

ISURU THAMBAWITA

The National flag is majestically fluttering and the extravagant preparations have been made to mark the historical event of gaining independence from the British on February 4, 1948. On the Independence Day we celebrate our victories and remember our war-heroes who dedicated their lives for the motherland. The 74th Independence Day celebrations will be held on February 4 at Independence Square, Colombo 7 with the full state honours under the patronage of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. It is evident that the president will pay tribute to our war heroes who laid down their lives, in his address to the nation. On this day, the entire country will rejoice with the spirit of patriotism and magnificent pageantry.

The hoisting of the National Flag across the country symbolizes our national pride and glory. Our National Flag which consists of a golden Lion holding a Kastane Sward in his right fore-paw in a maroon background within gold Bo leaves can be viewed as a symbol of peace and reconciliation of the country. The lion and the maroon background represent the Sinhalese and the saffron border and the four Bo leaves represent concepts of metta, karu a, mudita and upeksha. The orange represents the Sri Lankan Tamils and the green is for the Sri Lankan Muslims.

The National Day Celebrations which include a 21 gun salute to the president of the country will be the main attraction of the event. The parade which displays the majesty and the supremacy of our Tri-Forces, police and the Civil Defence Forces will be the cynosure of all eyes. All communities celebrate the Independence Day by holding religious ceremonies at temples, kovils, churches and mosques. To discuss the significance of the Independence Day, the Daily News spoke to the professor of History Dr. Dilma Koggalage at the University of Kelaniya.

OUR GOLDEN HISTORY

PORTUGUESE PERIOD (1505 – 1594)

Back in 1505 a Portuguese fleet commanded by Lourenso de Almeida was blown into Colombo by adverse winds. Almeida formed a new friendship with the king of Kotte Vira Parakrama Bahu. In 1518 they were allowed to establish a fort at Colombo and were given trading concessions as well. Back in 1521 the three sons of Vijayabahu put their father to death and partitioned the kingdom among

themselves. The eldest one of the brothers named Bhuvanaika Bahu ruled at Kotte and the other two named Mayadunne and Raigam Bandara had established independent kingdoms at Sitawake and Rayigama. The king of Sitawake, Mayadunne was an ambitious ruler who sought to expand his frontiers at the expense of his brother at Kotte. On the other hand, Bhuvanaika Bahu could not resist the temptation of seeking Portuguese assistance but defended his kingdom against Mayadunne. But Bhuvanaika Bahu was succeeded by his grandson Prince Dharmapala. Moreover, the agreement between Bhuvanaika Bahu and the king of Portugal in 1543 had guaranteed the protection of the prince Dharmapala on the throne and the defense of the kingdom. Prince Dharmapala was offered a missionary educa-

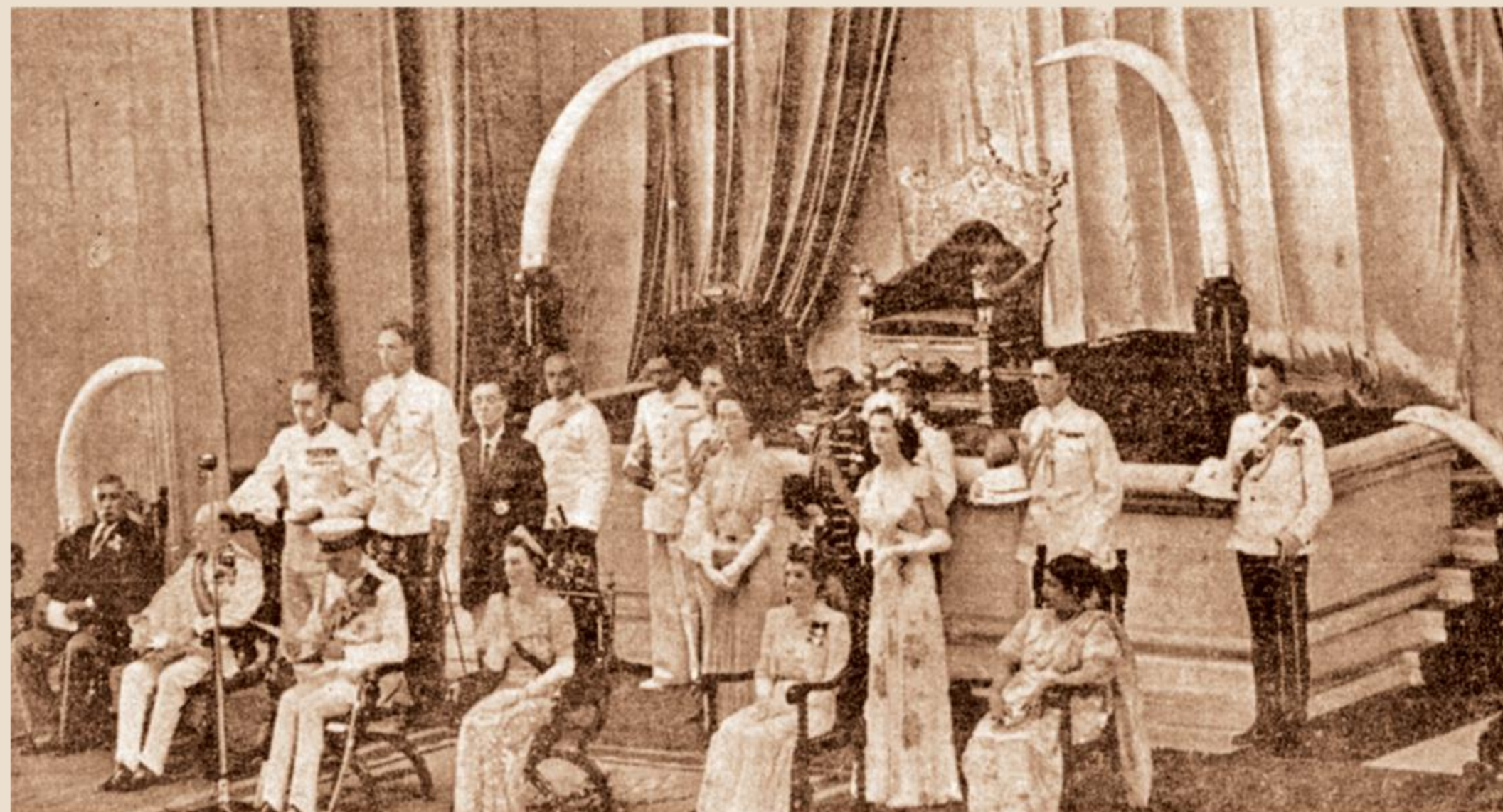
Before this land was named Ceylon

tion. In the end, his conversion to Christianity was announced. In addition, after the passing away of Mayadunne, his son Rajasinha like his father continued the wars successfully on the land. But he failed to combat the Portuguese on the sea. In the year 1602, The Dutch captain Joris van Spilbergen landed on Sri Lanka. The king of Kandy Rajasinghe II appealed to Joris for help with the intention of getting rid of the Portuguese. He made a treaty in 1638 with the Dutch to achieve his goal. The Dutch captured Colombo in 1656 and the last Portuguese stronghold in 1658. They began to impose higher taxes on goods than the Portuguese had done.

KANDYAN PERIOD (1594 – 1815)

Konappu Bandara known as King Vimalad-

harmasuriya, who won the battle, became the first king of the kingdom of Kandy. It is Konappu Bandara who built the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic. In 1803, the British invaded the Kingdom of Kandy. But in the first Kandyan War, they were defeated by the Kandyan Sinhalese. Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe alias Kannasami was placed on the throne according to a plan of Pilimathalawwe Maha Adikaram. The king Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe had rendered a greater service for the Kingdom. Hence, Pilimathalawwe realized that it is impossible for him to obtain the throne. Hopefully, Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe became the king in the year 1798. Pilimathalawwe decided to seek assistance from the British. Later he had few secret discussions with Sir Fedrick North. The ambassadors led by Meegasthenna who is the 2nd Adikaram were sent to Colombo to have discussion to get into a trade treaty. Meegasthenna has discussed about executing the king. But it was an unsuccessful attempt. Finally, as a result of a conspiracy people began to leave the king. The General John Doily led a troop to Medamahauwara with Ehelepola, Molligoda, Mudliyar Jayawardhana, a Malay Muhandiram, Ekneligoda Mohottala, Kaudumma Mohottala, Thorawaha Mohottala, Delwala Mohottala and Mahawalathenna Mohottala. The king was caught as a prisoner on 18 February 1815 at Medamahauwara Udupitiya Gedara, the place of Bomure Appuralla Arachchi. The king and his queens were taken to Vellare in the ship "convolis" on 24 January 1816 as royal prisoners. In the end, the king breathed his last on January 30 1832 at the age of 52. The struggles against the colonial powers began to emerge in 1817.



Professor Dilma Koggalage

Later the British found the uplands of the country to be appropriate for the coffee, tea and rubber cultivation. In 1830 coffee was introduced into Sri Lanka. But the Kandyan Sinhalese villagers refused to abandon their traditional subsistence holdings. As a solution to this problem, the British transported the Tamil Coolies to the country from India. However, back in 1870 the coffee economy collapsed.

MATALE REBELLION

In 1848 Matala Rebellion was led by Henne-dige Francisco Fernando and Gongalegoda Banda. Under the British rule, the Sri Lankans had to undergo many hardships, paying high taxes even on cats, dogs and weapons. Rebels marched through the old capital of Kandy under the leadership of an ex-policeman called Gongalegoda Banda. They wanted Gongalegoda to be the crowned King. The crowning ceremony was performed by the chief incumbent of the Dambulla Temple. Another leader, Puren Appu was appointed as his sword-bearer. On 28 July, the rebels launched two attacks against the British Government. Gongalegoda's brother Dinas led the first attack at the Waryapola coffee estate. The British troops reacted and shot a number of rebels dead. The leaders were arrested. On the same day Gongalegoda and Puren Appu led an assault on government and mercantile buildings at Matala. A coffee storehouse was burnt down by them. Moreover, the government tax records were destroyed. But on the next day the British army arrived from Waryapola and dispersed the rebels. Gongalegoda fled into hiding while Veera Puren Appu was arrested. On August 8th, Veera Puren Appu was executed by firing squad. Our proud history has written his last words in gold, "if there had been half a dozen men such as me to lead the struggle, there would not be a white man living in Kandy Province"

OUR NATIONAL HEROES

Speaking of the Independence Day, we have to focus on our national heroes who rendered a remarkable service for the country. Anagarika Dharmapala, being a Sinhala Buddhist revivalist awakened our patriotic feelings. He raised his voice for an independent country which is free from the British rule. Back In 1906 he founded a weekly publication titled "The Sinhala Bauddhaya".

A SECRET MEMORANDUM

Sir James Peries drafted a secret memorandum to be drawn in great secrecy with the aim of abolishing the martial law. The secret memorandum was taken to England hidden in the sole of the shoe by E. W. Perera. Later, the Governor Sir Robert Chalmers was recalled. The commendable service rendered by Edward Walter Perera can never be underestimated. E. W. Perera (1875 – 1953) known as the "Lion of Kotte" was a Sri Lankan barrister, politician and freedom fighter. After having abandoned a promising career at the Bar, E. W. Perera undertook the task of traveling to England to present a memorandum to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, pleading for the repeal of Martial Law and the release of the leaders who were in detention. Furthermore, Sir D. B. Jayatilaka and Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan joined him to carry out this successful mission.

SIR PONNAMBALAM RAMANATHAN

Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851 – 1930) was a Solicitor-General and a Tamil political leader who was elected to represent the educated Sri Lankans to the Legislative Council of the country. In 1915, when the British Governor had several Sinhalese leaders imprisoned, Ramanathan stood against their

imprisonment and fought against the tyranny of the British Governor.

SIR PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM

Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam (1853 – 1924) was a member of the Executive Council and the Legislative Council.

* F. R. SENANAYAKE (1882 – 1926)

F.R. Senanayake was a Sri Lankan politician who served the country as an independence activist. Being a Barrister-at-Law at Lincoln's Inn, London, he played the role of a leading member of the Sri Lankan independence movement in the early parts of the 20th century and he was an active member of the Legislative Council.

* D. S. SENANAYAKE (1884 – 1952)

Don Stephen Senanayake better known as the "Father of the Nation" was an independence activist who served as the first Prime Minister of Ceylon from 1947 to 1952. He played an active role in the independence movement, supporting his brother F. R. Senanayake. After his brother's death in 1926, D. S. took his place in the Legislative Council and led the independence movement. His most distinctive contribution to the nation was his agricultural policy.

* C.W.W. KANNANGARA (1884 – 1969)

Dr. Cristopher William Wijekoon Kannangara better known as the 'Father of Free Education' was a Sri Lankan lawyer and politician. Rising up the ranks of Sri Lanka's movement for independence in the early part of the 20th century, he became the first Minister of Education in the State Council of Ceylon. He is Known as the 'Father of Free Education' in the country because of his introduction of the free education in 1944. C.W.W. Kannangara paved the way for the free education for all children in the country.

CAPTAIN HENRY PEDRIS (1888 – 1915)

Captain Edward Henry Pedris was a prominent socialite in colonial Ceylon. He was executed by the British officials for alleged incitement of racial riots in 1915.

D. R. WIJWARDENA (1886 – 1950)

Don Richard Wijewardena was a Sri Lankan press baron who was a leader in the Sri Lankan independence movement. It is D.R. Wijewardena who established the Lake House newspapers. In 1914 he acquired the Sinhala language daily Dinamina. Later in 1918 he bought the English language daily The Ceylonese. Moreover, D. R. Wijewardena and E. W. Perera discovered the location of the banner of the last King Sri Vikrama Rajasinghe, the last king of the Kingdom of Kandy to the Royal Hospital Chelsea where it was kept since the surrender of the Kingdom to the British in 1815. The recovered banner became the flag of the Dominion of Ceylon upon its independence in 1948. Significantly, he played a vital role in the Independence movement.

THE INDEPENDENCE DAY MESSAGE

As noted by Prof. Dilma Koggalage, we have to re-build our country by learning lessons from our past mistakes.

"We should learn from our past mistakes to rebuild our country. We have failed to learn important lessons from our history. Very importantly, we want our policy makers to be educated and intelligent. Learning history as a subject is very important. But if we fail to learn from our history, it is futile. Leaving the mother-land in search of another greener pasture is not the solution. We have to fulfill our duties for the betterment of our country."

