

Former High Commissioner for Sri Lanka to India, Mr. Chrysantha Romesh Jayasinghe, who until recently held the post of Foreign Secretary of Sri Lanka, passed away in Colombo, on 8 August 2011, following a brief illness.

High Commissioner Prasad Kariyawasam, joined by members of the High Commission staff and their families, organised a Thanksgiving Service in remembrance of the late Mr. Jayasinghe on 12 August at the Cathedral Church of the Redemption in New Delhi. A number of Heads of Diplomatic Missions in New Delhi and Senior Officials of India as well as friends of Mr. Jayasinghe attended the service. The Service of Thanksgiving included the hymns 'Blessed Assurance' and 'Abide with Me', congregational song 'Amazing Grace' and a Tribute to the late Mr. C.R. Jayasinghe by High Commissioner Prasad Kariyawasam.

The text of the Tribute by High Commissioner Prasad Kariyawasam to the late Mr. C.R. Jayasinghe:

We are gathered here today, joined by grief and the sense of loss that we share and our deep affection and respect for Chrysantha Romesh Jayasinghe. All of us here knew him and had our own special links with him. For me, Romesh, as we affectionately called him, was a batch mate and a colleague in the Foreign Service that we joined together in 1981, and above all, a friend.

Romesh, "CR" to his friends in school or "CRJ" to some of his colleagues in the Service, the three letters that he used to pen in his beautiful handwriting as his initials, was born on 5th August 1955, in Colombo. His father, W.T. Jayasinghe, was an illustrious civil servant who went on to serve as Secretary of the Ministry of Defence and Foreign Affairs as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which was created later. Romesh's mother, Brenda Jayasinghe, was a public servant and Vice Principal of a leading private school for girls, in Colombo.

Romesh had his primary and secondary education at St. Thomas' College Mount Lavinia, a premier private school in Sri Lanka that produced most leaders and senior bureaucrats of early post-independent Sri Lanka. Romesh was a brilliant student, not only due to his family background that imbibed in him a knack for constantly seeking knowledge and education, but also due to his own intellectual prowess which was amply manifested during his professional

career spanning 30 years.

Having graduated from the University of Colombo with an English Honours Degree, Romesh worked briefly in the private sector before joining the Sri Lanka Foreign Service in 1981. He was placed first in that intake of ten to which I belong as well. The two of us formed a friendship on the basis of our common interests and common friends which lasted until his death. Through the long, vivid, and at times stressful paths in our professional careers, Romesh and I found solace in being able to discuss and share our thoughts and views on issues. Not always did we agree, but our discussions enabled us to sift out the grain from the chaff, and come to terms, or find practical solutions, to problems and issues even when we were oceans apart and serving in different locations.

Our initial years together in the Foreign Service made an indelible mark on my mind of Romesh's character and style. If I may borrow the words of Rudyard Kipling, Romesh was 'a man who could walk with kings without losing the common touch'. Although Romesh hailed from a privileged family and had his schooling in one of the most prestigious schools in the country, he was always humble and simple. He was never a man of ostentation and never sought the limelight. In a theatre of large and competing egos, Romesh remained true to the ethics of public service. Comforts and privileges sat lightly on him. Authority that came his way easily was never used as an instrument to trample upon the not so fortunate but as a tool to help within means that he perceived as administratively feasible and fair. He did not hesitate to take decisions that were to his mind, fair and reasonable. He never displayed signs of insecurity. He respected all who came his way, and greeted everyone with a smile, irrespective of the stresses and strains of office that he bore. Calm and unruffled, he never raised his voice even under the most trying circumstances. To the young Foreign Service officers who joined, he was a mentor, yet, he treated all as equals, never hesitating to take on board the views of another. Meticulous and always well organised, his minutes and reports were precise and concise.

In his long career in the Foreign Service since 1981, Romesh Jayasinghe served in many capacities in the Ministry, and at our Missions in Bonn, Geneva, Dhaka, Brussels and New Delhi. He spent seven years of his life here in New Delhi, which is considered to be the most important post for an officer in the Sri Lanka Foreign Service. He served at first as Deputy High Commissioner from 1995 to 1998 and later as High Commissioner for Sri Lanka to India from September 2005 to October 2009.

The crowning glory of his career was his appointment as the Foreign Secretary of Sri Lanka in October 2009, a post which he held until recently. His appointment as Foreign Secretary was an unprecedented co-incidence since his father, the late Mr. W. T. Jayasinghe, held the same

post for long years.

In fact when Romesh joined the Foreign Service in 1981 through the competitive public exam, his father was the Foreign Secretary. Yet, I recall vividly, that he did not allow the fact that his father was Foreign Secretary, to affect him. He never attempted to seek any privileges which would have come his way easily if he had displayed even the slightest interest. This simplicity and unassuming nature that I observed initially in Romesh, remained with him right throughout his career as he climbed the rungs of the Foreign Service ladder. When he became the Foreign Secretary, he chose to sit in the front seat of the official car along with his driver rather than travelling in the back seat which is considered the traditional seat for a senior official in the Sri Lankan Administrative system.

As a Foreign Service professional, he was par excellence. His linguistic skills were in full display in his work both in office and in other activities expected of a Foreign Service professional. He was kind and concerned of the welfare of fellow and subordinate officers at all times. He did not allow himself to be guided by the hours of the clock when it came to Service. No matter how many meetings he had to attend, he would still find the time to clear the mountains of papers that would accumulate in his in-tray at the end of the day, often working until very late in office. He was a man of impeccable integrity in his conduct both in office and in private life.

Romesh was a loving husband to Shalini and a devoted father to his two children, Suhit and Sumudu. Given that his professional career placed much demands on him, he still spent as much time and energy as he could afford, for the welfare of his two children. I recall how fondly he used to speak of his children and his hopes and aspirations for them. Romesh was proud of his sister Neloufer, a well known and academically brilliant Professor of English.

Romesh was born a Christian and remained so. He was a good and responsible Christian. Yet, he had deep respect for other faiths and would often try to draw from other religious philosophies. My colleagues in the Service and I recall his fondness for seeking quotes from the Buddhist scriptures to emphasise points in speeches that we would draft. Romesh was the personification of an ideal Sri Lankan, liberal, tolerant, sociable and friendly.

Romesh's departure from amongst us was too soon, too sudden, and even unfair. His untimely death leaves an irreparable void not only for his family, but for those who came to know him closely and were drawn close to him, as a result of his warmth, camaraderie and intellectual excellence. For the Sri Lanka Foreign Service, his passing is a monumental loss.

Today, we, together mourn his passing. It is us who are left behind that will feel the emptiness. It is us who will have to bear the brunt of loss. It is us who will be diminished for not having his benign presence to sooth and calm our nerves in times of travail. While we pray for his departed soul we can be confident that Romesh has found a place in heaven, according to his faith.

For us, his passing is a reminder that we cannot know for certain how long we have here. We cannot foresee the trials or misfortunes that will test us along the way. What we can do is to live our lives as best we can with purpose, with love, and joy. We can use each day to show those who are closest to us how much we care about them, and try to treat others with the kindness and respect that we wish for ourselves. We can learn from our mistakes and grow from our failures. We can strive to make a difference each day so that our fleeting presence in this world would have a lasting impact on the lives of others.

Dear Romesh, on behalf of all who are present here and on behalf of my family, I wish you good-bye. We will miss you.

High Commission for Sri Lanka to India
New Delhi
13 August 2011

