

## MALDIVES

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#### **GEORGE G. B. GRIFFIN** **Desk Officer, Ceylon and the Maldives** **Washington, DC (1967-1969)**

*George G.B. Griffin was born in Turkey in 1934. He graduated with a BA from the University of South Carolina in 1957, and served in the U.S. Navy as a lieutenant overseas from 1957 to 1959. After entering the Foreign Service in 1959, his postings abroad have included Naples, Colombo, Calcutta, Islamabad, Lahore, Kathmandu, Kabul, Lagos, Seoul, Nairobi and Milan. Mr. Griffin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.*

*Q: Well then in about '67...*

GRIFFIN: No, 1966. In June again, a year after I came to the Op Center, I went to NEA as Desk Officer for Ceylon and the Maldivian Islands. That was of course the way political officers were supposed to progress; start out as a desk officer or as a political reporter abroad. It was a good job. At least I knew something about it. That was also about the time when the idea of cones was invented. Until then, most of us were generalists. I was summoned to Personnel, where Dave Zweifel and Dennis Kux told me I would make a lousy political officer. Why didn't I become an admin officer or consular officer? I said, "Huh? My bosses say I am doing great work. What do you mean?" What they meant was they needed people in those other cones, and there were too many who wanted to be political officers. So they tried to talk everybody out of it. That just made me want to stick with it. They said, "The competition is fierce." I said, "That doesn't bother me," and I did stick with it.

In any case the function of a desk officer then became apparent. I got to coordinate activities between the bureau and the embassy and to handle our relations with those two countries. I also worked part time on India. When I arrived, SOA was an office within NEA covering India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives. Carol Laise was the Director. Ray Hare was

Assistant Secretary. He was succeeded a few months before I left in 1967 by Luke Battle. David Schneider was the Deputy in the office and worked mostly on India. Dave had a little test for new officers in SOA. It was a little delicately balanced toy on the corner of a table in Carol's office. The rule was that anyone who knocked it over had to put it back together during the course of the staff meeting. Of course, he made sure that the new guy sat next to it and was jostled to knock the damned thing down. It was impossible to put it back during the meeting because others kept asking me questions – a little hazing.

My immediate boss was Carl Coon, who was the chief political officer for India. Mary Olmsted was the chief economic officer for most of my time. It was a good team, and we worked together well. I was there for two years. When Carol left, her position was elevated to deputy assistant secretary, and the office was split in two. One office – INS – covered India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Sikkim, and Bhutan. The other – PAB – did Pakistan and Afghanistan. The first Director of INS was Doug Heck. His soon-to-be wife, Ernestine Sherman, came in as a secretary. She had I believe, passed the Foreign Service exam.

*Q: She was a Foreign Service officer.*

GRIFFIN: Not at first. She wasn't even a reserve officer because she was given a temporary job as a secretary. She did become an FSO and, later, was Consul General in Madras. Anyway, one of my more interesting chores was dealing with the Maldives, the chain of atolls south of Sri Lanka. While I was stationed in Colombo I wanted to visit there, partly to check it out for a potential Peace Corps job, but the British wouldn't allow it. There was unrest in the Southern Maldives on Gan Atoll, where the British had a strategic air base. They didn't want anyone else coming in and provoking the Maldivians. I was also interested in deep sea fishing, and knew it was good there. I had a friend who asked me about establishing a fishing resort, but the British wouldn't hear of it, though some Maldivians were delighted with the idea. However, the idea of flying from the U.S. to go fishing in the Maldives would have taken some doing and lots of money in the early days of jet travel.

Anyway, the Maldivians knew the British would give them independence. When that happened they turned their office in Colombo into their lone foreign mission. The population of the islands at that time was less than 100,000. After awhile, they decided that they needed a presence at the UN in New York. They also wanted to set up an embassy in Washington, where the ambassador would be dually accredited to the United Nations. They immediately ran into a buzz saw in Protocol and on the Seventh Floor, where they were told they couldn't have an ambassador dually accredited to the United Nations and to Washington. They said, "Why not?" pointing out our that our Ambassador in Colombo is dually accredited to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. They got a fuzzy answer, and went ahead with their plans.

Abdul Sattar was sent out as Ambassador, but he had almost no money. It was really sad. He had never been outside of the Maldivian Islands in his life, except twice to Colombo, and once to Mongolia for a United Nations conference. He had a good story about that. As Minister for Fisheries and Economic Development, he went to a UN-sponsored conference in Ulan Bator. He said all he could see was dirt. Where he came from, you see mostly water. He was quite astonished. At one point he said he got tired of the conference, and decided to go shopping for

presents for his family. So he went down the street until he saw some dolls in a window which he thought would be nice for his daughter. He went inside, and was soon overwhelmed by hospitality, even though neither side spoke the other's language, so it was all sign language. Finally, he walked away with two or three dolls, which they wouldn't let him pay for. He said he thought, okay, this is Mongolian hospitality and they are trying to be nice to the UN. So he asked his Intourist handler, his minder, to go back and pay for them. The minder quickly discovered that Abdul had walked into a private house. There were no curio shops in downtown Ulan Bator at that time. The people had just given him the dolls, and insisted that he keep them. After returning home, he sent them some Maldivian kites. Some of them are quite fancy, as almost everyone competes in that national pastime.

That is when I first got enmeshed in real estate in Washington. A friend who was an agent helped us find a run-down house on R Street off Massachusetts Avenue and got it fixed up to the point that they could tolerate it. One thing many South Asians don't understand and don't like about American houses is bathtubs. They aren't used to them; they like showers. The house didn't have a shower, but I managed to find some hardware and rigged up one. Similarly, in New York where the prices were even higher than Washington, they managed to find an apartment close to the UN. But that experiment didn't last long because the Maldivian Government really was strapped for money. Eventually they shut the Washington Embassy, but kept a toehold in New York for General Assembly meetings.

Sattar told me another funny story. At the time, Maldivians essentially lived off of fishing. The national sport was kite flying, and the national recreation was swinging. Their swings are large and lavishly decorated. They sell most of the sea catch to Ceylon in the form of dried fish, called Maldive fish, which they dry by spreading the fish on beaches for months. After it rots to a certain degree, they crumble it up. It's used as a condiment for curries in Sri Lanka. It's very pungent, but is pretty tasty stuff.

When I was in Colombo, the Maldivian merchant marine consisted of five ships, mostly coastal steamers, which brought fish to Colombo, and a couple of larger ships which sailed as far as Bombay, Karachi, Singapore, and so forth. Then all of a sudden the merchant fleet expanded, and one day they had 15 ships. Now they may have 60 – I don't know. Anyway, a huge expansion for a country with almost no money. So I asked Sattar about it over lunch one day. He giggled and said, "Piracy." I asked him to explain. He pointed out that the Maldivian archipelago sits squarely on a direct line between Singapore and the Suez Canal. Any ship that tries to go straight can run into one of the atolls, especially careless sailors. Some of them are under water, but very close to the surface. He said the first time it happened, a Norwegian ship came barreling along and ran aground. Some of the natives went out in their canoes to take a look. The skipper asked if there was a tugboat nearby. They told him no, but added that the ship wasn't so badly aground that it couldn't float off at high tide in about 12 hours. They advised him to relax until then, and invited him to come ashore and have a cup of tea with the island's headman. When the captain agreed, they suggested that he bring along everyone; they would have a feast. So, the whole crew clambered down a ladder and were rowed ashore in the little boats. But meanwhile, on the other side of the ship, a group of men was climbing onto the ship. They commandeered it, and said it belonged to them because it had been abandoned. They hoisted a Maldivian flag, and

put the captain under house arrest for a few days before allowing him and his men to fly home. Sattar said that was just the beginning.

Mrs. Bandaranaike's Government in Sri Lanka was a coalition, in which one of the more powerful parties was the LSSP, a Trotskyite party. Its head, Dr. N. M. Perera, was expelled from the Fourth International for joining the coalition. When I was Desk Officer, he and several other politicians who had never been to the U.S. were offered an IVP grant. The delegation included the Deputy Prime Minister, James Obeyesekere, his wife, who was a Senator, and Sam Wijesinghe, the Clerk of the House of Representatives – a big political figure in Colombo. I was asked to be escort officer because I knew all of them. They first came to Washington, and then I went with them to New York. After that, we went to Puerto Rico to show them that we had tropical islands like theirs. Then to New Orleans, the Grand Canyon, Disneyland, and San Francisco. They went on to Hawaii, but I didn't go along. Obeyesekere kept asking me when we were going to a Playboy Club. When he heard about that, my boss Doug Heck told me he was a member, and gave me his card. He said, "If you find one, take him to it." I never did find one, but we did go to a topless show in the North Beach section of San Francisco, which the men thoroughly enjoyed. Even Mrs. Obeyesekere went and declared it fascinating and fun.

*Q: Such is diplomacy.*

GRIFFIN: Yes, and they were quite impressed by the U.S. You may have heard of Briggs Cunningham, who won several Le Mans races in France. James Obeyesekere had raced a few cars, and was the first man to fly solo from England to Ceylon. So, I lined up a visit to Cunningham's classic automobile museum in Long Beach, California, where Obeyesekere and I drove fabulous cars for a day.

*Q: Okay. One question. Where did Colombo or Sri Lanka stand in the Cold War context of that period?*

GRIFFIN: It was one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, and not much liked in Washington for that reason. Ambassador Willis had a tough time trying to maintain decent relations and an AID program because they were not friendly to us at the UN. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike's husband, was one of the founders of the Movement and she stayed on the same course, as did most other Ceylonese politicians. So, no, they weren't much loved here.

Another vignette. Cecil Lyon left, and it was a sad departure. He had expected another assignment, but didn't get one. He happened to be on his second visit to the Maldives on a U.S. Navy warship when he got the news. Washington wanted access to the Maldives for use as a refueling station, mostly for Persian Gulf activities. We focused on the British strategic air base at Gan, the predecessor of what they have now in Diego Garcia. But the Maldivian Government's policy was a ban on visits by nuclear vessels, or those with nuclear weapons. At about that time, the nuclear powered USNS Savannah was sailing around the world trying to make the point that it was not dangerous. The Maldivians weren't very impressed. They were hewing to the Non-Aligned line. We searched for a way to say that, if we sought clearance for a ship visit, it would not be for one that carried nuclear weapons. But we wouldn't make a specific

declaration, and hoped they wouldn't ask. They said no; they must have a declaration. We said we couldn't do that, because as a matter of principle we neither confirmed nor denied the existence of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world. Ambassador Lyon invited their leaders aboard a Middle East Force destroyer, and gave them exhaustive tours from top to bottom. He argued that they could see it didn't carry nuclear weapons. But while we would not state that, we would never embarrass them. That was as far as we were willing to go. They finally bought it in principle.

**ALBERT A. THIBAUT, JR.**  
**Desk Officer, Sri Lanka and Maldives**  
**Washington, DC (1975-1978)**

*Albert A. Thibault, Jr. was born in Massachusetts on August 5, 1941. He received his BA from the University of Windsor in Canada in 1962, his MA from the University of Toronto in 1963, and another MA from the University of Pennsylvania in 1964. He entered the Foreign Service in 1969. His career has included positions in Guinea, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia.*

*Q: Well then, you came back in '75.*

THIBAUT: That's right, I came back in '75 and spent a few weeks on the Iran desk. The only thing I remember about that is Charlie Naas, who was the office director, called me in, welcomed me, and pointed to my desk. I was only there while they were scurrying around to place me elsewhere in NEA. And he immediately said, "Well, you'll be working on ...," I forget what it was. I said, "I know nothing about Iran." He paused and looked me in the eye, saying, "You're an FSO, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." He said, "End of discussion." He was right. That brief exchange told me instantly what being a U.S. Foreign Service officer is all about, including esprit de corps. I have never forgotten it.

After that then I went, as I mentioned before, to be desk officer for Sri Lanka in what was then and now is still known as INS, the Office of India, Nepal, Sri Lanka Affairs in the then NEA. Today it's in SA, the Bureau of South Asian Affairs.

*Q: Were you it for*

THIBAUT: For Sri Lanka and the Maldives. I should have mentioned the Maldives. I never made it to the Maldives when I was stationed there but the ambassador in Colombo was also accredited to the Maldives.

*Q: Well then, you were doing this for how long?*

THIBAUT: In INS? I was there for three years, 'til '78. I was two years desk officer for Sri Lanka, one year as political officer for India and then I went into Hindi language training for a year at FSI prior to being assigned to New Delhi.

*Q: During this '75 to '78 period. In the first place, had this become Sri Lanka?*

THIBAULT: Just trying to think. I believe it did, I believe it did. That's the traditional name of the country. Ceylon was the foreign name.

*Q: Was there anything that happened? Were you getting 26 page reports there that got you all excited?*

THIBAULT: The major issue there was grappling with the Zone of Peace concept that aimed at regulating, i.e. constraining, non-littoral naval presence and activities in the Indian Ocean, including the right of free passage. Understandably, this notion was anathema to our Navy. It became a real irritant, because it was not only a Sri Lankan notion. It had been, if I recall correctly, initiated by Mrs. Bandaranaike but it was very much picked up by India and by all the countries of the littoral who made it a centerpiece of their regional policy, recalling how the USS Enterprise had sailed into the Bay of Bengal to apply pressure on India during its 1970 war with Pakistan. It was a constant point of friction between ourselves and the Sri Lankans. Those were the days when the Soviets had a base, we thought a naval base, in Somalia at a place called Berbera and there was a lot of dire thinking about the Soviets, how they were expanding their presence in the Indian Ocean. That was sort of the grand issue, the one issue in which Sri Lanka could claim higher level attention. I recall it involving a lot of interaction with the PM Bureau, the IO Bureau (because much of this was played out in the UN environment,) and with the Pentagon. Otherwise, there was the routine work of the desk officer. A lot of managing of visitors, for example, the PL-480 program, the sort of briefing memos on military assistance or at least military relationships, briefing a new Ambassador for his nomination hearings, you just name it. But I don't recall any sort of glowing moment at that time.

*Q: I would image this Sea of Peace Zone of Peace Zone of Peace wouldn't even get the time of day from, particularly the American Navy.*

THIBAULT: Oh, the Pentagon was very concerned about this. If it was ever adopted and implemented then it would have severely limited our ability to deploy in the Indian Ocean. And of course, as I mentioned, it reflected a hostility to U.S. Navy operations in the Indian Ocean and had some impact on our ability to access ports, to have joint exercises with local navies, and to develop navy to navy relations.

*Q: Well how did we, the Navy of course, and rightly so, immediately goes into extreme defensive mode when it comes to anything that would limit its ability.*

THIBAULT: Exactly, and so there was a lot of pressure on the Department to counter this. A lot of the action took place at the United Nations and in various UN fora so that the concept wouldn't gain traction. Coordinating with our allies as well and keeping an eye on what the Russians were up to, the Soviets were up to, in the Indian Ocean. So I certainly don't recall ever twiddling my thumbs or having nothing to do, as we were always very busy. But, as I say, I can't recall the specific details of individual issues.

*Q: Did you get very much involved in Indian affairs?*

THIBAULT: I was backup officer for the India desk but was not directly involved until I became desk officer, political officer for India, it was called. I took that job in '77. I had come back to Washington in January '75. So '75 'til '77 and '77 to '78 I was desk officer, and then I went into Hindi language training prior to assignment to Delhi. The India desk was a higher profile job.

**TERESITA C. SCHAFFER**  
**Ambassador, Sri Lanka and Maldives**  
**Sri Lanka (1992-1995)**

*Ambassador Schaffer was born in New York and later educated in France. She received her undergraduate degree from Bryn Mawr College and joined the Foreign Service. Her Foreign Service career took her to Israel, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Ambassador Schaffer was interviewed by Thomas Stern in September 1998.*

*Q: In 1992, you were appointed US Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. First of all is there any affinity between Sri Lanka and the Maldives?*

SCHAFFER: The Maldives is a country consisting of a 1,000 islands -- 1,000 miles from anywhere. In 1992, there were about 250,000 people living on those islands. We had established diplomatic relations with the Maldives in the mid-1960s, but neither country felt that maintaining a resident embassy in the other made any sense. From the very beginning, our ambassador in Colombo also became our emissary to the Maldives. In general, most of the diplomats in Colombo were also accredited to the Maldives. The embassies in Colombo were the nearest diplomatic institutions to the Maldives.

The Maldives have a very interesting approach to the management of their foreign policy. It has tried to avoid having any "special" relationship with any other state, even those that might be "close" by. It is on good terms with all of its "neighbors." The only countries that maintain resident embassies in Male' are Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and now Bangladesh. All four of these countries send a substantial amount of labor to the Maldives -- teachers, hotel workers, etc. The Maldives maintains only two embassies: in Colombo and at the UN in New York.

My appointment was announced in early May; the confirmation hearings were in late May; I was sworn in in late August and arrived in Colombo on October 1. So the journey took about eleven months, which is about average. Other countries find our system bizarre, but that is the result of our "checks and balances" system.

The confirmation hearings went very smoothly. Only one or two Senators showed up; I was being interviewed along with Kenton Keith, who I believe was being proposed for the UAE.

After confirmation, I attended the ambassadorial course. I had taken it before -- as the spouse of the ambassador-designate to Bangladesh. The first time, David Newsom and Shirley Temple Black were the majordomos of the course. It is hard to imagine two more different personalities. The second time the co-chairs were Tony Motley and Brandon Grove, who at the time was the Director of FSI. Both were superb. The content of the course had evolved over the years; so it was somewhat different from the one I went to as an ambassadorial spouse in 1984 -- not radically, but somewhat. The course's main effort is to explore the meaning of leadership, both conceptually and in practical terms. This has been its focus since the beginning and was true in 1992 as well as later when I was the co-chair with Motley while serving as the Director of FSI. I might note that Motley is still co-chairing the course. We heard from a lot of people representing other agencies and many parts of the Department, particularly areas with which the putative ambassadors may not have had an opportunity to become acquainted. I found it extremely useful and it was an excellent preparation for my ambassadorial assignment.

My predecessor in Colombo was Marion Creekmore, whom I knew well and had worked with for quite a while. Creekmore's DCM was Don Westmore; they both left at the same time, which I think is under normal circumstances a terrible practice. They had both arrived at the same time and left at the same time after three years of service. Before I left Washington, I picked Steve Mann to be my DCM. My choice raised a lot of eyebrows. I have long believed that ambassadors should not pick clones of themselves, but should select DCMs who bring some different strengths to the post. I was an area specialist; the Embassy Political Counselor, Bob Boggs, was also an area specialist. Therefore I did not look for a DCM who had area expertise. I was looking for someone who had had overseas management experience since that was the area in which I had little experience. I was also looking for someone to whom I could turn for advice on subjects that I did not know well. Initially, I was very interested in John Holzman, who is now our Ambassador in Dhaka; at the time he was completing a tour as DCM in one of the West African countries. John had had a substantial experience in South Asia and told me that he would be interested in the Colombo assignment. He was a splendid officer, but in looking at the issue a little more closely, I had to reach the conclusions that his bio looked very much like mine. He was an economic officer, an expert on South Asia; furthermore, I was receiving mixed signals. He had family reasons to prefer a Washington assignment.

So in the end, I decided to ask John whether he preferred to become the Pakistan Country Director; that interested him greatly and I needed to fill that key job with an outstanding officer. That took care of John. I then interviewed people on the list of DCM candidates prepared by the Office of Personnel. I decided that Steve Mann was my choice; he was technically a consular officer, although he had spent much of his career in other fields. I had never met him before the interview. I knew that he had opened two posts: Mongolia and Micronesia. He appeared to me to have the necessary people-skills; he had experiences in those fields that I didn't know very well; he had run posts where the support services were minimal. He had no South Asia experience at all.

We were both interested in ideas. I had the impression, which turned out to be correct, that he would be willing to bring me bad news, if that was necessary. I think that attribute is essential in a DCM. An ambassador faces the ever-present danger of being insulated from what is really going on. I had been aware of this danger, but it was really brought home by the ambassadors'



course. Both Motley and Grove emphasized that an ambassador must be served by people who will tell him or her things that may not be popular or well received. No ambassador can afford to be caught unaware when problems arise. Brandon used to say: "You have to have a psychological contract with your DCM so that you will level with each other, but at the same time, you function as one as far as the Embassy and the host country is concerned." I used the same phraseology when I co-chaired the ambassadors' course later.

I discussed this issue with all of the people I interviewed because this bond was very important to me. In fact, Mann and I had a very good relationship; we leveled with each other and made a good team. The Embassy in 1992 had about sixty direct American employees; by the time I left, there were about ten fewer.

My vision of the DCM job was that of managing the mission -- that is assuring that it was pulling together toward common objectives. This was particularly important in Sri Lanka where many US government agencies were represented -- AID, VOA, DoD, USIA and the intelligence community. For example, we were building a "Voice of America" transmitter; that required the presence of two independent sections of the "Voice" -- the engineers building the new facility and the radio people who were managing the existing facility.

Without diminishing the role of the Administrative Counselor, I expected Steve to pay close attention to the Embassy's administrative functions. In the case of our Embassy in Colombo, quite often the Administrative Counselor was outranked by several of the representatives of other agencies. AID for example still had a relatively large mission in Sri Lanka and the Mission director certainly outranked the Administrative Counselor. So it was useful to have the DCM fully cognizant of the major admin issues; he could influence the representatives of other agencies as the Admin Counselor could not.

I also expected Steve to be my understudy/alter ego on political and economic issues. When it became apparent that we would be entering into an active negotiation for a new country-to-country agreement for the Voice of America, I assigned that to him. He became the principal negotiator. Others were of course involved, particularly the VOA staff, but he was the head honcho on this negotiations. I was held in reserve to be brought to bear if the negotiations ran into some heavy seas.

I was not surprised by anything I found in Colombo, having been involved in the various issues from my Washington perch. Since I had known that I might be assigned to Colombo since Nov. 1991, I had ample opportunity to pay attention to what was going on there and to prepare myself for this assignment. I should say that in Washington, Sri Lanka is primarily of interest to the desk officer. In my days, and even now, the Bureau's front office paid relatively infrequent attention to Sri Lankan matters. Only if a crisis arose or if our Ambassador was in town, would the front office focus on Sri Lanka. I don't remember Kelly ever going to Sri Lanka, partially because he was so preoccupied with the Gulf War that he didn't have time to visit countries not involved in that matter. The Department's leadership may have focused on Sri Lanka perhaps twice per year. VOA did pay attention to Sri Lanka, not only because of the station, but also because it covered internal developments there.

Let me just briefly cover the activities of the other agencies. I have already mentioned VOA and its activities. AID had about 12-14 Americans when I arrived to administer an assistance program of about \$12-14 million, mostly technical assistance, as was true for most aid programs. AID was working on financial sector reforms -- working with the stock market to increase its efficiency; it assisted some environmental efforts on the west coast to stem erosion and with some environmental co-ops in one of the major water-sheds. We had provided major assistance to developmental projects in the Mahaweli River basin which is the major river in Sri Lanka, used for major irrigation schemes for the last 1500 years. By the time I got to Colombo, we were still marginally involved in an international effort to assist in the further development of that basin. We did nothing in the fields of family planning or health, largely because of Sri Lanka's extraordinary record in these areas. They had already done a lot of what AID was working on in other countries.

When I arrived, we also had a substantial food aid program -- PL 480. Sri Lanka was a food deficit country -- had been so for many years.

Now for VOA. It had had a transmitting station in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) since 1951. It beamed programs throughout the area. The one that was functioning when I first arrived was not very powerful. VOA wanted to build a more powerful one that could reach further; it was to be built in a different location. After much delay and discussion, the Sri Lanka government had offered a site which was about two hours by road north from Colombo on the coast. But this offer had been politically controversial from the beginning, largely because the groups not in the government used this facility-to-be as a part of their anti-American politics. The Indian government, while negotiating their peace-keeping role in 1987, made the Sri Lankans sign an annex to the agreement which would committed them to not allow any broadcasting from its territory which would be anti-Indian. This document was widely interpreted as an anti-VOA action, although we chose not to interpret it that way by declaring that VOA was in no sense anti-Indian, which was correct. India has always been very sensitive about the interference -- actual or perceived -- of foreign powers in South Asian affairs. This annex was a manifestation of this concern. The book by a former Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka in 1987 makes it eminently clear that India was absolutely driven by a concern that Sri Lanka would become too closely aligned with the U.S.; that, in the Indian view, would have been quite contrary to the Indian interests. The VOA broadcasts was just another manifestation of this concern.

Both the U.S. and Sri Lanka saw the construction of a new transmitter as an opportunity to update the country-to-country operating agreement -- something that had already been done two or three times before. This was not an agreement that focused on the new transmitter primarily, but merely an update of an existing agreement; there was a new feature because the new facility was going to be both transmitting and receiving -- the latter being a new feature not covered by the existing agreement.

But most of the issues were entirely straightforward and not contentious at all -- such things as continued Sri Lankan sovereignty over the site, access to the site, conditions under which employees of the U.S. government would operate, etc. There was no argument about these matters.

More difficult were the questions about compensation. There had always been an understanding that the site then in use would revert to Sri Lanka once the new site was operational. But there had been a clause in a prior agreement which to the best of my recollection said that the U.S. government would give Sri Lanka the surplus broadcasting equipment -- or its equivalent. We tried to negotiate an equivalent compensation package. VOA of course was trying to spend the minimum necessary to complete the new agreement. This part of the draft agreement took a long time to work out; it was further complicated by the fact that the Sri Lanka was somewhat reluctant to announce a new VOA agreement at a time when various opposition figures were using VOA as the symbol of all evil.

Sri Lanka had always had a very important political left. It claimed that new station was really a new method to communicate with U.S. submarines. Further opposition came from an unexpected source. The new site was in an area heavily populated by Catholics. The Catholic Church was a curious amalgam of exceedingly conservative theology -- somewhat akin to the American Church up to the 1960s -- and radical politics. So there were Catholic politicians who belonged to one of Sri Lanka's most conservative parties -- the UNP -- which was in power at the time. There were a substantial number of Catholics -- both in the clergy and in the laity -- who were very sensitive to the charge that because they were Christians they were foreign to Sri Lanka. There were clergymen who, either because they were leftists or because they wanted to show their Sri Lankan *bone fides*, looked for opportunities to wrap themselves in the national flag.

Unfortunately for us, the then Bishop of Chilaw, who was responsible for the Catholic souls in the area of the new VOA site, was one of these clergymen. He took a very strident position in opposition to the VOA project, charging not only that it was to be a communication station to submarines, but that it would spread AIDS and immorality among the youth of Chilaw and Iranavela, the actual site of the VOA facility.

When I arrived, this political issue was a very hot subject, widely discussed in the newspapers. Our negotiations were obviously being slowed down by an increasingly nervous Sri Lankan government. As I said, our main negotiator became Steve Mann, but I wanted to be as supportive as necessary. In that role, I wanted to call on the Bishop. He sent word that he wouldn't receive me. I made one attempt, through the Papal Nuncio -- a Frenchman who had studied in the same Institute in Paris where I had also spent a year; he tested the waters and then advised me not to bother. The Bishop was not about to let go of an issue which was bringing so many headlines. That was the end of my efforts; I was not about to continue to beg for something that was not going to happen.

*End of reader*