IN THE COURT OF APPEAL OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA

In the matter of an application for mandates in the nature of Writs of Certiorari, Mandamus and Prohibition, in terms of Article 140 of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

B.H.M. Kapilaratne,
No. 10, Dunukewatta,
Dumkolawatta.

PETITIONER

C.A. Case No. WRT/0457/20

-Vs-

- The University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.
- Prof. Upul B. Dissanayake,
 Vice Chancellor and Member of
 Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
- 2A. Prof. M.D. Lamawansa

 Vice Chancellor and Member of
 Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
- 2AA.Prof. M.D. Lamawansa

 Vice Chancellor and Chairman of
 the Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.

- 2AAA. Prof. Terrance Madhujith,
 - Vice-Chancellor and Chairman of the Council and Member of Senate, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.
 - Prof. S.H.P. Karunaratne,
 Deputy Vice Chancellor and Member of Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
 - 3A. Prof. Terrance Madujith

 Deputy Vice Chancellor and Member
 of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
 - 3AA. Prof. R.W. Pallegama,

 Deputy Vice-Chancellor and member
 of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
 - 4. Prof. A.S. Abeygunawardena,
 Dean Faculty of Medicine and
 Member of Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
 - 4A.Prof. M.V.G. Pinto,

 Deputy Vice Chancellor and Member of Council and Senate

 and Chairman Faculty Board –

 Faculty of Medicine,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.

- 4AA.Prof. M.V.G. Pinto,

 Dean Faculty of Medicine and

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
- 4AAA. Prof. P.S.K. Nanayakkara,

 Dean Faculty of Medicine and

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
 - 5. Prof. D.K.N.G. Pushpakumara,
 Dean Faculty of Agriculture and
 Member of Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
 - 5A. Prof. K.A.A.S.Kittiwake,

 Dean Faculty of Agriculture and

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
 - 5AA. Prof. K.S.S. Kodithuwakku,

 Dean Faculty of Agriculture and

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
 - 6. Dr. M.A.G.C. Marasinghe
 Dean Faculty of Allied Health
 Sciences and Member of Council
 and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.

- 6A.Prof. M.D.M.L.D. Yatawara,
 Dean Faculty of Allied Health
 Sciences and Member of Council
 and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
- Prof. O.G. Dayaratne Banda
 Dean Faculty of Arts and Member of
 Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
- 7A.Prof. E.M.P.C.S. Ekanayake,

 Dean Faculty of Arts and Member of
 Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
- Dr. J.A.V.P. Jayasinghe,
 Dean Faculty of Dental Sciences and
 Member of Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 No. 353, Kotte Road,
 Rajagiriya.
- 8A.Prof. A .M. Atygalla,

 Dean Faculty of Dental Sciences and

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
- 8AA.Prof. B.M.H.S.K. Banneheka,

 Dean of Faculty of Dental Sciences
 and Member of Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.

- Prof. G.B. Herath,
 Dean Faculty of Engineering and
 Member of Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
- 9A.Prof. D.M.U.I Dissanayake,

 Dean Faculty of Engineering and

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
- 9AA. Prof. B.G.L.T. Samaranayake,

 Dean of Faculty of Engineering and

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
 - 10. Dr. M. Alfred,Dean Faculty of Management andMember of Council and Senate,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
 - 10A.Prof. E.M.A.S.B. Ekanayake,

 Dean Faculty of Management and

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
- 10AA. Prof. R.H.Kuruppuge,

 Dean of Faculty of Management and

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.

- 11. Prof. S.R. Kodithuwakku, Dean Faculty of Science and Member of Council and Senate, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.
- 11A.Prof. R.G.S.C. Rajapakse,

 Dean Faculty of Science and

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
 - 12. Dr. D.M.S. Munasinghe, Dean Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Sciences and Member of Council and Senate, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.
- 12A. Prof. P.G.A. Pushpakumara,

 Dean Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
 and Animal Sciences and Member of
 Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
- 12AA. Dr. A.W. Kalupahana,

 Dean of Faculty of Veterinary

 Medicine and Animal Science,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
 - 13. Prof. Anoma Abeyrathne, Member of Senate, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.

- 13A. Prof. P.G.A. Pushpakumara,

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
 - 14. Prof. N.A.A.S.P. Nissanka,Member of Senate,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
- 14A. Prof. P.G.A. Pushpakumara,

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
- 14B. Prof. B.M.H.S.K.Banneheka,

 Member of Council and Senate,

 University of Peradeniya,

 Peradeniya.
- 14C. Prof. R.H.Kuruppuge,Member of Council and Senate,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
- 14D. Prof. C.S.Wickramagamage,
 Member of Council and Senate,
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
 - 15. Most Ven. Niyangoda Wijithasiri,Member of Council,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
 - 16. Mr. Gamini Dissanayake, Member of Council, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.

- 17. Mr. Samantha Ratwatte,Member of Council,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
- 18. Eng. Nihal Rupasinghe, Member of Council, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.
- 19. Dr. D.M.R.B. Dissanayake,Member of Council,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
- 20. Mr. Udara Kirindigoda,Member of Council,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
- 21. Mr. Prasanna Gunathilake,Member of Council,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
- 22. Prof. Geri Peiris,Member of Council,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
- 23. Eng. Mahendra Wijepala,Member of Council,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
- 24. Dr. Gamini Buthpitiya,Member of Council,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.

- 25. Dr, Syril Wijesundara, Member of Council, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.
- 26. Prof. N.D. Samarawickrama,Member of Council,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
- 27. Mr. Janaka Chaminda Warnakula,Member of Council,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.
 - 27A. Prof. B.M.S.K. Banneheka,
 - 27B. Prof. C.S. Wickramagamage,
 - 27C. Prof. G.S.J. Dissanayake,
 - 27D. Prof. K. Gunawardena,
 - 27E. Dr. Sardha Hemapriya,
 - 27F. Mr. Mahendra Wijepala,
 - 27G. Senior Prof. Lakshman
 - 27H. Dissanayake,
 - 27I. Professor A.N. de S. Amaratunga
 - 27J. Mr. Saliya Dharmawardena
 - 27K. Dr. D.M.D.V. Jayampathi,
 - 27L. Mr. Mohan Weerakoon,
 - 27M. Dr. R.H.S. Samaratunga,
 - 27N. Prof. B.C. Javawardena,
 - 270. Prof. D.D.K.S. Karunanayake,
 - 27P. Dr. D.M.D.V. Jayampathi,
 - 27Q. Mrs. Nirodha S. Kalansooriya,
 - 27R. Mr. E.M. Gamini,
 - 27S. Prof. B.C. Jayawardena
 - 27T. Prof. Pradeepa Bandaranayake
 - 27U. Prof. Kapila Gunasekera
 - 27V. Prof. Oliver Illeperuma
 - 27W. Prof. Vasanthi Thevanesam
 - 27X. Prof. Vijaya Kumar
 - 27Y. S.T.B. Amunugama
 - 27Z. Praneeth Wickramaarachchi

27AA. Lal Wijeneyeke

27AB. H.M.P. Punchi Banda

27AC. Nimal Wickramasinghe

27AD. Ranjini Jayakody

27AE. Kamani Ranatunga

27AF.Tissa G. Marahela

All being Members of the Council, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya

28. Mr. R.Maheswaran,
Librarian (Acting) and Member of
Senate,
Librarian of Borndonius

University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.

28.A Prof. C.M.B. Dematawewa

Director – Post Graduate Institute of
Agriculture,

28.B Prof. S.G.S. De Mel

Director – Post Graduate Institute of
Humanities and Social Sciences,

28.C Prof. S.D. Dharmaratne

Director – Post Graduate Institute of

Medical Studies,

28.D Prof. H.M.T.G.A. Pitawala

Director – Post Graduate Institute of Science,

28.DDr. N.U. Jayawardena

Head of Department – Agriculture
Biology,

28.E Prof. S. Kumar

Head of Department – Agricultural

Economics & Business Management

28.F Prof. N.D.K. Dayawansa

Head of Department – Agriculture Engineering,

28.G Dr. U.L. Dissanayake

Head of Department – Agricultural Extension,

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Head of Department - Animal Sciences,

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Head of Department – Food Science and Technology,

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Head of Department - Soil Science,

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Head of Department - Physiotherapy,

28.M Dr. UJMAL Jayasinghe

Head of Department – Radiology / Radiotherapy,

28.N Dr. KLTD Jayawardena

Head of Department – Medical Laboratory Science,

28.0 Dr. N.R. Amarasinghe

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Head of Department - Basic Sciences,

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Head of Department – Arabic & Islamic Civilization,

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Head of Department- Economics & Statistics,

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Head of Department – Education,
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Head of Department – English,
28.X Prof. A. Parakrama
Head of Department – English Language
Teaching,

28.Y Dr. M.A.S.B. Mantilake Head of Department – Fine Arts,

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- 28.KK Dr. NSS Jayasuriya Head of Department – Oral & Maxillofacial,
- 28.LL Dr. Leuke Bandara Head of Department – Oral Medicine & Periodontology,
- 28.MM Prof. BSMS Siriwardena Head of Department – Oral Pathology,
- 28.NN Dr. IP Thilakumara

 Head of Department Prosthetic

 Dentistry,
- 28.00 Dr. GK Edirisinghe

 Head of Department Restorative

 Dentistry,
- 28.PP Dr MA Elangasinghe
 Head of Department Chemical Process
 & Engineering,
- 28.QQ Prof. Wijethunga JJ Head of Department – Civil Engineering,
- 28.RR Prof. Ragel RG

 Head of Department Computer
 Engineering,
- 28.SS Prof. Fernando MARM

 Head of Department Electrical & Electronic Engineering,
- 28.TT Ms. Sylva KKK

- Head of Department Engineering Management,
- 28.UU Dr. Perera SPC

 Head of Department Engineering

 Mathematics,
- 28.VV Dr. Kulatunga KMAK
 Head of Department Manufacturing &
 Industrial Engineering,
- 28.WW Dr. Rathnaweera AC
 Head of Department Mechanical
 Engineering,
- 28.XX Mrs. Kodithuwakku S. Head of Department – Business Finance,
- 28.YY Ms. Edirisooriya WA
 Head of Department Human Resource
 Management,
- 28.ZZ Ms. Kumari RMC

 Head of Department Management
 Studies,
- 28.AAA Ms. Hettiarachchy BS

 Head of Department Marketing

 Management,
- 28.BBB Prof. Kuruppuge R.H.

 Head of Management Operations

 Management,
- 28.CCC Dr. Amaratunga HA Head of Department Anatomy,
- 28.DDD Dr. Nanayakkara PSK Head of Department – Anesthesiology,
- 28.EEEProf. Alles CNRA Head of Department – Biochemistry,

28.FFF Prof. Tennakoon TMSUB

Head of Department – Community

Medicine,

28.GGG Prof. Edussuriya DH Head of Department – Forensic Medicine,

28.HHH Prof. Marambe KN Head of Department – Medical Education,

28.III Prof. Ralapanawa DMPUK Head of Department – Medicine,

28.JJJ Prof. Gamage CD Head of Department – Microbiology,

28.KKK Dr. Kandauda C Head of Department – Obstetrics & Gynaecology,

28.LLL Dr. Atapattu DN Head of Department – Parasitology,

28.MMM Prof. Wijethunga S Head of Department – Pathology,

28.NNN Prof. Dissanayake Pathum Head of Department – Paediatrics,

28.000 Dr. Fonseka HFS Head of Department – Pharmacology,

28.PPP Prof. Dasanayake WDMTL Head of Department – Physiology,

28.QQQ Dr. Udupihille JJKH Head of Department – Radiology,

28.RRR Dr. Samarasinghe

AKBBTB, Head of Department - Surgery,

28.SSS Prof. Jayasooriya KMGG Head of Department – Botany,

28.TTT Prof. Ganehenege MY Head of Department – Chemistry,

28.UUU Dr. Dassanayake BS Head of Department – Environmental & Industrial Sciences,

28.VVV Prof. Malaviarachchi MASPK. Head of Department – Geology,

28.WWW Dr. De Silva THKR Head of Department – Mathematics,

28.XXX Dr. Dhanapala MPCS Head of Department – Molecular Biology & Biochemistry,

28.YYY Dr. Sivakumar V Head of Department – Physics,

28.ZZZ Dr. Abeysundara SP Head of Department – Statistics & Computer Sciences,

28.AAAA Prof. Karunarathne WAIP Head of Department – Zoology,

28.BBBB Dr. Lokugalappatti LGS Head of Department – Basic Veterinary Sciences,

28.CCCC Dr. Fouzi MNM Head of Department – Farm Animal Production & Health,

28.DDDD Dr. Edirimanne ERKV

Head of Department – Veterinary Clinical Sciences,

28.EEEE Dr. Kalupahana AW Head of Department – Veterinary Pathobiology,

28.FFFF Dr. Fernando BR Head of Department – Veterinary Public Health & Pharmacology,

- Prof. S.A.C.N. Perera,

 Head of Department-Agricultural
 Biology
- 28HA.Dr. J.M.P.N. Anuradha, Head of Department - Agricultural Extension
- 28LA. Dr. D.N. Vidana Gamage, Head of Department - Soil Science
- 28OA. Dr. B.C.G. Mendis,
 Head of Department Medical
 Laboratory Science
- 28PA. Dr. T.M.I.U.K. Tennakoon, Head of Department – Pharmacy
- 28QA. Dr. A.M.S.D. Pathiranage, Head of Department – Nursing
- 28UA. Dr.Ven. J. Dhammaloka, Head of Department - Classical Languages
- 28VA. Prof. J.G. Sri Ranjith, Head of Department- Economics and Statistics
- 28YA. Prof. P.R.K.A. Vitharana,

- Head of Department English Language
- 28ZA. Prof. W.M.P.S. Bandara, Head of Department - Fine Arts
- 28AAA. Prof. T.W.M.T.W. Bandara, Head of Department – Geography
- 28CCC. Dr. M.L.K.C.K. Senaratne, Head of Department – Law
- 28DDD. Prof. H.M.M. Herath, Head of Department - Pali and Buddhist Studies,
- 28GGG. Mr. D.M.M.K. Dissanayake, Head of Department – Sinhala
- 28JJJ. Prof. A.K.S. Arambawatta, Head of Department - Basic Sciences
- 28KKK. Dr. H.S.K. Ratnathilake, Head of Department - Community Dental Health
- 28LLL. Dr. K.G.K.D. Kapugama, Head of Department - Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery
- 28MMM. Prof. H.N.S. Soysa,
 Head of Department Oral Med.
 And Periodontology
- 28000. Dr. J.A.V.P. Jayasinghe, Head of Department - Prosthetic Dentistry
- 28QQQ. Prof. D.G.G.P. Karunaratne, Head of Department - Chemical and Process Engineering

- 28RRR. Prof. K.K. Wijesundara, Head of Department - Civil Engineering
- 28TTT. Prof. H.M.V.R. Herath, Head of Department - Electrical and Electronic Engineering
- 28VVV. Dr. M.I.M. Ishak, Head (Actg.) of Department -Engineering Mathematics
- 28WWW. Dr. P. Gamage,
 Head of Department Manufacturing and Industrial
 Engineering
- 28ZZZ. Ms U.W.G.Y.E. Jayawickrama, Head of Department - Human Resource Management
- 28AAAA. Mr. T.S.S. Fernando, Head of Department Management Studies
 - 28BBBB. Ms. R.M.R.U.K. Rathnayake, Head of Department - Marketing Management
- 28CCCC. Dr. S. Maheswaran, Head of Department - Operations Management
- 28DDDD. Dr. D.R.K.C. Dissanayake, Head of Department – Anatomy
- 28EEEE. Dr. A. Abeysundara, Head of Department – Anesthesiology
- 28GGGG. Dr. Samidi Navaratne, Head of Department -Community Medicine

- 28HHHH. Prof. D.M.G. Fernando, Head of Department Forensic Medicine
 - 28JJJJ. Prof. L.P.M.M.K. Pathirage, Head of Department – Medicine
- 28KKKK. Prof. L.V.C. Liyanapathirana, Head of Department – Microbiology
- 28LLLL. Dr. M.C. Gihan,
 Head of Department Obstetrics and Gynaecology
- 28PPPP. Dr. H.M.T.W. Seneviratne, Head of Department -Pharmacology
- 28QQQ. Prof. D.W.P. Dahanayake, Head of Department – Physiology
- 28RRRR. Prof. P.B. Hewavithana, Head of Department Radiology
- 28SSSS. Dr. Manjula Peiris, Head of Department – Surgery
- 28TTTT. Prof. S.C.K. Rubasinghe, Head of Department – Botany
- 28UUUU. Prof. C.V. Hettiarachchi, Head of Department of Chemistry
- 28VVVV. Dr. W.M.C.S. Wijesundara, Head of Department – Environmental and Industrial Sciences
- 28WWWW. Prof. N.W.B. Balasooriya, Head (Actg.)-Department of Geology

- 28XXXX. Dr. W.N.P. Rodrigo, Head of Department – Mathematics
- 28ZZZZ. Prof. L.R.A.K. Bandara, Head of Department – Physics
- 28BBBBB. Prof. S.H. Boyagoda, Head of Department – Zoology
- 28CCCCC. Dr. R.M.S.B.K. Ranasinghe, Head of Department - Basic Veterinary Sciences
 - 28EEEE. Prof. A. Dangolla,
 Head of Department Veterinary Clinical Sciences
- 28GGGG. Dr. K.S.A. Kottawatta,
 Head of Department Vet.
 Public Health and
 Pharmacology
 - 28FFFFF. Dr.S.S.S. de S. Jagoda, Head of Department - Vet. Pathobiology
 - 28.1A Prof. Amarathunga KSP,
 - 28.1BProf. Athauda ARSB,
 - 28.1CDr. Ariyaratne WMTP,
 - 28.1DProf. Bandaranayake PCG,
 - 28.1EProf. Costa De DM,
 - 28.1F Prof. Costa De WAJM,
 - 28.1GProf. Dharmasena DAN,
 - 28.1HProf. D.S. Dandeniya,
 - 28.11 Prof. JP Eeswara,
 - 28.1J Prof. Gunaratne LHP,
 - 28.1KProf. Hemachandra KS.
 - 28.1L Prof. Herath HMVG,
 - 28.IMProf. Hitinayake HMGSB,
 - 28.1M Prof. SMC Himali,
 - 28.1NProf. Ileperuma DCK,

- 28.10Prof. Janak Kamil VA,
- 28.1P Prof. Jayawardana BC,
- 28.1QProf. KKSP Kodithuwakku,
- 28.1RProf. Marambe PWMBB,
- 28.1S Prof. Mohotti AJ,
- 28.1T Prof. Mowjood MIM,
- 28.1UProf. Nissanka NAASP,
- 28.1VProf. Perera SACN,
- 28.1W Prof. Prasada PVP,
- 28.1XProf. Prasanna PHP,
- 28.1Y Prof. Prasantha BDR,
- 28.2A Prof. Pushpakumara DKNG,
- 28.2BProf. Rajapaksha RMCP,
- 28.2CProf. M.S.M Saleem,
- 28.2DProf. Samitha S,
- 28.2EProf. Silva GLLP,
- 28.2F Prof. Silva WPRA de,
- 28.2GProf. Sivananthawerl T,
- 28.2HProf. Suriyagoda LDB,
- 28.21 Prof. Vidanarachchi YVAJK,
- 28.2J Prof. Vitharana WAU,
- 28.2KProf. Weerahewa HLI,
- 28.2L Prof. Weerakkody WAP,
- 28.2M Prof. KMS Wimalasiri,
- 28.2NProf. Wijayagunawardena MPB,
- 28.20Dr. N.R. Amarasinghe,
- 28.2P Prof. DBM Weeraratne,
- 28.2QProf. Fahim A.C.M,
- 28.2RProf. Herath HMTU,
- 28.2S Dr. MPS Mudalige,
- 28.2T Prof. Abhayaratne ASP,
- 28.2UProf. Athukorala PPAW,
- 28.2V Prof. Azmi MI Fazeeha,
- 28.2W Prof. Bandara TWMTW,
- 28.2XProf. Bandara WMPS,
- 28.2Y Prof. Chandraratne RMM,
- 28.2Z Prof. Dayaratne Banda OG,
- 28.3A Prof. Dissanayake DML,
- 28.3BProf. Ven. Gnanananda M.
- 28.3CProf. Gunawardena DNB,
- 28.3DProf. Hennayake N,
- 28.3EProf. Herath HMM,
- 28.3F Prof. Hettiarachchi R.,

28.3GProf. Hewawasam ALT,

28.3HProf. Jamahir PM,

28.31 Prof. Jayawardena RGD,

28.3J Prof. Jayawickrama JMA,

28.3KProf. Karunanayake D.D.K.S.,

28.3L Prof. Kularathne GGS,

28.3M Prof. Liyanage WA,

28.3NProf. Perera WLP,

28.30Prof. Pinnawala MR,

28.3P Prof. Rambukwella MWCNK,

28.3QProf. Ranathilake MB,

28.3RProf. Sarathchandra P.G.R.,

28.3S Prof. A Sarjoon,

28.3T Prof. MSM Saleem,

28.3UProf. PGR Sarathchandra,

28.3VProf. Seneviratne R.P.,

28.3W Prof. A.G.L. Seneheweera,

28.3XProf. Sivamohan S.,

28.3Y Prof. Somathilake M.,

28.3Z Prof. Sri Ranjith JG,

28.4A Prof. Vijesandiran S,

28.4BProf. Wickramagamage CS,

28.4C Prof. Wickramasinghe

WMWGCSM,

28.4DProf. Wijesinghe SN,

28.4EProf. Wimalasena NA,

28.4F Prof. Amaratunga EAPD,

28.4GProf. Arambawatta AKS,

28.4HProf. Ariyasinghe KSN,

28.41 Prof. M.D.K. De Silva,

28.4J Prof. Dissanayake UB,

28.4KProf. Herath EMUCK,

28.4L Professor Jayasinghe RD,

28.4M Prof. PR Jayasooriya,

28.4NProf. Jayatilake IAMS,

28.40Prof. Jayawardena JACK,

28.4P Prof. Nandasena BGTL,

28.4QProf. Pallegama RW, P

28.4RProf. Panagoda GJ.

28.4S Prof. Peiris HRD,

28.4T Prof. Siriwardena BSMS,

28.4UProf. Soysa HNS,

28.4V Prof. Tilakaratne A,

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39CZ Dr. V.N.Seneviratne

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All being Faculty Board Members of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.

- Mr. R.S.V.P. Rajapaksha,
 Registrar (Acting),
 University of Peradeniya,
 Peradeniya.
- 42. Ms. Samanthi Herath,

 Deputy Registrar Academic

 Established Division,

University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.

43. Ms. Herath,Assistant Registrar – Faculty of Medicine,University of Peradeniya,Peradeniya.

44. The University Grants Commission,No. 20, Ward Place,Colombo 07.

RESPONDENTS

BEFORE: K. M. G. H. KULATUNGA, J.

COUNSEL: Rajeev Amarasuriya with Subani Hewapathirana and Yohani Yoharajah, for the Petitioner.

Sumathi Dharmawardena, ASG, PC, Shemanthi Dunuwille, SC, for the Respondents.

ARGUED ON : 31.07.2025

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS ON: 11.08.2025

DECIDED ON : 09.10.2025

JUDGEMENT

K. M. G. H. KULATUNGA, J.

1. The petitioner was an undergraduate of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya, registered for the academic year 2009/2010. The petitioner has successfully completed the undergraduate studies and graduated, obtaining an MBBS degree. The petitioner's basic complaint to this Court is that though she had obtained the required marks to qualify to be awarded a Second Class Lower, by obtaining the required average marks as specified in Clause XXIII of the Student

Handbook. However, the Council of the University of Peradeniya has refused and not awarded the Second Class Lower to the petitioner on the basis that she had not passed all the subjects in the first attempt as prescribed in the said Clause XXIII.

- 2. The petitioner, in November 2019, was required to sit for the final MBBS examination and take five subjects, namely, (1) Medicine; Gynaecology & Obstetrics; (3) Paediatrics; (4) Surgery; and (5) Psychiatry. The petitioner has sat for three subjects, Medicine, Surgery, and Psychiatry, in the final examination held in 2019. The petitioner has then sat for the other two subjects, Gynaecology & Obstetrics and Paediatrics, in the Final MBBS Examination held in June 2020. The petitioner has so sat for two subjects in the following year upon submitting a medical certificate for those two subjects. It is common ground that the medical certificate submitted by the petitioner was approved by the Senate and accepted by the University. Upon so accepting the medical certificates, the petitioner was permitted to sit for the said two subjects in June 2020. The petitioner had successfully passed the said two subjects and has also obtained an average of 62%, which brings her within the qualifying average mark of 60-64% to be awarded a Second Class Lower. The petitioner was not awarded the Second Class Lower. In view of this, the petitioner preferred this application.
- 3. The position of the petitioner is that if a medical certificate is approved by the Senate and is accepted, such attempt is not considered as being an attempt, and passing of the said two subjects on the following occasion would then be deemed as the completion of the final examination and passing all subjects in the first attempt. As opposed to this, the respondents' position is that the said position of the petitioner is devoid of merit and unreasonable, as all medical students from faculties of medicine across Sri Lanka were required to sit for all five subjects without any break, in one sitting, in the final MBBS examination, as per the procedure approved by the University Grants

Commission (UGC). It is such students who are entitled to have obtained classes. This, being a highly competitive examination, allowing a person to claim a class upon sitting for the examination on two different occasions, affords such student an undue advantage as against those who have sat for all five subjects at one and the same examination without any break. To this end, the respondents appear to base their arguments on the plain reading of Clause XXIII that the candidate must pass all subjects in the first attempt to obtain a class.

4. The final year MBBS examination consists of five subjects, and all final year medical students are required to sit for all five subjects to be considered as a first attempt. It is the position of the respondents that the MBBS final examination is a common examination, held across Sri Lanka for all medical students at all Sri Lankan universities registered under the UGC. The criteria and guidelines as to the requirements to award degrees is contained in the Rules and Regulations Governing Examinations in the Faculty of Medicine, as incorporated and included in the University Student Handbook (P-9, 2014 Edition), according to which the relevant clause is Clause XXIII, which reads as follows:

"CLAUSE XXIII

Classes

With respect to the final MBBS, classes are awarded on the basis of the average overall mark as shown below. This proposal was implemented from 2007/08 batch.

Average Mark per subject	Class
60-64	Second Class Lower
65-69	Second Class Upper
70 and above	First Class

The candidates must pass all subjects in the first attempt to obtain a class."

According to the above, it is expressly provided that the candidates must pass all subjects in the first attempt to obtain a class. The contentious issue between the parties in this application arises out of this clause based on the term "first attempt". The argument advanced on behalf of the petitioner is that the phrase "first attempt" is subject to Clause XV, which provides for the tendering and accepting of medical certificates. Clause XV of Section 3 provides that:

"CLAUSE XV

With respect to any examination

- (1) A student must sit the first available examination unless a valid excuse has been submitted to the Faculty and accepted by the Senate.
- (2) The first available attempt is the examination in respect to a module, for which a student has been assigned to and is held at the scheduled end of the module, course or subject.
 (3) If an excuse submitted to the Faculty for failure to sit an available examination is accepted by the Senate, that examination shall not be considered as an attempt.
- (4) A valid excuse shall be
 - (a) An illness; or
 - (b) A personal problem (described in item 6 below)"

The above clearly provides that an illness is a valid excuse. As contemplated by sub-clause (3) of Clause XV, if the Senate had accepted the said ground for the failure to sit an examination, such examination shall not be considered as an attempt.

5. Relying on these provisions, it is argued on behalf of the petitioner that due to her failure to sit for two subjects on the basis of an illness, the subsequent attempt should be deemed her first attempt in respect of the said subjects, though she sat and successfully completed the examination that was held next. On this basis, it is the petitioner's contention that she should be considered as having *passed all subjects in the first attempt* within the meaning of Clause XXIII. It is on this basis that the petitioner is seeking a writ of *mandamus* directing the respondents to award her a Second Class Lower classification.

- 6. Clause XV provides for any examination; this would include the Final MBBS examination as well. Accordingly, if the excuse is accepted, it provides that such examination shall not be considered as an attempt. Based on this provision, the petitioner argues that due to being excused from two subjects the first time around, based on the valid excuse of an illness, such first attempt would not be considered as an attempt, which certainly is correct and appears to be so on a plain reading of Clause XV (3).
- 7. According to the objections, the Admission Card had been issued on the basis that the petitioner's sitting for the examination in 2020 is a repeat examination. It is also the position of the respondents that the petitioner was offered two options. The said options alleged to have been so offered are that "the petitioner can request to make the first attempt null and void and to sit for all the five subjects at the next available examination as the first attempt and in such instance she will be entitled for honours and distinction, OR the petitioner can sit for the remaining two subjects in the next available examination, which will be a second attempt" (vide paragraphs 41 and 42 of the objections). The respondents submit that the petitioner did accept the second option and sat for the examination on the said premise.
- 8. I will now consider the position and procedure as provided for by the Rules and Regulations Governing Examinations in the Faculty of Medicine in the context of this application. In the current application, the submission of medical certificates and the same being accepted and approved by the University is not in dispute and is common ground. This is in fact admitted by the respondents in paragraph 53 of the objections. That being so, the rules provide that a student is required to take all subjects to complete the examination in any given attempt.

Clause XXII provides thus:

"Clause XXII

Referred and Fail

In any given attempt the student is required to take all the subjects in which he/she needs a pass to complete the examination."

Therefore, it is a requirement that all the subjects should be taken by a student at any given attempt.

- 9. The piecemeal sitting for selected subjects is thus prohibited and not allowed. However, a student may, in certain circumstances, be excused from taking and sitting for one or more subjects at such examination and be permitted to take and sit for such subjects. separately on a subsequent occasion. This, according to the current Rules and regulations, may arise in two situations: firstly, where a student is referred in respect of one or more subjects as provided for by Clause XXII; and secondly, if a valid excuse is accepted in respect of some of the subjects as provided by Clause XV. In both these situations, such student is entitled to and will be required to take and sit such referred or excused subject at the immediate next examination. The referred students will be so categorised and will be considered as their next attempt. However in respect of those who have been excused, be it based on medical grounds or otherwise, they are not in the same position, nor can they be considered referred or repeat candidates, as Clause XV (3) clearly provides that if a valid excuse is accepted, such examination shall not be considered as an attempt. The effect and import of this clause is that if on the first attempt an excuse was accepted, then the immediate next "attempt" which such excused student sits for will be considered the first attempt. Thus, to my mind, the plain reading of the Rules and Regulations is that an excused candidate stands in a different position from that of a repeat/referred student.
- 10. At this juncture and in this context, the propriety of the purported two options granted by the University requires to be considered. As stated

above, the respondents claim to have offered either to abandon the first attempt in respect of the successful subjects and sit afresh for the entire examination (all five subjects) or sit and take the two subjects as a referred student. For the aforementioned reasons, as an excused student cannot be considered or deemed to be a referred student, the second option is not tenable.

- 11. The first option was that the petitioner could have the first attempt made null and void and to consider the next examination the first attempt (vide paragraph 21(i) of the Objections). I have perused the provisions pertaining to the Rules and Regulations Governing Examinations in the Faculty of Medicine, but I have not found any provision that enables making of a first attempt null and void in order to make the next examination the first attempt. This option so offered to the petitioner is contrary to the said Rules and Regulations. Accordingly, the so called options offered are clearly contrary to and is inconsistent with the Rules and Regulations Governing Examinations in the Faculty of Medicine. In similar vein, there is no lawful basis to deem or consider the sitting of the 2020 examination in respect of the two subjects to be a repeat or referred. Accordingly, I hold that the respondents could not and cannot categorise the petitioner as a referred student nor compel the petitioner to abandon and make void the entirety of the examination she sat for in 2019. Accordingly, I hold that the sitting of the 2020 examination of the two subjects should be considered as the petitioner's first attempt for all purposes of the Rules and Regulations, including for the consideration of awarding of a class.
- 12. On an overall consideration of the Rules and Regulations, it is apparent that the scheme provided for examinations appears to be as follows. To qualify for a class, it is required that a student should pass all the subjects in the first available attempt. As for the petitioner, it was the 2019 examination. As for the said three subjects, the 2019 examination is the first attempt. Then, as for the subsequent two subjects, taken and

sat in 2020, it cannot, in the normal course, be the first attempt but is the next attempt. However, by virtue of the provisions in Clause XV (3), the 2019 examination cannot be considered as an attempt. As stated above, the examination the petitioner sat for in July 2020 and took two subjects, for all purposes, including for the consideration of awarding of a class, will thus be deemed the first attempt for the said two subjects. Therefore, the petitioner, by operation of the said Rules and Regulations is considered to have passed all the subjects in the first attempt, so to say.

- 13. The learned State Counsel vehemently argued that a student, to be considered and to qualify for a class, is required to pass all the subjects in the first attempt in *one and the same sitting*. The learned State Counsel, in advancing this argument, proceeds on the premise that there is a requirement of having to sit and pass all subjects in one and the same sitting, under Clause XXIII. Unfortunately, the clause does not provide so. It only refers to a first attempt. With the acceptance of an excuse with the Clause XV (3), such subsequent attempt will be deemed and be considered the first attempt. If the Rules and Regulations intended to exclude the application of Clause XV (3) to the awarding of classes, the Rules ought to have excluded its application and specifically stated so; in the absence of which, such a requirement cannot be read into by a process of interpretation.
- 14. The supporting argument of the respondents is that as the petitioner had the opportunity of sitting for the several subjects on a staggered basis as opposed to the other students who were required to sit all subjects in the same examination, and this would create an unfairness from the point of view of the other students, giving an undue advantage to the petitioner. It was also argued that the awarding of classes is a matter which should be left to the academic authorities, and this unfairness, or unfair advantage that may be gained by the petitioner should be a relevant consideration in deciding this issue. As

aforementioned, on a plain reading of the provisions of the Rules and Regulations, it has enabled the petitioner to be considered to have sat and passed all five subjects in the first attempt, although it was two different sittings. When rules provide so, the petitioner is entitled to the benefit of the same. The basis of a possible unfair advantage as against others merely cannot be a lawful reason to deny the petitioner the benefit or the advantage she may have so gained according to the rules. Such advantage or benefit cannot be considered illegal or unlawful but is a lawful advantage gained in accordance with the Rules and Regulations.

15. I am mindful that matters and decisions pertaining to qualitative issues of awarding degrees and making other similar decisions should be left to the respective educational institutions and that Courts should seldom intervene. In this regard, I find the following dicta of Sedley, L.J., in *Clark vs. University of Lincolnshire and Humberside* (2000) 1 WLR 1988, cited in Wade & Forsyth's Administrative Law (11th Ed. at page 537), relevant:

"The courts will, in any case, be reluctant to enter into 'issues of academic or pastoral judgement which the University was equipped to consider in breadth and in depth but on which any judgment of the Courts would be jejune and inappropriate. That undoubtedly included such questions as what mark or class a student ought to be awarded or whether an aegrotat was justified."

The above was followed in the case of **Abeysundara Mudiyanselage Sarath Weera Bandara vs. University of Colombo** (CA Writ Application No. 844/2010, decided on 08.06.2018), where A. H. M. D. Nawaz, J., with P. P. Surasena, J. (P/CA) (as his Lordship then was), agreeing, held that,

"The consistent judicial opinion, therefore, is that in matters which lie within the jurisdiction of the educational institutions and their authorities, the Court has to be slow and circumspect before interfering with any decision taken by them in connection therewith. Unless a decision is demonstrably illegal, arbitrary and unconscionable, their province and authority should not be encroached upon. This is mainly because of want of judicially manageable standards and necessary expertise to assess, scrutinise and judge the merits and/or demerits of such decisions." [emphasis added].

16. In the present application, however, it is not a pure and simple decision or a holistic determination of a qualitative issue of awarding a class. It is but a specific decision and determination of the **entitlement** of a student to be awarded a class in accordance with the express Rules and Regulations. The 1st respondent university and its authorities have initially made certain proposals completely alien, inconsistent and contrary to the express Rules and Regulations. Secondly, the petitioner had been denied what she is plainly entitled to by virtue of the operation of the said governing Rules and Regulations. This is different and distinct from the facts and circumstances of the aforesaid decisions. Dr. Shirani Bandaranayake, J. (as her Ladyship then was), in *Dr. Karunanada vs. Open University of Sri Lanka and Others* (2006) 3 Sri L.R. 225 (decided on 31.05.2006), did clearly opine that,

"I am not in agreement with the view that academic decisions are beyond challenge, there is no necessity for the Courts to unnecessarily intervene in matters 'purely of academic nature' since such issues are best dealt with by academics who are fully equipped to consider the questions in hand; however if there are allegations against decisions of academic establishments that fall under the category stipulated in terms of Article 126, there are no provisions to restrain this Court from examining an alleged violation relating to an infringement or imminent infringement irrespective of the fact that the said violation is in relation to a decision of an academic establishment." [emphasis added].

This is one such unique situation in which the academic decision is not beyond challenge and where the intervention of the Court is required, warranted, and justified.

17. Accordingly, the decision to refuse and not award the relevant class is, to that extent, contrary to the rules and amounts to an illegality. In the context of the principles of administrative law governing the grounds of

judicial review, an illegality arises where a decision maker acts outside the scope of its legal authority, misdirects itself in law, or fails to apply the governing legal framework correctly. Lord Diplock, in his exposition of the principles of judicial review in the landmark case of *Council of Civil Service Unions vs. Minister for the Civil Service* [1985] AC 374 (commonly referred to as the "GCHQ case"), expressed the above view as follows:

"By 'illegality' as a ground for judicial review I mean that the decision-maker must understand correctly the law that regulates his decision-making power and must give effect to it. Whether he has or not is par excellence a justiciable question to be decided in the event of dispute, by those persons, the judges, by whom the judicial power of the state is exercisable."

In the present instance, the 1st respondent University and its authorities have acted contrary to the Rules and Regulations Governing Examinations in the Faculty of Medicine by categorising the petitioner as a repeat candidate and by purporting to offer options not contemplated by and inconsistent with the said Rules. This amounts to an illegality and constitutes a clear instance of an authority acting *ultra vires*. The impugned decision, therefore, is tainted with illegality, warranting the intervention of this Court in the exercise of its writ jurisdiction, and is liable to be quashed.

- 18. For the aforesaid reasons, I am of the view that the petitioner is entitled to the relief as prayed for by prayers (b), (e), and (h) of the petition.
- 19. Accordingly, the following writs are issued:
 - a. a writ of *certiorari* is hereby issued to quash the impugned decision of the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Medicine, the Senate and/or the Council of the University of Peradeniya, comprising the 1st to 40th respondents and/or any one or more of them or the other respondents, deciding/determining and classifying that the petitioner was a repeat candidate when she sat for the subjects of Gynaecology and Obstetrics and

Paediatrics at her final MBBS Examination at the University of Peradeniya;

- b. a writ of *mandamus* directing the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Medicine, the Senate and/or the Council of the University of Peradeniya, comprising the 1st to 40th respondents and/or any one or more of them or the other respondents, to issue fresh/amended results/results sheets/transcripts which do not classify the petitioner as a repeat candidate at her final MBBS examination and to classify the petitioner as having completed the same examination in her first attempt; and
- c. a writ of *mandamus* directing the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Medicine, the Senate and/or the Council of the University of Peradeniya, comprising the 1st to 40th respondents and/or any one or more of them or the other respondents, to award the petitioner the Honours Class in the appropriate category for the MBBS degree programme.
- 20. Application is allowed to that extent. However, I make no order as to costs.

JUDGE OF THE COURT OF APPEAL