

# THE HISTORY OF KURUNEGALA

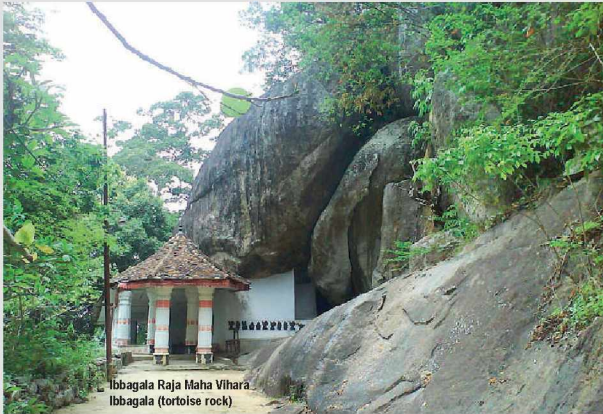
BY AN OCTOGENERIAN

Located in the North Western province and lying approximately 58 miles from Colombo is the city of Kurunegala. Any visitor to this city, no matter which route is taken to get there, cannot fail to observe the eight enormous rocks which encircle the city, standing out like sentinels placed by a benevolent deity to protect it and its citizens.

According to an ancient legend there had been a time when the entire city had been in the grip of a severe and prolonged drought. Whereupon the animals being unable to quench their thirst, threatened to drink as much water as possible from the nearby lake. This had been an unprecedented crisis for the people who in sheer desperation consulted a witch who volunteered to

transform these animals into rocks. It is for this reason that these eight rocks have been named Ethagala (elephant rock), Ibbagala (tortoise rock), Andagala (eel rock), Kuruminiyagala (beetle rock), Wanduragala (monkey rock), Gonigala (sack or gunny rock), Elugala (goat rock) and Yakkessala (meaning a witch).

Since Ethagala was not only the largest of these rocks but also the highest, towering to almost 1,000 feet over the surrounding plains it was justified that that the city should derive its name from the Sinhala translation of Ethagala was 'Kurune' and 'Gala' meaning rock.'



When combined they formed the name 'Kurunegala'

At this point it is necessary to explain the importance of the Sacred Tooth Relic of Lord Buddha which had become a part of the history of this city. In addition to its sacredness there was a belief that whoever had the custody of the Sacred Tooth Relic had the power to govern the country by overcoming any threats from forces outside or within the island.

This sacred relic had been in the custody of King Buvanekabahu I who was the ruler of the Kingdom of Yapahuwa around in 1272. It can be surmised that it was

because of this belief, that one of the kings of Jaffna had surreptitiously removed the Sacred Tooth Relic and later transferred it to the city of Madurai in South India which was later named as Madras and subsequently renamed as Chennai.

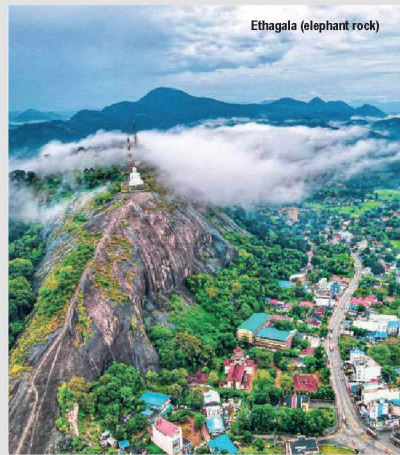
The absence of the Sacred Tooth Relic from the island compelled King Parakramabahu III to restore it and install it in Kurunegala from where he ruled from 1287 to 1293. However this ancient city was destined to receive embarrassing publicity when as recently as end December 2023, the former mayor and four accomplices were sen-

tenced to prison for the willful and wanton destruction of the Assembly Hall built by king Buvaneka Bahu II who ruled from 1293 to 1302.

Parakramabahu was succeeded by two other kings, the last of whom was Buvaneka Bahu III who was referred to as Wannl Buvaneka Bahu from ruled from 1335 to 1341 and had been the last king to have ruled the island from Kurunegala.

Readers acquainted with the geography of our country will recall that the three towns encompassing Puttalam, Kurunegala and Gampaha are referred to as the 'Coconut Triangle.' Spreading across

Ethagala (elephant rock)



this triangle are the vast coconut estates the products of which even today constitute an important share to the Sri Lankan economy.

Lying adjacent to Kurunegala are three historical sites namely Parakrama pura also referred to as Panduwasnuwara where the ruins of an ancient palace and monasteries can be seen. Yapahuwa is from where King Bhuwanalike I ruled from 1271 to 1283. In order to protect his kingdom he had selected a rock which arose abruptly to 300 feet above the surrounding lowlands. He had built his palace on its summit surrounded by a moat and ramparts. It had been claimed that this had been constructed on lines similar to Sigiriya.

The third historical site

was Dambadeniya which had served as the capital of King Vijayabahu III who ruled from 1232 to 1236. However in very recent times Dambadeniya will be remembered for having created political history. This occurred at the General Elections of 1956 when R.G.Senanayake as an Independent candidate contested both the Dambadeniya and Kelaniya electorates and won both creating a unique record of winning two seats concurrently at the same General Elections.

Readers may remember that one of the candidates for the Kelaniya electorate was the formidable J.R.Jayawardene, who on February 4, 1978 was appointed as the island's first Executive President.