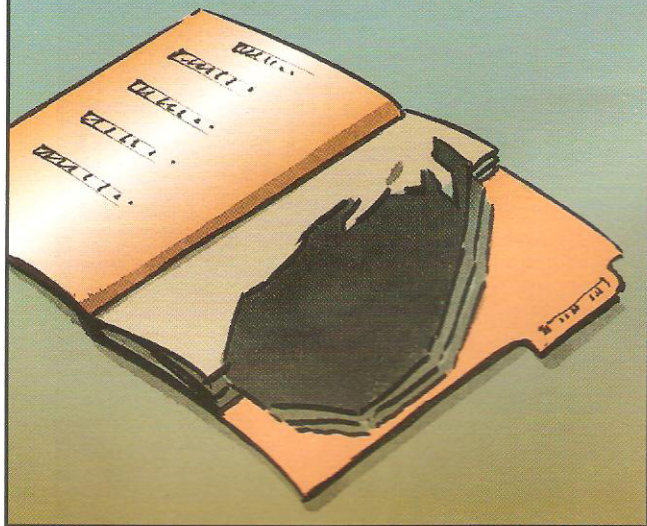


# PROMOTING SRI LANKA



If we dismantle all our embassies abroad and replaced them with public-relations outfits, Jayantha Dhanapala - Sri Lanka's former ambassador to the US - would be the country's leading guru. You wouldn't spot him having power lunches with Larry King, but you may catch him speaking on Mahatma Gandhi at Yale, or on nuclear non-proliferation in California. This Kandy-bred, Peradeniya-educated student came out of Washington DC with a Masters Degree in international studies: but, it's his uncanny sense of pride in his country that makes his message most compelling. Disarmingly soft-spoken, and yet super-charged with optimism, he's got what it takes to sell Sri Lanka as a brand - he possesses an intuitive grasp of marketing, a proven global perspective, and the ability to anticipate the answers to questions, before they arise. An odd bunch of talents for a diplomat, the old guard would surely think. Not so, in the 1990s.

At a time when it's not unusual for US politicians to head trade missions for automobile manufacturers, it takes more than schmoozing to get someone to listen to your country's point of view. The sound you hear in the background is not the rustling of diplomatic credentials, but more compelling business ones.

As he succinctly defines it, Dhanapala's role is not so much political diplomacy. "Sri Lanka needs a major public-relations exercise," he says. And no, he's not speaking of the kind of publicity that you get from a high-powered PR agency. It's a concerted effort, by Sri Lankans everywhere, to counter the negative publicity that we are scarred with. So, what does that make his job? "Striped-pants" marketing, he calls it, and you could say that Jayantha Dhanapala has been on a global marketing tour, ever since he joined the foreign service, some 30 years ago.

He gives you the impression that he would be more comfortable presenting ideas out of a briefcase, than reading policy statements out of a diplomatic pouch.

So, what's become of the whisky-swilling, batik-shirt clad political diplomat? It depends on what your definition of politics and diplomacy is, at this moment in time.

A good politician is no longer that fellow who swings votes, just as much as a great diplomat is no longer the retired admiral who got the job as something of a golden handshake. Today, politicians and diplomats are like CEOs, plotting the course of the ship of state, in the farthest waters of the global economy.

Jayantha Dhanapala's

## "STRIPED-PANTS" MARKETING

What has become of the whisky-swilling, batik-shirt clad political diplomat?

Dinosaurs that hopefully, won't come back. Today's diplomat talks business. Could we have more of them, please?

LMD's special correspondent, **Angelo Fernando**, reports from the USA, on Jayantha Dhanapala's "striped-pants" marketing for Sri Lanka.

Dhanapala intuitively responded to this task. "When I joined the foreign service, the emphasis was on trade promotion, not investment promotion," he reveals. The role of the ambassador, he maintains, has changed dramatically: "You are required to tailor your performance accordingly." And, his was no ordinary performance.

In 1987, to pick out just one highlight of his career, when the world was anticipating such momentous events as the dismantling of the Iron Curtain, Jayantha Dhanapala was appointed Director of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research. "My period has seen a transition from 'political diplomacy' to 'economic diplomacy'," he observes.

But, if economic diplomacy is the equivalent of a marketing strategy, then it requires some extraordinary skills to be able to implement it. Everybody has a slightly different view of what Sri Lanka needs, but if you were to ask Dhanapala, he'll probably tell you we need "customers" (or "investors", if you prefer the nomenclature).

### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- Third Secretary of the Sri Lankan High Commission, in London
- Third Secretary of the embassy of Sri Lanka, in Beijing
- Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs, in Colombo
- First Secretary of the Embassy of Sri Lanka, in Washington D.C.
- Director of the Non-Aligned Conference Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Colombo.