

# CONTINUED CRISIS OR PEACE & PROSPERITY – THE CHOICE IS OURS

by

R. Paskaralingam

The 1990s will usher in an era of unprecedented change – and the change will be accompanied by unparalleled opportunity.

Dr. Arthur C. Clark, Sri Lanka's most distinguished "Futurist", would no doubt tell us that the 1990s will bring mindboggling changes in communications, computer technology and space exploration. In addition, he would most probably tell us that education – most particularly, improved, expanded education in the sciences – will be crucial to competitiveness in the 1990s.

I would certainly agree with these forecasts. However, I submit that they will be but a part of a larger, more important trend toward the establishment of a bona-fide world community. The trend is already well underway and it will gain ever-increasing momentum in the 1990s. The most salient feature of the trend will be dramatic changes in geo-politics – with the traditional prominence of the nation-state being gradually, yet inexorably replaced by an emerging awareness of interdependence. The ultimate outcome of the trend should be increased harmony and improved standards of living throughout the world.

There is abundant evidence of the emerging trend. We are all familiar with the words "glasnost" and "perestroika"; and

we have all witnessed the profound changes which have occurred in Eastern Europe in recent months. To these ideas and events you can add a host of equally important barometers of change. Consider, for example, the following:

1. The worldwide, institutionalized effort to reduce trade barriers and to foster international commerce through GATT. (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs).
2. The growing consensus that preservation of the environment is a high priority challenge and, perhaps more importantly, the gradual recognition that it is a global challenge;
3. The emergence and gradual spreading of economic power and influence among Asian countries, together with the planned unification of European markets in 1992 and the reunification of Hong Kong with China in 1997; and finally,
4. The systematic move toward abandoning tension, distrust and confrontation in favour of increased communications and negotiated solutions to sensitive problems and issues.

## East Asia Dragons

In sum these events point clearly to a wholesale reordering

R. Paskaralingam is a senior member of the Public Service, currently serving as Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Policy Planning and Implementation. He plays a crucial role in mapping out the Governments' development strategy.

of the world community. But what does it mean for Sri Lanka? How are we to benefit from the changes already underway and from those on the horizon?

The answer is quite simply self help, self control! The choice and the implicit challenge – is ours. We can become a worthy contributor to the process of change, and share proportionately in the benefits to be derived. Or we can be a casual observer who contributes minimally to the events in motion, and who benefits only commensurately.

We should draw our "lessons learned" from the so-called "Dragons" of East Asia, that is South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong – the super-achievers of the 1980s who combined stability, enlightened policy and entrepreneurship to become leaders among nations.

Of the three ingredients cited as fundamental to the success of the "Dragons" – again, stability, enlightened policy and entrepreneurship – we have made great strides in recent

*Continued on page 34*

*Continued from page 4*

months in putting the first two in place. Internal security and economic stability are being restored systematically, and far-sighted policy reforms are being adopted and implemented with unprecedented speed and vigor. Most notable among the policy decisions taken of late are the adoption of the Janasaviya Programme and the newly formulated industrial reform policy. Together, these programmes set the stage for the all-important ingredient of entrepreneurship to come to full fruition – with individuals from the lowest rungs of the economic ladder to businessmen with the most ambitious of proposals invited and encouraged to pursue their self-interests. As they flourish, they will in turn, propel the country to new heights of accomplishment.

### **Individual**

Underlying this entire strategy is a fundamental, abiding faith in the dignity and worth of the individual. Everyone counts! And, in this regard, the ultimate measure of our success – or the lack thereof – will be directly proportionate to our capacity to unify, mobilize, motivate and support individuals islandwide. Everyone must rec-

---

But we tell people and we devolve and legitimise and give the people the right to think for themselves, act for themselves to manage their own areas, both individually in human terms, both within their families and across families, in a communal sense, you know, if we recognise that right and open up that space, I think, we will get the kind of creative impetus that we are looking for.

ognize that he or she can and will make a difference – be it a positive contribution or a drain on the collective effort. Bureaucrats must come to recognize that Sri Lanka does not suffer nearly as much from a shortage of resources as it does from a lack of commitment and capacity to excel. More importantly, they must “set about the task” of redressing deficiencies and of achieving higher standards of efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation and management of government programmes

Similarly, businessmen and professionals must join the quest for excellence by accepting fully the challenge of entrepreneurship; and in the process, assuming vastly increased responsibility for mobilizing and managing the economy and for restoring Sri Lanka to a position of world leadership in health and social services. Finally, individuals islandwide must “join in” – either under the auspices of Janasaviya or through their own resourcefulness – to increase productivity and to reinvigorate growth and development.

As stated earlier, the choice is ours. We can sit by idly and watch the world advance to new thresholds of achievement or we can participate actively in the process. If we elect to do the latter – and I am confident that we will – our success will, in the final analysis, depend upon individual achievement. The Government can chart the course and facilitate the process, but ultimate success or failure depends first and foremost upon individual effort.