



# AAUP NewsLetter

News update of the Alumni Association of the University of Peradeniya

March 2010

## Congratulations !



The AAUP conveys heartiest congratulations to newly appointed Vice Chancellor of the University of Peradeniya, Prof. S. B. S. Abayakoon. The AAUP looks forward to cooperating with the Vice Chancellor and working for the development of the University.

## President's Message

### Message from the President of the AAUP Prof. Chandani Perera

The Alumni Association of the University of Peradeniya (AAUP) is an Association for all graduates of the University of Peradeniya. Alumni of the University of Peradeniya should be proud to say to their children and the younger generation that 'I was here at Peradeniya and I am an alumnus of the first Residential University in Sri Lanka'. Even after leaving this lovely university, you can still remain a part of the university by making a lively link through membership in the AAUP. The new AAUP website offers you facilities to get online membership. Take a moment to browse our website at <http://www.pdn.ac.lk/alumni/> to see the ways by which you can get involved in the AAUP activities.

The Chief Guest at the AGM this year is Mr. S. Kumarasinghe, Managing Director, Nature's Beauty Creations Ltd., a distinguished alumnus of the University of Peradeniya while Prof. S. B. S. Abayakoon, Vice-chancellor of the University of Peradeniya and Prof. Gunadasa Amarasekera are the Guests of Honor. We warmly welcome them to the AGM and thank them for gracing this memorable event of AAUP.

The AAUP last year expanded its activities in diverse fields. A number of activities were carried out to help produce quality graduates who were competent to meet the demands in the public and private sectors. These activities also promoted relations between the alumni and the current generation of undergraduates in the university.



The AAUP tried to make close links with the students helping and encouraging their activities.

Our graduates are often equipped with knowledge but not with soft skills necessary to market themselves in this competitive society. The AAUP therefore decided to support our undergraduates by organizing a number of activities to develop their career skills.

A one-day Career Workshop on 'Improving Employability of Graduates' which was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2009 at the Arts Theatre. However the AAUP organizers of the workshop were disappointed that only about 150 undergraduates participated in this inspiring workshop which covered all topics relevant to career aspirations of undergraduates. About forty need-based studentships to undergraduates of the eight Faculties at Peradeniya were awarded last year by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof. A. Wickramasinghe, at an Awarding Ceremony held on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2009 at the Career Guidance Unit, University of Peradeniya.

The AAUP also gives other types of financial support to undergraduates when requests are made. The AAUP intends to organize small evening programs at the Residential Halls to interact with and welcome new undergraduates.

The AAUP now has a spacious office room in the student center of the university. Many of the student welfare activities are held in the AAUP office which is open from Monday to Friday from 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. As President of AAUP I appeal to all alumni of the University of Peradeniya and the Faculty Alumni Associations to join us and work together towards the development of the university.

## Student Welfare Programmes

### **Career Guidance Program "Improving Employability of Graduates"**

A career guidance program was held on June 23, 2009 at the Arts Theatre. Mr. Christus Wickramasekara, Head of Human Resources, Hayleys AIIG addressed the participants on "Finding the right job: tips on CV preparation and facing job interviews with the right attitude"; M. L. Tennekoon, Informatics Institute of Technology, Kandy, spoke on "Tools to enhance career prospects" and Mr. Jude Fernando from Noritake Porcelain Pvt Ltd. explained the "Japanese way of developing competent graduates". The three Resource Persons at this program worked with about 150 undergraduate participants.

### **Training on CV Preparation**

Ms. Lalitha Gunawardena conducted a program to help students at Hilda Obeysekera Hall with CV preparation in October 2009. A group of about 60 students attended the program.

### **Donation of Tape Recorders**

AAUP awarded four Walkman type Cassette Recorders and Battery chargers to the following differently abled students studying in the Special Needs Resource Center of the University of Peradeniya. Mr. Mahinda Senanayake (AAUP Exco Member) graciously donated the money for this purchase.

### **Book Donation by the Colombo Chapter**

The Colombo Chapter has taken steps to donate Text books worth of Rs. 56,000.00 for Needy Students. 14 students have been selected for this project and each student would get Rs.4000.00 to buy books. The books will be offered at the forthcoming AGM.

### **New Studentships**

The following new studentships were established during the last few months thanks to the efforts of the President /AAUP Prof. Chandani Perera.

Adeline Memorial Studentship - Rs. 50,000  
(Donor: Mr. Padmasiri Ranasinghe)

Lionel Rajasekera - Rs. 50,000  
(Donor: Mr. Lionel Rajasekera)

Mrs. Surahie Saldin Scholarship - Rs. 50,000  
(Donor: Cuttilan, Azhari)

Mrs. Nina Cuttilan Scholarship - Rs 50,000  
(Donor: Cuttilan, Azhari)

1977 Batch Studentship - Rs.60,637.00

Kekulawala Gautamadasa Studentship - Rs. 6000  
(Donor: Mr. Kekulawala Gautamadasa)

Gamlath Science Studentship Rs. 50,000  
(Donor: Dr.C.B.Gamlath)

### **Special Studentship**

The AAUP raised funds to award a special studentship to Mr. WYS Ekadeera, a first year student of the Faculty of Arts. The dean/Arts Faculty recommended award of this studentship. Mr. WYS Ekadeera informed University authorities of being subjected to inhuman ragging and was therefore afraid to stay in a hall of residence.

### **Young Alumni Club Ramya Nagaraya**

The young members of the Ramya Nagaraya Club organized a photography exhibition.

## Alumni/Staff Welfare

### **IELTS Program**

Ms. Lalitha Gunawardena voluntarily conducted an IELTS program for about 15 participants at the AAUP Office during Saturdays commencing from July 2009. This programme included 10 class room lessons of 03 hours duration. Most of the participants were medical doctors from the Faculty of Medicine, and the Teaching Hospitals at Peradeniya and Kandy. It is a pleasure to note that Dr Wajira Jayasinghe a Surgeon attached to the Peradeniya Teaching Hospital recorded the highest score at the IELTS test held in October 2009

### **Ladder to Success**

A Career Guidance program for non-academic staff was organized by Ms. Arosha Perera. The two- day workshop was held on September 17-18 2009 and conducted with the assistance of Resource Persons, Prof. H.M.D.R. Herath, Dr Danesh Karynanayake, Dr B.M.K. Perera, Mrs. Lalitha Gunawardena and Dr. Adikari. About 40 Non academic Staff members benefitted from this program.

## Speech at the last AGM

### Speech at the last AGM ( 22-03-2009) of the AAUP by the Chief Guest, Mr. N. G. Wickramaratne, Chairman Hayleys Group Companies

In the message I wish to convey today, and I have a serious message, I would first like to broadly sketch my impressions of Peradeniya and the influence they had on my thinking and work. I recall the atmosphere and ambience of Peradeniya in my first years in the late 60s. I am sure universities in Sri Lanka were always best during the pockets of rule of the more liberal UNP of those times. There was always the space for discussion, often filled by the irresistible stimulus to contest capitalist certainties. You could throw stones and not get shot. The sight of Dudley Senanayake's 1968 Independence day celebrations in Kandy dissolving in a hail of stones as we threw our then mainly Parade- Ground Army out of the Campus must come in contrast to the battle-hardened formations that I hope will bring about a speedy end to the tragic military conflict in the North. Somehow, the arrival in 1970 of the Coalition government saw the discussion becoming stilted as new incumbents - busy donning the trappings of power - were impatient to be reminded of their own recent rhetoric. This was then the context or the counterpoint - or were they the portents of the first JVP rebellion that quixotic tilt of the *galkatas* against a sleeping establishment which, when awoken, with a fright started firing in all directions. And it has yet to stop. I left Peradeniya exactly at this time, 38 years ago, to take up a job at Hayleys in Feb 1971. I have spent all of the time since here in Sri Lanka and at Hayleys and having started as a Management Trainee I have risen to this position. In this time I may have been responsible for recruiting more graduates for management and professional positions than any other that I know. I have hence thought on the substance and quality of university education in some depth. So if nothing else I bring a kind of unique perspective. Hayleys has played a singular role in the post liberalized economic era by focusing on adding value to Industrial and Agricultural production. A large segment of our business is in Manufacturing for global markets using agri-based raw materials available in Sri Lanka which were previously exported as commodities - for instance rubber and coconut products. Hayleys has acquired a reputation for its sustainable business practices in terms of impact on the environment and maintaining high standards of social responsibility and ethical behaviour. For this it has been the recipient of many awards but one that I do consider a great honour was to be invited by the UN Secretary General to the UN's First Private Sector Forum on sustainable development - attended by top CEOs, heads of state and multilateral institutions - on the 24 September 2008, prior to the opening of the General Assembly. However, it could be the work I have done with Dipped Products or DPL which perhaps may merit some of the recognition being accorded to me today. In a period of 30 years I have seen this initial investment of some 2 million rupees grow to a multinational with revenues of Rs 12 billion-

with some 7 production facilities in Sri Lanka and Thailand, a marketing company in Italy and interest in the Plantations. In a country whose industry is two-thirds focused on apparel manufacture, it is one of a handful of industries that uses the scientific and engineering skills available in Sri Lanka and I am very gratified that DPL has employed and retained many chemists, engineers and scientists who may have otherwise left our shores - as I am sure Dr Kumar would testify to - many of them from Peradeniya.

So what did Peradeniya do for me-

Its most significant impact was to bring me into contact with the young people of our country with an intimacy which would not have been possible except in a residential campus.

Getting to know the mainly 'rural' Sinhala undergrads and coming to understand them and their ways was an important experience for me. The Tamils especially the large numbers coming from the great schools of Jaffna were largely better spoken in English and hence more outgoing, but the more conservative of them were no different to the Sinhala student-body. I could not quite place the differences of the Batticaloa Tamils from their Northern brethren being sure there were differences but not knowing what precisely.

I discovered to my delight the surprising sophistication of the boys and girls of the coastal cities from Matara and Galle to Negombo - St Alloysius especially - which produced some of my best Muslim friends - and marveled at the contribution Christian schools had made to education in Sri Lanka. I did however have some challenges in understanding the aggressive 'ragging' culture. Observing the gradations and the nuances of behavior from the quietly simple to the more sophisticated and the academically brilliant made me realize the richness of the social tapestry of our country. My academic experiences at Peradeniya had a very important influence on me. Undoubtedly the Chemistry and Math worked for me, as later I used the knowledge and techniques to develop process technologies new to Sri Lanka at the time.

However, the value of this influence was less on the structured lecture room process - as I usually failed to be inspired by the mindless transmission of notes from lecturer to student. It had more to do with the content and tone of the intellectual interaction. The fact that I spent so little time on my lectures and so much on reading and discussion on all manner of subjects often unconnected with the sciences - would profoundly affect my life and work in the future. Nevertheless I have to admit that there was yet something missing. I tried to reconcile my expectation of the intellectual atmosphere of the

great universities of the world with the experiences at Peradeniya and knew we were probably achieving less than our potential, given the gifts of this magnificent location including the magical gardens and impressive architecture; and above all the intellectual resources of the faculty and student body. There were those flashes of promise as at the Pop Science Gossips, brilliantly moderated by Dr Osmund Jayaratne, which were hugely stimulating for many of us. The interactions with Prof Ashley Halpe at the Music Society and the Dram Soc which allowed space for the pursuit of aesthetic and intellectual interests. The great theatre and dance of Dr Sarathchandra and Chithrasena in the 'wale sellam' which are permanently etched in my memory. And of course, who can forget the great moments in the lecture rooms that eventually became the stuff of university folk lore. The understanding of our interaction with the world in any spectrum of knowledge - from trade and commerce, environment and climate change, health and nutrition, international law, peoples and cultures, or whatever subject from the sciences to the humanities you choose - is a process of discovery and unraveling a web of often confusing threads of information. We are all competing in one way or another to project our ideas and create value. The most efficient pathway which has been available for this is the use of English. It is spoken and used by perhaps one and a half billion people and the internet is accelerating the process. We have been in denial on this point for too long and all the while we lose our advantage. I have been through too many bright young

People who have struggled with the lack of access to English and the confidence to use it, which would have been theirs if we recognized and supported that need. Unfortunately the quality of graduates that I have come across confirms a long-term declining trend. In a world which is becoming increasingly integrated, it is by acquiring skills in language and social intercourse that we can realize the potential of this country and its people. I realized in my first days in this campus that the mindset of the times was out of sync with the developments the world was witnessing for one the European Community was just being formed. I realized that I had competencies my colleagues would have difficulty to master. This was pure intuition nearly four decades ago and my presence here talking to you would sadly suggest that I have not been too much off target.

It is never too late to correct mistakes and our young people deserve this. As a business leader I can tell you that the world is facing in its current financial meltdown cataclysmic changes which will affect everybody, even those in this campus. So the threat is really up close and personal and more so for the young people who look to us for guidance. I would call on this great university to live to its potential by giving leadership where it is likely to have the greatest benefit. After all, as the tablet outside the senate building has silently reminded us over nearly six decades, we were established to be "*more open than usual.*"

## AAUP Chapters

An AAUP chapter was inaugurated in Canberra, New Zealand.

## University Development

### Improvement in Landscaping

Prof SA Kulasuriya, together with Dr DHP Peramunugama proposed a project to improve environmental aspects of the University of Peradeniya. They suggested that the AAUP should undertake a project to replant old trees in the University campus, with the help of the National Botanical Gardens. The Curator, UOP, together with AAUP members submitted a proposal to the VC, on this project. This project has been initiated at the Faculty of Science.

### Art Gallery

The Art Gallery Project is expected to materialize very soon. The Vice Chancellor Prof.S.B.S.Abayakoon announced this at the last meeting of the Board of Trustees for the Art Gallery and Museum. The architectural drawings by Mr. Ashley de Vos will be utilized at the selected venue adjacent to the Jayatilaka Hall. The estimated cost at the current rate would be around Rs. 120 million. Phase 01 of the Project in which a Gallery Room, Souvenir Shop and an Office Room are included will be constructed first.

## University Shramadane

The University organized a Shramadane campaign to clean the university premises in an effort to prevent a Dengue epidemic in April 2009. The AAUP supported this by providing refreshments to those who participated.

## Support for Sport Activities

The AAUP provided financial support to three students who participated in the World University Games and the Asian Football Championship.

These students were,

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1) Mr. MTR Mohamed      | Faculty of Science, Asian Football Championship (China)   |
| 2) Mr. WMPB Wasala      | Faculty of Engineering, World University Games (Belgrade) |
| 3) Miss. T. Weerasekera | Faculty of Agriculture, World University Games (Belgrade) |

## Fund Raising Activity

**Noritake Sale** - A sale of Noritake porcelain ware was organized as an AAUP fund raising activity from 27 to 29 Nov 2009. Mr. Ravi Mulleriyawa and Mr. Tharusha Ekanayke from the AAUP and Mr. Mano Wickremasuriya and Mr. Jude Fernando, Peradeniya alumni from Noritake Porcelain (Pvt) Ltd, helped to coordinate the event. The sale which was held at the Regal Cinema car park in Kandy was a great success.

## Depressive Disorders Amongst the University Students

### Depressive Disorders Amongst the Students of the University of Peradeniya

Psychological or emotional disorders are becoming increasingly common among students of the University of Peradeniya. Their problems are often psychosomatic (emotional stress surfacing as bodily complaints) but also include poor concentration, sleep problems, panic attacks and feelings of isolation, failure, even suicidal thoughts. Many of these students are found to suffer from depression.

Depression amongst university students not only interferes with their performance, achievements and social functioning but is also indicative of a potential risk of depressive disorders later in life. Thus, there is a great need for early detection and provision of suitable assistance to such students.

Detection is aided by awareness and alertness amongst the academics and other support staff. In addition to their general behavior, it has been found that two questions in particular, regarding **persistent** low mood and **persistent** lack of pleasure in life can help detect up to 95% of patients with major depression. Although many contributory causes have been observed, only a few play major roles as causative factors.

During the transition from secondary school to university, many students experience stress due to new academic and social demands. The inability to cope with the transition from a sheltered loving home environment to 'campus life' (where one has to fend for one's self) is made much more traumatic by the horribly hostile, degrading, sometimes violent

treatment meted out to them by the senior students. It often succeeds in destroying their self worth.

During this 'Rag Period' which lasts about a month, many 'freshers' are treated for depressive episodes. Though the majority recovers with time, a significant number are emotionally scarred for life. Some who find themselves handicapped by their poor knowledge of English become deeply depressed, even suicidal.

Relationship problems and conflicts with lovers, family, friends and room mates as well as personal losses too play a major role. Although many supportive measures are already available in the university system, a few useful suggestions are worthy of mention.

- More awareness and alertness amongst academics, support staff and students with talks, brochures, etc about simple facts regarding mental ill health and about the support currently available.
- Firm steps towards abolition of the 'Rag'
- Effective and timely assistance to cope with the stress associated with the initial 'transitional' period.
- Easy access to voluntary student counselors who have had a basic training in counseling.
- A 24 hour emergency "help line"
- Greater emphasis on teaching of English at university and pre university levels
- Provision of better living conditions

## Farewell Lunch to the former Vice-Chancellor

The AAUP Exco members hosted a Farewell lunch to the former Vice Chancellor, Prof. H. Abeygunawardena and his wife Dr.I. Abeygunawardena. The lunch was held on 9<sup>th</sup> August at the Hotel Hilltop, Kandy.

## AAUP Trip to Kalpitiya

### Trip to Kalpitiya

The young, the not so young, the old and the not so old ---forty of us went on a trip to Kalpitiya on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January and returned the next day. We left from the Science Faculty at 8.30 a.m. and on the way stopped at Panduvasnuwara to see the ruins of a 13<sup>th</sup> century civilization. We passed the Muneswaran temple and stopped at a beach in Chilaw for lunch. We left for Kalpitiya after that, passing the famous Talawila church on the way. We arrived at Tanya Hotel around 3.30 PM for tea. After exploring the environment, which was interesting because it was so different from what we were used to, we left for the beach. The children enjoyed themselves playing in the sand and getting wet all over. Then it was dinner with seafood delicacies and back to the Hotel for the night.

We were up by 5 a.m. and were taken by bus to the beach where boats were arranged for us to go to view the dolphins. We were all given life jackets and after an OK signal from a Navy cadre who seemed to be in charge, we set out in 6 boats into the open sea. The bouncing of the boats on the choppy sea was exciting and at the same time scary at first. Passengers on all 6 boats kept in touch through mobile phones !!! About ten miles into the sea we saw around hundred dolphins frolicking around, some curving up and leaping into the air as we have seen in pictures.

It was a beautiful sight with an orange sun casting its glow on the rippling water. We also saw large whales with part of their fins and tails sticking out of the water again like the pictures we have seen. There was a lot of activity among them I had an uneasy feeling that they were panicking because of our sudden presence in their tranquil surroundings in noisy fuel smelling motor boats. If this spot is to become a tourist attraction it should be planned in such a way that man's intrusion into dolphin/whale territory will not in any way disturb or distress them.

After this memorable trip we returned to the Hotel and checked out after tea. We visited the Dutch Fort in Kalpitiya. There is a Navy contingent based there. We were taken on a tour round the fort and its special features were explained to us. Some of us went to a market close by to buy dried fish which Kalpitiya is famous for. We had lunch on the way and started our journey back. Everybody was in a happy mood and by then we had all got to know each other. Young and old joined in the singing till we returned to Kandy at 7 PM.

Seeing dolphins and whales in their natural habitat was indeed a memorable experience. Our thanks go out to the organizers for making this possible.

Pat Jayatileke

### Kalpitiya Trip



A group Photograph



Site scenery at Panduwasnuwara

## Executive Committee of the AAUP- 2009/10

**President:** Prof. Chandani Perera, **Immediate Past President:** Prof. Savitri Kumar, **General Secretary:** Ms .Asoka Dissanayake, **Treasurer:** Dr. Swarna Wimal Siri, **Vice Presidents:** Dr. Anura Kariyawasam, Ms Arosha Perera, Mr. Ravi Mulleriyawa, Dr. Anura Danthanarayana, Prof. S.A.Kulaooriya, **Editor:** Dr Thushari Hewapathirana, **Asst. Secretaries:** Ms. Hema Gamage, Ms. Lalitha Gunwardena, **Asst. Treasurer:** Mr. R.M.P.B. Ratnayake, **Committee Members:** Prof. S Illanganthilake, Mr. Mahinda Senanayake, Mr. M.B. Adikaram, Mrs. Vagdevi Fernando, Dr.A.R. Ariyaratna, Mr Tharusha Ekanayake, Dr Malini Epa, Ms. Thamara Ekanayake, Dr.S.S.S.de S. Jagoda, Dr. D.H.P. Peramunugama, Dr Piyasiri Ekanayake, Mr. D.M Jayawardena, Mr Ashwin Wickramasooriya

## AAUP Activities



Fund Raising Activity: Noritake Sale



Ladder To Success- Prof. Anura Wickramasinghe, former Deputy Vice Chancellor awarding certificates



Fund Raising Activity: Bring and Buy Sale



Ladder To Success -Dr B.M.K.Perera addressing the Participants



Prof. Anura Wickramasinghe, former Deputy Vice Chancellor awarding studentships



Prof. H. Abeygunawardena, former Vice Chancellor drawing the raffle at the Fellowship Lunch 2009



Mr. N.G. Wickramaratne/Chairman: Hayleys Group of Companies Chief Guest at the AGM 2009



At the Vice Chancellor's Lodge - Fellowship Lunch 2009



Donating Tape Recorders to the Student Resource Centre



Mr. N.B. Adikaram welcomes the members of the EXCO meeting held at the Nation Builders Association, Kundasale



Environmental Project: A group of students numbering the trees

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