the feelings of the people; it is not authoritarianism which we are seeing increasingly today," states Jayantha Dhanapala. "We are not only geared to elections and the cycle of elections and the electability of governments, but we are actually looking to the dispensation of justice and fairness. A Right to Information Act would help us understand whether the Government is in fact serving the people that it has been elected to serve," he elaborates.

The Former Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs at the UN says that the Opposition has shown a lack of leadership, and notes that the UNP must remedy its internal problems before it can "play the role that an Opposition should play in any parliamentary democracy."

However, Dhanapala acknowledges the difficulties facing the Opposition; in particular, the crossing over of its members to government ranks, which he says not only undermines the role of the Opposition but also that of the electorate – because "the people who voted for that man voted for him because of his party policy. For him then to betray those votes and cross over to the Government is in fact a betrayal of democratic rights. He has no business to be in Parliament if he switches sides."

The former senior diplomat feels that the Opposition must do much more in terms of mobilising opinion, in presenting itself as an alternative government. For example, when the Opposition criticises government policy, it should put forward an alternative. "What, for example, is the United National Party's policy with regard to the 'ethnic issue'? We have not yet seen that. We know what they did when they were in power, but we have not seen an alternative for a permanent political solution to the problem," he observes.

Turning his attention to the Urban Development Authority

MEDIA SERVICES PHOTOFILE (ANUSHAN SELVARAJAH)



(UDA) – which now falls under the purview of the Ministry of Defence – Dhanapala says that although he is impressed by the UDA's recent achievements, he is not impressed by its modus operandi. Further, he feels that the municipal authorities, rather than the armed forces, should carry out the work of the UDA: "The armed forces are there for a particular reason in any country, and the extension of their remit to undertake urban development is a step too far. It is also a dangerous step, as it could lead to the armed forces being delegated other tasks which are none of their business."

Nonetheless, Dhanapala gives due credit to the armed forces for the victory over the LTTE: "The army has done a magnificent job in winning the war and ridding the country of terrorism. It must now go back to the barracks and remain there. This is what other armies have done after they have served their countries in wars as well as

in internal conflicts. I respect our army, but it has a place in a democratic setup."

Looking ahead, Jayantha Dhanapala says he would like to see a consolidation of the military victory of May 2009, with an adequate devolution of power and a greater measure of decentralisation, as well as a greater measure of democracy at the grassroots to ensure that all citizens of Sri Lanka have equal rights – human, political or economic.

"There is still no sense of unity and community, and a dedication to a common goal for a united and prosperous Sri Lanka. This needs to be done, and I think 2012 would be a critical year in terms of achieving that. If a consensus comes out of the Parliamentary Select Committee, that would be excellent; but we know that there are vastly contentious areas, and there are very different points of view from one aspect of the spectrum to the other. Unless the President acts as a unifying figure and welds all those different elements together to come out with a statesman-like solution, I can't see Sri Lanka getting out of the current problem," he states in conclusion.

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