

by **Bandu de Silva**
Former Ambassador

Continued from yesterday
Expert advice & voting
against Egypt

This situation of reliance on expert advice, a practice followed very much in U.S. foreign policy making, where the Desk Officer in the State Department is a central figure in policy making, though working behind the scene, con-

a semi-official letter written by the British High Commissioner in Colombo (Sir Cecil Syres as I recall) to Permanent Secretary Gunasena de Soya. In the old [school/intimate diplomatic] tradition, addressing by first names, the British High Commissioner suggested to the Permanent Secretary that the Ceylonese government may, 'as a recognition of the role Israel played over the issue of admission of Ceylon

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the seeming annoyance of Ambassador Neville Kanakarathne in New York, who obviously suspected some sinister purpose in that inquiry and reported the matter to Secretary W.T. Jayasinghe, one could have come across amazing evidence of Arab support to Ceylon, perhaps, no second to what the Israeli's were reported to have rendered.

I recall among the U.N. records, the almost passionate plea that the

Today, the documents are no longer there except perhaps, what is retained in the Hansard (one has to research that), and it is 'my oral evidence' as against 'Hussein's oral evidence' that is still available. This was no oral tradition in the 1950s but very much based on factual data. In 1989 when I wanted to show this case [and a few China files] to the last batch of recruits to the Foreign Service whom I trained in 1989-90, (all Ambassadors now) as examples of the way foreign policy was made but all these files were then missing as I said earlier, sent to Valachanai for recycling; and many were consumed in the bon fires. My narrative to the trainees then became 'oral tradition'!

I followed these events closely with the meticulous interest of the new recruits to the Foreign Service then, and more so, with interest in historical development as former history research student. The Arab protest was heard even in Beijing where I had been posted Third Secretary at the time when an Egyptian diplomat shouted from afar, "Silva,..... You are 'finished'....'finished!'" which attracted the attention of all the guests at a diplomatic National Day reception at the Beijing Hotel. All eyes turned at me and my senior colleague,

A.T. Moorthy and several others close friends came running to me thinking that I had committed a serious diplomatic indiscretion. That should show how Arab emotions ran over the issue.

Voting against Egypt

Hussein seems to place the responsibility for the decision to vote against the admission of Egypt to F.A.O. on Permanent Secretary, Gunasena de Soya but finds it difficult to provide a rationale for his action except to say that the Permanent Secretary had a dislike for the Egyptian Ambassador in Colombo but I doubt if that could be the real cause. Anyway, things ended well as Ambassador Sir Arthur Ranasinghe ignored instructions and voted for Egypt's entry.

One may be right in thinking that though Mr. Bandaranaike was sympathetic to the Jews he may not have wanted on that account to take a policy decision affecting a country like Egypt which had freed itself from the shackles of colonial bondage. I also find it difficult to place at what point of time the decision taken in Mr. Bandaranaike's time to oppose Egypt's entry to F.A.O. took place.

With the landmarks I mentioned in place where would the decision on a vote on Egypt's entry into the F.A.O. fit in? I am puzzled! Mr. Bandaranaike became a very vocal critic of Anglo-British-Israeli aggression in Egypt over the Suez canal take over. That was early in 1957. The Asian Ministers who met in New Delhi selected him as the spokesperson to carry a message from that meeting to New York when he met the British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden on the way and President Eisenhower in Washington. His government's policy towards the Arabs was one of close friendship despite the Israeli affair which may have been a slip.

In this context the vote on Egypt's entry to F.A.O. and its timing presents an enigma. From the response he received from the Arab League over the appointment of Mr. H.A.J. Hulugalle as the first Ambassador to Tel Aviv, which led to his calling off the arrangements, the Prime Minister would have known how damaging a vote against Egypt in the F.A.O. would have meant.

Bandaranaike may have made the initial mistake of being carried away by the British High Commissioner's (Sir Cecil's, as I recall) diplomacy and his own sympathy for the Jews as a people, though not for Zionism, and even considered Israel's image favourably at that time as a Socialist country, but could he or his Permanent Secretary have engaged in anti-Arab policies? It seems to me that Hussein has either simplified things or mixed up the chronological sequence.

Sri Lanka had been admitted to the U.N. at the 1955 autumn session of the General Assembly, just a few months before the General Election. The Suez Canal crisis took place in early part of 1957 on which Mr. Bandaranaike joined Asian leaders to put their collective weight behind Egypt. He had decided to exchange relations with Israel in 1956 soon after he became Prime Minister. So, where does Gunasena de Soya's directive on voting on Egypt fit in? Surely, it is difficult to think that this old generation Civil Servant was not astute enough to have taken such a decision which would have political ramifications without the knowledge of the Prime Minister!

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Role of oral history in understanding Sri Lankan foreign policy

The issue of diplomatic relations with Israel – Part II

trasts with the position taken by the former Permanent Secretary, Gunasena de Soya, a much respected civil servant, a decade earlier to which Hussein referred in his article. Hussein says the Permanent Secretary set aside his professional advice and instructed the Sri Lankan (then Ceylonese) representative at F.A.O., Sir Arthur Ranasinghe, to vote against the admission of Egypt into that body. He thinks it was due to lobbying by Lorché, the very energetic Israeli Charge d'Affaires in Colombo. What is amazing is that according to the sequence of events given by Hussein, the situation he described should have taken place under Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike though he did not place emphasis on that fact and did not give the point of time when that decision on Egypt was made.

This brings me to the point

I presented to G.V.P. Samarasinghe which he used successfully to prevent Mr. J.R. Jayewardene's pressure. Later, my report became the reference document in the Foreign Ministry on the Israeli issue and also formed the knowledge-base for Parliamentary debate. [The document is now not traceable though there was a later reference to it by my colleague Tissa Jayakody and now remains part of 'oral history']. Anyone who read my report could have made use of it to place the responsibility for taking the initiative to open diplomatic relations with Israel on Mr. Bandaranaike. My purpose was only to put things in perspective and argue the point against upgrading diplomatic relations to embassy level. Having known Charge d'Affaires Ramati so closely, I was not blind to see his own ambition to be appointed the first Israeli Ambassador here. He was a very senior skilled diplomat.

Role of British High Commissioner

In discussing the decision to open diplomatic relations with Israel, I depended on official records, notably,



S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike



Sir John



J.R.

into the U.N., be accorded 'official recognition' by the Ceylonese government.

The idea was that as a [new] member of the U.N. Ceylon should accord diplomatic recognition. It seemed unnecessary as both countries were members of that organization. It would then seem going an extra distance to get Israel, the protégé of the British government, some propaganda advantage. Whether the British High Commissioner's initiative was due to a fear that the new government under Mr. Bandaranaike would take a negative position towards Israel was behind this move one cannot say. But, as Hussein says the Prime Minister was a statesman, the only of that kind in the recent political history of the country. At that time, it was also no secret that Israel followed socialist policies in her internal affairs. Our left politicians continued to be sympathetic to Israel. However, the West may have looked at Mr. Bandaranaike with suspicion especially with signs of his government moving away from the Western orbit and getting closer to the Soviet bloc. So, the question of a negative response from the Bandaranaike government, if there was any such, was misplaced. As I say, on the contrary, his government gave a very positive reception to Israel. The opening of the Israeli embassy here cannot be disposed of as due to trickery by the Israeli government in imposing a Charge d'Affaires on Sri Lanka on the Bandaranaike government. (Oral tradition quoted by Hussein).

The evidence I presented was, as I recall, that the British High Commissioner's letter was submitted by the Permanent Secretary to Prime Minister Bandaranaike. I cannot even think of there having been an opportunity to take up the issue with the former U.N.P. government as in the context of the content of the British High Commissioner's letter, it could not have been written when she was not a member of the U.N. The first Prime

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Sri Lanka's admission to the U.N. was made the turning point by the top British diplomat to take up the matter. Our admission to the U.N. was in October 1955, just a few months before the general election in which Sir John Kotalawala's government was defeated and Mr. Bandaranaike's coalition party came to power. Even if it is granted that the Israeli lobby worked so fast during these few months before the election when the U.N.P. was in power, the evidence presented by Mr. Bandaranaike (Hansard) itself would show that the government machine had been understandably, rather slow at that time, preoccupied as it was with mounting opposition to Kotalawala government and international issues like the gross persecution of Buddhists in Vietnam under the Diem regime.

The British High Commissioner's letter provided Mr. Bandaranaike an opportunity [to sympathise with the 'accursed' Jews] and he snatched it. That was a hot issue to make an international impact. I am not blaming him for that. As Hussein says, [and I am yet to examine that matter carefully], he was a statesman who looked at things rather rationally, and sympathetically, to the Jews in this case, whose historical condemnation he much regretted.

I cannot recall having seen any comment from the Political Desk on that occasion. Political desks were virtually non-existent at the time, the Permanent Secretary and his Senior Assistant Secretary (Neville Jansz) being the only interlocutors with the government in taking policy decisions. A such, there was no 'fine-tuned' verification of the British High Commissioner's statement of Israeli help or Ceylon's admission to the U.N. which was given as the reason for the British diplomat's reminder, against such other support received from other countries.

One could then say that the process of our foreign policy making was not well advanced to that extent then; and our new representation at the U.N. was also not sufficiently geared for such inquiry. [It was much later that Ambassador Shirley Amarasinghe picked up a young man from my village, Piyatissa de Silva who had become a documentation officer and gave him local rank of Second Secretary to enable him unimpeded access to the UN Documents Centre].

Sale under Section 4 of the Recovery of Loans by Banks c (Special Provisions) Act No. 4 of 1990

AUCTION SALE BY SEYLAN BANK PLC (KATUNERIYA BRANCH)

VALUABLE RESIDENTIAL/AGRICULTURAL PROPERTY SITUATED WITHIN THE CHILAW PRADESHIYA SABHA LIMITS IN THE VILLAGE OF MANAKKULAMA DIVIDED AND DEFINED ALLOTMENT OF LAND MARKED LOT 1C2 DEPICTED IN PLAN NO. 3070B DATED 28/06/2000 MADE BY M M P DUNSTAN PERERA LICENSED SURVEYOR OUT OF THE LAND CALLED 'MANAKKULAMAKELLE WATTA' TOGETHER WITH EVERYTHING ELSE STANDING THEREON IN EXTENT 74.6 PERCHES.

Property secured to Seylan Bank PLC for the facilities granted to BULATHSINHALAGE NIHAL KRISHANTHA KUMAR PERERA of Nattandiya as Obligor.

Access to Property:- Proceed from Katuneriya along Negombo-Puttalam highway towards Chilaw pass 68th K.M. Post travel 500 meters turn right to Madagoda Road travel about 2 K.M. to Manakkulama and turn left to road leading to Kakkawila and further 600 meters to reach the subject property on to the right.

I SHALL SELL BY PUBLIC AUCTION THE PROPERTY DESCRIBED ABOVE ON 4TH JUNE 2008 AT 10.30 A.M. AT THE SPOT

For Notice of Resolution refer the Govt. Gazette of 22/02/2008 and Daily Mirror, Lankadeepa of 12.02.2008, Veerakesari dated 21/02/2008. For Notice of sale refer the Govt. Gazette of 23/05/2008.

Mode of Payment:-

- 10% of the Purchase Price at the fall of the Hammer
- Balance 90% of the Purchase Price within 30 working days of the sale.
- 1% (ONE PERCENT) Local Sale Tax to the Local Authority
- Auctioneer's commission of 2 1/2% (TWO AND A HALF PERCENT) of the Sale Price
- 50% of the total cost of Advertising
- Clerk and criers wages Rs. 500/-
- Notary Attestation fees for conditions of sale Rs. 2000/-

Title Deeds and other connected Documents may be inspected from the AGM (Property Unit) Seylan Bank PLC, 12th Floor, Ceylincro Seylan Towers, No. 90, Galle, Road, Colombo 03. Tel. 011-2456285, 011-4701000, 011-2456275, 077-773645

I. W. JAYASURIYA

Court Commissioner Auctioneer State and Commercial Banks
No. 83/5, Bomaluwa Road, Watapuluwa, Kandy
Tel/Fax: 081-2211025, 071-4755974