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Ceylon Daily News celebrates its' Centenary

(DailyNews) - The centenary that the Ceylon Daily News celebrates this year is also a hundred years where this newspaper, newspapers in Sri Lanka and indeed the media, in general, have metamorphosed several times over, serving different roles depending on the needs of the day. A hundred years ago, in 1917, the Ceylon Daily News was born when Don Richard Wijewardene (known as 'DR' to all), took ownership of The Ceylonese and re-christened it the Ceylon Daily News. Wijewardene was involved in the movement to gain Independence from Britain and was not shy to use his newspaper for that purpose. In that sense, the Ceylon Daily News had an enmeshed role in the country's politics from its very inception. Four years earlier, in 1913, Wijewardene had been elected secretary of the Ceylon National Association, an organisation formed for the purpose of agitating for constitutional reform and self-rule. Its President at the time was James Peiris.

In 1919, the Ceylon National Association amalgamated with the like-minded Ceylon Reform League to form the Ceylon National Congress (CNC). Working with those who agitated for the country's independence in the CNC brought DR into contact with those who would later become political heavyweights in the lead up to Independence. These included the likes of F R Senanayake, D S Senanayake, D B Jayatilaka, E W Perera, C W W Kannangara, Patrick de S. Kularatne, H W Amarasinghe, W A de Silva, George E de Silva and Edwin Wijeyaratne. D S Senanayake was to later leave the CNC in 1943. In 1946, he formed the United National Party (UNP). Wijewardene too gravitated towards the UNP and was particularly close to the 'father of the nation', D S Senanayake and his son, Dudley. As a result, his newspapers were increasingly identified

as 'UNP newspapers'. DR passed away two years after the nation gained Independence leaving the company he founded, the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited (ANCL) to be run by his sons-in-law. By this time, DR's sister Helena's son, J R Jayewardene had also emerged as a leading figure in the UNP. Jayewardene was close to Esmond Wickremesinghe, DR's son-in-law who for all intents and purposes 'ran' ANCL after DR's demise.

Lake House group
Therefore, it surprised none that the Lake House group supported the UNP and as the country was emerging as an Independent nation, it played a significant, if slightly unabashed pro-UNP role in moulding public opinion in what was already a highly politically literate electorate. Lake House was not alone in this. Their erstwhile rivals, Independent Newspapers Limited, or the Davasa group owned by the Gunasena family, with relatively fewer links to political families but with the dynamic D B Dhanapala at the helm, was not averse to endorsing some of the policies of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Matters came to a head in 1964. Even then, the Lake House was identified with the UNP and the government of Sirima Bandaranaike attempted to take over Lake House by introducing legislation in Parliament. The directors of Lake House, led by Esmond Wickremesinghe, ever the shrewd strategist, worked tirelessly around the clock lobbying SLFP parliamentarians to vote against the proposed Bill. Thirteen of them did. They included the then

Deputy Leader of the SLFP, C P de Silva and Mahanama Samaraweera, father of Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera. The vote was lost by one vote and led to the fall of the SLFP dominated government. Among those who could also claim credit for this were two others who voted against the proposed Bill, S Thondaman and Speaker Hugh Fernando, the latter an SLFP

of the SLFP led coalition in 1977, with the UNP returned to power with a record majority.
State media
The UNP lifted the restrictions on the Davasa group which resumed publication but did not reverse the nationalisation of Lake House which remains under state control to this day; forty years later under successive UNP and SLFP led



parliamentarian at the time, who had the casting vote with the votes tied for and against the Bill. If Mrs Bandaranaike was thwarted then, it didn't stop her, nearly a decade later. After her return to power in 1970, the United Front government introduced the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited (Special Provisions) Law No. 28 of 1973 to nationalise 75 percent of the ownership of ANCL and the takeover of Lake House followed soon after. The Davasa group which by then had fallen out of favour with the Bandaranaike government was sealed a year later in 1974 under emergency regulations which were initially enacted to quell the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna led an insurrection in 1971. With Lake House under firm government control and the Davasa group out of circulation, media freedom became a crucial issue for the UNP-led opposition which called for a boycott of Lake House newspapers. It would have been a factor among many other issues- that led to the downfall

governments. Interestingly, D R Wijewardene's son and heir, Ranjit, instead of reclaiming Lake House, has gone on to acquire the publishing rights of several other newspapers. These publications, including The Sunday Times, Daily Mirror and Lankadeepa have now established themselves as being relatively independent, publishing under the banner of Wijeya Newspapers Limited. Nevertheless, the state media is not what it was a few decades ago. If media was restricted to one radio station, the state-run 'Radio Ceylon' and a few ...
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From left to right: Rabbi Jeff Berger Rabbi at Rambam Sephardi Synagogue, Borehamwood, Venerable Mahinda Deegalle, Bath Spa University, H.E. Amari Wijewardene, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in the United Kingdom and Dr Zimar Sivardeen, Chairman of the British Sri Lankan Association (BRISLA).

BRISLA calls for communion at interfaith event

The British Sri Lankan Association (BRISLA) showed its commitment to building stronger relationships with communities in London by attending an interfaith event this month. The meeting, held at the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre in Kingsbury, brought together many religious leaders from a wide range of faiths - from Christianity and Buddhism to Islam and Judaism - to discuss ways of building unity and celebrating diversity on a local scale. Dr Zimar Sivardeen attended the event in his capacity as chairman of the British Sri Lankan Association, an organisation dedicated to developing ties between the UK and Sri Lanka. BRISLA saw the event as an excellent platform to raise awareness of the need for compassionate listening and acknowledgement of the suffering of others to help build peace across the whole of society. Dr Sivardeen said: "BRISLA serves a wide range of people from many different backgrounds and faiths, so this event was a great opportunity to share ideas and learn more about how we can develop closer relationships with members of our local area and build stronger links with the community."

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