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30 years ago Sri Lanka created history

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Sri Lanka stood tall on the global scene in terms of a community of marketing professionals, when members of the Institute of Marketing, UK (IM) in Sri Lanka became the first association of IM members to be established anywhere in the world. While in the UK itself, the Institute had many branches operating under the aegis of the Institute, Sri Lanka received the blessings of the Institute to create a global first, with the formation of the Association of Members of the Institute of Marketing, UK, in Sri Lanka (AMIM).

How it all happened

In 1976 formal teaching for the examination courses of the Institute of Marketing, UK resurfaced after a lapse of more than five years in Sri Lanka with the Institute of Accounting Studies and the Oxonia Institute commencing tutoring of students for the IM examinations. From 1976 to 1984 there was rapid growth of the student population and by the end of 1984 more than 45 Sri Lankans had completed the Professional Courses of the Institute to become qualified marketers.

In spite of the growth of tuition centres, facilities for the preparation of students for the Institute's final examinations were lacking.

As a result students formed themselves in to small study groups and a few of us as seniors helped many of them in this effort. A group of students preparing for the final examinations in 1985 were extremely active and enthusiastic with the prospect of formalising a good students' and members' group.

In 1985 May I received an invitation from the Director of Education of the Institute, Norman Waite, to visit the Institute's headquarters in Moorhall, Berkshire, UK, as his guest during my planned visit to Europe that year. When students came to know of it they made a special request of me to obtain permission to establish a Branch of the Institute in Sri Lanka.

At Moorhall, Waite disclosed at the very outset that the Institute had been very impressed with the large number of enrolments of students from Sri Lanka and their success rates at the examinations. He wanted some insights on how this had happened and I gave a detailed account of Sri Lankan's thirst for education, the increasing interest in professional management courses and the commitment of many towards marketing education.

Waite informed me that he had heard from students and members of my engagement in the education front and requested me to accept the position of the Honorary Education Liaison Officer of the Institute in Sri Lanka (CIM-ELO, Sri Lanka). He further stated that this was the first ELO they were placing in South Asia and the only other ELO in a neighbouring country was Dr. James Loh in Singapore. I was humbled at this request yet elated that Sri Lanka had received this honour. The then Director General of the Institute Tony McBurnie endorsed the decision of the Director of Education, at a post lunch meeting we had with him.

At the afternoon discussion, in keeping with the request from students, I posed the question about the possibility of setting up a Branch of the Institute in Sri Lanka. Waite, without dampening my enthusiasm on the subject, politely stated that the Institute's current Articles did not allow the setting up of international branches. My follow up question was a surprise to Waite. "Can we then set up an Association of Members in Sri Lanka?" He promptly stated, "I do not see why not. Send me an official request and I shall follow up."

On my return and after hearing in the affirmative from Waite I spoke with a group of members and final examination students whose vibrant enthusiasm convinced me that we could set up an association. I formalised a committee, with a very enthusiastic person, Chitranjan Nugapitiya, as the President of the Steering Committee and as CIM-ELO in Sri Lanka I served the committee in an ex-officio capacity. Within a year, the progress was so good that with the blessings of the Institute, the Association of Members of the Institute of Marketing, UK (AMIM) in Sri Lanka was inaugurated on 12 August 1986 at the Taj Hotel. Nugapitiya was unanimously elected Founder President.

This was a great achievement for our members. The whole of the marketing community in the UK and other countries, in which there were large numbers of Institute members, were exposed to this initiative of Sri Lanka. It was the beginning of the unbelievable progress of the Institute's membership in Sri Lanka and the result of the combined efforts of marketing professionals with the CIM qualification. When the Institute of Marketing, UK was granted the Royal Charter, the Association in Sri Lanka was renamed, Association of Members and Students of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, UK in Sri Lanka' (AMCIM).

In the following years, 1986-1995, the programme of activities presented by the AMIM and AMCIM, with the enthusiastic participation of members and students was so impressive that the Institute in the UK began to refer to Sri Lanka's enthusiastic progress as a 'quasi branch' of the Institute. This gave a global focus to Sri Lanka and many countries tried to emulate this example but did not reach the levels of success Sri Lanka enjoyed.

As the Institute's ELO in Sri Lanka I served the Association in these nine years as an Ex-Officio member and the Association was very fortunate to have been led by the following Presidents who had the privilege to have enthusiastic and committed members to serve in their Councils and Committees. A special mention must be made of the Association's first President, Nugapitiya, whose enthusiasm and initial leadership set a very good precedent and also supplemented my role as the CIM-ELO, Sri Lanka to a very great extent.



1986-1987: Chitranjan Nugapitiya
 1988-1989: Major Chandra Jayaratne
 1989-1990: Travice De Silva
 1990-1991: Margo Thomas
 1991-1992: Rohan Fernando
 1992-1993: Uditha Liyanage
 1993-1994: **Ranjan De Silva**
 1994-1995: Prasanna Perera

I wish to pay a tribute to each of the above Presidents and all the members of their committees for what they did for Sri Lanka during the above period of the Association's existence and for the supporting role I was privileged to receive from them to execute my responsibilities as the CIM-ELO in Sri Lanka.

During this period for the first time in the history of the Institute, a formal Convocation and Graduation Ceremony for passed finalists was organised and held in Sri Lanka. This was in 1990. The same year Sri Lanka launched the Senior Management Programme to enroll managers with significant experience to commence studies leading to the professional qualification of the Chartered Institute of Marketing. Nearly 40 managers from Sri Lanka pursued this course and completed the final examinations to graduate from the Institute.

On a subsequent visit to the Institute's headquarters in Moorhall in September 1993, I was delighted to hear the Director General's commendation of the progress made in Sri Lanka and also the role of the AMCIM as an exemplary unit of CIM members, which he stated was functioning better than most of the CIM Branches in the UK. He requested Norman Waite to make a visit to Sri Lanka the same year – the first from any official of the Institute. Enthusiastically I requested Waite to come to Sri Lanka as the Chief Guest for the Convocation and Graduation ceremony to be held later that year. Impressed by the ceremony, Waite as the Director of Education introduced a similar ceremony in the UK from 1994.

By this time the Institute was looking up to Sri Lanka and in 1995 requested Sri Lanka to work towards obtaining Branch status as the Institute had decided to establish branches overseas. Without hesitation, I set up a Steering Committee to activate this request and the following served on this steering committee, which was chaired by me as the CIM-ELO in Sri Lanka.

It comprised Lasantha Abeywickreme, Rohantha Atukorale, Ravi Bamunusinghe, Amal Cabraal, Stuart Chapman, Romesh Croos Moraes, **Ranjan De Silva**, Rohan Fernando, Shibani Louis, Graham Marshall, Stefan Moraes, Prasanna Perera and Thushara Ranasinghe.

A gratifying observation was that, except for Rohan Fernando, all the others were those young marketers whom I had taught on the CIM courses and they were rallying now in support of their Alma Mater in a very distinguished manner. We all owe them our gratitude.

We were very confident of obtaining the Branch status and our proposal submitted to the Institute on 14th August, 1995 with a request to establish a Branch in Sri Lanka was approved and communicated to us within two weeks by the Director of Membership, Meriel Riesley. Then International Chairman of the Institute, late Prof. Michael Thomas, inaugurated the CIM Sri Lanka Branch at the Intercontinental Hotel in Colombo in December 1995 in the presence of a large membership, tutors, senior representatives of professional bodies, corporate and State institutions. Sri Lanka created global history once again. The Sri Lanka Branch has made significant progress in the last twenty years and has now reached recognition as a Region of the CIM, UK.

I thank Norman Waite, Director of Education at CIM, the former Director Generals of the Institute; Tony McBurnie, James McCainsh and Steve Cuthbert as well as late Prof. Michael Thomas, International Chairman of CIM for the confidence they placed in Sri Lanka and the tremendous support we had from them to make our dream a reality.

Before I conclude, it is appropriate and am duty bound to state that a note of sadness for all of us CIM members is the loss of Prof. Uditha Liyanage. Uditha was a Past President of AMCIM, a Past Chairman of CIM, Sri Lanka Branch for two years and thereafter a Member of the International Board of Trustees of the Institute for a further two years. To date he ranks as the only CIM member who pursued the academic path for many years to reach the pinnacle of his career heading the most prestigious Postgraduate Management Institute in Sri Lanka, the PIM. He distinguished himself as an outstanding teacher, pathfinder, researcher and writer in marketing, in Sri Lanka. While I pay a tribute for his contribution to management and marketing in particular, his valuable thinking and practical approach to marketing issues is missed badly. It will not be easy to replace such capability in this country.

Behind our successful history undoubtedly is the leadership and exemplary role of the AMIM/AMCIM which paved the way for the Institute to grant Sri Lanka the first Overseas Branch, ahead of Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong who were all vying for this prestigious recognition. I salute all those who were associated with the AMIM and the AMCIM, for their pioneering effort for Sri Lanka to receive this accolade. At the same time I gratefully acknowledge the contribution made towards our success by the members of my Steering Committee, all of whom still contribute much for the progress of the profession of marketing, setting a great example for the younger generation of marketers to follow.

[The writer was CIM-ELO, Sri Lanka (1985-1995), and Chairman CIM, Sri Lanka Branch (1995-1997).]

Chitranjan Nugapitiya

First President: 1986-1988

It is with great pleasure that I write this note, as the Founding President of AMIM, later AMCIM, which led to the formation of CIM Branch in Sri Lanka. When we were doing combined studies in 1984 preparing for the CIM final exams, we formed a small group to help each other as there were no classes for us. We had two objectives:

1) To get through the exams and 2) To form a local IM Branch. I then shared my thoughts with Eardley Perera who later requested me to form a group of students. I chaired all meetings, which were held at Perera's office in Colombo-5. On August 12, 1986 we launched the AMIM at the Taj Samudra Hotel. With the support of the Committee and the mentoring from Perera we had successful monthly meetings focusing on various topics, embracing the concept of marketing in a very practical manner, to boost the economy of the country and promote marketing education. In the early stages, we started these meetings with about 40-50 members attending and later the attendance rose to about 100 participants.

The main objectives of AMIM were:

1) To have 'marketing' recognised as a profession in every company and to appoint marketers with CIM qualifications to lead marketing management.
 2) Attract students to study marketing and support them to be professionally qualified.

3) To be successfully employed and helping to expand AMIM to CIM branch level. Now, when I look back to the past 30 years I feel that we have achieved our objectives, and today marketing is recognised as a core management profession in almost every organisation to help establish sustainable brands and businesses locally and globally. Currently I am working to form an AMCIM Past Presidents' Club and invite Past Board Members and Past Chairpersons of the CIM Sri Lanka Branch to join us to reminisce the glory of being a wonderful fraternity. On a personal note, I must sincerely thank Eardley Perera and all board members for the contribution they have made towards the success of the AMIM during my time as the Founding President. I live in Toronto, Canada now and I am practicing as a Marketing, Business and Tourism Consultant, and a Professional Youth Mentor. I credit my success to my CIM qualification and learning and to many who supported my career including my Marketing Guru Perera. Warmest regards and best wishes.

Travice De Silva

President: 1989-1990

When Eardley invited me to join the AMCIM and having discussed his vision for the Association it was apparent that we needed significant funding to bring to fruition. Our primary objective was to grow the organisation through higher enrolments and being able to provide the services and assistance that were vital for students to succeed.

Our challenges were exacerbated by the ongoing unrest the country was facing but with a dedicated team we planned and executed a series of programmes which were financially rewarding and appreciated by participants.

During my tenure as the third President of the Association many events were hosted for the membership and students. A highlight of that year was a seminar for the Tea Industry which was a half-day session graced by the late Gamini Dissanayake, who was Minister of Plantation Industries, as the chief guest and keynote speaker. We had speakers of the calibre of A.S. Jayawardene who later became Governor of the Central bank at this seminar. This was a big event and brought AMCIM and the CIM qualification much publicity. Rohan Fernando, who subsequently succeeded me as President two years later, was the main catalyst to make this seminar a reality.

When I visited Sri Lanka a few years later and was invited by Eardley to meet the then Marketing Committee I was blown away by the massive progress the Association had made. On subsequent visits to realise the progress being made by the CIM Sri Lanka Branch enthused and made me proud as a Sri Lankan.

All this has been possible due to the vision of one man, my childhood friend and fellow Marketer Eardley, and without a doubt all the Presidents that followed and their Committees that embraced the vision of its founder.

My best wishes for the continued success of the fraternity of CIM members and CIM Sri Lanka.

Margo Thomas De Zilva

President: 1990-1991

I have many pleasant memories of both AMIM and AMCIM. During my presidency in 1990 we continued with the very successful evening meetings programme conducting them on a monthly basis. We started with a talk by Dr. Gamini Corea, which was a very successful meeting with a large attendance. He spoke on the country's economic issues and gave an excellent account of world trade. One other session was a Panel Discussion which included one of the most eminent civil servants of Sri Lanka, Bradman Weerakoon.

On the social side, the first Members' Dance of the Association was held a month after I took over and I still have the programme – in fact I still have lots of memorabilia! AMCIM also had a library housed at the Taj hotel, for the benefit of students and members. Midway in office, I had to leave for Australia and Rohan Fernando became Acting President.

Being a part of AMCIM and being the President for a one year period gave me much satisfaction and wide experience, and the pleasure of working with a committed membership.

Dr. Rohan fernando

President: 1991-1992

I was President of AMCIM in 1990-1991 and the Hony Secretary was Roshani Moraes. We did have several programmes aimed at the members and also students and these programmes were well received by the membership. These also enabled the marketers develop knowledge and skills.

I recall we had Hemaka Amarasuriya as Chief Guest for the AGM which was held at Mount Lavinia hotel. Hemaka made a brilliant speech on marketing strategy that evening. We had many evening events for members and non-members and the fellowship was excellent and helped our attempt to build the membership and the CIM qualification. Resources were very limited, but we managed to provide members with many activities.

Overall, the experience of being involved in a worthy effort to build the community of CIM Members and students gave all of us a sense of achievement and happiness.

Ranjan De Silva

President: 1993-1994

I was privileged to have been elected President of AMCIM for 1993-1994 after late Prof. Uditha Liyanage. I worked with a dynamic team of marketers and the AMCIM Hony Secretary that year was G.S. Sylvester, a source of comfort to know all matters were well recorded.

The committee worked towards fulfilling the main objective of AMCIM; to work towards the greater recognition of the CIM qualifications in Sri Lanka and to assist students sitting for the CIM examinations to succeed.

At that time AMCIM was enjoying tremendous growth in membership, student enrolments and success at the examinations. I was conscious about the tremendous responsibility on my hands to sustain and grow. I felt blessed to have the support of Eardley Perera and former Presidents to guide me.

Perera continued to remain as the Education Liaison Officer and provided us leadership to ensure quality of marketing education and student growth in Sri Lanka.

A significant activity during this year was to formulate a Strategic Plan to address needs of members and students for greater recognition of the AMCIM. We held two performance improvement-planning workshops too to augment the effort for greater recognition by CIM. It is gratifying to see how the members of that era continue to add value to the economic development of Sri Lanka even today."

Congratulations from Norman Waite, CIM Director of Education Emeritus



Norman Waite

We acknowledge today that event 30 years ago when ‘The Association of Members of the Chartered Institute of Marketing’ organisation was first formed following my discussions with Eardley Perera, who was then the Educational Liason Office for Sri Lanka.

That development, which grew out of the active membership in Sri Lanka, in order to provide a service for those who had satisfied the exacting standards to become Members of the CIM, was a most significant step because it’s legacy was the formation of the first overseas Branches of our international body, CIM(UK). This was eventually granted in 1994 and I am pleased to say, still remains a vibrant and successful branch to this day. I further recall with much pleasure my visit in 1993 when I was able to give notice of this decision to form a Branch, to both CIM Members and students. I was also honoured on that occasion to be asked to present the diplomas and prizes at that year’s graduation ceremony.

None of this would have been possible without the hard work and dedication of Eardley Perera whose early efforts have significantly contributed to raising the status and practice of Marketing in Sri Lanka. Fortunately others have followed in his wake and in spite of difficulties, ‘Marketing’ continues to make a valuable contribution to the nation’s success which I note, has mostly shown strong growth over recent years. With continued commitment you can remain equally optimistic for the future. Professional marketing means successful business.

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