

## Address by Eng. R J Gunawardene - President 2007 / 2008



Hon. Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, Prime Minister of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Eng. Lakdas Taldena, outgoing President of the Institution of Engineers, Sri Lanka, Members of the head table, your excellencies, distinguished invitees, Past Presidents of IESL, Council Members, fellow Engineers, Ladies & Gentlemen,

At the outset I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all of you, members of the Institution for the trust and confidence you have placed in me by electing me the President of your Institution. I am fully aware of the enormous responsibilities associated with this trust and confidence. I assure you that I will do my best to meet your expectations and also justify the confidence that has been reposed in me. My association with the Institution extends over a period of 30 years. I became an associate member of the IESL immediately after graduation. It was Prof. Rohan Lucas who gave me the membership application and asked me to join. I was an instructor at the Katubedda Campus of University of Sri Lanka (now called as Moratuwa University) at the time. I obtained my Charter in 1981. I became closely involved in the Institution activities in 1984 as the Secretary of the Electrical Engineering Sectional Committee. For three conservative years, I was holding that post under the chairmanship of Eng. Eardly Silva and Eng. Joe Varnakulasinghe. It was the Electrical Engineering Sectional Committee under the chairmanship of Eng. Joe Varnakulasinghe, which started the 1<sup>st</sup> Techno Exhibition in 1985. The first one was named 'Electro Techno Exhibition' as initially it was an activity organized by the Electrical Engineering Sectional Committee. I as the Secretary was very much involved in organizing it. Since then Techno Exhibition has been held consecutively for 22 years and today it has developed to be the premier engineering exhibition of the country.

I entered the council in 1998 as the Chairman of the

Electrical Engineering Sectional Committee at the request of the then President Eng. D.C. Wijeratna. Since then I was in the council continuously for the past 9 years and I take this opportunity to thank all you members who supported me and elected me to the various posts in the council and made it possible for me to reach this post, which is the highest position of this esteemed professional body. I also take this opportunity to thank the people who guided, helped and assisted through out my journey.

The outgoing President Eng. Lakdas Taldena has successfully led the institution through the past year achieving a number of objectives out of which the most significant is obtaining the full membership of the Engineers' Mobility Forum and the provisional membership of the Washington Accord. He took fresh initiatives to prepare a new draft for Sri Lanka Engineering Council Act and took action to obtain the Cabinet approval for the amendments to the IESL Act. Whilst thanking his council and him for the contribution made to the institution, I look forward to his continued assistance and association in the council. We will take all possible steps to get these two pieces of legislation enacted with the cooperation of all the stakeholders.

As mentioned in the Presidential address, IESL has gained international recognition by obtaining full membership of EMF and as a result, our members who obtain professional engineer status will be able to practice in other developed countries, without requiring to obtain qualifications in those countries. Further, IESL has been granted provisional membership of Washington Accord which indicates the acceptance, of the IESL's accreditation procedure for 4 year full time B.Sc. Engineering Degree programs by this international body. IESL wishes to apply for full membership of the Washington Accord in June 2009 and we will take all the necessary steps to work

towards this target during my tenure in office. If this becomes successful it will pave the way for international acceptance of Sri Lankan Engineering Degree programs. The Institution of Building Services Engineers, UK has already agreed to sign a Memorandum of Agreement with IESL to recognize our members with Building Service experience as their members. We will pursue close collaboration with other recognized foreign engineering institutions for similar agreements.

Honourable Prime Minister, I wish to thank this government for taking much awaited decisions on development projects and the power sector projects in particular. The power sector is undergoing a crisis mainly because of the decisions to establish low cost power plants were not taken in time. I can remember IESL made several representations on this issue earlier without much success. One of the very first tasks of His Excellency the President after assuming office was to give the green light for the Norochcholai Coal Power Plant. The Ceylon Electricity Board's least cost generation expansion plan is given due recognition and most of the power plants in the plan for next 15 years are now in the pipe line. Sir, I specially mention power sector here for 2 reasons. First reason is that it is very close to my heart since I am from the power sector and I understand the consequences of indecision or wrong decision. Second reason is that it is very important for the country since without developing the power sector the economy of the country cannot develop. As all of us are aware power generation cost is very high today as we were unable to develop low cost power plants. It is therefore imperative to get the professionals and the specialists involve in the policy making and decision making process. What happens most of the time is the business entrepreneurs' voice is heard above the advice of the professionals. Honourable Prime Minister, The Institution of Engineers wishes to closely associate with the engineering related ministries and offer its services to them on all important national issues.

Dear members, I wish to dedicate the coming year especially for the members. I am aware of some of the problems faced by the young engineers. I intend to create a conducive environment at IESL, especially for the young engineers to participate in IESL activities, with the help of my President - elect and council members. I am aware that there are engineers in the private sector and small organizations, who are unable to obtain the charter, due to non-availability of chartered

engineers to supervise them. We intend to implement the mentor scheme meaningfully to overcome this problem.

We have identified the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of our engineers as of vital importance. We have a standing committee on CPD. With the help of this committee, we intend to strengthen the CPD activities targeting different groups of members. We wish to obtain the assistance of the heads of government organizations with engineering bias and also the CEO's of the industrial organisations. We will set up an industrial liaison committee, similar to the University liaison committee in order to build a closer relationships with industries. We will closely monitor the follow up actions of the implementation of the decisions taken at those liaison committee meetings.

It is important for us to ensure that physical and administrative environment in our institution be maintained at the highest standard, so that our members provided with a better service. In this regard we will complete the work started by the outgoing President and in addition start a few items selected on a priority basis. We will take actions to provide more assistance from the secretariat to the activities of sectional committees and other membership activities. In the meantime the difficulties faced by the secretariat staff will be looked into and appropriate action would be taken.

Honourable Prime Minister, out of the 6961 engineers in the role, there are 3561 members serving in the outstations. We have 8 provincial centres of IESL in the country to serve these members. However we are aware almost all these centres lack the required facilities. We are aware that there are many requests from the provincial centers for increase financial allocations and facilities. During the coming year, we will give priority to provide facilities to provincial centers within the constraints of finances. Even though during the centenary year, we laid foundation stone for an office for North Central Provincial Center it could not get off the ground so far. We will make every endeavour to ensure this project a reality and I will pay special attention to it.

Honourable Prime Minister, your excellencies, dear members, many of our engineers are employed abroad. There is a heavy concentration of Sri Lankan engineers in the countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand and a few other countries. Many of them are still our members. Some of them are holding high positions in these countries. Hon. Sir, IESL in association with the Ministry of Science and

Technology conducted a conference on the topic of "Nano Technology for sustainable development", on the 16<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of this week at BMICH. Hon. Tissa Vitarana, Minister of Science and Technology delivering a lecture on "Sri Lanka Nano Technology Initiative", described how South Korea initiated its development. He mentioned that the South Korean government got down one of their experts of very high caliber giving him similar remunerations he was receiving abroad and set up a steering committee consisting of local scientists, engineers along with the expatriate Korean engineers and scientists. They formed the nucleus of development and they have taken action to start new industries in their field of expertise. IESL will also take initial steps to get the assistance of our own expert engineers practicing abroad for the development of new concepts and wish to advise the government on at least one or two key projects during the coming year. In order to facilitate this we will take action to set up IESL centers in countries where the concentration of Sri Lankan engineers are high.

Our institution is beginning its 102<sup>nd</sup> year in January 2008. Ours is the oldest professional institution in the country and also the oldest engineering institution in the South Asia and perhaps even in the whole of Asia. Also IESL is the 1<sup>st</sup> in the South Asia to obtain International recognition by getting the full membership of the Engineer's Mobility Forum. So dear members, we have reasons to be proud of IESL. We have largely achieved our vision statement i.e. "To be among the leading professional institutions and the centre of excellence and leadership in the fields of engineering and technology in Asia".

However, we have a long way to go. I assure you that I shall provide the leadership to the Institution to achieve its objectives and implement the corporate plan. In this endeavour, I seek the active participation of council members in all the activities. I intend to handover one activity per council member and request him or her to be the champion of that activity through participation in standing committees and sectional committees. I consider these challenges have to be met by team work.

I along with the President elect and my council which is the IESL 2007/2008 Team, seek your fullest cooperation and support to serve you better in the coming year.

Thank you so much ladies and gentleman