

Nationalistic spirit of freedom

KKS PERERA

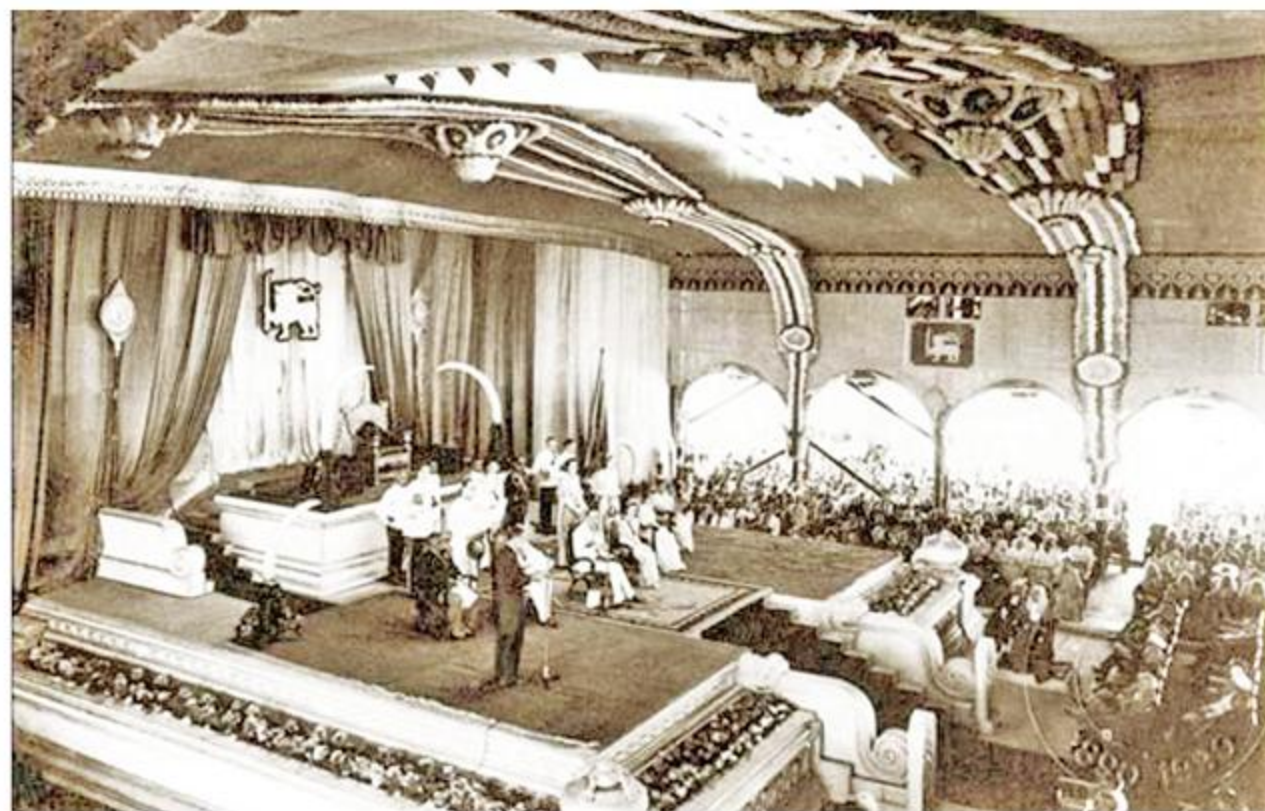
‘Mighty is the land of Bharata;
And, likewise, mighty is the Lion’s Land.
Rejoice! For this day’s bright dawn,
Sees the Lion Island free.
Victory to those who lead their people’s ever beloved.
Victory to Senanayake, leader of the government,
And victory to India’s gem of Gems.’
- *Dr SN Sashtri: Indian poet wrote in ‘Ceylon Souvenir’,
[a journal published by India in
1948 to commemorate our independence]*

According to Constitution, it is “The National Day”, and not Independence or Freedom Day. Clause 8 of our Constitution says, “The National Day of the Republic of Sri Lanka shall be the fourth day of February.”

Commemorating on February 4 each year, the country’s political independence from Britain in 1948, Sri Lanka Celebrates Freedom Day in its main event, with a military parade exhibiting the power of the three armed forces, the Police and the Civil Defense Force.

Sri Lanka was a major economic hub and port for the British Empire, which granted it semi-independent ‘dominion’ status in 1948. It became a full republic on May 22, 1972, and was formally named the Republic of Sri Lanka. Six years later, in 1978, a new constitution was adopted renaming the island nation as the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is home to quite a few communities and religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and other Christian sects. Each community celebrates Independence Day by hold-



ing religious ceremonies at their respective places of worship on February 4. The multicultural range of functions includes Buddhist pirith at Independence Square, prayer sessions at Christian churches and Hindu ceremonies at kovils. The diversity of celebrations and many varieties of performances can be witnessed with great pride at Independence Square. After years of being under colonial rule, which lasted 443-

years, Sri Lankans commemorate the 74th anniversary of independence today. This thrice-blessed nation can boast of a proud tradition with an un-written 30 centuries and a recorded history of 26 centuries. Among the leaders who spearheaded the course to independence in the present era were DS and FR Senanayake, Sir D.B. Jayatileke, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, SWRD Bandaranaike, TB Jayah and DR Wijewardene to name a few, were among many others who were united and worked wholeheartedly with great insight and grace to achieve sovereignty and autonomy. Many national struggles and rebellions were made in history. And on Independence Day all of these national heroes are commemorated and their rebellions celebrated.

MATALE REBELLION

The Matale Rebellion of 1848 is one of the great rebellions against the British government. On July 26, 1848, the leaders and the supporters of the great fight entered the historic Dambulla Vihara; Gongalegoda Banda was consecrated as “Sri Wickrama Subha Sarva Siddhi Rajasinghe”. Weerahennedige Francisco Fernando, alias Veera Puran

Appu was appointed Chief Minister and Sword Bearer to the king.

They were eventually captured by colonial rulers, and charged with high treason. The trial commenced in November at the Supreme Court condemned Banda, the national hero to be hanged on January 1, 1849. Puran Appu was captured, taken to Kandy and was sentenced to hanging. Subse-

quently, it was amended to flogging 100 times and was deported to Malacca.

Thoughts of Jawaharlal Nehru

“... and now comes the turn of Ceylon or Lanka of ancient fame. No country can rejoice more at this change than India which has been and is like an elder brother...India and Ceylon stand in the centre of South Asia. Indian Ocean washes their shores. Great trade routes pass by them. Inevitably there is going to be a closer union of these countries of Southern Asia. More specifically of South East Asia, and of common ideals and common objectives furthering peace and freedom in the world.” - Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Ministers’s message to “Ceylon Souvenir”, [Courtesy JR Jayewardene Centre—MFN7854]

DS spearheaded the struggle for independence from the British empire, along with Sir James Peiris, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, DB Jayatilaka, CWW Kanangara and EW Perera, TB Jayah and a few others. Fortunately, the ‘Sinhala-Buddhist’ ideologists and racist groups then were an insignificant lot. 30-year-old DS commenced the freedom movement with the launching of the Temperance campaign along with his brothers DC and FR as early as the second decade of 20th century.’ Based purely on policy issues, Senanayake severed all relations with CNC by 1943. The issues included an education scheme that preferred Swabhasha, instead of English, and the welcoming of Communist Party members into the Congress. DS resigned from the Congress because he disagreed with its ‘modified aim’ of ‘achieving freedom’ from the British rulers.

DS Senanayake preferred Dominion Status and vehemently opposed the thoughts of young JR Jayewardene and his son Dudley, who proposed a freedom struggle in parallel with the Indian model, in the early 1940s. DS had an idea of forming a political party with rational views to represent national harmony; a party acceptable to the Tamils and Muslims. He assumed the Congress had lost the support of non-Sinhala factions and the chances of salvaging it were far-off.

As customary, Independence Day in Sri Lanka, the 74th will be celebrations at Independence Square on February 04 under the theme ‘Prosperous Motherland that Overcomes Challenges’. These functions are characteristically thrilling with Lion flags gleaming majestically

and the ceremonially dressed soldiers march creating a feeling of patriotism.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

The national anthem is usually a patriotic harmonious composition - typically in the form of a song of honour - that evokes and honours highly, the history, customs, or great efforts of its people. National anthems are either officially documented by the constitution or by an endorsement or simply by practice. Every single inhabitant, by virtue of the constitution, is at liberty to equal rights irrespective of divisions created by humans. There is a demand for the National Anthem to be sung in Tamil. An alternative suggestion would be to adopt a few verses in Tamil in the National anthem.

Expect to see the fluttering orange, green, and maroon flag – complete with a yellow lion holding a kastane sword, adorning the flagpoles in houses, businesses, and vehicles. The three main colours of the flag represent the main demographics in the island – the maroon for the majority Sinhalese, the orange for Sri Lankan Tamils, and the green for Muslims. The lion icon dates back to 486 BC, when the first king of Sri Lanka, Vijaya, brought a Royal standard with a lion from India.

Many Sri Lankans articulate their loyalty by attending military parades. This allows Sri Lankans to show their appreciation for their nation’s current and fallen defenders. The main event is followed by a festive series of cultural agenda that highlight the best and brightest of Sri Lankan intricate, traditional dances, arts-and-crafts, and pageants all across the country: food, music, dance, and history.

Actual sovereignty for the dominion of Ceylon came in 1972 when the Constitution of 1947 was revised with the Republican Constitution. The 1947 Constitution provided for a bicameral legislature with a people elected House of Representatives and a Senate that was partly nominated and partly elected by members of the House of Representatives. A prime minister nominated his Cabinet, chosen from the largest political group and any willing members joining from smaller groups in the legislature. The Governor-General, as nominal head of state, also represented the British monarch.