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Volume 1

ORAL HISTORY RECORD
Of
AMBASSADOR ERIC GONSALVES

Interview Conducted
By
Ambassador Kishan S. Rana in 2010

Indian Council of World Affairs
Sapru House, New Delhi

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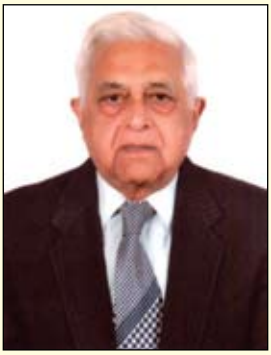
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



Name	:	Ambassador Eric Gonsalves
Date of Birth	:	9th May, 1928
Education	:	B.Sc. (Chemistry Hons.), Madras University
Joined IFS	:	24th May, 1950
Languages	:	Spanish (compulsory), French, German (optional)

Main appointments:

Oct. 1952 to Sept. 1953	Private Secretary to MEA Secretary General
Sept 1953 to Jan 1955	Second Secretary, NNRC, Korea
March 1954 to Aug. 1955	Vice Consul, Consulate General, New York
Aug. 1955 to Aug. 1958	Second Secretary and First Secretary, High Commission, London

Oct. 1958 to Dec. 1961	Deputy Secretary (Establishment), MEA
Feb.1962 to Dec. 1964	First Secretary, Indian Embassy, Rangoon
Jan 1965 to March 1968	Counsellor (Establishment), High Commission, London
June 1968 to Jan.1972	Director (Administration), Joint Secretary (South), MEA
March 1972 to June 1975	Minister(Political), Indian Embassy, Washington DC
July 1975 to June 1978	Ambassador of India, Tokyo
June 1978 to July 1979	Additional Secretary (Asia), MEA
June 1979 to July 1982	Secretary (East), MEA
Aug. 1982 to May 1986	Ambassador of India to Belgium and to the EEC and Luxembourg

After retirement he had served as Director of India International Centre, Delhi from 1986-91, as Director of Asian Relations Commemorative Conference, 1987. He was also a Member of International Observer Group, Sri Lanka Elections 1989-94 and Member in Board of Management MAHE (now Manipal University) from 1994 to 2006. He was the President of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, till April, 2008.

Currently, he is serving as the Member of Governing Body, Centre for Policy Research, Delhi and is the Convenor Indian Delegation BCIM (Bangladesh China India Myanmar) Forum.

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Early Life of the Ambassador

Interviewer: Thank you very much Ambassador Eric Gonsalves for agreeing to this oral history interview. Can we begin with the earliest part of your career i.e. your- recruitment, the early experiences of your training and your very first assignments?

Amb. Eric Gonsalves: Recruitment was not very different from today. There was a written examination followed by an interview. (After my retirement I had been invited to serve on the UPSC Interview Board and I found the procedure archaic and even more bureaucratic.) In my time the eligible age was changed and we found out that we were eligible to give the exam a few months before it was scheduled to take place. There was no reason for us not to try as we would have two more chances for which we could prepare better. So we took it rather lightly.

I had just graduated from an Honours course in Chemistry and two of us from the same class decided to take up French and British History. The gamble paid off as there were few candidates for French and we topped the History class. From my college class of 14 that year, six of us made it to the IAS. Some 30 years later, four of us served together as Secretaries to the Government, and three of us lived as close neighbours on Pandara Road.

When we went to seek guidance from our predecessors, we were warned about the Interview Board and their sadistic desire to trip up young aspirants. In fact, the only thing that the Chairman of the Interview Board had asked me was why I had put the IFS as my first choice. Was it because I wanted to have a good time abroad or was it because I was unwilling to serve under corrupt provincial governments? I was not able to answer. Discretion is undoubtedly the better part of valour.

Our training was still evolving then. I was part of the second batch recruited after Independence. The IAS officers with whom we trained in what is

now called the 'Foundation Course' were able to use what had been used for the ICS. But for the IFS, the course had to be developed. In fact, books on how to run Embassies and Foreign Offices are now being written more than 60 years after we had started our careers. Those in charge felt we needed a modicum of grounding in Indian studies. So, professors from Delhi University were lined up to teach us the basics of geography, history and Indian civilisation and culture.

It was nothing like the structured courses now available in the academies and training institutes. After two months of this initiation we were sent off to get the patina of a classic British University, as had been done in the ICS. This meant spending an academic year in Cambridge or Oxford (in my case Cambridge). We were not expected to do any specific academic course or pass any exam. It was really about experiencing the world, meeting a variety of people and exchanging different views.

I was very fortunate to get two excellent tutors at Cambridge – one an economist and the other a historian – who sent me to a whole lot of tutorials, classes and lectures. Students of my generation in India were interested in almost everything. But the extra-curricular activities at Cambridge were a revelation and a delight in broadening one's vision and enabling one to make and keep friends from across the spectrum.

During the Christmas vacation two of my friends invited me to their home to spend Christmas and New Year with their families. This is when everything was rationed. By the Easter vacation my tutor had got me invitations to visit some of the new industrial plants. I did so by hitch hiking across Britain as I could not afford the rail fare.

We were also given a brief course on how the Foreign Office was run. The course was for about two months and new probationers from India, Pakistan and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) were the guinea pigs. The British did not dislike training, but they had a firm belief that you got most of it on the job learning from your superiors. So we learnt little and anyhow it was summer and there were so many other attractions in London that we had only read about!

The next part was language training. Again this was like learning to swim by being thrown in into the deep end. I learnt Spanish by living with a Spanish family where no one spoke anything but Spanish. In fact, during this period I spoke nothing but Spanish as I met people who spoke English only once or twice a week. At the end of six to seven months by dint of sheer necessity I was beginning to speak some colloquial Spanish. I must say that my tutor and my landlady did an excellent job. By the end of my stay when I went for trips around Spain, people used to ask me which part of Spain I came from as they could not place the accent. I still remember a heated argument in a local bar during which I suddenly realised that I was thinking in Spanish and not translating from English.

When we got back to Delhi we were supposed to become familiar with the work in various divisions of the Ministry. We were supposed to be attached to Under Secretaries to learn how they handled their work. This lasted for a few months during which I believe I got some idea of administration and accounts. However, as there was a severe shortage of Under Secretaries, we were asked to fill the gaps and deal with the files rather than be taught how to do it. I was temporarily given charge of Under Secretary (UK). This included the whole British Empire, which in 1952 was quite extensive. I did so badly or so well that after six months they made me Private Secretary to the Secretary General. This was another learning experience. If there was training on the job I certainly got it.

Interviewer: Can you say a little more about what happened at the British Foreign Office during the three months you spent there?

Amb. Eric Gonsalves: The British Foreign Office course was arranged during the height of the summer season. It was intended for the new ex-colonials from South Asia i.e. Indians, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans (Ceylonese as they were then). They marched us through a series of lectures by not very distinguished retired diplomats which were quite boring. They took us to some Divisions in the Foreign Office to give us an idea of how they worked and allowed us to study some old files. At that stage, the British did not have in place the admirable training systems that they have now evolved, which cover different periods of the career

and also brought out latent talent and stream officers to optimise specific abilities. I have a god son who is fast rising up the ladder in the British Foreign Service and from what he tells me and from what I learnt while giving evidence before two Commissions to reform the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, they have moved light years from the past.

At that time it was an old boys' network where the family was important and the right course at the right university with a facility with languages provided almost certain entry. Thereafter, the same network and on-the-job training was considered sufficient. To tell you the truth I skipped a lot of those classes. Being in London during the summer, we had so many other things to do. We could get into Wimbledon for almost nothing, we could go to the theatre or the opera, we could visit friends outside London. I felt that the time was not wasted.

Interviewer: Would you like to speak about your experiences working with the Secretary General, which was obviously an extremely informative period?

Amb. Eric Gonsalves: At that time the Ministry had been in existence for about five years. The first Secretary General, Girja Shankar Bajpai had moved to Bombay as Governor. The second Secretary General was a man of a very different mould. N.R. Pillai had worked in India in the Finance and Commerce pool. He had become Commerce Secretary in his 40's and was appointed India's first Cabinet Secretary at the time of Independence. In accordance with the British tradition that we kept, he also became the senior-most civil servant in the Government of India. At that time the GOI was so small that everyone was housed in large rooms in North and South Blocks. There were about 15 or 16 Secretaries to the Government, three of whom happened to be in the Ministry of External Affairs.

The Ministry of External Affairs worked under the Prime Minister. Every file that went to the Prime Minister would come back the next morning. Secretaries, some Joint Secretaries, and even one Deputy Secretary would submit them directly to the P.M. On their return they were routed through the Secretary General for his information, and landed on my desk. Deciphered telegrams were also distributed every morning. If the Secretary

General wanted to we would keep our own file but that was rarely done. The paper trail we inherited from our predecessors was superb and almost any file could be traced and submitted in short order. A private secretary's job is to control the files (move them in and out, keep them and submit them at the right time), control the boss's time-making appointments and arranging meetings etc.

N.R. Pillai was not at all demanding, and anyhow in those days senior civil servants used their own cars, furnished their own houses and arranged their own leisure. Official entertainment was done by the Protocol Division mainly at Hyderabad House. The Prime Minister's hospitality was arranged at the Rashtrapati Bhavan or rarely at Teen Murti House.

One early lesson was the effectiveness of the collegiate nature of decision making that operated at that time, and which has been lost with time and the enormous expansion of the bureaucracy. It was a time when Panditji (Jawaharlal Nehru) would just walk into N.R. Pillai's office as and when he wanted, or we would get a call saying the PM wants the Secretary General and the Secretary General would scurry off down the corridor. Every morning there was a meeting of the Secretaries and Joint Secretaries in the Ministry of External Affairs in which all outstanding matters were discussed. There were regular Cabinet meetings and interdepartmental meetings and meetings with the PM, as there still are. But at that time networking was very effective because everyone knew everyone and there was effective communication and exchange of information.

Most Secretaries would turn up on Sundays. I got two days off in a year, on Independence Day and Republic Day (because the parades made the Secretariat inaccessible). The Secretary General never got a day off nor did the Prime Minister. I still remember being called down to the lawn one Sunday to vote on which musical version of the National Anthem was most acceptable. A band played three versions and the 20-30 of us assembled there liked one version and that is now the official one.

Interviewer: Was the morning Cabinet meeting chaired by the Secretary General?

Amb. Eric Gonsalves: Yes. With three Secretaries and five Joint Secretaries it was a workable arrangement for coordination and decision making. The Prime Minister was then the only politician and minister. There was no PMO, only a very small secretariat headed by a Joint Secretary and the now famous personal assistant M.O. Mathai who was the PM's door keeper.

Interviewer: Is it correct, as described by Mr. Gundevia, that at the meetings with the Prime Minister, the Secretary General and the Secretaries, there was essentially a one to one dialogue and in fact not much of a group discussion of issues? Secondly, do you have any personal encounters with Panditji that you remember or any incidents that come to mind?

Amb. Eric Gonsalves: I am sorry but I did not attend these meetings. The morning meeting was chaired by the Secretary General and the PM did not come to them. N. R. Pillai was a very polite and soft spoken man and I doubt if he tried to dominate the meeting. He was used to having his way but not by hectoring. In any case the other Secretaries and Joint Secretaries were quite strong personalities and I have no doubt that they had their say. The PM, in the meetings in which I was present, was prone to ramble on as anyone who has heard him in Parliament would remember. But he was open to questions and suggestions. Indeed my recollection is that he would go around the problem before he decided on what he wanted to do. And he was very accessible. Many Joint Secretaries would put up papers directly to him and meet him if necessary. Later, when I was a Deputy Secretary, I put up answers to unstarred Parliament questions directly to the Prime Minister. They weren't important and they were just accepted, Panditji did flare up, he even did that in his noting. But it would be only momentary and he would revert to his charming self.

Interviewer: Any recollections of encounters with Panditji?

Amb. Gonsalves: There were many encounters with him over the years. Mostly as a very junior officer one was part of a group and kept quiet. I will only recount one which was quite typical. Panditji used to give a farewell lunch for departing Ambassadors. On one occasion I was sent to fill a vacant seat at one such lunch at his residence. Quite unlike today one just walked in and after the customary soft drink we sat down to lunch.

Two Ambassadors and their wives were the guests of honour, Mrs. Gandhi was the hostess, and Krishna Menon and I were the remaining guests. Panditji was preoccupied with some problem and he would just come in with random comments on the conversation. Mrs. Gandhi and I were trying to keep up. Krishna Menon, unlike his usual acerbic self, was half asleep since he had just got off a plane.

The Ambassadors took their leave and so did I thinking that this lunch with the PM was not too entertaining. But by that time Panditji had resolved whatever was troubling him. He saw me down the stairs all the way to my car, patted me on the back jovially, and even inquired about what I was doing in the Ministry.

Another occasion was a dinner to brief a group of visiting U.S. Senators on Kashmir. Since there were no accessible maps at a dinner given on the lawns, one of the Joint Secretaries used a table cloth and crayons to outline positions for their benefit with the PM and the Secretaries adding their comments.

There was very limited security in those days. My wife used to lie and wait for him to arrive at South Block to sell him flags for the Red Cross and other charities. Sometimes he had no cash and it would be sent down from the office. In the early days he even shared the common toilet.

Interviewer: Compared with your experience in the Ministry later when you were Secretary to the Government, how would you describe the decision making process in the Foreign Ministry in those days?

Amb. Eric Gonsalves: The decision making was collegiate because the numbers involved were small. Most were more than willing to give their inputs. The number of concerned departments and institutions were also limited. Ultimately the buck stopped with the PM. But although the issues were often global and India did make her voice felt, they were simpler and fewer because the complexities of globalisation and economics had not yet come to their present pitch. Also the number of players was much less and so were the centres of power. The Cold War created its own strait jacket which made for a sort of predictability.

By the time I became a Secretary, the number of nations had multiplied and the issues between them had also multiplied. Technology had speeded up communications and access to missions, archives and information incredibly. But I would say that the real difference lies in the way decisions are made. There is more of a paper trail, more organised meetings and conferences. There is less of a feeling of a team working together as competition has taken its toll and more and more officers seek to be courtiers at the Minister's court.

Coordination in decision making and even more in implementation has become increasingly difficult because of the increase in the number of stakeholders to be addressed and the short sightedness of many of them. But I am still proud that even today when we talk to our peers in the diplomatic world our words still bind our governments and we do not shelter behind the ploy of being misquoted.

Interviewer: To return to what we were discussing Eric, the way the Ministry worked when you came back as Secretary to Government.

Amb. Eric Gonsalves: All governments have a tendency to expand. Coordination, decision making and policy formulation have to keep up with the many new areas into which the government is drawn. Even a market economy in the post industrial world faces this problem. But in the post colonial developing world with or without socialist leanings, the State was not only drawn into more and more areas of regulation, but even more into creating a public sector as neither private nor foreign capital was willing to undertake the risks in new sectors. Besides the experience of the Soviet Union, socialist doctrines were looked up to with admiration by many leaders in newly independent countries. Given the cordial nature of the transfer of power from the British to India it was natural that the British way continued to influence thinking in administration and governance for long. Gradually, as American power grew and Indians began to migrate to and study in the U.S., America started to provide a countervailing influence. This was our background.

The Ministry was created by amalgamating the old Foreign Department of the GOI with the Indian Overseas Section of the Commerce Department.

The first had been headed by the Foreign Secretary for a long time under the British. The latter was put under a Commonwealth Secretary as most Indian migrants were located in the erstwhile British Empire. The post of Secretary General was created at the top to accommodate Girja Shankar Bajpai who had been India's Agent General in the U.S.A.

Like everywhere else in the GOI, new Ministries were headed by ICS officers who had become the steel frame of the British Indian Empire. (If one travels around former British colonies, it is apparent how all colonial administrations were modeled on India. The key field officer may be called Collector or District Magistrate or Government Agent or Deputy Commissioner, but his duties were roughly the same as he was the face of the Raj. The penal code and the criminal code were simply revised for local conditions.) The style evolved gently away from the inherited British style. But the policy as laid down by Nehru was distinctly Indian - geopolitical savvy mixed with idealism. In the early days of the Cold War, India (with a relatively effective if small diplomatic service) provided the only effective interlocutor between the opposing alliances and also between the old imperial powers and their restive colonies as decolonisation took place.

When I came back, we had lost that position after the conflict with China and Indian policy had turned inward. Indira Gandhi was more realistic and ruthless than her father in the pursuit of goals at home and abroad. She was the PM under whom I served most of my time as a Secretary.

The enormous growth of the bureaucracy made it far more impersonal. At the same time it made it much more capable of manipulation by those adept at pleasing their masters. It was only when I was more than half way through my service that I began to lose my conviction in the fact that the best man would usually reach the top. The intake into the IFS had increased considerably while its attractiveness had diminished, making the intake uneven in caliber. Making sure that promotion avenues were maintained, middle level officers such as Joint Secretaries were devalued by giving them smaller charges or less important Embassies. But almost all still retired in the top grade.

Suggestions for a mid-level review and a refresher course were never implemented. So many of the officers did not develop the larger vision required to manage a Ministry. To my knowledge, this has not happened in any other Foreign Ministry. They may have had to add manpower but the major overseers have rarely expanded, whereas today we have about 20 or 25 Secretaries and Additional Secretaries. (*Interviewer*: 40)

The interactive meetings involving all officers have diminished. Another negative tendency is that the Foreign Secretary has become the chief interlocutor for policy both with the Foreign Minister and with the Prime Minister whereas in Panditj's time all Secretaries and even other officers in the ministry had easy access to the Prime Minister, however busy the Prime Minister might have been. The sense that one belonged to a coherent machine and that one was aware of the general direction of policy has diminished. During all the years that Panditji combined the offices of the PM and the FM there had been a single source of authority. With the establishment of the PMO and its aggrandisement under Indira Gandhi, a new layer of decision making entered into the picture and diminished the freedom of the Ministry in making external policy.

Interviewer: You mentioned the de facto quasi monopolisation - if I can use such a term - by the Foreign Secretary of higher level access. Is this a problem intrinsic to the system or do you think there are ways through which this can be improved? Now I am referring to a more general issue not directly related to your early experiences.

Amb. Eric Gonsalves: I think it stems from the desire of bureaucrats, particularly that of Indian bureaucrats, to monopolise as much decision making power as they can without realising that they may, dilute their own efficiency and that of the whole institution. Also, politicians are now inducted into office with limited knowledge or experience of their portfolio. Often these appointments are based on domestic political equations. This makes for Ministers who do not care to apply their mind adequately to their charge. They may be driven by party positions or interested in following the PMO lead to get preferment or become subject to the suggestions of their top bureaucrats.

Since Indian Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers have usually been interested in and knowledgeable about foreign policy and as the policy itself comes under close scrutiny from the media and other sources, we have not been as troubled by such problems. Occasionally, Foreign Ministers have tried to impose unwise policies but these have not gone too far. The real problem had been the enormous increase in external involvement in a number of areas and the direct involvement of many other ministries. The GOI has long faced a problem from the generalist thesis that an IAS office can undertake any assignment successfully. In these days of specialisation, it is vital to ensure that the professional point of view is given adequate weight.

As a result, the Indian bureaucracy has declined in spite of the outstanding abilities of many of the top bureaucrats today. That the generalist idea was inherited from the British is a myth. The British believed in streaming. In the ICS, once you got into the foreign and political departments you stayed there. It was the same with the finance and commerce pool, which included officers from services other than the ICS and who became top Secretaries at the time of Independence. But today a Home Secretary is competent to be the Commerce Secretary one day and the Finance Secretary the next day. Worse still is how the IAS has preempted professional services from heading their own departments. Do departments of education or archaeology or customs need IAS officers at the top? Should IPS officers become Vice Chancellors?

But I have digressed from your question to highlight a serious issue in managing the GOI.

The top official in any Foreign Office should be the government's principal adviser, but he or she cannot do that if he or she also has to supervise the day to day workings of divisions in the Ministry. More so, if those divisions are responsible for all major problems. European Foreign Offices have a Secretary General for the job of conceptualising policy, coordinating internally and with other departments and advising the political leadership. The British have the Permanent Under-Secretary. Directors General undertake the day to day supervision of their divisions.

This is what our Secretaries should do and you would only need five or six. The Foreign Secretary should do what the Secretary General used to do before the ICS got rid of the post as it felt that this devalued the Cabinet Secretary.

Korea and New York (1953-1955)

Interviewer: After your stint in the Ministry as Private Secretary to the Secretary General what was your first assignment. Also were there some great experiences during that assignment?

Amb. Eric Gonsalves: In the British days, civilian officers generally had a stenographer who kept a diary and gave appointments etc. Even when I became a Secretary I had two stenos and a clerk. Generals had staff officers and the Viceroy had quite senior ones. The Private Secretary (P.S.) to the Secretary General was that sort of Staff Officer, a new concept in the Secretariat. It started with Jagat Mehta in Girja Shankar Bajpai's office. When the Korean War was coming to an end and India was to become the Chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission, the co-Chairman, who was Ambassador B.N. Chakravarthy noted that the Chairman General Thimmayya had a staff officer plus two ADCs and suggested that he would need a similar staff.

The only person who was anything like a staff officer was the PS to the Secretary General. So I was sent off to be the Secretary to the Co-Chairman. That was my first assignment in the Neutral Nations Commission in Korea. Ambassador Chakravarthy had very limited work for me, so I was made the Secretary of the Commission.

This was our first assay into peace-making or peace. There were three Political Advisers and no secretarial staff. So I became the dog's body and kept the papers and files that we generated. They were very limited. I also drafted the final report when the Commission decided to wind up. Then I left to get married and take a posting in New York.

Interviewer: How long was the tenure of the Commission?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: The commission lasted for only six months. It wisely decided it had done as much as it could and disbanded itself. Unfortunately, its example has rarely been followed. I have already done a brief oral report on that assignment which is available in the Association Journal.

Interviewer: Okay let us turn to New York where you arrived as a newly married young officer in a fairly small permanent mission.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: No, I went as a Vice-Consul in the Consulate General. This was an office under the Embassy in Washington looking after consular and commercial interests in the Eastern U.S. It was housed in the same building as the Permanent Mission to the U.N., which had four or five officers while the Consulate had only three. Inevitably during the busy season and especially during the General Assembly we helped out with U.N. work. While this usually involved all the logistics and protocols, it was not uncommon to have to represent India in one of the lesser committees and hold the hand of the MPs who have been included in the U.N. delegations. Within six months of my joining I found myself acting Consul General because the Consul General (Mr. Arthur Lal) became the Permanent Representative. The new Consul General came after six months.

Despite the high profile that multilateral diplomacy has always enjoyed, I came to prefer the more solid achievements of bilateral work even if it was at the mundane level of helping Indians in trouble with the local immigration or police or dealing with the local people and authorities during festivals or calamities.

Interviewer: What were the highlights during that assignment? How long was it, and what were its main tasks?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Well, the main task really was consular work helping the small number of Indian nationals mainly with immigration problems and issuing passports, visas and other consular documents. The Consulate also handled our commercial interests which again were limited. Export promotion by governments was new and embryonic. Leather, fabrics, tea, coffee and handicrafts were the staples. It was a marvel to us when an

Indian entrepreneur made a small fortune importing brass gifts for the Christmas trade using methods such as market research, which were unheard of at that time.

Interviewer: And there were Indian immigrants in those days?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Oh, yes. There were Indian immigrants but the numbers were small. There was a tiny group of middle class professionals many of whom had come as students. There were the students, but again not in the numbers they swelled to after a couple of decades. The immigration laws at that time were biased against Asians. New York had a Chinatown. (We had to go there to get anything resembling Indian condiments or have them sent from India. It is amusing to recall that it was customary to take spices and other condiments in your heavy baggage when you went on a posting.) But the display of Indian businesses, shops and restaurants in Indian neighbourhoods, accompanied by similar displays from most Asian countries was still far into the future. There were German and East European neighbourhoods and the big African community at Harlem .The Hispanic migration was just beginning.

We ran a small operation with just one assistant. Nevertheless, it was comprehensive. A consular officer gets involved in all aspects of his citizen's life, including births, marriages, deaths, property problems and difficulties with the local officials. Mostly it was counseling in family or economic problems and that was the pattern everywhere except for the times when Indian migrants became a target. That came later in my career.

Interviewer: Any incidents during the New York period? Memories with Krishna Menon or Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit had been the face of India at the U.N. practically since its inception. Krishna Menon was our equally formidable High Commissioner in London. Both were rivals to be main advisers to Panditji. There was an ideological basis to the rivalry too. Krishna Menon was a man of the left with an anti-colonial record whereas Mrs. Pandit belonged to the gentry and was familiar with royalty and high society in the U.S.A and Britain, although her record in the anti-British

struggle in India was also exemplary. The rivalry was evident even though it was usually conducted with a great deal of charm and urbanity. In 1954, the year I arrived in New York, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was elected as the President of the General Assembly and Krishna Menon took her place as the Head of the Indian Delegation.

There was a confrontation in the General Assembly when she called him to order. (***Interviewer***: As President to the Indian Delegate?) Yes, when he was speaking as the Head of the Indian Delegation. That day we all kept away from the two and avoided all comments. These disagreements were to surface again from time to time, including in London where I was soon to be posted.

Hence, my memories of New York are divided between the U.N. and our efforts and problems there and getting to know America and the Americans. As we all know they can be very warm and interesting, but when a phobia seizes them they can act quite hysterically. We experienced the former personally while discovering the latter professionally. It was the height of the McCarthy era. India due to our efforts in Korea (from where I had just come) was being dismissed as another bunch of commies by McCarthy and his supporters in the media. At meetings one would be attacked and harangued as an ingrate who did not appreciate American contribution to world freedom and Indian Independence and so on. But New York in those days was even more a migrant city than it is today.

Most of our neighbours and friends were largely Jews with European backgrounds. They were warm, supportive and friendly as we tackled our personal problems. When my first child was born prematurely and I had insufficient money to pay the hospital deposit, it was the consulate lawyer who guaranteed a bank loan and it was my other friends and neighbours who made sure all went well. The doctor would only take what the consulate actually paid me, which was a fraction of his fees. Americans collectively can be impossible and throughout my career one has had to battle with them as the government, as the media, as the academics and as the experts of many different kinds. But as individuals, they can be the most caring and wonderful of friends.

London as First Secretary (1955-1958)

Interviewer: You then reached the United Kingdom working again as First Secretary and perhaps Private Secretary to the High Commissioner Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. What are your memories of that period?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: It is one thing to admire Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit at some distance as she richly deserves for her many attributes, but working as her Private Secretary was difficult. She was ready to be guided politically by the briefs that she was given, and she had the right political instincts. She was a superb hostess and exercised her charm to excellent effect in the highest circles of political and official life. However, she was whimsical and even mercurial in administrative matters and felt no obligation to observe governmental rules and regulations as far as her own expenditures were concerned.

Her predecessor Krishna Menon had lived very frugally and yet had invited severe censure from the audit authorities for his actions in acquiring buildings and defence equipment. So, the High Commission was naturally concerned that we should not find ourselves being roasted once again over inadmissible expenditures. But I could not make much headway with the High Commission. It soon became obvious that I was not the correct Private Secretary. A few months later, as the Establishment Officer who supervised the entire administration of the High Commission was due to retire, I was appointed to his position.

(***Interviewer***: The High Commission in those days was so much larger than the Ministry). The High Commission in those days had a staff of 1,300. A much more suave and able officer named Gurbachan Singh was brought in as the Private Secretary so everything turned out for the best. In hindsight, I suspect we were prudish in judging Mrs Pundit. She knew how to capture an audience.

At one reception for the Commonwealth PMs she ordered the garden to be replanted with flowers from a conservatory two months before they were due to bloom. The collective appreciation of her guests was probably worth the cost, but we felt the cost was exorbitant because in India one still did not

usually pay for flowers. On another occasion, she instructed us to repaint the residence in an austere white. The London residence, known as KPG by its address, is a classic bijou continental mansion with gilt and polished paneling and is probably the most attractive residence we own anywhere. Fortunately, with strong support from the official surveyors and art lovers, we were able to convince her that things should be left as they were.

My tenure in London was devoted mostly to understanding the problems of administering missions abroad. Rules and regulations for service abroad did not exist. The various civil service rules made for India were applied with some ad hoc variations. The majority of the staff in London was local and was governed by 'Estacode' which meant the pay scales, grades, and rules of the British civil service. A very small number of officers deputed from India were paid at Delhi rates with a house rent allowance. Entertainment was reimbursed at the High Commission's discretion from a grant. Even duty free items were bought in bulk and distributed.

This situation slowly grew worse because the local staff were better off than the India based staff because India had not yet instituted any system of pay revisions and automatic cost of living benefits. With a pool of Indian migrants who were willing to accept less than the local rates of pay, it was inevitable for our financial authorities to decide to delink the newly recruited local staff from 'Estacode'. Krishna Menon as the High Commissioner had also staffed almost all departments, except for the political section, up to the top with local officers as this gave him undisputed control. Some of these had to be replaced gradually with India-based officers.

To work this out without causing too much bad blood for a staff of over 1,300 was a fairly massive task. By the end of my three-year stint I was already drafted, even before I had left London, as Deputy Secretary Establishment in the M.E.A to revise the rules and regulations, foreign allowances etc. So, I dug my next grave. The Private Secretary was defunct and I was brought in as an administrative expert.

But London was a major world capital and even a First Secretary (Establishment) could benefit from the run-off from the other happenings

in what was still our most important foreign post. At that time Britain was a world power, the future decline was not yet evident, and Panditji and most of the Indian elite took the British connection seriously. India had ensured the continuation of the Empire in the new form of the Commonwealth and the old white dominions increasingly accepted the Indian PM as a crucial member with whom they did not always agree, but whose views must be heeded.

The Cold War had established its overall grip over international affairs and our position on non-alignment was slowly evolving. We had established a role in Asia and the UN and were becoming a player in disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament. A major interest in London was decolonisation in which India and Britain were the pioneers. Political leaders from Africa had begun the process with the Colonial Office.

(***Interviewer***: And negotiating with them) Yes, negotiating independence one by one.Ghana was the first colony in Africa to get independence while I was still in London. African countries, Malaysia, Singapore, the Pacific and the Caribbean all followed in the next 15 or 20 years. The British Empire on which the 'sun never set' was to disappear including colonies that had special problems like Rhodesia and Hong Kong, leaving only minor entities like Gibraltar and the Falklands which claimed to be peopled by British migrants. One unsung story of that time is the help we gave the British in sorting out these problems. The leaders of the colonial movements had grown up with our own leadership or had studied with them in British universities and consequently they were all London-centric. For instance, the Irish leaders had very warm feelings for Mr.Giri who had studied in Ireland. (***Interviewer***: Mr. Giri who became President?)Yes. The British elite, the Indian elite and most of the Commonwealth elite were an old boys' network, to use a British phrase. A process of adjustment got under way as everyone diverged from the values and ideas they had adopted from the British connection.

The Suez crisis provided an important point of departure with the British, French and Israelis on one side and the Americans backing Egypt, the Arabs and the Third World. When diplomatic relations between Egypt and the UK were broken off, India became the protecting power. Now the country's diplomats stay on and put up the protecting country's flag. But in

those days they all cleared out within hours as we had to take over palatial buildings full of cars and furniture, look after their funds and issue their visas etc.

Interviewer: It must have been a huge administrative problem?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: We had to make some housekeeping arrangements, but the Egyptians never queried over anything we spent or charged. I suspect we were more economic than they were. Anyhow, they levied enormous consular fees so we were not short of money.

Slowly, India's world vision started to emerge. I believe Panditji had this vision even before he became PM, but its articulation and emphasis was becoming clearer. The use of the term 'non-alignment' may not have come till the later 50's but it had its origins before independence in the emphasis on non-violence in the freedom struggle and in the concepts for a new world order put forward at the Asian Relations Conference. The flesh was put on these concepts at the Commonwealth meetings in Marlborough House.

Interviewer: Would you then say that the notion of non-alignment goes back to 1946 when Panditji said India had not become Independent to become a pawn in the hands of foreign powers? While this was fine as a statement we were really not so clear in our minds about non-alignment in the early 50's.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: When one is young and enthusiastic one is also naïve. After Independence, to stand up to the West or the British was a natural reaction. To be lenient to former colonial and developing countries, which included China, and to be enthusiastic about the Soviet experiment and to its Socialist system followed the same pattern. It took time and several conflicts before we began to come to term with the reality of geopolitics and all the related factors of territorial claims and influence. Paradoxically, I believe India gained a reputation in the early years as a go - between. This is a version of soft power which we gained before we really understood hard power and having lost that too, we are learning the hard way to acquire enough of both again.

I have mentioned the personal equations with African leaders. But in the 50's the really important equations were with Asian leaders. Pakistan was the most complex case. Partition and its aftermath created an intense hostility at the government and military level in affected provinces like Punjab. Yet old ties also beckoned people from both sides. If one looks at the words and actions of the Indian leadership, their expectation that partition was temporary was evident. Much larger crowds would turn up at Palam to welcome the Pakistan PM than most others except the British Queen and the American President. After Jinnah died there were many meetings with Pakistani PMs and Ministers, but no rapport emerged.

Ceylon gained its independence almost as a corollary of Indian Independence and while some its leaders had links with the Congress, they tended to be far more Western oriented until the emergence of Bandaranaike who was a leader with a parallel ideology. Proximity and the Indian Tamil problem made for an uneasy dialogue, but Ceylon was present and active in all the Asian groupings like the Colombo powers and Bandung. Panditji really found his counterparts in U Nu of Burma, Soekarno of Indonesia ,Ho Chi Minh and Phan Van Dong of Vietnam, Sihanouk of Cambodia and Chou Enlai of China. We were to have differences with almost all of them in time, but till and after Bandung the Asian linkages were strong. Subsequently when Malaysia became independent a warm friendship developed with the first PM Tunku Abdul Rahman. He was later to donate blood for Indian troops during the 1965 War.

Panditji's world view had, I believe, a historical basis in two frames. He was a great student of history and was influenced by the geopolitical realities that concerned any ruler of the Indo-Gangetic Plain from the days of the Mughal Empire , a vision that influenced even alien rulers like Curzon to pursue the 'great game'. British doctrines brought together goals across the mountains to the north, as well as maritime objectives from the Pacific to the Mediterranean. I once toyed with the idea of doing a comparative study of these world visions, but gave it up. I still think it would be interesting. The second strand was the conviction that most conflicts originated from colonialism, and, therefore, once imperialism was eliminated a better world would emerge. He hoped that the mind set of newly independent countries would be for the use of dialogue and

discussion rather than war. Unfortunately, he was to discover that using force to secure your interests came far more easily than dialogue, and this too from our immediate neighbours.

Moreover, we also discovered that the U.N. machinery in which we had reposed much faith was more susceptible to great power manipulation than we could have imagined. But let me also recall that non-alignment and retaining independence in the making of external policy can be traced back to George Washington's address to the first American Congress in which he said that our first interest should be to keep ourselves free of all the designs of European powers (***Interviewer***: Foreign entanglements) Yes indeed. To what would the PM of a newly independent country give priority? Economic and social development and maximising resources for that rather than defence would seem to be the natural choice. Hence, we should avoid getting entangled in great power quarrels and settle our own peacefully. The Cold War, Pakistan and China have proved this to be somewhat of a fallacy.

In fact most actual conflict has taken place between proxies of the Cold War groups while alliance members have generally managed to avoid it and even established in the Helsinki process a path to détente. Even today in a globalised world, tending to multi-polarise the use of force can never be eliminated. Idealism and sticking to principle may have merit but they can also attract sanctions. As an example, we were prepared to sacrifice a considerable amount of aid just to upgrade a Consulate in Hanoi to an Embassy because it gave a boost to the Vietnamese. The message to the Vietnamese and the world was that they had friends in Asia other than the Chinese and the communist bloc behind them. This was a lesson for which the Vietnamese were grateful, but is forgotten today.

Interviewer: Some would say that the Vietnamese have also forgotten that lesson. But putting that aside, let me jump to a rather contemporary issue. It is said today by some scholars and some of our own experts that the India of 2009 is virtually at the high table, but India is not ready or able to play the power game of diplomacy. Is that a fair comment that we are in some ways yet to learn the real politik that others have practiced?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: I totally concur with that. A few days ago I was commenting on some presentations at an Indo-European Seminar on Multilateralism, where I had to point out that after all the learned speakers had spoken that neither India nor the European Union has a world view which is sufficient and self sustaining. What most of us have is a reactive attitude based on what other powers including our neighbours will do or might do. We tend to rely on an unnecessary extent on favourable actions or influence from super powers and the 'international community'. We need to put more effort and resources into our projection abroad and ensure that it is adequate to safeguard our national interests.

This means much more effort in coordinating intelligence with use of hard and soft power, improving vastly area studies in the country and establishing liaisons with all the influential domestic players in our neighbourhood and in Asia; expanding economic interaction beyond trade and aid to cover investment, services and technology transfer; and upgrading and using our educational and other training facilities to build permanent friends in foreign countries.

Deputy Secretary (Establishment) at Ministry of External Affairs (1958-61)

Interviewer: Coming back then to the time when you returned to the Ministry as Deputy Secretary Establishment and framed the rules of the service, how long did you stay and what were your main experiences of that?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: So many of us had undergone so much of hardship that it was evident that the framing of rules for the IFS and for service in missions abroad was overdue. The Home Ministry had also decided to revise the rules for the All-India Services. Three Deputy Secretaries were tasked with this job of framing rules for the IAS, the IPS and the IFS. For the first two it was a case of revising existing rules for the ICS and the IPS. Ours was more complex. There were really no rules. The rules being used were intended for officers serving in India and made no sense abroad.

So, we had to write a whole new set of rules taking into account what other foreign services had done and what we had learnt in the first decade of Independence. In addition to the rules and regulations, we also laid down a methodology for fixing and revising emoluments abroad taking into account the cost of living, medical treatment and education, travel allowances etc.

Interviewer: So, you were the father of the IFS PLCA Rules of 1961.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: The PLCA Rules are the bread and butter ones and they are the most consulted. We also promulgated two other sets of rules, one for cadre management promotion etc and the second for conduct and discipline. Yes, the first edition was signed by me when they were issued in the Gazette in early 1962. In my introduction I said these rules were a necessary beginning but they needed amendments in the light of experience. This had happened and will continue. Officers posted abroad are much better off today thanks to the PLCA rules. The cadre rules do exist, but we have not used them to mange a modern service with adequate in service training, streaming, career planning and all the rest that we had initially envisaged. It should have become a holistic and dynamic process, not just ensuring that everybody gets promoted.

The result is that you have many Foreign Service officers 'in waiting' in Grades I, II or III until a post actually becomes available. We did consider selection systems and specialisation. These could not be put into the rules but should be conventions to guide the Foreign Service Board. A systematic effort to do this is still a task for the future.

Interviewer: Is this also the time when we did not get legislative sanction for the Foreign Service because Rao's book makes the point that it was in 1952 or 1953 that Panditji considered having a law or an Act of Parliament for the Foreign Service and he was dissuaded not to go in for one. Today, we regret very much that without this legislative sanction our hands are tied and we cannot look for differentiation in selection and in many other things. Any thoughts on that?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: We did apply our mind. The NR Pillai Committee and others have gone into these suggestions to some extent. The IFS is a

Central Service and not an All-India Service. Since the control of the latter is shared between the Centre and the States there is a need for legislation. The IFS, therefore, does not need an Act.

Interviewer: But all over the world Foreign Services have Acts of Parliament.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: I think whatever is needed can be done through an executive action by the GOI.

Interviewer: UPSC for example, will not let us have any differentiation in selection procedures because they are just a Central Service. If we had an Act of Parliament we would have greater…

Amb Eric Gonsalves: There are separate exams for the Engineering Services, for the Defence Services, and other specialised Central Services and none except the defence services are governed by an Act of Parliament, and that is for other reasons. I am not against an Act; I am only saying it may not be necessary.

Interviewer: But we did not do it.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Before Independence the British had used the Indian Political Service which staffed posts in British Embassies in neighbouring countries, which were paid for by the Indian tax payer, and also the Residencies in the Indian States. This service was staffed by seconded officers from the ICS and the Indian Army. After Independence all these officers came to the new IFS. The few non-IFS officers posted abroad during the 50s went mainly to missions like London and Washington. They did not realise the hardships in Asia and Africa. Hanoi or Beijing or Rangoon did not see any of them and the difficulties we faced there especially during cultural revolutions or coups or American intervention did not register.

I have mentioned elsewhere the urge on the part of the IAS to take over everything in the GOI. They felt that the Foreign Service was unnecessary. It only survived because it was nurtured by the PM. As soon as Panditji died the ICS officers led by the Secretary to the Prime Minister proposed that the MEA and its missions should be staffed by officers on deputation

from the IAS and other Central Services. To counter this we had to resort to the time honoured process of appointing a Committee, in this case the Pillai Committee. By the time the Committee reported, Indira Gandhi was in the saddle and that difficult period was over.

The top bureaucracy in the GOI and for that matter even in the MEA did not realise the need for professional expertise in a Foreign Service. That has come slowly and I am not sure adequately even now. We have lost many opportunities. After the Foundation Course at the Academy, which I believe the IFS should join, the IAS probationers have to undergo a further exam which affects their final ranking. We can and should do the same at some stage of the training and develop our own specialisations including languages. Mid career training and evaluation can be instituted by internal orders and I believe some departments do it. The defence services have a system of colleges, and without passing successfully through these further advancement of officers is denied. I believe we have thrown away all these opportunities to professionalise the service.

I would also like to remind you that the IFS is the only service that is bracketed with the IAS in terms of pay scales. Separating them may make that more difficult to maintain.

Interviewer: Coming back to the time when you served in the Ministry, these were which years: 57 to something in the 60s…

Amb Eric Gonsalves: I came back in 1958.The IFS Rules were gazetted in January of 1962.

Then I went to Burma.

Interviewer: We will return to Burma in a minute, but before that anything else during this period that strikes your mind, for example, the very complex relationship with China developed in those years? You handled administration, you were not directly concerned with it but anything of the China period that sticks with you?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: I was in Korea in 1953-54 with Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission. We dealt with the Chinese every day there and

subsequently I went to New York where my Korean background was a liability in the McCarthy Era. During that time we had entered the 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai' period with the signing of the 1954 Treaty ending any presence in Tibet and there was much coming and going between the two countries. In New York we strongly supported the PRC government for the seat at the U.N., a stand from which we never resiled. One did hear that Chou objected to being patronised by Panditji at Bandung.

By the end of the 50's, the questions of maps and borders had raised its ugly head. But the real jarring prospect of violence and conflict came most unexpectedly at a press briefing at Hyderabad House, where I had landed up while getting a lift home from Jagat Mehta. This was the first encounter in Ladakh when the CRPF suffered its first casualties and we had to own up to finding the Chinese had built a road in our territory without our knowledge. P.N. Menon went off to escort the Dalai Lama from Tawang.

In 1962 I was in Burma and we had to deal with some of our forces who had retreated across the border into Burma. In all this I was essentially an observer. That the Chinese were prepared to attack in force across an international border came as a great shock as it set at naught one of the cardinal principles of our policy that we would not need to defend those borders against such an attack. That we had to repel Pakistani raiders in Kashmir 10 years earlier had not made us any better prepared. I may also say that our stock in Burma plummeted and never recovered.

Burma (1962-1964)

Interviewer: Let us return to the time when you went to Burma and spent three years there

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Yes. Three years. I went in January of 1962 and I left in December of 1964.When I went to Burma we were basking in a warm relationship which extended from Nehru and U Nu downward. Burma had a relatively prosperous economy with a higher per capita income than we had. It looked like a good place to be posted to with not very much to do. But we should never believe in expectations. Everything came apart in

those three years. As I left India the police operation in Goa had begun and bad publicity hit us from many western sources, although the operation was a success and many years later I had the pleasure of being there in New York when we restored relations with Portugal with much cordiality. A couple of months after my arrival, U Nu was overthrown, the Generals took over and the Generals have never left. The longest running military dictatorship in current history had begun.

That same year the border dispute with China escalated to an open war. Burma was a friend and neighbour of both countries and scrambled not to offend anyone. It is a sad commentary that we had just interceded with the Chinese not to exacerbate the border problem with the Burmese as there had been some incidents in the Wa State and Kachin State. The success of the Chinese in 1962 gave our reputation in the region a considerable knock. The fact that we had to evacuate some of our troops from Burma as they withdrew from the Chinese onslaught did not help.

The coup took place barely a month after I had reached Rangoon. A few days later a reception was held by the Ambassador to introduce me to the diplomatic corps and foreign office. (***Interviewer***: And the Ambassador was?) – RS Mani, an ICS officer – the Burmese Foreign Secretary came and informed the assembled diplomatic corps that the new Burmese government would be seeking recognition and he was giving them advance notice. Now there is a better procedure that you recognise a State and you can then have dealings with the government, leaving recognition as a separate and subsidiary matter. In those days you had to hand over a note of formal recognition.

We conveyed this to Delhi saying that in our considered opinion we were fairly confident that the Generals were going to remain and there would be no return to the democratic set up. (This was the second time General Ne Win had taken over power. On a previous occasion he had been invited to run the country for a limited period and had returned power to the political parties.)

Panditji replied within in a day or two, saying that he had had a long association with U Nu, and was greatly distressed by what had happened.

But if in the considered opinion of the Embassy that we have to deal with the military government, we should go ahead and give them recognition. This illustrated a willingness to recognise reality and not overburden it with sentimentality. It was also a sign of maturity that we have not always shown later. I believe we were the first government to convey our recognition followed by the Chinese and then everyone else.

Ironically, this got us little benefit. This was the period when newly independent governments were looking for scapegoats to blame for the economic problems created by bad management. In many countries of the erstwhile British Empire in Asia and Africa, Indian migrants had been imported as a labour force or had come to fill the professional posts that were created as the economies developed. The Burmese Generals were terrible economic managers; they distrusted their own middle class and forced many to emigrate, and egged on by socialist advisers they sought to find resources by nationalising everything in sight, including banks, business houses communications and even trade.

The well-off Indian (and Chinese and European) businessmen, traders and professionals had already deposited their money abroad and they proceeded to leave. Only a tiny fraction of this group with special links to the country still remained. However, in the rural areas there were still pockets where Indian settlers had merged into the local population. As the economy deteriorated, the Burmese leadership which had historically used chauvinism to rally their people in the face of discontent sought to create a broader target by making continued residence of non citizens in urban areas well nigh impossible. That created a scare and a panic among the largely Indian labour force in the main towns.

By this time the Ambassador had left and I became Charge d'affaires. This continued for almost a year as designated Ambassadors found reasons not to take up the posting. One senior officer even wrote to me that the new direction of Italian politics was so important for India to observe that he did not feel he should leave just then. With the help of an outstanding group of officers, most of them in their 30's like me, we managed and I feel we managed well. I suspect that had we been older we might have

been more cautious in taking on the Burmese authorities. The Burmese had laid down stringent regulations prohibiting the carrying gold or any other valuables by people leaving the country for good. Women even had to leave behind their wedding rings.

So we arranged for them to be deposited at the Embassy. We accepted more than rupees two crores worth of gold and jewels in a matter of only three days. At this stage the Burmese finally said the matter could be discussed. The Foreign Secretary came from India and we had some negotiations. It did not get very far beyond recognising that this property belonged to the Indian expatriate. It was then deposited in a bank. I regret to say these items are still lying in that bank if the Burmese have not confiscated them, as no one has got their gold back. But we established a legal claim and forced the Burmese Government to acknowledge that they could not ride rough shod over everyone.

Finally the Government had to appoint a non-service ambassador who was willing to come to Burma. The first Indian Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Katari, who took the job turned out to be a very good ambassador.

Interviewer: So, those deposits are still lying somewhere?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: I think so. I remember vividly our Second Secretary, now distinguished Ambassador Alan Nazareth sitting there in his room taking boxes and bags of gold and jewellery, putting tags on them and then locking them in a safe. How often would one get the chance to see something like that again? We eventually surrendered them to one of the People's Banks. Later we gave them some credits or loans in India against those receipts. Many of them have probably grown much richer, and there must have been some who did need their savings but we did not get a lot of complaints. Our people realised we had tried to do the best we could and that it was a gamble and so they did not really fault us.

The GOI gradually became aware that there was no way the Burmese would allow the Indians to stay, nor did they want to stay. Once the matter was agitated in Parliament we had to arrange their evacuation. This was not like East Africa or much later in the Gulf where the evacuees had

proper papers and a fair amount of money. Most of these people had neither Burmese nor Indian documents, and many were destitute. We had to issue temporary travel documents, which at one time reached a rate of over 1,000 a day. We had to arrange passenger ships. Fortunately the GOI owned a shipping line, the Mogul Line which was used to ferry pilgrims to Jeddah for the Haj. These were available during the non Haj period. Our records are not reliable, but I am sure we lifted out of Burma possibly two or three times as many people as had to be taken out of the Gulf during the Gulf War.

In retrospect, I am surprised at the low level of violence. There was intimidation, there was some looting, there were people being forced to dispose of property and valuables at distress rates. Indians were herded into camps at the race course and elsewhere. However, compared to contemporary incidents where targeted minorities suffer from much more violence even in India there was much less by way of direct attacks. Officially sponsored demonstrations were regularly taken out in front of our Embassy. They shouted slogans, smashed the glass, and yet we still walked around freely.

We ourselves lived in an isolated house surrounded by a garden hedge in a totally Burmese area near the Shwe Dagong Pagoda. The institution of security guards that has become so ubiquitous had barely come into existence. Our neighbours were three Burmese monasteries, *pongyi kyaungs* as they are called. These monks turned out to be our watch dogs and protectors against the Burmese military intelligence which was constantly trying to find out who our visitors and contacts were. The truth was almost every political contact was underground or in jail. The odd guy who came up in the guise of a pilgrim was more often a journalist and he usually knew as little as we did.

Interviewer: How many Indians lived in Burma before the breakdown, before the military takeover, how many left and last but not the least, was there nothing substantial that we could do to help our diaspora?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: All these numbers are guess estimates. Burma has not had a census since World War II. I doubt if they have any reliable

numbers even today. Our estimate was that all persons of Indian origin would come too about 10-15 lakhs. We sent back to India about 3,00,000. There had been an earlier evacuation when the Japanese took over Burma and again a large number trekked back to India by land. These were mostly middle class either connected with the government or salaried workers from business houses.

The involvement of Indian businessmen-the Chettiars- in the expansion of the Burmese economy in the 1920s and 1930s needs to be mentioned. With the Indian market facing a shortage of rice, progressive development of rice cultivation in the Irrawaddy delta provided an excellent commercial opportunity. However, the British banks could not provide the necessary credit facilities to the Burmese farmers. Both found the Chettiars an ideal intermediary.

The Burmese economy became highly dependent on rice exports which at one time went up to 4-5 million tonnes. The Chettiars could provide them small loans and recover them when the harvest came. The Chettiars, unlike the Chinese, remained aloof from their clients, were strict in collecting their dues with help if necessary from the colonial officials, maintained a strictly Indian lifestyle and repatriated most of their profits. Like many middle men they incurred the wrath of the cultivators who never saw the big British bank in the background.

Hence, when Independence came they were the first targets. The Burmese Government nationalised the rice trade and exports. The lot of the peasants did not improve, the price of rice went up and the annual agreement with India was a big '*tamasha'* between two STCs. The Chettiars were held up as the villains in the prevailing Socialist climate in both countries and were forced to leave. That they had done well cannot be questioned. But that they alone were the cause for the peasant's problems was an effort to find a scapegoat.

Their role in developing Burmese agriculture has never been acknowledged. Even at the level of Ne Win the sins of omission and commission of Indian traders were highlighted as the rationale to justify the pogrom

against the resident Indians as protecting the simple Burmese from foreign exploiters.

This time it was the working class that was driven into leaving, and they intended to make a new life in India. (The professional and business class like a later diaspora movement from Africa, particularly Uganda and East Africa, preferred to go to the U.K. and other English speaking countries as they saw no future in India.) They were supposed to be helped by the remnants of the old Ministry of Rehabilitation which had finished with the exodus from Pakistan. Most of such migrants have learnt to survive by doing a bit better than the local people. So, most did that in India too.

For instance they set up a Burma Bazaar in Madras where they sold whatever they had brought from Burma and it was pitifully little. Then they diversified into smuggled goods and I think the Bazaar still survives with that. As a footnote when I was in Burma last year I tried to trace some of the old Embassy personnel, and I discovered that our driver had gone to India and had then been able to migrate to Canada. Never underestimate our people.

Interviewer: Any other recollections of Burma dealing with the military junta?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: In my time it was the Indians who were being pushed out. But once the idea is planted that dispossessing foreigners can bring dividends it gets a life of its own. The Chinese were less obvious than the Indian as there were fewer labourers and more businessmen and small traders. Moreover, they attracted less attention as they did not bring their women. They married local women and blended far better into the landscape. But even so the pressure was eventually directed at the Chinese community and many left. They did not go to China, they went to Taiwan or Singapore or Malaysia. The Chinese communities in Southeast Asia were usually inter-related.

The Chinese were actively cultivating our Asian neighbours and there were frequent high level visits. This was also due to the need to refuel planes more often in those days. Rangoon and Calcutta were favourite stopovers

for the Chinese and Soviets respectively. To illustrate the elementary nature of security and intelligence, my wife once rang me up from a kitty party to inquire if I knew that Chou Enlai was in town. She had just seen him driving in from the airport. The next day the Chinese embassy invited the diplomatic corps to meet their PM. During 1963-64 when I was CDA, Chou came at least twice and Chen Yi also came once.

Chou Enlai was always courteous and he always made sure the Chinese ambassador brought him to the Indian charge d'affaires. He made the normal diplomatic small talk, asked that his compliments be conveyed to our Prime Minister. I think he had a certain feeling for Mr Nehru despite what had happened. I must admit that I would try to avoid him as the whole diplomatic corps was watching. But he had the opposite view.

Interviewer: But you know there is some irony that while he had this affection for Nehru, I think it was in a meeting with Sri Lankan journalists in 1963 or 1964 he said Panditji was the most arrogant man he had ever met. This was something of a friendship that had soured badly.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: It was not quite affectionate. Many years later, in the 1990s I met his Secretary who had become the Chinese Representative to the Disarmament Committee in Geneva, in Islamabad. He had taken me to visit a tree Chou had planted there. As we were reminiscing about the past, he told me quite candidly that when Chou made his compromise offer in 1960 (which was practically the 'package' Deng proposed to Vajpayee in 1979) he and his delegation could not understand why Panditji was not even willing to discuss it. Not only did he not discuss it but then he sent Chou to meet several of his Ministers who were quite discourteous in their comments. The Chinese felt they were trying to build a bridge in spite of their own difficulties at home.

I would just hazard a guess that Chou was disappointed at not being able to achieve a lasting basis for better Indo-China relations. There can be no doubt that the Chinese have more than their share of policy makers who have a middle kingdom complex. But in my dealings with them I also believe there are those who are interested in a reasonable compromise.

Unfortunately, it seems we can never synchronise our attitudes to achieve that. As you know I consider we should negotiate some version of the package proposal to settle the border. But when the Chinese seem ready our leadership and public opinion make it impossible. When we are in a more reasonable mood the Chinese are less so. I can only hope that our successors will be able to break this deadlock. Today, our claims in Aksai Chin are being questioned by some of our own experts.

According to my reading of the archives there was really not even a working border there. In putting the border in the 1954 map, the Survey of India in consultation with the Historical Division placed it along the Kuen Lun watershed. This was the most distant claim that could be made. It is not as good in terms of defence strategy as the Karakoram watershed. In the Eastern sector the position was different. The McMahon line was part of a Treaty made in 1913. There may be some controversy about the making of that Treaty. The Chinese have accepted it indirectly in the package. They have also conceded it in the border agreement made with the Burmese which follows the McMahon line all the way from the tri-junction right to the end of Tibet's jurisdiction.

I am sorry. I have strayed from your original question. The Burmese Army was unlike almost any colonial army at the time of Independence. It was led by freedom fighters, the 30 comrades who had been organised by the Japanese. They had changed sides to join with the British in liberating Burma. Aung San was the leader and when he became the political leader, Ne Win became the army commander. Aung San was assassinated just before Independence. The new Burmese Government found itself embroiled in insurgencies from the minority communities which surround the Burmese in the plains along the Irrawaddy River, and even there a large area was dominated by various factions of the Communist Party. An arrangement initiated by Aung San to provide political space for the minorities had never been implemented after his death.

The AFPFL also broke up because of personalities and policies. Ne Win was invited to take over as PM to restore order. He effected some improvement and handed power back to the political parties only to find

that the old problems surfaced in even worse form. He then took over permanently, and even after his retirement and death the generals have continued to rule Burma.

When he took over in 1962 he still had with him a certain number of the original comrades from the group that had returned from Japan. Two or three were Brigadiers and all the rest were still Colonels. Some became Ministers, and some became regional commanders and some ran the armed forces. In time all these original officers have been replaced by the present leadership, which is now trying to establish a 'civilian elected' leadership from the same military officers who have controlled all aspects of life in Burma (now Myanmar) for 50 years. The Army and its officers came largely from peasant stock and had little time for the urban middle class. They did not trust the civil services or the professionals and businessmen who came from that group, and they were happy that many of them decided to emigrate.

They had a vaguely Socialist philosophy and initially articulated it under the aegis of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). This narrow minded inward attitude which was also fairly characteristic of past Burmese rulers resulted in a chauvinistic and isolationist attitude to the world. Everything internal was sought to be tightly controlled, and external relations reduced to a minimum. A visit to Myanmar today makes one feel time has almost stood still. The bamboo curtain was probably more impenetrable than the iron curtain and not many cared. Since India was a major neighbour and could not abandon the large number of Indian origin residents and as the rice trade was still important to both countries, we continued to have relations on a much reduced scale.

With this must be factored the diminution of our profile after the 1962 conflict with China. At the time when the Chinese forces entered India, I was visiting Lashio which was not far from the Sino-Burmese border. The local commander had made me feel most welcome on a past visit. That day all the bonhomie disappeared. I was requested not to leave the guest house and then to leave Lashio as soon as possible. The iniquities of Indian traders mentioned above were highlighted more openly and more often.

When Panditji died, Ne Win did not go the funeral ceremonies, although he did go to pay a condolence visit some weeks later. But the old feelings had not totally died away. When a cultural troupe happened to be there on the next Republic Day, no official representative came but the demand for tickets from locals could not be satisfied. Mrs. Ne Win's father sent me a paper he had prepared on the similarities of Kathakali and Burmese dance. My last meeting with Ne Win occurred many years later when he came to India in the 80's and I was the Secretary. Before he left he invited me for a cup of tea and as he looked around his assembled officers he said 'these are all young men from a later time than ours'.

There are cautious steps being taken in Myanmar to craft a new order. They are as yet too limited to be effective. Yet South and Southeast Asia need a reinvigorated country and people to join them in the building of a new Asia. The challenge for India is to play a role if it can be fashioned.

Interviewer: So, you left Burma at the end of 1964, what was your next assignment?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: My next assignment was in London again. But let me insert a word about my farewells. The military government had restricted all social intercourse to the bare minimum. I was, therefore, surprised that the Foreign Office made a special gesture in hosting a farewell for me at the official guest house, a ritual only used for departing Ambassadors. They said I had officiated as Charge for so long that it was only right. Later, when we were embarking on the ship, almost all the civilian officials I had dealt with came to the docks to see us off. The chief of Military Intelligence was also there and he said that he was there to make sure I was really leaving. Later we worked out an arrangement for U Nu to come to India from the U.S. when he was the Burmese Ambassador in Washington. The civilian officers continued to drop in and see us in Delhi or in posts abroad.

The last visit was after I had retired, when an old friend on the Asia desk came to tell me that the maritime boundary we had negotiated many years earlier had been ratified. Having felt that I had almost become an enemy of the state, this was very gratifying.

London as Counsellor Administration (1965-68)

Early in 1965, I went to London as the Counsellor Administration. London was still our largest mission abroad, so administration was a heavy responsibility, the more so as we were revising the terms and conditions of the local staff. In addition, it included consular activities for an increasing Indian community complicated by radical restrictions on Indian immigration. Although not in my jurisdiction, circumstances made it necessary to handle some political and public relations problems as well from time to time.

Politically during that period we had to deal with two major issues, the Indo-Pak conflict of 1965 and the unilateral declaration of independence in Rhodesia by Ian Smith. Up to 1965 the British were playing the lead role for the West in South Asian affairs. Pakistan had already begun to move into the American orbit. However, when the first confrontation occurred in the Rann of Kutch it was the British who worked out an arrangement for a ceasefire and a withdrawal which held for a few months. The Pakistanis used that pause to regroup and then launched their attack across the border into Jammu and Kashmir and the rest is history. Pakistani sympathisers in the Commonwealth Office then sought to tweak international opinion by getting Prime Minister Wilson to come out immediately with a stinging condemnation of the Indian action when we retaliated by crossing the international border.

There is no need to rewrite history. Many myths were destroyed in that conflict about the prowess of the Pakistani (read Punjabi) soldiers and generals. Not that their admirers gave up, and some myths still survive. But in strategic terms the Americans decided that war and peace in South Asia would be hereafter dealt with directly by them. Further it was accepted by most analysts that the resolution of the question of Kashmir by sending regular troops across the border was no longer a real option. This made the Indian position in Kashmir much stronger until the events of the late 80's served to derail the equations established in 1965 and reinforced in1971. At a local level changes in the Commonwealth Office tended to make the Indo-British equation easier and also more equal.

The second major issue that we had to deal with in London during my tenure was Rhodesia. It dominated the Commonwealth discourse following the unilateral declaration of independence by Ian Smith. South Africa had been expelled from the Commonwealth, but it did not seem that the apartheid system could or would be dismantled by the international community. Hence, its virtual extension to a neighbouring British colony was a negative development to most in the international community and certainly to the Third World.

The British had gone quite far down the road of self government in the process of decolonisation, but they could also not tolerate a blatant anti-constitutional operation which was Ian Smith's intention. They were, however, hamstrung by the reality that Ian Smith was backed up by the regimes in South Africa and some of the nearby Portuguese colonies. Further there was considerable sympathy and support for Ian Smith in important sections of the British establishment such as the conservative politicians and media and the business world. The attitude of the leadership of their armed forces also made the use of serious military sanctions a somewhat doubtful proposition.

I was a member of the sanctions committee functioning under the Commonwealth Secretariat. Some economic sanctions were attempted. These were to be mainly operated offshore by the British Navy. They did so in a rather desultory manner, and to the best of my knowledge did not harm the regime in Rhodesia very much. (An unforeseen irony is that the present economic state of Zimbabwe may well be worse than when Rhodesia was under sanctions during Ian Smith's regime.) The Rhodesian question did create a big split within the British political establishment as well as in the Commonwealth. The end of UDI and the establishment of Zimbabwe occurred in 1980 well after I had left London.

Rhodesia and South Africa (like Algeria) represent a special aspect of decolonisation. The British had been among the imperial powers that had been willing to accept reality, and starting with India they dismantled their empire with less reluctance than almost anyone else. But where there were settlers from the mother country, other political and economic factors

came into play, and as mentioned above, the process became much more difficult and protracted.

During this tenure in London a new institution was born, the Commonwealth Secretariat. There were also associated institutions like the Commonwealth Foundation, but they did not make too much of an impact. Being associated as a part of the oversight committee almost from the beginning, it was interesting to see the interplay of interests. The Secretariat was intended to replace the U.K. Foreign Office that had provided the staff for meetings and acted as the liaison between meetings. As feelings grew that this allowed the British to manipulate proceedings in their own interest, it was rightly felt that this arrangement should be replaced by an independent office staffed by all the members. The first Secretary General, Arnold Smith, a very able Canadian diplomat, ensured that this was done.

But in the usual way the Secretariat saw itself providing more and more services especially to the smaller and less well endowed members. Some, like the provision for assistance in development, holding elections and in training in government, were indeed desirable. But like most multilateral bureaucracies it seems doubtful whether the overall results were cost effective. Some of the old vices also crept back with the U.K. being the major paymaster and the close relations with the secretariat based in London.

Beyond this, an element of growing interest during my posting in London was the beginning of using what is now called public diplomacy, namely to put across the national interest by reaching beyond the traditional relations with the government and the traditional establishment. The first of these was to put across our point of view to British MPs by inviting a few members from both the major parties to a lunch. Initially we served food from our canteen. Slowly it developed and grew into the well known Curry Club which now has over a hundred members, at least at the last meeting I attended after retirement.

It is interesting to note that during my tenure when the 1965 conflict with Pakistan took place, we got little support from Parliament and had to deal

with an unfriendly Commonwealth Office. But by 1971 the Curry Club provided us with considerable leverage with the British government.

Another relationship that one was able to develop was with various academic and non-academic institutions dealing with international affairs. We already had a working relationship with Chatham House. As specialisation developed, the Institute of Strategic Studies was started by Alistair Buchan. It was located very near our High Commission and we established extremely cordial relations with them in the early days when it was working out of two or three rooms. This was to prove a great introduction to an enormous number of institutes and specialists who now exist all over the world.

I also remember with much nostalgia a sort of travelling circus where the diplomatic correspondent of the Daily Telegraph and I would address the questions of the senior class in high schools around the country in a programme set up by the Commonwealth Foundation. There were a number of notable correspondents at that time. There was Patrick Keatley of the Manchester Guardian and John Dickey of the Daily Mail and this man of the Telegraph whose name I am not able to recall, was rather more academically inclined. He made me aware of the importance of influencing academia and the younger generation. We were already well aware of the need to cultivate and influence the media.

A major concern that became gradually more serious was migration. From the days of the Empire to the early years of the Commonwealth, a commonwealth citizen was always treated as a British subject even after his or her country gained Independence. Initially this suited the British as they found an easy source of workers for their expanding economy. Then the inevitable backlash against the outsiders began. This was exacerbated as it became impossible for the Indian Government to continue its tacit cooperation in the shape emigration controls once the Supreme Court ruled that every citizen was entitled to travel abroad and could not be denied a passport.

Then restrictive policies against outsiders, mainly in East Africa, resulted in an exodus of residents of Indian origin who were British subjects and

held British passports. At this stage the British Government finally decided to restrict free entry of British subjects domiciled outside the U.K. and Commonwealth citizens. Ever since then the process has become stricter and the entry further and further curtailed. (Subsequent to the entry of Britain into the E.U. the entry of E.U. citizens has had to be given priority over the Commonwealth citizens under various E.U. Treaties.)

The prejudices aired against the entry of this group of rather better off and more enterprising Indians, however, served to draw attention to a different problem which was the difficulties of integration into the local society faced by direct migrants coming from rural areas in India and Pakistan. Finally the British government decided to set up a Committee on Race Relations headed by a very distinguished retired ICS officer, Philip Mason. There were two non British members, a West Indian social worker and myself. Our mandate was to go into the field and consult with immigrant communities, local authorities, the police, social welfare and educational authorities and recommend measures to ameliorate and remove the problems of immigrant groups.

Broadly, these amounted largely to various programmes to educate the immigrant communities and the larger society in which they were embedded about each other and how to remove the unnecessary friction which resulted from a lack of understanding. For instance the BBC started radio and television programmes which put across the British way of life to the immigrant, and also explained to the hosts the cultural background of the immigrants. In due course we helped the immigrants to help themselves by accessing directly the political, economic, and educational levers to succeed in a multicultural society.

This was inevitably a long process. The first generation is always willing to work for less for longer. This causes dissatisfaction and envy. India is no stranger to slogans such as ‘No jobs for the outsiders’. Unfortunately, one also discovers that the organisations, who should be more responsible, such as political parties and trade unions, are often the ones who become more populist in such matters.

It was an education for all of us. Britain is not a perfect example of a multi-racial society even today. I do not believe any actually exists. But if

the two million or more South Asians have managed to make Britain their home and prosper, this Committee on Race Relations provided valuable inputs just when they were needed.

Interviewer: Eric, this kind of a Race Relations Committee that you mentioned where a host government reaches out to foreign embassies and enrols them in a process of trying to deal with the new migrants and to reach out to both their own communities and to the migrant communities is quite unique. I do not know if this kind of a method is practiced any longer in any part of the world.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: No, I think this was a unique situation. At that time in Britain, the problem was that the effective migrant groups did not really have any institutions and organisations which could represent them. Normally, one would have taken the office bearers from these groups to serve on such a committee. But the established groups of Indians which had been there maybe for one or more generations and their institutions consisted of middleclass professionals that had no interest at all in the working class migrants. You had also the better off migrants, who had come from Africa or other British colonies, but they again had distaste for mixing with the Punjabis and the other working class groups.

The working class has established community groups, generally called the Indian Workers Association (IWA). Most of these had the same membership as the local Gurudwara Committee as most of the active migrants were Sikhs from the Punjab. But they had given little thought to how to handle problems with the host community. Their preferred political interests were all rooted in India, and involved agitating against the Indian Government in the shape of the High Commission. At that stage using an officer from the High Commission seemed the only way. Our consular activities for individuals as well as the community had made us develop relations with the IWAs and Gurudwara committees. It was to them we went for establishing the initial agenda.

In time as these organisations developed and grew they were able to articulate their own interests and represent their community. Then those so inclined started working up the political ladder and now you have maybe

20 or more MPs and members in the House of Lords who come from the migrant community.

It might interest you to record my relationship with the Southall Gurudwara. It started with my wife starting a committee to explain to the newly arrived Indian housewives there how they needed to understand local customs and values and conform to the extent possible. As I got more involved with the IWAs and Gurudwara Committees across Britain, the Southall Committee came to me with a proposition to buy a local cinema hall that was going bankrupt to establish a gurudwara and a community centre. The cinema was still a favoured mode of entertainment for migrants and this would give them the necessary collateral. The loan they needed was modest, but no Indian bank in London would consider it. Finally I succeeded in getting them a loan from a British bank because their Vice Chairman (who had been an ICS officer in India) had complete faith in the ability of Sikhs to repay him. And he was right.

When we left London, they gave us a farewell with the traditional gift of a saropa etc. In the corridor outside were placards condemning the Indian Government for some oppressive labour legislation against which they were going to demonstrate in front of the India House. They said that this was a different matter which did nothing to lessen our friendship.

Joint Secretary (South) of Ministry of External Affairs (1968-1972)

Interviewer: When did you leave London and what was your next destination?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: I left London in 1968 and came back to Delhi as a Director for a short while and then became Joint Secretary (South). Joint Secretary (South) was then responsible for all the areas South and East of India which included Sri Lanka, the Indian Ocean, Burma and of course South East Asia and the Pacific. But it also included the U.K. and all her remaining colonies. This needed rationalisation. U.K. was transferred to the Europe Division where it should have been. Among the last

assignments I undertook was the preparation for the first Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, which under the new dispensation of the Commonwealth Secretariat was to be held for the first time outside London, in Singapore. The Singapore government had asked four or five of us from Asian members with some prior experience to come to Singapore to help with the preparations in January 1971. That was the beginning of an extraordinary year for India.

For the first time Mrs. Gandhi dissolved Parliament before its normal five year period was completed and an election was to be held just after the CHOGM. The Presidential election in 1969 had resulted in the breakup of the Congress Party and Mrs. Gandhi led a minority government. Domestic political problems were not the only concerns.

Sri Lanka was to face an unprecedented domestic upheaval into which we were inevitably drawn. But a major crisis was building up in East Pakistan. The Pakistani elections, which the Awami League had won, led to the inevitable army crackdown to avoid giving in to the Bangladeshi demands which had by now escalated to calls for Independence. I was involved in a dual capacity because in addition to my territorial responsibilities, I had also been appointed the MEA member on the Joint Intelligence Committee.

The Joint Intelligence Committee of those days was not too important. It was a talking shop which was supposed to evaluate whatever secondary intelligence was made available to it by the agencies. (***Interviewer***: Yes, because the real intelligence was never shared by the big boys in that committee) Yes, however I discovered later that even the big boys did not get all the real intelligence. As the East Pakistan conflict escalated the Soviets were very anxious that it should not last too long because they felt that it would be impossible to maintain the support they were giving us in the U.N. Security Council after a limited time.

Probably for other reasons too they decided to provide us with intelligence on our three major security concerns. One was whether or not the Chinese would support the Pakistanis by starting diversions across our border. Second was the whereabouts of the Pakistan's Second Armoured Division

which would have been of crucial importance to the balance on the Western front. And the third was what exactly the Americans would do with the Seventh Fleet task force led by the USS Enterprise which was headed to the Bay of Bengal. The Soviets had put up a special dedicated satellite to observe these areas of concern and shared that information with us. For most of the period of the actual fighting very senior officials from Moscow were stationed at their Embassy in Delhi to provide extremely close and effective liaison.

That was how we knew that we could afford to draw down the troops from the northern border because it became evident the Chinese were not going to do anything and they were not going to move anybody. It also became clear that the American Seventh Fleet would not arrive in time to relieve the pressure on Dhaka. I never really found out about the Second Armoured Division except that inexplicably it was not sent into action.

Interviewer: Any other recollections of the 1971 War and the role that you played or officials in the ministry played during that rather key period?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Enough has been written about the higher management of this conflict, and I believe it was one of our most glorious periods in external relations. A crisis of this dimension with the enormous stakes involved does generate tension and anxiety. However, my overall recollection is that while we were all working, there was a relaxed feeling because the outcome was guaranteed. A minor illustration was that the External Affairs Wives' Association raised money to send ambulances to the border areas with East Pakistan. It was then discovered that as they had never registered themselves as a Society they could not get exemption from tax.

As my wife was the Secretary it fell to me to get this exemption from the Delhi Government, which my Private Secretary and I obtained in no time, besides contributing to the usual fund raising gimmicks of advertisements etc while still getting ready for the final show down in the East.

Everybody from the Foreign Minister down was actively involved. Like my colleagues I went with him to a number of bilateral consultations abroad.

Foreign Ministers and senior officials came with increasing frequency to Delhi. During the actual period of hostilities he had to speak for us in the United Nations.

The Policy Planning Adviser Mr D.P. Dhar was masterminding the whole undercover operation, including the establishment of Mujibnagar and the assistance to the Mukti Bahini Operation etc. Of course the Defence Forces, the State Governments, R&AW and other agencies were involved, but it was all managed from South Block, working out of the office next to mine.

We had innumerable coordination and briefing meetings led by the hyper active Foreign Secretary. We briefed all the missions covered by our division almost on a daily basis towards the end.

A superb PR operation was mounted especially towards the parliamentarians, the media and NGOs in the western countries to counter the tilt of their governments. Kissinger's opening to China using Pakistan as a go between seemed to necessitate that they could not let Pakistan down lest they would be dubbed unreliable by the Chinese. (Or do Western Governments really prefer to do business with generals while touting democracy?) Certainly Nixon and Kissinger were willing to support the Pakistanis through hell and hot water. This was done despite the fact that actual people in the field like the American Consul General in Dhaka was forced to resign as his dispatches were ignored.

I had to deal with the South East Asians who are not so sentimental. Moreover, at that time they were mostly military or authoritarian governments. Of course, India and China were the exceptions. In the rest of the region there was a desire to stay out if not some sympathy for Pakistan. The Islamic ties were beginning to come into play.

But we had a staunch supporter in the Sri Lankan High Commissioner. When his appointment had been proposed his reputation was that he was so anti-India that at one stage some thought had actually been given to declaring him *persona non grata,* which we rightly vetoed. But he was clearly a man of principle. He showed me the dispatches he was sending to

Mrs. Bandaranaike that she should abandon her fence sitting posture and support India. This was the Mrs. Bandaranaike whose government we had saved. But that is another story.

It was an interesting side note to see how the permanent officials from Australia and New Zealand were more helpful than their colleagues in either the ASEAN or the West.

One last reflection on how success provides the ultimate justification in real politik. After the last U.N. debate where the vote against us was totally lopsided, in a matter of months Dhaka had been recognised by everybody except the Chinese. I remember comforting Sardar Swaran Singh when he was ruing that vote, saying that we had just taken Dhaka and that was what mattered.

Interviewer: So, these were actions of both political and public diplomacy?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Oh absolutely. 1971 in my opinion represents possibly the apogee of Indian diplomacy because we were actually able to take on not just the Pakistanis but all their mighty backers successfully. In my next posting to Washington, the President might have tilted against us, but our profile remained high for quite a while and it was heartening to be told by press men and Members of Congress and even a few State Department officials that they had been behind us all the time.

In recent years much has been made of the U.S. President dropping in when a Foreign Minister is meeting the National Security Adviser. When Swaran Singh came to Washington as FM he was driven in a motorcade straight to the White House to meet President Nixon in the Oval Office. The Time magazine featured Indira Gandhi the cover of the year under the title 'Empress of India', and in a year or two Kissinger was to address the ICWA and congratulate India on non-alignment.

Interviewer: But the cause was also manifestly clear and morally right?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: And we were able to sell it. As you know the morality or rightness of one's cause is no guarantee that a foreign

government will buy it. With Pakistan a CENTO and SEATO ally as well as a key interlocutor in the US 'opening to China' we never convinced many Western and Western oriented governments. The debates and voting in the UN provide telling evidence. But the extreme measures used by the Pakistan Army regime, the flood of refugees into India were ably relayed by us using a cooperative foreign media and receptive parliamentary and civil liberties organisations. I think this was the one and only time we were able to sell our proposition to the public and thwart governments. I do not know that if we have ever been able to do that since then. Maybe we were lucky that we could bring the issue to a successful conclusion in record time. Once Bangladesh was established everyone was falling over themselves to recognise the new state.

However, in the Southern Division there were a lot of other things to be dealt with. I will return to the staples of Indo-China and ASEAN in a moment.

Just before Bangladesh, we were also involved in another rescue operation of great importance in our immediate neighbourhood. In April 1971 the Sri Lankan government was practically knocked out by a concerted JVP insurgency taking over many police stations and disabling almost all telecommunications. Requests for assistance came by the most unusual channels. The High Commissioner had to send an officer to Trivandrum to relay the request from the Sri Lankan Government, which also reached us by the only cable link via London. (At a later stage I used to talk to our High Commission from AIR while he spoke from the studios of Radio Ceylon)

The cabinet simply decided that we will have to do everything we could to keep the constitutional government in power and then left it almost entirely to the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Defence to carry out that decision as everybody else at the policy level went back to Bangladesh and Pakistan. The intervention in Sri Lanka deserves recognition and commendation as it has been sidelined because of Bangladesh. India flew in troops within days, and took control of the airport. To our good luck a naval flotilla was coming back from South East Asia. It was diverted

and within a few days it was in Colombo harbour patrolling the coast line. Literally, we put Colombo back into the hands of the Sri Lankan government. Then we helped them restore their own security forces and restore governance over the rest of the island.

(***Interviewer***: Who was the operation against? The JVP?) Yes the JVP. The JVP at that time was a very Left Wing Sri Lankan group which in fact had been financed and trained, probably with the connivance of the Chinese, overtly by the North Koreans. Indian advisers with the Sri Lankan forces were able to recover materials and manuals of DPRK origin. Initially the JVP was an extreme Left Wing group. Since then of course the JVP has changed its stripes and has become a stridently Sinhala nationalist party.

After the situation returned to normal in Sri Lanka and later also in Bangladesh we immediately withdrew our forces. We did not get embroiled in the subsequent internal conflict which we could not avoid when the IPKF went to Sri Lanka some years later.

While the praise during the effective part of the operation was effusive, as normality returned Sri Lanka started asking for and getting some military assistance from other Asian countries, especially China and Pakistan. I could understand Sri Lankan domestic compulsions in not being seen as totally beholden to India. That was why we had evacuated our forces as quickly as possible. But what seemed excessive was that as soon as we handed over Katunayake Airport, Pakistan was granted over-flight permission to ferry troops to Dhaka. To their credit, Sri Lankan civil society mounted vocal protests.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are object lessons in real politik. Nothing succeeds like success. But also do not count on gratitude in the future. Relations need to be based on current realities and not on past debts

Interviewer: What were then the next stages that you had after Delhi?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: It is not possible to cover everything but the real focus of the Southern Division is South East Asia, and that region was also in a state of rapid transformation during my tenure. Indonesia was

pulling itself together after the ouster of Soekarno. Showing remarkable statesmanship Malaysia and Indonesia ended confrontation and the embryo of ASEAN began to take shape. The Vietnam War had engulfed Laos and was subsequently extended to Cambodia. In what was probably the last of its peacemaking roles India was still involved as the Chairman of the International Commissions with the three Indo-China nations. The very close relations we once had with all our South East Asian neighbours had weakened. They were establishing fresh relations with great powers. After 1962, our stature and our interest in the region both diminished. But the relationships still had content and the prevailing Cold War climate gave us a limited role. Later our relevance was to diminish further as the Asian tigers began to get into their act and India was no longer on the radar until her economy reformed and grew.

There was some wishful thinking in the MEA that we should seek membership of any regional body. At first it was something called SEAMIC. But even later in the 80s when we were offered a role as a dialogue partner it was eventually withdrawn. This happened later on when I was Secretary to government.

By the late 60s many relationships were forged with existing and incoming Ministers and officials. Tunku still ruled in Kuala Lumpur and Tun Razack was well inclined. Lee Kwan Yew had not yet become the great world mentor. Mrs. Gandhi's first visit to meet President Suharto was a success. The foreign ministers and senior officials like Rajaratnam, Nathan, Ghazali Shafie and Moktar became good friends and while we disagreed at times we had a good working relationship over the years. The deterioration really got worse after the U.S. left Vietnam and was trying to make Vietnam pay by bleeding it over Kampuchea. It seems strange now that almost all the South East Asians, China and the U.S. favoured Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge regime, the remnants of which are being tried as war criminals.

Interviewer: Would it be fair to say that in a way after that period we failed to pay attention to South East Asia and we almost took a position of benign neglect? Was this a product of the Cold War? Although we hate to think that we were influenced by the Cold War, but we were and that

we saw South East Asian countries in a Cold War context at a political level and, therefore, in a sense did not wish to have too much to do with them. Why is it that in 1993 the Prime Minister of India had to say that we needed a Look East policy? Where were we looking at that time?

Amb Eric Gonsalves ***India's*** Asian policy is always a little difficult to comprehend, especially as the rhetoric differs considerably from the reality. Nehru had an idealistic vision of the colonial world. He started out with the conviction that once countries were freed from imperialism they would not go back to conquest and conflict which was a legacy of their colonial masters. He also felt that balances of power would disappear in the new world where backward nations would necessarily have to give utmost priority to development. You see this in the agenda and discussions of the Asian Relations Conference which he convened even before Independence and later in the concept of nonalignment which he fostered. I think he anticipated a special leadership role for Asia, the home of most of the world's great civilisations, in achieving this.

One can recall the work of the Colombo powers, the Bandung Conference etc. But as the Cold War made its inroads into Asia and many of our neighbours saw their interests served by joining alliances, India began to get disillusioned. However, in this early period of the Cold War we still had a useful role in acting as an interlocutor between the two sides. The Korean Armistice and the Geneva Agreements on Indo-China are instances of this.

By the 60s new realities came flooding in. The Colombo powers took an equivocal stand on the India-China conflict. American assurances that the arms given to Pakistan were never to be used against India proved empty. This was nothing compared to the visceral anti American reaction to the Nixon tilt and the Enterprise sortie in 1971.The Indo-China Commissions were ignored and became ornamental bodies that could do nothing and could not be dismantled. Our role there gave rise to much bad blood with the Canadians, all participants in the conflict there, and even with those South East Asians who had begun to incline towards the West while remaining in the NAM like Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The process was gradual. Tunku Abdul Rahman out of gratitude donated blood for Indian troops in 1965. The Suharto government was very appreciative of the help we were able to give in the early reconstruction period. But as ASEAN started its rapid economic rise with Japanese and Western help, they began to look down on India with its 'Hindu' rate of growth. We too turned inward and the personal relationships started to dissolve. The academic and cultural links which had begun to bloom did not survive as our institutions and linkages dried up due to lack of interest and resources just as Japan, Europe and America started pouring them into relations with Southeast Asia.

It was perhaps natural that India, grateful to the USSR and the Soviet Bloc for the political military and diplomatic help encapsulated in the Indo-Soviet Treaty and the vital economic assistance engendered by the rupee trade and technical aid, tended to lean towards that group. Our anti-imperial tendencies also made it natural to support the indomitable Vietnamese as they proceeded to take on the French and later the entire might of the West and drive them out of their country.

Pham Van Dong the Prime Minister reminded me during a visit in 1981 to visit one of the farms where the buffaloes India had donated in the 70s were flourishing after several attempts had failed. We helped to make the almost defunct railways render some service. But I think our most important contribution to Vietnam and also Cambodia and Laos was that they had a friend in Asia outside the Communist group. Our welcoming the Foreign Minister, Mrs Binh, caused many raised eyebrows around the world, and in India too, but it was a morale booster to the Vietnamese.

During a bilateral meeting with the U.S. State Department in 1969, I mentioned to the American press our decision to upgrade the Consulate General in Hanoi to an Embassy. This was undoubtedly somewhat partial as we did not intend to upgrade the Consulate General in Saigon, but it made very little difference in actual political terms. The State Department immediately persuaded a Congressman to put forward an amendment to the Foreign Aid Bill which would make a country upgrading its Consulate General to an Embassy in Hanoi ineligible for aid.

Later I think the State department saw the absurdity of the proposition and the amendment was either not passed or it became a dead letter. The aid did not stop and we had demonstrated our independence. This actually gave us leverage with both sides. Sometimes one has to disregard immediate interests to play for larger interests. We have ceased to have that attitude in making foreign policy. Rather it has become reactive and focused only on two or three major actors.

Further afield another fruitful international activity which gave India kudos was facilitating the start of decolonisation as empires disappeared. Also the U.S. policy of thwarting U.N. action in this process very forcefully where its interests were involved (peacemaking in Congo being a prime example) put an end to that avenue of international effort.

To revert to your question. We had a very active 'Look East' policy after Independence. We lost interest, and also the capacity to do much towards the end of the 80s as ASEAN left us behind. Since the 90s we have talked about this policy and done very little. Today as we look at the situation in 2011, let me say it is imperative to put content and resources into this effort and mount a major base to implement it from our North East, if we are to remain an effective member of the Asian and world systems in light of China's drive to dominate all of her neighbourhood economically.

Interviewer: Let us fast forward then to the period after Delhi. Where did you go next?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: After Delhi I was sent to Washington in early 1972. Just as the surrender in Dhaka was announced, the Foreign Secretary sent for me and told me that the PM had decided to send me as DCM to Washington. I protested because I had done four strenuous years in the Ministry. But I realised quickly enough that Washington was a challenge. It was undoubtedly the most important world capital and facing the Americans directly rather than at second hand added to that challenge. So I landed up in Washington.

Washington D.C. (1972-1975)

Interviewer: So, Eric what were the highlights of your long and important stay in Washington D.C.?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Washington proved a most eventful posting. I was sent there as Minister (Political) or the DCM, towards the end of the Bangladesh conflict in some haste as it was felt the Washington Embassy needed reinforcement in the post conflict period. Dhaka fell in the middle of December, and by the middle of January 1972 I was in Washington.

It was prefaced by a brief visit to Bangladesh. Bangladesh was in transition as the departure of the Pakistanis had left a vacuum at the top and the Bangladeshi officials had yet to be appointed or assume office and get the administration running. Indian civil and military officials were temporarily holding the fort. But there could be no question over the euphoria over independence and the warmth of our welcome. The climax was a dinner in Banga Bhavan by the newly installed President. There we feasted in state in the totally untouched banquet hall next to the reception area which the IAF had razed completely to the ground. Honeymoons unfortunately do not last forever and our relations with Bangladesh, with which I have had to deal with during later years, have been a roller coaster ride.

The posting to Washington began at the time of the Nixon tilt. We were in the dog house, and I remember a sharp exchange with Deputy Secretary of State in the early days about some statement by the Government of India. I refused to be apologetic and there were no future repetitions. One discovers very soon that the Americans unlike Indians believe in closure. Once a situation is seen to have to an end they come to terms with it and get on with pursuing their interests in the light of the new realities. Permanent interests are the goal. Friendships and alliances and even ideologies can be bent or ignored while interests are always pursued.

My first real introduction to this American desire to get on with the business in hand came within months of my arrival. I was called in by the Special Assistant for South Asian Affairs in the National Security Council, which is part of the White House, to say that they wanted to take up the question

of the accumulated PL480 funds. These were rupee deposits held by the U.S. Embassy in the Reserve Bank which represented the sale proceeds of aid from the U.S., mainly in the form of food. The Embassy could draw on them for U.S. government expenditures. This covered all rupee expenditure for the Delhi Embassy and other offices in India and also for other Embassies and government departments.

This was broadly interpreted and covered even stocking libraries in many U.S. Universities and expenses of American scholars in India. But even so the outgo was relatively small and the corpus had accumulated by that time to some $6 billion, a very large sum in 1972. Some suggestions were made about investing that in projects such as rural electrification. But an economic analysis showed that this would cause havoc in the Indian economy, because if the Reserve Bank tried to re-issue the money against these deposits which it had virtually written off, it could result in large scale inflation.

The Indian Government was becoming concerned about this, but under the legislation and agreements governing these funds we could do little. But the U.S. Aid Administration had recognised that there was a problem, and economists from both countries had been suggesting ways to deal with it.

I was told that even while the Bangladesh war had been going on, the National Security Council (NSC) staff had been looking at the problem and had almost concluded that it should be written off. This sounded very logical and reasonable, but for it to be implemented required an agreement between the governments. This did not amount to a serious hurdle as both governments were already thinking on the same lines. The major difficulty was the need to have that approved by the U.S. Congress which did not easily forgive debts. I was given access to their papers and facts and figures. Initially they could only be studied in the White House. Slowly after taking into account the requirements of different pieces of legislation we arrived at an outline agreement about which amounts could be written off and how. Diplomacy of this kind is best not conducted too much in the public gaze and we were dealing only with the N.S.C. i.e. the White House.

The State Department was not kept in the loop. Ironically when the time came to convey the final agreement from Delhi we had to take it to Kissinger, who just a few days before had moved from the post of National Security Adviser to that of the Secretary of State. When we handed over the *aide memoire* containing the agreed points the then Deputy Assistant Secretary was taken rather by surprise. He knew that this was in the works but he did not know that it had come to the point of agreement and finalisation. So it is not only in India that sometimes the Foreign Office is not always aware of what their Head of Government is doing.

The major problem of selling the Agreement to Congress then had to be tackled. How this was achieved was to be another object lesson in the management of American government and politics. Nixon, a hardnosed Republican had appointed a very liberal Harvard Professor Patrick Moynihan as his Ambassador to India. Moynihan was a leading academic on American society. He had served in high posts in the U.S. government, and was to end his career as one of the best known U.S. Senators. He hoped that like his predecessor, Galbraith he could advise India on her development programmes. Writing off the PL480 debt was going to be his entry point and he did us a signal service in leading the battle for that through Congress. There were stout opponents in Congress who came from many groups, those opposed in principle to writing off debts, those to whom India was anathema as a stooge of the Soviet Union, or a friend of the Vietnamese enemy and sundry other special interests. But Moynihan had a gift for convincing U.S. politicians and lobbyists. We helped in the process through innumerable briefings and meetings and over lunch or drinks. The goodwill created over Bangladesh that still carried over was useful.

These two campaigns educated us considerably how to sell our views in political America. Congressmen rely on bright staffers in their offices and in the committees that they work on, who are themselves aiming high for careers in politics, government or academic life. Getting them on your side is as vital as ensuring the Congressman's interest. They network with other branches of government, academic experts, the media and where necessary business and industry. Lateral movement is very common.

Getting connected into these networks is essential to influencing the making of policy. The lobbyist industry has made a professional job of this and is regulated by legislation. For too long Indian official circles were unwilling to recognise the need to use lobbyists and shied away from their cost. This has now changed.

A footnote on bureaucracy. We had handed over a half sheet of paper with six points which contained the essentials of the agreement. Months later an enormous tome came from the ministry containing the agreement signed in Delhi between the Finance Ministry and Ambassador Moynihan. It had hundreds of pages with annexures, appendices etc. and I could never find the original six points. Fortunately, almost all these agreements that we sign are rarely opened again. If governments were to disagree and seek arbitration on them it would keep armies of lawyers in business forever.

The PL480 Agreement was a landmark in Indo-U.S. relations coming as it did so soon after Bangladesh. It set the climate for some other significant collaboration in science and space and elsewhere. It displayed the essential pragmatism in American policy making. (It had already been displayed to us in Kissinger's secret visit and the subsequent opening to China). But interestingly there are some limits on their willingness to modify their attitudes. Indira Gandhi was very interested in coming to Washington for an official visit.

Despite various ploys being tried out, such as an unofficial visit to an old family retainer in Vermont following an official visit to Canada, the U.S. Administration did not respond. Statements from Delhi long after 1971 and the closeness of some of her advisers to the U.S.S.R. were cited to me by informed observers even from outside the government. The invitation for a visit came in 1982 when President Reagan, a Republican was in the White House. I can claim some credit as it was partly organised through a back channel that I still had to the White House through an old friend who had been Deputy Director of the CIA while I was in Washington.

Interviewer: But coming back to the agreement and the negotiations, you had once mentioned to me that one aspect of the negotiations was that much of it was conducted in discussions and that the final accord was put

down on paper only when things had been agreed upon. Would you like to say a word about that in terms of how the negotiation process worked?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: There were files and letters and telegrams on both sides. I do not know if they are still available in our archives. I am fairly sure they would be available in Washington and would be available to the public. PL480 was conceived as a way of giving away surplus commodities, mainly food grains. Initially they were given as grants. Later the legislation was amended to give them as loans for which the recipient government would deposit local currency in an American Embassy account.

(***Interviewer***: Blocked account). Well, it was not a blocked account but an account for which draws were allowed for certain purposes. As I have mentioned above the entire rupee expenditure of the American government was met from PL480 funds. It covered an enormous variety of uses, but even so most the money just accumulated and it became a notional amount in the books of the Reserve Bank of India to the credit of the United States government. Once the two governments agreed in principle to a write-off, drawing up the necessary agreements was fairly routine. Since different legislation covered different transactions, all the relevant provisions had to be observed. The main hurdle was the need to cater to the views and interests of Congressmen as they had to give their approval. So, the write-off required submitting a number of proposals for the approval of several committees of Congress. They went, as far as I can remember, to the International Affairs Committee and the Ways and Means Committee of the House and to the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate and the Appropriations Committee of the Senate.

The important thing at that point of time was to keep a sufficient number of the Congressmen and Senators favourably inclined and to keep the numbers of those who were opposed to the minimum. The attitude of the Chairmen of the main committee and of the relevant subcommittee was always crucial. We were fortunate in having Senator Fulbright as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Frank Church heading the relevant subcommittee. Congressman Lee Hamilton was the Chairman of the House International Affairs Committee of the House and he was also a strong supporter.

Interviewer: Did we use any lobbyists at all to reach out or was it really the lobbying effort of the Embassy that carried the ball?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: No, at that time lobbying was a dirty word in India. We had a PR consultant Mr Ganju who had some background and data on the Congressional set up such as important committees, their staff, influential aides etc. He also had some similar data on the major newspapers and magazines and on the major think tanks such as the Council on Foreign Relations. Over a period of time the Embassy had also built up its own data bank not only on Congress and the Administration, but also on universities, academics, the professional associations such the Associations for Asian Studies, security think tanks like Rand etc. As we went systematically to visit these institutions either at their invitation or on our own the data bank was refined and improved. Invitations to Harvard, or to the Centre for International Affairs soon brought us contact in a number of associated foreign affairs schools and also with neighbouring M.I.T., Boston University and so on.

It was the same in New York and San Francisco. We also kept in touch with major universities that had schools of Indian studies like Ann Arbor (Michigan), Austin(Texas), Yale, Pennsylvania, Chicago and Berkeley etc. Major publications including the New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, The Time and Newsweek, to mention only the most important had also to be cultivated. In American newspapers this often meant keeping up with two power centres as the news correspondents could be on a different wave length from the editorial team.

Lobbying was done by all the political officers in the Embassy as well as by some other senior officers. The Ambassador handled the highest level of the Congress. When I reached Washington Ambassador L.K. Jha has made his mark. He was one of the few Ambassadors who could drive straight into the parking lot at the State Department and go to the Secretary's office in his private elevator. His hospitality may have been a little less celebrated than that of the legendary B.K. Nehru, but his guest list and hospitality had paid us rich dividends during the Bangladesh conflict. Further down we tried to assign administration officials, congressmen,

their aides, journalists and academics to different officers in the Embassy. Within our limited resources of time and representational grant we had worked out a fairly good system for getting information and selling our point of view. Compared to what we do now it was limited, but it seemed to work and it was cost effective.

At that time there were a few Indians who had become socially prominent or had established useful political contacts. But they were not yet organised in the form that has happened today, and could not provide the kind of leverage now available. The present situation is certainly to our advantage, but catering to the NRI groups now requires a lot of effort as they believe in extracting their pound of flesh.

Ultimately it is your credibility that carries the day. If for instance the Congressmen and their staff dealing with a particular subject are convinced that the Indian Embassy was worth taking seriously, more than half the job was already done when we went in to brief them in their offices or over a meal. In fact it was desirable to keep inviting key officials and staffers to lunch on a regular basis, even when there was no specific issue to sell, because when we needed their help it was much more easily available. Exchanging information and analysis on topics of common interest, but not necessarily on Indian concerns, was important in being taken as a serious interlocutor.

Travelling across the U.S. and Canada was a bonus. Cities and towns are often much alike except for the special ones like New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and New Orleans. But nature has been very generous and the mountains, lakes, forests, canyons and bays are spectacular. You never know what interesting and surprising people you may meet at the most unexpected places and unexpected moments.

Interviewer: So, then what were the other issues that loomed large on your work agenda in Washington D.C. apart from this agreement?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: From 1972 to 1975 there were many crises in and around Washington. In 1973 there was the last Middle Eastern War which led to Egypt quitting the Soviet camp to become a staunch U.S. ally and eventually via Sadat's normalisation with Israel and Camp David to set

the outline for the present geo political situation in the Middle East and the current de facto frontiers of Israel. Despite the fall of the Shah and the Khomeini Revolution, Saddam Hussain and Kuwait, and 9/11, the Pax Americana and access to oil remained intact till today. Today it is now much clearer how important central Egypt is to the region and to those who wish to manage it.

Interviewer: I am sorry to interrupt but would you say a word about the Israeli lobbying effort in the United States and how the Jewish lobby operated as you saw it during that very important period of the 1973 war?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: The Israeli lobby is rightly a legend and was in place long before Israel came into existence. It has many components which do not always agree but work together quite effectively because of their Jewish background or connections and because of their common objective of promoting Israel's interests. By coincidence during my tenure in Washington when Senator Church retired a senior aide, Tom Dine with whom I had worked fairly closely, became the Director of the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). AIPAC was funded by U.S. Jewish groups and provided the cutting edge to a multi-layered effort to influence every facet of opinion making in the U.S. The methods used were of many kinds, mass appeals, what is today called paid news, and individual approaches and pressure suited to the case.

At that time there was also an oil lobby funded by the big oil companies which espoused Arab causes and worked loosely at times with conservative Christian groups. Once Egypt and Saudi Arabia felt the need to ally with the U.S. and Israel against the Islamic street all the lobbies coalesced. The result is that liberal strands in the international Jewish community and inside Israel got increasingly sidelined and voices of reason and genuine Arab scholars got short shrift as the political establishment and the media in America became progressively aligned to the more hysterical and ultra conservative Jewish leaders and commentators. Ironically many of them originate from America, and many are from the recent migrants from Russia and Eastern Europe.

But I am running ahead of the situation in 1973. In U.S. academia, entertainment and media the Jews have always been extremely influential, but they were subtly discriminated against in politics and society. They had built organisations to counter this. To give you an example, my predecessor wanted to get membership of the best golf clubs in Washington and found it would take time. But he found it easier and cheaper to join an extremely good golf club a little further down the road which the Jews had to set up because no Jew even in my time was accepted in this Burning Tree Golf Club. They had B'nai B'rith and so on which were organisations specifically to counter anti-Semitism. Supporting Israel was a natural extension which had already been given a foundation by the international campaign for Israel with the powerful propaganda engine of undoing the Holocaust behind them.

Initially there were drives to raise money for Israel. Then it became political and military support. Slowly it has grown to a point where the lobby has become self sustaining as few people in American public life are able to stand up and disagree with any Israeli position as it would damage their political and even career prospects in academic life, the media or in business. Any U.S. Government has had to look carefully to Jerusalem before taking major decisions in the Middle East. The outcome of the ongoing revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world could change this.

Interviewer: Any other events that remain in your mind?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Asia was going through a period of flux. Post 1971 the equations in South Asia had changed radically. The American 'opening to China' at the same time altered the situation in East Asia and the Cold War even more. The Vietnam War was winding down which was to have drastic consequences in South East Asia.

Taking South Asia, strangely I do not recollect too many problems concerning Pakistan coming up. After the Shimla Agreement and the appointment of Yaqub Khan as Ambassador the major problems seemed to be in the competition between Embassy wives at charity bazaars. We

had to protest vigorously when the arms embargo was lifted and sales of weapons systems which could only be used against India were allowed.

There was much more to be done to help Bangladesh as it set up its own Embassy and other offices. Fortunately they had inherited a sufficiency of able trained officers from the Pakistani services (although the numbers were small) and were up and running very soon.

China had always been a subject of common interest between the U.S. and India. China studies flourished all over America and was a major interest to many government agencies. For a while after the 1962 conflict we had also been cooperating in intelligence exchanges and some covert cross border operations in Tibet with the Americans. After Kissinger's 1971 visit this did not stop. One was aware of exchanges going on between our spooks and their spooks about China without always knowing what transpired. But both the State Department and the CIA were generous in making available their analyses on the internal situation in China and Chinese policies.

The new relationship with China after 1971 began to create a new strand among Chinese scholars in the West and especially in the U.S. Instead of everyone demonising China and its Communist ideology, it became fashionable to find favourable aspects of the system and even suggest that it might have better lessons for developing countries than those available from the democratic process used by India. Even World Bank and IMF economists began to quote Chinese statistics rather than those they had independently arrived at to justify economic aid. This Cultural Revolution is now regarded, even by Chinese scholars, as a disaster. But in the 70s a group of U.S. academics emerged, particularly in West Coast Universities, who suggested that China had better answers for Third World problems, than say, India. From the earliest days of Independence, our democracy had been a major plank in our favour.

If one looks at the debate between Chester Bowles and the likes of John Foster Dulles or Dean Rusk, India was faulted for being on the wrong side of the fence by espousing non-alignment but India had the redeeming features of being a democracy, and its economy, with its Five Year Plans

etc deserved support. But gradually China started becoming the flavour of the month. America had always had a closer relationship with China across the Pacific. The need for a sales pitch for the new strategic relationship with a communist ally became easier if India could be painted as a relative failure in Asia.

Even later after the events of Tiananmen had seriously dented the Chinese image, the American strategic community moved as fast as it could to contain the damage. So the eminence we gained over Bangladesh was short lived and we had to keep working hard to maintain our relevance in Washington.

Ironically in the 90s when American scholars saw the political system in China imploding as had happened in the U.S.S.R, Indian scholars were to prove correct in seeing the continuing rise of China by adapting its system. But for political drama, the last years of the Nixon Presidency were dominated by Watergate.

Interviewer: Watergate had no direct connection with India or impact on India as such.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: If you were serving in Washington it had an impact. Moreover, when an American Administration becomes totally embroiled in a domestic situation it does have some international impact. For an observer on the spot, the fascination was in just seeing the American political system work. Eventually Nixon was not impeached, but he was forced to resign by the pressures of public opinion. It is difficult to convey the white heat of anger which one found in so many individual Americans as they felt let down by their President. It is a commentary on how public opinion can boil over with a need for cleansing their system. This was a President who had carried 49 out of the 50 states in the last election. American politics have more than their share of fixing and money power and it has not become better since Watergate. Other democracies should look more carefully at the American insistence on closure. We tend, as you know, to let things go on and muddle through and consequently our leaders become less and less accountable.

Interviewer: Moving on then, how did you wind up your stay in Washington D.C. and what was the next destination then and how did that come about?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: I have covered the Middle East. The Vietnam War had already begun to wind down. There were peace talks between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho and American troops were being reduced. The final victory of the D.R.V.N. and the capture of Saigon were still in the future. It was interesting because I had been dealing with Indo-China issues in Delhi just before I came to Washington. But one could not quite grasp earlier how much the Vietnam War had become a major factor in domestic politics. Containing communism was still the basic ideology, but to do it on the ground using conscript forces against an enemy who could not be defeated by whatever firepower and technology was thrown at him illustrated the weakness of American military doctrine and power. The conscripts did not share the objectives of their generals and leaders. Congress never supports an unpopular war; and 'declare victory and depart' rather than 'do or die' is a far better slogan.

The unpopularity of the war had led to clashes between students on several campuses with law and order forces which in one case resulted in fatalities. This generation of students did not always emulate their parents and newer concepts of freedom were brought in by 'flower children and flower power' as entry into universities became financially easier and available to lower economic groups. (When I was invited to give the commencement address at a relatively small college the president of this college told me he was relieved that none of these kids turned up barefoot).

The U.S. forces now consist of only volunteers. Student campuses have also changed because it is no longer that easy to pay for a university education and it is a lot harder to get a job. Like Watergate, the Vietnam War gave us a firsthand opportunity to watch American society evolve and that was also part of our education on how to deal with that society.

***Interviewer*:** So from Washington D.C. you went to Japan?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Well, actually I was posted from Washington D.C. as High Commissioner to Sri Lanka. In fact, I would have gladly gone

to Sri Lanka rather than Washington but that was not to be. Having done a little bit of lobbying I got Sri Lanka. However, I never got there. The ambassador posted to Tokyo died and I was reassigned there.

Tokyo (1975-1978)

Interviewer: What was your age when you reached Tokyo?

Amb. Eric Gonsalves: Tokyo, 1975. I was 47 years. Somebody told me I was the youngest Ambassador sent to Tokyo because almost everybody goes to Tokyo on their final posting. But before I go to Tokyo I need to mention two domestic events which occurred while I was in Washington because the Embassy was very much involved in them. It also happened that when both events occurred the Ambassador was in India and I was in charge.

The first was the imposition Emergency. This aroused tremendous reactions and much condemnation from both liberals as well as the chronically anti-India groups. The media was generally critical and this got exacerbated by the decision to expel the Washington Post correspondent. (***Interviewer***: That would have created a huge ruckus of course in the U.S.). Yes and no, relationships were never disrupted but a certain wariness crept in. The tremendous goodwill that had resulted from the liberation of Bangladesh had already begun to erode. We had to cope with the new realities regarding China that I have mentioned. At about the same time one of our steady sources of support, the liberals in the Jewish community, began to turn against us because we were seen to be fraternising too much - in their eyes - with their worst Arab bête noires like Arafat. Suddenly the bottom dropped out of the Indian market. The editor of the Washington Post sent me a 50 page telegram of protest which was delivered at 2 a.m. Further there was the negative reaction from the Indian community and the need to cope with almost daily demonstrations outside the Embassy. It must be said that protests were still on a relatively polite basis compared to what transpires today. The Ambassador was once showered with marshmallows, quite non-lethal compared to shoes, fruit and vegetables which are the current missiles of disapproval.

Then came Pokhran, again when I was the charge de affaires. I was actually about to visit the Yosemite Park when I get a frantic telephone call from the Consul General from San Francisco asking me to get there double quick. He said news reports said we have let off an atom bomb. We dashed off to San Francisco and got the Ministry briefing on implosions and peaceful uses of nuclear explosions etc. But of course this did not wash very well with the American press, neither in California nor in Washington.

The Emergency did not continue as a public relations problem for too long. I think we ourselves continued to ask questions after our foreign friends had forgotten it. Pokhran on the other hand did not present any problem of principle. India should have exercised its option to become a nuclear power as early as possible and I still believe we would have been wiser to have taken the step in time before the NPT put us on the wrong side of the fence. However, since I will deal with much of this when we come to the negotiations over the Tarapur Nuclear Station later we need not go into it now.

Let me, however, put in a brief word about the Indian community in the U.S. From very small beginnings when I had first served in the U.S. in the 50s it had grown rapidly by the time I went to Washington. It was very different from the community in the U.K. that I had mentioned earlier. It was middle class, mainly professional and very ambitious about making opportunities for itself and even more for the next generation. U.S. politics and society is much more rooted in ethnic roots than those of the U.K. and the Indian community could afford to establish associations through temples, mosques and gurdwaras. This did not necessarily isolate them from their neighbours as it was a recognised practice.

By the 70s they became more interested in professional associations and Indian doctors and hoteliers soon found the benefits of bonding together. Some got drawn towards politics, but this was more as a form of social aspiration by donations and association with politicians and political parties. Their contributions could be very generous and by the 90s they had become a recognised ethnic group sought after by politicians. A far sighted publisher Gopal Raju had started a small newssheet for the

community called India Abroad and it flourished going from matrimonial and other advertisements to providing a roundup of news from India and about the community. There were many other others who followed suit from different centres given the size of America and the range of local interests.

Community leaders made it a point to keep in touch with the Embassy and over time, as their wealth and clout increased, they began to be of more use to the Embassy than the other way round. By the time President Bill Clinton was elected, our easiest access to him was through one of his Indian backers. Gopal Raju started a small programme where young aspirants could be placed as interns in Congressional offices. This pace has quickened since with Indian origin politicians rising to important offices. There is still some leeway to be made up in Congress itself. Keeping in touch with the Indian community went from being a duty to a fairly important part of political activity.

The Embassy made its attendance at the Republic Day and often Diwali functions systematic so that everyone was covered. The more important events got the Ambassador and so on down the line to First Secretaries. I must say that it was an interesting and welcome diversion from office work and compared favourably with our other normal visits to academic institutions, and foreign policy and business groups. The NRIs today wield a great deal of leverage, in the U.S. as well as in India. Their interests do not always coincide with those of the Embassy and managing them is a major responsibility for the Embassy.

An old friend of India Philip Talbot, who died recently, once characterised Indo-American relations as a roller coaster. That is true of many countries as superpowers tend to pursue their own interests and that too in a shorter time frame. Those who are neither permanent allies nor adversaries can find themselves downgraded or upgraded depending on current circumstances. The constant need for hype from the media, local pressure groups and Congress can lead to extravagant statements from the Administration which are not always in consonance with actual policy.

One illustration was the portrayal of the Soviet Union as an evil empire and worse, while in fact the major organs of the state treated their

opposite numbers with great respect and seriousness and major deals on disarmament were reached. The Soviet Embassy had access which I doubt the Embassy of a democratic Russia has. The Israeli stranglehold over all government organs is almost beyond belief. European allies and Japan can find themselves marginalised. So it is with South Asia, where we have to manage within these whims of a superpower which one day has a vital need for Pakistani support and the next day does not, or where China is the flavour of the month, to become a target a year later. India has never been inclined to be a strategic ally of anyone and the consequences follow. The so called common bond of democracy is a myth as it will never supersede national interests.

No country can ignore the U.S., but we do need to develop policies that further our own interests those of others, while allowing for convergence with those of the U.S. which are certainly increasing because our profile is rising and that of the U.S. is gradually diminishing; the world is slowly turning multi-polar and the matrix of power is getting diversified with soft power increasing its role. The roller coaster has become less steep in recent years. It will be even easier once we clarify, determine and maintain our priorities. A strategic vision and the road map to attain it are essential.

Interviewer: Eric, let us talk about your time in Japan. You reached Tokyo towards the end of 1975. How long was your stay and what were the main impressions that remain of that period?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: I was in Japan for three years from late in 1975 to mid-1978 that was when I was posted back to the Ministry. I had visited Japan many times since 1954. By 1975 the Japanese had made incredible advances. They had become a full fledged developed country and a potential economic super power. It was not just a recovery from defeat, but a triumph. They had just concluded a spectacular Expo, and a successful Olympics. They had built subways and expressways into the middle of Tokyo, one of the most congested cities in the world. It was an upbeat country, an upbeat people, an upbeat society, but joyously so and not yet tinged with the arrogance which one finds today.

The older pre-war generation was still in charge. They were getting old, but they were still frugal and did not demand much for their outstanding

services. They operated a national system based on a consensus on most issues which was arrived after painstaking deliberation and through brain storming. Japan's greatest asset was that while people looked at things in somewhat different ways, for instance in reaching an agreement you had to reconcile the technical, financial and other competing views, ultimately nothing in Japan was undertaken until a consensus was reached.

Negotiating with a Japanese entity of any kind, be it a company or be it a government department, required that everybody concerned would be consulted and would have to come on board before a final decision was taken. Indians, Americans and Europeans usually take decisions at the top and allow the rank and file to iron out the differences and then execute the orders. In Japan, decision making is much more of a cooperative exercise between all the stakeholders. (***Interviewer***: It was really a bottom driven process). Well, it was top and bottom. Guidance might come from the top, but it was not coercive.

(***Interviewer***: And negotiating with Japan involved also reaching out to the lower levels and convincing them). That was what I found one of the most difficult things to get across to Indian teams, whether they were from companies or government or any other organisation, that negotiations would tend to be rather complicated and that they would involve dealing at all levels. So one should be patient and allow the Japanese enough time to allow their system to work out. There would always be more than adequate compensation as their decision making made execution almost flawless and deliveries would be made on the dot and usually much faster than could be matched by any competitor. Of course, as management studies have developed since the 70s when I first observed Japan in depth, in a more globalised world Japanese practices are much more prevalent.

(***Interviewer***: That is because it was consensus based?). Yes, because everybody was on board and they got it all slotted in beautifully. This applied to everyone, was and it was like the Foreign Ministry making sure that the Desk Officer, the Head of the Division and the Vice Minister were all on board when they wanted something. The political ministers were not too involved in the making of policy as their main responsibility was the

public posture of the government, maintaining dialogue with the voters and ensuring their understanding and support.

(***Interviewer***: The bureaucracy was very much at the power) The bureaucracy did have power, but power controlled by the consensus method of decision making which at the apex was vested in the Prime Minister's Office, the Cabinet and the usual set of interlocking committees. Further public discussion of policy is the norm not only in the media, but also by academics in a wide range of excellent scholarly publications. Retired bureaucrats not only continued in service heading government agencies, but also made careers in politics or business. It was also necessary to reckon with academics who had a considerable role in providing inputs into Japan Inc. From the Meiji era, Japan had placed education on a very high pedestal. The President of Tokyo University is paid more than the Prime Minister and he and his myriad colleagues sit on important committees and are consulted on a wide range of national concerns. There was a fairly rigid protocol among the scholars with the old imperial universities like Tokyo and Kyoto being given precedence. In the employment structure then obtaining in Japan where a 'salary man' remained with the same company from his graduation to retirement the initial degree was of crucial importance. Not getting admission to Tokyo University led to many suicides.

An unexpected benefit for us was the surprising utility of a newly created post in the Embassy. Tokyo, like Washington and London, had just been sanctioned a Science Attaché. The first incumbent Ashok Jain had a Doctorate from Kyoto University and was proficient in Japanese. Therefore, he was automatically accepted by most scientific leaders and groups, including the Presidents of Tokyo and Kyoto Universities and a number of Nobel Laureates. This access was invaluable because professors and scientists were much more accessible and more willing to part with information than the bureaucrats they advised and their advice carried weight with the government and the .industry. Dr Mukaibo, the President of Todai (as Tokyo University - is colloquially known), became a good friend.

Again harking back to my London days we also started rebuilding the Indo-Japanese parliamentary group in the Japanese Diet. It had been in existence for a long time, but was not very active. With the help of our enthusiastic language officers we found dedicated office-bearers and gave them an interest in the bilateral relationship by briefings, hospitality, meetings with Indian dignitaries and visits to India. Slowly and steadily it has grown to become an effective lobby. The President who took over during my tenure, Yoshio Sakurauchi, remained an advocate for India through many avatars as he went up the political totem pole holding a number of Ministerial posts including Foreign Minister and eventually Speaker of the Lower House. His advice was often invaluable in navigating the unknown waters of domestic politics in selling our point of view or in getting things done.

The proverbial mill stone around our necks was the nuclear test at Pokhran which we had undertaken in 1974. Elsewhere I have outlined how I had to deal with American ire over Pokhran as it went against their geo-political construct. The Japanese, having been the only victims of actual nuclear attacks at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, had a totally justified visceral reaction to anyone who was for exercising 'nuclear options'. Facing them as the Ambassador of a nation that was in the process of acquiring that option did fill one with trepidation.

However, I found that regarding the actual use of nuclear weapons the Japanese position was not as principled as they would have most of the world believe as they commemorated Hiroshima with much anguish. Their stated position was that Japan would never possess or use these weapons and they would never allow them to be stationed on Japanese soil. At the same time they had placed themselves totally under an American defence umbrella which was maintained by nuclear weapons. And some of those weapons undoubtedly were positioned on Japanese soil while carried by U.S. ships or aircraft which used Japanese facilities under the Mutual Assistance Treaty. The fig leaf was that U.S. policy precluded any disclosure of whether their craft or bases carried nuclear weapons. (Subsequently after we agreed to U.S. naval visits we also took advantage of this provision.)

Japan has a Ministry of Defence and the usual Armed Force Headquarters. But for decades they have used the title of the Self Defence Forces to maintain the myth that under their Constitution that they would not maintain armed forces. So far they have never deployed fighting forces outside Japan. (This has been subsequently slightly diluted to allow armed cover for transport, support and medical deployment overseas.) The U.S. has provided the shield and they have concentrated on becoming an economic super power. Their armed forces and their weapons, mostly produced in Japan under licence if needed, are very sophisticated. Indeed most observers are convinced that Japan has the technology to make sophisticated nuclear weapons and deliver them, given the large nuclear power and space programmes they have undertaken.

Undoubtedly, the casualties and suffering from the atom bombs has caused a severe backlash against weapons of mass destruction, more specifically nuclear weapons, among the Japanese public especially among the left wing parties and unions. But the lure of power can never be eradicated from a society and especially its elite. When I called on Mr Nakasone, at that time Secretary General of the LDP which was the ruling party, (roughly equivalent to the President of the Congress or BJP) his comment surprised and enlightened me. He said "Your Prime Minister wears trousers. Our ministers all wear skirts." That did serve to reassure me to some extent and made me somewhat immune to the critical comments of the Mayor of Hiroshima on whom I had to call as a duty.

Nakasone later became Prime Minister and started the change in the constitutional position of the armed forces to bring them more in line with the conventions of other states. He was one of the best advocates for Indo-Japanese relations which really began to develop only after he became Prime Minister, as he realised that Japan could not survive as the only outpost of a Western system in Asia and has to forge relations that took adequate account of Asian neighbours.

Interviewer: What were the bilateral issues that figured in the relationship which were important apart from, for example, the emergency and the Japanese reaction to the emergency?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: In Japan, there was no great reaction to the Emergency. (***Interviewer*:** Unlike the West). In fact, I don't recall any Asian country which reacted strongly to the emergency. (If one may draw a parallel from the current situation in the Middle East, I would say that Asians normally come down in favour of stability rather than revolution.) One does discuss domestic politics with old friends and westerners can be devastating in their criticism without meaning to be offensive. In Asia that is rare. There may be snide comments meant to be offensive from some of our immediate neighbours but those are meant to score points. Otherwise I think our norm is not to go public in criticism of domestic policies in other countries.

While not exactly in context, let me mention one reaction which was in the reverse direction but served to emphasise the need to be realistic and maintain stability. I was passing through Singapore on my way back from Japan. An old friend, Nathan who is now President of Singapore, and at that time was their Foreign Secretary remarked to me that 'the Janata Government did not do themselves any great sort of glory to put Prime Ministers in jail.' His Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew was himself quite authoritarian and quite capable of getting his opposition sent to jail by the courts under their rigid laws. But they were conveying a certain message, as I read it, that it did not help to rock the boat. I never gave that message because I do not think Morarji Desai or Atal Bihari Vajpayee would have appreciated it.

Let me also mention here that we once broke that convention and began to criticise the Myanmar regime, and soon found that counter-productive.

Interviewer: No issues with Japan?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Well, there were no serious issues other than the nuclear test and even that tended to be forgotten with time. During most of my tenure, India was treading water cautiously because of the Emergency. Furthermore, as long as I dealt with Japan through the 70s and 80s, Japanese foreign policy may not have been 100 per cent made in Washington but it rarely deviated on any major issue. Their version of the South Asian script largely skipped the region as unimportant as compared

to the more prosperous regions of South East Asia and the Gulf and also hyphenated India and Pakistan more than anybody else.

Interviewer: Do you think that hyphenation has ended now as far as Japan goes?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Yes, I think this hyphenation began to end with Nakasone and Koizumi more or less finished it. While I was there the Japanese were locked in interminable negotiations over a fisheries treaty with China which was really to set the parameters for diplomatic relations and they were concerned about any spillover of Korean tensions. They had established thriving economic partnerships with ASEAN, Taiwan and South Korea. This partnership with South East Asia which was recommended to others as the 'flying geese' pattern started with the development and import of natural resources, and then went on to offshore production of components and less complicated manufactures. Korea and Taiwan moved up this value chain much faster to become competitors. In South Asia they could not open up in the same way. They leapfrogged over us to the Middle East because its oil was vital.

They tried to establish stakes similar to those in ASEAN by considerable investments in downstream petro products such as refineries and petrochemicals in Iran and Kuwait etc. Somehow this did not take off because the existing oil multinationals were not in a mood to allow more outsiders as they were already giving stakes to the local potentates. However, in their calculus, the hyphenation of India and Pakistan was still desirable as Pakistan clearly was close to their oil suppliers and was an enthusiastic Cold War ally against the Soviets in Afghanistan. This continued up to the late 90s when Kargil and the Clinton visit to the subcontinent started off a major change of attitudes.

Also the economic magnetism exercised by the Indian economic reforms had begun to take effect. According to my observations it is usually the Americans who are most willing to take economic risks, much earlier than the Europeans and Japanese, the latter usually being the most cautious. From my day almost till now you could hear Japanese officials moaning about the lack of governance and infrastructure in India. Korean companies

have often eclipsed Japanese in India to their great benefit because they are more willing to face risks and operate on much smaller scales than the Japanese.

But the dawning of this new era was also due to a new approach to Asia which came after the Japanese threat to become the new super power waned in the 90s and power equations together with the level of economic exchanges altered with the rise of China. This vision also coincided with some fresh thinking on geo political and economic relations in Asia among the Japanese elite and industry during the administrations of Nakasone and Koizumi. Then there were the revolutionary inputs about the relevance of India coming from the Bush Presidency in Washington which carried weight.

I should also mention Prime Minister Hatoyama here. In Japan, foreign ministers change frequently. He was a member of the Upper House and had become a member of our parliamentary group. When he became Foreign Minister, it had been about 15 years or so since a Foreign Minister had visited India. Our ministers visited other countries more frequently. He was willing to change the pattern and accepted our invitation. He was the first to articulate the idea of an East Asia Community.

Interviewer: So that visit did take place?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Oh yes! I like to think it did a little to improve relations. We had a system of annual bilateral consultations at the Secretary level, but the Foreign Ministers had not met for a long time. After that the exchanges became a little more frequent. But I must be quite honest in saying that our ratings did not go up till at least a decade later. We certainly were not as important as South East Asia or the Middle East.

There was the common Buddhist heritage which gave us some mileage. Buddhist pilgrims provided some tourist revenue and we slowly made efforts to cater to that constituency. The rise of a Buddhist inspired party, Sokko Gakai, which did a lot to promote India and her early civilisation, was also beneficial.

There was some sentimental posturing over the immediate post war period during which an Indian judge, Justice Pal, had refused to treat the Japanese leaders as 'war criminals'. There is a small shrine in his honour near Hakone. We had also refused reparations and helped to get an almost destitute Japan access to some old deposits abroad, and we gave Japanese academics scholarships. Among them was Chie Nakane who became a world famous anthropologist and always remained a great friend of India.

When I had served in London and Washington where we had much larger economic dealings, I had not been too actively involved in them. Now in Japan, as Ambassador to a major trading partner and with fewer political issues to handle, it was possible to understand far better the gamut of economic issues an Embassy has to manage including trade, aid, industrial collaboration, transfer of technology, and even the role of NRIs abroad. Trade promotion is always a standard item. Here there was a reasonable quantum based on exports of iron ore, marine products, tea and spices.

All these primary commodities needed constant monitoring given the high level of quality control that Japan requires. They were always ready to advise the producers in India on how to ensure the specifications were met. Imports covered all kinds of manufactures from the most sophisticated industrial machinery to white goods. There were a few industrial collaborations with some modest technology transfer. All of this was monitored by an annual meeting between FICCI and Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) in which they went over much of the same agenda, making a few improvements in what was largely a static situation.

To give you a flavour of the prevailing attitudes take one of the earlier collaborations which involved the HMT watch plant. Until then India had never established a watch industry. I think we assembled some with imported components. Even after the HMT plant was up and running we still continued to import the movements for quite some time. HMT after failing to get collaboration from Switzerland, France and America, came to Japan and wanted to collaborate with the number one company, Seiko. When we went to Seiko they just listened. Japanese never like to say 'No'

As we were leaving the president, whose acquaintance I had already made earlier, took me aside and said "Do not waste your time here because my company smuggles into India every month as many watches as your company is thinking of making in one year."

Interviewer: And then I think HMT turned to Citizen.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Yes, but only after we had tried some more companies. These companies also exported like Seiko and so they were not interested. Citizen was a small company that did not export at that time. Citizen had no compunction about collaborating because they were not going to lose any market. Some years later the same logic brought Maruti into collaboration with Suzuki after they had been turned down by several manufacturers around the world.

Interviewer: That is interesting how we find a partner amongst the small players when the big guys are not interested.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Economics of scale and the risks of joint ventures are not seen from the same view point everywhere. I remember having an argument with some American scholars and businessmen at Brookings in Washington about 10 years ago over the lack of success in our collaboration with the Japanese which they felt showed a lack of enterprise on our part. I had to tell them quite frankly we did not need the Japanese because for us the South Koreans were the right partners because they were willing to do business under existing conditions.

Interviewer: So, the South Korean approach is the more realistic one as far as we are concerned?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Well, I would say 'was' because since then the situation has changed radically. The Indian market is growing at a rate that attracts many major producers, and its manufacturing capacity has improved to make it capable of becoming an export base. Today certain categories of even Japanese cars are exclusively produced for the world market in India. Tata's takeover of Jaguar and Rover and Korean automobile plants and its ability to design and produce the Nano is in yet

another dimension. But in the last two to three decades South Koreans were much better partners than the Japanese and their contribution is still more important than is realised. As we climb the technology ladder and reach larger production levels, Japanese technology may become more relevant. Certainly in the energy efficiency stakes and in nuclear power production no one is ahead of the Japanese.

In some ways history almost repeats itself. When I visited a major Nissan plant, I was given the history of Nissan's existence. They used to assemble Austin cars after the World War. Tentatively they made an indigenous design for a small van which was ridiculed by the Austin engineers. They persevered with its production and as they said "Look at us today and where is Austin". Suzuki has done us proud and I would not wish for the day when we can say "Where is Suzuki", but to become a leader in manufacturing and technology, as well as services, must drive a country with India's potential.

Interviewer: Shall we then move on to the next phase where you left Japan and came back to Delhi?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Yes, but let me record how much Japan impresses one in so many ways. There is the vaunted order and cleanliness in extremely congested cities. The local police function out of little kiosks and are part of the community. When they have time to spare you will see them sweeping up the street in front of their box. We had a break in at the Embassy residence on one occasion. The security guard nabbed the intruder, and he was handed over to the police. The next day the police came to the chancery to plead for him saying he was drunk (which had been obvious) and was a valuable member of the community. However, as Embassies could not be violated with impunity the law would take its course if we insisted on prosecuting. Naturally we left it to their discretion and my wife was the recipient of an enormous fruit basket from the man's family.

When we got to Japan, industrialisation had taken its toll in the shape of pollution. Mount Fuji could almost never be seen from Tokyo. The Sea of

Japan was like our Yamuna full of debris and chemicals. Then the clean up began. Within a decade Fuji was visible for more days every year and fish came back even to Tokyo Bay as well as the Sea of Japan much to the delight of our chauffeur who could once more fish in the same waters he had enjoyed as a boy.

One last nugget to illustrate the incredible data base that existed even in the 70s. When we had visited the latest blast furnace built by Nippon Steel with a capacity of 2 million tonnes using ore from India, my wife had insisted on visiting the furnace,overcoming my many attempts to dissuade her. Actually it was the cleanest industrial plant we had ever visited; even our gloves remained a pristine white. Incredibly, there were so few workers in control cabins, not at all like our noisy and crowded work places. At our farewell call on the Emperor he joked with her calling her the intrepid lady who had climbed to the top of a blast furnace.

The Secretary of Ministry of External Affairs (1978-1982)

Interviewer: When did you get back to Delhi and what were your major activities at that phase?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Delhi was almost my last major posting. I came back as Additional Secretary in mid 1978. I was told that I would become a Secretary fairly soon as my batch in the IAS was being empanelled. It took about a year and came about under somewhat chaotic circumstances. Seen from outside, the Janata government in 1978 seemed very firmly in the saddle. Morarji and Vajpayee and the whole edifice looked as if would last for the normal five years. But as we have been learning ever since, coalition politics is an art that is neither easily learnt nor played in India. There was no Janata Party. Efforts to bring the various elements under the discipline of a single party leadership collapsed as was inevitable given the egos involved and the unwillingness to compromise on ideologies.

Let me give you the view of a civil servant. I have only attended cabinet meetings with two Prime Ministers, Morarji Desai and Indira Gandhi, and the two could not have been more different. Morarji Desai's cabinet

meetings often ended up almost like fish markets with many ministers trying to intervene, sometimes with irrelevant comments. At the end of the day sometimes you had to make sure that the Cabinet Secretary recorded the needed decision. With Indira Gandhi, not only was there order, but even a reluctance to speak. Ministers often appeared unwilling to put forward views and left it to their Secretaries.

I had just about become a Secretary when the Morarji government collapsed. The Charan Singh government that followed was a lame duck government as it never got a confidence vote in the Parliament. The Foreign Secretary, Jagat Mehta, was due to retire. The two other secretaries, Bajpai and Vellodi, had also retired. On the last day of the Morarji government I found myself the only Secretary physically in the office and having received a circular from the Cabinet Secretary that a caretaker government could not take policy decisions, we took all the outstanding files we could lay our hands on to obtain the Foreign Minister's orders. I still remember Atal Bihari Vajpayee telling me at the end of the session how much he looked forward to going back to writing poetry.

The Foreign Secretary was a candidate for the post of Commonwealth Secretary General and the new Foreign Minister took up his candidature at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Lusaka despite clear indications that it would not succeed and advice from the Ministry that it would be unwise. When we lost the post there were naturally questions in the Cabinet. By that time the election had been announced. Almost the last act of the Charan Singh government was to appoint Ram Sathe as Foreign Secretary.

During the Charan Singh Government we carried on without too many problems. The only major one, the Soviet decision to move troops into Afghanistan, came just before the election and was rightly condemned by the Prime Minister. As the elections took place almost at the same time it was left to Mrs Gandhi's Government to handle the issue. When the matter was debated in the Security Council we had as yet no Foreign Minister. The statement by our Permanent Representative, Brajesh Mishra was approved by Mrs. Gandhi with one correction. There was much debate as

to whether India was returning to the Soviet embrace. As I will elaborate later we were driven by necessity.

During Mrs. Gandhi's tenure I was in the Ministry for about two and a half years. I continued to look after all of India's relations, from the East ,starting with Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka and going right up to the Atlantic which included the United States, the Americas, Japan, China and the Pacific and South East Asia and the Indian Ocean.

I feel that it is necessary to distinguish between two periods of Mrs. Gandhi's management of foreign policy. In the early period she was able to concentrate more on foreign policy because she had decided to delegate to Sanjay a large measure of decision making on other issues. So, she had time to look at foreign policy, time to talk and discuss things. After the Emergency it was but natural that the West would welcome a return to democracy and a right of centre government in India. Carter and Callaghan came to visit, and there was a warm demonstration of friendship. But our attitudes had already been changing since 1971 and this put our need for a Soviet ally on the back burner and the need of our economy for greater inputs from the West became more demanding. Nothing can happen overnight and the Janata Government could not turn its back on the U.S.S.R, nor could it agree on giving up the nuclear option. I was present at the Cabinet meeting where Vajpayee rejected Morarji's suggestion to that effect. It took two years from the time Mrs Gandhi explained her desire for improved relations to an American special envoy, for her to be received in the White House by Reagan as part of the unveiling of a Festival of India.

Interviewer: And what was the second phase? You mentioned Indira Gandhi; the time that you were in Delhi you divided it into two broad periods. Was it after the death of Sanjay or was that the kind of a dividing line?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Yes. Till Sanjay's death there was more time for discussion of foreign policy. We began to explore better relations with the U.S. and China. The possibilities of a dialogue with ASEAN appeared on

the horizon. Once he died, much of this went back to the drawing board with the old pro-Soviet advisers regaining their prominence.

Within weeks of her taking over as Prime Minister, Special Envoy Clark Clifford came from Washington to convey greetings and seek her views. He was representing President Carter and was one of the usual elite Ambassadors that Americans use for such missions. It was a very small meeting – Narasimha Rao, Mrs. Gandhi and I, Clarke Clifford and the American ambassador. The entry of Soviet forces into Afghanistan had created a great dilemma for us. It created a great opportunity for the United States in its confrontation with the U.S.S.R, but this was only possible if Pakistan was brought back as a key ally in this new version of the great game.

Bolstering Pakistan naturally meant giving them leverage versus India which meant that we had to reassess our dependence on or independence from the U.S.S.R. Mrs. Gandhi put all her cards on the table and said that normalisation between India and Pakistan would be set back if the U.S. was to build up Pakistan unduly as part of their response. It was not a plea that got much consideration from a government that was taking a very jingoist stance led by Brzezinski posturing on the Khyber Pass and Carter still insisting on his non proliferation agenda against India. I must also say that the P.M. was also fairly forthright in her conversations with the Soviet side, because I also remember when she told Brezhnev and others from the Soviet bloc including a Cuban intermediary that what they had done in Afghanistan was going to have most unfortunate results as they could not gain their ends. When they left, it was the countries of the region like ourselves that would be left picking up the pieces. We reverted to this theme every time we could and I remember a particularly acerbic interview with Foreign Minister Gromyko on this subject in Moscow.

Interviewer: What did he have to say?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: He thought we doubted the bonafides of the Soviets and was really confident of the outcome. It was in the early days of their occupation.

Interviewer: So, they never anticipated the problems?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: They soon did. I have just been reading some of the reports their commanders were sending back. Gorbachev himself had told us about this and how the need to get out of Afghanistan was realised. But in the pre-Gorbachev days, the qualms over Afghanistan may not have been recognised soon enough. I think at the beginning it was a straightforward little exercise of managing one of the republics that had gone out of hand and I do not think they understood the contours of Afghan politics any better than the British in the past and the U.S. and NATO today. It is amazing how the equations have changed.

During the Soviet era in Afghanistan and even after their withdrawal while the Najibullah Government was still in power, one was faced with Western commentators who spoke glibly about 'freedom fighters' who today are their main opponents. During a visit to Islamabad in the late 90s I still remember meeting former American Ambassadors telling me about their plans with Pakistani generals for pipelines being built by Unocal from Central Asia guarded by the Taliban supported by the Pakistani ISI.

In retrospect the final denouement in1989 became a turning point in world history. It was much worse for the subcontinent than anyone could have imagined. Not only had the Soviet Union and its Empire disappeared removing one of India's basic points of reference, Afghanistan went down the drain and even though it was no heaven the pre-Soviet era must be something all Afghans would probably find eminently desirable now. Pakistan was to be Islamised by Zia ul Haq and go on to become the spring board for the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Kashmir through follies committed by India and others was to become another conflict zone.

Interviewer: When did you return to Delhi after your assignment in Japan and what were the main events of that time?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Well, it was 1978. The Janata government was at the highest point. It had won a large mandate in the elections, all the Congress state governments had been purged, it had established cordial relations with the neighbours, the establishment of diplomatic relations with China

was to be consolidated by the first Foreign Ministerial visit after 1962 and the restoration of democracy had won approbation from the West.

The first rude reminder that countries put their own interests first came from President Carter even while he was toasting 'democracy' in the shape of an aside that India needed a sharp reminder on the subject of nuclear cooperation and proliferation. The result of the 1974 Pokhran test was that the West led by America decided that nuclear proliferation had to be prevented, and once the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act (NNPA) was law they set about making India an example of how difficult and unprofitable it would be for those who would not accede to the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The sanctions established under domestic legislation were coordinated into an international system of denial with the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Control Group etc to rein any maverick. India was considered vulnerable as she could be targeted through the U.S. sourced fuel sully to the Tarapur Nuclear Power Station. That problem began to build but was only to peak during the Indira Gandhi administration.

Similarly, with Bangladesh and Nepal, the Farraka Barrage and other river waters and cross border problems were to bring us to face reality once the initial euphoria had dissipated. Sri Lanka began to show impatience over the repatriation of Indian Tamils. While the situation in the North and the East had not yet deteriorated to the point where the conflict with the LTTE became inevitable, the actions of the Government and the Sinhala majority were making that more and more likely.

Bhutto had already been tried and hanged with almost no official Indian reaction. Zia-ul-Haq had re-established the military dictatorship with a pronounced Islamic face. In the Ministry of External Affairs there was still hope that Pakistan might change. The Soviet move into Afghanistan and the Western reaction which included co-opting Pakistan was to put an end to these dreams. Its animus towards India was to be demonstrated during the Khalistan upsurge in the Punjab.

Nevertheless the Janata Government was correct in recognising the need for improving relations with all our neighbours and in becoming pro-active in addressing outstanding problems. One of the major decisions

was to attempt to rebuild the relationship with China. Mrs Gandhi had already started on a process of rapprochement. Diplomatic relations had been restored to the level of ambassadors. Still it was a leap into the dark and it required political courage, given existing domestic attitudes, for Foreign Minister Vajpayee to undertake an official visit to China.

Interviewer: Were you on the visit with Foreign Minister Vajpayee (***Amb Gonsalves***: Yes.) Tell us a little bit about this and then look at each of these issues, perhaps a little bit in detail.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: There are some limited parallels between the Vajpayee visit and the Nixon visit which took place seven years earlier. Both were essays into unchartered waters, despite a minefield of domestic disapproval, relying on signals that Chinese leaders were ready to revise external attitudes. For India, unlike the U.S., there were no Cold War or Vietnam War gains that could be realised. Sentiment in India about China had remained negative since 1962 and this extended well beyond the security community and the academic elite to the media and most political parties except the CPI (M).

Many in the Congress leadership leaned towards the Soviets and support to the Vietnamese was essential in keeping with the still popular anti-colonial ideology. The Janata Government had its complement of nationalists and anti-communists who also saw little merit in normalising with China, and the party leadership was only lukewarm in its support for the visit. (Some of this was due to the internal faction fighting within the party and not necessarily related to foreign policy.) It is only if one is able to take an objective longer term approach that one realises that retaining a frozen attitude of hostility towards a major neighbour has little merit. Vajpayee and his Ministry colleagues deserve credit for going ahead with the attempt to break the mould despite all the negative inputs.

The visit started with formal bilateral talks with Foreign Minister Huang Hua which covered the usual ground of bilateral relations and problems and the international situation mainly in Asia. Two issues need to be highlighted. We called on Hua Kuo Feng who had taken over those posts on the death of Mao, and the post of Premier on the death of Chou

Enlai. With the eclipse of the 'Gang of Four', he was replaced by Deng Xiaoping.

In the formal talks with the Foreign Minister, Huang Hua, the boundary was naturally the central issue. Beyond restating the positions taken in the official discussions in 1960-61 there was no progress. Then on the last day of the official talks the Foreign Minister called on Deng. At this meeting Deng once more put forward Chou Enlai's proposal made in Delhi in 1960 in what is now called the 'package proposal'. This was to recognise that the boundary dispute was a legacy of history and it should be resolved by both sides accepting the current line of actual control.

Vajpayee had no specific negotiating brief on this question and all governments in India had always maintained they were bound by the parliamentary resolution that no territory of India could be surrendered. He responded with standard brief giving the Indian arguments for our border claims based on culture, history, usage etc. Deng then said that if his proposal was not acceptable, then this problem, which is a problem of history, should be set aside until it is possible for us to resolve it to our mutual satisfaction. In the meantime the two sides should endeavour to improve all other relations. To this we could only give a positive response while reiterating that the settlement of the boundary dispute remained central to the relationship.

The only concrete agreement was to permit once more the pilgrimages from India to Kailash and Mansarovar which had been discontinued from 1962.

The Chinese made a point of supporting the Pakistani position on Kashmir, not in its entirety, but sufficiently to show that they were not neutral on this issue. Vajpayee was naïve enough to believe that the Chinese had not been adequately briefed on Kashmir and an effort was made to remedy this. Now I am fairly sure they were signalling not only that the 'all-weather friendship' was a permanent feature of their policy but also that they would not allow India to monopolise South Asia.

The war in Indo-China had ended with an American withdrawal. Along with the enormous stress of rebuilding after decades of war, the Vietnamese

found they were under threat from the extreme and fundamentalist Khmer Rouge regime that had taken over in Cambodia. They had little choice but to retaliate. The Khmer Rouge, in spite of its abysmal record of genocide against its own people, was supported by China, America and ASEAN and NATO in one of the most cynical geo-political ploys ever seen. The Chinese, presuming to take the role of hegemon which they aspire to from time to time, had threatened to teach the Vietnamese a lesson. (Their incursion across the Indian border in 1962 was also given the same justification) For the Chinese and Vietnamese to engage in hostilities while the Indian Foreign Minister was in China on an official visit would seriously embarrass us.

Desperate efforts were made even before the visit to get an undertaking from the Chinese that such an embarrassment would not occur during the visit. The subject was briefly discussed and our viewpoints remained unreconciled. The Chinese remained non committal about any future action. After we had left Beijing they marched into Vietnam. They were to regret this foray as it was the Vietnamese who taught them a lesson.

After Beijing, a cultural visit to Hangzhou had been arranged. In the evening as we were returning from the official banquet we stumbled on an open air performance of *Awaara* dubbed in Chinese. As we were about to go to bed feeling relaxed and content, the Times of India correspondent came banging on my door asking whether I had heard the BBC announcement of Chinese troops entering Vietnam. (In those days radios and televisions in Chinese guest houses were unthinkable. Even we did not carry any shortwave radios. Our correspondents were smarter than us). We had little choice but to tell our Chinese hosts of our displeasure and that we would have to leave post haste.

The visit to Guangzhou was skipped. Taking the ferry down Guangzhou to Hong Kong we were able to get on an Air India flight to Delhi. It is interesting as a commentary both on how the Janata Party operated and on the personalities involved that efforts to get any comments or views from the Prime Minister proved fruitless. Vajpayee was left to look out for himself. We spent most of the flight from Hong Kong to Delhi drafting

statements and putting the best face on what had transformed a very useful visit into a somewhat disastrous episode. In retrospect, it did not matter too much. At that time the knives were out for Vajpayee when he came back, but that was mostly domestic politics. After the elections and Mrs Gandhi's return to office we were able to pick up the threads and continue normalisation.

Interviewer: What was the Chinese reaction in this situation where the Foreign Minister abruptly left and exited out of China? Was there a reaction at all?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: The Chinese officials who were with us were not very senior, and were mainly protocol officers. After consulting their senior officials in Beijing they told us there was no need for us to get upset as it had really nothing to do with us. As the visit was successful and both sides recognised considerable progress had been made and nothing should be done to vitiate that. Partly this was normal diplomatic speak. Given the highly centralised nature of the Chinese Government, inadvertence was out of the question. They certainly showed insensitivity quite in keeping with the 'middle kingdom'. It was also probably deliberate to show us where we stood in their scheme of things as far as their immediate neighbours like Vietnam were concerned. If one is to establish a strategic vision and policy a measure of ruthlessness in the pursuit of national interest is essential.

But I also remain convinced, and this was confirmed during my subsequent meetings and negotiations with the Chinese, that the Chinese did make a genuine offer to compromise on the border not very different from the offer made by Chou Enlai in 1960. It is another matter that we were in no position to consider it at that time.

Interviewer: While you are on China, shall we talk about your experience in the subsequent ones after the Vajpayee visit, when you led the first two rounds or was it three rounds of negotiations with China?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: After Vajpayee came back, the dissensions within the Janata Government grew worse and about three months later the Morarji government fell. When Mrs Gandhi came back to power she was

interested in continuing with the opening towards China. Within the first year, in mid 1980, I was sent on an exploratory mission to see how we could continue with the process.

Apart from the dispute on the boundary itself, both India and China were embroiled in cross border destabilisation activities. After 1962, we had begun to cooperate with the West, particularly the Americans, allowing them access to Tibet to provide aid and assistance to anti-Chinese groups such as the Khampas and others. The Chinese from 1949 had been supporting the Communist movement in India, and had even supplied arms to some revolutionary groups. When insurgence started to create serious problems in the North East, particularly in Nagaland, the insurgent groups sought and found support from China.

These proxy wars did need to be addressed. I found that my counterpart Vice Minister Han Nien Lung and I did agree in principle that stabilising the border was a desirable condition precedent to actual resolution of the border question. Supplying arms and providing assistance to dissident groups on the other side of the border should be discouraged, if not stopped. We tried to pin this down into a written agreement. Han Nien Lung, however, cited his much longer experience and said that we should first try out an informal agreement to discontinue all governmental activities. Getting governments to commit themselves needed a longer period when we were just beginning to restore the relationship. In due course we did reach formal agreements to maintain peace and tranquility on the borders in 1993 and 1996. This phase first came into vogue during the Vajpayee visit.

It must also be noted that incidents between the armed forces across the border from 1962 till today have been few and far between. (I can recall an Indian patrol from Sikkim being intercepted by a single Tibetan cyclist in 1980 after they had inadvertently crossed the border during bad weather. A potential furore was hushed up after the Chinese Ambassador and I agreed that the state of preparedness displayed by both armies was well below par given that our forces did not know they were in Tibet, nor were the Chinese aware of the intrusion for quite some time.) In the two years after we made

this agreement as long as I was in Delhi the intelligence inputs confirmed that the activities had come down on both sides. It was impossible to say the Chinese completely stopped everything.

However, the Nagas, for instance, were soliciting and getting support from around the world. They were purchasing arms from Burmese groups such as the Kachins, who in turn got them from Chinese official sources as well as from the warlords who had established themselves in the Sino-Burmese border regions and were cultivating poppy for opium.

On resolving the border, efforts were made to agree on certain principles. The Chinese suggested some 18 principles and we countered with some eight counter principles. I had already been involved in the demarcation or really the re-demarcation of the British ordained border with Burma and the maritime boundary with all our eastern neighbours -Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia and eventually with Burma. When you are demarcating a border it is usual to try to use geographical features like rivers, watersheds etc. particularly in uninhabited areas, as these are natural frontiers. In more populated areas one goes by history and ethnicity and local loyalties.

For maritime boundaries the law of the sea provides certain standard limits for territorial waters, economic zones etc and the use of the median line where those do not apply. Eventually you get the maps out and each side puts down its claim line and the negotiation consists of reconciling all the differences. Our claim lines are well known after the publication of the Survey of India map outlining all India's frontiers as settled and undisputed in 1954. This includes the McMahon Line in the east and the Kwen Lun watershed in the west. (There are experts in India who have some doubts about the latter claim).The Chinese dispute both of these claims, but have never to this day given us a map showing their exact claim line except in the middle sector where there is no real dispute. Even if we were to consider accepting the package proposal, no map of the Line of Actual Control, as claimed by the Chinese, has been made available to us.

So it seemed that they were not ready to settle the major disputed portions of the border. It is possible that they had some problems within their

own establishment. But I have always suspected that they felt that any compromise which they could accept could never have been sold by the Government of India to its own people. They then decided that time was the only way to handle the problem. It is the basis of the phrase they coined for their policy subsequently of 'mutual understanding/ mutual agreement'. I think that is why we have never been able to have very meaningful negotiations on the border.

Interviewer: This is really the key issue that India has been unable to sell a settlement to domestic opinion, and that has been a big barrier.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: I am quite certain about that. It has come out in formal talks I had in December 1981 in Beijing with Vice Minister Han Nien Lung and in May 1982 with Vice Minister Fu Hao, as well as subsequent informal talks after I had retired. Not only in my own discussions but I think that even the high political level emissaries never got further on the border than I did. We modified our position somewhat like suggesting a return to the positions obtained in 1959. It is intriguing to note that just after 1962, the Chinese accepted the McMahon Line while demarcating their border with Burma. Very recently in preparatory talks for a BCIM meeting they suggested re-establishing connectivity by restoring the Stilwell Road up to the Pangsau Pass. So despite the posturing on Arunachal Pradesh, it seems the offer on the eastern sector stands. They appear to be asking for concessions over Tawang now. This did not occur at all in the 80s. It would seem reasonable to believe that had the package been accepted in the 80s this problem at least may not have arisen.

Interviewer: Would you like to complete this section by going to the last part of your formal talks with the Chinese?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Well, I took part in two formal rounds of bilateral talks, which covered all aspects but concentrated mainly on the border as agreed during the return visit of Foreign Minister Huang Hua in 1981. There had been some delay in fixing the date for this due to our decision to recognise the Heng Samrin Government in Cambodia. That visit went off well as the Chinese conceded our wording that the border was central to

the relationship. We agreed that there would be bilateral talks at the Vice Minister level which would also address the boundary question. This was in line with Vice Premier Deng's suggestion at his meeting with Vajpayee. In the Ministry too it was felt that we should engage with the Chinese even if we could not make immediate progress on the border. So, we discussed economic and trade relations and international problems, especially in Asia. The problem of Cambodia was a source of some differences.

In the first round in December 1981, the Chinese tried to force the pace. At the same time as we were holding official discussions, the correspondent of a fairly unknown defence journal, Vikrant, was given an interview by Deng Xiaoping where the package proposal was reiterated. My brief gave me no flexibility and very little room for compromise. We made a demarche to the Chinese foreign ministry saying that this was an effort to undermine the official talks. But while the talks went nowhere we parted amicably. I must record that my ongoing relationship with Han Nien Lung always remained relaxed and friendly. Even after telling me that in recognising the Heng Samrin Government, India was dropping a stone on its feet, he gave me a sumptuous private dinner. It was a pleasure to renew his acquaintance after we had both retired.

From the hype the Chinese gave that round of talks I now believe Han Nien Lung was making one last effort to get the package through. He was to retire soon thereafter. I also was due to complete my tenure in 1982. Unfortunately, the flexibility that we had had in 1980 got circumscribed by the return of pro Soviet advisers to the government after Sanjay Gandhi's death. The Soviets were also negotiating their border with the Chinese and did not want us to agree to any compromise that might complicate their position. Their Vice Minister Kapitsa came with a strong request from his government. It was also hinted to me that Indian negotiators should not tarnish Panditji's legacy.

I had already got my posting orders when the Chinese intimated us that they would like to come to Delhi for the next round of border talks. We indicated that it might be better to wait for my successor which would ensure greater continuity. However, they insisted and the second round of

talks took place in May 1992 led by the new Vice Minister Fu Hao who had been my colleague in Japan. We covered the same ground except that we went into greater detail about establishing more parameters or principles. Since then there have been variations in the format of the border talks. The level of the leaders has been raised. The subject has been raised at the highest level and by special envoys who thought they had privileged access to the Chinese leadership. But as I told my Joint Secretary in 1982 the present brief will ensure we have at least another 10 rounds. That has proved true and 20years later we have made little progress.

Interviewer: But this really is the crux of it till today. I remember on the field visits that I made and when I met Chinese officials one of the key questions they would ask is, is India ready for a settlement? And I had to say that I did not think so.

Ambassador Eric Gonsalves. One episode that I feel bears inclusion here is a meeting with the 'Great Leader' Kim Il Sung en route to the first round of border talks. The North Korean had been very persistent in telling me that compared to the South we were neglecting the DPRK. I kept telling him that reflected the economic content of the two relations and it was beyond my capacity to alter it. I, however, said I was very willing to go to Pyongyang myself. So I was invited for bilateral talks. When we arrived Joint Secretary Vinod Khanna was asked on the way from the airport whether we were carrying any special message. We thought over this at the guest house, which incidentally was the most palatial I had ever been housed in. My suite of seven to eight rooms even had a private library with the works of Kim Il Sung in many languages.

It seemed that they needed something to ease the protocol of receiving us at a level higher than the Foreign Minister which is the norm at a bilateral meeting. As Prime Minister Gandhi had sent a message at a recent NAM meeting, we improvised and said we were carrying an oral message for the President. Everything changed and our entire programme was altered and a whole day was set aside for the Foreign Minister to conduct us to the country retreat of the Great Leader. The meeting itself was not very different from any meeting with a Head of Government. It took about 30 or 40 minutes and views on bilateral and Asian matters were exchanged.

Kim Il Sung behaved very courteously and escorted us down to our transport as we left. What was extraordinary was the pre-meeting preparations for us to appear correctly groomed and the post meeting oration by the Foreign Minister thanking us for giving all those dealing with Indo-DPRK relations so valuable an opportunity to bring them to the attention of the Leader. Kim IL Sung was the only man in North Korea who did not wear a medallion with his portrait on it.

***Interviewer*:** Okay Eric, then let us take it to the next big issue which perhaps could be Tarapur. Would you like to say anything?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: After Pokhran I in 1974, the question of nuclear proliferation began to agitate the international community, particularly the western powers. They started to erect a regime of denial and sanctions which would make it painful for governments to acquire and utilise the technology required for making nuclear weapons that no one would wish to proceed down that road. Beyond the need to promote disarmament, I suspect it was really an effort to maintain the power structure put in place in 1945 whereby the P5 had installed themselves at the apex of the entire international system including the United Nations, and did not want to permit any challenge to the hegemony of that system.

Interestingly enough, although the Cold War was still very much alive at that time, the Soviets also subscribed to this because, being the weaker side of the bipolar system, the status quo with the veto gave them considerable benefits. The regime that was established with all its sanctions, licenses and controls became extremely formidable. In the name of restricting nuclear proliferation, sanctions were applied to trade, aid and technology transfers quite indiscriminately. World Bank assistance, PL480, food, aid and all manner of innocuous transfers were sought to be made conditional by American legislators. The real motives were mixed and were not always to ensure non proliferation.

India's nuclear establishment may have put emphasis on the peaceful uses of nuclear power, and it was pioneered by civilian scientists, but from the very inception of this programme they were in no doubt that India should also have weapons technology and this had been endorsed at the highest

levels of government. So they proceeded overtly and covertly to obtain the necessary materials and to build their technological capacity. At that time a test was the only way to demonstrate that you had acquired weapons capacity and when it was done it was hailed almost as a test of national virility. Pressure to test was always there in all nuclear establishments and their political masters were out there encouraging them as often as restraining them.

Pokhran-I certainly established that India had become a nuclear power. Pokhran II was only about our moving up the ladder to more sophisticated technology. But we kept underplaying it saying that it was an implosion meant to be used only for peaceful purposes. The delivery systems at our disposal were crude but we had a nuclear weapon. If we thought we could avoid the consequences we were very much mistaken and all hell broke loose. All cooperation was immediately stopped. The Canadians left the reactors at Kota unfinished and walked out. Our scientists suddenly found themselves pariahs and unwelcome at meetings with their counterparts. More and more technical exchanges stopped as did supplies of critical material and equipment. The Americans began to throw doubt about the availability of the enriched uranium fuel supplies they had contracted to give in perpetuity for the Tarapur power station and which they had helped build in 1959-60.

During the Nixon period, despite the serious political differences earlier over Bangladesh there were some rumbles but no disruption of fuel supplies to Tarapur. However, with passage of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Act (NNPA) and the election of a Democratic President wedded to a much tougher regime on proliferation the noose began to tighten. Carter has to be commended for the causes he has espoused since he left the President's office. But we soon learnt of his moral bent when he came to India to celebrate the return of democracy but also insisted that no mercy be shown on the question of Tarapur and nuclear sanctions.

A crusade against proliferation was being orchestrated at that moment by an unlikely coalition of peaceniks who were genuinely interested in a nuclear free world along with politico-military and scientific establishments who

want to retain the dominant position of a super power within the P5 system. This became evident later when the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was being reviewed and renewed. The assurances of comprehensive nuclear disarmament have been dropped. The nuclear weapons powers intend to remain that way indefinitely. Meanwhile, the proliferation regime was tightened up selectively so that independent powers could be coerced into accepting this unequal system. India was to be made an example. Israel on the other hand was helped by the same P5 powers.

Fuel supply to Tarapur was an obvious source of pressure and slowly but surely it began to slow down and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission began to give that action legal cover. The Indian position was always clear. The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties to which both the U.S. and India are parties maintains that a treaty overrides any domestic legislation. But the difficulty with international law is that it is not as easily enforced as municipal law. Once the United States invoked its NNPA and its Nuclear Regulatory Commission used its quasi judicial role to first delay and later stop the fuel supplies, with the support of the entire political establishment, both in Congress and in the Administration, and also of influential groups such as the scientists and the military we would be effectively between a rock and a hard place.

Despite our rights in law it was doubtful if we could obtain redress by purely legal processes. The only other choice was to get the fuel elsewhere or produce it ourselves. (The current situation with Iran has some parallels, although Iran as a signatory of the NPT has obligations that India did not). We had not acquired the technology for making enriched uranium which was the fuel used in Tarapur. We had gone the more efficient and more difficult route of separating plutonium from the spent fuel. We were experimenting with a mixed oxide fuel which was then unknown and untested technology. Some of our scientists thought it was feasible, but there were others with reservations. I went with a delegation to discuss possible ways out of the impasse during the last year of the Carter Presidency and found there was no give at all. Their intention was to slowly reduce fuel supplies to nil.

Then the elections brought President Reagan to the White House. Just at that point of time the nuclear power industry was going through a fair

amount of expansion and the makers of nuclear power plants were anxious not to have their markets circumscribed because it was a very profitable business. They let it be known that companies wanting reactors from the United States could possibly arrange to get fuel from countries other than the United States. This gave me the idea that we could also try this route even if we were not buying new reactors. The Tarapur Agreement stipulated fairly easy safeguards which applied only to fuel supplied to the plant.

Subsequently full scope safeguards were introduced by which all facilities that had anything to do with the fuel cycle would attract safeguards. Accepting these would have meant that IAEA safeguards would have applied very soon to all our nuclear facilities. When we went to discuss fuel supplies with the newly installed Reagan Administration, I explored the supply of fuel from another source with existing safeguards with my counterpart in the State Department. (***Interviewer***: Which year was that?) This was in mid-1981.The new Assistant Secretary Malone, who in keeping with the Reagan ideology was business friendly, did not seem averse to considering it.

Interruption: Just a point of clarification, when you put this idea to him, this really was your own idea. It was not part of a brief or anything.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: At that stage it was my own idea. Having floated a balloon and found that there appeared to be a response on the other side I had to get it approved by my government. It was not easy as the Department of Atomic Energy was very anxious to prove that they could use indigenous fuel. They were all for denouncing the agreement with the U.S. But there were doubts even among some of their senior people and elsewhere in the government because the technology was new and not completely tested. (***Interviewer***: The so-called MOX Technology) Yes. I believe it is working today in certain reactors.

This was 30 years ago and many foreign scientists, with whom I had a chance to interact, urged great caution because of the unstable nature of some of these compounds that would be used. One of the reactors causing problems at Fukushima after the recent tsunami was using MOX, but it is

not clear whether this had contributed in any way to aggravate problems there. My alternative proposition was to obtain the current fuel from another country. (Tarapur is still operating using that fuel, although the supplier has changed more than once). If we went down the indigenous route and failed, we would get egg on our face with a shut down power station. This was eventually approved by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. The imminent closure of the station due to the non arrival of fuel helped to bring closure. However, it was a big battle. The supporters of the indigenous option, including the DAE and their friends in the media even put out a story that got some currency that I had exceeded my brief and negotiated an agreement on my own. Since the final agreement was signed by our Prime Minister and the U.S. President that was a canard indeed.

It was the cupidity of American industry that we were able to use. Time and again one finds that if you want to beat American sanctions find some American captains of industry whose interests coincide with yours and they will very often help you to find a way to beat those sanctions. China knows how to exploit this very well. There was no great difficulty in getting agreement for the proposition for an alternative supplier from the Reagan Administration. There was also no difficulty in getting the French to agree to undertake that role.

(***Interviewer***: So it did not take many rounds of negotiations) No. Ultimately the negotiations were not too difficult. Of course they would have been unthinkable with the Carter Administration. Here the rapport that came to exist between Mrs Gandhi and President Reagan (and for that matter with Mrs Thatcher also) also played a part. It had been established at the summit at Cancun and was followed by the first invitation to Mrs Gandhi to visit the U.S. after 1962. The difficult negotiations were in fact the negotiations in India about whether this should be done.

Interviewer: In a way what this narrative shows is that sometimes our zeal for domestic development of technology overtakes our sense of realism as to what is possible. So many DRDO projects lie in the doldrums or have been a failure because of that kind of zeal. ISRO is a different story altogether and so is the nuclear industry.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: I was just going to say that there is a need for us to be at the cutting edge of technologies and this applies to nuclear, space and many other areas. The difference between atomic energy and space is that the DEA heads have become somewhat like frogs in a well and wanted to be totally independent because of the sanctions. Space officials were also affected by the sanctions, but the leadership of Vikram Sarabhai and Satish Dhawan was more broad minded and this enabled them to maintain some working relationship with their foreign peers.

Interviewer: Also maybe because the space industry from the beginning was able to partner with private Indian industry and this also helped in this attitude of openness.

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Actually the DAE was quite willing to subcontract to the private sector. Tata, Larsen & Toubro etc have always had contracts in defence and other sensitive areas, for instance, the nuclear submarine for the Indian Navy. It is more about the ability to work with and exchange ideas and techniques with your foreign peers. Even if you have to circumvent sanctions you do not need to reinvent the wheel. You need to maintain flexibility in your thinking. Paranoia about the source of supply has been a bane in the all security matters. Keeping it as far as possible in the public sector goes back to Krishna Menon and the making of coffee machines in ordnance factories. The DEA has done India very proud in keeping us ahead in the nuclear competition. But the overall strategy remains as laid down by Homi Bhaba and puts a premium on the utilisation of thorium via the fast breeder reactor. Fortunately we did not get bogged down in trying to use MOX.

Interviewer: Shall we move on to another set of issues, Sri Lanka and South East Asia, and ASEAN?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: When we entered the 1980s and I came back as Secretary the security situation in South East Asia was rapidly changing partly because the old Cold War had already disappeared there. The Sino-American rapprochement had altered the European Cold War pattern in Asia and the end of the Vietnam War had further changed the matrix. An economic

superpower, Japan, was flexing its muscles. China while concentrating on economic reform at home was working out a new equation with the United States, because the hostility over Taiwan remained unabated. South East Asia also had to digest the new reality in the Indo-China region after the U.S. withdrawal. During the Vietnam War, Thailand and Singapore whole heartedly supported the USA, while Malaysia and Indonesia were more non-aligned and did have some dialogue with Vietnam.

The rise of ASEAN was another success story in the making. The ending of confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia produced in ASEAN a remarkable regional organisation enabling the countries of the region to work together, and thus, enhancing their political capacity while undertaking complementary economic reform and growth programmes that acted as a magnet for trade aid and industrial development. They were all conservative market oriented societies which made them attractive partners to the West. Japan needed offshore partners for producing components and even complete manufactures.

This was to be the decade of the 'Asian Tigers' which also included South Korea and Taiwan. That some of them were not democratic was no bar. In fact, authoritarian governments were preferred by Western governments and their companies found them much easier to deal with. Crony capitalism was a preferred way of doing business. The gains of ASEAN made others wish to join. India tried for quite a while to join or become associated. In retrospect it is clear that it was not possible because we were so large and diverse a country and so poor an economy that it would never have been worthwhile for the ASEAN to take us in.

ASEAN had its own internal politics. Thailand and Singapore were total supporters of American policy in their region. Malaysia and Indonesia were more circumspect. So they considered a possible linkage with India might be a balancing factor. At that stage our relations with the Vietnamese were very good; we were quite influential in the non-aligned group and had reasonable relations with both super powers. Our relationships with the top leadership in ASEAN, except Thailand were warm. I recall that most of us were on first name terms.

ASEAN had started inviting its major partners to join a dialogue processes to coincide with their annual meeting which then took place at the Foreign Minister level. The U.S., Japan and the E.U. were among the first invitees. During the annual bilateral meetings in 1979-80 with Malaysia and Singapore they offered to include India as a participant in the dialogue meeting in 1980. To join the dialogue process did make sense as we had been striving for a connection to ASEAN. But it could not be at the cost of giving up the Vietnam connection. What Singapore hoped to achieve was not to break that but to get India to be more accommodating on the Khmer Rouge regime.

I never been able to understand the fact that countries like the United States and other proclaimed democracies made a fetish of human rights etc supporting the Khmer Rouge with their campaign of genocide. This was clear realpolitik directed against the Vietnamese. Today all agree that the Vietnamese had no choice but to intervene in Cambodia and no one questions the trials of the surviving Khmer Rouge leaders. But at that time Prince Sihanouk, a puppet in the hands of the Khmer Rouge was recognised by the majority of the U.N. membership. The government of Heng Samrin established by the Vietnamese was recognised only by the Warsaw Pact countries. Hun Sen who was in that government and succeeded Heng Samrin is now accepted everywhere.

We did take some time before we gave recognition. We also invited a delegation led by Hun Sen as Foreign Minister to discuss how we could help them rebuild a country that had lost maybe 80- 90 per cent of its elite. We emphasised that we hoped to provide an Asian option against the Soviet option which was the only one they had. This naturally had considerable repercussions in ASEAN.

But the first dialogue invitation was eventually not accepted by us. I was coming from Beijing where I had gone for an informal round of border talks. At this point, Sanjay Gandhi died and that effectively changed power equations and policy patterns in the Delhi establishment to such an extent that the Foreign Minister, Narasimha Rao, who was looking forward very much to leading the delegation suddenly discovered that he had to attend

his adopted mother's funeral and cancelled his visit. After that the dialogue invitation was not renewed for over a decade.

Interviewer: All the way until the late 1990s?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Of course, in fairness I will say that we could never have sustained any meaningful dialogue process because we did not have sufficient economic capacity at that time.

Interviewer: But Eric**,** looking back would it be right to ask if we were really wise in what we did vis-à-vis Cambodia, that at the end of the day what has our relationship with Indo-China produced for us today? Vietnam does not feel any particular sense of obligation to India or any great nexus towards India. One even hears that in ASEAN affairs Vietnam is sometimes more hostile to India than some of the others or it is reluctant to come forward vis-à-vis India. What have we achieved by this leaning in favour of Vietnam and its policies?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Firstly I have no doubt that frustrating the Cambodian attempt to destabilise Vietnam with the support of China, the U.S. and ASEAN enabled the emergence of the current ASEAN which encompasses the whole of Southeast Asia. With all the institutions that have been projected around ASEAN like APEC, ARF, ASEM and the East Asian Summit the process of placing Asia in the centre of the globe made its start. The rise of India and China has since given the movement a more substantial base. Internationally supported intervention and elections have brought Cambodia back into the international community and this has been based on the leadership recognised by us in the 80s.

It is true that the close relations we had with Vietnam since Independence into the 90s have frayed. But I would submit that our own lukewarm attitude towards the Indo-China states, and for that matter towards most of Asia except China and Pakistan, has more to do with this than ingratitude. When Vietnam was going through its early reforms we should have gone in on the ground floor when the old links were still available. I think I have mentioned earlier how warm the Prime Minister was in lauding our help in an animal husbandry programme in the 70s and 80s. Even the 'Look East' policy has been more of a slogan than a programme.

Interviewer: I mean the position taken by India in the end did not matter very much?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: We failed to develop a realistic policy for our relations with South East Asia. Clearly it should have focused much more on economic content, it should have been trade driven, resource driven, technology driven and investment driven. But we could not have sustained it in the 1980s. By the 1990s as the reforms were beginning to bite we did announce a 'Look East' Policy, but did precious little to give it substance. The reality is that after 1962 we began a process of slowly turning inward. The momentum of the earlier interaction abroad during the heyday of Nehru's placing India on the world stage carried us on for a while. But the infrastructure which was minimal anyhow was lost with time.

Our foreign language and international studies programmes are inadequate, government policies on dealing even with our neighbours suffer from interdepartmental rivalries and from a total lack of long term policy direction. The necessary coordination between the private sector, public sector, academia, media etc is sporadic and unplanned. To take the place our potential entitles us to in the world, requires far more systematic planning of all our external policies and the infrastructure that will support them. In all this we have also to make a much more sophisticated engagement with the region which takes into account the reality of the Chinese presence.

We cannot compete outright any more, no ASEAN country will accept that. BIMSTEC is out of date and needs to be merged with BCIM so that we can work out a matrix of cooperation and competition with China. That would have buyers as the Chinese have become more arrogant with Southeast Asia. But this will require serious introspection into our policy towards China, which includes re-evaluation of their projection towards South and Southeast Asia which envisages much more utilisation of economic muscle and other soft power which we cannot yet match but must deal with somehow. This will require allocation of resources to economic interaction and building infrastructure in this region as well as making our Northeast a base for projecting interaction rather than the present focus on internal security.

***Interviewer*:** So, Eric would you like to speak a little about Sri Lanka and any other aspects of your stay in Delhi before you moved on to Brussels?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Sri Lanka provides an excellent example of the complexity of a relationship with a neighbour. Beyond the normal diplomatic and security relations and the web of economic interaction there is an enormous network of ethnic cultural, other person to person contacts and even family relations. These impinge across the spectrum of bilateral ties and even have their fallout on domestic politics.

In Sri Lanka, JR Jayewardene and the UNP had come to power in the elections of 1977 almost at the same time as the Janata ouster of the Congress and Indira Gandhi. There were parallels in political developments in the two countries. Mrs Bandaranaike had also postponed elections for two years using a parliamentary resolution. The UNP like the Janata made much of saving democracy and the nation from the left wing dictators. Mrs Gandhi was undoubtedly close to the Bandaranaikes and after some uncharitable remarks from Jayewardene had little time for him during the entire time they were in office together. The Sri Lankan decision to change the Constitution opting for a Presidential system instead of the parliamentary form had many admirers in India. The use of proportional representation for selecting members of parliament was the other main change. (These constitutional changes although condemned by the opposition have never been reversed although the SLFP held power during many terms since then).

However, the warm feelings between the Jayewardene and Desai governments which was bolstered by economic aid and state visits etc soon had to face reality with the Tamil problems becoming more serious. There are two distinct Tamil communities in Sri Lanka and they pose different problems for Indo-Sri Lankan relations. The 'Indian Tamils' are labourers imported to work on the tea estates in central Sri Lanka in the late 1800s and early 1900s. After Independence, Sri Lanka wanted to send them all back and a series of repatriation agreements were reached between the two governments agreeing on repatriating a proportion and giving the rest citizenship.

However, both sides were unenthusiastic about implementation and the catch was that the obligation to repatriate included the 'natural increase', which made the agreements virtually unending. One of my first tasks after reaching Delhi was to deal with complaints from Colombo of foot dragging. We did investigate this and made some efforts to improve the rate of acceptance and return to India. But we had to recognise that the other side was also not playing fair in giving citizenship.

Ultimately this problem was ended when the High Commissioner Tom Abraham and I were able to persuade our government that the last agreement was for a fixed period of 15 years, and on the expiry of that term there was no further obligation on us to do anything more. Once this was communicated to the Sri Lankans they did not object and in time accepted the proposition. The Foreign Minister even said to me privately that such agreements had to be finite.

The reality was that the government had realised what the British planters had done a century earlier - , the local workers were unwilling to do plantation work. The tea industry was a key foreign exchange earner and the Indian workers were indispensable. The estate workers had long been organised as the Ceylon Workers' Congress under the legendary Thondaman. With a sufficiency of voters once they were given citizenship the party was able to join most governments formed in the last 20 years. They have ceased to be a serious problem.

Historically Sri Lanka and India only became separate political entities when Britain established the Crown Colony of Ceylon. Before that and during the earlier periods of colonial rule, Ceylon was part of various kingdoms ruled mainly from India. The last King who was dethroned by the colonial power was in fact a Tamil. Tamils had settled in the north and eastern areas for centuries and had developed a distinct culture which had a proud presence in Jaffna. This Tamil community flourished under the British and rose to occupy a disproportionate portion of government and other public posts such as teachers and other professionals.

There was also a fairly small Tamil commercial community especially in Colombo which again did better than their Sinhala counterparts. The

Sinhala social structure was dominated largely by the high caste landed gentry and they by and large did not wish to compete. This changed after Independence and Sinhala politicians found the minorities an easy target. With Sinhala language made the sole method for entry to government and universities and other forms of employment, the space for the Tamils grew smaller.

As chauvinism grew anti-Tamil violence was encouraged and there have been incidents such as the burning of the famous Jaffna Library. Racial riots increased and it seemed that the government was not willing to do much to stop them. During Morarji Desai's state visit in 1979, the Tamil leader Amrithlingam pleaded with him in my presence to take up the Tamil cause with Jayewardene, but got little satisfaction. The Indian Government did not want to rock the boat. It was not yet evident, but the presidential system which Jayewardene had brought in had removed from the Sri Lankan system a safety valve that the parliamentary system had provided. While that system operated it was necessary for both parties to compete for the Tamil vote to get a majority.

While the Tamils went through three or four years of increasing pressure between elections, concessions were offered just before elections and this to some extent mitigated the ethnic tensions. Jayewardene held no election for 12 years using a referendum to avoid an election and this safety valve was blocked. Jayewardene's government did make commendable efforts at economic reform, but most programmes served only the majority community. Even the irrigation project aided by India that Prime Minister Desai went to inaugurate ironically was to help Sinhala farmers move to the arid eastern provinces and displace Tamils.

The virulent anti-minority sentiments among the Buddhist clergy combined with a rising militant Sinhala movement which had morphed from the old left extremist JVP exerted pressure on a President and government that were already anti minority. They gave some lip service by giving recognition to Tamil as an official language. A clear indicator was the second Oath of Office mandated for the swearing in of the President that required him/her to maintain a unitary state. This clearly rejected any plurality or federal

structure in the polity which would have been necessary to give the Tamils any sort of stake in governance.

I was present in 1994 when President Chandrika Kumaratunga took that oath. The growing disaffection escalated from small riots to much more. The existing Tamil parties were discredited as they could not do very much for their constituents and more radical leaders groups and parties took over their space. They found sustenance from the world wide Tamil Diaspora as well as official and nonofficial sources in Tamil Nadu. Training and equipment came from many sources like the IRA, PLO and Israel, as well as Indian intelligence. Ultimately, the LTTE led by Prabhakaran with their slogan of 'Tamil Eelam' emerged on top after a ruthless campaign of eliminating any other Tamil leadership, while taking on the Sri Lankan and Indian states with effective guerrilla tactics including suicide bombers interspersed with spells of negotiation.

This was to continue for many years and long after I had left the service. We tried desperately to get the Sri Lankan elite to make genuine efforts to redress the grievances of the Tamils. The Indo Sri Lanka Accord only came when the Jayewardene Government had its back to the wall and was unable to deal with the JVP and LTTE threats simultaneously. Even that did not work out as Prabhakaran never intended to have anything other than a defacto Eelam. President Premadasa did not want to be beholden to the IPKF and Tamil Nadu was unhappy with the Indian Army battling Tamils. There were many bitter lessons learnt at a great cost in this whole process.

Taking 1971 and the IPKF together we have to redefine our attitude towards intervention in our neighbourhood. We should not rule it out. We have to be realistic about its negative impact on the local population and ensure we do not outstay our welcome. Our intelligence inputs are inadequate and little effort is made to coordinate them. Often the intelligence agencies compete with each other in seeking access to the top. Intervention even by super powers has had its failures and therefore must be undertaken with extreme caution. However, if one aspires to be even a regional power one must consider all possible scenarios and make contingency plans.

Interviewer: Shall we move on to the Bangladesh and then to Brussels?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: Sri Lanka was an island neighbour and there was no land border to cause problems. However, even an uninhabited island, Kachativu, was to cause us some difficulty. When India accepted Sri Lankan sovereignty as the very limited historical background required, the resulting maritime boundary left fishermen on both sides dissatisfied and is still a problem today. With Pakistan, partition left many problems on the land boundary, despite the precision of the Radcliffe Award. A monumental task was completed in the demarcation of most of the boundary according to that Award by the Foreign Ministers.

In East Pakistan the Nehru-Noon pact had tried to resolve a knotty problem. In the northern portion of Bengal, jurisdictions overlapped and this had left enclaves of one country within the other. The logical solution in that agreement was to exchange enclaves. However, local politicians and administrators have managed to delay its implementation till today. One of the particularly troublesome problems was a Bangladesh enclave in India called Dhagram to which it had no access. In such a safe haven with no governance every kind of crook and unlawful activity was able to thrive to the despair of all the local Bangladeshis and Indians alike.

The Bangladeshis could do nothing because we would not allow access and we could not act or did not want to act because of the possible precedents elsewhere. Access to Dhagram required us to allow the Bangladeshis to move security forces with weapons across an Indian territory called Teen Bigha for about a kilometre. They wanted unlimited access which our security forces absolutely refused. This went to innumerable meetings and various solutions such as an underpass and an over bridge were considered. Eventually we were able to agree to permit Bangladesh to use a small corridor across our territory at Teen Bigha.

Although this was agreed in 1980 and approved by both governments and the state government of West Bengal, it could not be implemented as it was dragged through all the courts by the local West Bengal politicians. It took some 10 or 15 years for this agreement to come into force. Today I doubt if anyone remembers Teen Bigha.

Another similar problem which also hogged the headlines and caused much antagonism was a sand bank called New Moore Island which only surfaces during the low tide. Its possession could make a difference in demarcating the maritime boundary. Sand banks, however, tend to disappear and reappear depending on the river and tidal flows. It was not a very good case on which to hang a dispute. But we once managed to reach a high point of a naval confrontation in which most of the Bangladesh Navy and a good portion of our Eastern Fleet were looking at each other across their guns and armies wanted to establish permanent posts where everyone would have drowned at high tide. Here the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and I were able to get agreement on establishing a 'no go' area, i.e. no air patrols, no Navy nor anything else. In time, as the furore died down New Moore Island too was been forgotten.

While it might have been possible to sort out these relatively minor problems even if they became temporary flash points, not much progress has been made on the major question of the enclaves although I understand some serious negotiations are currently underway.

The most serious source of disputes in the subcontinent has probably been water, even more than land. Ever since the Farrakka Barrage was conceived and built, it created controversy over the downstream flows of the Ganga. From time to time the sharing of almost all the rivers of the Brahmaputra-Ganga-Meghna Basin has caused problems. Sometimes even a change in their course created disputes. Perhaps if the problem had been tackled in the early days, agreement could have been reached because the Pakistanis only wanted a small amount of water. It was a minor problem compared to the far greater achievement in the Indus Waters Treaty.

But our engineers felt too much had been conceded in that Treaty and were in little mood to find a compromise. By the time the Janata government came into office the demands from Bangladesh had grown. The Janata Government had a genuine desire to accommodate neighbours and accepted a grandiose scheme proposed by our engineers that intended to meet everyone's demands by transferring surplus water from the Brahmaputra by a canal to Farakka. Initially this agreement was accepted by Bangladesh.

Later their technical advisers reneged and made it a big national issue on the grounds that such a large canal would effectively divide the country and Bangladesh would be deprived of its rightful share of Brahmaputra waters. The augmentation of Ganga waters by the Brahmaputra waters or rather the planning of their joint utilisation was and is the most sensible approach. Bangladesh reels under the floods from the Brahmaputra every year and much of that water does go unused into the sea. But the Indian insistence on getting enough water to flush the Port of Kolkata was also soon to become irrelevant with the silting of the Hooghly below Kolkata, making it anyway inaccessible.

Like all arguments in the subcontinent, this issue was raised from the practical to the conceptual. India maintained that the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna system was one river basin, while the Bangladeshis maintained they were all separate. As, it became clear that the concept of the canal and long term augmentation would never be accepted in Bangladesh, when the first review came up after five years the Government of India decided, as recommended by the Ministry of External Affairs, to let the whole agreement lapse and continue with ad hoc sharing at Farraka.

In due course that ad hoc agreement was converted into the present Treaty after the water sharing formula had been sold to the Bangladesh and West Bengal Governments by a process of public and private discussions sponsored by NGOs from the two countries. If you go to Bangladesh today nobody complains about Farrakka. Maybe the moral of the story is that try to get an agreement that is saleable even if it is a compromise.

Also the Bangladeshis have never really used the water that we have given them. The water still goes to the sea because they have not desilted one particular link which is vital for the waters to get to Khulna. Also today both of them are concerned about upstream diversions by China. A situation is never static.

There were of course many other negotiations over river water such as the Teesta, but with no success till today. But as we are still arguing about our own internal sharing of waters of the Sutlej, Beas, Narmada or Kaveri etc. we are only too well aware of the difficulties.

The internal politics of Bangladesh were of course of the greatest importance. After the assassination of Sheik Mujib, General Zia ur Rehman had established a political base for himself and had come to the President's office via a relatively fair election. But he could not manage the factions within the Army and was assassinated by some of them in 1981. His equations with the Morarji Desai Government were good even if we could not make much progress on water problems. He was the first state guest after Mrs Gandhi came back as Prime Minister and continuing the rapport seemed within possibility.

After his assassination, the Vice President took over as mandated by the Constitution. But it became clear very soon that the Army would not stay out of the picture. General Ershad made it known that they would take over at an appropriate time. It became one of the favourite guessing games of Indian intelligence to forecast the date of the takeover. However, they let me down. I had just managed to get a few days of a well earned leave in Goa, only to find two dispatch riders waiting for me as we reached the guest house with messages summoning me back to Delhi as the coup had taken place. In some ways we were relieved to be dealing with the familiar set up again.

It may seem strange today, but in the 80s democracy had practically ceased to exist in South Asia except in India. It was only in the 90s that the restoration of democracy started taking place. For this one has to thank some stalwart supporters all over South Asia who supported elections and combined as observers to ensure their transparency. It was a privilege for some of us to be called back from retirement to help in this process.

President Zia had already conceived the idea of SAARC and the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry started a campaign to sell the idea. With regional organisations becoming the rule, it seemed that South Asia would also have to consider going down this road. However, Mrs Gandhi was totally opposed and thought it was an attempt among the neighbours to gang up on India. There may have been an element of this behind the proposal, but it was a challenge to be met. In the Ministry all we could do was to keep the idea on the back burner and not allow it to be dismissed. As soon as Rajiv Gandhi succeeded his mother he took up the idea enthusiastically.

Let me add some small notes about economic achievements. A country like India is bound to have a fairly robust trade with its neighbours unless they adopt draconian measures to prevent it, as Pakistan did with progressive tightening after each conflict. The result was that when Bangladesh started opening up the balance of trade, it was enormously in our favour. This has always caused unhappiness. But no Commerce Ministry in India would ever consider our pleas for some relaxation. I was fortunate to find a Commerce Secretary who not only was sympathetic but also found a practical way to do so. ESCAP had agreed that neighbours could make some tariff reductions in certain circumstances and we were able to use that to allow the import of jamadani saris and blue leather and a few other items. It was a gesture which cost us very little, but was appreciated.

Another project which has always given me satisfaction was building a modern airport in the Maldives. The funding came from Kuwait and our Airports Authority got the contract for construction. At that time no one else would or could have done it. It was a far better airport than they ever built in India. This gave the Maldives the capacity to sustain its tourist industry which has provided it with basic revenues and prosperity.

It should also be recorded that in dealing with all these neighbours, one had necessarily to deal with delicate issues with Heads of State and Government and Ministers besides the top officials. We were fortunate through all that time that we had good relations with all of them despite the controversial issues that we had to manage. Senior officials who almost invariably became lifelong friends helped. When I went in advance of PM Desai's state visit, the President sent my wife and me on a trip around Sri Lanka in an air force plane. Later,after a tense stand-off, he called us to his private residence for tea and backed down.

Let me recall one final incident. I had gone with President Sanjeeva Reddy on his state visit to Sri Lanka just after the Congress had returned to power in Delhi. We had of course written out all his speeches. Jayewardene proceeded to throw away his prepared speech and spoke extempore with references to his relations to the earlier Janata Government. I was on tenterhooks as our President did the same. Fortunately he was statesman

enough not to cause any embarrassment. As we were leaving, Jayewardene who had noticed my preoccupation, offered me a brandy with a smile and said "Surely you were not worried about what I was going to say."

SAARC came into existence after I had left Delhi. We did what we could to keep the concept in suspended animation during Mrs. Gandhi's tenure given her almost paranoid suspicions about a gang up among the neighbours. Sadly it has proved a stunted plant. Any effort to increase cooperation, even among smaller groups, has been sabotaged by those who might have benefited and those who did not. It seems with the return of the Awami League Government in Bangladesh and the triumph of the Sri Lankan armed forces over the LTTE that progress might now be possible.

Even Nepal in spite of its internal political stalemate can do some business and Bhutan and the Maldives have never had any problems with regional systems. Pakistan is a continuing problem, but there too the process in Kashmir has provided pointers for establishing connectivity. This is, I believe, the most important contribution needed just now. Unfortunately the GOI has also seemingly lost the way and is content with summits and declarations rather than concrete projects.

My responsibilities also included the Pacific. That meant Australia, New Zealand and a whole lot of island territories that I have never seen though there was useful interaction with Fiji, Tonga and the tiny island of Nauru. Australia was firmly in the Western camp and kept the Pacific an American lake. They like us were feeling their way with ASEAN. We compared notes during our annual bilateral talks which were really useful as we had many common points of reference. But the real economic ties that would have added weight were just not there at the time. A more effective Asian policy is being formulated. Let us hope it will reopen the days when India was a major economic and civilisational contributor to the Asian system.

I shall conclude this section by mentioning the last in a long series of Commonwealth PMs meeting in which I was able to participate in Melbourne in 1982. Our initial purpose was simply to prevent an invitation going to Pakistan which had been suspended for the usual suspension of

democracy with the advent of martial law. That did not prove too difficult as one's relations with the top civil servants in the U.K., Canada, Australia and Nigeria were more than sufficient to agree they would not override our veto. At the end of the meeting Mrs Thatcher suddenly rejected the agreed communiqué paragraph on the Indian Ocean as she felt it was not fair to the U.S.

We spent a sleepless night because I refused to yield saying I must get instructions from my PM. Next morning Mrs. Gandhi was in a mind to concede as she thought we were being unnecessarily difficult. Fortunately, the day was saved by the Chairman, Australian PM Fraser, who felt that Mrs. Thatcher was the one who was asking too much. In any case, we left on a high as the next meeting was to be held in Delhi and the PM had received the invitation to Cancun which was to establish an unlikely rapport with President Reagan.

Brussels (1982-1986)

Interviewer: Shall we then move on to the next phase Eric? Brussels where you served as our ambassador to both Belgium and to the European Economic Community (EEC) which later became EU. Which year was that?

Amb Eric Gonsalves: 1982 to 1986. Brussels was an initiation into an area of diplomacy with which I was not very familiar. It was essentially economic and the primary interest was trade not aid. In time it got diversified into investment, cooperation in industry and technology. The EEC was a curious entity. It was not multilateral, nor quite supra-national. The Commission in Brussels had the competence to negotiate trade agreements, but we had to bear in mind the national interests of the member states. At that time it had nine members. Since then it has grown to 27.

The European Union (EU) as it is now known has progressed much further down the road to becoming a single entity with more recent treaties making it a single market, bringing in a common currency and even eliminating

border controls between most of the members. Our initial need to engage with the European Economic Community arose with the entry of Britain into the Community. The Commonwealth system of trade preferences which had succeeded the old imperial system had to be scrapped.

The colonies of the original six, mainly French had been accommodated by the Lome Agreement by which the European Union in a sense assumed all responsibilities that the French had for aid and guaranteed imports of tropical products at favourable prices. This was extended to British colonies in Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean. It was obviously impossible for the Lome arrangements to be applied to the much larger Asian economies, Australia and New Zealand that had benefited from Commonwealth preferences.

The first trade agreement and the first aid agreement that the European Union reached with a developing country were with India. These were mainly standstill agreements. They were reviewed at annual talks and some evolution took place. By the time I reached Brussels in 1982 we were receiving aid for trade development and for enhancing energy efficiency. But the European common market was really for the benefit of European producers and European consumers. European consumers and tax payers subsidised European producers in agriculture to a scandalous extent. Many battles had to be fought over tariff and non tariff barriers concerning agricultural products such as tobacco, groundnut cake, cotton etc. We did manage to get some schemes of preferences for developing countries, but it was nothing compared to the opening up that came later with the Uruguay Round and the WTO.

In the latter half of my tenure, when the German Commissioner for External Relations was replaced by a former French Foreign Minister, he tried out a minor version of the Marshal Plan where financial intervention would replace the old routine of trade with a little dollop of aid. Of course, this was a pipe dream because the European Union itself had very limited financial resources. Aid and investment remained with member states and their private sectors. Even today that picture has not altered much.

The Maastricht Treaty, the single market and the Euro were great leaps in making Europe an economic power house. But it is now clear that the

nation state still remained the basic structure and when the international economy was struck by the 2008 crisis, the continuance of the Euro itself was questioned as the more solvent members were unwilling to bail out their more profligate colleagues. Even in 1983 or 1984 the idea of the European Union becoming an investment leader trying to compete with the World Bank or replacing the World Bank did not seem practical.

I countered with some ideas on industrial collaboration, more joint ventures in industry and using India as a base for supplying the Lome countries with technology transfers advisers and simpler industrial goods instead of the more expensive European variants. In the 1980s, we were still at the worst of our license and permit Raj and there was not really very much hope.

Let me give you an example. You know that the Hanover Trade Fair is one of the great events for deals in engineering goods, projects and technology. The EEC and the Germans underwrote a massive Indian participation. We had the cream of Indian industry and on the whole they put up a fairly creditable show. The next year only 20 or so of the over 100 participants from the previous year bothered to come. They were not the big boys who had only come because of the subsidy and the need to please the Indian Government. The Germans had made a critical analysis of the Indian stalls and made recommendations as to how the items could be improved.

My technical officers reported that neither the government agencies in India nor the trade bodies like FICCI or CII were at all responsive to queries from us on how we could internalise the recommendations.

My only real success was in helping the Indian diamond traders in Antwerp become one of the most effective of our export efforts. When I came to Brussels they were considered as smugglers to be watched. Their prowess in processing diamonds with obsolete equipment was not recognised. That changed as they demonstrated their ability. The customs establishment began to understand the need for an opener regime if exports were to flourish. Indian banks came to provide credit. Export licensing for diamond processing machinery was eased. South Africans could be given visas if they helped with our exports. There are similar stories of food processors in the U.K. Marketing and processing expertise was helped

by our Embassy's assistance using EEC development funds to build up the Indian food industry there. *Naan* and chicken *tikka masala* became household names in the U.K. owing to the Brussels Embassy.

We had a friendly relationship with the European Union. We did not make much progress and it was a bit of a disappointment to see how some other countries, in particular China and ASEAN, began during that period to establish the openings in which they actually copied what the Koreans before them and the Japanese before that had developed their entries into the European market. If we could have started our economic reform 10 years earlier our headstart would have been formidable.

Concluding Thoughts

Interviewer: Any other final thoughts Eric that you would want to add.

Amb Eric Gonsalves There are always after thoughts. Some are about policy and the working of the Ministry and our missions. I have made some comments in the earlier parts of these interviews. It would be redundant to try to add another summary here. There is, however, one serious omission in that while outlining the evolution of policy and events I have not mentioned enough about my colleagues, senior and junior, who were crucial in developing policies and implementing them.

I was extremely fortunate in the many officers under whom I served and who guided me in shaping my thinking and my attitudes. P N Haksar who was my boss several times was a true mentor, a guide and a friend. While we did not always agree, I learnt especially from him how to discern the national interest and seek it. Y D Gundevia and Ramdas Katari made me realise that there were principles which transcended policies and personal interest. Everyone in the IFS had some gift for diplomacy, but Vishnu Trivedi was exceptional in demonstrating its practice. There were many others whose abilities and expertise rubbed off on to me, but the list would be too long to put down.

I was equally fortunate in the gains that came from the interaction with one's contemporaries and later from the younger officers who worked

with me. Since almost all have since risen to the higher posts in the Government, I would hope that they will make their own contributions to this Oral History Project. I apologise for not naming them and must reiterate that without them it would have been impossible to have done all the things mentioned in the above narrative. Whether in a mission or in the Ministry the evolution of a policy and its implementation is a continuing process of discussion and disputation till the desired goal has been achieved. Everyone does contribute and there is no mastermind who has a monopoly of wisdom.

Lastly and most importantly we are all indebted to our spouses for the support they provided us in so many ways. Many people envy the large and sometimes palatial residences we come to occupy as we came to the end of our tenure as Ambassadors. Does anyone even realise what it is to start a family in a strange environment with almost nothing in the bank? It is there we came to understand what an extended family we are lucky to have in the Foreign Service. Also to be able to return it with a little interest as our younger colleagues went through the same traumas and troubles. Even the palatial residences are often more of a headache to maintain than an entry into the gilded life style. But be it their immaculate existence or the traditional hospitality expected of us or the support to embassy families facing problems in an inhospitable environment or competing with the other embassies in the charity stakes and fashion shows, the HOM's wife is as or more indispensable than the HOM. The Government may not appreciate that. But I feel it must be placed on record with all the emphasis it deserves.