



tv supplement

DOUBLE STANDARDS MUST END

Jayantha Dhanapala emphasises that it is time to address *all* the pressing issues that played second fiddle to national security.

Some might say that in the 20 months or so since the guns fell silent in the north, the nation has taken strides in certain directions that matter – infrastructure development for one. However, while commending these efforts on the part of the UPFA Government, former senior diplomat Jayantha Dhanapala says that a few other matters have been left unattended as another new year dawns.

A political solution to the ‘ethnic issue’ is at the top of his wish list for our land in 2011. “We’ve talked a lot about constitutional reform and nation building, but members of ‘minority communities’ still feel a sense of uncertainty and insecurity. And it doesn’t reflect well on the majority community,” he contends.

Second on his list is foreign policy. Dhanapala, who was once in the running for the UN’s highest office, laments that “there seems to be total confusion in the minds of the Government as to what the right foreign policy should be. We need to get our foreign policy right. We would be well-advised to follow the path of Mrs. [Sirimavo] Bandaranaike, who deployed a strictly non-aligned path.”

And thirdly, we must ensure that the nation’s dream of becoming the ‘Wonder of Asia’ is more than just a dream, Dhanapala says.

“Economic development must maintain momentum and we must match our actions with our words. We must also go out there and attract investment, tourists and trade. We seem to be rather ambiguous in this regard. On the one hand, we abuse the West; and on the other, we want the West to come in and invest here. We must have a much more intelligently conducted strategy with regard to foreign investment and trade,” he stresses.

As for other burning issues that must receive the nation’s undivided attention this year, Dhanapala counts political unity, corruption and the lack of regard for the rule of law.

He observes: “We need to have total political unity, where



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everybody feels they belong to this country and has equal status. Then, the rule of law must prevail. You can’t have one rule of law for ministers who go around tying up errand public officials, and another for the rest of us. We can’t have convicted murderers being pardoned by the President, while an army commander who brilliantly attained the military victory remains incarcerated.”

These are double standards that must end, along with our wasteful expenditure and widespread corruption, he adds.

Dhanapala praises the incumbent Government’s efforts in resettling civilians displaced by war but feels there’s more to be done.

He explains: “By and large, the Government has performed creditably, given the enormity of the task. But there are still complaints that many of those who have been resettled are still without livelihoods, and that they were dumped on a patch of land without a roof over their heads.”

Doing more for these communities involves power sharing, he maintains – and of them knowing what their future will be. And in this regard, President Mahinda Rajapaksa must lead the way, Dhanapala asserts.

He elaborates: “Now that he has won the war, the President must ensure that he doesn’t lay the seeds of a future insurgency. All segments of the population must be brought into harmony. It doesn’t mean 50/50 power-sharing, but that you consult everybody and that you take a top-down approach. He must also ensure good governance and a corruption-free government.”

Further, that vital element of a true democracy, the Opposition, must also get its game in shape this year, Dhanapala stresses.

“The opposition parties must reorganise themselves if they’re to mean anything in this country. They have to resolve their leadership and policy issues. There were excellent contributions from some of the nominated Opposition MPs to the budget debate – and we need similar contributions on all other issues, so that there’s an alternative presented to the people of this country,” he adds.

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