

NAAL Today and Tomorrow

Netherlands Alumni Association reached 50 years, thankful to membership and the executive committee. The executive committee meets once in every month and if there is a need meet twice. This dedication of the of the committee inherited from founders continues even today and hope the future executive committee would also follow this valuable example.

Members of most of the association, such as young men Buddhist association, young men Cristian Association, Old boys' associations of schools are mostly and many other organizations run by very elderly persons today in Sri Lanka. NAAL also having more elderly members and mostly retired from their occupations and very few members are there who are below 50 years of age. It is a big challenge for the NAAL membership to get young generation to carry forward the NAAL.

When the per capita income of Sri Lanka was low and eligible to receive foreign assistance NAAL benefited immensely as a good number of fellowships offered by many developed countries and the Netherlands was one of them. However, this situation is changed around a decade ago as the per capita income of Sri Lanka has reached the middle level. The change resulted in reducing Dutch fellowships drastically and also the institutional and individual supports for NAAL Projects. During the past few years NAAL engage in exploring new avenues to establish new relationships and continue previous ones and still not very successful.

The Government of Netherlands have opened up short-term fellowships in some fields for government and private sector employees and NAAL is taking every effort to get them to join the association. Meantime the present executive committee is exploring possibilities to engage reasonably a young group of members to take over the responsibility of running the association.

The activities of NAAL continued during the years 2020 and 2021 although the country faced Covid 19 epidemic. When physical committee meetings could not be held due to health guidelines, Zoom meetings were held. The AGM 2020 was also held following the health guidelines for which the Dutch Ambassador also attended. However, NAAL was unable to have family get-together due to the Covid issue. Such activities would be recommenced once the country comes to normal.

NAAL has employed one person for its office work including accounting during the last two decades as committee members cannot find time to do a continues job. That helped NAAL to function smoothly and need to continue in the future. Meantime the association has to find new avenues to consolidate its financial position as all activities depend on money. It is up to the new committee to look into the issue to continue the practices followed.

In order to consider the way forward the committee of management decided to conduct a survey among the present members as well and a few new budding members during the e-conference. The survey gave us some thoughts on how NAAL should proceed in the future. The result of the survey clearly indicated that members are mainly looking for "networking", "development" and "fellowship". NAAL's activities has to base on these requirements to attract younger generation scholars. Therefore, the focus during the next year should be to generate value to NAAL. It is very important to understand that all above activities need funds and so far, NAAL generated fund by administrating the projects which came through the Netherlands affiliates of NAAL. Now, due to status change of the country and many other reasons NAAL does not get such and the only income source the membership fees (that too more members are life members) and interests on the savings of NAAL.

One of the major drawbacks indicated in the survey was that the members were not aware about NAAL until a friend indicated to them of the Alumni Association. Hence, we need to look this very seriously how we need to promote new members from those who go for training in the Netherlands.

Understanding the situation, NAAL committee of management also conducted a brainstorming session sometimes back and prepared a strategic action plan for future. Some of the areas which was highlighted at this brainstorming session were:

(i) to make awareness of the existence of NAAL through various methods like Awareness Pack for persons leaving to the Netherlands for Study, Website, social media, digital marketing, through the Sri Lanka Embassy in Netherlands etc

(ii) to prepare projects using the large number of professionals in the membership as fund raising projects through local NGO funding and small grants from foreign donors

(iii) to investigate the possibilities of training in Netherlands and give publicity to attract new members

(iv) Networking with NUFFIC and other Alumni Associations and arrange regional training workshops

(v) To prepare a project report to obtain funds to establish a permanent office for NAAL