

Obtain worlds best consultancy

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services - Wickramasinghe

Chamber of Construction Industry (CCI) President Surath Wickramasinghe says that we must go for the best consultancy firms in the world if Sri Lanka money is used to pay for their professional services.

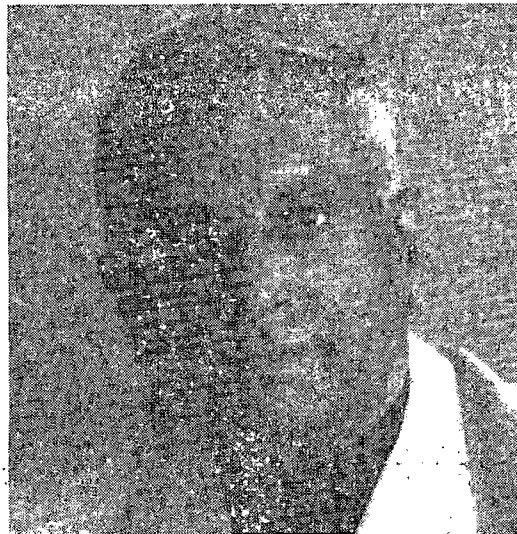
This way the image of Sri Lanka could be enhanced and be comparable with the most modern cities in the Region. This is exactly what the Middle Eastern countries and even Singapore, Malaysia and China have done and are doing at the moment.

The Construction Industry, he said, is reviving slowly after the severe slump over the past 4-5 years. Part of the Southern Highway Project has commenced and several other projects that were in the pipeline are now getting into a more positive mode towards implementation. The interest among foreign investors from several countries is encouraging. The trend that is building up is primarily private sector oriented and if the public sector stops vacillating and facilitates approvals, with land, and the necessary infrastructure facilities expeditiously the Construction Industry and the economy could turn around much faster.

We are aware that under the directions of the government, a plan for the development of the Western Province is to be prepared, along with the development of the Wellawatte Mills Site and a few other projects. Our Chamber is fully supportive and is in agreement with the Government that these projects should be implemented without delay. This is the only way that we could re-activate the Construction Industry and transform the Western Province for the needs of today and for at least those of the next 20 years and also be competitive with our neighbours in Asia.

However, serious repercussions detrimental to the Members of our Chamber particularly in the Planning, Architectural and Engineering professions are anticipated. Several Government Agencies are in the process of introducing mediocre foreign Planning and Architectural Firms to prepare a Western Regional Plan and also to undertake Real Estate Development Projects. These firms are hardly firms of international repute and in that context certain Sri Lankan firms are better and more experienced than these foreign firms.

As mentioned above we must go for the best Firms in the world. If not another practice that some countries follow is for local firms to collaborate with for-



Surath Wickramasinghe

eign firms once again with the best in the world and participate in open competitions. The selection is made independently by an international Jury to ensure that fair play and justice prevails. Why cannot Sri Lanka follow this practice? If so there would then be technology transfer and the end result would be a 21st century product.

The payment to the best firms of the world are the same as the rates presently being negotiated by the government agencies to pay the 20th century firms referred to above. No alternative firms to the best of our knowledge were consulted by the government agencies prior to selecting these firms. This type of action by the government destroys the enthusiasm and aspirations of the local professionals and the private sector who are waiting to launch after the recent down turn in the construction sector.

In the recent past several major projects were initiated in the cultural, residential, highway and urban development sector by the previous government, where millions of dollars were paid to consultants and contractors and these projects were subsequently aborted. This is extremely tragic and unfortunate since

nobody seems to be held accountable for this expenditure. The irony is that the mistakes made by the previous government are repeated by this government.

One of the primary reasons why the Chamber, Construction Industry Sri Lanka was formed by the allied professions and the Contractors was to highlight anomalies of this nature. Due to the fantasies of Politicians the members of the Construction Industry comprising consultants, contractors, skilled and unskilled workers, suppliers and manufacturers of building materials are under going severe hardships with the scarcity of work and consequently are at the mercy of the Banks due to delays in the settlement of their dues by the government.

In the government's policy initiative 'Regaining Sri Lanka', several major projects to be implemented have been highlighted. Accordingly, over US\$ three billion have been pledged by the donor countries on the basis of US\$ one billion per year. The Chamber has been regularly pointing out to Ministers and Officials that to get the best value from this huge fund there should be several integrated Development Plans and projects designed and ready for implementation not only for the North and East but also for other parts of the country.

Unfortunately, we are not aware of any comprehensive plans besides the sectoral assessments for the North and East identified in the 'Post Conflict Needs Assessment Survey' by the Donors and the projects mentioned in the 'Regaining Sri Lanka' documents which are not detailed in anyway. It would therefore be optimistic to believe that even 25% of the funds pledged by the Donor countries being utilized for the reasons mentioned above. Our inability to utilize these funds fully may mean that we have over looked an important opportunity, after many years of stagnation.

Once again the Chamber, Construction Industry, Sri Lanka wish to offer our services to the government to work in partnership with them to accelerate the decision making and implementation process of the several projects mentioned in the 'Regaining Sri Lanka' document. Inability to act on time may reduce the Construction Industry to a level of mere spectators watching our projects being hijacked by foreign companies for no fault of ours.