

OPPORTUNITIES ALONG THE EAST COAST

by
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The educational system in the Eastern Province is not on par with the other regions of the country. The young people of this region are ill-prepared for life and for participation in development. Hence they end up in unskilled jobs such as farmhands, peons and watchers. Vocational and technical training facilities are practically non-existent, except at the Eastern Technical Institute. The Hardy Institute of Technology, once a leading vocational training institute in this area has fallen into bad times and it no longer enjoys the same status. This prestigious institute, needs immediate rehabilitation in order to enhance vocational training facilities.

Since 1983, with the escalation of the conflict, most of the buildings in the east were either damaged or demolished. The task of rehabilitating these buildings needs vocationally trained manpower-masons, carpenters, plumbers, etc. which is not readily available in the region itself. Due to the unsettled conditions that prevail here, skilled as well as unskilled workmen from other parts of the country, hesitate to move into these areas. Further, owing to these factors the funds allocated for rehabilitation work in the east are idling or in some cases underutilized. Setting up of vocational training centres has become an urgent priority because employment potential in the construction and allied sectors seem to be very high.

University

In the field of education, over the years, the east has been neglected and there was no University in this area until 1984. The Eastern University was set up as a university college, affiliated to Peradeniya University. The British University system on which our Universities were modelled had its own weaknesses. Education for the sake of education was the overriding principle. In the original master plan of the Eastern University, it was expected to break away from this tradition and set-up a different kind of higher educational institute which, apart from imparting knowledge, would act as a catalyst in bringing development to this area. As a first step in this direction the affiliation to Peradeniya University was broken and a separate university, namely, the Eastern University of Sri Lanka, was set-up.

In breaking away from Peradeniya University the newly formed Eastern University was expected to fulfil its obligations to local society, by involving itself in:

1. Local Industry
2. Agriculture
3. Education

The curriculum of the University was reshaped in this direction and considerable efforts were taken to implement the primary objectives. It was to be a multi-campus university each specialising in a particular subject. Faculties of Bio-science and

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Natural Sciences were located at Vantharumoolai while Commerce and Cultural Studies were at Batticaloa. According to the master-plan for this University, the faculty of Marine Biology was to be developed at Trincomalee.

Resources

Our resources are limited in a sense, and the main resource we have at our disposal is water, both fresh and brackish. The only mineral deposit that could be exploited economically in this region is ilmenite. In the North, huge deposits of quartz sand is found. In the case of ilmenite, perhaps we have one of the richest deposits in the world. From Pulmoddai, where these deposits are found, 150,000 mt. tons of refined ilmenite could be extracted annually and marketed.

In the case of refined ilmenite too, we enjoyed a relatively advantageous position vis a vis our competitors. From our deposits at least 70-80% refined ilmenite could be obtained while Australia, one of the largest producers in the world is in a position only to extract about 50% refined mineral; sometimes it goes down as low as 5%. At present, only 100,000 tons of

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ilmenite is mined along with 8,500 mt. of Rutile and 5,000 mt. of Zircon annually. Zircon is not produced now, as the fresh water installation at Pulmoddai is damaged.

Aqua — Culture

Surveys on water quality for aqua-culture, have established that from Mullaitivu to Pottuvil, water is suitable for prawn and fish culture. The pioneering prawn culture farm, set-up by a private sector enterprise at Batticaloa in the early 1980's, was a thriving and successful venture. This farm which applied a semi-intensive culture system attained the highest output recorded in the world. In this system an average yield from black tiger prawns in most countries is 1000-1200 kilograms per hectare. But in the Batticaloa farm, we have obtained over 2000 kilograms per hectare, because of the water quality.

If not for the damage caused to this pioneering prawn farm in 1987, it would have been possible to start-up several small scale farms along the east coast. The idea was to have a nuclear farm like this, and from there to feed small farmers who live along the lagoons. Thousands of acres of paddy lands abandoned over the years due to salinity are ideally suited for aqua-culture.