

The Helmsman for the Nuclear Arms Pact

Jayantha Dhanapala

By BARBARA CROSSETTE

UNITED NATIONS, May 12 — As a global conference on the future of the treaty banning the spread of nuclear weapons wound to a close tonight, there was consensus on more than extending the Man accord indefinitely. In the Praise for the conference president, News Jayantha Dhanapala of Sri Lanka, was even broader and certainly more enthusiastic.

A diplomat mostly unknown outside the arms control world until he was elected to preside over this conference, Mr. Dhanapala, who is Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the United States, is now being mentioned as a possible Secretary General of the United Nations.

Ralph Earle, deputy director of the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and an American delegate at the conference, called him "masterful."

George Bunn, one of the treaty's original negotiators in the 1960's and now a resident arms control expert at Stanford University, said Mr. Dhanapala had displayed an understanding of all positions that made him outstanding as a diplomat. His sense of humor, as he steered this

huge conference through Middle Eastern mistrust and standoffs between nuclear powers and poor nations, did not fail him.

When the final, crucial session began nearly two hours late on Thursday, he said, "I apologize to the delegations for the delay in convening this meeting, but I assure you it was for very good reasons." Consultations apart, he added, "we also commence a little after high noon to intensify the drama of the occasion."

A few minutes later, the conference shared its first laugh when he waited only a second between introducing a much-rewritten Middle Eastern resolution and declaring it adopted — before anyone could contemplate another change of mind.

If there were any criticisms, they were heard in the final days, as old squabbles refused to fade and several delegates said Mr. Dhanapala would be too "soft" to bang the heads necessary to gain a consensus.

Those who wanted tougher concessions from the nuclear weapons nations said he allowed proposals to be watered down too much. But the Americans liked him.

"He managed this conference brilliantly," said Joseph Cirincione, executive director of the Campaign for



Don Hogan Charles/The New York Times

the Nonproliferation Treaty, a Washington coalition of independent arms control research groups.

"When the conference started, there were very few people who thought you could actually get a consensus on the treaty's indefinite extension," said Mr. Cirincione, whose group kept a daily score card of delegates' attitudes on the choices before them: whether to make the treaty permanent, extend it for one fixed period or renew it for a series

of fixed periods.

"The State Department wanted a vote," he said.

But Mr. Dhanapala, with long experience in arms control and in the diplomacy of developing nations, always wanted to avoid splitting the conference publicly and sending away a clutch of disaffected nations.

In an interview in Washington before the conference began, Mr. Dhanapala said making a decision on an issue as momentous as the nonproliferation treaty with a simple majority vote "would expose us as a divided house and not make the treaty viable." Disgruntled nations could be dangerous, he said.

By the time the conference ended, after four weeks of almost nonstop bargaining, American negotiators and diplomats were applauding Mr. Dhanapala for getting the outcome Washington wanted with the fewest possible countries alienated.

Only North Korea, embroiled in a dispute with the United States over the future of its nuclear energy program, refused to take part in the final decision. The 174 other nations attending the conference signed on to the consensus with varying degrees of agreement. Three of the treaty's 178 member nations did not send delegates.

Mr. Dhanapala, who was born into his country's Buddhist Sinhalese majority on Dec. 30, 1938, was educated at Peradeniya University in Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was known, the American University in Washington and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, where he learned Chinese. He also speaks French.

As a teen-ager, he spent three months in the United States in 1957 after winning an essay contest held by The New York Herald Tribune and a place at a World Youth Forum sponsored by the newspaper.

Entering the diplomatic service at the top of his class, he was assigned over the years to embassies in London, Beijing, New Delhi and Washington and served as Sri Lanka's representative at the United Nations in Geneva.

From 1987 to 1992 he directed the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, also in Geneva. Before coming to Washington in January as Ambassador, he was an Assistant Foreign Secretary in the Sri Lankan Government.

Mr. Dhanapala and his wife, Maureen, have two children — a daughter, Kiran, and a son, Sivanka.

At a news conference today, looking exhausted and with a few hours more negotiating still left on documents reviewing the progress of the treaty to date, Mr. Dhanapala turned aside reporters' questions about his success here.

"The president of a conference is not a magician who can produce a rabbit out of a hat," he said. "The rabbit has to be in the hat and must want to come out. All we can do is to coax it occasionally."