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*The coming decades will witness a growing share of the urban sector in the spheres of economic development, investment, employment, population distribution, etc. Consequently, there has to be a radical change in the management and development of that sector. It's vitality has to be captured to the fullest in the interest of the country as a whole. This Article highlights the significance of the "urban corridors" in such a context.*

# CORRIDORS OF INVESTMENT, GROWTH AND PROSPERITY

There has been an increasing realisation that the urban areas of Sri Lanka have a pivotal role to play in the country's development. It's perception as mere "service centres" administering to its rural hinterland is giving way to a more vibrant economic entity and a dynamic social organism in the spatial fabric of the nation. This transformation is being accompanied by a growing commitment to ensure sustainability of the development process. Consequently, scholars in urban planning have examined the spatial configurations which could facilitate urban areas to become growth oriented within the context of the behaviour of a market economy. Hence, uppermost in their minds have been the need to create the conditions necessary to attract investment, become competitive, and also be an affordable quality habitat for its citizens.

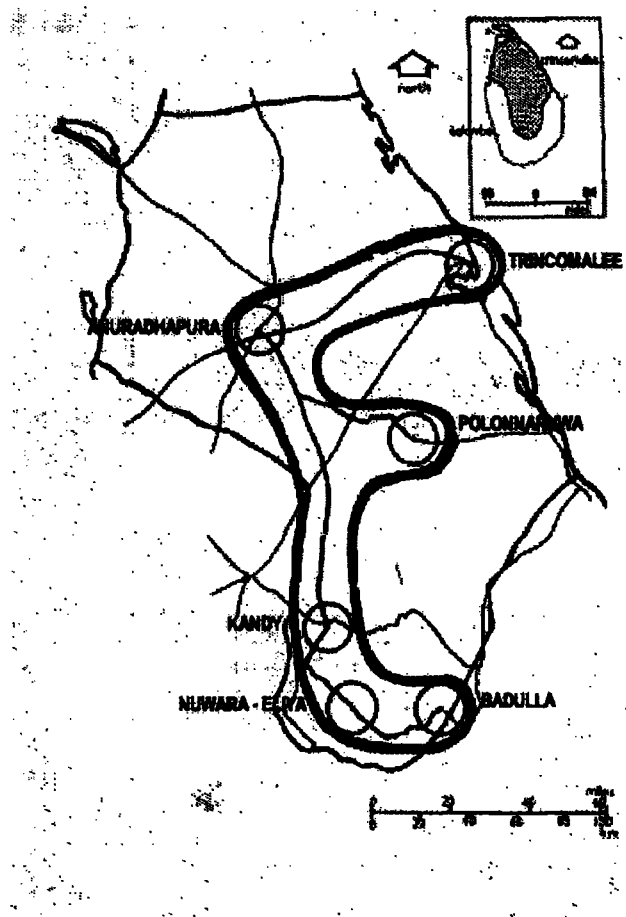
In these circumstances, urban planners and policy makers alike, have become tuned to the concept of "growth". It has inspired them to identify and analyse the spatial ingredients which are required for same. Thus, the administratively defined boundaries of mono-centric cities or towns have now been seen as inadequate to promote growth. In particular, the sustenance of an infrastructure to accommodate growth has also been considered impossible without boundary reforms or the creation of institutions with trans-border jurisdiction to deliver such services.

In this situation, the networking of mono-centric cities and towns, and the emergence of urban agglomerations have become worthy of closer study.

The focus of such spatial patterns has drawn the attention of urban planners at both national and sub-national levels. It has also encouraged the convergence of multi-disciplinary skills in development planning by using the common denominator of the spatial platform. The latter being increasingly employed to create conducive conditions for production, marketing, social interaction, and environmental management.

The principle of networking of urban areas differs from urban sprawl. The former comprises the conscious design of conditions which will not degenerate or decay the urban areas as will usually happen under sprawl. Networking involves the establishment of connections between activities in urban centres which may or may not be spatially contiguous. Consequently, it will re-inforce the mutual development of the networked urban areas, and also it's intervening hinterland. The aggregate impact of same will be two fold. Firstly, it will contribute to overall growth in the national economy. Secondly, it will generate a spread-effect of development in the spatial systems in and between the networked urban areas. The latter will mainly arise from the dissemination of specialisation in technology and in services resulting from the emergence of economies of scale and from a massive increase in communications between them.

Another important beneficial consequence of networking will also be the establishment of the culture of competitiveness in production and in services. This factor being a pre-



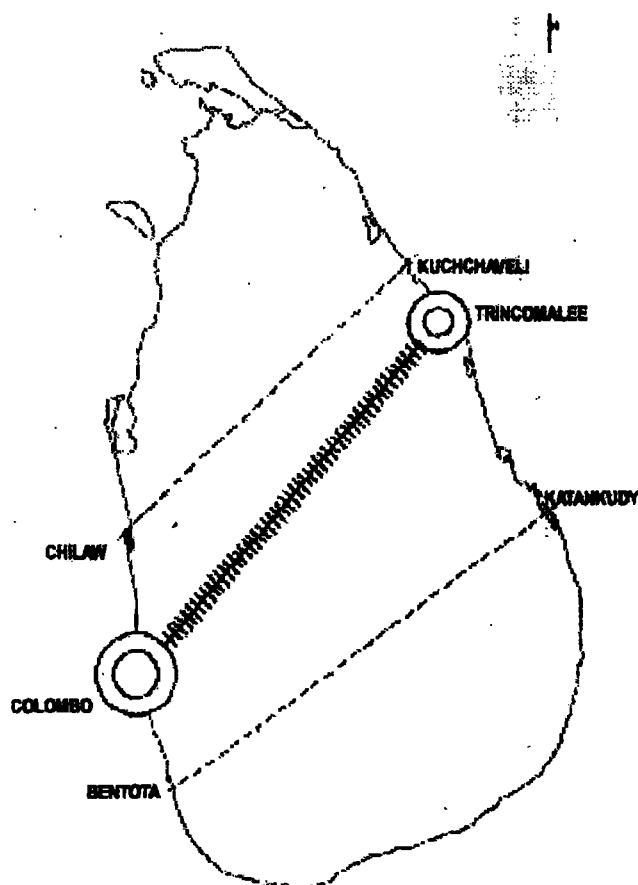
**The Urban Corridor Model for the Mahaweli Region (Mendis: 1971) Fig. 1**

requisite for the sustainability of growth in an environment of a market economy.

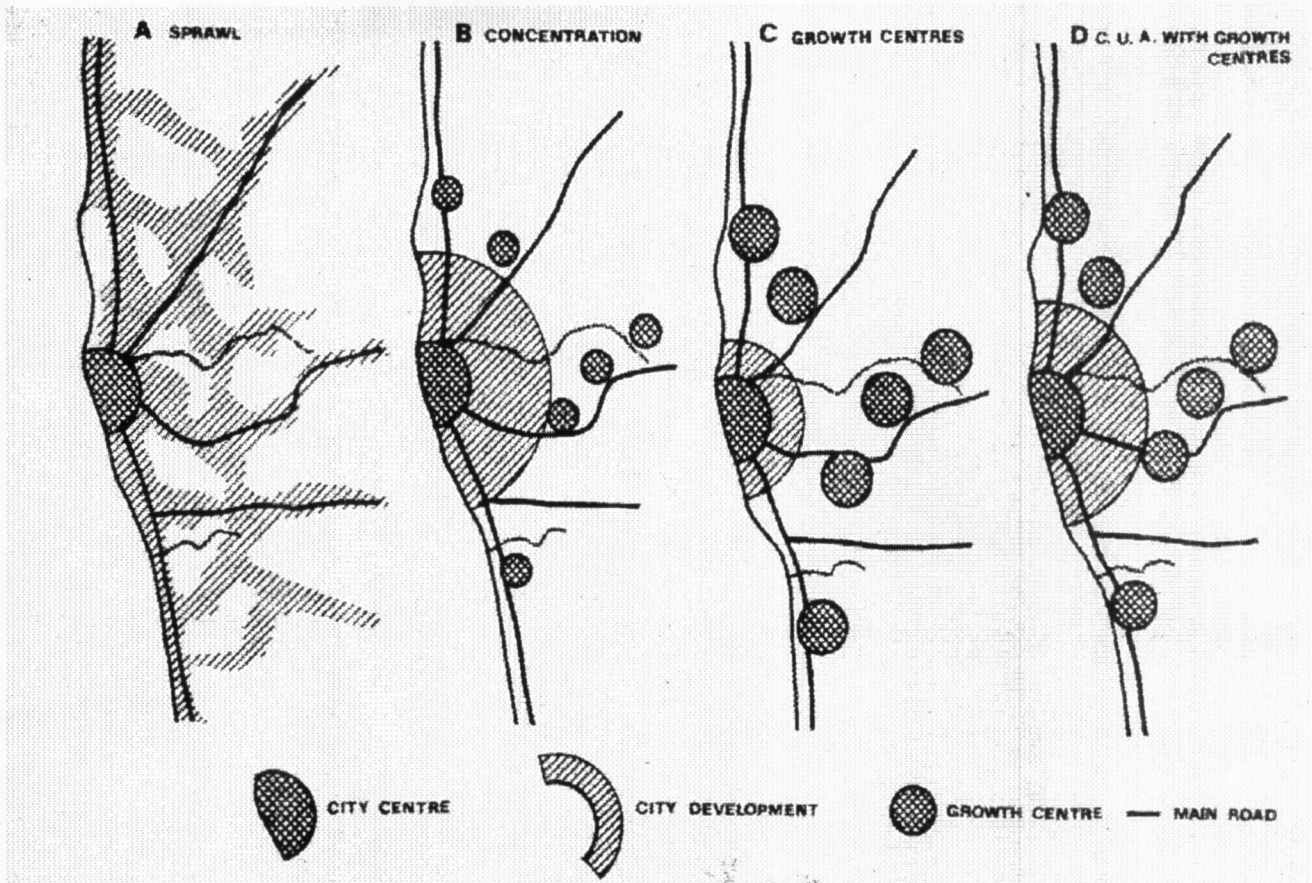
In the above context, it is pertinent to review and analyse the spatial zones of the country wherein the urban sectors have potential for growth through networking. In this connection, the earliest urban network corridor was that proposed in 1971 for modelling the development of the Mahaweli Region. (Vide Fig.1). It was followed in 1976 by a proposal to network Colombo and Trincomalee as a spatial strategy for national development. (Vide Fig. 2). The latter comprised a 50 – mile wide corridor formed by linking Chilaw and Kuchchaveli on its northern frontier and by linking Bentota and Katankudy on its southern frontier. It housed about 70% of the country's wealth from natural and man-made resources. It's dynamism was to be energised by the construction of a rapid transit system between Colombo and Trincomalee; accompanied by the laying of an optical fibre cable to provide for a massive demand expected in Telecommunications arising from forecasts of higher

incomes and also from a greater cost of commuting vis-a-vis communications in the years to come. Further, the rapid transit route was to be linked to the Northern urban system centred on Jaffna by a connection at Habarana via Vavuniya. Such networking of the urban areas would have reinforced the potentials of the giant Accelerated Mahaweli Development Scheme which was aimed at revitalising the economy of about 40% of the country's land area. The latter would have become facilitated if the networking proposed in the previously mentioned "E-model" urban corridor for the Mahaweli Region was also incorporated into the Colombo – Trincomalee Development Axis. Unfortunately, such a rationale was never utilised in the planning of the Mahaweli Development Project. Consequently, the fuller development of the urban-rural complementarity never materialised in the latter project.

In 1978, another urban centred spatial network system was devised by the UN-sponsored Colombo Master Plan Project Team (Vide Fig. 3). Its outcome was the first time that an urban centred concept was actually adopted to steer



**Colombo – Trincomalee Development Axis (Mendis: 1976) Fig. 2**

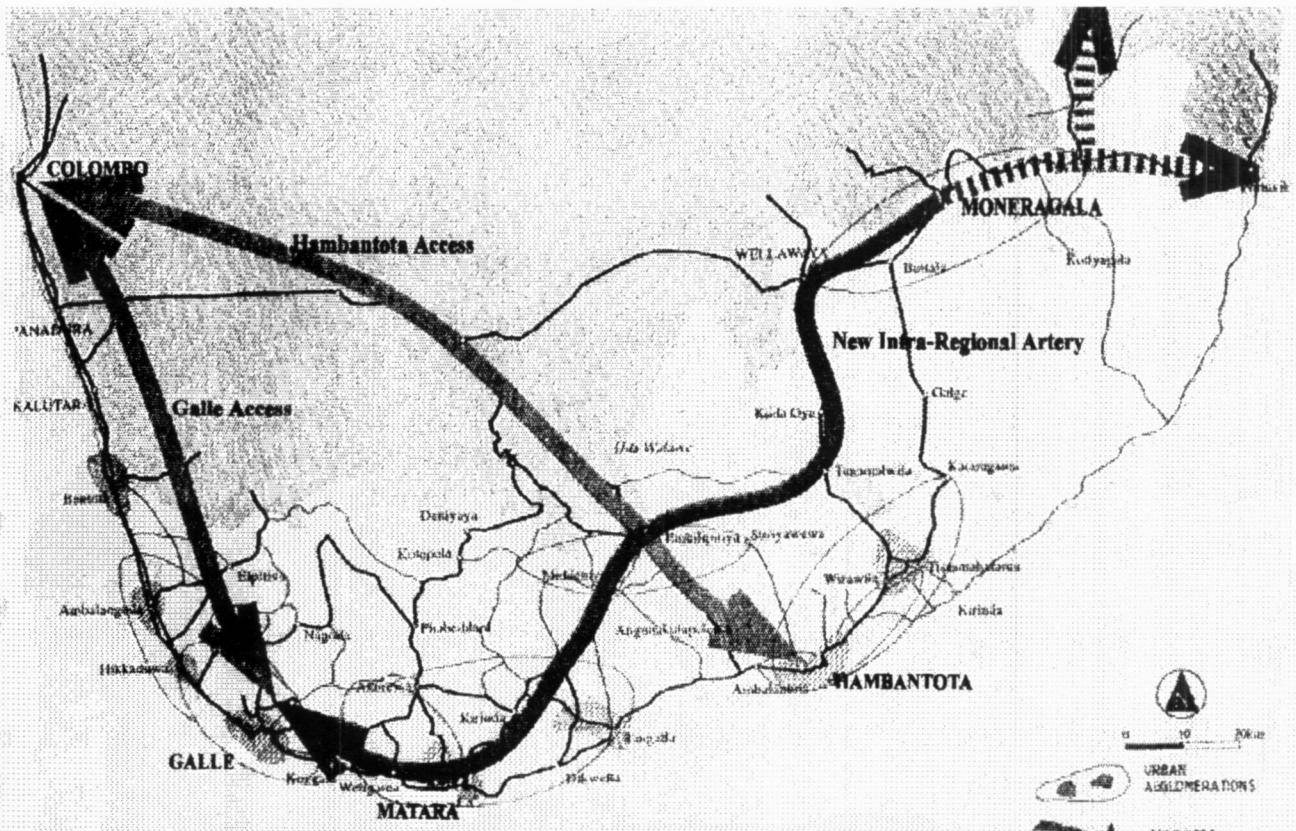


*Development Strategies for the Colombo Metropolitan Region (CMP: 1978) Fig. 3*

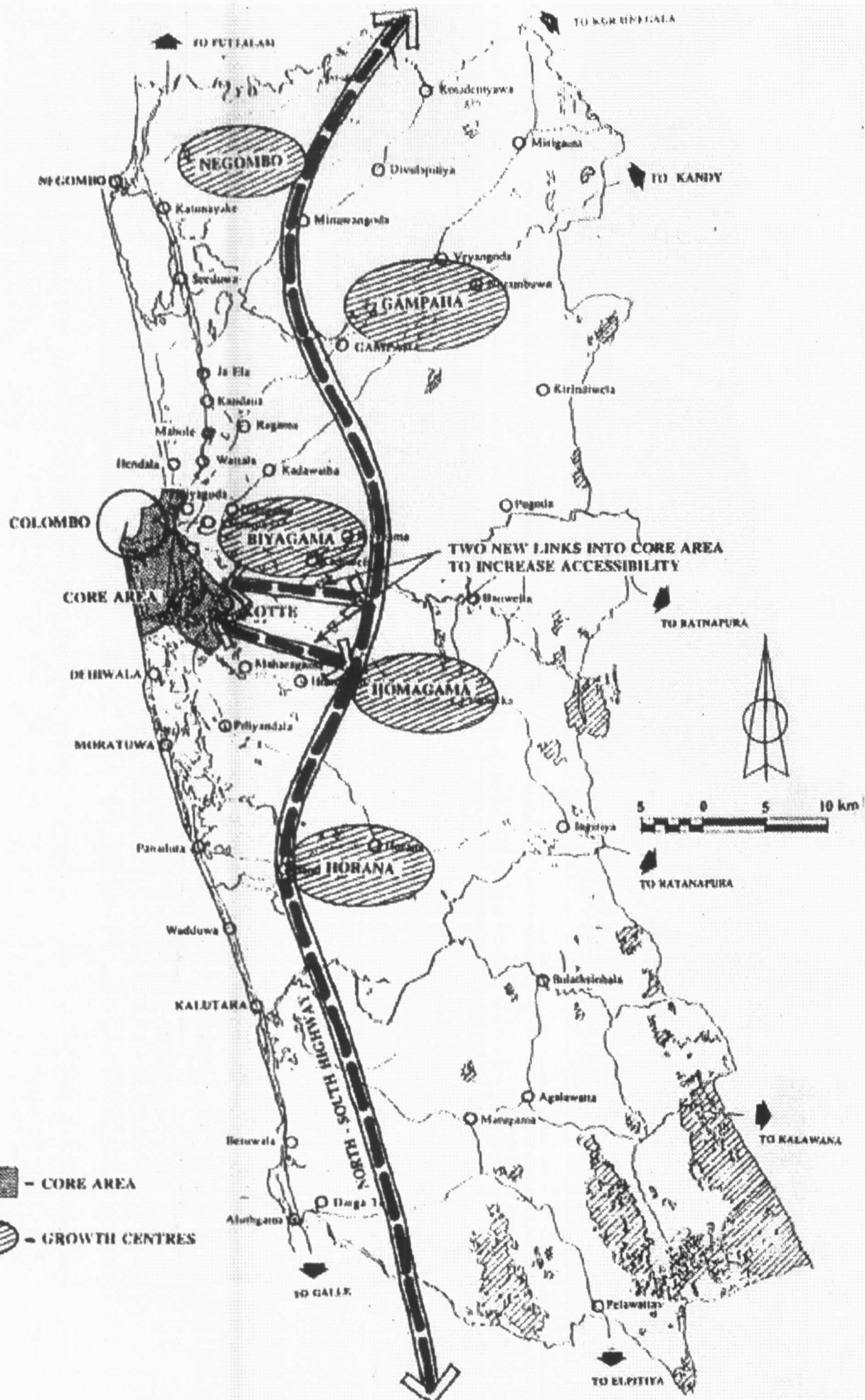
development in the Colombo Metropolitan Region. It provided a spatial cover for the accelerated investment in the latter Zone. Above all

it created the awareness of the potentials of urban agglomerations. In turn, it spearheaded the revival of the concept of urban growth centres which

could be replicated in other regions. Nevertheless, the economic significance of such a strategy was not shared by several key sectors of the economy.



*Emerging Urban Agglomerations and Corridors in the Southern Development Area (JICA: 1996) Fig. 4*



Revised Colombo Metropolitan Regional Development Strategy  
North-South Corridor (UDA: 1996) Fig. 5

Consequently, its integrated development never became fully realised.

The urban centred development in the Colombo Urban Area was emulated in the preparation of the planning strategy for the Southern Development Area (Vide Fig. 4; 1996). The complementary feature of the latter has comprised the "Hambantota Access" or the "Galle Access" and the "New Intra-Regional Artery" which straddle the envisaged urban agglomerations in the said Area. Its linkage with the Colombo urban agglomeration is also being enabled by the Southern Highway Corridor between Colombo and Matara.

More recently (1996), the Urban Development Authority has also published its revised draft plan for the Colombo Metropolitan Region. It too has retained the corridor concept and has further reinforced the primacy of the Colombo Urban Agglomeration (Vide Fig. 5).

Thus, the mosaic of the parts of the national urban fabric being proposed for networking is now transforming itself with rapidity; but has yet not been enveloped within an explicit urban development strategy for the country as a whole. It therefore remains incomplete in its overall design. Consequently, the urban – rural complementarity in development especially of urban development itself has lagged far behind in terms of the potential levels of growth.

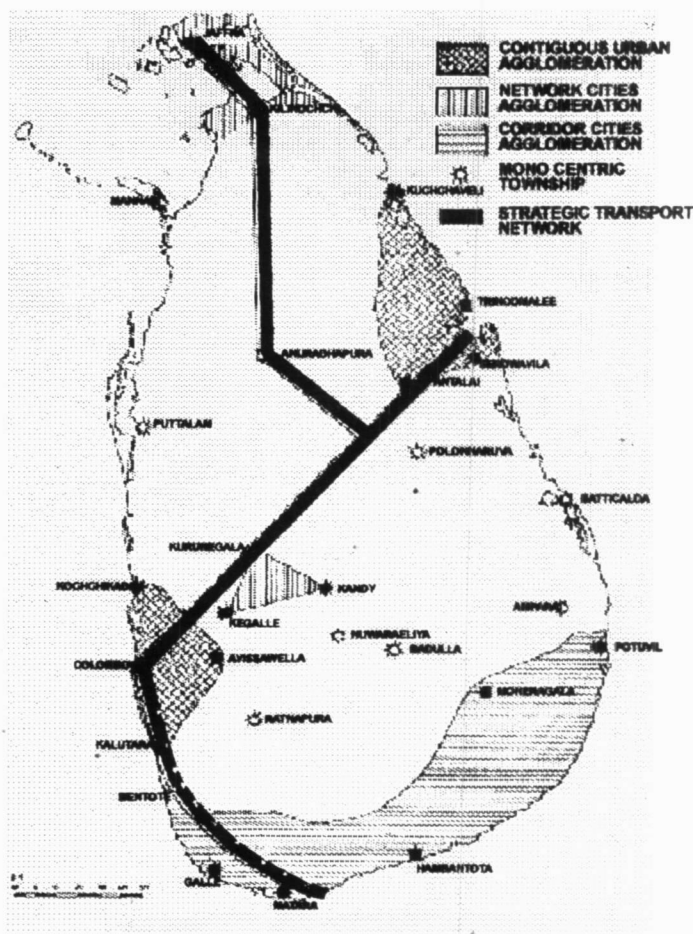
A key element in a growth oriented urban development strategy within the context of a market economy is the entablement of the distribution of the critical mass of the urban population in relation to the other conditionalities for same. Its analysis indicate that Sri Lanka will require a 50% share of its total population as urban if a strong economy is to prevail in the early years of the next century. It's mix of manufacturing and services sectors will then acquire the significance required to facilitate employment, investment, and overall growth to off-set the limitations in the agricultural sector. In such a context, the distribution of the urban population has to satisfy the agricultural hinterland as well as create the specialised environments required by the modern manufacturing and

services sectors. Accordingly, the said urban population has to reflect a degree of scale in its distribution which support such a rationale. Further, it must enable expeditious communication between them.

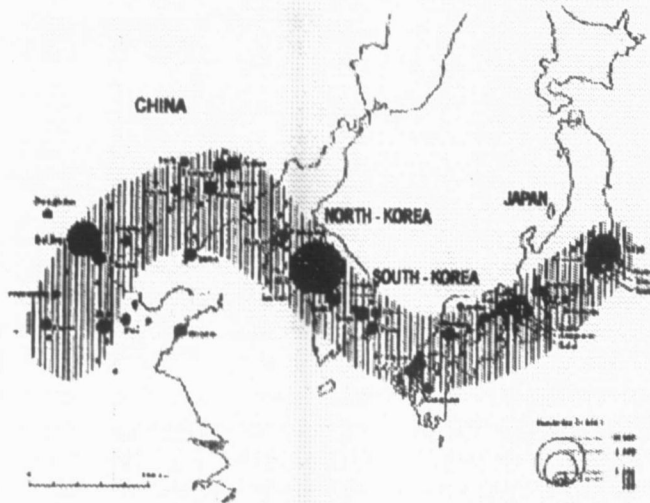
Independent analysis of the above has indicated that Sri Lanka's spatial fabric can share the proposed urbanised population in five urban agglomerations and in the monocentric cities and towns located elsewhere. The networking of this urban configuration by the engagement of the concept of corridors will enable the creation of a rational allocation of space to enhance the propulsive nature of the agriculture – dominated rural sector and also to steer it to modernity. The incorporation in such corridors of rapid communications via Expressways/rail, air, and telecommunications will empower both urban and rural sectors to access markets and sustain its competitiveness. The schematic design of the urban spatial strategy as described above is shown in Fig. 6.

In reality, the urban corridors represent "investment corridors" with its corresponding opportunity for growth and prosperity. In such a context, in the more developed countries of Asia, the corridor designs have been extended to even network trans-border urban agglomerations. These urban corridors are at varying stages of formation, some exhibiting incipient development whereas others are quite advanced in form and connectivity among the mega-cities. In the latter, the best illustration of a mature urban corridor is one called BESETO which consist of the cities focused around Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo. Its profile is that of an inverted "S" of some 1500 km within which are 77 cities of over 200,000 inhabitants in each. (Vide Fig. 7).

Another concept of agglomeration which is unique to Asia is that of the "growth triangle"; one of which called SIJORI is taking shape among Singapore, Johore (Malaysia), and Indonesia's Riau archipelago, notably Batam Island. It is centred in the world



Urban Configuration – Sri Lanka, Year 2010 (Mendis: 1996) Fig. 6



*Trans Border Urban Corridors Strategy in Pacific Asia  
(Yue – Man Yeung: 1994) Fig. 7*

city of Singapore and is based on the potential benefits arising out of the complementarities that exist among the triangle partners. The latter have agreed that in terms of broad objectives, the triangle can be developed into a single investment area with uniform standards of economic management and safeguards for investors that would attract business and capital, especially from external sources.

The above suggests the timeliness of Sri Lanka too to consider a joint study with urban scholars in India to devise an investment corridor which can envelope key agglomerations of prosperity for the mutual advantages of each. Its objectives could be similar to those adopted by the partners of the SIJORI growth triangle. Such a corridor can be integrated with the proposed Asian Highway which can complement the other communication systems.

Herein it is important to note that the current trends of establishing market based economies are spreading at breakneck speed across South Asia. Accordingly, it's smaller nations like Sri Lanka can thus greatly benefit by networking with its mega neighbours. It is then that it can possess the capacity and fuller capability to access investments and marketing opportunities. The future assures those that are willing to shift emphasis from nation states to "networks" in creating an organisational model for business based on relationships that transcend national barriers. The latter can draw inspiration from like minded spatial systems such as the SIJORI Triangle. A corresponding urban network in the Indo-Sri Lanka context can be BAMATRICO corridor networking Bangalore, Madras, Trincomalee and Colombo, which can be similarly conceived to be developed into a single investment area.

Urban corridors must thus be visualised as concentrated reservoirs of human resources capital and also of investment, transportation, communications and of technologies. Its proper planning and management will thus comprise an essential tool to ensure the growth of prosperity. The methodology for same may require a radical re-structuring of the practices and institutions presently in place for steering the development of the country. This is the challenge the country will need to face as it transits from the 20th century to the 21st century. In the latter, the skills of Urban and Regional Planners will need to figure prominently in strategic decision making fora.

The on-going process of granting autonomy to the regions and its local institutions will further reinforce the relevance of the concept of growth-oriented urban networking. The telescoping of the different spatial scales of planning from city and region to national, will provide the necessary cohesion with each other's goals and objectives of development. It is in the latter context that an explicit national policy on urban development and its corresponding spatial strategy will become essential to ensure urban – rural complementarity. Hence, the schematic design shown in Fig. 6 incorporating the Colombo – Trincomalee mega corridor is worthy of urgent consideration at the highest level of policy making. It's integration within the previously mentioned BAMATRICO corridor is of paralld importance.