



OREPA

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2020

FROM INNER PAGES

- OREPA Sports Day
- Fraternite
- Idea Hackathon

**Welcome to the Newsletter of
Old Royalists Engineering Professionals' Association**

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Idea Hackathon 2019

The Idea Hack 2019 was held on 11th of October at RCU skill center. The enthusiasm of both the students and professionals were significant by the number of participants. The task was to pitch a STEM based issue in the college with creative, novel and practical solutions.



Science A team emerged as the winners of the competition of Idea Hack 2019. The idea hackathon was a great opportunity for students to enhance their problem-solving skills along with presentation skills.



Three teams were participated in the competition representing Science and Mathematics societies of the college, two teams out of three were from the Science society. Two members representing the OREPA main body participated along with Mr. Amarathunga as the judges of the competition. President of the student body of ORPEA was also present at the occasion.



OREPA Sports Day 2019

The Annual OREPA sports day was successfully held on 13th of September 2019 at the College Junior Grounds. This year, undergraduates from Universities of Moratuwa, Peradeniya, Sri Jayewardenepura and KDU participated along with a school team representing College's Science and Mathematics Societies. Thus, making it an extended version of previous encounters held before. In total nine teams participated in the tournament and each team comprised 8 members. Five overs with four deliveries were delivered to each team. Every single match was both exciting and rollicking fun along with a notably hilarious commentating.



Since rain interfered the game after the first match the event was continued by restricting number of overs up to 4 overs. The teams “Siyabala Gaha Yata Eksath”, “Namak Nah”, “Hanthana Boys” and Student’s Team were selected for semi-final round. The first semi-final round was held between team “Namak Nah” from University of Sri Jayewardenepura and Student’s team representing College Science and Mathematics Societies. Both the teams were unbeaten throughout the game, thus, making this match a nail-biting semi-final. Anyhow despite equal talent and performance from both teams, team “Namak Nah” managed their way to the finals by defeating Student’s team. The second semi-final round was held between team “Siyabala Gaha Yata Eksath” from University of Moratuwa and team “Hanthana Boys” from University of Peradeniya. This match was an epic battle, both teams played so well and full of energy. After a perfect battle team “Siyabala Gaha Yata Eksath” was qualified to the final match.

Team “Siyabala Gaha Yata Eksath” won the toss and choose to field and each team had to deliver 5 overs.” Siyabala Gaha Yata Eksath” team was able to achieve early dismissals which paved a hard knockout, limiting the total up to 34 runs at the end of 5 overs. With a strong determination of chasing 34 runs “Siyabala Gaha Yata Eksath” had to face a strong defending side after their first dismissal which made the scorecard to 12 runs to win in the last over. Despite of tough defending by the opposition “Siyabala Gaha Yata Eksath” team won the tournament emerging as champions for the year 2019.

Tharindu Pinnawaduge of team “Hanthana Boys” emerged as the best batsmen for scoring 75 runs in total while Kavindu Asanka of team “Siyabala Gaha Yata Eksath” emerged as the best bowler with 6 wickets. A short award ceremony concluded the event successfully.

Nilan Fernando

Interview with Dr Ajith Pasqual



Dr Ajith Pasqual is the founder and CEO of the leading tech company in Sri Lanka, named Paraqum Technologies (Private) Limited. He is also a former Head of the Department of Electronic and Telecommunication Engineering in University of Moratuwa and is currently performing as a senior lecturer at the department with close to 25 years of experience in academics.

Q) As a Royalist, what was school life for you and how has it helped in molding your personality?

Royal College has a very diverse set of students from all forms of life. The interaction with all sorts of students, some being very studious and some being very playful was the most enjoyable part. It was an experience I will never forget. Although I don't have specific highlights in my school life as such, it was very much enjoyable. In fact, I was keen on going to school every day. I also participated in extracurricular activities but not in a formal manner. Only after I came to Grade 9, I got the interest of studying. Up until that I was playful.

One thing that I admire most about Royal College is the equality among students. Even after the incidents that happened during the riots of 1983, we never discriminated any one by their race. We considered everyone to be the same. We had friends from all ethnicities. This mindset helps the students to step into society and build their life on a similar foundation.

Q) What is it like to study at a high-level educational institution like University of Moratuwa ?

Immediately after my Advanced level exam, I found a job at "Unilevers" and worked there for a little over a year. In these type of work environments, you really understand the importance of every employee from top to bottom. Therefore, we tend to respect everybody. When I started university, the experience gathered from school life and from work life helped to broaden my perspective on people.

In the university we had 280 students in our batch, and out of that, fifty were Royalists. So, we didn't feel much of a difference between school and the university. But having said that, one thing I truly admire is, we never considered ourselves to be superior. We treated everybody as a friend.

We had to spend 7 years at the university due to JVP riots in 1987. The university was closed for nearly two and a half years. Some student left the country. Me, and a lot of my friends did CIMA during this time. The fact that we spent 7 years at the university might probably be the reason that our batch is so united and care about each other. University life is the best part of any one's life if you ask them and nothing is different for me as well. It was really enjoyable.

Q) What made you choose an academics profession in the beginning rather than getting involved in the industry ?

I was the batch top in Electronics so I thought it would be better for me to continue in an academical career. Also, there were little opportunities in the industry at that time. The only reputable industries back then were Sri Lanka Telecom and Celltel Network. I went to one job interview in Celltel, but they were not expecting fresh graduates at the time being. So, after that I decided to pursue a path in academics

Q) What motivated the thought of building up a tech company in Sri Lanka?

In Sri Lanka we don't have much of electronic related companies. All the staff at our department looked at many ways to expand or encourage the industry to diversify into design sector but it did not work out properly. Based on the work that has been done by the department we applied for a government grant to support electronic startups. Unlike in the software field electronics require lot of tools and software to do design work and those tools are very expensive. We hoped to use the government grant to buy some of these tools and offer them to the startups to use.

After obtaining the grant I also thought why not actually try something myself and since the tools are available why not try to make something. Four students were doing one project in video compression under my supervision. We decided to continue this project in the startup. That was how everything started in 2014.

Q) What type of obstacles and hardships did you have to encounter when embarking on this venture / organization?

Engineers are your biggest resource and you need to give them industrial standard salaries. Unless you have an excellent source of income it would be very difficult to maintain. We had difficulties in previous years because we were only developing a product and not doing any sales but now, we are slowly getting there, and our products have started to gain traction.

Q) What would your advice be to a beginner who is expecting to begin a startup in this field?

Anyone who wants to do a startup in Sri Lanka in electronics, should keep in mind that the returns are not going to come immediately. It will take a minimum of two to three years to get anything up to a sale stage. So, it has a long return time. If you don't have a way to sustain your staff for that long, then it will be very difficult to establish the company. It is also a reason that new startups are not seen now a days.



Q) We are pretty sure that you have a busy schedule. But if you were to have a free time, on what would you spend it?

These days most of the time it will be spent on reading. As part of the university system I would anyway have to read but if you put the company operation also into perspective, I also have to do a lot of reading to keep myself up to date because I cannot delegate it to somebody and expect them to update me.

It is also bit of a stressful thing because you cannot relax as much when you have the responsibility for taking care of more than thirty people here. It is very important to keep myself updated because I need to give them a direction on what needs to be done.

Q) What is your vision for the coming years?

There are no globally recognized tech companies from Sri Lanka that do manufacturing. Our intention is to make Paraqum a global brand and we are already working on it.

We have gained a good regional visibility within the Asia- Pacific region and we are taking one step at a time to reach the global market. Within the next three to five years we are hoping to reach this goal and through that we also expect to provide more employment and revenue to the country.

FRATERNITE 2019

The event Fraternite was held as a get together of OREPA Student Chapter. It is one of the three main events held by the OREPA Student Chapter annually. We received a bronze sponsorship from London Stock Exchange Group for the event.

Small hindrance was made by the rain at the start of the event but later on the rain subsided and the party gained its pace. Games and Music made the evening more memorable and everyone enjoyed the food and drinks.

Five personal from the main body, Dr. Nadika Jayasuriya, Mr. Chandula Samaranayake, Mr. Pamodh Alwis, Mr. Dulana Gajaba and Mr. Dasith Gunawardena participated in the event.

Pramuka de Zoyza and Isuru Janith acted as the Project chairmen.



Udara Kumarasena

SLASSCOM – OREPA TechKids

Young minds are the best learners. OREPA identifying this potential, joined hands with SLASSCOM, in planning “TechKids” to enhance the young minds at Royal College, thus molding future tech pioneers. SLASSCOM is a tech-based body aiming at accelerating innovative and technology sector in the island by providing opportunities for growth of new avenues in the sector.

SLASSCOM TechKids is a nationwide network of volunteers who run free coding clubs for young people. There are already over 10,000 Code Clubs across the world functioning through Code Club International inspiring the next generation on areas of computing and digital making.

The Student Body will be handling the coordination with the College to get participants for these programs, finding volunteers from universities to conduct these programs and collaborating with the College to handle the logistics of hosting these events. The program will be commencing on the coming year (2020), with a well-structured curriculum.

The initial phase of finding capable volunteers from universities has been completed. The volunteers were given a special training session, “Train the Trainer” to enhance the quality of the volunteers. This program was held at Hatch, Colombo 01 with the participation of the initial batch of five volunteers. The session was conducted by SLASSCOM representative, Mr. Shiraz Azad, who was the initiative behind the program “TechKids”.

The second phase involving planning of sessions has also been completed, and necessary coordination with College has also been initiated. The program for now has been structured as a lecture series conducted by volunteers of OREPA Student Chapter on every Thursdays, initially focusing on grade six students. Students will be taught basic programming using “Scratch” programming language which is a block-based visual programming language as an initial step. The program also aims on teaching other fundamental and popular programming languages like “Python” and “Microbits” once the students are familiar with basic programming principles. The program will be commencing soon as the college reopens for the new year. Participants for the program have already being selected through class teachers with the focus on Grade 6 for now.

This program is aimed at being a long-term partnership with SLASSCOM to explore further possibilities to strengthen the programming and technology related knowledge of students passing out from Royal College as these skills are emerging to be essential in the modern world.



Industrial insights 2019

The project “Industrial insights” conducted by OREPA Student Chapter was executed successfully in 2019. The focus of this project is to create a good rapport between the undergraduates and the old Royalists who are working in the engineering field. It was also aimed at expanding the network amongst them.

The project also helps to give industrial information to old Royalist undergraduates. The first introductory session was held at RCU. Mr. Heminda Jayaweera, chief operating officer at SLINTEC, conducted a motivational speech.



As the second session, the students of Electronic and Telecommunication Department were given the opportunity to meet Mr. Himantha Alahakoon, who is the Associate software Architect at Paraqum Technologies. A mentoring session was conducted by him.



Robotix

Robotics is a novel field of interest among entrepreneurs, learners, enthusiasts, and youngsters. It has evolved to a greater height rapidly in the past few years opening new avenues of interests. OREPA identifying the necessity of investing resources on such novel insights of technology has foreseen the need of developing skills related to robotics and has undertaken many projects.



“Robotix” was such an event which was aimed at providing aid to the college students in order to develop fundamental skills and knowledge related to robotics. This project was mainly aimed on the students who are interested in studying robotics thus, giving them the opportunity to broaden their knowledge on this fascinating sector of modern technology. Moreover, this was also aimed at providing necessary knowledge for the students who are interested in participating in tournaments and competitions related to robotics.

The program started on 26th of July. “Paraqum Technologies” sponsored the project by providing necessary technical equipment and support. The introductory session was a brief session on the technology and its importance. The program was scheduled on every Friday and the students were given hands on experience on Arduino programming, which is a basic form of programming language necessary for advancing in robotics. The program was a success and was carried out for up to seven successive sessions with the participation of enthusiastic number of students.

Student Intern

As phase 2 of the student Intern project we were able to obtain two new internships at Stack Technologies (Pvt) Ltd. The feedbacks received from the students were very much encouraging. One intern, Sandil Ranasinghe shared with us his experience .

“Student Intern program is a very valuable opportunity for us to obtain experience. After we started our internship, we gradually learned different kinds of computer languages such as digital JavaScript, web frameworks and so on. The hands-on experience really helped us to learn these aspects more efficiently.

Later, they involved us with their projects, and it was a wonderful experience. The staff there were really helpful. They helped us with the difficulties we faced and taught us what we lacked. We learned how to come up

with solutions for the problems we face by observing them. We also got the chance to work one on one with clients. The project that we are currently working on requires us to visit factories run by the client

Overall, we learned so much from this program. We not only learned the technical stuff, but we also learned how to work with people and the ethics of a work environment.”

Student Intern has provided many students with the opportunity to learn new skills and gather new knowledge beforehand. These new experiences give them confidence and also the upper hand when stepping into the industry later on in their career. We hope Student Intern will be able to similarly empower many more students in the years to come.



Yasas Guneratne

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“OREPA, as a host of technical experts in many facets of engineering and related fields, opens up a reservoir of knowledge, technical expertise and material support in the fields of engineering, architecture and related fields for the benefit of the students and the youth. OREPA is looking forward to become a key stakeholder of the Royal College and the community. This professional newsletter provides news on our projects, events and achievements to promote sustainability and youth empowerment within and beyond Royal College.”

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empower our initiatives;

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