

Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka signs MoU with State Ministry of Gem and Jewellery To enhance the teaching and research activities in the industry
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Collaboration of Universities as knowledge generating bodies with the government entities and private sectors in reaching distinguished milestones will culminate in win-win outcomes in the sustainable development of the relevant fields. Thereby, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka through University Business Linkage Cell has entered a Memorandum of Understanding with the State Ministry of Gem & Jewelry Related Industries (SMGJ) in enhancing teaching and research activities with the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka and the gem community including miners, lapidary, jewelers, local and international traders as well as the community involving in value addition sector in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan gem industry dates back to 250 B.C. As one of the steadiest gemstones producing countries in the global gem market, Sri Lanka supplies top-quality Ceylon Sapphires and seventy-five other types of gemstones. Ceylon Blue Sapphires have been celebrated for many generations for its natural colour and lustre. It is popularly known that Sri Lankan gems are supreme and the finest in the world. Thus, Sri Lanka has stabilized its name as the “ninth largest exporter of precious stones and as one of the five most important gem bearing countries of the world”. Most of the gem deposits in Sri Lanka are located in an area called Highland Complex, extending northeast to southwest with Rathnapura being the main traditional gem mining area and containing high-grade metamorphic rocks.

Considering the significance of the gem industry to the country, Sabaragamuwa University and SMGJ have collaborated in establishing a mechanism whereby the educational and research environment can be used to develop a better understanding of gem and jewelry related fields, and stimulate industrial innovation.

This crucial event of signing the Memorandum of Understanding was held on 11th November 2021 at the board room of the Vice Chancellor’s office of the University conquering another massive goal of the University Business Linkage Cell. The joined forces of this MoU were,

Prof. Udaya Rathnayake - Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Indunil Dayaratne - Director/UBLC, Prof. Chandana Udawatte – Principle Investigator (AHEAD Grant RIC No:07), Dr. Rasangi Sabaragamuwa – Dean - Faculty of Applied Sciences, Dr. Enoka P. Kudavidanage – Head – Department of Natural Resources, Dr. Nuwan Wanniarachchi, Dr. Hasintha Wijesekara and Dr. Iromie Gunasekara on behalf of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka.

S.M. Piyatissa - Secretary, SMGJ, Wipula Jayasekera - Director, SMGJ, Thilak Weerasinghe - Chairman, NGJA, G.W. Amarasiri - Director, NGJA, Wasantha Gamlath - Director, GJRTI, Mr. H. Janaka Hemachandra – Assistant / Gemologist and Prasad Thenuwara – Director General, NGJA on behalf of the State Ministry of Gem and Jewellery Related Industries/ National Gem and Jewellery Authority of Sri Lanka/Gem and Jewellery Research and Training Institute

Prof. P.G.R. Dharmaratne, University of Moratuwa, Dr. Saranga Diyabalanage -University of Sri Jayawardenapura and Dr. Chamal Jaliya, Uwa Wellasa University on behalf of academia

Ananda Dela - President, Ratnapura Gem and Greenary Association, Punsiri Thennakon - Sri Lanka Gem Dealers and Miners Association, and L.M.C.S.A. Abeymanma - Managing Director, Trade bay International (PVT) LTD on behalf of the industry.

Sabaragamuwa University shall design, develop, and deliver certificate, diploma, and other higher study programs (Postgraduate Degree Programs) in Gemology ensuring the required quality and needs in gem industry which in turn will lead to professional courses as per the industry requirements and making aspirants employable and skillful.

On the other hand, SMGJ shall make the financial arrangements for the cooperative activities undertaken within the framework of this MoU including the development of gem laboratory facilities in SUSL, implementation of the Gemology certificate, diploma and other higher study programs offered by SUSL, conducting gem mapping projects and other related activities upon agreed by both parties. **continued on Page 46**

The Vice-Chancellor professor Udaya Ratnayake, while appreciating the collaboration stated that with signing of the MoU, a platform of progress has been reached and thereafter the hard work begins. S.M. Piyatissa, secretary of SMGJ emphasized that Sri Lanka is in the world gem zone for over 2500 years and no any government or non-government partner has thought about Gem education so far.

He further explained that this is a historical moment that will change the perspective of the Gem and Jewelry sector of the country and will generate more employment within the country and more foreign exchange. Moreover, at the end of the event three parallel courses were agreed to be implemented namely, “Gemology”, “Gem cutting” and “Heat treatment to Gemstones” targeting both local and foreign students who are interested in the gem industry. Optimistically, this collaboration will satiate the void prevailed in gem education in the country while stimulating young generation to enter into this fascinating industry.

During the meeting, an open discussion was held with all the participants in initiating mutually beneficial links through sharing the expertise knowledge with FDRE Ministry of Mines and Petroleum (MOMP), Ethiopia via skill transfer from skilled Sri Lankan gemologists and gem industry experts which is to be continued under the guidance of University Business Linkage Cell and the Faculty of Applied Sciences as requested by FDRE Ministry of Mines in collaboration with YEKA Plc. Ltd.

Ethiopia’s gemstone potential is exceptionally promising with many varieties of quality gemstones with a total report of gems up to over 40. Ethiopia is a significant producer of opal, sapphire, and emerald in the recent years. The field is wide open for investors to bring these extraordinary gemstones to the global market. Hence, YEKA Environmental Solution is seeking a training program to be conducted for the MOMP staff officers including identification, valuation and pricing of Gemstones.

By adding to his views, Prof. Indunil Dayaratne, the Director of the University Business Linkage Cell (UBLC) stated that intensifying study areas such as Gem and Jewelry is more realistic to Sabaragamuwa university, prominently as the university is situated in the gem zone of Sri Lanka. He further elaborated extending hands to other nations would in return be beneficial for the enrichment of our country’s Gem and Jewelry industry.

Joining the discussion, Dr. Nuwan Wanniarachchi gave an insight about this project highlighting that they are mostly interested in the knowledge of value-adding techniques. Prof. P.G.R. Dharmaratne asserted that it is a privilege to have a cooperation since our gem resources are getting diminished and it's a necessity of the hour to find alternative sources to maintain the established gem market of Sri Lanka. He further accentuated that we can disseminate our knowledge and bring-in rough gems so that value addition can be done in Sri Lanka generating foreign exchange.

After a series of rationales all the participants in the meeting agreed to provide the required training for the MOMP staff officers including identification, valuation and pricing of Gemstones considering the prospects that follow and appointed a resource team representing members from the university, SMGJ, academia and the industry.

In conclusion, all the participants were of the view that though Sri Lanka has been a pioneer in the Gem and Jewelry industry with hereditary skills and creativity of the craftsmanship over centuries, we have to incorporate the latest technology in design and manufacture focusing on design excellence and significance to compete in the rising global market for Gem and Jewelry. In reaching proper gem education, continuous research with advance laboratory facilities and building new business partners worldwide would be needed in the hour.

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Participants from right to left: Mr. L.M.C.S.A. Abeymanna - Managing Director, Tradebay International (PVT) LTD, Mr. Ananda Dela - President, Ratnapura Gem and Greenary Association, Mr. Wasantha Gamlath - Director, GJRTI, Mr. G.W. Amarasiri - Director, NGJA, Mr. Wipula Jayasekera - Director, SMGJ, Mr. Prasad Thenuwara – Director General, NGJA, Mr. Thilak Weerasinghe - Chairman, NGJA, Mr. S.M. Piyatissa - Secretary, SMGJ, Prof. Udaya Rathnayake - Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Indunil Dayaratne - Director/UBLC, Dr. Rasangi Sabaragamuwa – Dean - Faculty of Applied Sciences, Dr. Hasintha Wijesekara, Dr. Enoka P. Kudavidanage – Head – Department of Natural Resources, Mr. H. Janaka Hemachandra – Assistant valuer/ Germologist, Dr. Nuwan Wanniarachchi, Ms. Taniya Rashmi – Manager/UBL Cell, Ms. K.N.M.H.H. Kosgahakumbura – Business Development Manager/ UBL Cell, U.L.C.P. Kumari – Trainee