



Engaging the World,
Holding Her Own





AIR FRANCE

F-BPJL







“Mrs Bandaranaike was the Minister of Foreign Affairs in effect for a period of 11 years during her two terms as Prime Minister... It is an uncontestable fact that Mrs Bandaranaike was by far the most distinguished and successful Minister of Foreign Affairs that this country has had.

“Madam Bandaranaike came to high office suddenly [and] unexpectedly... She was richly endowed with common sense and qualities of character that served her and the country in very good stead as the years unfolded. Among those qualities of character were... tenacity and determination. In popular parlance, one would say she had grit. She was able to get to the heart of a problem very quickly and she was able to pursue the resolution of a problem to its conclusion in a determined manner...”

Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar

*Minister of Foreign Affairs
speaking in Parliament on 24 November 2000 during the
Condolence Proceedings for the late Sirimavo Bandaranaike*





“A little over a decade after the island emerged as an independent country, Sirimavo Bandaranaike’s pioneering role and her unshakeable identification with Non-Alignment set an irreversible trend in Sri Lanka’s foreign policy providing the island nation with an invaluable reservoir of international support. Her service, under a Westminster form of government from 1960-65 and again from 1970-77 in the powerful position of Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and External Affairs, witnessed her nation’s bold identification with the economic diplomacy of the developing countries of the Group of 77 ... It also bore witness to her understanding of the geopolitical importance of good relations with both India and China, her neutrality between them in the 1962 war, and her efforts to mediate between the Asian giants ...”

Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala

*Formerly with Sri Lanka Foreign Service (1965-1997) and
Under Secretary General of the United Nations (1998-2003)*

Non-Aligned Movement

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is a forum of 120 developing countries that are not formally aligned with or against any power bloc. After the United Nations, it is the largest grouping of states in the world. NAM emerged at the height of the Cold War between the United States and the USSR (Soviet Union). It was formally established at the first summit held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, from 1 to 6 September 1961.

Mrs Bandaranaike was a co-founder of NAM and remained one of its most ardent supporters during the first and second decades. She led her country's delegations to the inaugural Summit as well as the next three held in Cairo, Egypt (October 1964); Lusaka, Zambia (September 1970) and Algiers, Algeria (September 1973).

Her contributions to the movement were recognised when Sri Lanka was selected to host the fifth Summit in Colombo from 16 to 19 August 1976. With 86 participating nations and 30 other observers and guests representing all continents in the world, the Summit remains the single largest gathering of world leaders that Sri Lanka has ever hosted.

At the Colombo Summit, Mrs Bandaranaike became chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement, in which capacity she reported to the UN General Assembly a few weeks later on the Summit's key outcomes.



“I am happy to attend this great assembly not only as a representative of my country but also as a woman and a mother who can understand the thoughts and feelings of those millions of women, the mothers of this world, who are deeply concerned with the preservation of the human race.”

Mrs Bandaranaike
opening her speech at the first NAM Summit in Belgrade, 1961



The first Conference of Non-Aligned Countries was held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, from 1 to 6 September 1961.



The first NAM Summit in Belgrade was hosted by Josip Broz Tito, President of Yugoslavia, and attended by 24 countries, most of them represented by their Heads of State or Government. The delegation of Ceylon was led by Prime Minister Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Among the other co-founders of NAM were Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (India), Prime Minister U Nu (Burma), President Sukarno (Indonesia), President Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt) and President Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana).





“Small developing countries like mine which seek to follow a non-aligned policy are subjected to many pressures, threats and trials. But there is no question that non-alignment and friendship to all countries is the best policy for newly developing countries. The size of our own conference today proves that half of the world has come to understand and value non-alignment as a positive force in international politics.”

- Mrs Bandaranaike
in her speech to the Third NAM Summit in Lusaka, 1970



SECRETARY GENERAL CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

RAPPORTEUR



“I declare most emphatically that the Non-Aligned do not consider any nation or any people as their enemy. Their fight has always been, and always will be, against injustice, intolerance and inequity, and old concepts of empire, intervention and dominance and all theories which would attribute to any nation, however powerful it may be, exclusive authority or responsibility for peace and stability in the world. Such concepts are irrelevant as we approach the 21st century, and therefore, we shall continue to oppose them. Peace is a universal right and the responsibility for it, too, must be universal.”

- Mrs Bandaranaike
in her address to the Fifth NAM Summit in Colombo, 1976







“The Summit in Colombo was seen as a crowning moment in her foreign policy, as the Movement wasn’t just another grouping, or one which didn’t make an impact. From its inception, right through the 60s and 70s NAM remained a critical and crucial grouping, which was the only solace for countries that didn’t want to be engulfed by the opponents of the Cold War.”

George I H Cooke
Diplomatic historian and strategist

“The United Nations stands for the maintenance of international peace and security and it is in the interest of all concerned, particularly the small countries, to maintain and strengthen this organisation.”

- Mrs Bandaranaike
speaking at the NAM Summit in Colombo in 1976

United Nations

Mrs Bandaranaike's engagement with the United Nations began in November 1956, when she accompanied her husband, Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike, who became the first head of government from Ceylon to address the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

Later she returned on her own merit as Prime Minister and made her mark at the UN. On 12 October 1971, Mrs Bandaranaike addressed the 26th session of the UNGA and called for world peace through a nuclear-free world. In the context of disarmament, she proposed that the Indian Ocean be declared as a Zone of Peace. This proposal led to a resolution sponsored by Ceylon and Tanzania and was co-sponsored by several other countries. It received widespread support at the time.

In September 1976, she once again addressed the UNGA – this time not only as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka but also as chair of the Non-Aligned Movement. Speaking on behalf 86 countries with a combined population of 2.5 billion she reported on the outcome of the fifth NAM Summit held in Colombo a few weeks earlier.

“The essence of our proposal is that in the Indian Ocean a defined area shall be declared to be a zone of peace and which shall be reserved exclusively for peaceful purposes under an appropriate regulatory system. Within the zone, no armaments of any kind, defensive or offensive, may be installed on or in the sea, on the subjacent sea bed or on land areas; ships of all nations may exercise the right of transit, but warships and ships carrying war-like equipment, including submarines, may not stop for other than emergency reasons of a technical, mechanical or humanitarian nature; no manoeuvres by warships of any state shall be permitted; naval intelligence operations shall be forbidden; no weapons tests of any kind may be conducted. The regulatory system to be established will be under effective international control...”

- Mrs Bandaranaike

*speaking at the 26th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York,
12 October 1971*





Visiting United Nations Headquarters in New York on 30 September 1976, Mrs Bandaranaike called on Secretary General Kurt Waldheim (*Left*)

Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, Mrs Bandaranaike and Ambassador H Shirley Amerasinghe, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the UN who also served as President of the General Assembly in 1976. (*Right*)



Fully recognising the value of multilateral diplomacy, Mrs Bandaranaike engaged with various other forums and arms of the UN system.

In March 1974, addressing the annual meeting of the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE, now UNESCAP) in Colombo, Mrs Bandaranaike proposed the creation of a World Fertilizer Fund. It led to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) launching the International Fertilizer Supply Scheme Fund within months.

The UN designated 1975 as the International Women's Year, and as the world's first woman Prime Minister, Mrs Bandaranaike was invited as a special guest at two key global events. She used these platforms to renew her commitment towards the progress of peace, justice and gender equality.

On 10 June 1975, she addressed a session of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva devoted to the role of women in human progress.

After speaking at the ILO Conference in Geneva, Mrs Bandaranaike travelled to Mexico City where she delivered the keynote address at the first UN World Conference on Women which was held from 19 June to 2 July 1975. The event, attended by 133 UN member states, launched a new era in efforts to promote the advancement of women by opening a worldwide dialogue on gender equality.

In May 1977 the FAO awarded her the Ceres Medal recognising "the contribution made in the field of food self-sufficiency in Sri Lanka".

Mrs Bandaranaike's governments also engaged the World Bank, which is technically part of the United Nations system even though it has its own governance.





“Women’s rights, the creation of employment and human resources development, are all excellent ideals, but the pursuit of them in the absence of economic wherewithal, and the prospect of ultimate fulfilment would be both frustrating and self-defeating. What use would be the widespread education of women, and for that matter men, if the economy of the country cannot sustain them in fruitful toil?”

- **Mrs Bandaranaike**
at the ILO Special Session in Geneva, June 1975

“The United Nations provided a global forum for a small country like Sri Lanka to maintain a high profile in world affairs. In December 1971, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution initiated by Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike to declare the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace. It was a happy coincidence that when she addressed the UN in her capacity as the chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement [in September 1976]...the General Assembly was presided over by Mr Shirley Amerasinghe, Sri Lanka’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations...”

Professor Amal Jayawardane

Emeritus Professor of International Relations, University of Colombo





“We are not here only to demolish discrimination but to envision the benefits to the human race of integrating this forgotten half of humanity in development.”

- Mrs Bandaranaike
at the First UN World Conference on Women, 1975



The president of the World Bank, Mr Robert S McNamara, is engaged in discussion with Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike at Temple Trees in Colombo on 25 January 1971. Ceylon had become a member of the World Bank in 1950, and over the years, the multilateral funding agency supported successive governments to implement many development projects in the country. In 1970, the World Bank Group approved a loan and a credit facility totalling US Dollars 29 million to Ceylon to assist the first stage of the Mahaweli river diversion scheme for the development of agriculture and electric power generation.



United Kingdom and The Commonwealth

Mrs Bandaranaike's first encounter with the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth was in 1956. She accompanied her husband, Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike, to the 8th Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference held in London from 27 June to 6 July.

Five years later, after the dramatic turn of events in Ceylon, Mrs Bandaranaike led her country's delegation to the 11th Prime Ministers' Conference held in London from 8 to 17 March 1961. That was the first multilateral conference she attended as a delegate; it was also the first time a woman sat at the main table among fellow Commonwealth leaders. (As head of the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II did not join the working sessions.)

At the 11th Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London in March 1961, Mrs Bandaranaike joined Queen Elizabeth II and fellow leaders including Harold Macmillan of the UK, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Ayub Khan of Pakistan, Robert Menzies of Australia, Archbishop Makarios III of Cyprus, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaya.



Mrs Bandaranaike once again led the Ceylon delegation to the 13th Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference in July 1964 in London. By this time the UK Prime Minister was Sir Alec Douglas-Home. In both 1961 and 1964, the conference discussed the apartheid policy in South Africa which Mrs Bandaranaike's governments consistently and publicly opposed.

The event was renamed as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) from 1971 when Singapore hosted it from 14 to 22 January. Now in her second term as Prime Minister, Mrs Bandaranaike attended this meeting and articulated her proposal for the Indian Ocean to be designated as a Zone of Peace.

In October the same year, she made a four-day official visit to the United Kingdom to strengthen bilateral relations. By this time her government had initiated the drafting of a new Constitution that would soon turn Ceylon into a republic while remaining in the Commonwealth.

Meeting the British Prime Minister Edward Heath, Mrs Bandaranaike thanked his government for the support extended earlier that year in responding to the JVP youth uprising. She also met the Queen, key ministers and officials, as well as Arnold Smith who was then serving as the first Commonwealth Secretary General.

After Sri Lanka became a republic in 1972, the country continued to be an active member of the Commonwealth. Mrs Bandaranaike led Sri Lanka delegations to the second CHOGM in Ottawa, Canada, in August 1973 and to the third CHOGM in Kingston, Jamaica, in April 1975.

Mrs Bandaranaike talks to Herwald Ramsbotham, 1st Viscount Soulbury
– who served as Governor-General of Ceylon between 1949 and 1954.



Heads of delegations who took part in the first Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Singapore 1971 with their host, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. As Queen Elizabeth II did not attend this meeting, Mrs Bandaranaike was the only woman head of government present. In fact, during her first term of office from 1960 to 1965, she was the only woman leader at any international gathering of heads of state or government. Change came slowly over the decades: according to UN Women – the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women – there were 26 women serving as heads of state and/or government in 24 countries on 1 September 2021.



“She understood the relevance of working with the Commonwealth and its member states, especially through the strong bonds of friendship she built with leaders of the grouping, which enriched her bilateral relations.”

George I H Cooke
Diplomatic historian and strategist

The UK Prime Minister Harold Wilson receives Mrs Bandaranaike at No 10, Downing Street, London (the Prime Minister's official residence) during a visit in the early 1970s.



Mrs. Bandaranaike with Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, at the UK Foreign Office in London on 10 October 1971. *(Left)*

Mrs Bandaranaike is escorted off the tarmac by Mr Duncan Sandys, Minister for Commonwealth Relations, after she arrived at London airport on 5 March 1961 to participate in the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. *(Right)*





Mrs Bandaranaike is with Lord and Lady Mountbatten. Louis Mountbatten (1900-1979) was a member of the British Royal family, Royal Navy officer and statesman, who served as the last Viceroy of British India, and the first governor-general of the Dominion of India. During the Second World War, as Supreme Allied Commander of the South East Asia Command (SEAC), he had his headquarters in Peradeniya, near Kandy.

Mrs Bandaranaike and Kwame Nkrumah, President of Ghana, having a lighter moment at the 13th Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference in London in July 1964.

SIRIMAVO





India

Young Sirimavo's first visit abroad was to India when, in November 1940, she accompanied her husband who was a member of the Ceylon Government delegation to New Delhi. Throughout her life, Mrs Bandaranaike maintained excellent personal and official relations with Indian leaders that she used for her country's benefit whenever she was in office.

The Bandaranaike family and the Nehru-Gandhi family enjoyed a unique friendship that went back to the 1940s and also transcended politics. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (who was in office from 1947 to 1964) found a kindred spirit in S W R D Bandaranaike and, upon the latter's demise, with Mrs Bandaranaike. Both families shared a firm commitment to democracy, social justice and a non-aligned foreign policy.

"A strong grasp of the implications of Sri Lanka's unalterable geopolitical context, together with a close friendship between the Bandaranaike and the Nehru families... was a hallmark of Mrs Bandaranaike's India policy. She maintained close relations with Indian Prime Ministers Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi, while holding firm to Sri Lanka's national interest," says Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala, formerly of the Sri Lanka foreign service.





In fact, Mrs Bandaranaike's first official visit to a foreign country was made to New Delhi in late December 1960. On the last day of that year, she laid the foundation stone for the new High Commission (Embassy) building for Ceylon in the Indian capital.

Prime Minister Nehru (who had been coming to Ceylon since 1931) made another official visit in October 1962 – it turned out to be his final. On that occasion he addressed the House of Parliament, spoke at the science congress, and inaugurated the Bandaranaike Memorial Ayurvedic Research Institute (BMARI) in Nawinna close to Colombo.

Shortly afterwards, the Sino-Indian War between China and India erupted and lasted for a month. Deeply concerned by this conflict, Mrs Bandaranaike convened what came to be known as the Colombo Conference on 10 December 1962. Leaders or ministers of six countries who met in Colombo urged the two Asian giants to work out a peaceful settlement for their Himalayan border dispute. They also mandated Mrs Bandaranaike to travel to the Indian and Chinese capitals with the Colombo proposals. Nehru's government accepted them in full while China only agreed to use them in principle as the basis to start negotiations.

When Nehru passed away on 27 May 1964, Mrs Bandaranaike travelled to New Delhi to attend the state funeral held the following day. She joined heads of state and other dignitaries who arrived from around the world to salute the elder statesman.

In October 1964, she visited India at the invitation of Nehru's successor, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. Following fruitful negotiations, she signed an agreement known widely as the Sirima-Shastri Pact concerning the citizenship status of nearly one million persons of Indian origin who had been brought to Ceylon by the British to work on tea and rubber plantations. It was decided that 525,000 such persons would be repatriated to India while 300,000 would be granted Sri Lankan citizenship.

With Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India



The Bandaranaike family and the Nehru-Gandhi family enjoyed a unique friendship that spanned across generations and transcended politics

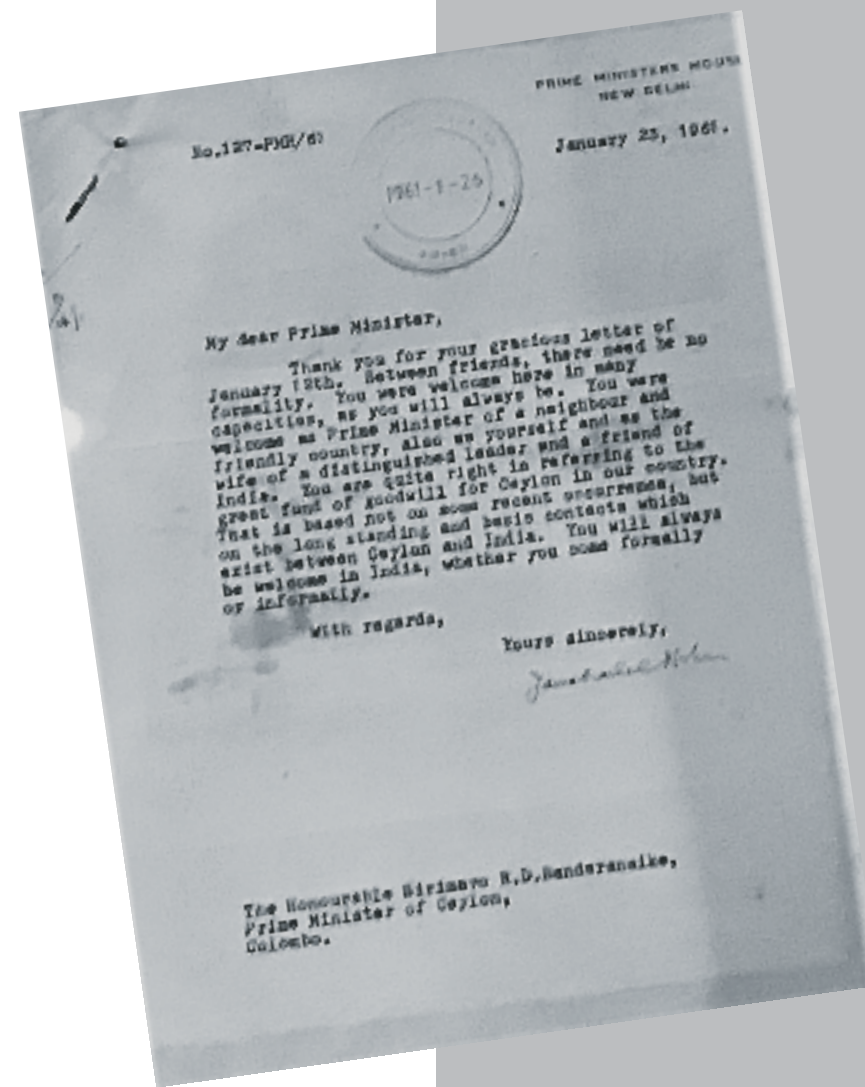
The bonds between India and Sri Lanka strengthened further when Nehru's daughter Indira became India's third Prime Minister (serving from 1966 to 1977, and again from 1980 to 1984). Born one year apart, Sirimavo and Indira had first met in London in 1956 and formed a life-long friendship.

Mrs Gandhi visited Sri Lanka in April 1973 when she addressed the Sri Lankan Parliament while bilateral talks covered many issues including the citizenship of the remaining people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka and demarcation of the Indo-Lanka maritime boundary.

On 26 January 1974, Mrs Bandaranaike (along with Yugoslav President Tito) were the chief guests at India's Republic Day ceremony – an honour that the Indian Government extends only to select foreign leaders.

In June 1974, after intense negotiations involving the two lady Prime Ministers, India conceded the ownership of the island of Katchatheevu in the Palk Strait to Sri Lanka. Within two years, the demarcation of the Indo-Lanka maritime boundary in the Gulf of Mannar and the Bay of Bengal was also completed.

Mrs Bandaranaike was shocked and deeply saddened by the news of Indira Gandhi's assassination on 31 October 1984. She was among the large number of world leaders who arrived in New Delhi for the funeral.



My dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your gracious letter of January 12th. Between friends, there need be no formality. You were welcome here in many capacities, as you will always be. You were welcome as Prime Minister of a neighbour and friendly country, also as yourself and as the wife of a distinguished leader and a friend of India. You are quite right in referring to the great fund of goodwill for Ceylon in our country. That is based not on some recent occurrence, but on the long standing and basic contacts which exist between Ceylon and India. You will always be welcome in India, whether you come formally or informally.

With regards,

Jawaharlal Nehru



From Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to Mrs Bandaranaike, dated 23 January 1961 Source: *Sirimavo Bandaranaike Museum, Colombo*



“I think it is a lesson of history that war does not solve any question:
it only provokes more problems.”

- Mrs Bandaranaike
speaking in New Delhi in January 1963



Mrs Bandaranaike lays the foundation stone for the Sri Lankan High Commission Building in New Delhi on 31 December 1960.

SIRIMAVO





Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's funeral in New Delhi, May 1964.



Signing the Sirima-Shastri Pact in October 1964 (*Left*)
Mrs Bandaranaike paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi at his samadhi at Raj Ghat, New Delhi, on 23 January 1974 (*Right*)



China

Diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and the People's Republic of China were established in February 1957 as part of Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike's foreign policy. Mrs Bandaranaike built on this foundation in the 1960s and 1970s when China became one of Sri Lanka's closest development partners.

She convened the Colombo Powers' Conference in Colombo in December 1962 to seek a negotiated settlement between India and China of their dispute over Himalayan border territories. It was attended at head of state or foreign minister level by Burma, Cambodia, Egypt, Ghana and Indonesia and resulted in a set of proposals for the two Asian powers to consider as the basis for a negotiated settlement. Armed with these, Mrs Bandaranaike travelled to New Delhi and Beijing as an Asian mediator. Her shuttle diplomacy helped diffuse tensions and impressed both countries' leaders.

"Her objective conduct of the Colombo Powers mediation effort in the Sino-Indian war impressed [Chinese Premier] Zhou Enlai, with whom she formed a close friendship," notes Jayantha Dhanapala, a retired foreign service official who was once posted to Sri Lanka's embassy in Beijing.

In February 1964, Zhou Enlai made a four-day visit to Ceylon (his second, having first visited in 1957). It was agreed during this visit that China would make an outright gift of an international conference hall, to be named in honour of Mr S W R D Bandaranaike, as a symbol of friendship between the two countries. This is the origin of the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH), opened in May 1973.

SIRIMAVO



Mrs Bandaranaike made a state visit to China from 24 June to 5 July 1972 where she had bilateral talks with Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party Mao Zedong, Premier Zhou Enlai and senior officials. In support of her Five Year Plan, the Chinese Government pledged a long-term, interest-free loan. China also expressed support for her proposal for declaring the Indian Ocean a Zone of Peace.

As Jayantha Dhanapala has written, “Chinese aid to Sri Lanka began during Mrs Bandaranaike’s term of office. Very different from the aid received from other countries, aid from China was distinguished by its soft terms and its relevance to the development needs of the country.”



Meeting Soong Qingling ‘The mother of modern China’ (Left)





During his February 1964 visit to Colombo, Chinese Premier Zhou En-lai and Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike sign an agreement for bilateral cooperation between China and Ceylon.

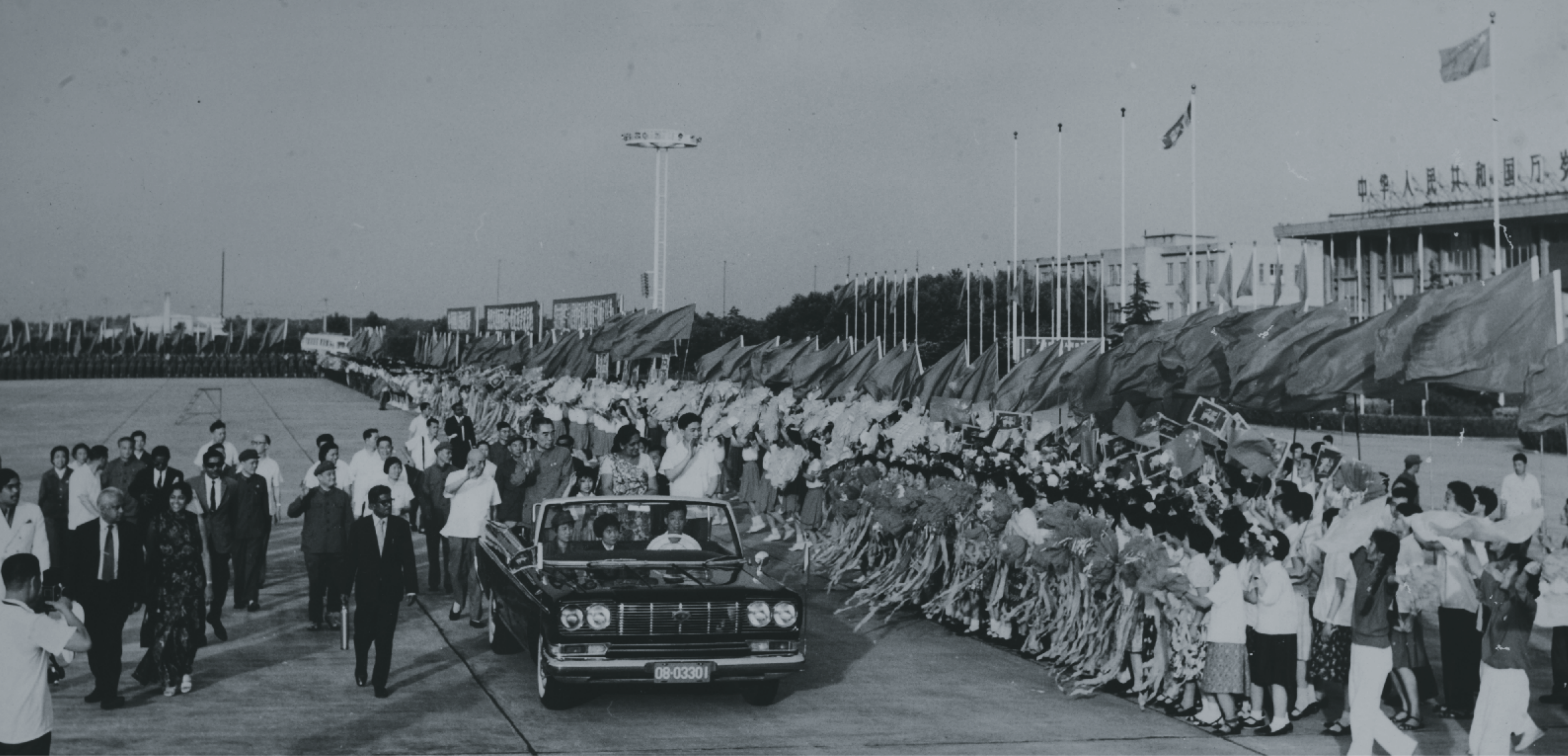
“Her actions in mediating between India and China led to the reduction in hostilities. The term ‘shuttle diplomacy’ although not coined in the early 1960s, would best describe what she engaged in, as a relatively new player on the world stage.”

George I H Cooke

Diplomatic historian and strategist



Mrs Bandaranaike with the Chinese Ambassador Mr Ma Tzu-Ching at a reception to mark the National Day of the People's Republic of China, October 1972



SIRIMAVO







The Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) is an outright gift to the Government and people of Sri Lanka by the Government and people of the People's Republic of China. The construction was done by a team of Chinese engineers, technicians and workmen working with their Sri Lankan counterparts in the Department of Buildings. The BMICH complex occupies a total land area of 13 hectares in the heart of Colombo. The ground-breaking ceremony was held on 24 November 1970, and work was completed in under three years. It was opened on 17 May 1973 at a ceremony attended by Mrs Bandaranaike, President William Gopallawa, Vice Chairman of the State Council of China Marshal Hsu Hiang-Chien and the Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka.





Pakistan and Bangladesh

Foreign policy under Mrs Bandaranaike achieved a fine balance of bilateral relations between South Asia's two largest countries – India and Pakistan.

During her first term, Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan - the second President of Pakistan - made a state visit to Ceylon in December 1963.

During her second term, Mrs Bandaranaike undertook a state visit to Pakistan in September 1974, where she addressed a joint session of the Senate and National Assembly of Pakistan - a first by any Sri Lankan leader and considered a rare honour.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited Sri Lanka in December 1975. He held extensive talks with Mrs Bandaranaike and also addressed the National State Assembly. He acknowledged the support Sri Lanka had extended to Pakistan in 1971 during the separation of East and West Pakistan.

The episode has been documented by M D D Pieris, who served as secretary to the Prime Minister from 1970 to 1977, in his memoirs. According to him, during the 1971 conflict that led to the creation of Bangladesh, Pakistan had requested facilities for their aircraft in Colombo. That had posed a diplomatic challenge.

He writes: "The Prime Minister clearly did not approve of the manner in which [the Founder of Bangladesh] Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was treated. She considered it an anti-democratic, reactionary and unwise act. She was appalled that an elected leader was treated in that fashion. Nevertheless, Pakistan was a friendly country that had come to our assistance in our hour of need [insurgency in April 1971] ... Therefore, the Prime Minister decided that whatever assistance that was legitimately possible was to be accorded to Pakistan. She was aware that both in the political and emotional context of the time, this could cause considerable strain with India. But she reckoned that her relations with the Indian Prime Minister



would overcome these. Therefore, permission was granted for Pakistan civilian aircraft to overfly Sri Lanka and refuel here. Permission was not given for military aircraft. Pakistan was also requested not to ferry soldiers or armaments but only civilians...”

Sometime in 1973/74, faced with a major food shortage, Mrs Bandaranaike sent confidential messages to friendly nations seeking assistance. Diplomat Stanley Jayaweera, then acting Head of Mission at Sri Lanka’s High Commission in Pakistan, sought an urgent appointment with Mr Bhutto to present the coded telegram from Colombo. Such was Mr Bhutto’s respect for Mrs Bandaranaike that he met the Sri Lankan diplomat at midnight and took quick action: he ordered four Pakistani ships carrying rice to Latin America to be diverted at mid sea to head to Sri Lanka instead.

On 5 July 1977, the Pakistani military staged a *coup d’état* that abruptly removed Mr Bhutto, who was soon arrested and detained. The army chief General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq declared martial law and appointed himself Chief Martial Law Administrator. Shortly afterwards, he sent crates of juicy Pakistani mangoes to heads of government in neighbouring countries as a gesture of goodwill.

However, Mrs Bandaranaike declined to accept the mangoes. She sent them back to the Pakistan High Commission in Colombo with a note of thanks that added, “I cannot accept a gift from a person whose hands have the blood of Pakistan’s elected Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on them. He was not just the leader of Pakistan but a great spokesman for the Third World. Please return this gift to the sender.”

After a highly controversial trial, Mr Bhutto was sentenced to death. Despite appeals for clemency from all over the world, he was hanged on 4 April 1979. Journalist Dr Ranga Kalansooriya, citing Pakistani diplomatic sources, has written that Mrs Bandaranaike – by then out of office – repeatedly appealed to General Zia-ul-Haq to pardon Mr Bhutto and allow him to go into exile, even offering to host the deposed leader in Colombo. But there was no mercy in Islamabad.

Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visiting Sri Lanka in December 1975. (Right)



In October 1971, Mrs Bandaranaike meets Mr Adam Malik, the Indonesian statesman and diplomat who served as President of the UN General Assembly in 1971-1972.

SIRIMAVO



Other Asian Neighbours

Mrs Bandaranaike's foreign policy maintained strong bilateral relations with immediate neighbours in South Asia (being covered elsewhere in this book), as well as with other Asian countries in the sub-regions of Southeast Asia and East Asia.

During her second term as Prime Minister, she made official visits to several such countries including Burma (now Myanmar), Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, The Philippines and Thailand. She also welcomed the leaders of more Asian countries – such as Bhutan, Nepal, Singapore and Vietnam - when they visited Sri Lanka.

In these engagements, she highlighted Sri Lanka's shared history or cultural heritage with Asian countries. For example, in Burma and Thailand (visited in January 1976) she renewed Sri Lanka's Buddhist links going back to centuries.

Mrs Bandaranaike also spoke out on behalf of Asian Buddhists when they faced difficulties. In 1963, she raised the concern at the UN about the discrimination

Official visit to another neighbour, The Maldives

SIRIMAVO





of Buddhists in South Vietnam. At the time she wrote to the Indian Prime Minister Nehru, Burmese leader General Ne Win, Prime Minister of Laos Prince Souvanna Phouma, Cambodian leader Prince Sihanouk, Japanese Prime Minister Ikeda, Thai Prime Minister Thanarat and the Nepalese King Mahendra calling on them to support diplomatic efforts to reduce the suffering of Buddhists in Vietnam. She also appealed to President John F Kennedy to use his good offices with the Government of South Vietnam to ensure the granting of freedom of worship and religious equality for Buddhists.



Receiving King Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan who arrived for the NAM Summit in Colombo. *(Left)*

Welcoming King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal to Colombo NAM Summit in 1976. *(Right)*

Being welcomed to Manila by President Ferdinand Marcos at the beginning of a three-day official visit to the Philippines in November 1976

SIRIMAVO





Being felicitated by President Ferdinand Marcos and Mrs Imelda Marcos in Manila



USSR and Eastern Europe

Diplomatic relations between Ceylon and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) began in 1956 and strengthened over the next two decades – especially when Mrs Bandaranaike served as the Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs. Her governments also engaged Eastern European countries while maintaining good relations with the West.

In October 1963, she became the first Sri Lankan Prime Minister to visit the USSR, where she had extensive discussions with Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. During this visit, she negotiated a deal to buy oil from the USSR at a cheaper price for the newly set up Ceylon Petroleum Corporation.

In November 1974, Mrs Bandaranaike made official visits to the USSR and Georgia, with stops in Tashkent, Moscow and Tbilisi. The USSR sent a special aircraft for her delegation's travels. On this occasion she met the Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and other key officials.

M D D Pieris, who as Secretary to the PM was part of the Sri Lanka delegation, has captured in his memoirs an interesting exchange during these talks. "During the official discussions Mrs Bandaranaike bargained closely on many issues pertaining

Visiting the museum ship Aurora in Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) during her 1963 visit



to Soviet aid to Sri Lanka. She wanted to get the best terms and the best deal possible. At one stage, Mr Kosygin banteringly wagged a finger and said, 'You are a hard lady'. Mrs Bandaranaike replied that if she was hard, it was on behalf of her country. The discussions were cordial, and we were able to obtain assistance for the public sector, industrial sector as well as a commitment to preliminary studies relating to Samanalawewa hydro-electric scheme."

Mrs Bandaranaike also visited a number of other countries in Eastern Europe to strengthen bilateral relations and seek technical or financial assistance for her country. These included visiting Czechoslovakia (mid October 1963) and Poland (late October 1963).

Her most enduring engagement was with Yugoslavia, which had distanced itself from the USSR in 1948 and declared itself an independent socialist republic. Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, better known as Marshal Tito, was a close friend of the Bandaranaike family which helped cement bilateral relations between the two countries while he was in office from 1953 to 1980.

President Tito had visited Ceylon in January 1959 and soon became a co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement by hosting the first Summit in Belgrade in 1961. From then onward President Tito and Mrs Bandaranaike regularly met each other at NAM and other international forums, and she made a number of official and personal visits to Yugoslavia.

During Mrs Bandaranaike's illnesses, President Tito offered facilities in Yugoslavia for treatment. In May 1980 she flew to Belgrade to pay last respects to her long standing friend.

“Sirimavo was a very special guest of Khrushchev, the general secretary of the Communist Party, and prime minister of the Soviet Union. He was a bluff and earthy man with a homely wife, who called a spade a spade, and the two leaders got on very well together.”

- **Bradman Weerakoon**

Secretary to Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike (1960-65), in his memoirs

During the 1963 visit, with Nikita Khrushchev,
First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party

SIRIMAVO







Visiting the Russian Museum in Moscow. *(Left)*

Being presented with an album of works by Russian artists at the Russian Museum in Moscow. *(Right)*

SIRIMAVO



Civil servant Bradman Weerakoon, who accompanied the PM on her 1963 USSR visit as her secretary, recalls how internationally acclaimed Sri Lankan dancers Chitrasena and Vajira performed excerpts from their ballet 'Karadiya' in Moscow. "Vajira, then in her prime, did us all proud with the fluid agility and statuesque beauty of her dancing and came a very close second to the star performers at the Bolshoi, the home of classical ballet."





In December 1961, Mrs Bandaranaike welcomes to Colombo the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, who had become the first human to travel to outer space in April that year. While attending the First UN Conference on Women in Mexico City in June 1975, she also met Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova the first woman to travel to space (in June 1963) – sadly, there is no photographic record of that encounter.



During her visit to the Soviet Union in November 1974, Mrs Bandaranaike meets the Soviet Premier Alexi Kosygin and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko (who held that position for a long time, from 1957 to 1985). *(Left)*

With Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Communist Party, during the visit to Moscow in November 1974 *(Right)*

SIRIMAVO







Meeting Czechoslovakia's President Antonin Josef Novotny in October 1963 (Left)

With Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz of Poland in October 1963 (Right)



During a visit to a hand blown glass factory in Czechoslovakia

SIRIMAVO





Visiting an industrial facility in Czechoslovakia in 1963

Yugoslav President Marshal Tito was a close friend of the Bandaranaike family.

SIRIMAVO



SIRIMAVO





The Middle East and Arab World

With their principled foreign policy and solidarity in times of crisis, the Bandaranaiques earned the lasting goodwill and respect of countries in the Middle East and the Arab world.

During the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, the government of Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike firmly supported the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's decision to nationalise the Suez Canal company. Speaking at the UN General Assembly in November 1956, Mr Bandaranaike eloquently argued that the Suez Canal rightfully belonged to Egypt.

Ceylon's relations with Egypt and other Middle Eastern and Arab countries strengthened further during Mrs Bandaranaike's first and second terms as Prime Minister.

Her government's decision to nationalise foreign oil companies and make the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation the sole importer and distributor of petroleum products was disliked by Western countries. But she deftly used diplomacy with petroleum producing countries in the Middle East to ensure uninterrupted supplies.

“As the world’s first woman Prime Minister, Mrs Bandaranaike was a figure instantly recognised and enjoyed celebrity status. Her strong non-aligned stance and her friendship with the Arab world had visibly made her popular in the Middle East.”

- **Desamanya M D D Pieris**

Secretary to the Prime Minister 1970-77

With Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was President of Egypt from 1956 to 1970

SIRIMAVO





In October 1963, Mrs Bandaranaike was accorded a warm welcome by President Nasser who was a founder of the Non-Aligned Movement. Her discussions led to the United Arab Republic (as Egypt was officially known from 1958 to 1971) agreeing to buy a higher quota of Ceylon tea. The following year she led the Ceylon delegation to the second Non-Aligned Summit held in Cairo.

When President Nasser died in September 1970, Mrs Bandaranaike attended his funeral. Her government declared two days of national mourning.

During a four-day visit to Iraq in April 1975, Mrs Bandaranaike held talks with then Vice President Saddam Hussein on the impact of high petroleum prices on developing countries. Iraq, a founding member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) agreed to supply 250,000 tonnes of oil on a four-year deferred payment scheme at a very low rate of interest.

Mrs Bandaranaike's foreign policy recognised and supported the right of the Palestinian people to have their own state. In July 1975, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) opened an office in Colombo.

With the then Vice President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, during her official visit in April 1975



Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO),
called on Mrs Bandaranaike in Colombo in March 1997



Western Europe

In pursuit of non-aligned foreign policies, the governments of Mrs Bandaranaike maintained diplomatic relations and bilateral cooperation with countries in Eastern Europe (generally aligned with the USSR) as well as those in Western Europe.

Such relations were strengthened by occasional official visits in both directions. During her second term, Mrs Bandaranaike visited West Germany, Switzerland, Norway and the Vatican (in addition to several visits to the UK).

Mrs Bandaranaike made a brief visit to the Vatican in September 1973, during which she had a private audience with Pope Paul VI at Castel Gandolfo. She had met the Pope during his short visit to Colombo in 1970.

The visit to West Germany in September 1974 was undertaken at the invitation of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Besides bilateral matters, the two leaders also discussed the energy crisis created by OPEC oil price hikes and its impact on developing countries.

During her October 1976 visit to Oslo, Mrs Bandaranaike had talks with Norwegian Prime Minister Odvar Nordli, who welcomed her initiatives in international affairs, noting the progress made by the Non-Aligned Movement and the leadership role Sri Lanka was playing in the UN Law of the Sea Conference which at the time was being chaired by Ambassador Shirley Amerasinghe.

Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and Mrs Bandaranaike listen to the National Anthems during her welcome in Bonn, after which they inspected a guard of honour.





With Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and Mrs Schmidt



Signing the Golden Book of Bonn, while the Mayor of Bonn Peter Kraemer looks on. *(Left)*

SIRIMAVO



“Coming at a time when there is universal demand for the outlawing of these [nuclear] tests and when the hopes of the world are centred on the current negotiations in Geneva, the resumption of these tests is a grave setback to peace and brings mankind once again to the brink of nuclear destruction.”

- Mrs Bandaranaike

writing to US President John F Kennedy in 1962

United States of America and Canada

Beginning from the time of Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike, Ceylon's foreign policy engaged both camps of the Cold War – the United States and the Soviet Union – in the spirit of goodwill and cooperation while the country carefully maintained its non-aligned stance. Mrs Bandaranaike's governments continued and strengthened this approach.

While having sound bilateral relations with the superpowers, Mrs Bandaranaike did not hesitate to speak out on important matters related to peace, security and development. Some positions were taken publicly while other concerns were expressed in confidential diplomatic communications.

Mrs Bandaranaike and President John F Kennedy were elected to high office a few months apart in 1960. Declassified US records show that the two leaders exchanged many communications on a range of issues including US nuclear testing in the Pacific, nationalising of foreign oil companies in Ceylon and the plight of Buddhists in South Vietnam.



With US President Richard M Nixon
at the White House on 19 October 1971



In April 1962, Mrs Bandaranaike wrote to President Kennedy expressing Ceylon's deep concerns about continuing nuclear testing by the US. She called for a greater commitment to nuclear disarmament.

Atmospheric nuclear testing (as well as testing in outer space and underwater) was banned by the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty which the US, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom signed. On 27 July 1963, Mrs Bandaranaike welcomed the treaty and said, "This is indeed an important first step on the road to world peace. If the present Treaty, as we genuinely hope, could lead to a total ban on nuclear tests, it would indeed be hailed as the most significant act of peace since the Second World War."

Shortly after President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, Mrs Bandaranaike wrote to Mrs Jacqueline Kennedy saying, "As a wife and a mother who herself lost her husband in such tragic circumstances, I know how you must feel in this hour of grief."

When Mrs Bandaranaike was in New York in October 1971 to address the UN General Assembly, she also visited Washington, DC, to hold bilateral discussions with President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State William Rogers. The White House meeting was held on 19 October 1971.

Bilateral relations with Canada also thrived during Mrs Bandaranaike's terms as Prime Minister. She had a close friendship with Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau who held that office from 1968 to 1979, and again from 1980 to 1984. In January 1971, Mr Trudeau made an official visit to Ceylon, and Mrs Bandaranaike reciprocated with a visit in October that year.



Welcoming Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau
to Colombo in January 1971



‘
It was far from my mind to achieve any personal glory
for myself when I assumed the leadership of the party
at the request of its leaders.

’
Mrs Bandaranaike
reflecting on her entering politics in 1960





‘

I guided the country through a coup planned to topple my government when I first took over... But what I am most proud of... is that during one of the most trying periods in recent history I guided our country. The JVP uprising [of 1971] was the first terrorist insurrection in this country directly attacking the government. It was an outstandingly difficult time. But I kept my cool... I asked the misled youngsters, both men and women, to surrender. I told them as a mother I felt for them and felt sorry that they should have been so falsely misled with grandiose ideas of power.

’

Mrs Bandaranaike
in a media interview in 1995