



# UoR HIGHLIGHTS

The Official Newsletter of University of Ruhuna

October 2012  
Volume 1, Issue 1

## Inside this issue:

Rathnayake Mudiyansele Ranaweera Banda, Professor of Sociology: a succinct obituary.	2
International Conference on Management and Economics 2013	4
An international Mangrove conference in Sri Lanka this year	5
Science Symposium and Invention and Innovation Exhibition	5
Inter-University Enterprise Mobility Application Software Development Competition	6
Science Faculty Day 2012 - "Towards strengthening Unity and Social life on campus"	6
Orator of the year	7
1st AHSDP Students Academic Day	7
Ongoing Industry-University Collaborative Research	8
Collaborative Research for Manufacturing Solar Cell	8
Achievements of faculty academics	9
Research Vessel for the Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Sciences & Technology	9
ITRCC for the University of Ruhuna	10
Coastal Resource Awareness Centre	11

## Higher Education in Sri Lanka: In crisis or at the crossroads?

By Professor Susirith Mendis, The Vice-Chancellor

It is with many concerns in mind that I open these comments for the inaugural 'Newsletter' of the University of Ruhuna. I have posed a question that, to me, is one that needs urgent answers. The answers are needed whether higher education is in crisis or at the crossroads, or both.

We are at a point in time when multiple events that can be called crises have developed within a short time. The trade union actions by the non-academic and academic staff for higher salaries, demand for higher public sector investment in education, the 'Z' score fiasco, the proposed amendments to the Universities Act of 1978 and invitation to the international private sector to invest in higher education in Sri Lanka by establishing 'private' universities are some issues that are prominent in the current debate.

These crises coming together at the same time have created a mood of despondency and uncertainty within the university community as well as the public at large. One therefore

needs to determine, if it is at all possible, whether there was a confluence of specific factors that has created the present crisis and whether it has brought Higher Education in Sri Lanka to a critical juncture in its future development. The Government has a definitive objective of making Sri Lanka a 'Knowledge Hub'. Presumably, it envisages the inflow of both capital and human resources - both local and overseas - into the education sector. This requires that a conducive environment be created for such an enterprise. In the context of Sri Lanka's post-independence development with significant public investment in education and health and enviable literacy rates and health indices for a developing country, it is to be expected that the slightest perceived attempt at disturbing such a status quo by new government policy initiatives will invite immediate and strong reaction.

On the other hand there is a serious erosion of quality and standards in higher education that is alarming and

**“We are at a point in time when multiple events that can be called crises have developed within a short time.”**

*(Continued from page 1)*

calls for urgent intervention. This situation is not only due to reduction in state expenditure in higher education alone. Perhaps, there are more important aspects within the universities themselves that have given rise to it. The lax recruitment and promotional criteria of academic staff and their lack of commitment to improving quality of university courses to meet the demands of the expanding economy are two possible contributory factors. This has been seen most prominently in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences faculties in all universities.

Is orienting university courses and degrees to meet the current demands of employers, i.e., ‘employable graduates’, the answer? How sustainable and enduring are

the current demands of such employers? Have long-term requirements in human resources been assessed in terms of the development goals of the country to make any reasonably accurate predictions? Should universities be merely degree-awarding assembly lines? Is the focus on English and IT competency too narrow in perspective and short-sighted? These questions need well-researched and informed answers.

With education being a trillion dollar ‘industry’ with assured large profit-margins that are perhaps second only to the armament industry - having overtaken the pharmaceutical industry - has it ceased to become what it was always claimed to be - a public good? Or is it now, just a tradable commodity? This

leads to other questions: Is it possible for education to be both – a public good and a tradable commodity at the same time? Or can it be switched from one to the other depending on circumstances? Can the motive of public good be achieved by levying cost-based or reasonable fees? In other words, need all fee-levying courses be considered as trading education as a commodity? Does education as a public good necessarily have to be non-fee levying?

More questions than answers. Yes, if higher education is in crisis or at the crossroads, as indeed it seems to be, there will necessarily be more questions that are becoming increasingly difficult to answer.

### A Glance at University of Ruhuna — December 2012

Established — 1st September 1978  
 Chancellor — Most Ven. Pallaththara Sumanajothi Nayaka Thero  
 Vice Chancellor — Senior Professor Susirith Mendis  
 Deputy Vice Chancellor — Senior Professor Gamini Senanayake

Number of Faculties — 8  
 Number of academic staff members — 433  
 Number of Academic support staff members - 36  
 Number of administrative staff members — 33  
 Number of non-academic staff members — 779

Number of Students: (Total — 6354)  
 Agriculture — 522  
 Engineering — 789  
 Fisheries and Marine Sci. & Tech. — 162  
 Humanities and Social Sciences — 1514  
 Management and Finance — 1263  
 Medicine — 994  
 Science — 941  
 Postgraduate Studies — 169

## Rathnayake Mudiyansele Ranaweera Banda, Professor of Sociology: a brief obituary.

By Wijerathne Bohingamuwa, University of Oxford

Ironically, it happened to be the Vaisakapunnami morning, when we heard the heart-rending news of the demise of Mr. Ratnayake Mudiyansele Ranaweera Banda, Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, University of Ruhuna. Being miles away from home, the only tribute I could perhaps tender is writing an obituary note. My spontaneous response to the sad news and perhaps my true estimates of the deceased Professor were posted on the FaceBook. It reads as follows: "He was a dear friend, a big brother, a fatherly figure, a mentor, and a bitter critic and somebody who enjoyed his life....He proved his intellectual capacity and commitments to academic work. Now he has proved the truth of life - its uncertainty..."

More than any of his academic accomplishments, of which I am perhaps less enlightened, what distinguished him from many others, to me, was his ability to move so easily with the

young and the old, the junior and the senior, and in essence with all walks of life. He believed and in fact expected that the younger generation of academics in the faculty should take the lead and take it to the next level. In my true estimate he was never interested in power politics. Only very few people in the faculty would ever know why then he contested for the Dean's post. From "Man makes himself" (V. Gordon Childe 1936) we read how circumstances force man to act the way he does even if it were not his own choice. Leaving aside such contentious issues, and with due respect to all senior academics of the faculty, let me very frankly note that Professor Ranaweera Banda was one among the very few senior academics of the faculty who realized that safeguarding the academic interests and early career of young colleagues was one of their responsibilities. Therefore, his loss would be more profoundly felt by the junior

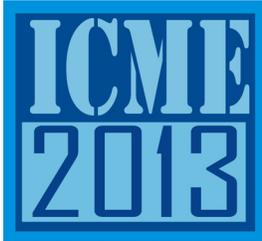
members of the faculty than the seniors. As a response to my FaceBook post, a colleague of mine who is also away from home paid his tribute with the following lines: "...He always was younger than most of the so called 'young academics'...being young at heart..".

Prof. Ranaweera wrote to me several times asking me to be observant about the youth uprising in London and marketisation of education in the west. When I communicated to him about the recent discussions on university reforms in the UK, he wanted the documents to be forwarded to him, which I did enthusiastically. He was very weak and tired when I last visited him in February, but he still had the presence of mind to ask me about these education reforms and of course about my own academic progress. With emotion, I realized it was my last meeting with Prof. Ranaweera. Understanding this perhaps, he said "*male umba ehe natara*

*wenawa ehema newai. Ek-manta oka* (PhD) *ewara karala waren*" – little brother you better not think of staying there (UK) and should return to Ruhuna soon. Those were his last words to me.

All humans possess both strengths and weaknesses. Prof. Ranaweera perhaps was no exception. But as we say 'De mortuis nihil nisi bonum (Of the dead, speak no evil) - not in an obituary anyway. Beloved Sir, Prof. Ranaweera, we, the junior faculty members will miss your charming presence in the faculty. Rest In Peace- Attain Nirvana!

**"He was a dear friend, a big brother, a fatherly figure, a mentor, and a bitter critic and somebody who enjoyed his life"**



## International Conference on Management and Economics 2013 (ICME 2013)

ICME 2013, the 2nd International Conference on Management and Economics will take place at University of Ruhuna, on 26th and 27th February 2013 with the collaboration of COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Sahiwal Campus, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Chinese -German Institute for Intellectual Property, Huazhong University of Science & Technology, P.R. China, University of Nordland and University of Agder Norway, and Strategize Blue, USA. The theme of the ICME 2013, 2nd conference, is 'Managing Turbulences in Economic Environment through Innovative Management Practices'. For further information, visit <http://www.ruh.ac.lk/News/ICME2013>

## CERES 2012

The 2nd Civil Engineering Research Exchange Symposium (CERES 2012) organized by the Civil & Environmental Engineering Society (CEES) of Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering University of Ruhuna in collaboration with Civil Engineering Societies of University of Moratuwa and University of Peradeniya was held from 02nd to 03rd of July 2012 at the Faculty of Engineering, University of Ruhuna. This annual conference is the only program that brings the final year civil engineering undergraduates from the three engineering faculties together to share their knowledge by presenting their latest research while developing healthy and positive associations with each other. Financial sponsorship for the CERES 2012 has provided by 'Tokyo Cement Group'.

## ACEPS 2012 Symposium

The International Symposium on Advances in Civil and Environmental Engineering Practices for Sustainable Development (ACEPS 2012) was successfully held at the Faculty of Engineering, University of Ruhuna on March 19, 2012. The aim of this symposium was to create a forum to discuss recent advances in sustainable engineering practices that can be adopted in the development of the region. The symposium was organized and hosted by Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Ruhuna in collaboration with Saitama University, Japan. The event was sponsored by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, and Science and Technology Research Partnership for Sustainable Development Program. Academics representing both local and international research bodies presented their research outcomes. The five key note speeches from four leading academics and an industry professional touched important aspects of the symposium.



## An international Mangrove conference in Sri Lanka this year

MMM is an international conference on mangrove ecosystems that is held every 6 years. MMM is organised by mangrove scientists worldwide, every 6 years, i.e. at an interval that allows scientific innovation. It is not aimed at massive attendance but at single sessions covering various topics, with plenty of time for discussion in each of them.

The conference was ceremonially launched on 2nd July 2012 at Koggala Beach Hotel, Galle. The 3rd edition

of this international conference was held in Sri Lanka and named as “Meeting on Mangrove ecology, functioning and Management” (MMM3).

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Ruhuna Senior Professor Susirith Mendis was the Chief Guest at the inauguration ceremony of the MMM3, and the conference was chaired by Professor Farid Dahdouh-Guebas from the Free University of Brussels in Belgium.

About 100 scientists from over 30 countries participated in this international conference. The conference continued till 6th July 2012 and there were about 40 presentations, 100 posters, 5 field tours, a cultural show, and a conference dinner during these days. Further, the conference was accompanied by a mid-conference excursion followed by a mid-week workshop in a mangrove site aimed at identifying research gaps through joint-fieldwork, analyses and brainstorming.

**“The conference continued till 6th July 2012 and there were about 40 presentations, 100 posters, 5 field tours, a cultural show...”**

## Science Symposium and Invention and Innovation Exhibition

The 8th Science Symposium was held successfully on Dec. 21st 2011 at the Faculty of Science. Dr. Senaka Pilapitiya delivered the Keynote Address on “Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the world of Modern Science. A total of 20 oral and poster presentations were made at the symposium. <http://www.ruh.ac.lk/Uni/science/symposium/>

A two day exhibition of inventions and innovations of students was successfully held in parallel to the Science

Symposium. Students’ response was very admirable and 28 exhibits were displayed. The Vice Chancellor was the Chief Guest at the exhibition. The best inventions were recognized by offering certificates

As the next step the ninth Science Symposium and the 2nd Invention and Innovation Exhibition will be held on November 13th and 14th 2012. The faculty has decided to open the symposium to scientists in other universities and research institutes in Sri

Lanka. The exhibition will also be held in parallel with the symposium. The exhibition will be open to Advanced Level students in schools of Matara District. Each school will be invited to submit a maximum of three exhibits to the competition. For details; <http://www.ruh.ac.lk/Uni/science/symposium/ninth/index.html>



## Inter-University Enterprise Mobility Application Software Development Competition – 2011

The project presented by a group of students of the Department of Electrical and Information Engineering won third place at Motorola Inter-University Enterprise Mobility Application Software Development Competition – 2011. 46 projects were registered for the competition from the leading universities and the institutions of the country and 16 were selected for the final round of the competition. The third place was won by a project presented by the Department of Electrical and Information Engineering. The group members were K.W.K. Gayashan, R.T.S. Chathuranga, K.G. Madushan and B.K.G.H.A. Batuwantudawa.

## Science Faculty Day 2012 - “Towards strengthening Unity and Social life on campus”

“Science Faculty day emerged from a desire to enrich the quality of intellectual and social life on campus”

The Faculty of Science, University of Ruhuna organized “Science Faculty Day - 2012”, on 21st March 2012 at the University ground and at the University Gymnasium. The Science Faculty day emerged from a desire to enrich the quality of intellectual and social life on campus and focuses on renewing relationships among the staff and the students, broadening our knowledge about the Faculty, and improving social harmony within the university community through a wide spectrum of activities such as tree planting and sports events during the day and entertainment with music and dancing in the evening. <http://www.ruh.ac.lk/Uni/science/facultyday/index.html>



## Migara Ratnatunga Trust Awards for Best Undergraduates Projects in Industrial Training - 2011

The students of Faculty of Engineering, University of Ruhuna won cash prizes and certificates in the Migara Ratnatunga Trust Awards for Best Undergraduates Projects in Industrial Training. Ms. H C Palihena won a Cash Award and certificate and D M I P Dissanayaka, R W M R W W A H K Warakagoda, L A T U Liyanarachchi, W J M K Perera, C N Nao-tunna, T M J P Thennakoon won certificates.

## Orator of the year

The University of Ruhuna organized the competition “Orator of the year – 2012”, in collaboration with the Indian High Commission. The final competition was held on 21st March 2012 at the University premises. The winners are as follows: Sinhala medium: 1<sup>st</sup> Heenkenda

HMEJ Faculty of Fisheries Marine Science & Technology, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nisansala DDF Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, 3<sup>rd</sup> Buddika HAAY Faculty of Agriculture. Tamil medium: 1<sup>st</sup> Sivatheepan V Faculty of Fisheries Marine Science & Technology, 2<sup>nd</sup> Suranutha L Faculty of Fish-

eries Marine Science & Technology, 3<sup>rd</sup> Asaama MNF Faculty of Management and Finance. English medium: 1<sup>st</sup> Madubashini ETS Faculty of Fisheries Marine Science & Technology, 2<sup>nd</sup> Hajara AHF Faculty of Management and Finance, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sandamini SSP Faculty of Engineering.

## 1st AHSDP Students Academic Day – June 2012

Allied Health Sciences students’ 1st academic day was held from 26th to 29th of June, 2012 at the Allied health Sciences premises at Uluwitike, Galle. This programme was introduced for the first time in AHSDP history and this time it was organized under the supervision of Dr.L.M.Hettihewa, The Coordinator, B.Pharm Degree Programme, Faculty of Medicine by the academic staff of AHSDP. The events were

organized with the purpose of developing different types of soft skills in students. The theme for the 1st Academic Day was “**Engaged learning soft skills and making it real**”. Prof. Gamini Senanayake, The Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Ruhuna was the chief guest of this ceremony. Dr.Sampath Gunawardene, Dean, Faculty of Medicine, Dr. P.A.P. Samantha Kumara, Dean, Faculty of Management and Finance,

University of Ruhuna, Mrs.Saraswathi Dahanayake, The Principal, Sangamitta Girls College, Galle, Dr.K.G.Imendra, Senior Lecturer, AHSDP and some Senior Lecturers participated as honoured guests for this event.



“The theme for the 1st Academic Day was “Engaged learning soft skills and making it real”.

## IET Day 2012

The IET day organized by the IET YP (Institute of Engineer’s Technology Young Professionals) Ruhuna chapter was successfully held at Faculty seminar room on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2012. Students with best academic performance in

previous semesters were awarded with plaques. It was a great experience for all the gathering to learn from experiences and was a great motivation for the students to work hard



### Ongoing Industry-University Collaborative Research

The Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Ruhuna and Provincial Department of Irrigation (Southern Province), Sri Lanka are currently involved in an Industry-University Collaborative Research project on

'Development of an information retrieval system for minor irrigation tanks in Southern Province'.

A Collaborative Research project on Water Quality testing -Turbidity and Total Suspended Solids (TSS) measurements in *Gin Ganga* water at

Baddegama is being carried out by the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Ruhuna in collaboration with the National Water Supply & Drainage Board.

### Collaborative Research for Manufacturing Solar Cell

A research programme for manufacturing solar cells has been initiated by Prof. Siva Sivananthan at the University of Illinois at Chicago and Sivananthan Laboratories Inc. and Prof. Lakshman Disanayake at IFS, with the collaboration of the Department of Physics, University of Ruhuna lead by Dr. G.D.K.

Mahanama and the Department of Physics, University of Jaffna lead by Prof. P. Ravirajan. The objective of the project is to establish research facilities for fabrication and characterization of solar cells and modules and building two solar villages; one in the South and the other in the North.

A group of scientists from Sivananthan Laboratories Inc. visited the University of Ruhuna in June 2012 to meet the Vice Chancellor to strengthen the collaboration.

“A group of scientists from Sivananthan Laboratories Inc. visited the University of Ruhuna in June 2012..”

### JICA and JST assisted projects

The Civil and Environmental Engineering Departments of University of Ruhuna and University of Peradeniya joined with Saitama University of Japan together with few other local institutes to launch a 5 year collaborative research project for develop-

ment of pollution control and environmental restoration technologies of waste landfill sites taking into account geographical characteristics in Sri Lanka. The financial assistance will be provided by JICA and JST through the Science and Technology Re-

search Partnership for Sustainable Development, SATREPS.

## Achievements of faculty academics

Academic staff of the Faculty of Science made significant achievements in their academic careers and brought honour to the university.

- Professor Hema Pathirana, Department of Chemistry, has been appointed as the expert for the water sector of the Technology Needs Assessment (TNA) Project

on Climate Change in Sri Lanka – Ministry of Environment

- Dr. Chinthaka Sanath, Department of Chemistry has been nominated for Presidential Awards for Scientific Research in 2007, 2008 & 2009, one of the most valuable awards that a researcher can receive in Sri

Lanka.

- Dr(Mrs) D.H.N. Munasinghe, Department of Zoology has received the Fulbright fellowship 2011-2012.
- Prof. W.G.D. Dharmaratna, Department of Physics, has been appointed to the Editorial Board of Sri Lankan Journal of Physics as an

Associate Editor for the period of 2011-2013

- Prof. Kanthi K.A.S. Yapa was appointed as the Editor-in-Chief of an international news-letter titled “NANO News”– an oceanography newsletter, in May 2011.

## Research Vessel for the Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Sciences & Technology

The Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Sciences & Technology received funds from the “Transforming of University of Ruhuna to International Status Project” to obtain a Research Vessel from the Sri Lanka Navy. The Sri Lanka Navy undertook this as a social responsibly project. This will be used for marine excursions and research of the Faculty.



## Fulbright professor to serve at DEIE

Assistant professor Ashok Ramasubramanian of Union College, New York, USA, has served at the Department of Electrical and Information Engineering for four months (mid March 2011 – mid July 2011) under a Fulbright Fellowship. During his service he has devel-

oped the syllabus for the technical elective module Bio Medical Engineering and has taught that module to final year students.

DEIE appreciates assistant professor Ashok Ramasubramanian's service to the Department.

## FOSMIS for students and faculty

Faculty of science has launched a fully automated web based information system called FOSMIS, Faculty of Science Management Information System for students and faculty aca-

demics. Student registrations, course registrations, attendance and other information can be managed and the database is accessible through internet.

<http://paravi.ruh.ac.lk/fosnew>

## Foundation Laying Ceremony for the Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Sciences & Technology

The Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony for the main building complex of the Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Sciences and Technology was held on 23rd July 2012 with the presence of Professor Susirith Mendis, Vice Chancellor, University of Ruhuna as the Chief Guest. The three storied main building estimated to cost Rs. 304.6 million comprises nearly 5000 square metres, including four elementary construction and commenced with the welcome address made by the present Dean of the Faculty Dr Tilak P D Gamage. The founder Dean of the Faculty Professor Cumarnatunge, The Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Gamini Senanayake and the Vice Chancellor Professor Susirith Mendis addressed the gathering.



## ITRCC for the University of Ruhuna

The Faculty of Science has established an Industrial Training and Research Coordinating Centre (ITRCC). Dr. J. R. Wedagedara was appointed as the First Coordinator of the centre and Dr. J.A.P. Bodika has been appointed as the coordinator. There are two main objectives of the ITRCC, namely, to build collaborative research with industry and to find placements for industrial training for students. ITRCC organized a one day workshop for selected small industries in Matara and Hambantota to identify their needs for development.



## New courses and Postgraduate programmes

The Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering has commenced Masters Degree programme in Civil and environmental Engineering from this year.

“There are two main objectives of the ITRCC, namely, to build collaborative research with industry and to find placements for industrial training for students”

## Coastal Resource Awareness Centre (CoRAC)

The plaque prepared to mark the laying of the foundation by the Professor Susirith Mendis Vice Chancellor of the University of Ruhuna for the Coastal Resource Awareness Centre (CoRAC) of the University of Ruhuna was unveiled by Professor Farid Dahdouh-Guebas and Professor Niko Kedom



of Vrije Universiteit Brussel of Belgium (Promoter and copromoter of the Green Dyke Project) on 16th July 2012. This project was funded by the Green Dyke Project on “The use of natural barriers

for the coastal protection in Sri Lanka” (Own Initiative Project, Flemish International Council –VLIR) and the project of “Transforming University of Ruhuna to International Status”.

The aim of this centre is to conduct awareness programmes for school children

and the general public by the Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Science & Technology (FMST) on the importance of these special kind of ecosystems.

The architectural design of the proposed centre was done by Archit. Gihan Mutugala considering the ecological sensitivity and respecting the environmental concerns

with minimal impact to the existing environment. This design is a hybrid of architecture and landscape, reflecting ‘almost non building’ structure support on stilts.

**“This design is a hybrid of architecture and landscape, reflecting ‘almost non building’ structure support on stilts.”**

## New State-of-Art Workshop for Faculty of Engineering

The Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering acquired a fully func-

tioning Engineering Workshop with state of the art machinery with the financial

support provided by the University Grants Commission.

## Best undergraduates project in electrical engineering for the late Mrs. E .W. Karunaratna Memorial Award -2011

Final year undergraduate projects of the Department of Electrical and Information Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, University of Ruhuna won third place and received certificates in the late Mrs. E W Karunaratna Award for

Best Undergraduates Project in Electrical Engineering.

The winners of the project titled “Brain wave recognition system” were D N Kumanayake, H M Kumanayake, D L D A Lakshitha, and S S H M U L Senanayake. The

winners of the project titled “Dimming Fluorescent Electronic Ballast” were N L S Dayanga, W K B C N Fernando, H G K Fonseka and H M A I Herath.



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To:-

## About UoR Highlights

Welcome to the first issue of *UoR Highlights*, the official newsletter of the University of Ruhuna. We intend to publish *UoR Highlights* bi-annually with the aim of fostering a dialog among our key stakeholders. More spe-

cifically, the *UoR Highlights* publishes information on recent developments, events, research publications, conferences and collaborative research projects at the University of Ruhuna. In addition, in each issue, we publish feature

articles which address current topic in education and higher education.

Together with other publications at the University of Ruhuna, we believe that *UoR Highlights* will generate interest among our stakeholders by

creating a platform for fostering an effective dialogue.

We welcome your comments and suggestions that will enhance the future directions of *UoR Highlights*. Please contact us with your ideas at pm@admin.ruh.ac.lk.

## Major Publications of University of Ruhuna

### Ruhuna Journal of Management and Finance (RJMF):

RJMF, a new refereed journal published by the Faculty of Management and Finance, University of Ruhuna Sri Lanka, publishes articles that present current practices and researches in the area of management and finance. RJMF

will provide the ground to conduct a forum for the dissemination of descriptive empirical and theoretical research in management and finance disciplines. For further information please visit <http://www.mgt.ruh.ac.lk/journal/index.php/RJMF/index>

### Ruhuna Journal of Science - A step forward

Ruhuna Journal of Science has been fully converted to an Open Source Journal platform which enables fully automated Author/Reviewer/Publisher functions. <http://paravi.ruh.ac.lk/rjs/index.php/rjs>

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