

Mahaweli Maha Seya

The biggest stupa to be constructed in Sri Lanka in 2350 years

by PREMASARA EPASINGHE

The work of recommencement of the Kotmale Maha Seya took place on May 8. Nestling in the picturesque Kotmale valley, the majestic, gigantic 100 feet dome structure adds considerable colour to this scenic atmosphere. Tourists, as well as pilgrims, flock to Kotmale Maha Seya premises, where a sapling of Sri Maha Bodhi was ceremonially planted recently.

Some of the most picturesque, breath-taking and soothing sights I have seen are the Table Mountain, Cape of Good Hope, Sun City and Pilensburg Park all in South Africa. The sight I got of the Kotmale Maha Seya from the distant point of Gamini Dissanayake Reservoir, is fantastic and out of this world to say the least. It is etched indelibly in my mind. What a panoramic sight it will be when the bubble shaped dagoba. (bubbulakuru stupa) rises to another 174 feet to caress the heavenly sky.

The Mahaweli Maha Seya will be a landmark structure of epic scale sited on an escarpment overlooking the Kotmale Reservoir, now known as Gamini Dissanayake Reservoir. This will be the biggest and the Largest Stupa to be constructed after 2350 years in Sri Lanka.

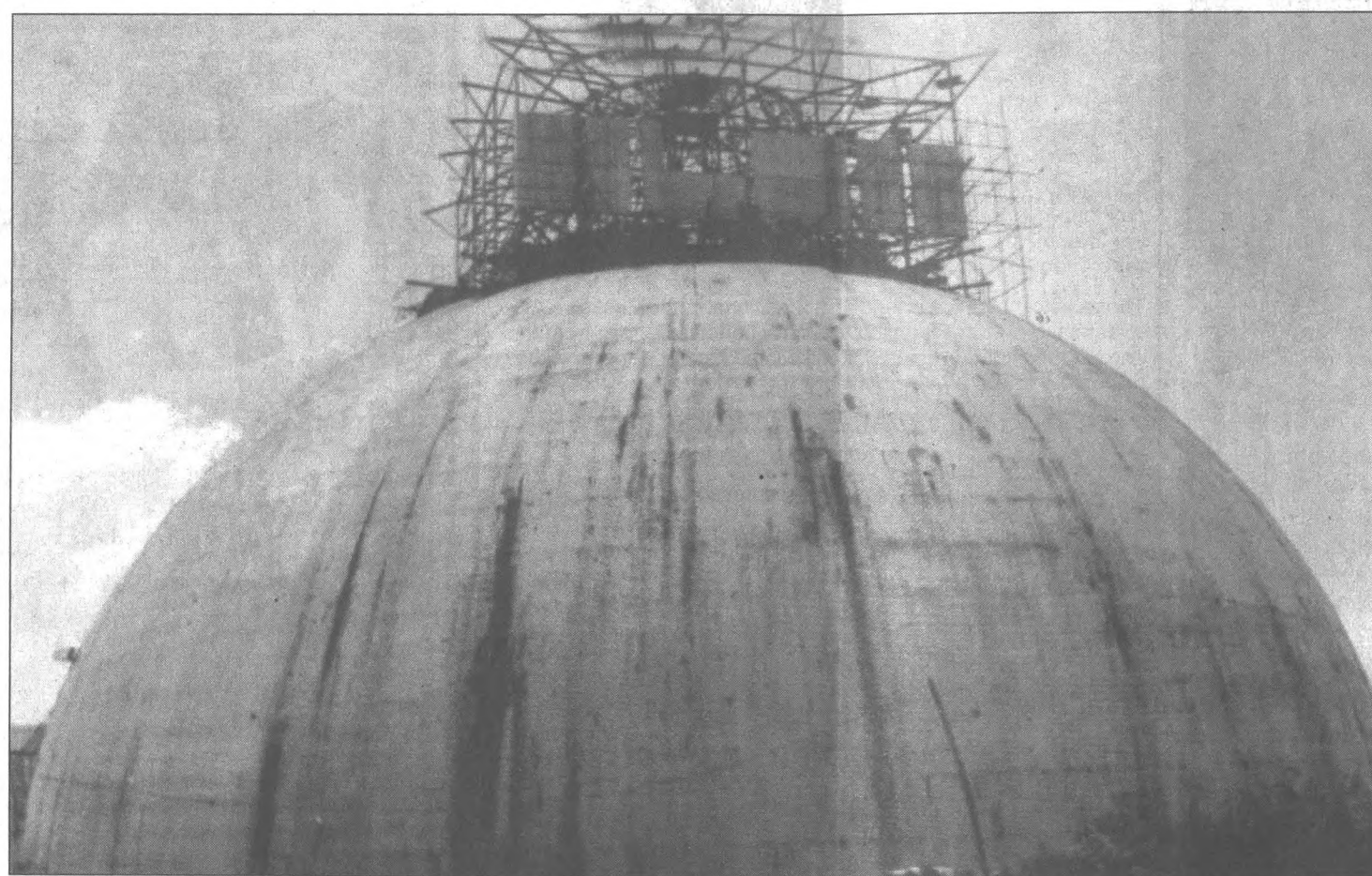
Construction

The work of Mahaweli Maha Seya commenced on March 20 1983, with the participation of the late President J. R. Jayewardene and Gamini Dissanayake. The construction work of the stupa came to a standstill in 1991. The recommencement of the structure began on May 8 2003. The colourful ceremony of the reconstruction work commenced and more than 200 Buddhist monks and about 1500 devotees were present to mark this occasion. A group of print and electronic media personnel were present to cover the proceedings, which I consider a praiseworthy gesture on the part of the media.

The Irrigation and Water Management Minister Gamini Jayawickrama Perera, took up the challenge and initiative and recommenced the work of Mahaweli Maha Seya, under his personal guidance and supervision.

The concept of the minister is to complete the construction work of this stupa, not only as a Buddhist edifice, but also, as a symbol of peace. He earnestly appeals to Sri Lankans and to all well-wishers abroad to contribute to this worthy cause by way of cash or material as the entire structure will cost Rs. 300 million.

It is proposed to complete the super structure above the dome costing Rs. 78m in the first instance. There is an account open at the Bank of



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Ceylon. Hyde Park Branch, for donations. The number of this Account is 005210110013. Remittances may be sent to this account, by those who wish to participate in this noble enterprise rebuilding the vanished glory of Sri Lanka and the eternal image of Buddhism.

According to ancient geographical and historical data, Sri Lanka was divided into three domains Ruhunu, Maya, Pihiti. Kotmale ranked number one out of 42 administrative areas or shires.

Folklore has it that Prince Gamini was hiding

at Kanda Uda Kotte, Urupelesse Village Headman's residence, disguised. This village is now named as Kotagepitiya and the Mahaweli Maha Seya is located within a short distance of one kilometre.

He had a love affair with a village damsel named Ranmenika, the daughter of Village Headman. After the death of King Kavantissa it is said that royal elephant Kadol Etha came to the prince Gamini and knelt.

Prince Gamini hid his sword at Dehedukadulla, which is the main entrance to Kotmale. History

says in his effort to unify Sri Lanka, he used Kotmale Pass, which is in close proximity to Mahaweli Maha Seya, as a link-Ruhuna, with Pihiti Rata.

Around the Kotmale valley is woven the epic story of Dutugamunu - hero king of Sri Lanka. During the reign of Kalinga Magha (1214-1235) and Vijayabahu III (1235-26) the name of Kotmale is mentioned. According to Pujavaliya and Rajavaliya, The Buddha's Sacred Tooth Relic was kept in custody at Kotmale at Pussalipitiya Temple.

With the commencement of Kotmale Reservoir, under the accelerated Mahaweli Project, 16 Grama - Sevaka Divisions, 66 Villages, four tea estates and 18 temples and two devalayas went under the water of Kotmale Reservoir. Kadadora Shri Priyabimbaramaya, Morape Bodhi Malakaramaya, Morape Subadrarama Viharaya. (These three temples on Right Bank and of Mahaweli and Kadadora).

Hedunuwewa Medagoda Gangaramaya, Otalawe Bodhirukkarama Viharaya, Nawangama Abinawaramaya and Tispane Shri Subhadraramaya (These four temples are situated on the left Bank of Tispane Hills.) The two devalayas are Morape Devalaya and Hedunuwewa Medagoda Pattini Devalaya which were among the main seven temples and the two devalayas, that went under Kotmale reservoir.

The late Gamini Dissanayake to compensate the loss of these religious shrines, decided to construct a stupa as a symbol in memory of the affected shrines and devalayas, which went under the Kotmale Reservoir. Further, his mission and vision was to set up an International Buddhist Cultural Centre at the Mahaweli Maha Seya premises.

Structure

The design of the stupa structure formulated by the former Chairman of Central Engineering Consultancy Bureau (CECB) Vidya Jothi Dr. A. N. S. Kulasinghe, an eminent Engineer of International repute is now complete. What remains to be done is terraced turret and finial to carry a Crystal Crest Gem. Another noteworthy feature is that the entire gigantic Maha Stupa construction will be handled by CECB, which celebrated its 30th anniversary on Friday, May 09, 2003.

Minister Gamini Jayawickrama Perera, constantly seeks the advice and guidance of the Maha Sangha and religious persons of other denominations to facilitate the continuing activities related to Mahaweli Maha Seya.

He has appointed three committees to oversee the specific aspects of the projects. The steering committee is headed by Dr. A. N. S. Kulasinghe the fund raising committee spearheaded by Mihindu Keerthiratne, Media committee presided over by Kalakeerthi Edwin Ariyadasa and Kumar Abesinghe supervises the overall progress of the Mahaweli Maha Seya Project.

At a time the world is seeking new centres of tourism, Mahaweli Maha Seya at Kadadora, Kotmale, will prove a compelling attraction to tourists of the world as it is an entirely new centre of attraction.

The Buddhist world, especially will make this a centre of pilgrimage.