

62ND DEATH ANNIVERSARY

SWRD: A REVOLUTIONARY LEADER

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When considering global politics, there have been many incidents where popular leaders who emerged from the common people were assassinated and such leaders often had untimely deaths.

As we all know, great leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi of India and John F. Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln from the United States (US) were shot dead. Solomon West Ridgeway Dias (S.W.R.D) Bandaranaike, who rendered an invaluable service to Ceylon in terms of socio-economic and political aspects of the nation, was also shot dead by an assailant, silencing the 'Silver Bell of Asia'.

It was the fourth year since his appointment as Prime Minister. During the period, he broke away from the United National Party (UNP) and formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP); he had hopes of making many changes in the country.

Known as the 'Silver Bell of Asia' because of his heroic rhetoric, Bandaranaike always kept in mind that he had a lot of work to do for the people. However, despite all that he had planned for the betterment of the country, he had to leave the world at an unexpected moment.

On September 26, 1959, people who did not expect a disaster to happen, began their usual work and Premier Bandaranaike also went to his home in Rosmead Place, Colombo 7, since he had to complete a lot of work, as well as listen to the grievances of all who came to meet him.

Then, one of the Buddhist monks who came to meet him came up to him without any difficulty.

Soon after, the Buddhist monk named Ven. Thalduwe Somarama Thera, approached Bandaranaike and shot him with a revolver hidden in his robe, leaving no one around to even understand what was happening.

Bandaranaike was immediately admitted to the Colombo National Hospital where he underwent a six-hour operation performed by almost all the well-known doctors in the country. However, their efforts were in vain and he passed away, plunging the nation into mourning.

This year – 2021 – is the 62nd year since the assassination of Premier S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike.

A son was born who changed a country

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, born on January 8, 1899, inherited the Bandaranaike legacy of the Maha Mudaliyar Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike and Lady Daisy Eslyn Obeyesekera, an aristocratic family living during the British rule in Ceylon. He was named 'Ridgeway' after the then British Governor to Ceylon, by his father, the Maha Mudaliyar.

Educated at S. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia and later admitted to the University of Oxford in England for higher studies, Bandaranaike returned to Ceylon in 1925 as a young man with many progressive ideas.

After returning to the country, he worked as a lawyer for a short time, and in 1926 became the Secretary of the Ceylon National Congress.

He was elected President of the Pro-National Party in the same year and later



In a contemplative mood.



The funeral of Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike.

joined many national organisations and started his political career.

Beginning of political journey

He became the Premier of the country at the end of a long political journey, beginning with his election as the Chairman of the Nitambuwa Village Committee.

He became the Secretary of the Ceylon National Congress in 1926. In the Colombo Municipal Elections held in December of the same year, he fought against the legendary labour leader A.E. Gunasinghe for the Maradana division and won with a majority of 615 votes over Gunasinghe.

Although many thought that an aristocrat like Bandaranaike could not win by contesting in an urban, working-class area like Maradana, he launched a successful door-to-door campaign and achieved an easy victory.

He thus entered the mainstream politics of the country as a Municipal Councillor and contested the Veyangoda electorate at the State Elections held after the Donoughmore Reforms and was elected unopposed to the State Council.

He was active in politics in the first State Council of Ceylon and expressed progressive views, calling for the expulsion of the three public servants and the abolition of their posts if the country is to achieve full independence.

He also said that the salary of the Speaker should be reduced to Rs. 1. In 1931, he became the Chairman of Ceylon National Congress and was the youngest to be appointed to that position.

Sinhala Maha Sabha

In 1934, the Sinhala Maha Sabha was formed by Bandaranaike with the aim of uniting the divided Sinhalese and promoting nationalism and giving impetus to the national liberation struggle. The Sinhala Maha Sabha was established under the Chairmanship of Bandaranaike and over time it developed into an islandwide movement.

The Sinhala Maha Sabha was so strong that it later convened as a large organisation at the inception of the United National Party (UNP), where there were protests by certain individuals against the merger of the UNP and the Sinhala Maha Sabha, but Bandara-



SWRD with Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike and their children Sunethra, Chandrika and Anura.

naike responded by saying, "It was formed for national independence and to form a joint party within the Parliamentary system introduced by the British." In 1936, Bandaranaike was re-elected unopposed to the Second State Council from the Veyangoda electorate.

He was also the youngest Minister in the Second State Council of Ministers and was later elected as the Leader of the House.

In the first General Election since Dominion independence in 1948, Bandaranaike contested from the Attanagalla electorate. After defeating C. Gunasekera, he was elected to Parliament with a majority of 26,854 votes and became a Minister in the first Cabinet of Ministers in the country.

Establishment of SLFP

Eventually, he realised that the UNP-led Government was not going the way the Sinhala Maha Sabha had hoped, but submitted a series of resolutions passed at the Madampe Convention of the Sinhala Maha Sabha to the then Premier, but the latter did not respond favourably and Bandaranaike sat in the Opposition in Parliament on July 12, 1951.

Later, on September 2, 1951, a group of 44 people gathered at the Colombo City Hall to form a new organisation in support of Bandaranaike. With the naming of the organisation as the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the arrival of a major factor determining the future course of Ceylonese politics took place.

Seven months after the formation of the new party, Bandaranaike faced an election in which the SLFP won nine seats. He won the Attanagalla electorate by a majority of 32,544 votes and became the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament.

Towards the post of Prime Minister

The SLFP and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), under the leadership of Bandaranaike, reached a unanimous agreement on September 24, 1955, signalling a change in the political dynamics that existed until then. On December 17, 1955, a resolution was passed to the effect that Sinhala should become the official language of the country. It was adopted at a convention of the SLFP.



Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike

Bandaranaike also accepted the 'Ten Commandments' introduced by the United Bhikkhu Front that Sinhala should be the official language of Ceylon, and pledged that his Government would implement it.

Due to the emergence of the language issue in the country, the idea that Sinhala should be the official language of Ceylon was growing around 1956, when Bandaranaike was gaining popularity as a revolutionary in Ceylonese politics.

The Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) was formed on February 21, 1956, with the participation of the SLFP led by Bandaranaike, the Revolutionary Lanka Sama Samaja Party led by Philip Gunawardena and the Sinhala Language Front led by Vijayananda Dahanayake.

Subsequently, at the 1956 General Elections, Bandaranaike led the MEP to power in Parliament, creating a 'common people's era' in the country. His main plank for the victory was the *Pancha Maha Balavegaya* (Five Great Forces) – *Sangha* (Bhikkus), *Guru* (Teachers), *Veda* (Physicians), *Govi* (Farmers) and *Kamkaru* (Working Class).

Bandaranaike, who became the Premier of Ceylon by winning the Attanagalla electorate by a landslide with a majority of 41,997 votes, has done a great service to the entire community and we are still enjoying the progressive results of the decisions he took then.

Among them are the establishment of the Ceylon Transport Board, the nationalisation of the private bus service, the nationalisation of the port, the establishment of the Employees Provident Fund (EPF), the recognition of state enterprise as a priority area, the designation of May 1, International Labour Day as a public holiday, and the protection of the rights of minorities, the granting of their rights, the amendment of Labour laws, the establishment of new State Corporations, the removal of foreign military bases operating in Ceylon, and the establishment of a national education policy.

Although he died less than four years after assuming the office of Premier, the people of this country will undoubtedly give Bandaranaike the honour of working tirelessly to provide the many services that we still enjoy today.

"Man's ultimate duty is to serve man" was his noble concept.

But some have forgotten this noble advice due to the existing political climate.

Therefore, it is the duty and responsibility of the SLFP, as well as those who love the country to keep his vision active and not limit it to mere words, as we commemorate his untimely death.

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