

## **Honorable Chief Guest, Respected Vice Chancellor, Distinguished Dignitaries, Colleagues, and Friends,**

A heartfelt thank you for gracing this historic occasion. Your presence here today is not only an honor—it is a source of strength as we embark on the next chapter of our journey.

For decades, our department has faced the dual challenge of meeting growing national demands—rising student numbers and limited infrastructure. When I assumed duties as Head of the Department, we stood at a pivotal crossroads. Around that time, nearly nine years ago, my colleague Prof. Liyanage approached me with a transformative idea: the need for vertical expansion of space by two more floors, while preserving the architectural legacy gifted to us by Prof. E. O. E. Pereira, the founding father of our faculty. His vision remains a guiding paradigm for infrastructure development in a land-constrained environment.

Nearly four years ago, another bold idea emerged—one that called for reimagining our academic programs to integrate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence destined to redefine engineering systems in the years ahead. Though both ideas initially seemed daunting and understandably raised concerns among colleagues, they resonated deeply with me. I embraced them with conviction, recognizing them as essential steps forward. These two visions came together to shape this expansion—not just as a physical space, but as a platform for academic renewal. Today, as we unveil these landmark projects as part of our 75th Jubilee celebrations, we owe Prof. Liyanage our heartfelt thanks—for his vision, courage, and for helping us shape the path forward.

This building is far more than a structure of steel and concrete and also more than public funds—it stands as a tribute to our heritage. We remained steadfast in preserving the architectural vision of Prof. E. O. E. Pereira—symbolized by the iconic corridor uniting all departments. We also felt a deep responsibility to honor the legacy of visionaries like Prof. R. H. Paul and Prof. W. P. Jayasekara, whose contributions shaped the identity and values of our faculty. Preserving this proud history is not only a tribute to their memory but a way of passing on a sense of purpose and continuity to future generations. Guided by this spirit, we configured the ground floor to reflect and respect this enduring legacy. At the same time, we have thoughtfully integrated modern design elements to create workspaces that serve both present demands and future aspirations.

It was Architect Mr. Praneeth Amaratunge, Structural Engineer Mr. Ravindra Meewaddana, Contractor Mr. Sarath Jayabahu (Managing Director and Chairman of KSJ Construction Pvt. Ltd.), Project Manager Mr. Ravindra Jayashantha, Project Engineer Mr. Sugath Bandara, Mr. Kularathne of Kalana Engineering Technologies, M/S Alumex, and Mr. Roshan of Aluminum Fabrication. Each of them played a pivotal role during the construction phase, navigating immense challenges—including the unprecedented disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic—with remarkable resilience. We extend to them our heartfelt gratitude. They have not merely built a facility—they have helped to build a legacy.

This achievement would not have been possible without the strong institutional support we received. We are especially grateful to the government leaders who supported us at critical stages—among them, the Secretary to the Prime Minister, the Director General of National Planning, the Treasury Secretary, the Secretary to the Ministry of Higher Education, the Chairman of the University Grants Commission, and the Director and teams of the Infrastructure Development Division of the Ministry of Higher Education. We remember their contributions today with deep appreciation.

We are equally grateful to our university community. Prof. Upul Dissanayake played a pivotal role in securing ministry approvals and initiating construction, followed by the steadfast support of successive Vice Chancellors. I wish to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Deans Prof. Gamunu Herath and Prof. Udaya Dissanayake, as well as Heads of Department Prof. Lilantha Samaranayake and Prof. Vijitha Herath, who succeeded me. My sincere thanks also go to the Registrar, the Capital Works Division, the Bursar and his team, the Project Unit, and the Works Department staff for navigating approvals and managing countless logistical challenges. I'm especially grateful to our Faculty Board, the Faculty and University LBMC, and the Senate and Council for their unwavering support.

I must also recognize my own departmental community. Prof. Nimal Ekanayake, now Emeritus, led the department through difficult times, preserving academic functions under trying conditions. His quiet strength and dedication laid the foundation for what we see today. I am also sincerely grateful to Dr. Sanath Alahakoon and his successor Dr. Janaka Wijayakulasuriya, whose initiative in developing the facility adjacent to this building offered much-needed relief during a critical period.

To my colleagues in the department—thank you for your patience and perseverance as laboratories and offices were displaced during construction. I am equally grateful to the wider faculty for generously accommodating us during this time. Our non-academic staff, too, played a vital and often unseen role. We deeply appreciate their steady support. Thanks, are also due to our consultants, the State Engineering Corporation, for ensuring a sound and safe structure, and to our alumni—particularly from Civil Engineering—whose industry expertise guided us through many key decisions.

This expansion is a testament to collaboration. To everyone who advised, encouraged, or lent a hand—thank you. As we celebrate today, let us remember: the walls around us may be new, but the spirit within them is timeless. Together, we have not just expanded a building—we have expanded possibilities.

Thank you all, and may this space inspire generations to come.

**M.A.R. Manjula Fernando**

**At Opening Ceremony of New DEEE Building (01-07-2025)**