

A half century celebration -part 2

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(Continued from 11/05/2000)

Professors Mahalingam and Jayasekera have unique record. They have seen it all, they were there as young lecturers at the inception and they are there today, monuments to dedication and commitment.

This writer's next brief encounter with the Faculty was in 1963, as a lecturer for a few years. This time round the Faculty was near bursting, the intake had increased considerably but the space remained the same. Prof. Pereira continued as Dean, in the same room, and still with the pipe in his mouth. But now his room was full of books and unopened boxes with equipment,

and Prof. Pereira was stepping over them to get to his seat. While new equipment cluttered and lay all over the place in Colombo, the brand new Faculty building at Peradeniya stood complete and empty. There was a big feud on between Prof. Pereira and that eminent gynaecologist, politician, tactician Vice-Chancellor, Sir Nicholas Attygalle, Sir Nicholas, in his usual autocratic manner, had given the bungalows built for the faculty staff at Peradeniya to others, and Prof. Pereira, equally stubborn, was refusing to budge until what was rightfully his was fully restored. In this battle of giants, a few of us little ones, impatient to move on, thought that we should act as facilitators or was it as mediators? With some apprehension we approached Sir Nicholas, who

agreed to release some bungalows immediately and assured that the others would be released when we started moving. He wanted us to supervise the construction of other buildings which we readily agreed to. We conveyed all this to Prof. Pereira, who very reluctantly agreed. So one day not long after, we loaded some equipment into a lorry, transported and unloaded them into the empty buildings at Peradeniya. With that initial tentative move, the shift to Peradeniya started in earnest and soon gained momentum.

Today, the buildings and well-equipped laboratories at Peradeniya stand testimony to the efforts of those great pioneers and their successors of today. The faculty staff have organised several events to cel-

ebate this fiftieth anniversary. One venture, The Engineering Centre Project, initiated jointly with the Alumni Association needs special mention.

This project is primarily for the benefit of children, particularly rural children, to provide them with an opportunity for a hands-on experience of modern science and engineering. Previous attempts of this nature have not met with success due to lack of funds.

Those who have seen children enjoying and learning from such facilities abroad, can only feel saddened that our children are deprived of this exciting introduction to the world of technology. Projects such as these have received low priority for state funds and grants. Boggled down by day to day problems and

crisis we seem to have lost vision for the future. Hopefully, this project will receive the attention that it deserves and will succeed.

What will the Faculty be like fifty years from now, in the mid twenty-first century when it celebrates its centenary? Will lecturers be replaced by robots answering questions more intelligently than their predecessors? Will students unable to cope with the explosion of knowledge and information need to have chips implanted to supplement their brains? And what of us who there when it started? Will be by some space time warp be brought back to be made into more efficient engineers than on the previous occasion? We will just have to wait and see.

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