

SOUL OF A DIPLOMAT



Following an illustrious career in the international civil service, son of Sri Lanka and citizen of the world **Jayantha Dhanapala** is back. **Savithri Rodrigo** profiles him on home ground.

Dubbed 'Our Man at the UN' – perhaps rightly so – it is not often that a Sri Lankan plays an active role in arguably the world's most august body with regard to international affairs: the United Nations (UN). But for Jayantha Cudah Bandara Dhanapala, Former Undersecretary-General for Disarmament Affairs in the UN, the most satisfying memories have been during the time he spent serving his country, Sri Lanka. Having just completed a five-year term with the UN, the affable, academician-cum-diplomat comes across as a thorough gentleman.

Dhanapala was born the second-last of 11 children, on 30 January 1938, to James Angus and Rose. A scholarship student at Trinity College, Kandy, he was also involved in theatre, the literary association and sports, counting S. M. L. Marikkar, Dr. Sarath Amunugama, Dr. Ananda Wickremaratne and Prof. Arjuna Aluvihara among his classmates. Awarded the Ryde Gold Medal for the best all-round student in 1956, Dhanapala had previously submitted a composition for a nationwide essay competition and was selected to represent Sri Lanka at the World Youth Forum organised by the **Herald Tribune**.

"Having spent three months in the US in 1957, I thought journalism would be my career; but the experience of being with an international group changed my mind. Even though opportunities to study in the US were available, I came back to enter university because I felt very strongly that it was the best course of action for me. More than anything else, the University of Peradeniya gave me an opportunity to mingle with people of my



MEDIA SERVICES PHOTO/AL GALVA SINGHAI

peer group from different parts of the country – an experience I value greatly," he reveals.

It was during his university career that Dhanapala set his heart on joining the diplomatic service. However, no examinations were being held at the time: so the determined Dhanapala – who was uninterested in joining the civil service – decided to bide his time by working in the private sector. So he joined Whittall Boustead's Estates Department for a sedate private-sector job.

Meanwhile, having met the pretty Maureen during his years at Trinity, Dhanapala tied the knot. Finally facing the foreign service examination and being selected at the age of

26, Dhanapala had the opportunity to pursue his dream career. "I was now even more determined, even though it would mean a substantial decrease in income. My wife supported me in my decision, and I have never looked back since," he beams.

"Diplomats have to be proactive – an aspect that most non-career diplomats miss, because they don't realise that you have to actually take the initiative and create opportunities. If you are building an institution, recruitment must be systematic. But recruitment has not always been objective and merit-oriented. What is worse is that at non-ambassadorial level, the foreign service is being used as a means to obtain assisted passage

JAYANTHA DHANAPALA

EDUCATION & CAREER AT A GLANCE

Education and school career

Scholarship student; Trinity College, Kandy (TCK)
Captain, House and Second XV Rugby teams (TCK)
Ryde Gold Medallist for Best All-Round Student, TCK (1956)
Represented Sri Lanka in the US as

the winner of a nationwide essay competition conducted by the **Herald Tribune** (1957)
B.A. (Hons) – University of Peradeniya (1961)

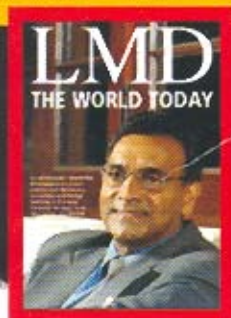
Early career

Executive – Whittall Boustead (1962-1965)

Placed first in the combined-open competitive examination for admission into the Sri Lanka Administrative Service and the Sri Lanka Foreign Service (1965)
Joined Sri Lanka Foreign Service (1965)
Diplomatic postings abroad (1965-1983)

- Third Secretary, High Commission in London
- Third Secretary, High Commission in China
- First Secretary, High Commission in Washington
- Deputy High Commissioner, India
- Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the

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and the individuals have no interest in the ideals of diplomacy. I must commend [Former Foreign Minister] Lakshman Kadirgamar, however, who did bring back a semblance of objectivity into recruitment," he elaborates.

Dhanapala recalls his initiation into the foreign service, when the then Counsellor of Foreign Relations, H. O. Wijegoonewardene, invited the selected few to lunch. "There were six of us: Nihal Rodrigo, Wilhelm Woutersz, A. K. David, N. Navarathnarajah and Khalidasa de Silva," he recalls.

Dispatched into training thereafter, where they oriented themselves with the varied nuances of towns and villages of Sri Lanka, Dhanapala and Rodrigo – having topped their batch – were selected to train with the Australian Foreign Service. Dhanapala was posted to London thereafter. Shortly, he became the proud father of a baby daughter, Kiran.

Having taken up his posting as Third Secretary, Dhanapala recalls, "Our salaries were rather meagre by today's standards; and at that time we were so innocent and naive that we didn't even want to ask for an increase in our allowances!" However, Dhanapala had already acquired a great ambition to learn Chinese. "So I enrolled myself at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. My high commissioner at the time, Prof. Gunapala Malalasekera, was most encouraging," he discloses. Around this time, the Dhanapala family welcomed baby boy Sivanka into the fold.

In logical sequence, it was only natural that the Dhanapalas then make their way to China for a posting in Beijing. It was during this time that Dhanapala also indulged his interest in Chinese artefacts, bringing back with him numerous items of furniture, scrolls and paintings to adorn his home. He had always been interested in the arts and culture, spending a hard-earned Rs. 600 during his years

as a junior in the foreign service to purchase an early George Keyt. About three years ago, while at the UN, he subsequently acquired Keyt's famous painting, *The Almsgiving*.

Back in the Foreign Ministry in 1970, working under the late former Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Dhanapala was placed in charge of matters related to East Asia and South-East Asia. "Again, it was a fascinating period for me, because the normalisation of relations between China and the US was taking place. I believe that my reports were read by the prime minister, who made notes on the fortnightly reviews sent to her by ambassadors. She maintained a very lively interest in foreign relations – and sometimes her judgements on issues were uncanny, putting many of us to shame!" he confesses.

Dhanapala was actively involved in the new initiatives instigated by the Bandaranaike government, including the Indian Ocean as a 'zone of peace'. "During the 1971 insurgency, we began a quest for parallel situations in other parts of the world; and I do believe that under the very inspiring leadership of [Deshamanya] Dr. Vernon Mendis – who was the Director-General of Foreign Relations at that time – and through the Foreign Service Forum, we presented some very good papers," he recalls.

Having known about young Dhanapala's flair for international relations, Dr. Neville Kanakarathne specifically requested his transfer to Washington D.C. in 1974. Dhanapala completed his Master of Arts degree in International Studies at the American University, in that city, while continuing his regular work as a diplomat. This led to the publication of his book, *China And The Third World*, which was a result of his research.

A change of government in 1977 saw Dhanapala back in Sri Lanka, heading the Non-Aligned Division under Foreign Minister A. C. S. Hameed. He explains, "The UNP

had inherited the chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and there was a great deal of scepticism about their ability to co-ordinate the world of NAM and maintain its genuine vision. Hameed was very convinced of the importance of NAM in Sri Lanka's national interest – and, despite the cynicism of some of his eminent colleagues in the Cabinet, maintained a genuine dedication to NAM policy. In fact, when Cuba took over in 1979, Sri Lanka received numerous plaudits for its stewardship of NAM."

Destined to travel from shore to shore, Dhanapala next opted to serve as Deputy High Commissioner to India, a country he deemed important in terms of its relationship to Sri Lanka and Asia.

"Culturally, it was a fascinating period for me, because this was the country where the components of our culture come from. But then came the political fallout of 1983, which was very unpleasant and unfortunate. It strained relationships between us, and there were many misguided policies pursued in Colombo with which I disagreed, not hesitating to say so in my reports," he reveals. With his thirst for academics being revived once again, Dhanapala decided to pursue a Ph.D at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in India. But with the thesis looming large at the end, he realised the impossibility of the task, abandoning it after two years.

At the end of 1983, he secured the coveted appointment as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN in Geneva, with concurrent accreditation to the UN agencies in Vienna. He explains, "I was pitchforked into a very stormy human rights situation. Try as we might to explain the racial riots as an aberration of Sri Lanka's hitherto impeccable record, it was very difficult because of the strong human rights and Tamil expatriate lobbies. We lobbied with the various delegations and obtained a relatively mild resolution that was not condemnatory

JAYANTHA DHANAPALA

EDUCATION & CAREER AT A GLANCE

United Nations (UN) in Geneva with concurrent accreditation to the UN agencies in Vienna
 ✦ Ambassador to Washington
 ✦ Ambassador to the US, with concurrent accreditation in Mexico
 Director, Non-Aligned Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1977)

Mid-career

Director, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) (1987)
 M.A. in International Studies – University of Washington, D. C.
 Chairman, Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review and Extension Conference (1995)

Additional Foreign Secretary, Foreign Ministry (1995)
 Member of the Canberra Commission, Government of Canberra – a group of 17 international personalities who published an influential report on nuclear disarmament (1996)
 Early retirement (April 1997)

Career highlights

Diplomat in Residence, Centre for Non-proliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, USA (August 1997)
 Commissioner in UNSCOM and the Head of the Special Group visiting the Presidential Sites in Iraq (1998)
 Undersecretary-General for Disarma-

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of Sri Lanka. And, since a few months prior we had had the Sub-Commission on Human Rights proposing a very damaging resolution against us, this resolution was certainly an achievement. I was able to get the ICRC view across to the government and the ICRC did pay official visits to Sri Lanka." He was also dealing with issues on disarmament, working with the World Intellectual Property Organization, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other UN bodies.

Aware of his interest in disarmament affairs, many of his colleagues suggested that Dhanapala offer his services as Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), to which post he was appointed by Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar while the former was on a leave of absence from the Sri Lanka Foreign Service.

"I looked forward to this job as a very nice fusion between academics and diplomacy; because while I was still accredited to the diplomatic corps, I also worked independently to provide research for the UN community to work with on disarmament issues," he reveals.

For Dhanapala, those five years proved to be most rewarding, allowing him to indulge in his treasured hobbies of reading and writing.

But at the end of the five-year term, despite an option of staying on at the UN, this true son of the soil decided to revert to the foreign service back at home. He worked at the Foreign Ministry before taking wing as Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Washington. Working extensively for the US government and acquainting it with the policies of the PA government, Dhanapala was instrumental in successfully negotiating the extension of the bilateral textile agreement and paving the way for legislation to ban the LTTE as a terrorist organisation.

Having represented Sri Lanka at the UN

General Assembly – as well as at many NAM and Commonwealth conferences – it was only natural that he should chair the widely acclaimed 1995 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review and Extension Conference. With some career opportunities in hand, in August 1997, Dhanapala decided to become the Diplomat-in-Residence of the Center for Non-proliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, USA – hailed as a centre of excellence on the subject of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). "And then, the reforms of Kofi Annan were adopted by the General Assembly and the Department for Disarmament Affairs was re-established," he explains.

Headhunted by the Secretary-General himself to lead the department – in addition to being appointed a commissioner in UNSCOM – Dhanapala, who was televised extensively on prominent international news networks, headed the special group visiting the presidential sites in Iraq in 1998. Just prior to taking up the appointment at the UN, Dhanapala also served as a member of the Canberra Commission at the invitation of the government of Australia, which published an influential report on nuclear disarmament in 1996.

In September 1999, he delivered the Olaf Palme Memorial Lecture at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI); and this year, he delivered the Dorothy Hodgkin Memorial Lecture to the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs.

So, five years down the line, the Dhanapalas are back home. Looking extremely content and very relaxed, Dhanapala hopes he will have more time to devote to his wife, who he says has patiently followed him around the world.

"She is my anchor, because I tend to be a little idealistic and even impractical at times," he adds. His other priority now is to

finish his book, which he says must be published before the 2005 Non-Proliferation Treaty Conference, to give the true story behind 1995. "For the next four years, I am on the Advisory Board of a Center in Stanford University, the Monterrey Institute, and the Geneva Democratic Control of Armed Forces Organisation. I have also been asked by the President of the ICRC to serve on its advisory panel," he discloses.

Dhanapala will also visit Rome this month, representing the International Peace Bureau in his capacity as Honorary President at the Nobel Peace Laureate Summit. In between his globetrotting, however, he intends to travel around Sri Lanka – which he says he has seen very little of. With both children involved in professions which he calls "service to humankind" – his son at the UNHCR, and daughter pursuing a Ph.D in environmental economics – he is greatly satisfied that even though they suffered because of the volatile and mercurial nature of his career, they seem to have benefited intellectually from those experiences.

For his work in diplomacy and disarmament, Georgetown University, Washington D.C., the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and the Ploughshares Fund have honoured Jayantha Dhanapala.

He was the Global Security Institute's first recipient of the Alan Cranston Peace Award in 2002. He has also been conferred an honorary degree – D. Litt – by the University of Peradeniya; while in May 2001 he was bestowed an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters by the Monterey Institute. In July this year, the University of Southampton in the UK also awarded him an honorary doctorate.

But what about the hot seat – the post of the Secretary-General of the UN, which falls vacant in 2006?

Smiling pensively, he concludes: "Well, it is too early to tell!"

ment Affairs in the United Nations (February 1998-May 2003)
Represented Sri Lanka at the UN General Assembly, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Commonwealth Conferences
Delivered the Olaf Palme Memorial Lecture at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) [1999]

Awards & Honours

Honorary D. Litt Degree – University of Peradeniya (2000)
Honorary Degree – Doctor of Humane Letters, Monterey Institute of International Studies (2001)
First recipient of the Alan Cranston Peace Award, presented by the Global Security Institute (2002)

Delivered the Dorothy Hodgkin Memorial Lecture to the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs (2002)
Honorary Doctorate, University of Southampton, UK (2003)
Member, Advisory Board of Centre for International Security and Co-operation (CISAC) in Stanford University

Member, Advisory Board, Monterey Institute
Member, Advisory Board, Geneva Democratic Control of Armed Forces Organisation
Honorary President, International Peace Bureau