

# The National Flag of Sri Lanka



The National Flag of Sri Lanka has been designed with great care and purpose. It not only represents the country and her heritage, but is a rallying device that integrates the minority races with the majority race.

The present day National Flag is an improvisation of the civil standard of the last king of Sri Lanka, Sri Wickrama Rajasingha. The civil standard had a passant royal lion with a sword in it's right fore paw at the center, and a bo-leaf on each of the four corners on a plain border.

The lion flag lost it's significance after the British conquered Sri Lanka in 1815. It was the Union Jack which was hoisted in its place.

When Sri Lanka gained her independence from Great Britain on February 04, 1948, it was the lion flag (the same as the standard of the last king of Sri Lanka) which was hoisted once again.

The first Prime Minister of independent Sri Lanka, D.S.Senanayake, appointed a committee to advise the government on the design of a new national flag. The design approved by the committee in February 1950 retained the symbol of the lion with the sword and the bo-leaves from the civil standard of the last king of Sri Lanka, with the inclusion of two verticle stripes green and orange in color. the significance of each symbol of the national flag is as follows:

- The lion in the flag represents the Sinhala race.
- The sword of the lion represents the sovereignty of the country.
- The noble eight fold path of Buddhism is signified by the lion's tail.
- Curly hair on the lion's head indicates religious observance, wisdom and meditation.
- The beard denotes purity of words.
- The handle of the sword highlights the elements of water, fire, air and earth.
- The nose indicates intelligence.
- The two front paws purport to purity in handling wealth.
- The verticle stripe of orange represent the minority Tamil race and the green verticle stripe the minority Muslim race.
- The four virtues of kindness: KINDNESS, FRIENDLINESS, HAPPINESS, EQUANIMITY are also represented in the flag.
- The border round the flag, which is yellow in color, represents other minor races.

- The bo-leaves at the four corners of the flag represent Buddhism and its influence on the nation. They also stand for the four virtues - Kindness, Friendliness, Happiness and Equanimity.
- The maroon colored portion of the flag manifests the other minor religions.

The national flag was hoisted for the first time on March 3, 1950.

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From Flags by Carol P. Shaw, Running Press Gem, 1994:

"The design of this flag has evolved gradually in an attempt to achieve national unity since the country, then known as Ceylon, gained its independence from Britain in 1948. Originally, the flag's central emblem was a gold lion and sword on a red field, derived from the flag of the Sinhalese kingdom of Kandy. As a consequence, it was not popular with the minority groups in the country, and so was amended in 1951 to include a green and orange band, to represent the Muslim and Tamil communities respectively. Finally, when the country adopted the local name of Sri Lanka in 1972, the flag was modified once more, with four leaves of the pipul tree, a Buddhist symbol, added to the four corners of the dark red panel. This version of the flag was in official use from 1978."

In 1972 the leaves replaced "finials" that were previously located in the corners. In 1978 the leaves were made more "natural".

Nick Artimovich, 2 October 1996

"The necessity of a National Flag was discussed even before Sri Lanka gained independence on February 4th, 1948. Mr. A. Sinnalebbe, MP for Batticaloa tabled a motion in the State Council on January 16th, 1948 suggesting that the Lion Flag of King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe which was taken to Britain in 1815 should be the National Flag. This was debated and later Prime Minister Rt. Hon. D.S. Senanayake named an Advisory Committee for the formulation of a National Flag. The Members of the Committee were Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (Chairmen), Sir John Kotalawela, Mr. J.R. Jayewardene, Mr. T.B. Jayah, Dr. L.A. Rajapakse, Mr. G.G. Ponnambalam and Senator S. Nadesan, and Dr. Senarath Paranavithana (Secretary)."

Although a Committee for the formulation of a national flag was appointed no finality had been reached when the first Independence Day was celebrated on February 4th, 1948. However the Lion Flag fluttered on that day. The Lion Flag and the British Union Jack fluttered on the occasion of the opening of the first Parliament of independent Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) on February 11th, 1948. Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake unfurled the Lion Flag at the Octagon (Pattirippuwa) during the Independence celebrations held in Kandy on February 12th, 1948.

"I have seen two different versions of the flag adopted in February 1948. One is a yellow lion holding a sword in the right hand facing the hoist on a dark red background with four yellow silhouettes of a Buddhist pagoda in four corners with a yellow border and a black thin border inside. The other was exactly the same without the black thin border."

Nozomi Kariyasu, 16 May 2000

"The National Flag recommended by the special committee was presented to Parliament by Mr. D.S. Senanayake on March 2nd, 1951 and adopted. It had two strips, one green and the other yellow. Each of these strips had to be equal to one seventh the size of the flag."

"When Sri Lanka was first made a Republic in 1972 the stylized Bo Leaves depicted in the National Flag were changed to resemble natural Bo leaves. The amended flag was first unfurled at the Republic Day celebrations held on May 22nd, 1972. The National Flag is incorporated in Section 6 Second Schedule of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of

Sri Lanka of September 09th, 1978."

"Except for the new Bo leaves the present flag is the same flag recommended by the National Flag Formulation Committee on March 2nd, 1951."

The Kandy kingdom flag officially hoisted on 4th February 1948 had sinhalese pines in the four corners. On 22nd May 1972 the sinhalese pines were changed to leaves of bo or pipul. On 7th September there was a very small change in the leaves that is very difficult to perceive and a change in the background colour shade.

Jaume Ollé, 27 May 2000

From Smith (1975): "The bo leaves of the sacred pipul tree in the corners are a symbol of the religion of the majority: Gautama is supposed to have received enlightenment, becoming the Buddha after meditation under a pipul tree."

"This would mean that pipul is a tree and bo the name given to the leaves of this specific tree..."

Ivan Sache, 10 October 1999