



Former Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne



With former Sabaragamuwa University Chancellor Ven. Prof. Kuburugamuwe Wajira Thera

D.M. Jayaratne: A political legend

LAHIRU FERNANDO

The passing away of former Prime Minister and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) Senior Vice President D.M. Jayaratne at the age of 88 marks the end of a revolutionary chapter in Sri Lankan political history. He had engaged in politics for nearly seven decades.

Born on June 4, 1931 in Doluwa village in the Kandy District, he was the fifth of his family of nine. D.M. Punchirala and M.A. Bandara Menike were his parents. He was married to Mrs. Anula Yapa and had three children with only son Anuradha Lanka Jayaratne being a Member of Parliament.

D.M. Jayaratne studied at the Doluwa Government School. He had served as a teacher and also a Sub Post Master before entering politics as a member of the then Village Council of Doluwa in June, 1957. Even before, Jayaratne had obtained the membership (13th member) of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) on the very first day it was formed (September 2, 1951) in Kandy by the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike.

Later on, he became the Chairman of the Village Council, President of the Kandy District Village Council Chairmen Association and later elected to the Federation of All Ceylon Village Council Chairmen. D.M. Jayaratne was first elected to Parliament from the Gampola electorate representing the SLFP in 1970. He served as an MP until his defeat at the next General Election in 1977. His re-election to Parliament in 1989 and 1994 were the most significant turning points in his political journey.

Dissanayake Mudiyanse Jayaratne, affectionately called "Dimu" was the last remaining member of the original 13 founding members of the SLFP.

D.A. Rajapaksa, father of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, was also among the founding members of the party that would create a socio-economic revolution in 1956 with the backing of the Pancha Maha Balavegaya (Five Great Forces) of Maha Sangha, Teachers, Farmers, Physicians and the Working Class. Unlike many others who changed their political hues every few years, Jayaratne remained a SLFPer for life. It must indeed have been gratifying for Jayaratne to see Gotabaya Rajapaksa becoming President just a couple of days earlier.

Hailing from rural Gampola, Jayaratne was a true grassroots politician who also felt the pulse of the working class. He did not leave the SLFP even though the party spent 17 long years in the political wilderness after its heavy defeat in 1977, where it gained just eight electorates.

He campaigned with renewed vigour in 1994, when the SLFP-led People's Alliance won, propelling the SLFP to power after a long hiatus. His experience with the Land Reform Commission in the 1970s prompted President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga to appoint him as the Minister for Agriculture, Lands, Wildlife Conservation and Livestock. He retained the agriculture portfolio in successive governments till 2001

and was appointed as the Minister of Post and Telecommunications in 2004.

He also held the portfolios of Agriculture Land, Forestry Food and Cooperative Development (2001), Posts and Communication (2004), Telecommunications and Rural Economic Promotion (2005), Telecommunications and Upcountry Development (2006) and Plantation Industries (2007).

The apex of his political career came in April 2010, when he was appointed as the 14th Prime Minister of Sri Lanka by President Mahinda Rajapaksa. He held the Premiership from April 21, 2010 to January 9, 2015. Jayaratne, humble to a fault and unable to hide any secrets, has confided to many colleagues previously that he would one day wish to become Prime Minister. He also functioned as the Buddha Sasana Minister during the 2010-2015 period. His service towards nurturing and promoting Buddhism around the world and improving religious reconciliation within the country was invaluable.

Even before becoming Premier, Jayaratne was an avid environmentalist (despite never being the environment minister at any time) who abhorred the destruction of the country's forest cover. Ambuluwawa, his residential compound, was his way of paying homage to the environment. He developed Ambuluwawa as a biodiversity hotspot complex, which has now become a major tourist attraction in the hill country. It also comprises of a small temple, kovil, mosque and a church on the peak. He took a hands-on approach to the complex – just one month ago, he was tending to the plants in the garden dressed in a garden worker's attire and no one could even recognize him apart from a keen-eyed photographer who captured the now-viral photograph published in several newspapers.

In addition, the introduction of the farmers' insurance scheme, farmers' banks, farmers' pension scheme, projects to uplift the estate sector and the nationalization of the lands are also among the outstanding services he rendered to the nation during his decades-long political journey. He had also authored 10 books on subjects relating to Buddhism, History and Literature.

Jayaratne lived through a tumultuous period of Sri Lankan history that included multiple youth insurgencies and an internecine conflict in the North and the East. Politically too, there have been many upheavals. Jayaratne also represented the gentlemanly school of active politics and political thought but lived to see the deterioration of values and standards in and out of Parliament. Unlike many young MPs, he took the work of Parliament seriously and regularly attended Parliamentary sessions and Select Committee deliberations. His was a voice of sanity and reason in the convoluted world of Sri Lankan politics. Young people in politics – and indeed in any other profession – can look at the life and legacy of "Dimu" Jayaratne for positivity and inspiration. May he attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana!



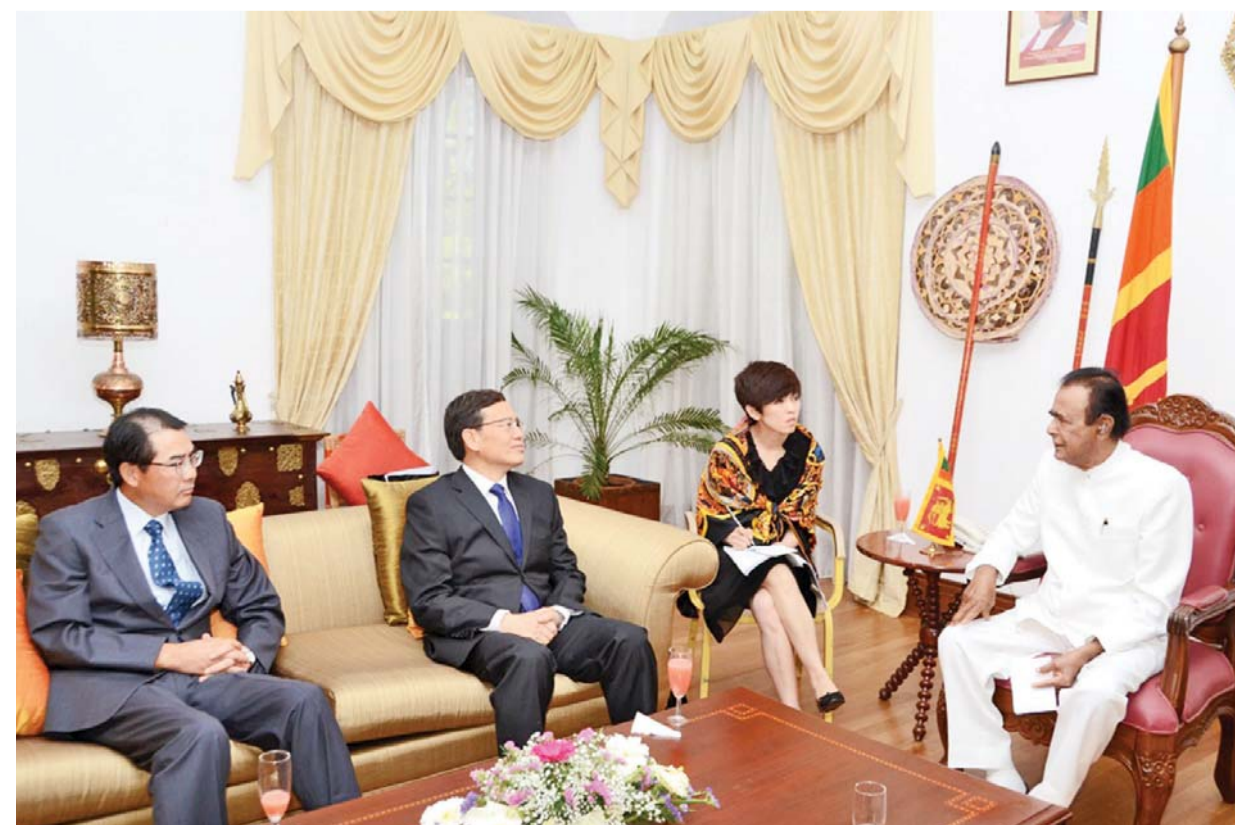
Former Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne with former President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Former Speaker W.J.M. Lokubandara was also present.



Former Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne with Japanese Special Peace Envoy Yashushi Akashi.



Former Prime Ministers D.M. Jayaratne and Ratnasiri Wickremanayake.



With a Chinese delegation



Speaking with the people.