



62 GROUP

(A Group of Old Boys of S.Thomas' College Gurutalawa)

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Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chickera,
Bishop of Colombo,
Bishop's House,
No. 370, Bullers Road,
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CONFIDENTIAL

BY HAND

Your Lordship,

S.THOMAS' COLLEGE - GURUTALAWA

1. We thank you for your letter of December 14,2001.
 - a) We just returned from Gurutalawa after attending to the painting and minor repairs to the Junior Dorms from December 21st to the 26th. This project incidentally was proposed (to be done) by us to the OBA on **March 15,2001** on our return after attending the Reunion and AGM of the OBA and having observed the deplorable conditions under which very young students were accommodated.
 - b) The Ex-Co of the OBA took no steps to consider our proposals. It was the New Head Master who, 08 months later, on **November 16,2001** having unearthed our letter, made inquiries and requested us direct, to proceed, which resulted in the accomplishment of the work. Incidentally, **the Ex-Co of the OBA** was even on **November 28, 2001** due to take this matter up and **consider appointing sub-committees to go in to it.**

- c) We enclose herewith for your information a copy of our letter addressed to 14 of our friends in our group who contributed towards this project. This amply demonstrates how a job of work can and ought to be done.
 - d) While we were staying elsewhere and supervising the painting work of College we were informed that the only Printer available at College was not functioning, and that this had caused inconvenience. The Fax Machine too had not been working for months. We undertook to have them both attended to at our expense in Colombo and arranged to have them collected by our Secretariat. These machines have now been put back in working order and delivered to the Head Master.
 - e) We were also informed that immense hardship and inconvenience is encountered due to the lack of proper communication facilities in the far flung campus which necessitated messengers being sent on foot from one end to the other. Even the Security Officers at the main gate have to commute to and fro from the Head Master's Bungalow or Office to the Front gate consequently. The undersigned offered to donate a Telephone System valued at approximately Rs. 115,000/- to overcome this difficulty. This is awaiting installation immediately the relocation of the administration block is finalized. The lack of a Photostat copy Machine was also brought to our notice and the undersigned has arranged a Canon 3325 Machine valued at Rs.115,000/- to be available for installation as soon as the above Re-location formalities are completed.
 - f) These are only a few of the projects which we have undertaken and / or executed during the December Vacation. It may not be out of place to mention that this period customarily is a time when the whole family of the undersigned gathers in Colombo and the most looked forward to event is the Christmas Eve Dinner which happens to be the birthday of the undersigned. However, all that was put aside and those days utilized to do something for College.
2. In the meantime, to come back to your letter, we note that you,
- (i) need some clarification as regards the "Status" of our Report, and
 - (ii) cannot recognize our Group officially since there is an official OBA.
- a) Although it would appear any discussion on the above matters may perhaps be purely of "academic interest" now, it may be appropriate on our part if the correct position as we see it, is set out. No one should later say that we failed in our duty to place this on record.
 - b) **FIRSTLY**, the observations we placed before you were prepared by 03 members of our Group (which is loosely referred to as the "62 Group"). This Group consists of about 80 Old Boys who were students at

Gurotalawa covering a period from its very first year of existence right up to the 1990's. They are not confined to a particular Class or Year, (as the numbers of such category in the case of Gurotalawa would be very small). The need for this Group to take an active interest arose at the beginning of this year to fill the vacuum of not having Old Boys who could act efficiently and speedily for the betterment of the College as the organized OBA appeared to be uninterested and/or ineffective. **Whilst almost all our members are members of the OBA, we count among them several past and present members of the Ex-Co** of the OBA including Vice Presidents. The core group consists of highly qualified and accomplished Old Boys in Canada, USA, UK, Australia and also in Sri Lanka.

- c) While Mr. Bradman Weerakoon, Mr.P S Duleep Kumar, and several Masters who have retired are Honorary Members, Very Senior Old Boys of the 1940's & '50's are fully supportive of the steps we are taking to support College, and give new life to the OBA. They consist perhaps of the most distinguished and accomplished Old Boys of Gurotalawa, who are actively involved in its progress and development.
- d) **We are not a break-away group of the OBA** and all our actions have been focussed to strengthen the OBA which has lost it's vitality and virility. **These facts and the status** were emphasized by no less a person than Mr. Bradman Weerakoon, at our Fellowship-Dinner on November 24, 2001.
- e) There are several Old Boys (members of the OBA and non-members) who individually, in twos, threes and small groups give assistance to College, particularly through the Head Master. None of these individuals or groups who meet informally and render assistance to College whether in cash, material or expertise (legal and otherwise) have sought any "recognition" from the College or the Church to assist the College. Head Masters and other officers of the Institution consistently call upon Old Boys for their advice without having conferred on them any **official** Status or Recognition and such assistance and advice is given readily and willingly, and the need to clarify their Status and / or obtain any official recognition before imparting any advice or assistance etc. did not and does not arise. This has been the practice for over 4 decades. Nobody has questioned their status, or willingness to assist the institution. They have not **requested** that they be **recognized**. No one has asked them to apply for recognition. Status or Recognition is not, has not and should not be an issue.
- f) We, as a group of Old Boys are hoping to rejuvenate the OBA, and are actively involved in assisting College through the medium of the Head Master without **in any way interfering with his administration.**

- g) The observations made by us in regard to Gurutalawa were not prompted by the OBA or the Ex-Head Master. They were solely of our own initiative and made with the best interests of the College and its present and future students, at heart.
 - h) As explained, many of our observations relate to highly confidential and sensitive issues and would be highly impracticable nay impossible to submit direct to the Head Master or for action through the OBA after open discussion. In any event, the OBA and its Ex-Co are so out of tune with reality and lethargic that no useful purpose would have been served in attempting to do so.
 - i) As such at no time did we seek recognition from you and do not intend doing so now or in the future.
 - j) Whilst we do not concede that you have any difficulty in recognizing us **since there is an “Official OBA”**, the question of recognition would hardly arise in view of what we have stated above.
 - k) There were a few matters which required very urgent attention by the new Head Master before he could place himself in a position which would have embarrassed him and also prejudiced College and himself. **That is why we were keen to have at least those matters brought to his notice and resolved early.** e.g. A new Secretary to be appointed for the new Head Master to handle all his confidential work and dispense with the Old hand at the end of his term on December 31,2001. This would have been a matter of common sense given the facts outlined by us. We are not sure whether these matters have been satisfactorily attended to. But then, we have done our duty by College.
3. **SECONDLY**, to put this question in its proper perspective, we are sure if any important or confidential information is placed before you by,
- I. a well wisher or a member of the community of the Gurutalawa village or
 - II. a member of the Tutorial, Administrative or Minor staff of the of the College or
 - III. a student or parent of the College or
 - IV. Old Boys who may have visited the College or passed through.
 - V. An Old Boy who is the O I C of the Welimada Police.

That –

- Immoral activities are taking place within the premises with the connivance of responsible persons on the Campus.
- Movable property, beds, tables, chairs, motor vehicles, etc etc are being pilfered, removed or misused.

- ❑ Trees are being illicitly felled
- ❑ Students are not being made to attend classes, regularly and are being diverted towards other areas.

You would not direct that such information be transmitted to you by those persons through the OBA. After all, what have any of the above individuals got to do with the OBA?. We are sure that in the circumstances of the case , prudence would have demanded your sending a handpicked Trouble Shooter to investigate and report back to you on a highly confidential and priority basis, after making available to him our report or arranging a meeting with us. This can be done even now. It will not take even 03 days to accomplish. It is common knowledge that this procedure is adopted in similar situations.

- a) When the exigencies of the situation demand it, even anonymous information is solicited to root out corruption and misdeeds, and the identity of the informant is not revealed.
- b) In our case we are prepared to meet and discuss the issues. Our group has sufficient credibility and responsibility that some urgent action could have been taken. No one could have found fault if we had been treated as one of the categories I to V above.

4. **THIRDLY**, over 7,500 students have been admitted to Gurutalawa since 1942. At the inauguration of the OBA in 1959, about 80 Old Boys were present. Today almost four decades have passed and yet, the number participating in the Reunion or AGM is about the same. **We found that more than 346 members had been left out in the cold incommunicado, as their current addresses are not available with the present Ex-Co of the OBA.** If the OBA was allowed to go on in the present fashion very soon it would have been reduced to only its Ex-Co and perhaps a handful of members.

- a. **We have** by making over 250 personal visits to houses/offices in the CMC areas as well as suburbs of Colombo and communicating with over 294 outstation members all over Sri Lanka **brought to the Association over 250 members during a period of 07 months** since June 2001. We have also been instrumental in having admitted to membership a very large number of **new members** in a very short period of time. In fact we, as an active Group are doing all the work the OBA **ought** to do to enliven the OBA and be the mechanism to spearhead the development of College and the betterment of future generations of Thomians. This has been the common observation of numerous concerned Old Boys.
- b. We are also sure that if for arguments sake an OBA hardly exists or ceases to exist at all for all practical purposes you would not be waiting for

official proposals to come from the OBA, and refuse to recognize information placed before you by any person, whether Old Boy or well wisher, imposing a restraint by way of a pre-requisite of “status”.

5. Whilst we appreciate that you are fully entitled to the view you seem to have taken we feel **most respectfully** that you are completely misdirected and that is why we have written at length to you to show you how wrong you could be. We are humbled that Bradman and Ronnie Weerakoon, Sisira Nanayakkara, P S Duleep Kumar, A H Ellawala, W S Dambawinna, Roy Abeysekara, C E H De Saram and so many others among a galaxy of distinguished Old Boys who pioneered our OBA and who have in letters to us faulted previous indifference of the Board of Governors, the shortsightedness of the Head Masters who have come and gone in quick succession each with his own agenda and priorities and the ineffectiveness of the OBA to give proper direction and guidance to the authorities **whilst strongly commending us on our activities have expressed their unstinted co-operation and support, financial and otherwise in all our activities to resuscitate College.**
6. We are quite content to leave the observations etc made by us for your wise consideration and implementation as and when possible. The only draw back would be that certain matters did require rectification with some sense of urgency. We certainly cannot and would not exert any pressure on you.
7. Currently, in a climate in which two of the Schools are reported to want to close down their Boardings and rumours are afloat that Gurutalawa as an institution is also to be closed down as it is not financially viable, and the students transferred to the other branches, and property disposed of, **we the Old Boys are willing to stand by the College** (and the Church).
8. **We wish to assure you that you have our highest respect, regard and consideration and all of us would continue to co-operate with you and the Head Master and be available to assist you or him to the best of our ability without in any way interfering with his administration or your decisions. We deeply appreciate that you have given us a hearing.**
9. We are happy to note that the Board and you will do your best for the school, although the interest of the Board in this particular School **has in the past, always been found much less than what it has deserved as a national asset.**
10. We understand that a Lay Chaplain has now been appointed. We hope he will fulfill a long felt need of the College. **We wish to thank you for same.**
11. As already indicated we intend **with your blessings**, taking up with the Head Master, tactfully, as many of the observations referred to earlier, at the appropriate time, if possible, and continue to assist the College and the Head Master if and when our assistance is welcome and / or solicited.

With kind regards and wishing you a Very Happy New Year.

Yours very Sincerely,

LAKSHMAN JAYATILAKA
For- Co-ordinating Secretariat