



Portrait of Courage  
and  
Resilience



## Opposition Struggles 1977 - 1994

At the general election held on 21 July 1977, the UNP won 140 out of the total 168 seats and formed a government. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) had the second largest number (18 seats) and its leader Mr A Amirthalingam became the Leader of the Opposition.

The SLFP suffered the worst electoral setback in its history, winning only eight seats (compared to 91 it had in the previous Parliament). Sirimavo Bandaranaike was one of the few SLFP Parliamentarians who retained her seat. But it was the beginning of more than a decade and half of oppositional struggles for her and the party.

In 1978, the UNP used its overwhelming election mandate to adopt a new Constitution which created an Executive Presidency as the head of state and government.

In 1980, the UNP government appointed a Special Presidential Commission to investigate allegations against Mrs Bandaranaike on “abuses of power” when she was Prime Minister. The process was highly controversial.

As Bradman Weerakoon noted in his memoirs, “Sirimavo decided not to appear before the Commission which she considered was a political venture with the avowed objective of finding her guilty and ensuring her forfeiture of civic rights for a long period.”

The Commission conducted its inquiry *ex parte* and claimed that the allegations were proven. Using its report, the government adopted a motion in Parliament on 16 October 1980 to deprive Mrs Bandaranaike of her civic rights for seven years, and another one to expel her from Parliament. Making a long and passionate speech in Parliament, Mrs Bandaranaike refuted the Commission’s findings and called it an act of political assassination.



The motions were passed by 139 votes in favour and 18 against. As a result, she was barred from contesting in elections and campaigning for others. However, she remained as the SLFP leader and a formidable presence on the political scene. Her son Mr Anura Bandaranaike - elected to Parliament in 1977 - became leader of the SLFP's parliamentary group.

Mrs Bandaranaike was not allowed to contest in the country's first presidential election held on 20 October 1982 which was won by the incumbent, Mr J R Jayewardene. She could only watch with mounting concern as the UNP won a referendum in December 1982 to extend the life of Parliament by six more years, and as the anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983 escalated the civil war.

By January 1986, when her civic rights were restored by a presidential decree, the country was facing multiple political crises. Despite turning 70 that year, she resumed her political activity, notably opposing the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of July 1987 that brought in Indian troops to counter the Tamil Tigers in the North and East.

She was the SLFP candidate at the next presidential election held on 19 December 1988 where she polled 44.95 per cent of the votes but lost to the UNP candidate.



Mrs Bandaranaike talks with President J R Jayewardene at the fifth convocation of the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS) on 31 January 1984. This encounter took place just three years after she was deprived of civic rights and expelled from Parliament by a questionable process led by Jayewardene's UNP government. Mrs Bandaranaike had the capacity to engage even her political adversaries when it came to matters of national and public interest.



“The action now proposed against me is a political crime heretofore not even thought of in this country that claims to be democratic. It is sponsored and forced upon the majority by a group that has, as its goal, the subjection of our country and our people now to tyranny, and later perhaps to a reign of terror...

...I therefore ask the honourable Members of the House, who sit today as judges, to examine their conscience before they decide to inflict on me the terrible injury that would rob me of my electoral franchise.”

- Mrs Bandaranaike  
*speaking in Parliament on 16 October 1980 during the debate on the motion to deprive her of civic rights*



Going to Supreme Court against the findings of the Special Presidential Commission that recommended her to be deprived of civic rights.





Mrs Bandaranaike returned to Parliament in the general election held on 15 February 1989. This time the SLFP won 67 seats and she became the Leader of the Opposition. During the term of that Parliament (1989-1994), she was a fierce critic of the government's human rights abuses and a strong defender of democratic values. She also supported the abortive impeachment motion against President R Premadasa in September 1991.

Importantly, she guided and groomed the next generation of opposition Parliamentarians who sustained centrist politics until the UNP was electorally defeated at the August 1994 general election.

Her younger daughter Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga led a coalition of parties known as the People's Alliance to victory and became Prime Minister. Re-elected to Parliament, Mrs Bandaranaike joined her daughter's Cabinet as the Minister without Portfolio on 19 August 1994.

In late September 1980, when the Special Presidential Commission found Mrs Bandaranaike guilty of abuse or misuse of power in respect of six allegations made against her, she sought the Supreme Court's intervention to quash the findings. However, without waiting for the court's ruling, the government rushed a motion in Parliament on 16 October 1980 to deprive her of civic rights. It was passed despite strong pleas from senior clergy members, intellectuals and citizen groups like the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the process, Mrs Bandaranaike was resolute and gracious, asking her supporters to remain calm and peaceful in their protests. *(Left)*





At the opposition May Day rally of 1980,  
Mrs Bandaranaike with Mr Bernard Soysa, Dr Colvin R de Silva,  
Mr T B Ilangaratne and other political leaders.





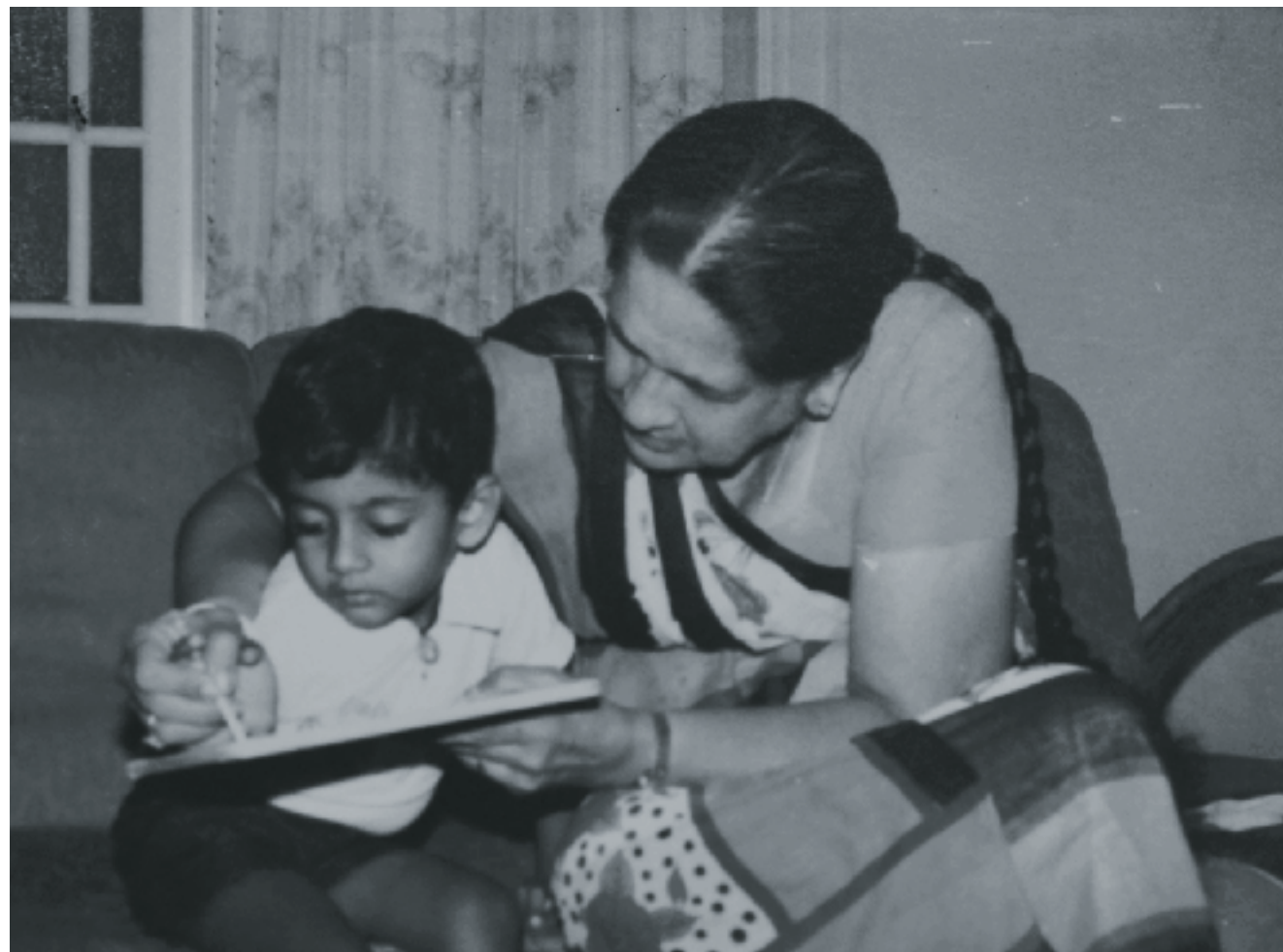
Party leader Mrs Bandaranaike speaks during a press conference held at the SLFP headquarters in Colombo on 20 Nov 1982. With her are party seniors and political allies including Mr Jinadasa Niyathapala, Mr Dinesh Gunawardena, Mr A Aziz, Mr Pieter Keuneman, Mr T B Ilangaratne, Mr K P Silva, Mr Hector Kobbekaduwa, Mr Anil Moonesinghe and Mr Percy Wickramasekera





Sometime in the early 1980s, Mrs Bandaranaike joins the birthday of her granddaughter Yasodhara. Her daughter Chandrika had married the popular actor turned politician Vijaya Kumaratunga in 1978 and they had two children, Yasodhara and Vimukthi. Vijaya was assassinated in February 1988 for political reasons. *(Right-above)*

Despite her hectic public life, the stateswoman was never too busy to accommodate a personal request. Here she is teaching the first letters (*akuru kiyaweema*) to young Anuradha Gamage, son of Mr Siripala Gamage, who has long served as the curator of the Bandaranaike Museums. *(Right-below)*





“She was not the kind of person who forced any ideology on any one of us [her children]. If she did, I wouldn’t have joined the UNP. She was not a person who said ‘Don’t do it’. She just left you alone to do it... and face the consequences.”

- **Mr Anura Bandaranaike**  
*in 1996 interview*



Mr Anura Bandaranaike was first elected to Parliament in 1977 and became the SLFP parliamentary group leader from October 1980 after his mother was expelled from Parliament. In November 1983, he emerged as the Leader of the Opposition when the incumbent, TULF leader Mr A Amirthalingam, boycotted Parliament and lost his seat. Mr Bandaranaike led the opposition till 1988, excelling in a position that was held by his father and mother at different times. Later on, he held various Cabinet portfolios including those of higher education, tourism and foreign affairs. He was elected as Speaker of Parliament in 2000 without a contest.





Mrs Bandaranaike with President R Premadasa sometime in the early 1990s. They were the main candidates at the second presidential election held on 19 December 1988. Mrs Bandaranaike polled 44.95 per cent of votes but lost to Mr Premadasa, who received 50.43 per cent. The election was marred by violence and had a low voter turnout of 55.32 per cent. Mrs Bandaranaike re-entered Parliament in the general election held on 15 February 1989 where her SLFP won 67 seats and she became the Leader of the Opposition from 1989 to 1994.





When President R Premadasa was assassinated on 1 May 1993, the then Prime Minister D B Wijetunga became acting President until Parliament convened to elect a successor as provided by the Constitution. On 7 May 1993, Mr Wijetunga was elected unanimously by Parliament to complete the remainder of the slain president's term and was confirmed as the third Executive President





“As I was growing up in the political arena, Mrs. Bandaranaike was almost a mother to me. Anura and I were good friends and she never treated me differently. To her, all of us were ‘young sons’ who needed to be guided and nurtured. In a way, it’s a unique relationship.

When I spearheaded certain initiatives such as human rights campaigns, particularly in the late 1980s when there were violations of people’s basic rights, it was Mrs Bandaranaike who encouraged me and gave me all the support. That was true leadership; allowing one’s followers to lead initiatives but providing all the guidance and support to make such activities successful.”

**- Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa**

*in a tribute to Mrs Bandaranaike on her 88th birth anniversary  
Daily News, 17 April 2004*





## Third Term as Prime Minister November 1994 – August 2000

The year 1994 marked a turning point in the illustrious career of Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Having served as the SLFP leader for 34 years, she stepped down in favour of her younger daughter Ms Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, who led the People's Alliance – comprising the SLFP and six smaller political parties – to victory at the August 1994 general election.

Ms Kumaratunga was sworn in as the Prime Minister on 19 August 1994. In the same election, Mrs Bandaranaike was once again elected to Parliament, and was appointed as the Minister without Portfolio.

A presidential election was held within weeks which Ms Kumaratunga contested and won resoundingly. The first woman to become the President of Sri Lanka, she took the oath of office on 12 November 1994. Shortly afterwards, she appointed Mrs Bandaranaike as her Prime Minister.

Thus, Mrs Bandaranaike became PM for the third time at the age of 78. Unlike during her two previous terms, however, the

Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike became the Minister without Portfolio in the new Cabinet sworn in on 19 August 1994.



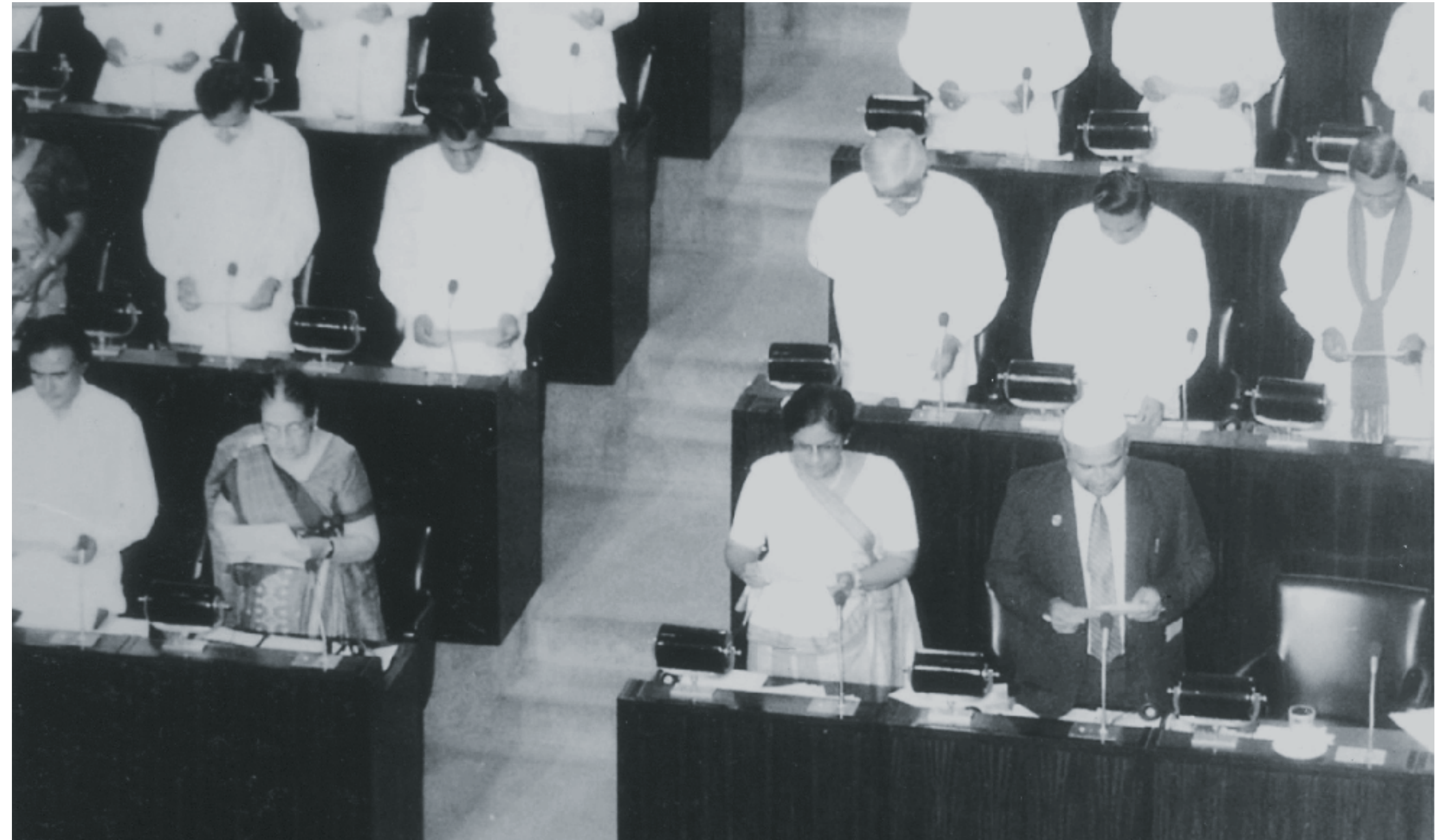
position had been made more ceremonial by the 1978 Constitution. But as the country's elder stateswoman and as a politician with decades of experience in Parliament and governance, Mrs Bandaranaike remained highly influential and respected.

In Parliament, she consistently stood for discipline and decorum in the House, and urged fellow members – from both sides of the isle – to enrich the quality of debates. She also took part in cultural, religious and educational activities albeit at a reduced pace due to advanced age and poor health.

On 10 August 2000, Mrs Bandaranaike resigned as Prime Minister, saying “I believe it is time for me to quietly withdraw from the humdrum of busy political life, to a more tranquil and quiet environment.”

Although wheel-chaired, she turned up in her hometown of Attanagalla to cast her ballot in the general election on 10 October 2000. On her way back home, she suffered a heart attack in her car and passed away. She was given a state funeral, and her remains were interred in the Bandaranaike Samadhi in Horagolla.

Mother and daughter at the forefront: in the new Parliament elected in August 1994, Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike served briefly as the Minister without Portfolio while Ms Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was Prime Minister.







In November 1994, Ms Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga became President of Sri Lanka and appointed Mrs Bandaranaike as the Prime Minister in her Cabinet of Ministers which was drawn from the SLFP and other political parties that made up the People's Alliance.



“...Why do people send us to Parliament? To do something useful for the people. Not to be shouting and behaving in an irresponsible manner. We should not lose the trust of the people. If we are hoping to get back for their vote, before long, the people of this country – particularly the youth – will throw us out by the scruff of our necks if we go on like this...The people are disgusted with what is happening here.”

- **Mrs Bandaranaike**  
*speaking in Parliament on 16 November 1995*

The illustrious mother blesses her victorious daughter, Ms Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, who has just been elected President of Sri Lanka in November 1994.

SIRIMAVO







“It was Mrs Bandaranaike who reorganised and revitalised the Sri Lanka Freedom Party that went into disarray after the assassination of Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike. She guarded the party’s policies under the most challenging circumstances, and never betrayed the party no matter what happened.”

- Ms Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga  
*in her message to mark the 21st death anniversary of Mrs Bandaranaike  
in October 2021*





Throughout her public life, Mrs Bandaranaike was a gracious host who ensured the highest standards of hospitality. Here she personally serves some visitors to the family's country home in Horagolla. *(Left)*

The Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute (BIDTI) was established in September 1995 under the guidance of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike for offering advanced training courses in diplomacy and international relations. The institution was a manifestation of her vision to enhance the skills of Sri Lanka's Foreign Service. A comprehensive foreign service training programme was conducted for the first time for 14 cadets recruited to the Sri Lanka Foreign Service in 1996.

Mrs Bandaranaike is seen with members of this first batch, along with Foreign Minister Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar, veteran diplomat Dr Vernon Mendis, and historian Dr Lorna Devaraja who served as a lecturer. *(Right)*





Both when holding public office and as a private citizen, she was a patron of the arts and crafts of Sri Lanka. *(Left)*

Sometime in 1995, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga arrives at the home-coming reception (function to welcome the newly married) of Opposition Leader Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe and his wife Maithree. *(Right)*





On 17 March 1996, Sri Lanka national cricket team won the ICC Cricket World Cup defeating Australia in a thrilling final match at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore, Pakistan. Upon the team's return to the island to a heroes' welcome, Sri Lanka cricket captain Arjuna Ranatunga visited Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike with the World Cup Trophy. Mr Ranatunga represented Sri Lanka in a total of 93 Tests and 269 One-Day Internationals (ODIs). He retired from playing competitive cricket in 2001, shortly after which he entered politics from the SLFP – the party where his father, Mr Reggie Ranatunga, had been a member since the early 1960s and later a Parliamentarian and Minister.



## Upholding Sri Lanka's Multiculturalism

Mrs Bandaranaike was educated in Catholic, English-medium schools, but remained a devout Buddhist all her life. Thanks to her upbringing and social background, she was comfortable in engaging in politics and governance within Sri Lanka's multicultural reality.

As First Lady, Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition, she engaged religious dignitaries and clergy members from all faiths.







Mrs Bandaranaike and young Mr Anura Bandaranaike exchanging conversation with the Maha Sangha after the monks had chanted *pirith* to bless them.





Visiting the Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth Relic) in Kandy. On her left is Mr H B Udurawana, who served as the 16th Diyawadana Nilame, the chief lay custodian of Temple of the Tooth, from 1964 to 1974.





On a visit to Bodh Gaya (known in Sri Lanka as Buddhagaya) in the Indian state of Bihar. For Buddhists, it is the most important of the four key pilgrimage sites related to the life of Buddha: this is the place where the Buddha had attained Enlightenment. The Mahabodhi temple complex at Bodh Gaya was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2002.









Pope Paul VI arrived at the Ratmalana airport on 4 December 1970 for a brief visit to Ceylon. This was his last stop on an Asian pilgrimage where he visited Iran, Pakistan, the Philippines, Western Samoa, Australia, Indonesia and Hong Kong. After being welcomed by Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike, the Pope celebrated Holy Mass at the airport itself. Also in the photo on the left are Mr William Gopallawa, the Governor General; Mr Felix Dias Bandaranaike, Minister of Local Government, Public Administration and Home Affairs; Mr Leslie Goonewardene, Minister of Communications; and Mr Lakshman Jayakody, Deputy Minister of Defence and Foreign Affairs.

SIRIMAVO







Pope John Paul II greets Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike during his visit to Sri Lanka on 20-21 January 1995 as President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga looks on. During his visit, the Pope met the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Sri Lanka, had a dialogue with representatives of other religions, and celebrated a Holy Mass for the beatification of Father Joseph Vaz, an early Catholic missionary known as the Apostle of Ceylon. *(Left)*

Mother Teresa of Calcutta meets Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike during her visit to Colombo in 1971. The Roman Catholic nun and missionary founded the Missionaries of Charity in 1950 to provide shelter and care for the abandoned and homeless. They are active throughout India and in more than a hundred countries – including Sri Lanka. Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, and canonised by Pope Francis in 2016. *(Right)*







## Champion of Social Service

When circumstances thrust her into the tumultuous world of politics, Sirimavo Bandaranaike had been a passionate social worker for decades. Insights from grassroots voluntary work helped her to stay close to ground realities when holding high office.

Having gained experience in malaria relief and flood relief work with the Balangoda Social Service League during her youth, Sirimavo moved to Colombo after marriage and joined Lanka Mahila Samiti (LMS) in 1941. Then the largest women's organisation in the country, LMS was founded in 1930 by Dr Mary Irwin Rutnam, a Canadian-born doctor who pioneered women's rights and community empowerment from the time she arrived in Ceylon in 1896.

With fellow LMS members, Mrs Bandaranaike visited remote villages in the North Central and Uva Provinces, where she met poverty-stricken families struggling against droughts, malaria, malnutrition and other deprivations. Responding to severe food shortages during the Second World War, LMS campaigned to regenerate subsistence farming by promoting home gardens, high-yield crops and other new methods in agriculture. Parallel to this, LMS was active on educating girls, skills development, women's political rights and family planning.

Mrs Bandaranaike served LMS in various honorary positions, rising in its hierarchy as a committee member, treasurer, vice president and eventually becoming president in 1959. By that time, LMS had grown and expanded to 150,000 members and 1,400 branches across the island. The following year she resigned when she became Prime Minister.



While LMS was her principal channel for social work, Mrs Bandaranaike was also a member of other charities such as the All Ceylon Buddhist Women's Association, the Cancer Society, the Ceylon National Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis (CNAPT) and the Nurses Welfare Association.

Initially as a politician's wife and then as a national leader, she supported charities in different ways. Her participation inspired and encouraged thousands of others to help those in need or distress.

When she was the First Lady, Mrs Bandaranaike witnessed the birth of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement which has since become the largest development organisation in Sri Lanka.

On 15-16 December 1958, Sarvodaya founder Dr A T Ariyaratne went to the neglected village of Kanatoluwa in the Kurunegala district with a group of teachers and students of Nalanda Vidyalaya, Colombo, for their first *shramadana* (donation of labour) camp. "It was the first organised activity launched with a strong determination to fight the divisive factors in society of class, creed and caste, and also to involve school children in an egalitarian movement," Dr Ariyaratne recalls in his autobiography.



Leading Buddhist monks, civil servants and educators of the area visited the camp. Prime Minister Mr Bandaranaike was also invited, but being unable to make it, he sent his wife with a message of greetings. Mrs Bandaranaike came to Kanatoluwa accompanied by Mrs N S Perera, the then President of LMS, and a few other social workers. They spent several hours at the camp learning about the Sarvodaya approach to awakening individual humans and humanity as a whole.

Mrs Bandaranaike remained a life-long champion of the Sarvodaya movement. When she was Prime Minister, says Dr Ariyaratne, she ensured that "there was no hindrance whatsoever from the state in our activities".

The first volume of Dr Ariyaratne's autobiography, *Bhava Thanha* (2001), was dedicated to "the illustrious name of Mrs Sirimavo R D Bandaranaike, who was a blessing to the Sarvodaya movement for four decades continuously".

She was a long-standing supporter of another civil society organisation that, coincidentally, was also founded in December 1958: the Sri Lanka Eye Donation Society. Inspired by the Buddhist virtue of organ donation, the society's founder, Dr Hudson Silva, pioneered a social movement for living persons to pledge donating their eyes upon death. Transplanted eye corneas would then restore eyesight to many living with vision impairment.

Within a few years, the society had more donated eye corneas than was needed locally. In May 1964, the society started sending donated corneas overseas. Since then over 70,000 corneas have been donated to recipients in close to 60 countries worldwide.

Mrs Bandaranaike signed a pledge in 1969 to donate her own eyes upon death. Eventually, her corneas helped two poor patients in Sri Lanka to acquire vision. The surgery to graft her corneas was done at the Colombo Eye Hospital on the very day she passed away, 10 October 2000.

Mrs Bandaranaike with Dr Mary Irwin Rutnam (1873–1962), founder of Lanka Mahila Samiti and pioneer of women's rights in colonial Ceylon. In 1958, Dr Rutnam won the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service in recognition of humanitarian and social work. Dr Rutnam was praised for having "for 62 years applied her heart, her mind and her medical knowledge with insight and understanding to the problems of the Ceylonese people, whom she has made her own".





In 1960, Mrs Bandaranaike poses with the senior members of Lanka Mahila Samiti. Some have been active members from the charity's founding in 1930. *(Left)*

Mrs Bandaranaike at a meeting of Lanka Mahila Samiti. She later acknowledged how her voluntary work had helped her to overcome shyness and refine public speaking skills. *(Right)*

SIRIMAVO







Sarvodaya leader Dr A T Ariyaratne with Mrs Bandaranaike at the fourth Sarvodaya National Award ceremony held at Sarvodaya Vishwa Samadhi Hall in Moratuwa on 29 June 1995. She participated as chief guest "in spite of her weak health condition", says an appreciative Dr Ariyaratne. *(Left)*

Mrs Bandaranaike takes part in a Sarvodaya event during her third term as Prime Minister, in the 1990s. *(Right)*





On 26 Sep 1969, Mrs Bandaranaike signs a form pledging to donate her eyes upon death to the Sri Lanka Eye Donation Society. Her wish was fulfilled on 10 October 2000, when her corneas helped restore the eyesight of two Sri Lankans.





The Last Farewell: Anura, Chandrika and Sunethra at the funeral of their illustrious mother Sirimavo Bandaranaike who passed away on 10 October 2000. Mr Alavi Mowlana, a senior SLFP politician and government minister, was quoted as saying: "I think the entire nation has lost its Mother. I cannot believe that she is no more."







‘

I hope there will be peace as we had up to 1977 and that my country will once again be able to live in peace, devoid of violence between ethnic groups and that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our country will remain intact. I pray for peace and prosperity for this country I serve and love so that future generations will call her blessed. May the Triple Gem bless all her people irrespective of race, caste or creed. That is my most ardent wish.

’

**- Mrs Bandaranaike**  
*in a media interview in 1995*