

Colombo's Master Plan

The key features of the newly planned Colombo Central Area in the Colombo Master Plan Project were publicly released in well illustrated document in September this year. The Central Area consists of 1,200 acres of land. Now covering Hulftsdorf, the Pettah, the Fort and Galle Face areas it will be restructured as six distinct areas known as: Echelon Centre, Lotus Centre, Marine Drive, Kachcheri Road, Fish Market and the Courts.

The development and re-development of metropolitan Colombo is one of the three major development priorities of the Government; the other two being the Mahaweli Ganga Scheme and the Free Trade Zone Project. The Colombo Master Plan Project is expected to cover about 1,000 square miles of the Colombo metropolitan region. Within this area a plan has been prepared for 100 sq. miles of the Colombo Urban area; while another plan is now being prepared for the 180 sq. miles of the adjoining Greater Colombo Economic Commission area. In the words of the planners

"These plans comprise bold efforts to rejuvenate and to expand the supply of housing, water supply, sewerage, transport.....indeed all of the equipment and infrastructure that make a modern city. Work is already underway on improving the slum and shanty areas, on new housing construction, on water supply expansion, on transport improvements and in many other fields of activity.

But the heart of a city, where the aspirations of a society are most dramatically made manifest, where the greatest concentration of employment and generation of wealth is located, where the image of a city is most sharply presented to visitor and citizen alike, is the city centre. The rebuilding of central Colombo is an important element both in the Government's economic programme and in projecting a new image for Colombo and for Sri Lanka".

The significance of planning the development of the city of Colombo and its environs has repeatedly been emphasised in similar terms.

The Master Plan was originally conceived by its present Director in the mid 1960's when he was head of the Government's Town and

Country Planning Department. His main motives in mooted this project at that stage appeared to be the apprehension that insufficient attention could be focussed on the planning of Colombo due to inadequacies of the Town and Country Planning Ordinance and lack of qualified technical personnel; and also the fact that there was a general ignorance of the importance of physical planning among economists in the Ministry of Planning. Some influential officials actively opposed the establishment of the Project partly on the grounds that more emphasis should be given to the rural areas than a high powered project for planning and development of Colombo. The Director's views eventually prevailed when the project was established in the early 1970's, though in retrospect there were rights and wrongs on both sides of the original controversy. The rationale and outline of this proposed development plan has been well summarised in a document, dated January 1978 prepared by the Colombo Master Plan Project.

This review appears to have involved firstly an assessment of the present role and likely future role of Colombo in the national context; an assessment of the current situation of Colombo; and finally an estimate of the future situation of Colombo. All these are described in terms of economic indices, population infrastructure and amenities etc. The objectives of the Plan have been visualised, and with these in view projects and policy issues identified and amplified. The methodology is sound with one welcome feature, namely the inclusion of the eight "action projects", a recent acquisition in the urban planners tool kit via the work of Prof. Otto Koonigsberger.

Need for National Urban Policy

While there are many sound aspects in the proposal there are also some major criticisms that could be made. Perhaps the most important is on the assessment of the present role and likely future role of Colombo in the national context. An assessment of a subject of this importance is tantamount to the identification of a national urban policy.

To date no such policy has been identified. Basic issues such as, how a national urban system can help rural transformation and development, how the present proposals fit into a national urban policy and the relation of the urban system to rural areas and the whole in relation to development strategies have yet to be spelled out. The Colombo Master Plan Project has thus far not made public its detailed work on these aspects. Judging by the content of the present proposal it would appear that the role of Colombo has been overstated.

The authorities quite rightly have recognised that the problems of development of the country's major urban area will get worse if there is no planned line of action. A major plan was necessary and is being duly conceived. As to how effectively this plan would help to solve the socio-economic issues confronting the country only time will tell. One reason for the mounting problems of urbanisation in many of the developing countries is that the urban economies have been treated as distinct from the rural, particularly when investments were made for development and this has been the case in Sri Lanka too. In the Colombo Master Plan Project again the focus of attention, by a high powered team of technical specialists has been on the problems of Colombo. No similar effort has been made as regards urban problems elsewhere in the island. The result is that the problems of Colombo have been identified while those elsewhere are escaping attention.

An important element in this development planning exercise is the exposition of the cost implied in the various plans and programmes of the Master Plan Project. The approximate costs are worked out for two separate periods 1978—1985 and 1986—2001. In the first period, the total capital investment costs (excluding land) are Rs. 4,584 million, while, the second period, 1986—2001, the total capital investment costs (excluding land) are estimated to be Rs. 7,261 million (See table on page 18). A major part of this capital investment is to be on housing and on transport, followed by commerce. If investment on the proposed scale by this project is made in the metropolitan area of Colombo, this may solve some of the immediate problems in Colombo, but it may also create new and serious problems. All the investments within this project point towards a more rapid growth and development and

increasingly important role for Colombo and its hinterland. But there is a danger that this may exacerbate rural migration to Colombo which upto now has been comparatively negligible.

In assessing the situation in Colombo the Project Report points out that unemployment is in the order of 26 percent in metropolitan Colombo as compared with 19 percent in the nation as a whole. The project sees this situation as one of imbalance where the solution is to correct that imbalance. The report

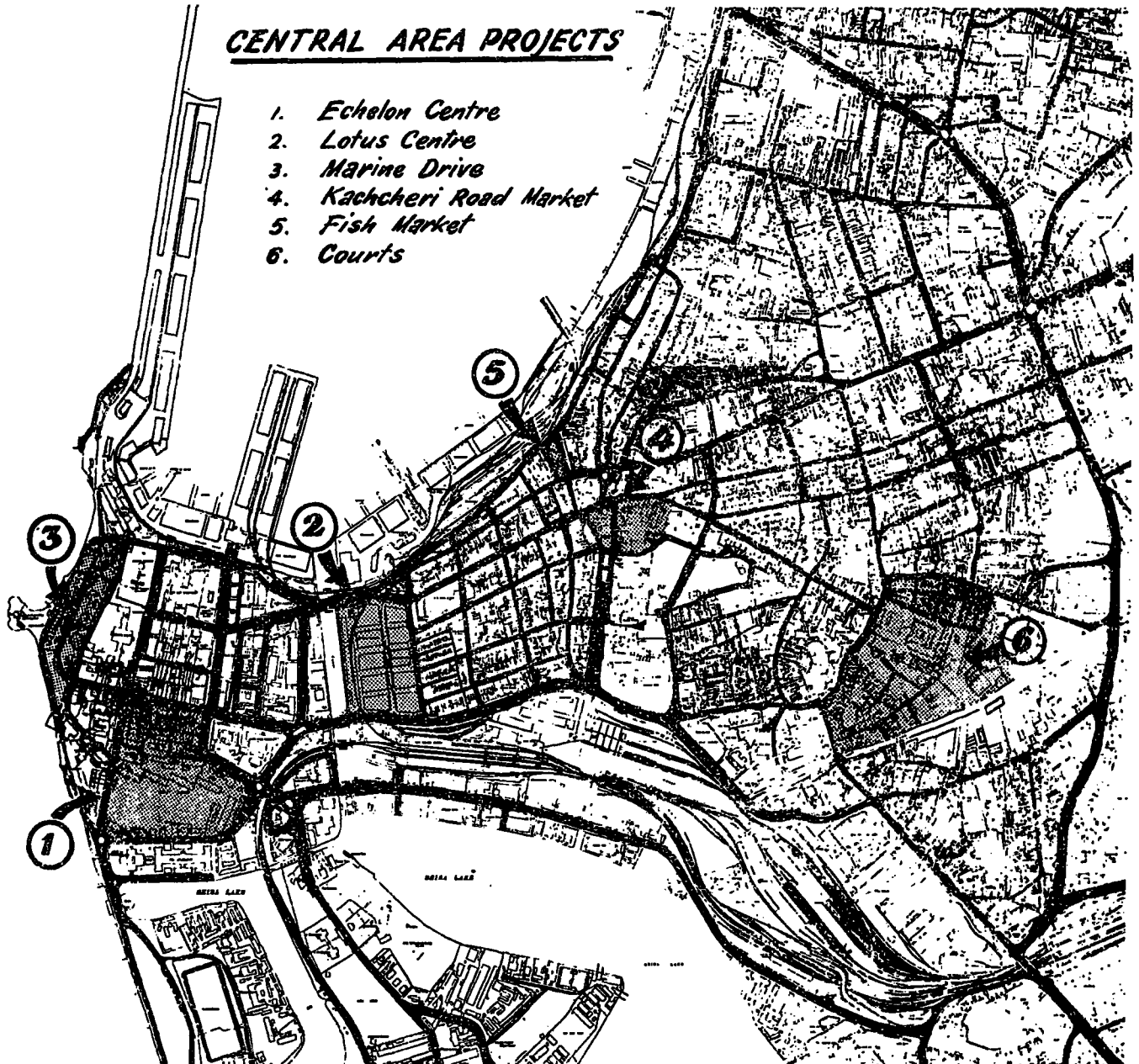
commenting on this aspect of employment appears to have drawn an erroneous conclusion based on a common misconception regarding the solutions to the employment problem of developing countries. It states "Obviously the central and critical problem facing the metropolitan region is the lack of employment opportunities. Equally obviously the potential for increased employment in the primary sector, particularly agriculture, is very limited. Expansion of manufacturing holds the key to the region's future econo-

mic health". That increased industry within the Colombo metropolitan region may lead to increased rural urban migration does not appear to have been sufficiently considered.

In addition to manufacturing, the Plan foresees considerable employment potential in construction. Housing is a relatively labor intensive activity. The expansion and development of infrastructure, water supply, sewerage, drainage, land reclamation, canals, roads, etc all have major employment potential.

CENTRAL AREA PROJECTS

1. Echelon Centre
2. Lotus Centre
3. Marine Drive
4. Kachcheri Road Market
5. Fish Market
6. Courts



The rebuilding of the Central area of Colombo is among the important development programmes of the Government. The objective is to selectively develop the 1,200 acre area of Central Colombo. The Colombo Master Plan has identified those project sites in the Central area where redevelopment could have the most positive impact. For instance, there is an area of about 17 acres of warehousing in the heart of Colombo's business centre. A significant feature of the Master Plan is the relocation of these warehouses and consequent integration of Pettah and Fort areas by building of the new Lotus Centre. (See illustration) Other major projects include the Echelon Quare site (15 acres) for office space; the Marine Drive site (16 acres) for luxury housing; the Pettah market project including Kachcheri Road Market and Fish Market which were the first in a series of projects started for the development of selected parts of the Central area.

Commerce and service employment has high employment elasticity but its potential for expansion in the near future is limited because, particularly in government and administration, the system is currently saturated. But expansion of the secondary sector will generate employment in the tertiary sector, a multiplier of perhaps 2.0 to 2.5, according to the Plan.

Employment estimates for the
Employment in Colombo Metropolitan Region 1971 — 2001
 (in '000's)

	1971	1986	2001
Total Metropolitan Population (a)	3025	4070	4800
Labour force	977	1392—1400	1767—1794
Employment Total	713	1127	1594
Agriculture, Fishing	63	81	110
Manufacturing	113	188	289
Utilities, Construction	30	57	85
Commerce, Finance	132	215	295
Transport	83	135	195
Services	180	281	385
Others	112	170	235
Unemployment (job-gap)	264	265—273	173—200

(a) *Dependent on female participation rates.*

Metropolitan Region are set forth in the above table.

Clearly it is Government's objective to eliminate the job gap to those not actively seeking employment. The figures above suggest the difficulty of this laudable objective, but they are not meant to imply its impossibility, adds the report.

In this instance, however, improved employment opportunities in the Plan region in relation to the rest of the island may not be the most advisable as it could encourage migration from the rural areas.

The details of this Plan help to focus serious attention on the need for preparation of a national urban policy which would take into account fully our overall national development strategies. The newly created Urban Development Authority may naturally regard this as one of its tasks. Of special importance would be the relation and importance of such a policy to the accelerated Mahaweli Project.

Planning of a particular area, however, should not be allowed to unduly influence national policy. This would apply in the present context to Colombo. Development planning in any form would require government intervention at various

levels of decision making and action in order to bring about changes in the economic, social and physical structure. For an explicit national urban policy, therefore, physical planning expertise will be required to guide decision making at the national level and also complementary planning work at the regional and local level.

Among the more positive aspects of the work of the Colombo Master Plan Project are the "Action Projects"

2. Each should represent a response to an immediate and urgent problem.
3. Each should have an impact beyond its immediate area, that is to say, reverberations should follow.
4. Each should be a pilot programme that, if successful, could be replicated on a larger scale and in other locations.

The eight projects listed include Slum upgrading, Shanty upgrading; Shanty resettlement; Export Processing Zone; Kotte Stormwater Diversion;; Pettah Market; Baseline Road; and Sub-centre Homagama.

There are many positive technical features too being emphasised by the Project. For instance it accepts that drainage has been and still continues to be a major problem in the Colombo region and it emphasises the need for a judicious balance between the demand for land reclamation and drainage in this region. Following careful consideration of the entire Colombo landscape it is proposed that major emphasis in the drainage plan be on natural gravity flow, limiting capital investment and maintenance costs in pumping stations; while the drainage proposals include bunds for flood protection and storm water diversion and this will also serve as locations for new water mains, sewer lines, other utilities and roads. One intention here is to reduce land acquisition problems and provide a means for coordinated construction.

Of the policy issues highlighted, perhaps the most important is the need for an Urban Development Authority which it states, would be of vital importance in maintaining the momentum generated through the current exercise of the Colombo Master Plan Project. The Government has already acted on this proposal and established such an Authority which it is hoped would fulfil the aspirations of the Master Plan Project.

which have been selected according to the following criteria:

1. Each major development problem area should be represented insofar as time and manpower permit.

Estimated Capital Investment Costs
 (Rs. Million)

	1978—1985	1986—2001
transport	992	2,459
water supply	190	295
sewerage	410	518
drainage	165	225
electricity	80	137
street-lighting.	25	46
telecommunications	1,583	155
gas supply	708	25
fire protection	107	7
solid waste disposal	7	40
health	1	290
education	1	140
post offices	5	13
cemeteries/crematoria	7	10
playgrounds/parks	61	2
community centres	142	1
recreation	15	—
housing	3	1,852
land	10	287
commerce	71	759

The grand totals are as follows:

Total cost excluding land	1978—1985	Rs. 4,584 million
Total cost excluding land	1986—2001	Rs. 7,261 million
Of which foreign exchange	1978—1985	Rs. 1,196 million
Of which foreign exchange	1986—2001	Rs. 2,107 million
Cost of land	1978—1985	Rs. 363 million
Cost of land	1986—2001	Rs. 531 million