

■ Ceremony to mark construction work of Mattala Airport

Wiping out rural poverty my priority - President



President Mahinda Rajapaksa unveils the plaque to inaugurate construction work of the new Hambantota International Airport

By Shirajiv Sirimane
in Mattala

"I want to wipe off all poor villages from the Sri Lankan map," said President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the ground breaking ceremony of the new Hambantota International Airport in Mattala, Hambantota on Friday.

No Sri Lankan leader ever had an ambitious vision of this nature. If a political leader did make a statement of this nature people would have laughed it off.

However, when President Rajapaksa made this comment people knew that this would be a reality as he had already given leadership to more ambitious tasks such as ending the 30 year old war and launched development projects which were only confined to 'talk' or foundation stones.

The construction of the Hambantota Port, Kotmale Hydropower project, Norochchole coalpower project, expansion of the Colombo South Harbour, Colombo Matara expressway, extension of the rail track from Matara to Kataragama and train service to Jaffna along with the Mattala Airport were just dreams a few years ago.

However, the vision of the President had converted these dreams to reality.

"People who visit Hambantota now say things have changed so fast that they think that they have visited another country," The President said. He said that new international stadiums, sports complexes, hospitals, bridges, roads have been laid to international standards, and this has surprised visitors to Hambantota.

He said the legendary writer Lenard Woolfe who lived in this area in has written about the poverty, hardships and the innocence of

the villagers. "When I walked in these villages I have seen this and today their lifestyles are changing, fast," he said.

He said that development would not be confined to one province but would have equal distribution including the North and the East which had been lagging in this aspect during the past 30 years.

"This is why we launched the 'Uthuru Wasanthaya' and 'Eastern Awakening' to benefit the people of the North-East as well," he said.

"My ambition is to bring all the luxuries enjoyed by the people in the Colombo to rural areas", President said that these projects should have been done 20 years ago and no politician had the vision to do so. "We have now prepared our plans for the present as well as to suit the country's needs 30-40 years ahead," he added.

Commenting on the change of location of the second international airport from Weerawila to Mattala he said that one should not think it is demeaning to reverse decisions if it benefit the masses.

"When we found that the land in the original proposal to construct the airport in Weerawila is comprised fertile paddy fields, we changed the location and we would also never hesitate to take decisions or revise them if necessary for the benefit of the people," he assured.

The second international airport was a long-felt need of the aviation sector.

The airport will not only bring benefits to the Hambantota area but also brighten the livelihoods of people in the entire South and economic benefits would also flow to Uva as well as the Eastern province," said Minister of Ports and Aviation Chamal Rajapaksa.

He said that Colombo airport has problems regarding expansion and the new airport due to the availability of 2,000-hectare bare land could meet the aviation demands for many more years to come.

The cost of the project would be US \$ 200 million with the Chinese Government financially assisting the project on a soft loan facility. During the first phase all basic facilities and requirements will be completed including a runway, taxiways and parking facilities. The runway is large enough to operate any aircraft such as the A380 Airbus, the largest aircraft ever built.

During the second stage aviation related facilities such as servicing and repairing centre for aircraft, pilot training centre, maintenance hub, private jet parking, technical training centres, hotels, and many more facilities will be completed.

The airport will be constructed as an 'eco-friendly airport' minimising damage to the environment.

These would attract foreign airlines to fly to Sri Lanka generating much needed revenue.

Chairman Airport and Aviation Authority, Prasanna Wickramasuriya said the construction of the first stage has been scheduled to be completed by end 2011 when the airport will be commissioned. "We want to land the first flight by December 2011."

"The new airport will be a boon to the local aviation industry while being a catalyst for the economic development of the southern province through the enabling of international trade, tourism, vocational training and employment."

The new airport would be linked with three major

roads and the proposed extension of the rail line from Matara to Kataragama. In addition the new proposed highway link would also speed up traffic to the airport.

The new airport will be geared to support both international and domestic travel, air-sea cargo transshipment in conjunction with the Hambantota port and will be the alternative to the Colombo airport. With the new port in Hambantota which would be ready by next year the South will be accessible by both air and sea.

Airport at a glance:

- Total extent: 2,000 hectares
- Cost of the project: US \$ 200 million
- Contractors: China Harbour Corporation
- Stage I - Initial Development: Basic Aerodrome Facilities, Runway, Apron, Taxiway, Passenger and Cargo Terminals.

Access roads, accommodation for officials, fuel farm, sewerage treatment plant, water supply facilities, meteorological building, fire building, catering facility and car park.

Stage II - Second Stage Development: A full length parallel Taxiway, a flying school, an airport hotel and recreational facilities.

DESIGN THEME:

Theme of Hambantota Airport is 'Eco Airport'. "The Eco-Airport" represents any airport that takes appropriate measures to preserve the existing environment and further creates a better environment in the airport and its surroundings. Planning parameters shall be established to meet this theme Existing environment shall be preserved as much as possible.

Buildings and other infrastructure will be designed to blend with the environment. At least 15% of Energy will be derived from renewable sources (Bio mass, solar, wind).

Existing water bodies and new water features will be developed to retain water table

Target markets

- AirSea Transshipment hub
- Airlines-Passenger and Cargo
- Aircraft Maintenance Service Providers
- Aviation Training
- Aviation Related Industries
- Hospitality Industries
- Private Plane Owners and Service Providers

Source of income

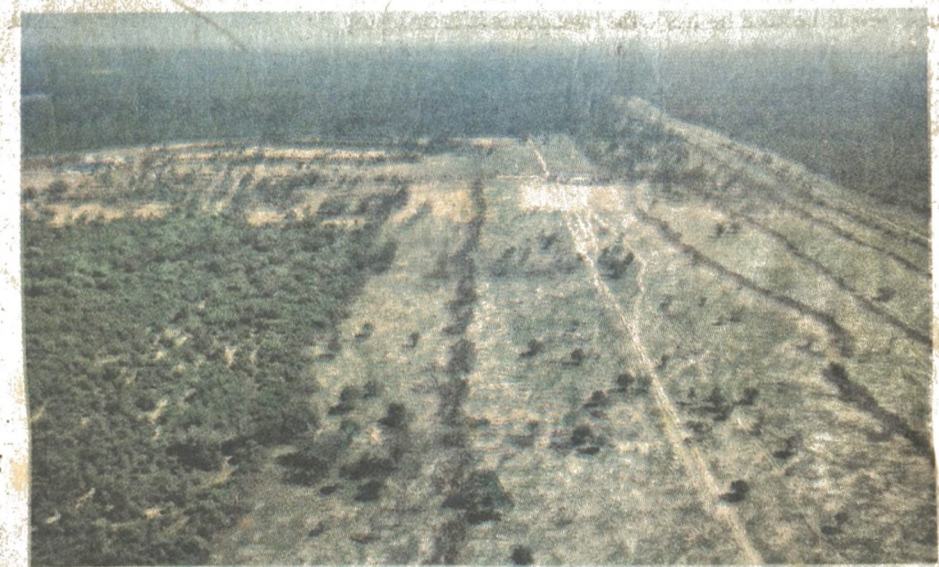
- Income from operation of free zone at airport
- Aerotropolis
- Landing and Parking slot fees
- Passenger Facilitation
- Airport Entry fees
- Concession fees from Aviation fuel, Ground handling etc
- Land lease fees for services like Aviation industries, aircraft maintenance, training schools, hospitality industry etc.
- Rentals from Duty free shops, and other facilities.

Benefits to the community

- Employment
- Business
- Improved infrastructure facilities
- Market for agricultural products
- Enhancement of Tourism in the area
- Uplift of Education
- Connectivity.



President Rajapaksa and Chinese Ambassador Yong Xiu Peng hoist the respective national flags of Sri Lanka and China



An aerial view of the proposed airport site



President and Chinese Ambassador disembark from the helicopter.



President, flanked by Minister Chamal Rajapaksa and VIPs inspect the map of the proposed airport.



Construction site