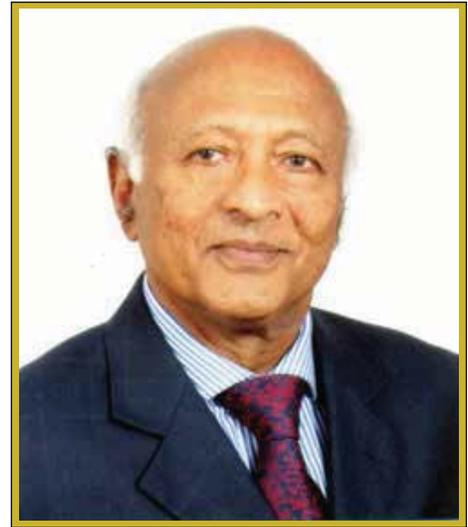


A T Fonseka

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PIM: MY SECOND HOME

Background

It was a bright morning in the year 2006. All of us at the PIM, academic and administrative staff, were instructed to assemble in the lecture hall 'Vision' for an address by the Director, Prof. Gunapala Nanayakkara. He was accompanied by Mr. Mahinda Abeywardene, former Registrar of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Prof. Nanayakkara announced that the purpose of the meeting was to remind all of us of the many obstacles and challenges he had to face in order to build the Institute.

The PIM's origin can be traced to the Division of Postgraduate studies set up around 1980 by Prof. Nanayakkara at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Due to undergraduate politics often interrupting academic work, Prof. Nanayakkara had tried to convince the Vice-Chancellor of the need to locate his Division out-

side the main campus. The proposition was not acceptable to the VC. Then, on a single night at the end of December 1985, a truck had been organized, furniture items loaded and the Unit was moved to a small portion of a hotel in the interior of Dehiwela. The operation was carried out by him single-handed, in less than twenty four hours. The move incurred the extreme displeasure of the VC and all other staff in the University but their feelings did not bother him in the least. Relationships between the PIM and the parent University were never very pleasant. This was the genesis of the Institute which was conferred postgraduate status in the year 1986.

My Association with the PIM

Within a few months I will be completing 30 years of continuous ser-

vice at the PIM which I consider as my second home. A substantial part of my early career i.e. 20 years was spent in another organization (the Police Force) which had little to do with the academic world. Entering the academia was a major transition in my life. During my tenure at the PIM, there have been six Directors with the founder Director Prof. Nanayakkara being at the helm for over 20 years, from 1986 to September 2007. During two brief spells when he was on sabbatical leave (1988-89 and 2000-01), the PIM had acting Directors who were merely expected to 'hold fort' without resorting to any drastic changes to the existing set up. I can consider myself as the longest serving and 'surviving' academic at the PIM. The word 'surviving' is used deliberately because under Prof. Nanayakkara those who did not subscribe to his work ethic and work values were to find out that "life could be... nasty, brutish



and short” (to borrow an expression from Hobbes’ Leviathan). Non-performing consultants were simply shown the door. This applied to non-academic staff as well. Those who did not toe the line were banished to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the Vice – Chancellor would accept these hapless individuals to his fold. The Director had his way with Ministers in charge of Education and Higher Education such as Hon. W.J.M. Lokubandara and Hon. Richard Pathirana, the UGC Authorities, and PIM’s Board members.

As Vice Chairman, UGC in 2007, Prof. Nanayakkara was instructing the UGC Chairman on what he should do for higher education in the country. At the time of the Tsunami tragedy (26 Dec. 2004), being a Board member of the Peoples’ bank, he even tried to teach the Bank’s Directorate how they should disburse bank loans. Outside observers often commented that this guy, Tilak, qualifies to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his peaceful co-existence with Prof. Nanayakkara.

Going back to the Tsunami tragedy, Prof. Nanayakkara was faulted by the Audit for involving the PIM in relief and rehabilitation measures for the displaced on grounds that it was outside the scope of work of a university institution. Prof. Nanayakkara’s reply, as expected, was swift and blunt to wit: Had the PIM not intervened to provide relief in the face of government’s gross inaction, more would have perished than the numbers washed away by the Tsunami waves. There was no further correspondence on this matter.

Early years at the PIM

Having been in the police force for two decades, a regimented organization, I had certain qualities and attributes ingrained in me when I joined the PIM. I had a serious attitude to life and work, a rigid adherence to regulations with emphasis on strict discipline and punctuality, a strong control mentality, maintaining some distance in personal relationships and a meticulous attention

to detail because invariably police work got tied up with court work.

I joined the PIM in September 1987 on the invitation of Prof. Nanayakkara. I had a varied academic background with a B.A. (Econ), an LL.B. and an MBA (Merit), besides being an Attorney-at-Law and having also reached the final stage of CIMA. I joined the PIM as the Coordinator of the MBA programme on a salary of Rs.9,100 per month which was attractive, because as a high ranking police officer my salary was barely half of that. They say that “policemen have deep pockets”.

Anyway, the decision to leave an organization where the highest position is given based on one’s political leanings was not tough when weighed against the contracted salary, a more sedate job and my love for academic work. I completed my Ph. D. in 1996, and after that I climbed down the academic ladder to complete an M.A. in Economics at the University of Colombo, in the year 2000.

The PIM was located in Dehiwela from 1986- 1995 before we shifted to our own building in Borella, in January 1996. Prof. Nanayakkara spent many hours with architects and engineers of the Nawaloka Construction company in planning the layout of the building, the outcome of which is the magnificent edifice that we have in Borella. All staff, academic and non-academic, were provided a clean work environment and comfortable office space. Janitorial services were outsourced to a specialized agency. This was in stark contrast to the set up I encountered at our parent university, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, where I conducted lectures in Economics and Management for Accountancy undergraduates in 1992 and 1993. Taking the first lecture in the morning, I found stray dogs roaming in the classroom and one invariably sleeping under the lecturer's table, in addition to the dust-laden furniture.

When I joined the PIM in 1987, the only in-house academics were Prof. Nanayakkara and myself. Mr. (later Prof.) Sudatta Ranasinghe joined the Institute exactly a year later as the Coordinator of the MPA programme. After another year Mr. (later Prof.) Mangala Fonseka joined the PIM. We came from outside organizations and were admitted to the PIM as consultants. We were then absorbed into the permanent cadre of the University as Senior Lecturers, Grade 1 with effect from 1st January 1992. The decision was unfair because I had joined the PIM a year or two before my colleagues but it went unnoticed because it did not occur to me then that this was to have a bearing on both seniority and the entitlement to sabbatical leave. It is with sadness that I record the untimely death of my colleague Prof. Sudatta Ranasinghe, an unassuming gentleman and a fine academic, who died of cancer on 10th May 2013. He underwent immense suffering for a

long period but bore it up with great courage. His wife Chitra had predeceased him.

Early years at the PIM were quite demanding, a 60- hour working week (9 a.m. - 9 p.m. x 5 days) being the norm, although the letter of appointment specified a 40- hour week. As there were very few lecturers, I taught several courses such as Economics, Multinational Enterprise, Research Methods, Organizational Behaviour, Marketing (for MPAs) besides a heavy load of research supervision. On evenings that I was not engaged in lectures, I sat through the sessions taken by visiting lecturers on IT, Operations Management, and Quantitative Methods, in order to acquire knowledge. In addition, from 1988-2000, I was lecturing 14 hours every week- end at commercial Institutes, guiding students for professional examinations such as CIMA (UK), CIM (UK), AIB (SL), and the PG Diploma in Business & Financial Administra-



tion at the ICASL. Prof. Nanayakkara's work schedule was as exacting, aggravated partly by his innate dislike to delegate responsibility. It was from these small beginnings that Prof. Nanayakkara built the Institute and had the courage to make it the only self-financing Postgraduate Institute in the entire state university system as from 1st January 1998.

On his initiative, education centres were set up in Dubai and Qatar in 2008 and he functioned as the Director, the PIM's International Division. It was ironical that the Institute which he built with great dedication was made 'out of bounds' for him after 2011 for alleged financial misappropriation that had taken place in the Dubai centre.

Working Environment at the PIM and Managing Relationships

Managing inter-personal relationships with tact and understanding is one of the foremost attributes that one should have to get on in life, a quality which could never be compensated by any number of paper qualifications that one might possess. For what I have achieved, I am immensely grateful to my wife who took full responsibility for managing the household.

During my tenure at the PIM I have served under six Directors. My relationships with all of them and with other faculty members and staff have been most cordial. The PIM offers a clean and pleasant work environment where faculty members pursue their academic work sans professional jealousies and 'backbiting'. For this reason, I have turned down requests that came my way from other universities to join their faculty. We are serious about our

work, the conduct of lectures on time (5.30 p.m.) and adherence to deadlines. In fact, in 1998 Prof. Nanayakkara got a minor employee named Austin to lock the lecture room door at 5.35 p.m. to prevent the IT lecturer (a habitual latecomer) from entering the classroom and the lecture was cancelled. On 9th Feb 2006, on the afternoon when my own sister was cremated, I still went ahead with my evening lecture for the MBA (HRM) class. My contemporary at the Peradeniya University, the most amiable Mr. Kalyanaratne, was a student following the MHR programme. I was faulted by both Prof. Nanayakkara and Dr. Travis Perera for conducting the class when it was one of the closest family members who was cremated that afternoon.

I have already written about my guru Prof. Nanayakkara. During two brief periods when he availed of his sabbatical leave, the Institute had Acting Directors. The first was Dr. Kamalgoda (1988-89), who should be given credit for keeping the Institute in continuous operation during the JVP insurrection. All campuses were shut down indefinitely and even the Open University was closed. A tribute must also be paid to him for 'discovering' a piece of prime land in Borella, an abandoned bakery site of the Department of Marketing, which was to be the future location for the PIM. Dr. Basil Perera acted as Director from 2001-02. The directive issued to him was to maintain the status quo and being a highly regulations-oriented person the role suited him well. Prof. Uditha Liyanage, who was enrolled as an MBA student in 1988 when I was the MBA coordinator, served as the PIM's Director from Sept. 2007- Sept. 2013. He was one who matured fast and truly blossomed when he served on the Directorate of several leading companies in the country helping them in their

strategizing exercises. Towards the end of his term as Director he fell ill and succumbed to his illness on 11 August 2015. A Commemoration booklet has been published in his memory but let me add that he was able to get the whole-hearted cooperation of all employees at the PIM, both academic and non-academic, without uttering a single harsh or unkind word. He endeared himself to all who came to know him. He did much to enhance the image of the Institute and passed away when he still had much more to give. Prof. Mangala Fonseka served as Director, PIM for a brief period in 2014. An excellent teacher of Accountancy and Quantitative Techniques, his contribution to the PIM was to systematise regulations. Prof. Ajantha Dharmasiri was appointed to the post of Director in 2015 and is striving valiantly to enhance the image of the Institute, and make it a centre for management excellence in South Asia.

During my tenure at the PIM, I was fortunate to be chosen to present papers at the ITC/ UNCTAD sponsored seminars held in 1988 and 1989 in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Pakistan. I also undertook educational visits to the Indian Institute of Public Administration in Hyderabad, the T.A. PAI Management Institute in Manipal, the IIMs in Bangalore and Ahmedabad, and the Victoria University. Whilst on sabbatical leave, I served as a lecturer and coordinator of link programmes with the Southern Cross University, NSW, for the Bachelor's degree and the Deakin University, Melbourne, for the MBA programme. What I keep uppermost in my mind on these foreign visits is the thought that we are in a sense going as ambassadors of the country besides always remembering to keep the PIM flag flying high.

Research at the PIM

Research is an important activity at the PIM. In the past, every MBA student had to prepare a research paper in order to complete the degree. In the face of low completion rates and the heavy burden of supervision, the issue that came up for discussion at a faculty meeting held in 1990 was whether we should dispense with the research requirement for MBA students, as done by many foreign universities. Except for myself, everyone in attendance including Prof. Nanayakkara and Mr. Sudatta Ranasighe, was in favour of this move. I vehemently opposed it saying that we are extremely clever at teaching Western management and Japanese management but could not enlighten our students on the way our own organizations are managed. As this issue could not be easily resolved, it was decided to take up this item later. At the next faculty meeting my stand remained unchanged. However, a via media was reached whereby those who were keen on research were allowed to proceed with their projects while the others (which turned out to be the majority) could take the option of preparing a Term

Paper and sitting for two comprehensive exams. This was duly implemented, but due to the dilution that occurred, we soon reverted to the earlier scheme. This was indeed fortunate as it enabled us to organize two Management Conferences in the early 1990s and publish the Sri Lankan Journal of Management continuously from January 1996 (with myself acting as the Editor from Jan. 1996 to Dec.2002). Prof. Nanayakkara thanked me for taking a strong and unwavering stand on the research issue.

In retrospect, one could reflect on what the Institute's future would have been had we dispensed with the research requirement when the prime objective of a University, and a Postgraduate Institute in particular, is not merely to disseminate existing knowledge but also to create new knowledge. The strong focus on research is the basis of our competitive advantage and what distinguishes us from other institutions conducting MBA programmes. The PIM would not have made much progress had we dispensed with the research component altogether. The PIM is the only ISO- certified higher edu-

cation institute in the country, and is striving to obtain the very prestigious AACSB accreditation. The PIM has entered into collaborative arrangements with several Universities, both local and foreign, and is on the path to realising its vision.

At the Crossroads

Within the space of a few months I would be completing 30 years of continuous service at the PIM. When I retired in October 2006 on reaching the age of 65 years which is the mandatory age of retirement for academics, many MBA students unaware of the university regulation asked me why I was leaving. Ten more years have passed since then and I am still at the PIM in a visiting capacity with a fair workload thanks to the appreciation of my services by successive Directors and good student assessments. The decision before me right now is whether I should quit or remain to face the embarrassing question: "Sir, why aren't you leaving?"

