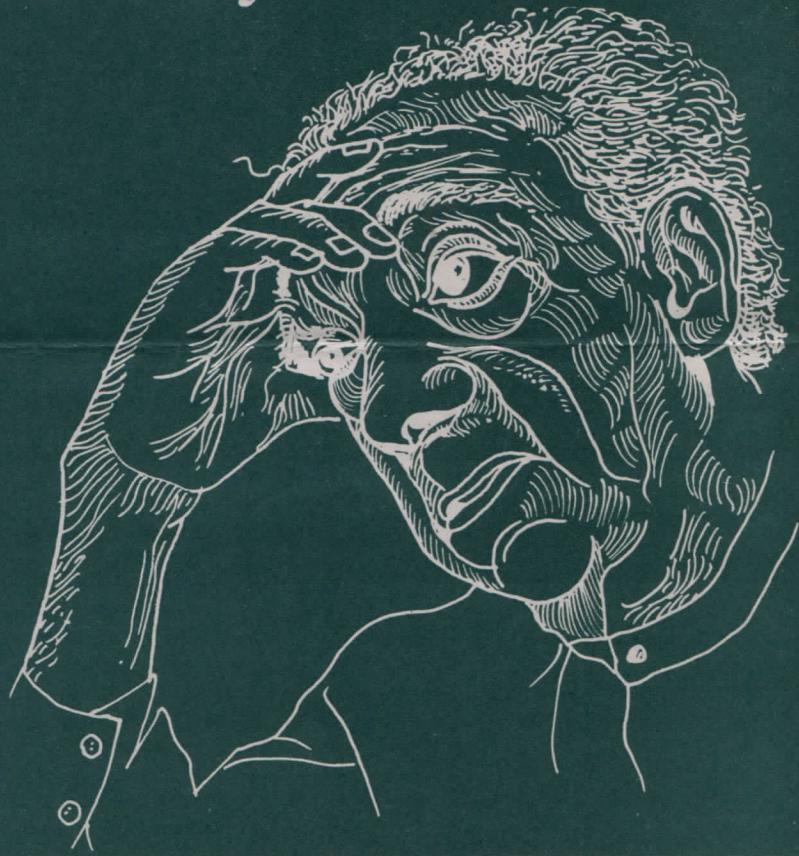


SRI LANKA **BACKGROUND BRIEFING**

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PRESIDENT
Junius Richard Jayewardene



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தமிழ்த் தேசிய ஆவணச் சபாங்கள்



Jayewardene as seen by the Cartoonist of the Sinhala Communist Party paper — the ATHTHA

Junius Richard Jayewardene was independent Ceylon's first Finance Minister.

In the first Cabinet headed by the leader of the United National Party, Don Stephen Senanayake, sworn in under the Soulbury Constitution on September 26, 1947 prior to the effective transfer of power on February 4, 1948, there were four future Prime Ministers — Dudley Senanayake (the son of the Prime Minister), Col. J.L. Kotewala (later to be knighted as Sir John), S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (later to found the Sri Lanka Freedom Party) — AND J.R. Jayewardene.

But while Dudley Senanayake succeeded his father as Prime Minister at the young age of 41, and Sir John took over the mantle 18 months later, and while Bandaranaike rode to power on the crest of a wave of Sinhala Buddhist emotion in 1956 (at 47), the fourth man, approaching 50, senior to all of them in public life, waited. It was a long wait.

J.R. was the Finance Minister in the D.S. Senanayake Cabinet, Finance Minister in the Dudley Senanayake Cabinet, and Minister of

Agriculture and Food and Leader of the House in Sir John's government. In 1956, the UNP's run of power was halted, his party routed at the polls and Jayewardene himself lost his seat at Kelaniya. In March 1960, he found himself back as Finance Minister in the shaky, short-lived UNP government of Dudley Senanayake, but with the defeat of that government in Parliament the very next month, and the emergence into power of Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike as the world's first woman Prime Minister in July 1960 (she was then 44) Jayewardene's political career was checkmated again.

Despite being publicly acknowledged as the man primarily responsible for the resurrection of the UNP after its shattering defeat in 1956, which eventually led to his party regaining power at the March 1965 elections, it was Dudley Senanayake who formed the government, with Jayewardene the deputy being sworn in as Minister of State, ranking next to the Prime Minister. A consolation prize no doubt, but he was getting on to 59.

Came the 1970 elections, and in the swinging pendulum of electoral moods, a characteristic

Sri Lankan phenomenon, Mrs. Bandaranaike swung back into power with a landslide victory, winning 90 seats as against the UNP's 17. Mrs. B was then 54, and Prime Minister for the second time. Junius Richard Jayewardene at the age of 64 became Leader of the Opposition.

J.R.'s disability was, despite the fact that he had proved himself to be the sheet anchorman of the party, both in triumph and defeat, he lacked the charisma and the popular touch that Dudley had, the latter's recurrent stomach problems notwithstanding. J.R. was feared by most, admired by some, but it was Dudley (a bachelor) whom the Sinhala people liked and trusted. There was hardly any ruthlessness in Dudley's character, a quality that J.R. had in ample measure. He was referred to, at various times, behind his back, as "Yankee Dick" because of his known proclivity towards the U.S. and as "tricky Dicky", an appellation that had fallen into disuse since he assumed absolute power.

The rift between Dudley and J.R. came into the open after the 1970 defeat of the UNP, but with the death of the former on April 13, 1973, J.R. assumed complete command of the party machine.

But it took him four more years, and in all 40 years in public life, and 30 long years close to the centre of power in the post-independence period before he was able to sit in the Prime Ministerial chair in July 1977. It was also the occasion for the biggest electoral victory in Sri Lanka's Parliamentary history. No party had ever won such a sweeping triumph as did the UNP under Jayewardene. The polls gave the party 140 out of the 168 seats, reduced the SLFP to a rump of 8 (as against the 90 it had in the previous Parliament), swept the Marxists out of the Parliamentary arena lock stock and barrel, and by the biggest quirk of fate brought the Tamil United Liberation Front with its 18 seats as the major opposition party, pitchforking the leader who came on an Eelam Parliament mandate into the chair of the Sri Lanka Parliament's Leader of the Opposition, a turn of affairs which fazed the Sinhala voter himself.

Power of office, like chicken pox, affects a man more strongly, when he gets it late in life. Having waited in the wings for 30 years, it was idle to expect an old man of 71 who gets his hands on the levers of power, to relinquish his hold easily, or give it up in order to conform to democratic norms. Moreover it became apparent later that even while being Leader of the Opposition in the years 1970-77, he had brought a Machiavellian mind to bear on planning what strategies were to be adopted once he came to power. Instead of bending to Democracy as many well-meaning but foolish politicians do, he decided to bend it, without breaking it. Consequently, half the world has now been bamboozled into the belief that Sri

Lanka under Jayewardene is a thriving democracy, or as the U.S. State Department prefers to call it "a functioning Democracy".

A perceptive Western commentator, Juliet London, wrote in 1982 : "... Sri Lanka may well be the harbinger of another type of Third World politics, where the forms of democracy, apparently intact, mask a subversion of the process. A pre-determined result is obtained, exterior appearances are preserved, the world Press cheers, and burial of real freedom takes place in a democratic shroud.... when next we read that Democracy is alive and well in Sri Lanka, let us remember that it is indeed alive, and it may be well, but it is also in chains". (World View)

How was the democratic process subverted? By political manipulation of the same democratic process of course. W.A. Wiswa Warnapala, Associate Professor in the Dept. of Political Science at the University of Peradeniya, wrote in 1983 :-

'A near-dictator'

"The Executive Presidency was created in February 1978 through an amendment to the Constitution of 1972, and the entire constitutional system was transformed in August 1978 to suit the Presidential system by the introduction of the Constitution of the Second Republic in August 1978.... The most important consideration which guided the introduction of the Executive Presidency was the need for a stable executive which could not be dislodged at the whim of an elected legislature, and certain other features of the Executive Presidency, therefore, showed that the institution had been created to suit the personal ambitions of the present incumbent of the office of the President.... The President in Sri Lanka is the Head of State, the Head of the Executive and of the Government, and Commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and it is in these fields that he wields a great variety of important powers which make him a near-dictator.... He is not answerable to the elected legislature, and the Prime Minister and the members of the Cabinet of Minister are his creatures, and they are therefore totally dependent upon the President.... The Constitution of 1978 brought into existence a number of changes which devalued the institution of Parliament in the country. President J.R. Jayewardene with his own style of party leadership, successfully converted his own party majority in Parliament into a docile group of men who could do nothing except to show absolute loyalty to the leader of the party – who in this case, is the incumbent President. He went to the extent of obtaining "undated letters of resignation" from the elected Members of Parliament who constitute the Parliamentary Group of the United National Party. The reason attributed to this decision of President J.R. Jayewardene was his desire to re-constitute the Parliamentary Group and

it therefore showed that the legislature needs to be re-constituted according to the choice and will of the President. In the context of the growing influence of the President, the Parliament as an elected legislature has progressively declined; political power is derived not by Parliament but by one man...." (Recent Politics in Sri Lanka : The Presidential Election and the Referendum of 1982 – W.A. Wiswa Warnapala and L. Dias Hewagama – Navrang, New Delhi, 1983).

This "one man" has now not only deprived the entire Sri Lankan polity, both Sinhala and Tamil, of many of the cherished democratic freedoms, but has also ushered in the process of violation of Human Rights on a section of the population. If the "Sinhala Only" Act of 1956 which sowed the seeds of division in Ceylon by destroying the rationale for a plural society was authored by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, that was only the external truth. Bandaranaike was certainly the author of the law. But the author of the idea was Jayewardene himself – in the year 1942, six years before independence. It was he who moved in the State Council that Sinhala should replace English as the official language, a motion that was then opposed by Bandaranaike himself and D.S. Senanayake. An amendment – to make Sinhala and Tamil together the official languages, was carried with the mover's consent and the other two supporting.

3-year Emergency

President Jayewardene has now been in power for 8½ years (Feb. '86). More anti-Tamil pogroms had taken place within these 8½ years than in the previous 30 years of independence. More Tamils had been killed during Jayewardene's first six years of regime than in the regimes of the six previous governments. More Hindu temples had been destroyed or desecrated under President Jayewardene's Buddhist reign than during the over 100 years of Portuguese religious persecution in the 16th and 17th centuries. (For detailed information : Plight of Hindus in Ceylon – ProTEG document, P.O. Box 782, Egmore, Madras 600 008). In fact, more than 100 Tamils were killed within one month of Jayewardene assuming power in July '77, going by the modest official government figures only. As evidence, all these is damning enough, but how does one explain the fact that Jayewardene has yet apologists who speak in his favour in media circles, in diplomatic quarters, in academic enclaves.....? Newspaper editors in India who threw a fit when Mrs. Indira Gandhi declared a state of Emergency in 1975 appear to think that Emergency rule by Jayewardene (now approaching the end of the third year) is not so bad for the wretched Tamils. Some say that Jayewardene was after all, elected to power, not remembering that even Adolf Hitler came to power through an election.

What then is the technique behind Jayewardene's art of influencing opinion? It is interesting to recall that when attacks on Tamils began in July '77, and when the killings had gone on for 10 days, Jayewardene, then Prime Minister, desisted from declaring a state of emergency on the highly moralistic plea that it would be "contrary to democratic principles"! Lovers of Democracy were expected to applaud that. President Jayewardene also indulges in the frequent habit of dropping names – like that of Gautama Buddha, Emperor Ashoka and Mahatma Gandhi, which leaves a favourable impression on many minds.

Indian "Concern"

The primary fact to remember about President J is that he is not only one of the most astute politicians that South Asia has produced, but has also proved to be a complete master of the Machiavellian management of fellow governments and fellowmen, which include both friends and foes, the media, both Sri Lankan and foreign, and all those who cross his path. Like Janus the Roman God with faces in front and back of head, Junius the President has assiduously cultivated the capacity to present two convincing faces at the same time. Is Jayewardene in complete control of the situation in Sri Lanka, or is he a prisoner of certain chauvinist forces? Is he for War or is he for Peace? Is he talking of War, but really thinking of Peace, or is he talking Peace, but really thinking of War? Is he for Annexure C or is he not? Does he want India to help, or does he not? Ask "knowledgeable" foreign observers academics, newspapermen, Editors, Diplomats, and one can be reasonably certain that they will all come out with contradictory answers. And that is how Jayewardene wants it to be.

It is useful to remember that the first expression of Indian government's "concern" over happenings in Sri Lanka began under Prime Minister Morarji Desai in July 1977. Gurbachan Singh who was the Indian High Commissioner in Colombo at that time, recalled in 1983, in an interview to the Indian journal, SUNDAY, that during the course of about 10 days he saw Prime Minister Jayewardene eight times, "four times at my request and four times at his summons". "Indian concern was not in any way misconstrued and Indian offers of assistance were readily welcomed", he said. "To my knowledge, there was no move or even thought, in 1977, to consider India as interfering or hostile". Indian government's "expression of concern" have continued ever since, under the rule of two other Indian Prime Ministers, but under the rule of the same President in Sri Lanka; but except in two instances, in 1981 and 1983, President Jayewardene did not seem to have demonstrated reciprocal concern. In August 1981, when Indian Tamils in the plantations were singled out for attack

by Sinhala mobs, it took President Jayewardene again 10 days to declare a state of emergency. Here are parts of a Colombo report as published in the INDIAN EXPRESS of August 18, 1981 :-

"President J.R. Jayewardene today (Aug. 17) declared an island-wide emergency throughout Sri Lanka effective from 1 p.m. following a spate of violence, looting and arson in the last 10 days..... This is the second time in three months that a state of emergency had been declared in Sri Lanka..... Hours before the President signed today's proclamation, Indian High Commissioner Thomas Abraham called at the Foreign Office to convey the Government of India's concern over reports of attacks on Indian Tamils in different estates..... Between 3,000 and 5,000 out of over 70,000 Indian passport holders awaiting repatriation have reportedly taken refuge in several places in and around Ratnapura district..... Mr. S. Thondaman, Minister of Rural Industrial Development and President of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, which represents nearly a million estate workers of Indian origin..... in a Press release states : "mob rule seems to be the order of the day in many parts of the country, and should be brought to an end without any further delay, as it had already resulted in the loss of many valuable lives and millions of rupees worth of properties. If the Government is unable to put an end to the mob rule forthwith, it should say so, so that the people themselves could take the necessary precautions for their safety and property....."

One does not know whether there was any significance or that it was only a coincidence

that President Jayewardene signed the proclamation declaring a state of Emergency hours after High Commissioner Thomas Abraham delivered the protest note. It was also known that when Tamilnadu tourist Dhanapathy was axed to death near the legendary Hindu shrine of Kataragama, in south Sri Lanka, Foreign Minister A.C.S. Hameed rushed to the telephone and conveyed his government's deep regrets not only to Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao but also to Tamilnadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran. Both reactions to Indian government's "concern" came when Mrs. Indira Gandhi was in power.

"At the highest level"

But the biggest gut reaction came when Sri Lankan High Commissioner Bernard Tilleke-rate was summoned to the Foreign Office in New Delhi on Tuesday 19th July, 1983; he was told by Foreign Secretary Shanker Bajpai of India's concern over developments in Jaffna and in Sri Lanka which could have "possible repercussions in India". Specific reference was made to the Emergency regulations in Jaffna and disposal of dead bodies without inquest. The Sri Lankan envoy was reported to have asked whether it was an expression of concern by Tamilnadu, to which the reply was - "We are expressing the concern of the Government of India at the highest level". The shaken Sri Lankan envoy, who was at one time the Director General of Foreign Affairs in Colombo said in his "most urgent" telex to Colombo - "The summoning took me by complete surprise". It took Colombo equally

by surprise. Said the Government-owned newspaper DAILY NEWS in a lead headline the next day - COLOMBO REACTS ANGRILY TO INDIAN MEDDLING. The anti-Indian animus which had always been a part of the Sinhala psyche, erupted into an anti-India hysteria. Mrs. Gandhi might have helped avert the genocidal scenario that President Jayewardene was planning in Jaffna, but five days later, the anti-Tamil pogrom in Colombo that had been also on the planning board, was advanced swiftly, when on the midnight of 23rd July the Liberation Tigers ambushed and killed 13 Army men in Jaffna. All hell then broke loose.

How credible are the statements made by President Jayewardene? For example, in an interview he gave the Indian magazine GENTLEMAN (July 1985), he was asked - When did you first begin to realise the Tamil separatists were serious? He replied : "When terrorists began on a really big scale. I would say just before the July 1983 riots. Neither the TULF nor the terrorists were taken seriously before that.....". Here are the exact words of a decree issued by President Jayewardene on July 14, 1979 to the then Army Chief-of-Staff, Brigadier Weeratunge :- "It will be your duty to eliminate in accordance with the laws of the land the menace of terrorism in all its forms from the island, and more especially from the Jaffna district. I will place at your disposal all resources of the State..... This task is to be performed by you and completed before the 31st December, 1979". Didn't he really take the "terrorists seriously" at that time?



By Courtesy : R.K. Laxman and Times of India