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Location of an Engineering Faculty in Sri Lanka: The Unusual Criteria, Lessons Learnt and Ethics Issues

Abstract – Sri Lanka recently decided to set up a new engineering faculty, in addition to the three already in existence. This paper describes the unusual considerations that went into the author making a recommendation on the location of the faculty at the behest of the University Grants Commission which is principally responsible for all university development and funding.

While in most countries the criteria on whether to set about establishing a new faculty and where would depend on need, in Sri Lanka, as in many countries where government is solely in charge of universities, the final process and its outcome depended on many additional criteria to the normal, including political criteria.

While need was certainly a part of it, in this instance, the author who was commissioned to write the report, had to a) Examine regional aspirations in a country rent by communal strife; b) Weigh the viability of big cities where industry can support an engineering faculty’s research and training programs and such programs’ associated placement needs, against the demands of rural cities long denied development; c) Consider the worries of parents close to any new faculty that their children would be sent to an as yet undeveloped faculty as opposed to the established ones where they would otherwise go; d) Look at the need to build hostel blocks in a cash-strapped national economy, which would become necessary in rural areas, as opposed to urban areas where private rooms for students are available from residential homes; e) Worry about the need of politicians to show that they are influential in settling the issue against the actual optimal situation, playing off presidential, ministerial and local politicians’ interests and their positions; f) Research the ability of students located rurally (educated in the Tamil or Sinhalese language to high school) to pick up English which is now increasingly important for employment prospects; g) Consider the rich additional course offerings available to students in established cities through other faculties h) Weigh the available water supply and recreational facilities in a rural setting and i) Consider the fears of local communities that their “traditional homelands” would be vitiating the government using the faculty to move in other ethnic groups for political reasons.

In the end, the issue was settled by ministerial directive based entirely on political considerations. The paper, using this experience, draws lessons on how best to serve the student community in such a situation; especially when the government is exclusively in charge of higher education as in Sri Lanka. This paper is also a full report on the development of the new faculty of engineering and raises many ethical issues for engineers in education administration.

Keywords: Professional Ethics, Jaffna, Engineering Faculty, Site-location, Sri Lanka, politics.

I. University Education in Sri Lanka and Official Histories
The modern Sri Lankan university system began in 1823 with the Batticotta Seminary in Jaffna (in the North) established by the Presbyterian America Ceylon Mission from New England. This, together with the Wesleyan Methodist Mission’s Seminary in Jaffna (1834), is certified by the
Colonial Secretary Sir James Emerson Tennent in a letter dated March 23, 1848 to Rufus Anderson, DD, of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions as “entitled to rank with many an European University.” Jaffna is the cultural capital of the Tamil minority of Sri Lanka, who occupied the North and East as the dominant majority while being scattered over the rest of Sri Lanka where the majority Sinhalese predominate (Fig. 1). The curriculum at Batticotta consisted of “In the Academical Department, Algebra, Euclid, Conic Sections, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Astronomy, Logic, Rhetoric, Mental and Moral Philosophy, Paley’s Natural Theology, Butler’s Analogy, Classical Tamil and Sanskrit; in the Normal Department Arithmetic, Algebra, Grammar, Geography, History, Natural theology, Tamil, Classical Reader, English Bible, &c.” The Wesleyan Seminary’s is said to have been similar in Tennent’s letter.

These missionary colleges turned their attention to secondary education after the colonial government established University College Colombo in 1921 as an extended part of the federated University of London with its system of affiliated colleges. This was upgraded to the University of Ceylon in 1942 under Parliament’s Ceylon University Ordinance No. 186 of 1942. This one University of Ceylon for the entire nation catered to less than 1% of the aspiring population and maintained very high standards. Graduates of the independent University of Ceylon were well regarded internationally as judged by their employment and postgraduate admission track records.

II. Ethnic Politics and Engineering

As a result of the missionary (mainly American missionary) educational efforts in the North, the Tamils of Sri Lanka, then numbering some 22% of the population, used to garner close to 50% of the competitive seats in engineering and medicine at the University of Ceylon; but because they shunned the humanities and social sciences, their overall share of university seats was proportionately well below their population.

This was not acceptable to the majority Sinhalese who introduced ethnic quotas from the admissions for the year 1970, the arguments centering around who was over-represented. Tamils prided themselves in doing well in mathematics and the sciences; and out of the four G.C.E. Advanced Level subjects for engineering admissions, namely Applied Mathematics, Pure Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry, they tended to score highly in the first two. Adding 28 marks to the 4-subject Sinhalese aggregate before determining admissions as they did in 1970, was brazen communalism and brought in a lot of criticism from outside. It was the reverse of affirmative action – a majority imposing a higher standard on a minority for university admission – and it seemed shameful to outsiders and even many Sinhalese. Therefore ethnic quotas were soon abandoned in favor of what the government called standardization whereby the means in the two language streams were equated as were the standard deviations. Standardization is a legitimate exercise in education management when comparing performances in different subject
streams. But this was the first time it was applied to compare students sitting the same subject papers in their different languages of instruction (the same question papers being used in translation). Since the Tamils did better in the sciences, standardization effectively brought Tamil marks down. It achieved the same goal as before of keeping Tamils out of the university but under the guise of a new scientific method. Before this, Tamils were just kept out of the university but now under standardization their grades too suffered, precluding them, upon being denied university admission, from applying for jobs based on their reduced grades. For example, as a result of standardization in one year in the mid-1970s a Tamil scoring below 55% in Physics got the grade of F whereas a Sinhalese with 65% in the same paper got the grade of A.

Further, the government arguing that the G.C.E. A. Levels were too diverting of student attention from other necessary student activities, reduced the G.C.E. A. Levels to three subjects, combining the two mathematics subjects into one. The Tamils saw it as a deliberate move to cut their feet off from under them.

![Figure 1: The Provinces and Major Cities of Sri Lanka](image)

In addition, the government also introduced regional quotas. This gave a socialist cover to moving away from raw marks for university admission. This allowed Tamils from poorer areas like Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mannar and Vavuniya to enter the university more easily. Co-opting some Tamils on to the standardization bandwagon muted the monolithic Tamil opposition to standardization while continuing with the overarching goal of eliminating Tamils from the professions.
In essence, engineering admissions from Jaffna were reduced further by regional quotas requiring a Jaffna student to score a lot more for engineering admissions.

The tougher admission standards for poor village Tamils vis-à-vis rich Sinhalese from Colombo on the grounds of Tamil privilege was embarrassing to the government clothing itself in the garb of socialism which therefore declared everything about examinations and admissions cut-off marks confidential. And under confidentiality, a lot of corruption was permitted which became public only when governments changed in 1977 – many had graduated as doctors and engineers (taking the most competitive university seats) and gone abroad by the time it was recognized that they never deserved admission for the few seats available although they possessed well above the minimum qualifications for admissions. This writer’s wife’s father was high up in the administrative service and he was offered by Sinhalese colleagues in 1974 to have her marks altered behind the closed doors of the examination branch of the ministry to upgrade her admission from the Faculty of Science to the Faculty of Medicine, an offer that was politely declined.

Different admission and grade standards for the two different ethnic communities (often mistakenly referred to as races) by a government that insisted that Sri Lanka is one indivisible nation, stoked Tamil separatism and set off student unrest. The regional quotas ensured that the loudest voice for separation would come more from Jaffna than any other Tamil region.

The cry for separation enraged the Sinhalese who increased repression and set off a pogrom against Tamils in 1977 and 1983 as the Sri Lankan President justified the pogrom thus in the height of the killings in July-August 1983: “I cannot see, and my government cannot see any other way by which we can appease the natural desire and request of the Sinhala people.”

In the brutal civil war that followed, the most educated of the Tamils fled the country, making it necessary by the year 2004 officially to categorize Jaffna as a backward region for university admissions. The Tamils, who had first had their opportunities restricted by standardization and regional quotas, now found that the system increased their admission. By and large, Tamils left behind were of lower quality (with the exception of some with strong reasons to stay) and these ensured their control of institutions in the Tamil areas by being obsequious to the government and keeping out those of good quality. It made life for Tamils even harder.

The ethnic war for separation by the Tamil Tigers from 1983 added to the all-round collapse of the education system as a poor country diverted its budget to defense, with defense spending (nearly always being marked by kick-backs) justified in the name of nationalism. Qualified Tamils nearly always fled. Sinhalese too fled as the inconveniences of a war-budget and checkpoints and bombings took their toll.
III. Engineering and Engineering for University of Jaffna

The university system was rapidly expanded to meet student aspirations, eventually accommodating about 3.1% of the population by 2004. The World Bank's target for reaching Newly Industrialized Country (NIC) status was having 8% of the 18-22 age cohort in degree programs. The single University of Ceylon first branched into regional campuses in the early 1970s which were then broken off into independent Universities numbering 15 today; these, with the closest city center in brackets, being presented in Table 1. The cities are shown in Fig. 1 to give the reader an idea of the geographical distribution of the universities over the island.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Nearby City</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Peradeniya</td>
<td>2220</td>
<td>Kandy</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Colombo</td>
<td>2240</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Moratuwa</td>
<td>3514</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Ruhuna</td>
<td>3514</td>
<td>Matara/Galle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University of Sri Lanka</td>
<td>5988</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ. of Srijayawardenepura</td>
<td>6382</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kelaniya</td>
<td>6594</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sagaragamuwa University</td>
<td>6382</td>
<td>Ratnapura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Jaffna</td>
<td>9406</td>
<td>Jaffna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Univ. of Sri Lanka</td>
<td>10859</td>
<td>Batticaloa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayamba University of Sri Lanka</td>
<td>11488</td>
<td>Kurunagala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Eastern University of Sri Lanka</td>
<td>&gt;12000</td>
<td>Kalmunai/Pottuvil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajarata University of Sri Lanka</td>
<td>&gt;12000</td>
<td>Anuradhapura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uva Wellassa University</td>
<td>&gt;12000</td>
<td>Badulla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of the Visual &amp; Performing Arts</td>
<td>&gt;12000</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
</tr>
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Out of these 15 universities, it is seen that six are effectively in Colombo and five of these six universities have been the best and have grown much faster than the others because of the willingness and even wishes of staff to be close to Colombo, with the benefits of urban life including access to good schools for their children. The exception is the University of Visual and Performing Arts which is staffed mainly by artistes without university training, which explains its lower ranking.

Of the out-of-Colombo universities, Ruhuna is an exception in doing relatively well because the Matara area, like Jaffna, has produced many intellectuals and has had time to develop. If not for the war and the isolation which came with it, it is likely that Jaffna too would rank at the top at least with Ruhuna.
An element of regionalism was introduced with Tamil areas in the North and East getting University of Jaffna and Eastern University of Sri Lanka in the 1970s, while the Muslim Southeast got its South Eastern University a little later. Technically all universities are national under the central University Grants Commission (UGC). However, the war meant that only Tamils and Muslims were fully willing to go to the Tamil and Muslim Universities in the war-ravaged Northeast of the island.

But the problem with expansion of the university system was staff. Many with modern western credentials to teach in a university had left as the country faced difficulties stemming from the war which also contributed to the politicization of the administration.\textsuperscript{10,11}

The humanities and social sciences, the pure sciences and even medicine adapted by issuing local postgraduate degrees, mainly at master’s level, to churn out large numbers of postgraduate degree holders minimally if not ideally qualified to teach in a university. Such master’s degree holders, however, usually lack the language skills to teach subject degrees in the sciences and medicine which are still officially conducted in English; as a result, in practice a lot of the teaching is in the vernacular. Nor did they have the research skills to do independent research of internationally publishable quality. But the arrangement sufficed to carry on.

In engineering however, with occasional exceptions such as the Department of Production Engineering at Peradeniya where unofficially teaching is in Sinhalese thereby keeping Tamils out of the program, the standard of a Ph.D. holder fluent enough in English to teach was retained; not in the centralized recruitment schemes, but at the selection committees following advertisement of vacancies. That is, the engineers academics on the engineering selection committees maintained standards higher than those required by the ordinances. This made expansion of engineering programmes very difficult – for finding those who can satisfactorily teach in English is well nigh impossible.

In late 1979, as the university system expanded, the Tamils staked a claim for an engineering faculty in the Tamil North which had the University of Jaffna at its historical peak. Smarting under the differential admissions system and given the relative peace of the times, many Tamil senior academics from Peradeniya had moved to the North and were publishing under the Jaffna imprimatur. The confident Jaffna Senate and university resolved that a Faculty of Engineering be established in Jaffna. In that era of nationalism preceding the civil war, however, when Sinhalese held all the power, the Senate made the mistake of appointing a feasibility study committee consisting entirely of Tamils in the academic system, albeit most of them accomplished, to study the matter and report. These were Prof. T. Sivaprakasapillai and his son Dr. Pratab Sivaprakasapillai, Dr. A. Thurairajah, Dr. Kumar David and Mr. A. Ragunathan. Many equally or more qualified Sinhalese were not brought on board to make the case.
As a result, their report of 1980 would have been seen by the UGC as pressure from Tamil quarters when it was passed on to them by the University. The UGC naturally sat on it – for years!

Prof. A. Thurairajah, a civil engineer and respected leftist with a Cambridge doctorate, had been Dean of the Engineering Faculty at Peradeniya which was once the only engineering faculty in Sri Lanka. His reputation for brilliance came from a reputed achievement of having the highest marks on record as an engineering undergraduate at the University of Ceylon, although his later performance in research was quite ordinary as is the case for most who return home to serve after their doctoral studies. This is because, in addition to being cut off from facilities, they are not subject to any pressure to publish and accorded a high status in society based on their undergraduate performance. But for undergraduate teaching with few research expectations as in Sri Lanka, that system works and works well.

This much academically respected Thurairajah had been disillusioned when he himself had been turned into a refugee at the University of Peradeniya when a calculated attack on Tamils was made at the university in May 1983. Over his problems there he had once even resigned, but was persuaded to withdraw his letter of resignation. As a leftist with a vision for a socialist world, and thus distinct from Tamil nationalists who wanted a separate state, he was socially respected in the South. When he was appointed Vice Chancellor (VC) of Jaffna in August 1988, the Engineering Faculty for Jaffna moved a further step and a UGC Committee consisting entirely of Sinhalese but good friends of Thurairajah’s (Dr. S.M.A. Perera, a member of the UGC with rich industry experience and, Prof. C. Dahanayake, Prof. Willie Mendis, and Prof. Milton Amaratunga, all at the full academic rank of professor unlike the Jaffna committee) plus a nominee of the Vice Chancellor of Jaffna, endorsed an Engineering Faculty in their report of Nov. 1988. They recommended that the faculty be sited at Kilinochchi, 45 miles South of Jaffna with agricultural lands and a man-made lake, called Iranaimadu, which had been made to retain rain water for irrigation. A hundred acres of land in Kilinochchi were alienated by the government for the faculty.

It was the time when civil engineering was booming through river diversion projects in Sri Lanka and jobs in the Middle East and Africa. Thurairajah had come from an older era where civil engineering had large labs with models of fluid channels almost 40 m long. Accordingly land had been allocated as recommended. But Thurairajah could not build up the faculty even then. Although the government approved the faculty with the assumption of protection from the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), the Tamil Tiger rebels began an insurgency against the IPKF disrupting the region with a bloody secondary conflict. Thurairajah was wooing this writer on a visit to California in 1989 to come as a department head and it was agreed that this writer would return in 1993 as classes got under way and students reached the second or third year. Thurairajah spoke of his plans to invite Korean contractors to build the university with a Sri
Lankan army guard. But the rebels, the Tamil Tigers, were too strong in disrupting normal life to the Tamil population, the key strategy employed by most rebel groups. As the IPKF departed in March 1990 when the Sri Lankan government and the Tigers joined forces against it, the Tamil Tigers had a field day. A senior Professor of Civil Engineering, Prof. V. Navaratnarajah, a Jaffna Tamil working as a senior academic in Malaysia, was hired in September 1990 – although the war had resumed, the approval of the faculty and the cadre during the ceasefire allowed the university to still hire him to set up the Faculty working under Thurairajah. But there was no progress. Without progress all plans for the faculty were frozen. VC Thurairajah was frustrated and disappointed, and became increasingly nationalistic, going so far as to make fiery separatist speeches at Tamil Tiger festivities and asking the English Unit of the University of Jaffna to assign staff to work full-time for the rebels as translators. He died prematurely of leukemia in Oct. 1994 and posthumously received from the Tigers the highest title they had for a civilian.

When the University of Jaffna did not launch on the approved faculty and the pressure from all communities for increased admissions became unremitting, the next Engineering Faculty was given to University of Ruhuna in the deep Sinhala South in 1998. This writer was engaged for a period as the most senior person on site, planning the faculty with and under the Coordinator Dr. H.H.J. Keerthisena of Peradeniya. Jaffna was told that until this new faculty was on firm footing, Jaffna’s engineering Faculty was on hold. However, since the time this writer finished his contract at the rank of Professor at the new faculty at Ruhuna in 1999, that faculty to this date has been unable to attract a person at the rank of Professor or even Associate Professor. Even junior academics from Peradeniya offered the post of Dean, going so far as to violate the ordinances in making such an offer, could not be induced to move from positions at Peradeniya. (In the Sri Lankan university system, one with a PhD joins as Senior Lecturer and rises in that position until switched to the professorial track when there is a substantial accomplishment in research). Those at Ruhuna Engineering who did rise as Senior Lecturers and acquired the qualifications to be professor soon moved abroad or to established Faculties at Peradeniya or Moratuwa, which are also constantly looking for qualified staff as their own personnel flee abroad to greener pastures. It seemed then that Jaffna would have a prolonged wait.

IV. The 2002-2006 Cease Fire: A New Opportunity for Engineering

A new ceasefire between the Tamil Tigers and the Government of Sri Lanka was imposed through western intervention with Indian approval in 2002. This was an opportunity to restart the long awaited engineering faculty. During this period, with peace being in the air, the University Grants Commission was sympathetic to Tamil ambitions for an engineering faculty and encouraged the University of Jaffna to go ahead and renew its plans for engineering. At the time there was a system of two governments in the Tamil North, the Sri Lankan government militarily in control and running Jaffna peninsula where the university was, and the rebel Tamil Tigers in charge of the Vanni, the southern part of the Northern Province (Fig. 1) and mingling freely with the population in the peninsula. University administrators had to answer to both, and
the government and the rebels permitted officialdom to operate in that fashion – for example getting the budget and operating under governance ordinances from the government’s UGC and the Universities Act while simultaneously building monuments for the fallen rebels on campus and holding festivities where rebels would be the chief guests and determining days to shut down classes to permit students to attend rebel functions. Another example would be that cited of the university’s English Unit staff paid by the government working for the rebels. Fig. 2 shows persons appointed to high office in a government institution, University of Jaffna, declaring open a monument, at that institution to the Black Tigers, the Tiger suicide squad which had killed several innocent people.

![Figure 2: Black Tigers’ Day Celebrated at University of Jaffna by Deans, Dept. Heads and Acting Vice Chancellor R. Kumaravadivel with Rebel Flag Hoisting and a Special Monument to the Tiger Suicide Squad. The next VC (who at the time composed and sang lyrics to the Tiger leader, and would after the rebel defeat in 2009, sing for President Rajapaksa) is also in the picture (Courtesy: TamilNet)](image)

At this point the Tigers insisted that the faculty be sited in the rebel stronghold of Kilinochchi which they were cultivating as the capital of their planned future Tamil state. The UGC believed it should be in the city of Jaffna where they could inspect it at any time to ensure that their funds were not being used for weaponry. The Member of Parliament for Jaffna also wanted it in Kilinochchi. Sensing the logjam, a senior Tamil Member of Parliament pitched for his electoral district, Trincomalee in the East (Fig. 1). The Council of the university too, in a situation where the Tigers could not be disobeyed, took the rebel line, insisting that the faculty be located in Kilinochchi. There was no Tamil position acceptable to the UGC.

The university’s first job was to recruit for the only approved cadre position for a senior academic to begin planning the faculty as the previous person recruited in 1990, Professor Navaratnarajah, had retired as professor of civil engineering without taking a single lecture in engineering and had voluntarily done some work in physics to salve his sharp conscience because he felt he was drawing a salary without doing any work. His giving up a lucrative position in Malaysia and coming home to serve but ending up having contributed little, now served as a warning to other accomplished Tamils settled abroad who might be moved by his same sense of dedicated service to his homeland to return and contribute. Getting staff would now be all the more difficult.

By now Sri Lanka was largely bereft of Tamil engineering academics. There were only two at the grade of professor, one a mechanical engineer and the other an electrical engineer. When the university advertised, the electrical engineer applied along with some junior persons. It was widely known that the electrical engineer was interested in the Vice Chancellor’s post soon to come vacant and some of the internal candidates and Council members did not want him
working with the council as it was seen as increasing his chances of being elected by the Council when the time came. So ignoring his application planning proceeded with a committee without any proper engineering academic, although commonsense demanded engineers for that task of planning an engineering faculty. As a result, absurd sections of the proposals of the new Committee bereft of engineering academics who would have caught the absurdities, passed by the Council. The new committee in charge said about the site in its report:

“Jaffna peninsula is over populated. The land is scarce and expensive in Jaffna and finding water is a problem. Kilinochchi is the major town nearest to Jaffna in the mainland. It is only about 60 km from the Main Campus of the Jaffna University, and land is available in plenty and cheaper [sic.]. Kilinochchi is not too far from Jaffna. If the roads are maintained in good condition, Kilinochchi is [sic.] only an hour’s journey by road. Iranaimadu tank can be used to supply water to Kilinochchi city and the Campus of the [sic.] Jaffna University […] It has been a consistent policy of successive governments and the local administration since independence to move the population out from the peninsula, to areas in an around Kilinochchi.”

A savvy council would have seen that the over-population of Jaffna was not an issue because as a result of the war it had been more than halved, at the time the committee wrote this, from its peak around 800,000. A University Council of responsible and educated members who read the report under the then Dean of Science, Prof. R. Kumaravadivel, would have asked in which document at independence is this policy of moving the population out of the Tamil cultural capital formally stated. In fact the practice of political stooges and uneducated persons being appointed to the governing University Council with electoral considerations in mind had already begun and it is widely known that some Council members came to Council meetings only to have their palms read by a soothsayer appointed to the Council while another came bare-bodied to Council meetings. In fact the Committee was catering to the Tamil Tigers who wanted to move the Tamils’ cultural capital to Kilinochchi. It was nationalist Tamil Tiger ideology pure and simple, having no chance of success either in getting the people to consent to such a move from their ancestral homes or in winning an engineering faculty from the government.

Moreover, Kilinochchi is 45 miles from Jaffna and the allocated land was a further 9 miles South of Kilinochchi, well over the report’s 60 km (the equivalent of 37 miles). If the report had mentioned 45 or 54 km, it might be believed as an accidental error in typing km for miles. Engineers familiar with new faculties in big western cities would have known that little land is required for an engineering faculty and most colleges of engineering are built upwards as indeed the Faculty at the University of Moratuwa was, taking up little land, and continues to expand upwards. Excessive reliance on the model of single storey large labs followed by Peradeniya from where most Tamil engineers come was partly to blame. Indeed, if Iranaimadu can supply water “to the Campus of the Jaffna University,” why go to Kilinochchi and not stay on at the
main campus? Whether in Tamil subservience to please Colombo or in incompetence, the report asked for a mere Rs. 800 million in buildings whose construction would go on till the year 2007 whereas the government had already spent Rs. 900 million on buildings for a similar sized faculty in Hapugala/Galle completed the year in 1999. The report naively recommended a Department of Computer Technology (rather than Computer Engineering), not realizing that Engineering Technology is a sub-engineering field not appropriate for students whose strengths are in mathematics as in Sri Lanka

It seems that in writing the report, its authors were confident that no one on the Council would have the competence and expertise to read it and ask simple questions. That was the depth to which Jaffna, the pride of the Tamils, had sunk in its education endeavors.

In a milieu where the main shortage was qualified personnel rather than money, in a short sighted move the Council without processing the application received from the electrical engineer for the post of professor, readvertised for an IT person or civil engineer. When the electrical engineer still applied since he had experience and publications in computer science, that advertisement too was disregarded and they advertised for a civil engineer arguing that the first professor needed to supervise the construction of faculty buildings. Although it was pointed out that the university’s medical faculty had been built without first hiring a professor of civil engineering, the Council nonchalantly went ahead and interviewed some junior civil engineers who were finally deemed unsuitable. In effect, the Faculty was sabotaged as the post went unfilled and the faculty forgotten for some years.

V. A Faculty for Jaffna: To or Not To?
The demand for a faculty for Jaffna comes from the people. Whether or not to found one, although a technical decision at the level of national education policy is based on the demand of the people as budget allocations are driven by political considerations.

As a people who prided themselves in their mathematical inclinations, the Tamil people generally wanted an engineering faculty. But one thing held them back. It concerned the area rule operated by the University Grants Commission which selected students to universities.

Of those to be admitted to engineering and medicine, the most competitive faculties for the physical science and bioscience streams, the top 40% based on all-island merit are allowed to choose the faculty they want\textsuperscript{15} and they usually choose the best engineering faculty, nearly always in their perception the one at Moratuwa. Few eligible under the all island merit list want to go to the University of Peradeniya or the third, the University of Ruhuna situated near the town of Galle. Indeed, Tamils felt very unwelcome at Ruhuna. But for the other 60% of the students the allocation is based on proximity and so long as they got that rare engineering seat, they would take it despite any personal preferences.
The fear among Tamil parents about starting engineering in Jaffna was that those Tamils coming under the balance 60% would be shoved on the basis of proximity into a new Faculty in the University of Jaffna which was already suffering in quality because those Tamils who could flee had fled. Children who go to a university in the South tend to pick up language skills in English and Sinhalese which stand them in good stead when it comes to employment. Further, by the area or proximity rule, most of the children getting into engineering from Colombo, the capital, end up at Moratuwa (Fig. 3). Since many of the students at Moratuwa speak English as a result of coming from the Colombo homes of people in the public service and the private sector, others who go there invariably pick up English. But Jaffna graduates, with a few rare exceptions, come out essentially monolingual. It has been observed by Suresh Canagarajah, previously an academic at Jaffna teaching English and presently holding a named chair at Pennsylvania State University, that University Lecturers from Jaffna (increasingly including senior dons too) cannot hold a sustained conversation or present an academic paper in English. He adds that a small percentage of senior members in the upper social groups, especially those who have gone abroad for training, or have studied in the older educational system, display better proficiency in English (By the year 2012, nearly all in this fortunate group have retired). And with the incestuous recruitment practice of getting their own graduates on to the staff, the fate of the University of Jaffna as a monolingual institution seemed sealed. An engineering faculty with the traditions of a fully English education and staff trained in the West had a chance of uplifting the whole university but was spurned.

For long, therefore, parents with children who would seek admission in the foreseeable future did not like the idea of an engineering faculty in Jaffna. For then their children would be in an as yet developed engineering faculty in Jaffna. However, by 2006 a new factor came into play. It was reported by the Vice Chairman at the UGC that a Korean team that had come to invest in an electronics factory in Sri Lanka packed its bags and returned upon learning that only some 50 electronics engineers per year were produced in Sri Lanka. Nationally it had therefore been determined that because of student demand and development needs there would be another engineering faculty. The need to provide more engineering seats had made the UGC determined to start another faculty. The existing three faculties claimed to be full and persuading them to admit more had been a daunting
annual task for the UGC, having to offer more and more money for the facilities the universities claimed not to have to admit more students. However, Jaffna had a pre-eminent claim to the next Faculty of Engineering based on the previous promises and failed plans. But if Jaffna did not show a keen interest in taking on engineering, another university would. Rajarata University, close to Anuradhapura in the middle of the country (Fig. 3), had shown some interest. The Chairman of the UGC, a former VC from Rajarata, was expected to be sympathetic to a bid from there. It seemed a given therefore that if Jaffna did not grab the opportunity to start engineering, there would be one in Rajarata. Under the proximity rule therefore, as seen in Fig. 3, the students from the major Tamil population centers – Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya and Trincomalee with the exception of Batticaloa – would get shoved into Rajarata University which had also ambitiously started a medical school. Due to lack of staff, however, Rajarata had for long been unable to graduate its medical students in due time as a result of beginning a medical faculty without the staff or the facilities. The prospect of Tamils students being shunted to Rajarata was scary to any sensible parent.

Based on proximity, with engineering at Rajarata only the people of Batticaloa would have access to the well-equipped and well-staffed University of Peradeniya while a few Tamils from the Amparai District might be sent to Galle. It was no longer the case that if the launching of the faculty under Jaffna continued to be postponed on various pretexts by Jaffna’s university authorities, their children would have continued access to the good faculty at Peradeniya. Instead, it became clear that their best children could end up at Rajarata, which was perceived as hostile Sinhalese country by most Tamils and posed many health risks, including an infestation of malaria bearing anopheles mosquitoes.

**VI. Ramifications of the End of the War**

From Dec. 2005 the war escalated and the government appears to have decided to pursue the war regardless of civilian casualties. The policy paid off for the government (but not its Tamil citizens) and by May 2009, almost the entire leadership of the Tigers was wiped off and the government was in full control at the cost variously estimated from 10,000 to 40,000 Tamil civilian casualties in the space of 6 months.\(^{17-19}\) Government policy appears to be that the war for ethnic separation had been possible only because there were minority enclaves or homelands and thus that these should be eliminated to preserve the integrity of the country. Since the war, many Sinhalese had been settled in Tamil areas in the East and now in the North too.

Sinhalese students have increasingly been admitted to the universities in the North and the East just like Tamil students have always been admitted to universities in the South. Vavuniya campus of Jaffna University has almost 50% Sinhalese students; yet the university’s exclusively Tamil authorities have stubbornly not recruited a single Sinhalese academic. It was asking for trouble in a system where Tamils had little power, especially when Tamil students had entry to universities in the South. Immense problems are created by the fact that with the collapse of
English proficiency many science lectures in the North and East which officially are in English had been unofficially conducted in Tamil or with a good admixture of Tamil (Arts course are in the vernacular and therefore do not have this problem, showing how important engineering is to bringing the University of Jaffna into the modern age). Now, with Sinhalese students in the science classrooms, the lecturers have to lecture fully in English. The governing Councils of the universities also now have Sinhalese members appointed by the government – it has already been done at Eastern University and will happen soon at University of Jaffna. With the government taking a hard-line in its postwar policy, changes are imminent whether the Tamils like it or not.

As such the university of Jaffna and Eastern University are being transformed from the parochial universities they were into national universities. Although this will benefit Tamil students, it is unsettling to many Tamils who feel they are losing the security of the few places where they are in majority. The universities are in confusion as many of those who were once in allegiance to the Tamil Tigers are now obsequiously subservient to the government. A Vice Chancellor who used to compose lyrics for the Tiger Leader killed in May 2009 now was at the Sri Lankan President’s residence singing his own compositions to him in Tamil. A Medical Dean who had worked full-time for the Tigers, now gave testimony against them to the government.20 Even top ranked rebel leaders are now working for Army Intelligence openly.

An atmosphere has been created where the university community does not know whom to trust. Even senior academics are rarely willing to give their honest opinions. These are the survival skills they picked up during the rebellion.

VII. The Faculty of Engineering: Postwar Authorities
With the government’s military victory over the Tamil Tigers, there is now talk of rebuilding Tamil areas – i.e., the North and East. Tamils by and large are distrustful of the government and vote for the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) which was affiliated with the Tigers until their defeat in 2009. Although the TNA leadership was quite moderate in its views even at the time, there was little space for dissent under the coercive hegemony of the Tamil Tigers.

As a result of Sinhalese governments being unpopular with the Tamil public, various governments in their time had cultivated a few select Tamil individuals and made them cabinet ministers so as to claim that they had Tamil support. In 1994 a group called the EPDP, a former Tamil militant group with a track record of murder of opponents and kidnapping for ransom,21 which the Tigers had tried to eliminate, sought protection from the Sri Lankan Army and soon became a vassal of the state winning seats in Parliament with 0.14% of the vote because the Tamil Tigers demanded a boycott of the election and only the EPDP dared defy the ban. It was allowed to rig elections in off-lying islands by the Jaffna peninsula and, as it is imperative for the government to have elected Tamil Members of Parliament in the cabinet to show Tamil support, the government not only looked the other way but even lent its institutional arms such as the
police to the EPDP to help in rigging. Consequently, any government business with the Tamil people is done through the EPDP, though the EPDP has been accused by the US Embassy in Colombo, the elected representatives of the Tamil people, major human rights groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and even the government’s own commission of inquiry, of armed extortion and all sorts of political thuggery. However, so desperate is the government to show elected Tamil support that the EPDP is treated as the Tamil people’s effective representative. Few things in the North therefore can be done without the EPDP’s consent and blessing.

In this atmosphere, the government decided to go ahead with the engineering faculty as the President promised in a speech while campaigning in Jaffna during the 2009 presidential elections. Subsequently this writer was appointed as Coordinator for Engineering by the University Grants Commission with the charge of recommending a site for the new faculty. This meant working with all political authorities, good or bad, if anything is to be achieved for the people.

All universities in Sri Lanka come under the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 with its subsequent amendments which carefully prescribes the powers of the President, the Minister for Education, the University Grants Commission and the Council governing each university. This Act prescribes under Article 22 of the Universities Act that the Minister, in consultation with the University Grants Commission, shall assign a campus to a university. As any engineering faculty on a new campus for a university must comply with this, the appointment of a Coordinator by and answerable to the UGC, was justified by and accorded with the Universities Act. The Vice Chancellor, backed by the EPDP and the university’s Senate, however, appointed a Senate Subcommittee to make a recommendation on the site. Such a recommendation would not have been binding on the Minister but anyone in a democracy was free to make a recommendation – that is while the statutory responsibility for determining a site was the Minister’s in consultation with the UGC which had appointed a Coordinator to make a recommendation, there was no bar to the university making its own recommendation. There was therefore some untidiness about authorities and the chain of command.

Thus to summarize, the forces at play in a decision on siting the engineering faculty were:

1) The President and Minister of Education: They ultimately were responsible for a decision, but being politicians would be guided by political considerations.

   Thus although even the Auditor General had accused university officials of embezzlement (see Appendix for the report which this writer received while a member of the UGC), the President, Minister of Higher Education and the UGC, knowing the serious nature of the Auditor General’s charges against a Dean of Medicine, did not seem to care
as they appointed her to the highest university office, the Vice Chancellorship of University of Jaffna, all because it was politically expedient and the EPDP wanted the appointment.

2) The EPDP and its Minister in Cabinet: They would be more concerned with propping up the few Tamils who supported them by endorsing the decisions of such persons. The Universities Act specified that the Council send three unranked names for the post of Vice Chancellor and the President picked any one of these three. In this particular case, as the government’s chosen agent among the Tamils, the EPDP’s recommendation was followed and as a result the EPDP would back the decision of the VC it had effectively chosen. The President’s choice via the EPDP for the post of VC of the University of Jaffna has included those who never made it to full professor, embezzlers, those found sexually abusing female students and staff and so on. so long as they would help the EPDP make patronage appointments to the university staff and invite the EPDP to university functions.

3) The TNA, the main elected representative of the Tamil people: Mindful that their wishes might be deliberately gone against by a hostile government, the TNA would only express opinions in private.

4) The University Grants Commission: The usual practice is for them to make a technical recommendation but then not care if their recommendation is not followed by the political authorities because they found it difficult to challenge the authorities. For example when this writer was on the UGC and objected to the UGC following through on the ministry encroaching on powers vested in the UGC by the Act, he was told by friendly fellow Commissioners half jokingly: “Go ahead and object if you want to be thrown off the Commission.” This might explain why Commission members appointed by the President and theoretically left alone thereafter to do their duties, never insist on exercising their statutory powers, especially if they are looking for reappointment.

5) The VC and Council of the University: Many of these persons have been appointed technically by the President or the UGC as described in the Universities Act but in reality on the recommendations of the EPDP. Before key Council meeting, the EPDP Minister has a “Pre-Council Meeting” where he instructs these Council members, according to the Section 44(vii) of the Universities Act appointed by the UGC “from among persons who have rendered distinguished service in educational, professional, commercial, industrial, scientific or administrative spheres,” meekly follow orders on how to vote. When this came to light, such meetings were suspended for a while but have now resumed. They were keener on showing they are in charge, preserving their positions by bowing to their
political masters and were adamant of the old decision from the 1980s to site the new faculty in Kilinochchi.

VIII. New Realities in 2011
Several things had changed since the original reports of 1979 on siting the new faculty of engineering. First, civil engineering classes in the west had shrunk drastically from around and since 1984 and few training opportunities would be available there to train a university’s academic staff. Training of undergraduates in universities is now based increasingly using software models and computer-aided design. Large labs are obsolete. Electrical and Computer Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Chemical Engineering are at the fore in modern industry. This has not dawned on many Sri Lankan educators (especially administrators who are older and therefore more obsolete) who worked in Sri Lanka from the time of their degrees. For in Sri Lanka where there are few design jobs, engineers who did not go abroad work in sales, commissioning and maintenance – ironically with the exception of civil engineering where engineers occasionally take on new design tasks in buildings and roads. Work done in the West by technicians and engineering technology graduates is done by Sri Lankan engineers whose academic training is for design far more than in the West because of the mathematical strengths of Sri Lanka’s engineering students. (Indeed, as we have seen, the distinction in nomenclature between Engineering and Engineering Technology in the educational literature is not readily recognized and the new Faculty proposal from the University of Jaffna by a committee of non-engineers had a Department of Computer Technology when what was meant was Computer Engineering). Further,

1) When Prof. A. Thurairajah planned on Kilinochchi, the North-East Province was one Tamil province under the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution hammered out under Indian pressure which was justified by the hundreds of thousands of Tamil refugees seeking shelter in India from a violent Sri Lankan army.

Kilinochchi was at the middle of this North-East Province and being promoted as the provincial capital by the Tamil Tigers. Since the defeat of the Tamil Tigers, the province had been broken up into two. Therefore Kilinochchi as the center of the province was no longer a viable argument after the split (or de-merger as it is commonly called) of the province back into two. For Kilinochchi was no longer the center of any province.

2) Thurairajah’s was a time when under the centralized administration of the Tamil Tigers, university staff ordered to move to Kilinochchi would not have argued. Today with choice, we cannot guarantee such ready compliance as we can see with the Agriculture Faculty where for a decade the academic staff had given various excuses for not moving when asked to do so (see section X.II, subsection on Proximity).
3) Thurairajah’s was a time when Kilinochchi had some schools, but even they were in a terrible state compared to the rest of Sri Lanka then. Taking from a 2-year study concluded in the year 2004 at Save the Children Fund for the World Bank, with the best schools in then President Chandrika Kumaratunga’s Gampaha District benchmarked at 100 points, material resources were the worst in Kilinochchi at 38 points as seen in the bar chart of Fig. 4.

![Figure 4: Resource Distribution District by District](image)

Human resources, as seen in the same bar chart, although seemingly comparable in terms of raw numbers according to Dr. Dushyanthi Hoole’s study, were equally as bad as material resources in quality because, for example, 67% of Kilinochchi teachers were untrained while the figure for the rest of the country was 23%. Furthermore, specialized teachers as shown in Fig. 5, were relatively unavailable in Kilinochchi and Mannar (also a Tamil district). But that is not the whole story – for 50% of English teachers in Kilinochchi were volunteers hoping for permanency whereas the rest of the country had nearly all English teachers in the permanent paid cadre. So the actual commitment of the government to providing specialized teachers is far poorer than reflected in Fig. 5.

Likewise, Fig. 6 shows the roads leading to schools in Tamil speaking areas are relatively nonexistent. School buildings as shown in Fig. 7 are also poorly provided to Tamils.

And that was all before the war finished off Kilinochchi. This writer has seen the devastation. Although reconstruction is occurring along the main road, away from it there are many
institutions that have vanished. Nearly all buildings had been bombed into oblivion by May 2009. Prof. Thurairajah’s decisions no longer hold although they might have had some validity in his time.

![Resource Quality - Specialized Teachers](image1)

**Figure 5:** Availability of Specialized Teachers District by District

![Availability and Condition of Roads Leading to Schools District by District](image2)

**Figure 6:** Availability and Condition of Roads Leading to Schools District by District

![Availability and Condition of School Buildings District by District](image3)

**Figure 7:** Availability and Condition of School Buildings District by District

**IX. Budget Problems**

It was also this writer’s mandate, as the UGC Coordinator for Engineering for University of Jaffna, to identify sources of funding. In the year 1999 when the University of Ruhuna built its
engineering faculty close to Galle, the cost of buildings – all up stair blocks in a tiny area of land – had been SL Rs. 900 million. Based on estimates made with civil engineers from the building industry with the help of engineers at the Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka Jaffna Centre, in today’s rupees, this would translate to Rs. 2000 million (US $ 20 million). It was our estimate that laboratory equipment and books for the library would come to another Rs. 1000 million. This $30 million was small by US standards but a heady amount in Sri Lanka where a senior professor makes but US$800 per month.

The UGC asked this writer to see how this sum could be raised under foreign aid. But with the end of the war, there was little interest in funding education. For Sri Lanka’s per capita income and per capita GDP had made the International Monetary Fund switch her into the group of Middle Income Countries, out of the previous list of “Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust” eligible countries as of Jan. 2010.  

As such Sri Lanka is no longer eligible for foreign aid as a poor country. Moreover, without the war, there seems much less interest in giving foreign aid except for purposes of having influence in the region. This meant playing China against India by sending the same proposal to both as urged upon this writer by some in high authority, which this writer was reluctant to get into.

The Minister for Higher Education, however, was confident of funding; the Indian Prime minister had assured him, he said, that funding would not be a problem. The Indian High Commission, on the other hand, informed this writer that they were not a funding agency and promised at most two grants of SL Rs. 2.5 million each since SL Rs. 2.5 million (Indian Rs. 1 Crore) is their ceiling on a project.

The prospects of a ready solution to the budget needs seem slim. The Minister for Higher Education felt that starting with the Indian funds and Rs. 500 million from the Sri Lankan Treasury, the faculty could be slowly built up.

Even these figures and the planning based on them are now in serious question because the country has been forced to devalue its currency by almost 10% since the beginning of 2012 as the Sri Lanka Rupee is allowed to float because of excessive imports. While the resulting inflation will push up costs, the partial funding from India, pegged in Indian rupees will go a longer way. Which the larger effect would be is difficult to assess.

These considerations made clear that any new engineering faculty would be on a shoe string basis at least for the foreseeable future and well below the other engineering faculties in academic standards to which Tamil students would go if there were no engineering faculty in Jaffna.
On the positive side, from a national perspective, the new faculty would give opportunities to read engineering to those for whom there was presently no place in the other engineering faculties.

X. Assessing the Most-mentioned Sites for the Faculty of Engineering: Jaffna and Kilinochchi

X.I Approach and Hope through Tamil Expatriates

The assessment of where the faculty should be sited had become emotional with people taking fixed positions without considered reasoning. The various authorities were keener to prove that their decisions would be final rather than in doing what is best for the university. It was therefore decided to simply make a technical recommendation and let the die fall as it would.

It was clear from the flow of events that wherever the faculty is sited, getting competent teaching staff would be the foremost problem. More than the Government of Sri Lanka which rarely seemed to understand what it means to keep its word, there was every hope that eminent Tamils abroad of goodwill would promise to come forward to help the faculty reach world standards. Therefore despite the seeming odds, this writer felt the need to push forward.

An arrangement was made with Michigan State University’s College of Engineering and its Dean (Professor Satish Udpa) to help develop the faculty and to train probationary staff who might be hired. Michigan went so far as to appoint a Coordinator. Qualified Tamils abroad sympathetic to the idea of a faculty but unwilling to return full-time, were persuaded to form “Friends of the Engineering Faculty Jaffna.” They promised books and to come themselves or send qualified persons to teach any accelerated semester course taking suitable vacation leave from their jobs. Although few are willing to risk their established positions by resigning and returning, many have sufficient goodwill to help in this way. At least one mechanical engineering Ph.D degree holder in whose country the retirement age is 60, agreed to come to serve up to the age of 65 as permitted in Sri Lanka. A few of expatriates visited Jaffna to emphasize their commitment. Other committed Tamil expatriates in the West promised slightly used equipment from their universities. Dr. T. Devendran from Germany, a distinguished Tamil who had retired from the University of Goettingen and University of Munich, offered the possibility of collaboration with the University of Stuttgart involving the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation. There was much hope.

However, even to use these kind offers and opportunities, the faculty had to start. To clear the air it was decided formally to assess the merit underlying the claims of the two most-mentioned sites, namely Jaffna and Kilinochchi, one against the other.

To this end, a literature search was done. The University of New Mexico’s site selection criteria had one project manager like the Coordinator here deciding on the criteria and using
committees to assess on their basis. This gave comfort that the process being followed was in order and with precedent. There is extensive literature on game theory methods of playing the various criteria and desiderata against each other. But most considerations at play here were political and matters of the heart rather than lending themselves to numerical assessment. So an early decision was taken to rely on expert testimony and consultations; and keep any numerical assessment to the minimum.

The engineers from the Institution of Engineers of Sri Lanka (Jaffna) were most helpful, especially in brainstorming and as a sounding board for ideas. They summoned all engineers working in Jaffna (numbering about 50) for meetings where possibilities were discussed. President Eng. Rajaratnam Muthuratnanandan and Assistant Secretary Eng. Amalendran Jesudasan provided transport for field visits to potential sites and in identifying several engineers working in the North with master’s degrees who could help with teaching until new probationary staff qualified and returned. It was judged feasible, based on the people identified, to start the faculty and teach with such engineers as Adjuncts while a full staff-body is built up slowly.

Two of Sri Lanka’s most experienced engineering academics were consulted and called upon to make written submissions. These were Prof. L. L. Ratnayake (former UGC Vice Chairman, and former Dean/Engineering, Moratuwa) and Vidyajoti Prof. K.K.Y.W. Perera (former VC/Moratuwa and Dean/Engineering, Moratuwa), both Sinhalese. They were unequivocal that the site should be Jaffna because to be successful, an engineering faculty needs to be surrounded by commerce and industry. Going by student choice, the once unique and superior faculty at Peradeniya had been clearly overtaken by the once backward University of Moratuwa, near Colombo. Both experts attributed this to Moratuwa’s proximity to Colombo’s industrial and commercial base, the training opportunities available to students near Colombo, and project opportunities available for staff research. Prof. Ratnayake advised a 7-8 storey building in Jaffna and pointed to the challenges of attracting good staff to Kilinochchi, especially considering that even Ruhuna’s Hapugala campus (close to the semi-urban town of Galle) did not have staff of the level of even Associate Professor, since once qualified by research for professorial professions, staff regularly move to Moratuwa or abroad as soon as opportunities present themselves.

Ratnayake in fact believed that judging by the potential for merit and effectiveness of the proposed faculty, the new engineering faculty should instead be at the University of Colombo with its industrial and commercial connections, but if such a faculty is to be given to University of Jaffna for political reasons, it should be in located in Jaffna and not Kilinochchi.

Vidyajoti Professor K.K.Y.W. Perera also favored Jaffna, which would have advantages over Kilinochchi in its greater ability to recruit staff and visiting lecturers, its proliferation of good schools, better interaction with other faculties, especially in consideration of the need for
industry interaction for a successful engineering faculty. Both of them gave their recommendations in writing.

In addition, discussions were held with Professor Dayantha Wijesekera (former VC/Moratuwa and Open University) when he visited Jaffna to review the University of Jaffna as an institution for an accreditation exercise. He too emphasized the need to site in Jaffna and promised to convey that to all authorities.

**X.II Factors**

*Land Availability*

Among the factors considered in decision making, the availability of land, which is most often cited by those advocating Kilinochchi, was not considered at all. Anyone who has been about and knows engineering will know that modern universities are today built upwards, taking little land. The advantages are many as spelt out elsewhere.

This writer made many site-visits with the help of engineers from the Institution of Engineers Jaffna Center. We were convinced based on professional advice that land is not an issue. There was land within the main campus of the university itself and close by too. We also identified other land within 5 km of the campus which was promised free by the Additional Government Agent in Jaffna.

Even as the nay-sayers at University of Jaffna were arguing that multi-storey structures are inappropriate for Jaffna, the government’s Ministry of Economic Development, the Mercantile Merchant Bank Ltd and the Jetwing Group, announced a Rs. 700 million 14-storey, 76-room, star-class hotel project on a 46 perch land area on the Old Clock Tower Road, in the heart of Jaffna town.\(^{31}\) It seemed that key decisions on the faculty had been left in the hands of incompetent people with high academic degrees, but not the good sense of far less qualified persons in the commercial sector, often without any university training.

The plan for assessment involved assessing the importance of the relevant factors by assigning a weight for each and then scoring each site with respect to these weights. The final score would be made up by the sum of the weighted scores to make up a composite score.

Accordingly, the following relevant factors were considered in choosing a site, with weights assigned out of 100:

*Staffing*

Staffing would be the biggest challenge. Given the experience at the Ruhuna Faculty of Engineering, it was not practically feasible to expect Sinhalese to come to the North unless motivated by die-hard nationalism that Jaffna ought to be Sinhalasized and not allowed to exist as a Tamil area. Among Tamils, as mentioned, most PhD holders had fled. At the time (2011)
there were two Tamil PhD degree holding engineering academics at the University of Peradeniya, both of whom, for personal reasons, were, this writer judged, unlikely to transfer to Jaffna. At Moratuwa and Ruhuna there were two and one respectively. The latter, accomplished in research, experienced in administration and committed to working in Jaffna, at the time of writing (2012) has just moved to Malaysia after realizing that the faculty in Jaffna will take too long for him to wait. To attract the remaining to the new Faculty would be difficult indeed.

Being successful in building up the faculty would require the faculty being near good schools in a competitive environment. Most members of the faculty would need to be recruited as probationers with the condition of permanency as Senior Lecturers contingent on their getting postgraduate qualifications. And it must not happen, as often does, that such probationers stay on in the West after their postgraduate studies. This requires an attractive environment for professional development and family life, which includes competitive schools for children. Until such probationers come back, staffing would be shoe-string and reliant of the good natured cooperation of engineers working in the North with master’s degrees who are far more numerous in Jaffna than in Kilinochchi.

Proximity
As mentioned, proximity to a good town is already a factor in staffing. Moreover, when getting senior staff would be the biggest challenge, an isolated faculty would have the added burdensome responsibility of getting staff for teaching ancillary subjects like mathematics, the sciences, management, humanities and the social sciences, rather than using the staff and courses already available on the main campus if the faculty is located there. The administration, library, medical services, sports facilities, etc. would also need to be duplicated at a remote campus.

Going by the experience of many of the regional universities in Sri Lanka, staff tended to leave their families in a big city and commute. It has been observed at Rajarata for example, that many academic staff members started for work on Monday morning, arrived late in the day and were gone on Friday morning. Similar stories exist at almost every remote campus, including Jaffna University’s Vavuniya Campus. This writer recalls that in the early 1970s before the rail tracks and sleepers were removed by the Tamil Tigers to make bunkers, most workers in government offices commuted from Jaffna and it was understood that no transactions were possible on Mondays and Fridays. If that was the story with government officials supposedly regulated by strict office hours, what was the scope for having a faculty staffed when lecturers have no office hours for reporting to work with the excuse of academic freedom for working from home?

It is equally pertinent that the University of Rajarata’s Faculty of Science was begun in far away Polgolla to make use of visiting staff from University of Peradeniya, but kept on in Polgolla for well over a decade because the academic staff, mainly recruited from the Kandy area and
University of Peradeniya, did not want to move and had kept the Science Faculty away from Rajarata University by their refusal to relocate.

Particularly relevant to Jaffna’s case is the experience of Jaffna’s Faculty of Agriculture being sited in Kilinochchi. The Faculty of Agriculture, established at Kilinochchi in 1989 because of the scope for agricultural experimentation, was “temporarily transferred” to rented houses around the main campus of the University in Jaffna in 1997. Once the ceasefire of 2002 was announced, it was stated in university documents that “Action is now being taken to re-establish the Faculty of Agriculture at Kilinochchi in [the] year 2003.”¹⁴ In 2011, however, Jaffna’s Agriculture Faculty was still in Jaffna, experiencing the same staffing challenges as Rajarata’s Science Faculty, with few staff members willing to relocate to rural, undeveloped areas. Furthermore, the Faculty’s academic staff had bought houses in Jaffna and their children were well-settled in Jaffna schools in the year 2010, making it increasingly unlikely that they would resume permanent residence in Kilinochchi. There is no reason to believe that the experience at any Engineering Faculty established in Kilinochchi would be any different.

If the students are to have engaged academics, the faculty needs to be close to the main university.

Prof. S. Mahalingam, D.Sc. (Eng.) Lond. of Peradeniya, a very experienced Emeritus Professor at Peradeniya, when consulted by this writer, warned of days of the one University with several campuses in the early 1970s, when on the day of the statutorily required monthly meeting of the Senate, universities would be bereft of Heads and Deans who would have gone to Colombo. For every interview, meeting with the VC, and even checking on leave applications, staff had to travel to Colombo. Urgent documents with deadlines like grant applications would be delayed as they went from the campus to the administration in Colombo and thence to the UGC with channeled signatures.

Moreover, to be well-rounded individuals engineering students would require interaction with peers from other faculties. With eighty five to ninety percent of engineering students in Sri Lanka being men,³² if the engineering faculty is located in Kilinochchi women admitted to a new engineering faculty in Kilinochchi would feel isolated outside classes, and remain voluntarily sequestered in the protection of their hostels.

Furthermore, there would be no recreational facilities in the area, such as restaurants or movie theatres, which could provide entertainment on an occasional evening. This writer’s experience at the University of Moratuwa in the 1970s was that the use of prostitutes and poor women of the neighborhood who were easily exploited by the relatively upper class engineering students, had become very common among students for want of any healthy social diversion in the evenings.
**Student and Staff Housing**

After the devastation of the final battles of 2009, Kilinochchi at present has no middle class housing in the required numbers. If located in Jaffna, the majority of students could continue residing at home or rent rooms in homes near the university, and the staff may be expected to invest in housing. In Kilinochchi, on the other hand, all residential needs would have to be provided by the state. However, there was in reality zero possibility that staff housing could be provided as the Jaffna university authorities expected in their budget proposals because a) there is no longer a tradition of providing housing to staff at other universities (excepting as token gestures) and b) giving the facility to Jaffna academics would open up a Pandora’s box at a time when the UGC is trying hard to contain demands from the teachers’ unions for better treatment citing conditions in Pakistan and India.

**Water**

In Kilinochchi although water from the Iranaimadu Tank is available, it would need to be pipe borne over some ten miles. In Jaffna where ground water is the main source, recycling procedures may be used. Water would not be a critical issue based on the advice of civil engineers consulted.

**Cost of Building**

For government projects usually government land is used. But construction costs in Jaffna would be higher because the buildings would need to be multi-storeyed. Even so, Jaffna has a better supply of laborers (if still inadequate) for construction projects than does Kilinochchi, thereby somewhat off-setting the increased costs in Jaffna.

It is relevant to consider in the context of the social impact assessment required of all projects, the experience of the authorities at the Anglican Church – the Church of Ceylon, Colombo Diocese. Having to rebuild destroyed orphanages in Kilinochchi they have had to rely, in the absence of local labor, on Sinhalese laborers from the South and then to deal with problems of their drugs use on ecclesiastical premises (away from their homes and their families with nothing to do in Kilinochchi).

**Development of the Surroundings**

This is a key political consideration for many of the disparate stake-holders and would also come under social impact assessment of the project. Tamils see Kilinochchi as sentimentally important, especially if they were supporters of the Tigers. Many Tamils also feel that the people of Kilinochchi have suffered through the war, and thus that locating the faculty there would bring some much-needed development to the area, directly and indirectly benefiting the local population. Stakeholders ranging from clergymen to a Member of Parliament for Kilinochchi made personal pleas that Kilinochchi be recommended.
Government, it seems to this writer based on the undue interest taken by the Army and the Ministry of Defence [sic.] under the Sri Lankan President’s brother, is interested in Kilinochchi because it raises the possibility of sending Sinhalese in as part of the university to break the Tamil preponderance in the North which is what makes political separation viable. By any measure of social impact, this would be very negative for Kilinochchi, very much like the issue of ethnically Chinese persons being moved into Tibet to alter the composition of the Tibetan population under a proposed World Bank project which was therefore not funded for that very reason.\textsuperscript{33}

However, it was politically explosive to get into that in a government financed venture and we steered away from a discussion of that at the time as, as to be seen below, there were many factors going for Jaffna in the building up of an academically strong engineering faculty, without having to open up a can of worms.

**X.III Weights**
The following weights were assigned to the above factors on a percentile basis for purposes of assessment as shown in Fig. 8 based on interviews with various stakeholders.

![Figure 8: Criteria for Decision on the Faculty](image)

Proximity to Big City: Proximity to the main campus is important for an integrated development of the faculty. In view of the identified problem of staff and the expert testimony it should receive close to 100% weight and be all-determining. However, because of the many who are invested in Kilinochchi, this factor receives the highest weight of 50%.

**Housing:** Student housing is important but not critical. So 15%

**Water:** Water availability is an important factor but both places can manage with existing supplies, so 15%

**Cost:** The cost of building, though important, is not as important in this assessment exercise as it is not a significant variable from city to city. While the cost of land availability is important to siting considerations, this is usually taken care of through government allocations. So 15%.
Development of City: Although individuals may have political imperatives, developing a city is but a minor aspect of a university’s mission which is to educate students. So the weight is 5%.

X.IV Scores
The two sites were scored on the factors out of 100 based on extensive conversations with stakeholders. Keeping in mind that the Council seemed to favor Jaffna, out of abundance of caution the score allocations were tilted towards Kilinochchi.

Proximity:
Jaffna: The title “University of Jaffna” by itself gives the city of Jaffna a preeminent claim. Jaffna gets a full score of 100% and we take heart in the fact that in the selection criteria for the university of North Carolina, it was a consideration that “the New Hope/Chapel Hill site was chosen over other contenders—Raleigh, Williamsboro [in Granville County], Hillsboro, Pittsboro, Smithfield, and Goshen—because it was “as near the centre of the State as possible.”

Kilinochchi: The campus being far away in an undeveloped area, students would not like it. Lecturers will leave their families in Jaffna and make only a nominal presence as at nearly all isolated university campuses. Teacher absenteeism would be a problem but cannot be addressed given the current norms on academic freedom. Every need has to be met in Kilinochchi through duplication. Score is 10%

Housing
Jaffna is congested so building more hostels is difficult. However, there is some compensation in that room and board may be available from homes interested in additional income. Score 30%

Kilinochchi: Hostels may be easily built as land is available. However, it is a mosquito infested area making living difficult. Score is 80%

Water
Water is available in Jaffna at good quality but is limited in quantity. Score is 40%.

Plenty of water is available in Kilinochchi but must be transported by pipes. Score is 80%

Cost
Jaffna: The cost of buildings will be lower in Jaffna because of the relative availability of construction companies and workmen. But land acquisition will be expensive though government allocations are possible. Score is 60%

Kilinochchi: Laborers may have to imported to Kilinochchi but land is cheap. Score is 100%
Development
Jaffna: The city is already relatively well developed but a lot can be done in terms of industrialization of the city through the Engineering Faculty. New industries can be brought in. A service industry can be spawned. Software services can be offered. Special solutions through upward building can be offered to address land shortage. Score is 60%.

Kilinochchi: Kilinochchi too can be developed together with the Agriculture faculty. As the area is already very under-developed, scope for improvement is much higher, Score is 90%.

Table 2: A first assessment based on Weights and Scores Decided
Total = $\sum$ Score $\times$ Weight.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Comparison: Jaffna Versus Kilinochchi</th>
<th>Proximity</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Dvlpmnt</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jaffna (Scores)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K’nochchi (Scores)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight (Total 100)</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the final scores made up by weighing the marks scored by each location on a factor and summing all the weighted marks.

Based on these weights and scores the overall assessment is Jaffna 72.5% and Kilinochchi 58.5%. The recommendation is for Jaffna.

XI. Action
The VC, and Senate had appointed their own committee to assess the situation, feeling that the UGC was intruding. It was important that the faculty not be jeopardized because of this rivalry. This writer therefore met the university’s committee and the two parties agreed to work together.

It was agreed that the best way to proceed was to get the students admitted to the faculty rather than plan for the distant future and grow the faculty progressively increasing annual admissions because without students the UGC would not make the necessary budget and cadre allocations. It was further agreed that we start from temporary premises in Jaffna and decide on a permanent location later. It seemed the only way to overcome opposition to Jaffna as a site. Once students and staff were in, all stakeholders together could decide together on where to put up permanent structures. A joint memorandum to the Senate was drafted, signed by all parties on 10 Feb. 2011 and forwarded for endorsement in the Senate and then the Council.

It seemed positive. We were confident that the faculty would soon be up and running with students.
However, when the then VC refused to present the memorandum to the necessary authorities (Senate and then the Council) for endorsement and demanded that the University Committee change the decision to Kilinochchi and send a new memorandum leaving out the Coordinator (who technically was a UGC Contractor), the senior academics – a dean and three department heads, all with western PhDs – simply complied, without informing the Coordinator. They changed their position from Jaffna to Kilinochchi by this new report of 29 March 2011. Subsequently after the intervention of the previous Chairman of the university’s committee on engineering in the year 2002 who at the time had been the Dean of all the new committee’s members, they changed their position yet again bending to social hierarchy in a memorandum of 21 April 2011 saying that the decision earlier in 2002 was not to embark on a faculty until all buildings including residential quarters and hostels are built, books ordered and staff recruited and that Council decisions cannot be changed! This rarely happens as the UGC’s priority is to increase student intake and they do not normally spend money for students far out in the future. Years under the Tigers had taken their toll on integrity and leadership in Jaffna.

In an eager rush to show competence upon the appointment of this writer as Coordinator for engineering, the until then indolent university rushed through a proposal which included as much hostel space for women as for men, something an engineer, knowing that Sri Lanka’s engineering faculties usually get only 10-15% women, would have caught immediately. Likewise building costs also were exaggerated and the request for land was for 200 acres! It seemed that the focus, rather than training sound engineers, was to give government sinecures with permanency through university gardening jobs to EPDP cadres and political hangers-on and their families.

The ability to disagree with those in authority and those who are senior was totally gone even from among senior academics. All that western doctoral training in independent thinking seemed to have been for naught. The Coordinator’s salary paid on behalf of the UGC by the University was regularly delayed and on a month by month basis required a formal complaint to the Labour Commissioner [sic.] to get it. The Coordinator was not invited to a single discussion at the university on the Faculty. Letters from the UGC to the Coordinator were lost in the internal mailing system. So also correspondence to the Coordinator from Tamils outside who wanted to help, such as letters from Dr. T. Devendran from Germany. Travel claims from the Coordinator submitted to the university with important invoices and bills mysteriously disappeared, making reimbursement of official expenses impossible. In those circumstances it was not even possible to present the draft Memorandum of Understanding from Michigan State University for the University to sign. Rivalries and jealousies had trumped the interests of the institution and the students.

Suddenly the announcement was made that the Faculty was being inaugurated in Kilinochchi. The Army would have a ceremony, the UGC Chairman informed this writer. The university was
asked to provide details of invitee lists and other details in accordance with the Army’s plans. This was the new Jaffna, run by the army but with a show of civilian input for public consumption as when the university was asked to provide a list of invitees for functions. Fig. 9 shows the Minister of Higher Education (in National Costume) and the UGC Chairman, both garlanded by obsequious hangers-on, on a trip to Jaffna with the army in high profile, making clear whether civilians or the military is in charge of education.

Figure 9: Ministry of Higher Education Tour of Jaffna, 11 Jan. 2012. Courtesy: UGC

XII. Conclusion and Ethics Dilemma
In a country like Sri Lanka where the talented have flown, those remaining behind are very insecure about their positions. Rivalries are strong. Patronage is important to secure and positions. Many in authority have stolen and been named by the Auditor General in his audits but nothing happens because of the patronage they enjoy. Perhaps it is because those involved in fraud would be the most cooperative so as to avoid accountability, that they are appointed to high office.

So few things are decided on merit. Even this writer’s consulting the experienced Professors Ratnayake (who is close to retirement) and Perera (who is retired) made the UGC nervous. The UGC felt, despite their giving their opinions only following a written request from the Coordinator, that they had interfered in what was not their business and that the Coordinator should have decided by himself without asking them for their opinion. An older person in retirement as Coordinator who would pose no threat to those in authority, might have been able to carry along those who wanted to undermine all decisions simply to assert themselves.

For the Sri Lankan university system to function there must be clear lines of authority. The army ought to have nothing to do with the university. Only the Minister of Higher Education should deal with the university and not the EPDP Minister. The political goal of ethnically homogenizing a region should never have entered university planning.

Until merit begins to rein again as in the days when the University of Ceylon flourished in its early years under its first Vice Chancellor, Sri Ivor Jennings, the country would continue to lose professionals and the educational system would sink deeper and deeper into the bog in which it finds itself.

As for Jaffna’s Faculty of Engineering, some appointments will be made. With 100 acres of land for a small faculty, patronage jobs to clear shrubs and do the gardening will be made by the political authorities. A junior person may be made Dean and he may accept because of the early promotion. It is unlikely that other academics would follow; at least not in the required numbers.
The faculty would probably lead to engineering also being led by master’s degree level academics unable to conduct the daily business of the faculty in English. Tamils students might be shoved into a half-baked faculty which would be one more nail in the Tamil coffin.

Ironically it would now appear that if the Faculty had been given to University of Colombo, Tamil children would continue to be sent to the long established faculties in Peradeniya, and Moratuwa and to the new one in Colombo with good prospects of coming up quickly, to receive an excellent training. But with the Faculty given to Jaffna and to be sited in Kilinochchi with little chance of coming up in the short-term, Tamil children will remain disadvantaged.

If anything is to be learnt from this fiasco, it will be in studying and coming up with answers to questions of engineering ethics: Should an engineer function in a job where political authorities call all the shots? Should an engineer keep away from a situation reeking with political and ethnic manipulation? If so who is to serve the interests of the people who are being used as pawns in a big political game? Who are the technocrats who will build universities working with political authorities who use murder, electoral fraud and patronage in retaining power? If engineering ethics requires keeping away from participation in the new engineering faculty, who would do the little good that can be done by serving in that faculty? How much of one’s personal integrity can be compromised in seeking to do the little good that can be done?

Perhaps most importantly, can one deal with unsavory characters for the sake of doing some little good as this writer tried to do, and still be an ethical engineer?

REFERENCES

Appendix: The Auditor General’s Report on Embezzlement at University of Jaffna
(Source: Minutes and Meeting Papers of the University Grants Commission)

Vice Chancellor,
University of Jaffna.

Unauthorized payment for the procurement of Computer Network Facilities to the Medical faculty, University of Jaffna

At a test audit examination of paid documents and other relevant books and records pertaining to this procurement of Network facilities to the Medical faculty of Jaffna, the following deficiencies were observed.

a) The Dean of the Faculty of Medicine had deviated the procurement procedure and ordered M/S Delven Computer (Pvt) Ltd. to supply computer network facilities to be installed at a total cost of Rs. 3,000,000 whereas the amount/value of procurement had been limited to a Dean of a Faculty to Rs. 100,000 only. When the availability of grants was Rs. 963,000 order was placed for Rs. 3,000,000.

b) No tender/quotation had been called for this procurement through newspaper advertisement for an open competition in order to obtain lowest and efficient bid/quotation.

c) It appears that the Dean had not consulted the Vice Chancellor and Technical Officer of the University regarding the above procurement.

d) A sum of Rs. 722,550 had been paid to the above company for supplies of certain equipments in connection with above network from World Health Organization funds.
e) The above payment had been made without any supporting documents such as Invoices, Bills, Technical Officers certificate, work completion certificate, inventory certificate etc.

f) According to the information made available the price quoted by the above company had been reduced to half of the original price after negotiation made subsequently. It shows that the price had been quoted by this company arbitrarily.

g) To rectify the above deficiencies a formal Tender Board had been appointed and the Technical Evaluation Committee appointed by the Tender Board had mentioned in its minute that they are unable to decide the reasonability of the prices quoted by this company due to the following reason.

i). No open tender/ quotation called for

ii). Technical evaluation report not obtained

iii). All equipment purchased were not installed and

iv). Details of purchase of equipments etc.

h) However, the works in connection with the Net work facilities had not yet been completed.

i) Therefore the entire expenditure incurred on the above procurement of Net work facilities could be considered as irregular, unauthorized and fruitless expenditure in terms of section 107 (6) (a) of the University act No. 16 of 1978.

I shall be glad to have your comments and let me know the action you propose to take on this irregular and unauthorized procurements early.

(S. Sivaguru)
Asst. Auditor General
for Auditor General.

Copy to: 01. University Grants Commission
02. Secretary, Ministry of Education
03. Secretary, Ministry of Finance