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Mutually beneficial partnership

TODAY we commemorate 50th landmark year of our re-emergence as an independent nation after four-and-a-half centuries of colonial rule.

We salute those who made a lifetime commitment and great sacrifices as Sri Lankans irrespective of their caste, creed and race, towards the achievement of our self-determined democratic rule.

We are proud of them and they very much live in our hearts particularly at a time we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our Independence.

Since the achievement of Independence we have come a long way while facing political and economic vicissitudes. Apart from what has been gained economically so far the present Government has made an effective three-pronged approach viz tabling a package that offers greater autonomy to regions to govern their own affairs which has been widely accepted and praised by the international community; concentrated military action in the north and east to weaken the elements who are involved in terrorist activities; and rehabilitating the areas where there is a large influx of displaced families to begin a normal life with their loved ones.

Truth, they say cannot be suppressed forever in an attempt for whatever ego-centric political goals. Sincerity in the proposals made by the Government and approach for a practical solution, taking into consideration the views of the majority among the minority communities and par ties, cannot be ignored in the eyes of those who yearn for peace and those who are keenly watching the situation from outside.

As such, like the light at the end of the tunnel we are heading towards peace which is not too far from where we are now.

It is in this context that we look at the issues and seek assistance and co-operation of the descendants of those who migrated to this country from Sri Lanka during colonial days. It is time that we need to work hand in hand with a broad objective in mind to relieve the people who are suffering as a result of the on-going clashes in the north and east.

This, in our opinion, is achievable in an environment where relations between Sri Lanka and Malaysia have grown from strength to strength that was quite conspicuous during the state visit by the President of Sri Lanka accompanied by the Minister of Foreign Affairs last year at the invitation of His Majesty Tuanku Ja'far ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia.

What is significant is that Sri Lanka's economy has been quite resilient despite the psychological impact of the conflict, confined to the north and east and a few isolated incidents in other parts.

Sri Lanka and Malaysia are now enjoying healthy economic relations both in trade and investment. Exports from Sri Lanka to Malaysia and Malaysian investment into Sri Lanka have been steadily increasing.

Apart from the investment plans in various fields, the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka has signed a number of memoranda of understanding with private sector conglomerates in Malaysia. Heads of both Governments witnessed signing of four such large scale investment projects amounting to over US\$1 billion, particularly on infrastructure development, preliminary preliminary studies of which are now underway.

This Mission plays a key role in the development of trade and investment activities and many promotional events have been conducted with the assistance of leading trade and industry chambers in Malaysia.

In view of the increasing number of inquiries to be serviced and the co-ordination work involved, this Mission has strengthened its information and co-ordination-related activities to provide a better service to the business community in Malaysia as well as Sri Lanka.

The Mission also represents other economic agencies in Sri Lanka, such as the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Export Development Board and Ceylon Tourist Board, in all their promotional activities in Malaysia.

We are confident that Malaysia will not take much time to recover from the present setback in the currency and stock market through the measures being taken and by activating many contingencies not only for an early recovery but also to be well on its path to the leadership's vision of becoming a fully developed nation by the year 2020, the journey throughout which Sri Lanka will be a close partner to Malaysia.

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