

-Speech-

National Awards for Construction

Galadari 16<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2009

I am pleased to be here this evening for the presentation of National awards for Construction Excellence and Performance in 2009. I understand that this program of recognition has been conducted by the Institute of Construction Training and Development (ICTAD) for a considerable length of time, with the objective of promoting the overall quality of the constructions industry through competitiveness. We are gathered here today under happier circumstances than obtained in this country for about 30 long years. We are meeting in an atmosphere free of terrorist threat, we are meeting in a united country with no one planting bombs in an attempt to break up our motherland into separate pieces or states.

As I mentioned earlier, the objective of this felicitation ceremony is to motivate contractors through competition to improve the quality of construction. The term quality in this context has a broad meaning encompassing factors such as durability, good craftsmanship, safety, etcetera. I would also add another factor aesthetics . but perhaps that is not relevant to your immediate concerns here.

Be that as it may, construction has been close to the human existence from the beginning of civilization. After fulfilling his basic need, food, man would think of shelter. Even clothing, I dare say, would have come later. Construction activity starts from this point.

Man builds a shelter for himself for protection from the elements. All the rest comes later, things like roads, bridges, harbours, airports, reservoirs, dams, power plants etc., and of course building complexes for community housing and administration.

Construction is one of the major industries in our island. I am told that more than a million people are engaged in it at various levels and functions. There are, in addition to the masons, carpenters, labourers etc. the Engineers, Architects, Consultants, Designers, Quantity Surveyors, Policy Planners, Craftsmen, Material Manufacturers and Suppliers are among them. Construction Industry is playing a big role in our economy and according to the central bank sources its contribution to the GDP is about 6-7%. Our government has initiated a lot of construction activities all over the island. Meanwhile special development projects have been started in the North and East after the war against terrorism ended.

Now the question arising in your mind may be why I am discussing this in detail. You should raise not only this question but also a series of questions related to this. How much do we spend from the budget for the construction of buildings, roads, water supply, harbours, airports, housing irrigation systems etc. Next is how much do we spend on rehabilitation and maintenance.

I must state here that the government spends annually a colossal amount for new construction activities which could be expressed in billions of rupees. Meanwhile more billions of rupees

are spent on rehabilitation and maintenance of existing resources, mainly owing to the poor quality of construction. I think now you realize the gravity of the quality factor in construction. Then we have to raise another question; whether these structures meet the stipulated quality standards during the construction process. I can take a simple example. Some buildings constructed a few decades ago are still in good condition, whereas some buildings constructed very recently are in a stage of needing major repairs. Here the main problem is the poor quality of the construction. That means they have not maintained quality standards during the construction process. If the quality standards could be maintained from the design stage until the completion of the project, maintenance cost could be reduced considerably and subsequently those savings could be used for some other activities in the national development.

Therefore we have to remind ourselves of the good examples from our proud history. Construction industry is not a new concept for us as it is linked with our ancient civilization. Although the present construction industry is equipped with all sorts of new tools, materials, technologies etc. good lessons could be learnt from our ancestors who practiced and maintained high quality standards in the constructions several centuries ago. Our ancient chronicle ~~%Mahawansaya+~~ shows that the ancient construction industry is a part of our civilization. Some ancient constructions amaze us. They have met high quality standards by using good materials, good craftsmanship, appropriate practices, etc. In the Sorabora Wewa the gates of the reservoir were constructed by using the granite rock.

These gates are still functioning after minor repairs done by the irrigation department. Meanwhile the famous %Moda Ela+ is an incredible feat of engineering and its average width of 40 feet is impressive even by today's standards. Its gradient for the first 17 miles is 6 inches to a mile, which gives an indication of the preciseness of the surveying and leveling technology that existed during that period. The skill ingenuity and resourcefulness of the ancient construction worker are quite evident in the remains of these construction industry structures that can be seen today.

I am confident that our contractors will follow the lessons related to the quality factor, taught us by our ancestors through building of marvelous structures, remains of which are visible today.

I would like to congratulate all award recipients for their efforts and commitments towards the promotion of the quality of the construction industry and thank the organizers of this event.

Thank you.