

## Inauguration Ceremony of the COVID-AI Project

The inauguration ceremony of the research project entitled "An Artificial Intelligence framework for threat assessment and containment for COVID-19 and future epidemics while mitigating the socio-economic impact to women, children, and underprivileged groups", dubbed COVID-AI Project, took place on 23rd of February 2020 at the Grand Kandyan Hotel, Kandy adhering to the health and safety guidelines as mandated by the Government and Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka.

The funding for this project worth CAD 846,700.00 (nearly 115 Million LKR) is granted by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, under their funding call "Global South AI4COVID Program". The IDRC has funded eight projects globally under this call, out of which this is the only project funded in the Asia-Pacific Region.

This multi-disciplinary project is conducted through a consortium of Universities and research institutes in Sri Lanka and Malaysia, with the University of Peradeniya as the principal research organization. The Faculties of Engineering, Medicine and Arts collaborate from the University of Peradeniya, partnering with the Ministry of Health and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) constitute the Sri Lankan research institutes. The partnering Malaysian research institutes are the Universiti Tenaga Nasional, the National University of Malaysia and the Management and Science University.

The objectives of the project include the development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) techniques to detect, model, and predict the behaviour of 'identified diverse groups' under COVID-19 pandemic containment strategies; understanding of the socio-economic impact of these strategies initiated in the Global South with special emphasis on Sri Lanka and Malaysia; and the development of AI-based solutions, to predict and manage a future spread of COVID or similar infectious disease outbreaks.

The inauguration event was graced by His Excellency the High Commissioner of Canada, Mr. David McKinnon as the Chief Guest; Dr. Amal Harsha de Silva, Secretary to the State Ministry of Primary Health Services, Pandemics and COVID Prevention as the Guest of Honour; the Vice Chancellor of Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Prof. Dato' Ir. Dr. Kamal Nasharuddin Mustapha; the Vice Chancellor of

the University of Peradeniya, Prof. Upul B Dissanayake; Deputy Vice Chancellor, Dean-Faculty of Engineering and Dean-Faculty of Medicine of the University of Peradeniya, Head of the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering and research teams from Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Due to the prevailing travel restrictions, the Malaysian team joined online.

The High Commissioner of Canada outlined the importance of studying and mitigating the impact of pandemics for the most vulnerable groups and the Canadian government's efforts to facilitate such efforts in partnership with organizations such as the IDRC. Dr. Harsha De Silva said that he is confident that the AI models that will be developed will change how Sri Lanka manages COVID in the future. The Vice Chancellor of the University of Peradeniya congratulated the research team for obtaining this grant and stressed the capability of the team to produce promising results. The Vice Chancellor of UNITEN said that this grant allows the consortium to achieve a single goal: to thrive, advance knowledge, and learn through research and innovation that will serve human society.

During the inauguration, the Vice Chancellors signed a partnership agreement between the University of Peradeniya and Universiti Tenaga Nasional. After the inauguration event, two workshops were held to discuss the types of data to be collected that would best reflect the impact of the pandemic and strategies were devised by the research teams on how to initiate and coordinate the data collection process.



Delegates in the Head Table



His Excellency the High Commissioner of Canada, Mr. David McKinnon addressing the gathering



Vice Chancellor, University of Peradeniya signing the Partnership Agreement



Vice Chancellor UNITEN signing the Partnership Agreement



Workshop followed by the innaguration session