

FRIDAY, JUNE 21, 1996

Embassy Row

By James Morrison

Embassy Row to U.N.?

The Sri Lankan ambassador yesterday found himself in a ticklish diplomatic position as his name was floated as a candidate for the job Boutros Boutros-Ghali wants to keep in spite of U.S. opposition.

Asked if he knew he was being mentioned as a candidate for secretary-general of the United Nations, Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala said: "So I've heard.

"Quite frankly, neither my government nor I have taken any position on this issue. It's all quite sudden."

But he didn't say he doesn't want the job, and that non-declaration of candidacy is as clear as it gets in a race for a position that no one publicly seeks but many privately covet.

Mr. Dhanapala, like others mentioned for the post, knows it would appear unseemly to campaign against Mr. Boutros-Ghali, although the Egyptian diplomat has no chance of reappointment if the United States is serious about blocking him.

Mr. Dhanapala is known to hold great respect for the United Nations. He speaks frequently about the importance of multilateralism.

Before the 57-year-old diplomat took up his position in Washington, he established a respected international reputation as chairman of the 1995 review of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. He is also a former ambassador to the U.N. office in Geneva.

As a source said, if Mr. Dhanapala were offered the position, "it would be a challenge he could not walk away from."