



Former President J. R. Jayewardene welcoming Queen Elizabeth II in 1981.



Former President J. R. Jayewardene with Queen Elizabeth II during her 1981 visit. Prince Philip, then Prime Minister R. Premadasa are also in the picture.



Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip during a visit to Sri Lanka in 1954.



QUEEN ELIZABETH'S REIGN: GOLDEN AGE OF BRITISH MONARCHY

RUWINI JAYAWARDANA

Millions around the world laid flowers or lit candles. Flags flew at half-mast. The Eiffel Tower dimmed its lights. The sails of the Sydney Opera House were illuminated. Some individuals even changed their Facebook profiles to pictures of Her Majesty. And over Buckingham Palace, two rainbows emerged.

All these changes occurred in the name of Queen Elizabeth II aka the "people's protector". Britain's longest-reigning monarch died on September 8 at Balmoral Castle at the age of 96. She had served 70 years as Queen. In honour of the occasion, the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth held a Platinum Jubilee in June 2022.

However, it is not simply her longevity that marks her out for greatness. Her ability to stay relevant as the world changed around her was one of the qualities which singled her out from other leaders.

Queen Elizabeth was the product of ancestral inheritance but was more popular than any of her Prime Ministers. She remained Head of State in countries around the world because of public support. She was in a sense a democratic Queen, a progressive conservative, an aristocratic multi-culturalist.

A fitting example of how the Queen's years of diplomacy and experience managed to win over people was demonstrated in the 2011 State visit to Ireland, a country that spent the first half of the 20th Century fighting for independence from the U.K. and the second half involved in the Northern Ireland issues that saw 3,600 people dead, including Philip's mentor, Lord Mountbatten. Her official visit to Ireland, the first by a British monarch in a century, came nearly 13 years after the Good Friday peace agreement. Addressing a dinner in her honour at Castle, Queen Elizabeth helped the two countries put the previous decades of strife behind them by beginning her speech in Gaelic.

Her reign covered a period of massive social, economic, technological and political change.

It saw the transformation of the once-global British Empire into a Commonwealth of 52 independent nations headed by the queen and the country's entrance into and exit from the European Union. She became Queen of Ceylon from 1952 to 1972.

Born at 17 Bruton St, London, on April 21, 1926, and christened on May 29 that year in the private chapel at Buckingham Palace. She became her apparent when her uncle, Edward VIII, abdicated on December 11, 1936, and her father became King George VI.

She ascended the throne on the death of her father, King George VI, on February 6, 1952, while she was in Kenya on a royal tour. She was crowned on June 2, 1953, at Westminster Abbey. It was the first ever coronation to be televised.

The queen's first Commonwealth tour began on November 24, 1953, covering a distance of 43,618 miles (70,196km). During a visit to New Zealand, the Queen introduced the "walkabout" - a meet-the-people tactic for royal tours. She also became the first monarch to address the US Congress during a tour of the United States in 1991.

Princess Elizabeth married Navy lieutenant Philip, a Greek prince, at London's Westminster Abbey on November 20, 1947. They had four children: Prince Charles (1948), Princess Anne (1950), Prince Andrew (1960) and Prince Edward (1964). Philip died in April 2021, aged 99.

The remarkably broad sweep of Queen Elizabeth II's life spanned the great to the inglorious: Churchill to Ceausescu, Mandela to Mugabe. She has been served by 15 Prime Ministers. During her reign, there have been 14 U.S. Presidents, all of whom she has met.

Queen Elizabeth was a constitutional monarch, not a political leader with real powers. She was required to serve an ever-changing set of realms, people, institutions, and ideas that were no longer as obviously compatible as they had been when she ascended to the throne. The Queen's great achievement was to honour the commitment she made to an imperial nation and its empire as a princess even as

it became a multiethnic state and a Commonwealth.

She devoted her whole life to the service of Britain's great imperial family, bringing harmony rather than discord. She presided over a family that saw tragedy, scandal and turmoil, including the death of former Princess Diana, the association of son Prince Andrew with the late millionaire sex criminal Jeffrey Epstein, and the decision by grandson Prince Harry to seek a more private life with his wife, Meghan Markle.

She was also deeply committed to many charitable and environmental causes. She advocated climate action. She began to publicly embrace environmental causes shortly after the 2000s began, mentioning the topic in a speech before the U.N., in a Commonwealth Day message and even in her annual Christmas Day speech.

On September 9, 2015, Queen Elizabeth surpassed the 63 years, 7 months, 2 days, 16 hours and 23 minutes that her great-great-grandmother Queen Victoria spent on the throne to become the country's longest-reigning monarch. Queen Elizabeth remains queen of 15 realms including the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Belize, Grenada, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent, the Grenadines, and Tuvalu. She celebrated six jubilees: her 25th, 40th, 50th, 60th, 65th and 70th years on the throne, as well as the marriages of her four children and the births of eight grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

Queen Elizabeth's reign was also marked by crisis, including two assassinations attempts, in 1970 and 1981 in Australia and New Zealand. Later during her reign, the world shut down as the Coronavirus pandemic swept the globe. Her son Charles became king upon her death and will be called King Charles III.

Queen Elizabeth was admired for her grace, dignity and dedication for whatever she took to heart. Much of Queen Elizabeth's lasting legacy will lie in the thousands of quiet lives she touched during her reign.

Queen Elizabeth was admired for her grace, dignity and dedication for whatever she took to heart. Much of Queen Elizabeth's lasting legacy will lie in the thousands of quiet lives she touched during her reign.

