

An urban vision for Trincomalee

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Trincomalee has always been the most breathtakingly beautiful urban setting in Sri Lanka. It is also potentially the most dynamic urban centre not only in Sri Lanka, but in the entire rim of the eastern Indian Ocean. At a time when we search for peaceful conclusions to conflict and a revitalization of our economy, the development of Trincomalee must be regarded as the principal pivot-point for energizing the north-east region.

This urban vision for Trincomalee town is part of an Integrated Urban Development Plan for Trincomalee District, commissioned by the Urban Development Authority in 2001 through a multi-disciplinary team. The writer participated as the Urban Designer on the project team.

This urban vision has set itself the goal of realizing the enormous potential of Trincomalee while protecting its environment, its beauty, and its people.

Multifaceted

The town of Trincomalee is a place of multifaceted potential. It has scenic beaches, both flat and sandy as well as green and hilly. It has spectacularly poised temples and fortresses. It has the capacity to service the commercial needs arising out of the development of the industrial harbour. It has an intense bazaar district and a local fishing industry. It is critical that these diverse potentials are not only developed, but also integrated into a harmonious whole. The district of Trincomalee covers an area of approx 2,400 sq.km., and is estimated to have a population of approx. 450,000. The town of Trincomalee covers an area of approx 800 hectares, and has an estimated population of almost 100,000. Trinco's ethnic mix is unique, being populated in equal proportion by Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.

The defining identity of Trincomalee is in its status as one of the finest natural harbours in the world. However, despite its history as a coveted seaport government at various times by the Portuguese, the Danes, the French, the Dutch and the British, it has failed to live up to its enormous potential, particularly due to the conflict in the region.

Maritime

Our vision for Trinco - based firmly in a post-war scenario - is as the principal maritime metropolis of North Eastern Sri Lanka. Trinco is a city of seafronts, a pre-eminent maritime city. Its geographical form creates a series of beaches, each of a different character, both physically and in the manner of its use. Among them are the Inner Harbour, Dutch Bay, Back Bay and Yard Cove, not to mention beaches such as marble Bay and Dead Man's Cove which lie outside the city limits. Enveloped by these diverse beaches lies the town center of Trincomalee: densely built and yet vibrant despite the tensions of conflict, a bazaar district that combines shops, homes and more than seventy Hindu shrines.

Our response here was to retain those elements which had the inherent strength to grow on their own terms and to project change for elements which had the greatest potential for change. In Trinco it is quite evident that the seafronts are the components which promise change, while the inner city could remain the pivotal bedrock of local culture.

A point of departure from conventional planning practices in Sri Lanka is the character-based, wholis-

tic, three-dimensional, spatial, vision-building exercise on which these proposals were based. The combination of land-use zoning and urban design guidelines into one and the same document sustains this approach.

A key feature of the integrated development plan are its plans for industrial development, among which are development of the industrial harbour, shipping-related industry, and the oil tank farms. However, these areas fall outside the urban centre of Trincomalee and are therefore not part of the plan for Trincomalee Town. Nevertheless, this plan incorporates the necessary responses within the town to the development of industry and industrial harbours outside it.

The plan

The main components of the plan are:

- * Enhancement of the existing mode of entry to the town to form a distinct city entrance, defined by Yard Cove to one side and a public park to the other.
- * Development of the main existing public esplanade as a civic hub, which is an urban focal point for the city.

- * Utilization of the diverse potential of each of Trincomalee's seafronts, to create a series of seafronts of varied purpose and character: a public/recreational beach, a commercial harbour and marina, a residential park-beach, a local fisheries harbour, an industrial harbour, a military harbour, a heritage seafront and an urban forest seafront.

- * A socially and economically sustainable development of the downtown core, which forms the contiguous urban fabric creating connectivity between each of the series of seafronts. The significant potential of the downtown core as a living, sustainable, inner city district is developed as a dense mixed-use zone, including a specific pedestrianised commercial district.

- * Enhancement of the accessibility of the town by a graded system of routes including an outer ring for fast traffic, and inner roads for slow and pedestrian traffic.

Zoning

Diverging from traditional planning practices in Sri Lanka, the zoning plan combined both land-use zoning and urban design guidelines. Zoning therefore is character-based, and place-based, attempting to capture the essential defining characteristics - functional, spatial, cultural and symbolic. Urban design guidelines seek to protect and nurture a special type of growth pattern unique to each zone of the city. The definition of densities, in particular, seeks to promote the formation of distinct urban neighbourhoods and protect open and green spaces in the city.

* Civic recreational zones

- * There will be two civil/recreational zones in the city. The first is the Civic Hub on the site of the existing esplanade, while the second will be the New Park which will form a definite entrance to the city, and will also be the civic nucleus of the expansion zones of the city.

- * These zones will be the most significant public places of the city. Land use will be predominantly open recreational space comprising esplanades, parks, playgrounds, etc.

- * Buildings in this zone will be Civic buildings (Town Hall, Provincial Council etc.), and buildings for public recreational and cultural facilities such as Outdoor and Indoor Sports, Cinemas, Theatres, Cultural Centres, Museums, Libraries, with limited Shopping activities. The number of floors will be limited to four, and a very low ratios of plot coverage and FAR will be imposed to preserve open and green spaces.

- * Such buildings should not be walled-off, and public access and visual connections should be reinforced and not impeded by the placement and the functioning of such buildings. There should be unhindered public accessibility at all times.

- * The area should have a formal character, expressed in both the buildings as well as in the hard and soft landscaping.

Institutional

- * This zone is defined for public administrative functions of the local/central/provincial authorities. The zone at present contains several administrative buildings.

- * This zone faces the Civic Hub and its buildings will have relationships to the Civic Buildings in the Civic Hub, both in terms of function and built form. Buildings facing the Civic hub should observe formal placement and character, and will be 4 to 6 floors in height.

Downtown: High and medium density

- * The downtown zones are intended to provide for a natural growth of the existing inner city area. These zones are defined in order to retain the position of existing city dwellers within the core, while high-profile development is taking place on the peripheral zones. The downtown zones should therefore be allowed maximum freedom for incremental growth in keeping with the evolving economic capacity of its residents.

- * A functional mix of small and mid-range commercial activity (including the informal sector), residential, and public activity should be fostered. It is specially important to retain the residential character of the zone by promoting a minimum residential component in every development (by building types such as shop-houses, commercial cum apartment blocks, etc). It is also noteworthy that there are an extensive number of places of religious worship in the zone, which should be retained and fostered.

- * The two density zones cater to a more intensely built edge-zone (4 to 6 floors in height) and a less intense inner zone (upto 3 floors). However, both zones should allow for densely built, low to medium rise urban blocks interspersed with pockets of open space.

- * The high density downtown zone will be the prime retail shopping district. Central Road will be pedestrianized and landscaped with shade trees. This street will form an axial visual link connecting the city entrance to the two civic zones.

- * The downtown zones should be served by an outer ring road for through-traffic, with roads within the zone designated for slow traffic. Parking requirements within the zone will be met by the promotion of designated parking buildings, while parking

requirements for individual developments will be low.

Beach promenade

- * Beach Promenade Zones are defined along the public and recreational beaches.

- * These zones should be free of any built permanent or impermanent structures, except for piers for boats, yachts etc.

Residential park

- * The Residential Park Zone will be an area landscaped as a Dry Zone botanical area, within which special residential development will be promoted.

- * Plot sizes will be large (a minimum of 4,000 Sq. Metres) and all plots will be landscaped according to special regulations which prevent the walling off of plots.

- * Permitted development will be apartments and hotels. Point blocks with a building height of up to 10 floors and very low plot coverage will be promoted to retain the open character of this zone.

Business

- * The Business Zone will be the exclusive business area of the city, designated for banks, investment business, city hotels etc. Public and recreational activities such as restaurants, cafes, galleries, shopping etc. will be promoted at ground level in all buildings.

- * This will be the high-rise zone of the city, with a minimum building height of six floors.

- * Plot sizes will be a minimum of 4,000 Sq. Metres and have a regular plot pattern along the zone. All plots will front on to paved and landscaped beach boulevards.

- * Building footprints will be restricted to allow view and breeze corridors cross the zone to the sea.

Transport hub

- * The Transport Hub will be the main inter-modal transport interchange of the city. It will serve buses, trains, taxis, and any other modes of transport including any People Mover Systems.

- * Development will include Supplementary shopping, restaurant, hotel or overnight stay facilities.

Heritage zone

- * The Heritage Zone comprises Fort Frederick, Koneswar Temple and its surroundings. This zone will be conserved in its entirety, including all built and un-built elements.

- * A Heritage Zone Conservation Plan will be formulated.

- * The Heritage Zone will be used for religious, cultural and tourist functions. Permitted buildings will include Temples, Cultural Centres, Museums, Galleries, Restaurants, Cafes, etc.

- * All new buildings within the Heritage Zone will architecturally complement the existing environment.

Military zone

This zone will be used only for Military functions and supportive commercial and service functions.

- * Free access on public roads will be permitted

within and across the Military Zone. Only individual plots will be walled or fenced off for restricted entry.

Urban forest zone

- * This zone will be a conserved ecological reserve. No building activity will be permitted, except for impermanent structures of limited size.

Special fisheries zone

- * This zone will be dedicated to functions related to the local fishing industry. Functions will include fish markets, storage facilities, transport facilities, and special residential projects for the local fishing community.

Public green zones

- * Public/Green Zones will be open public areas. These zones will be landscaped with hard and soft landscaping, including public sidewalks, avenues of shade-trees, turfing, etc.

- * These zones will be freely accessible to the public and will not be fenced off

Urban extension zones 1 and 2

- * The plan identifies two expansion zones for the growth of the Trincomalee Urban Area. While a target date of 2010 is set for the definition of detailed zoning and urban design guidelines for these expansion zones, incremental growth is facilitated in the interim period.

Industrial

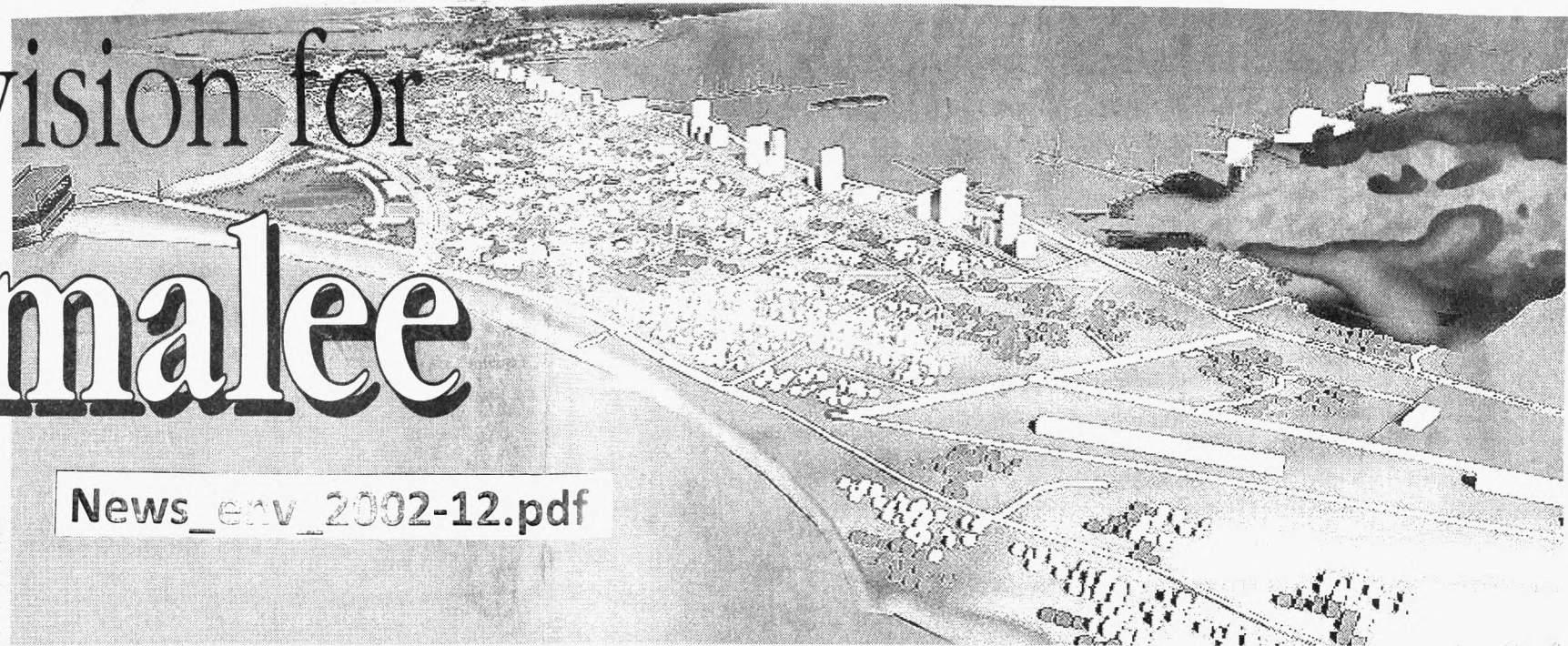
- * A limited zone within the town is designated for special port-related industry. This development is detailed in the Port Development Plan of the Integrated Development Plan for the entire district.

The much anticipated dawn of a peaceful settlement to the ethnic crisis would create urgent demands for an accelerated development of Trincomalee.

It is customary in such situations to impose ad-hoc and piecemeal solutions which have the appearance of immediate impact but are soon found to hinder the development of a harmonious whole. We therefore propose this urban vision of Trincomalee as the principal maritime metropolis of North Eastern Sri Lanka, and urge its utilization as an instrument for the development of Trincomalee's inherent potential within a functionally efficient, environmentally sustainable, socially sympathetic and visually imageable framework.

Urban plans must necessarily be the subject of public scrutiny and debate. This plan is offered as a basis for such dialogue and discussion.

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