

WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE

Jayantha Dhanapala elaborates on many lessons learned – and unlearned – while negotiating with the LTTE.



MEDIA SERVICES PHOTO/ALAN BURDORA

Very few of our politicians and professionals involved in critical aspects of our post-independence history have recorded their experiences. Thus, Dr. John Gooneratne's book is a welcome departure from the usually cautious bureaucrat hesitant to publicise his experiences even in retirement. I hope it will encourage others to help us have an accurately recorded history of our interesting and turbulent times. This book must, therefore, be regarded as an objective academic analysis and a guide to future negotiations from which we can draw lessons.

We have already had a comprehensive review by the veteran editor and ambassador Ernest Corea published in the media. Some of the features that impressed me may overlap or repeat what has been said.

The Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) of 2002 was, according to Gooneratne, concluded in what can only be described as indecent haste. It was not shown in advance to the

President of the country and to many others who could have given valuable advice. It was an exercise conducted close to the chest of the then 'first row'. Some of the suggestions that the Government of Sri Lanka wanted to incorporate were left out, such as the specific mention of conducting discussions for a political solution within a time frame; banning the import of arms, ammunition and other material by the LTTE during the CFA; disarming paramilitary groups on the LTTE side; reciprocity with regard to the conduct of 'political work'; and mentioning suicide bombings, assassinations and forcible recruitment as activities that the LTTE would have to refrain from.

The Norwegians had had a draft memorandum of understanding in their pockets from the time they were invited to be facilitators in 1999 and this document was quickly converted into a CFA after it was shown to the LTTE first. Pressure from Norway to have the CFA signed quickly led to inadequate consideration of all its aspects by the Government side. This was a disservice to our national interest – quite apart from being bad conflict resolution.

The imbalance in the obligations that the

two sides had to discharge in terms of the CFA was a basic flaw. There was no robust verification or provision for the enforcement of the terms of the CFA and the role of the Nordic-staffed Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) was reduced to that of well-intentioned boy scouts. This was reflected in the fact that up to the end of 2005, LTTE violations ruled by the SLMM were as high as 3,168, compared to 144 by the Government. There was also a sharp difference in the gravity of the violations – with killings, abductions and child recruitment being the common LTTE violations; and harassment of civilians at checkpoints cited as the major Government violation.

The six rounds of talks conducted between the Government and the LTTE were, in fact, more productive of results than is widely assumed. The book documents the work achieved including what was done (or not done, in some cases) in the sub-committees that were formed. Gooneratne himself says that the results were "spotty". He comments that there was "no sense of a goal or destination". Indeed, that has been my main criticism of the Norwegian facilitation – the absence of



The writer is a former UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. This article is based on remarks made at the launch (in June 2007) of the book, *Negotiating With The Tigers (LTTE) 2002-2005*, by Dr. John Gooneratne (Stamford Lake).