



Thanks to one of Sri Lanka's best known scholars we have an immortal character to ponder upon, and remember with some reverence in special situations. Kirihami created by Muniadasa Kumaratunga has outlived the creator and will no doubt enjoy many more years of fruitful existence among Sinhala writers and readers alike. Perhaps outclassing Kumaratunga's character, we have at present a Sri Lankan by the name Wickrema Seneviratna, a renowned Maths teacher better known even among his own pupils as a modern day Kirihami. He traveled to this country with R.R.Smarakoon's troupe last year. His friends even now take him to task for trying to live that role in actual life.

All that is history now, for a far more interesting and powerful Kirihami has emerged now, this time in the all-powerful arena of politics. I take the liberty to confer the title on him, for he has displayed extraordinary ingenuity in surviving more lives than the original Kirihami would have ever imagined. He has surpassed even the proverbial cat, who is supposed to last a mere nine lives. Modern Kirihami of Sri Lankan politics has had more lives than one could count on one's fingers. Whereas the original Kirihami is reputed to enjoy seven lives mainly due to his stupidity, with the help of wise men around, our political hero survives through his own sharp wit and quick thinking. In short, through cunning devious ways.

Many were the occasions on which political pundits predicted his imminent demise. All prophets of doom have been utterly shaken and put to shame by this political genius, at every turn. Let me, for the benefit of those who have by now not identified the great man, give his name, which does not fully describe the extraordinary political judgment and foresight of this wonderful human being. He is none other than former Prime Minister and current Opposition Leader of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremasinghe.

Soon after the U.N.P. came into power in 1947, its opponents invented a pithy slogan to ridicule its members who started globe-trotting, even for the flimsiest of excuses. 'Join the U.N.P. and see the world', they said in unison. Ranil Wickremasinghe, apart from beating the cat and Kirihami in his survival skills, has been the opposition leader who has seen every nook and corner of the globe while serving as leader of a major political party and the opposition in Sri Lanka. He is out of the island every other week, lecturing to Maldivians on democracy or advising Indian leaders on the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, or even conducting serious discussions on world affairs with leaders of the E.U. and the U.S.

Australian politicians should learn a lesson from this super Sri Lankan as to how one can survive in the cut-throat game of politics, coming out of every debacle stronger and stronger. Had this been learnt well in advance, Steve Bracks would not have been so childish as to throw away his job as premier of Victoria at the young age of fifty or fifty one. Bob Carr and Peter Beattie would have thought better and given up the idea of giving up their job with a couple of years of good life as premier of their State. Even Stevenborg would have stuck to his job as leader of the opposition in Queensland after facing the voters only three times. Kim Beazly was perhaps an exception in Australian politics, for he tried his luck again after losing two elections. Even he could have learnt a lesson or two had he read a couple of pages from Ranil's compendium on political strategy'

Counterpoint

by
The Defector

It was rumored that Karu Jayasuriya who was far more accessible to common folk and looks more at home at a Buddhist temple, left the UNP because he was unable to get the job of Leader of Opposition. Why he decided at this last hour to return to his old party is anyone's guess. Had anyone hoped to raise him to the position he had expected? Such attempts would have been thwarted by new aspirants, namely S.B. and Sajith. Both are waiting in the wings, marking their time.

Somehow it has now become the regular pattern, a move to oust the leader by a group of rebels. They appear as if from nowhere. No one knows when they disappear. A big noise is made, saying we are not going to sit and wait this time, we will accomplish the job this time around, no one can stop us, and much more stuff of that nature. The leader is listening, eager to introduce positive changes into the party structure, and rejuvenate the Grand Old Party. He as usual, appoints a committee to look into the issue and make recommendations. They come quick and

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In the meantime, another group of party stalwarts, apparently without the knowledge of the embattled leader, drafts a document which mysteriously contains all what the leader wants, and the much-publicized need for change evaporates overnight much to bewilderment of the so-called rebels. There is no such group as rebels after all. Who said there was a cry for imminent change. All that was President Rajapakse's fabrications. His machinations have failed once more. Our ever-green leader has performed another Houdini. Hats off to our leader. He will lead us for ever. Mark my words. This leader is going to last another generation fulfilling the wish of his arch rival Wimal Weerasinghe, perhaps taking the rest of latter's life span to continue his mission. He will contest the next Presidential election and lead his party in the forthcoming general election too. Whether that will lead to his or his party's victory is totally a different proposition.

This wonderful human being, though not blessed with the political acumen of his illustrious uncle the late H.E. Junius Jayewardene, possesses an uncanny ability to survive the most intricate operation to oust him mounted by inexperienced *podians* who think no end of themselves, and try simple out-moded strategies with a man of maturity and unimaginable foresight, an ability he has repeatedly displayed not only before the party faithfuls and dissidents as well. This perhaps has so far not been recognized by the country at large. If that had happened we would by now have called him H.E. Wickremasinghe

for a number of decades. It is not his fault either. It is the misfortune of an independent nation struggling to stand on its feet.

No one would then be whispering about Gonawla Sunil or the torture chamber of Batalanda, No one will talk of the number of elections in which he led his party to inevitable defeat, or the number of attempts by his party rebels to rid the party of him. No one will even remember the peculiar way he used to clap or rather the childish way he tried to clap. The very attractive and mod embellishments he wore on his hand will be forgotten in no time. But the country will remember with enthusiasm and gratitude the cheque for Rs. Five Million (or was it Five Crores?) handed over to the Mahanayake of Malwatta, on the eve of removing the proscription on the LTTE. The people of Sri Lanka will for ever remember with glee the most modern communication equipment he managed to procure free from the Norwegian Government and got delivered to the North duty free, thus enhancing the military capabilities of the world's most dangerous terrorist organization. Another very important contribution he made to world peace in giving the LTTE world recognition on par with an independent state will never be forgotten by the grateful Sri Lankans.

The modern day Kirihami of Sri Lankan politics will live on in the memory of all the islanders thanks to one of its illustrious scholars who perhaps had a mysterious premonition that even after his own death the country he loved so much would produce an extraordinary man destined to immortalize the comic character he created for the joy and enlightenment of our children.

Long live our modern day Kirihami!

