





# THE HEART OF NSBM

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DR. E.A. WEERASINGHE  
REMINISCENCES FROM THE  
VICE CHANCELLOR

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We are about to divulge into the heart and soul of the National School of Business Management, the man behind this great university town. In conversation with the dynamic visionary Dr. E.A. Weerasinghe, we are given insight into the toil and challenges of setting up this International university, as well as the many hopes and dreams the Vice Chancellor himself has for this educational venture, that over 9000 students currently call their second home



**What was your main inspiration to build this state-the-of-art university? What are the reasons behind this concept?**

In 2006 I undertook NIBM which was facing a 15 million operational loss, so, as the then Director General my first responsibility was to ensure that I find remedies bring the institute out this financial situation. NIBM was spread in to the regional

level to promote diplomas and certificate courses, but finally we realized there is a limitation to expand this structure. We realized the regional institutes are not providing a sufficient learning environment. Students are stuck in classes and it is not the learning environment we envisioned for our students.

Due to the changes made to overcome the financial loss in 2011 at NIBM, the revenue increased up



to 400 million. During this process, we realized that there was a high demand for degree programs in Sri Lanka, so I thought of developing a fully-fledged university to offer degrees. With the financial strength gained, I presented my idea of this new university complex to the academic governing council, but at that time many took it as a fancy, unrealistic imagination and all I received were negative comments and discourage. But, I had foreseen the future demand in higher education field and need to find ways of making this idea in to a reality. It was estimated as 4 billion project and we got a very good positive support from the former government since the leaders too had realized the real necessity of this mega investment.

**How did you operationalize your inspiration into reality?**

“ This university was built to cater a higher purpose, and within the next ten years this will be the most demanding knowledge hub in South Asia. We are now in the process of designing the second phase of NSBM and we are planning to introduce many new degree programs to cater future needs and demands. The second phase will consist of Law, sciences and medicine degrees to empower the higher education in Sri Lanka. We are also planning to acquire new affiliations from reputed universities and many other UGC approved degrees are in the pipe line ”

With the ministry and cabinet approval, we started seeking suitable land to implement the initial stage of the project. At that time, Dr. Abeyrathna Bandara suggested a land in Homagama and me including some of my staff made the first site visit. It was not the land that we finally built on, but it was certainly the start. After the visit, we requested 50 acres land and minister proposed this to the cabinet and finally 26 acres was approved and we bought this land, in Pitipana. Then we started call upon tenders for the architectural consultancy and after several discussions ECL was selected to design this university complex. Before commencing the design stage, we made visits to world's best universities with the design team, like Harvard, to get inspired. The preliminary designs were done, and the estimate was 8.6 billion. It was a





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huge amount for us and then suggestions came to go for a Loan from a Chinese bank. During that time period we managed to find small scale contractors, and we laid the keystone and put the

foundation. The former government also had a policy to build all the buildings which put foundations during a short period, without dragging. It was a blessing for us. We negotiated with the bank, but

they had many conditions and one was to award the construction to a Chinese contractor. Finally, the Chinese bank came out with an 18 billion estimate for the project and the secretary of the ministry tried to





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negotiate and get it down to an affordable level, but was unfortunately, unsuccessful. Fortunately, the Government got involved in to this financial matter and agreed to give a treasury guarantee to get a loan from a Local bank and BOC agreed to provide financial support. We got a quotation of 8.6 billion from a well-known local contractor and it was reasonable for us. Everything happened in an accelerated process, just within a period of 2 months we had a grand launching ceremony to launch this officially.

### **What were the challenges you faced in constructing**

### **this first ever green university in South Asia?**

The construction started and there were many challenges to face. There was no water supply to the site, thus, we started construction by digging several tube wells, until now we are using the water from these tube wells. Further, some tried to interpret NSBM as a private company and to cause chaos via this understanding, and we had to keep ensuring, that this is a self-finance institute under the then, Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training.

However, there was a huge concern,

how we are going to fill this massive university with students after construction. As a remedy to that, we started our city campus at Nugegoda in 2012 and started awarding degrees with affiliation from many foreign universities. The concept of the Green university became a reality within 1000 days and we were planning to make this transfer smooth in 2016. We made a grand opening ceremony in 2016 October and introduced a luxury transportation system for students to solve logistics issues.

### **What are the challenges you are currently facing in**

### managing this university complex?

After obtaining the bank loan, we didn't get any financial support from the government. We had a grace period to pay the loan, so during that time, we didn't quite feel the weight of such a huge loan, but when we started paying the installments, we realized it was indeed challenging. But until now, we are paying the loan without any delay and we have reached up to a 10000-student capacity within 2 years of opening.

In 2016, we gifted this state of art university to the next generations and the other challenge was to find qualified suitable lecturers to deliver the knowledge. Many were interested but, our selection criteria is very strict because we need a best team in building this knowledge hub. A few supportive hands worked with me and came hand in hand to face all the challenges, and without their support and strength it will be really difficult to face the challenges and grievances that came from many streams.

### What will be the future of NSBM?

This university was built to cater a higher purpose, and within the next ten years this will be the most demanding knowledge hub in South Asia. We are now in the process of designing the second phase of NSBM and we are planning to introduce many new degree programs to cater future needs and demands. The second phase will consist of Law, sciences and medicine degrees to empower the higher education in Sri Lanka. We are also planning to acquire new affiliations from reputed universities and many other UGC approved degrees are in the pipe line. I need to say, NSBM was not entertained by the government since this is self-finance institute. But getting

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the title of “university” is the key focus, and I think there is no reasonable reason to avoid this request, since I am confident that we have indeed made all the relevant infrastructure including quality academia to strengthen higher education in the country.

### How do you differentiate your experiences at NIBM

### and 4 years at NSBM city campus and now at Green university town?

Well, these are the three different phases, and at NIBM recovering the financial loss and changing the attitudes of the employers with a conventional mind set was the major challenge. And at NSBM Nugegoda we didn't experience much issues, the operation went smoothly because we had limited periphery to deal with and management was easy due to that. And there were academics and operational heads to look after the operations and everything went well at Nugegoda. Here at Green university town, we are facing different challenges, such as maintenance and managing human resources and a huge number of students. But all operations are going smoothly, and all are working really hard to ensure the quality standards at NSBM Green University Town.

### As a visionary leader of this Green University, what is your message to the society?

“Never give up”, you need to trust and believe in yourself when you are doing something. Especially when you are dealing with broad targets and visions, you need to have the strength and bravery to stand still and face extremely difficult circumstances. Facing all ups and downs with a stable mentality is the most difficult thing but it gives courage and strength to stay strong. And taking crucial and correct decisions wherever needed is the other secret of reaching the pinnacle of success. We have a limited timeline in our life. So, running fast and leaping over every hurdle is important. Do what you need to do right now, time is passing, so never wait for a good thing, go and get it.