

THE WORLD, THE UN, AND US



On two recent special editions of BENCHMARK, the Former UN Undersecretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, **Jayantha Dhanapala**, discoursed on global security, the peace process at home, and Sri Lanka's chances to star at the UN. **Darshana Abayasingha** culls snippets of the interview conducted by LMD's TV Correspondent **Savithri Rodrigo**.

With regard to the ongoing peace process in Sri Lanka, Dhanapala said that we are currently in a "no war, no peace situation". He said, "It's a little bit like Northern Ireland", ex-

Lanka, except there are more violations of the ceasefire agreement. The continuing arming of the LTTE, the recruitment of child soldiers, and other serious problems regarding the ceasefire agreement, continue..." he noted.

made every time we have a round of talks, is not the way to seriously conduct peace negotiations". Rather, he proposes that both sides must draft a constitutional arrange-



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plaining how, soon after the 'Good Friday Agreement' in that country, people had fostered hope that there would be a permanent peace there. There is still no peace in Northern Ireland, nor has the IRA been disarmed. "We are in a similar situation in Sri

Dhanapala remarked that he is "somewhat concerned" about the manner in which the peace process is being managed. He said that although he is "sure that there are very competent people responsible for the management of the process, it does appear to me that the very euphoric statements that are being

ment, which they could agree on. Dhanapala affirmed that the federal principle, on which the parties had agreed in Oslo, should have culminated in the drafting of what would have been a constitutional amendment. "The second aspect, which I am very concerned about, is the lack of any bipartisan support for the peace process. When it is abundantly

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clear that the people of the country yearn for peace, there is an attempt to nitpick on details and exploit the problems of the peace process."

The retired UN Undersecretary-General for Disarmament Affairs said that there is "very great relief" at the UN and among the international community that the actual fighting in Sri Lanka has come to an end, adding that there exists "a great deal of goodwill for Sri Lanka's future". Dhanapala explained that critical to this thinking is that "Sri Lanka's stock has always been highly regarded" in the international community. "It's been seen as a small, developing country which – despite great difficulties – has succeeded in maintaining parliamentary democracy. There is genuine confusion as to why we cannot solve this problem ourselves. No solution to an internal conflict can be foisted on a country from outside. Nobody wants to do that. Everybody thinks it is something for us to agree upon ourselves," he asserted.

Dhanapala maintained that the perceptions the world has of Sri Lanka today are due to the ground reality. Changing this perception requires "extraordinary leadership". He added that though the country does possess this talent, there remains the question of these leaders getting together. "Politics must be less personality-driven and more policy-driven," he prescribed. This "major leap forward" would help change the perceptions of Sri Lanka and the level of confidence among the international community.

What are his aspirations for Sri Lanka? "I very much hope Sri Lanka will remain a vibrant democracy, which will have strong democratic institutions: Institutions which will withstand changes of government, that would ultimately serve the people of Sri Lanka. I look forward to an economy that will grow in order to ensure that every man, woman and child stays dignified. Above all, we need peace. Peace, not only among ethnic groups; but also among the religious groups. I see, increasingly, signs of intolerance – which is very depressing. We cannot end our ethnic conflict only to start a religious conflict," he remarked.

Explaining the manner in which the UN Secretary-General is chosen, Dhanapala said that the man for the 'hot seat' is elected by the membership of the United Nations for a five-year term. "He is the chief administrative officer of the United Nations. He has much less powers than people assume he has; but much depends on the creative use of that

position," he said. The elections, he explained, first take place in the Security Council, where Dhanapala said the support of the five permanent members becomes crucial. He elaborated that when a candidate obtains a majority vote in the Security Council, that decision is put to the General Assembly, "which very rarely decides against the candidate the Security Council has elected".

"There is a convention – and it is only a convention," he stressed, "that the position rotates from one continent to another." With



incumbent Kofi Annan's term ending in December 2006, Dhanapala said that China, amongst others, has made it clear that the next Secretary-General "must be from Asia".

The former ambassador affirmed that the UN is no different to what its original architects conceived it to be. He firmly believes that the world "clearly needs an international organisation": not as a government, but to provide the framework for countries to combine and sort out their differences. He conceded, however, that the more powerful countries have less use for the United Nations than the smaller countries. Yet he opined that "multilateralism has now become the governing principle of international relations".

Dhanapala clarified: "If you look at the situation of Iraq, the US and the UK were impatient with the UNMOVIC process and

wanted to invade Iraq by themselves – unilaterally. They are now coming back to the Security Council. The world needs the United Nations, and I think the United States understands that. The reason why President Bush came to the UN on 12 September last year and made his speech with regard to Iraq was because he recognised the importance of the world. He may have got rid of a dictator, but he has not found the Weapons of Mass Destruction..."

On the subject of terrorism, he said: "9/11 was another one of those terrorist outrages we have seen in various parts of the world. But the difference with regard to 9/11 was that it hit the heartland of the mightiest power in the world. And this made the important difference. This was an attack into the very heart of the United States, into a very major city, which symbolised the capitalist world." Dhanapala said that the "hearts of the world" went out to the US following the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 – though "the consequential policy action has not led to the eradication of that terrorism", he noted. There has been much analysis as to how this terrorism took place; mostly, why it was directed at the US. He lamented, however, that "none of this soul-searching has led to the right conclusions in terms of policy actions". Dhanapala added that though he had said we must "delink the Palestinian issue from terrorism", the fact that Palestinians seem to suffer injustice, through the indignity of not having a state, is a "very sore point" in the Middle East. This, he said, helps to fuel terrorism.

If he does find himself in the 'hot seat', what are his aspirations for the United Nations? "What the Secretary-General of the United Nations can do – and Kofi Annan is indeed making a very great effort, more than many of his predecessors – is to ensure that the UN reflects the national interests of over 191 countries. It is a wonderful texture of all the countries – small and big – working together, where no individual country can adopt a 'beggar-thy-neighbour' policy. No individual country can pursue its individual security at the expense of others. It has to be a common facility; it has to be a co-operative facility. And that can only be achieved under the leadership of the UN. Inspiring leadership like that provided by Kofi Annan will help the UN to survive these temporary setbacks, including the sad debacle on 19 August in Baghdad. We will go on; because the cause is too important; and the common cause of over 191 nations is far greater..." he affirmed.