

# S. Lanka envoy: Dr M can seek UN sec-gen post

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Sri Lanka Foreign Minister Tyronne Fernando, who is currently the only Asian nominated for the UN Secretary-General's post from 2007, is willing to make way for Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad if member countries in the region think he is a better choice.

"If there is any person who makes a better diplomat than myself, I am willing to step aside. Even for Dr Mahathir if he can do a better job than myself as a diplomat," he added.

"Why not, if other member countries want Dr Mahathir, he can have the job.

"I am very open to anyone who thinks they can do a better job and if the UN member countries think that there is someone better than me for the position of Secretary-General," Fernando told reporters on his transit stopover here.

He was asked if Dr Mahathir should go for the job, as he was an experienced elder statesman

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's second term will end in 2007 and in August Fernando announced that he would be available for the job.

Fernando said Asia had missed its chance in 2001 and the African continent as a consequence had obtained an unprecedented third term.

Clarifying that he was not "bulldozing himself," Fernando said the Sri Lankan Government had nominated him for his leadership and worldwide contacts as a Parliamentarian for more than 27 years.

He said several countries supported his nomination since the last time an Asian candidate was appointed was more than 41 years ago.

Fernando told reporters that his "availability" for the UN Secretary-General's post had been conveyed to several world leaders and even to President George W. Bush.

On the home front, he hoped peace talks would resume soon, otherwise donor countries that had promised about US\$4.5bil (RM17.1bil) for Sri Lanka, would allocate the funds to other needy areas.

In June, foreign nations

pledged the aid at a donor conference in Japan to rebuild Sri Lanka provided there was progress in the government's peace process with the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam.

Fernando said although the two feuding parties had not set a deadline to resolve the government's internal political bickering, "it does not mean we can dilly-dally" to resolve the issue.

"The Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil Tigers are genuinely interested in sustained peace returning to the nation," he added.