

D.R. Wijewardene: Newspaper magnate of Sri Lanka



D.R.'s parents: Muhandiram D.P. Wijewardene and Helena Wijewardene

■ **1886 February 23:** Born in Sedawatta, Wellampitiya to **Muhandiram Tudugala Don Philip Wijewardene** (a timber merchant of Sedawatta) and **Helena Weerasinghe** of Waragoda, Kelaniya. His father passed away when **Don Richard Wijewardene** was very young and he was raised by his mother.

He received his primary education at the **Sedawatta school** and his secondary education at **S.Thomas' College**, Mutwal.



D.R. Wijewardene when he was practising at the Bar

■ **1912:** Proceeded to England to join **Cambridge University**. He obtained his BA and LLB and returned to the motherland, having qualified as a Barrister-at Law of the **Inner Temple, London** to embark on a legal career.

There, he developed his interest in politics and met famous personalities such as leaders of India like **Lala Lajpat Rai, Bepin Chandra Pal, Surendranath Banerji** and **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**.



■ **1914:** The idea of starting a newspaper company was proposed to Wijewardene by an Englishman - F.A.M. Cobert, a respected lawyer. D.R. (as he was popularly called) took steps towards building his newspaper industry, by acquiring the Sinhala language daily **Dinamina**, together with his brother D.C. Wijewardene, a newspaper pioneered by journalist H.S. Perera.

Don Richard Wijewardene (1886-1950), the great newspaper personality was the Founder Chairman of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited (ANCL), popularly known as Lake House, the largest newspaper group in the country. It publishes major English, Sinhala and Tamil daily and weekly newspapers. D.R. Wijewardene made his formal entry into politics in 1931 when he was elected Secretary of the Ceylon National Association. He agitated for self-rule and was an active collaborator in the fight for Sri Lanka's Independence from British rule. His 138th birth anniversary falls on February 23, 2024.

■ **1915:** D.R. Wijewardene married **Ruby Meedeniya**, second daughter of **John Henry Meedeniya**, a Rate Mahattaya. D.R. had two sons and three daughters. One of his grandsons **Ranil Wickremesinghe** is a politician and the present Executive President of Sri Lanka.



The portrait of D.R. Wijewardene

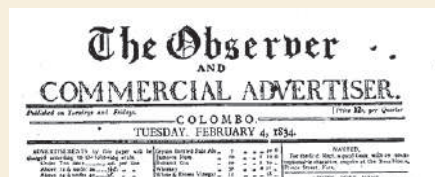
The wedding photograph of D.R. Wijewardene and his bride Ruby Meedeniya

■ **1915:** D.R. Wijewardene became a Lieutenant in the **Ceylon Light Infantry** when the Sinhala and Muslim riots broke out.

■ **1917:** D.R. became a joint Secretary of the **Ceylon Reform League** with E. W. Perera.

■ **1917:** He bought an English paper, The **Ceylonese** newspaper and relaunched it as **Ceylon Daily News** (CDN). The first issue of the **Daily News** on January 3, 1918, contained a special message from **Sri Ponnambalam Arunachalam**, one of his close friends. The centenary of the **Ceylon Daily News** was celebrated in 2018.

■ **1923:** D.R. acquired **The Observer and Commercial Advertiser** (which made its first appearance on February 4, 1834) from a European Company.



■ **1930:** The **Silumina**, The Sunday Sinhala weekly, was launched.

Source: 'The life and times of D.R. Wijewardene' Graphic: Mahil Wijesinghe



The Associate Newspapers of Ceylon Limited, ANCL (Lake House)

■ **1926:** He formed a new Company, the **Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited (ANCL)**. These newspapers where consolidated under the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited (ANCL) which published seven newspapers **Dinamina, Silumina** (Sinhala), **Daily News, The Observer, Sunday Observer** (English), **Thinakaran** and **Sunday Thinakaran** (Tamil). The rival newspaper group at the time, the **Times of Ceylon** which catered to the interest of British planters and other foreigners, did not reflect the national thinking of an era where all patriotic Sri Lankans were agitating or working towards achieving Freedom. He also owned an annual publication - **Fergusons Ceylon Directory**.



In addition to these newspapers, several weekly periodicals are also published by ANCL. Today, it is the oldest newspaper publishing group in Sri Lanka.



D.R. Wijewardene and his wife Ruby with two of their grandchildren

■ **June 13, 1950:** D.R. Wijewardene passed away two years after realising his cherished dream of freedom for the nation and becoming the press magnate of Sri Lanka.