

8 DEVELOPMENT

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■ Five years of development - Hambantota district

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President Mahinda Rajapaksa commissioning the Hambantota Tank Farm project. Minister of Ports and Aviation Chamal Rajapaksa, other Ministers and officials look on.



H'tota port project ahead of schedule

by Shirajiv Sirimane in
Hambantota

Undoubtedly Hambantota is the most rapidly developing region in Sri Lanka at present with billions of rupees being pumped in during the last four years.

One would say that Hambantota came into focus because President Mahinda Rajapaksa hails from the area. It's true that the President's initiative helped complete the ongoing projects in or even ahead of time.

Hambantota was not developed for centuries. People did not have drinking water let alone electricity and other necessities of life.

As Minister of Ports and Aviation Chamal Rajapaksa said recently though millions of people pass through Hambantota each year on their way to Kataragama no one bothered to spend some time here.

The district was also listed as one of the most underprivileged districts with low income generation and high unemployment rate. The road network was in a very bad condition. Incidents of organised gangs robbing motorists in the night were also reported in the past. The Hambantota district was relegated to wilderness

while the surrounding areas were developed.

What Hambantota needed was a mega development project to kick-start the development drive and solution was to go ahead with the proposed Harbour development project which was in the pipe line for nearly two decades.

To expedite this, billions of funds were needed and President Rajapaksa himself shouldered this burden by wooing the Chinese investors. Today the Hambantota port project is no longer a dream, but a reality coming true by end of this year.

As expected, the Port development project has already opened up numerous business opportunities after bringing in investors to the region.

The new port will commence its operations by November 2010, said Ports Authority Chairman, Dr. Priyath B. Wickrema. The construction work of the Port is five months ahead of the schedule with more than 50% key wall, 40% Excavation work, 100% Breakwater construction being completed.

The first phase will consist of two general purpose berths, one bunkering berth and a small craft berth which is 120 metres long.

Work at the Tank Farm

Project and the 15 floor Administration complex, which would be the tallest building in the district, too is on course. Also a fully fledged Bunkering Facility and a Tank Farm Project will be constructed with 14 tanks for bunkering and six others for Aviation Fuel and as LPG Tanks.

The second major development project is the international airport at Mattala. The new airport, with an investment of Rs. 22 billion with foreign funding would certainly enhance the country's image. The airport, in the first phase would consist of one runway. In the second stage the mega project would provide the necessary taxiway facilities for bigger aircraft like A380s to land.

The airport, in the first five years, would primarily focus on cargo operations in line with the Hambantota harbour.

The objective behind the Hambantota Master Development Plan is infrastructure development, and uplifting people's living standards not only in Hambantota district but in the adjoining backward areas such as Moneragala and Matara bringing them in line with other developed districts in the country.

Tourism in these areas too would have a major positive impact on the national economy while Mattala International Airport would serve as the cargo hub to the East.

These two mega projects have initiated a chain of development which would make Hambantota a fully developed district in the very near future. The road network has been redone with carpeted roads and night lighting largely reducing the travel time to the area.

Lighting Hambantota was initiated three years ago to provide electricity to all by end of next year and similarly solutions to the drinking water problems too have been found. Healthcare facilities too have received a boost with all existing hospitals being upgraded.

In 2006 the Government spent Rs. 39 million under the decentralised budget, Rs.



Suresh de Mel

61.79 million - Ministry of Plan Implementation, Rs. 263.31 million Southern Provincial Council, Rs. 557.26 million - State authorities totalling to a sum of Rs. 921.36 million.

Similarly in 2007, the Government spent a total of Rs. 3,098.35 million, with Rs. 38.77 million provided by the decentralized budget, Rs. 1,029 million Ministry of Plan Implementation, Rs. 229.28 million - Southern Provincial Council, Rs. 1,614.25 million - State Authorities, Rs. 163.30 million - Maga Neguma Programme and Rs. 22.80 million - Jathika Saviya Gama Neguma scheme.

Continuing with these development activities, the Government spent Rs. 7,297.73 million in the year 2008, representing Rs. 33.40 million provided by the decentralized budget, Rs. 498.79 million - Ministry of Plan Implementation, Rs. 280.80 million - Southern Provincial Council, Rs. 5,882.41 million - State Authorities, Rs. 131 million - Maga Neguma Programme and Rs. 471.33 million - Jathika Saviya Gama Neguma scheme.

In the year 2009, the Government spent a total sum of Rs. 7,399.29 million representing Rs. 34.80 million provided by the decentralized budget, Rs. 314.14 million Ministry of Plan Implementation, Rs. 458.23 million - Southern Provincial Council, Rs. 6,141.11 million - State Authorities, Rs. 279.80 million - Maga Neguma Programme and Rs. 141.21 million - Jathika

Saviya Gama Neguma scheme.

The Government implemented several housing projects during the period 2006-2008 to help the people. In the year 2006, the Government spent Rs. 19.20 million to construct 380 housing projects. In 2007, Rs. 8.40 million was spent on 210 housing projects and in the year 2008, Rs. 19.20 million was spent on 377 projects.

Agriculture is the main source of income for the majority of people in the district and the Government has been pumping in funds regularly to this segment to help raise their living standards.

During a period of three years, the Government spent Rs. 11,310.64 million for development of roads, electricity, water supply, housing, health facilities, education, irrigation and agricultural sectors in the Hambantota District. In the year 2009 alone the Government spent Rs. 7,406.09 million for the development of these sectors.

The Matara-Kataragama Railway project, which is being implemented by the Ministry of Transport, is estimated to cost Rs. 9,100 million. It would help the agricultural sector to move goods freely and also reduce post harvest losses.

The administration complex which would house all government buildings is expected to be fully operational by end of this year.

Azmi Thassim, CEO Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce said that the people in Hambantota District in general and the business community in particular, are very encouraged by the development projects in progress.

"The District is on the threshold of major opportunities to transform its economy, the living standards and future prospects of its people. The vast resources of the district remained unexploited, largely as a result of the over-concentration of the country's development priorities on the Western Province."

Mattala Airport

"As a result of the major improvements in the transport infrastructure, together with port, airport, cricket stadium and other projects involving massive amounts of capital investment, there is an unprecedented opportunity to redress the imbalance. These major projects, if handled well, could accelerate substantially the economic development of the District and bring the associated benefits to its people. Moreover, because of the mega nature of some of the projects, the benefits should also be felt across Southern Province and beyond as well."

The objective behind the Hambantota Master Development Plan is infrastructure development, and reflecting people's living standards not only in Hambantota district.

"However, if this challenge is to be met, there is much to be done. Economic success will be dependent on the full engagement of the private sector, and the Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce members are determined to play their part in this process."

"What is needed today is common vision and a well-coordinated implementation programme."

"There is need for the Government to prioritize and coordinate its activities and to strengthen the decision-making processes. We would like to see a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down development process. There is need to recognize the local community and harness their energies, if the full potential benefits of the development priorities are to be realised. We therefore want to see more local participation in the decision-making bodies. We are confi-

dent that this will contribute substantially to make the ongoing projects a success."

A land utilization plan is also needed. We also want to see greater transparency and opportunity for the local people and the business community to tender for and invest in projects and to get involved in the supply chain, as entrepreneurs and also in taking advantage of the many job opportunities," he said.

If local businesses and people are to seize these job opportunities there will also be a substantial need for skills development.

We are keen to work with Government at all levels in developing initiatives to assess the needs of local businesses and the people and to help them to develop the necessary skills and capacities. The HDCC as the representative of the business community would like to offer its fullest support and cooperation in this regard and also more in participating in planning, decision-making, implementation etc."

Suresh de Mel, an industrialist cum exporter in the Hambantota district commended the rapid development taking place in the area which was lacking for several years.

De Mel feels the ongoing development would create more employment opportunities and lead to empowerment of the area which is extremely important for equitable socio-economic development, not only in the Hambantota District, but in the neighbouring Eastern, Uva and Sabaragamuwa districts as well.

He feels that as investments start coming into the area, there will be a high turnover of workers from existing jobs and stiff competition for labour. Already the public sector is hiring many workers away from the private sector to fill the various government offices that are to be opened up in the District.

In a bid to provide leisure activities and wooing more tourists to the area a Safari

park is being constructed in Ridiyagama and the officials have expressed confidence that this would be open to the public by next year.

The construction of a six-and-a-half-kilometre-long wall along the outer boundary of the 500-acre park is under construction.

Rs. 500 million Dry Zone Botanical Garden project is being constructed.

Animals such as white tigers and similar species would be brought from other countries and people would be able to see animals roaming freely.

The International Conference Hall Complex is estimated to cost U.S.\$ 15.3 million while the Administration Complex is estimated to cost U.S.\$ 20.3 million. These two projects are being implemented by the Urban Development Authority. The entire project is being carried out at an estimated cost of Rs. 1,250 million.

In a bid to make the film industry more cost-effective and professional a Tele Cinema Garden at Ramminitenna is being constructed and would be opened by President Mahinda Rajapaksa on 30th this month. This project is the first of its kind in Sri Lanka and it will fulfil a long felt need of the Film and Tele Drama producers.

The Ramminitenne Tele Cinema Garden is constructed on a 235 acre land at a cost of over Rs. 5 million. It consists of natural environment, rivers, lakes, mountainous locations, forests, as well as village and urban locations. Ramminitenna will provide the prospective Film and Tele Drama producers all the amenities and services needed for their Film or Tele Drama Projects.

It has been designed and implemented in accordance with plans formulated after consultations with the producers, artists, musicians, engineers.

The international cricket stadium which hosts two games of the next Cricket World cup next year and the international racing track would bring more international travellers to the area.



Azmi Thassim, CEO Hambantota District Chamber with SLP Technical Director, J. Kurukulasuriya at Hambantota harbour