

Address by Hon. Governor Eastern Province Mohan Wijewickrama at the Opening Session of the First Assembly of Eastern Provincial Council on 11th June 2008 at the Provincial Council in Trincomalee.

Hon. Chairman,
Hon. Chief Minister,
Hon. Ministers,
Hon. Members of Provincial Council,
Distinguished Guests and
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I consider it is a great pleasure and an honour to be present here today and to deliver the keynote address at the opening session of the first assembly of the Eastern Provincial Council.

Let me begin by extending my sincere congratulations and best wishes to all the newly elected members of the Eastern Provincial Council on behalf of His Excellency the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and his Government.

Today is a historical and an important day for the people in the Eastern Province and marks an important milestone in Sri Lanka politics, when the Eastern Provincial Council for the first time commences its first session.

People in the East were deprived of a Provincial Council for well over 17 years as successive Governments since 1991 were unable to hold Provincial Council Election due to the conflict situation as a result of terrorist activity that prevailed.

His Excellency the President Mahinda Rajapaksa since being elected as President in Nov 2005, did attempt a number peace initiatives with LTTE, to bring about a peaceful settlement to the people in the North and the East. Even after a series of unprovoked attacks on vehicles carrying security personnel, destruction of naval vessels and the attempted assassination of the Commander of the Army, within three months, His Excellency being elected as President, the Government continued to engage the LTTE into discussions to bring about peace.

When the security forces launched an operation to restore the water denied to the innocent farmers in the Seruvilla, When the LTTE terrorist close the anicut at Mavil Aru, the terrorists drove the Muslim People in Muthur from their homes. It

was at this stage that His Excellency the President ordered the Security Forces to engage the LTTE terrorist in order bring about law and order to resettle the displaced Muslim people who had moved to Kanthalai and Kinniya.

I am happy to state that under the able leadership of His Excellency the President, our heroic and gallant Servicemen and the Police after a series of well coordinated operations liberated the Eastern Province and its people from the clutches of the terrorists. The “Eastern Revival” which was spelt out in the Mahinda Chinthana of His Excellency the President, as the vision of the Government to develop the Eastern Province, which had been neglected and battered by decades of turmoil, became a reality to the people in the Eastern Province after it was liberated from the clutches of the terrorists.

Therefore, it is my duty to pay my sincere tribute to all our gallant servicemen and the police who laid down their lives and limbs in liberating the Eastern Province to provide the freedom for the people in the East to live and carry out their livelihood activities without fear.

The people in the East displayed their appreciation for the leadership and direction given by His Excellency the President in restoring normalcy and giving them an opportunity to elect their representatives to the Provincial Council after a lapse of 17 years.

Geography

The Eastern Province is located in the East coast of Sri Lanka and is bounded in the East by the Bay of Bengal, North by the Northern Province, West by the North Central and Central Provinces and South by the Uva and Southern Provinces. The Eastern Province has a total area of 9,792 sq. km. including 390 sq. km. of inland waters. Eastern Province occupies 16% of the total land area of Sri Lanka. The long coast line with its famous sandy beaches, large number of inland waters, mix of forest and agricultural lands and the magnificent natural harbour in Trincomalee make the Eastern Province one of the most beautiful sought after Provinces in Sri Lanka. Trincomalee is accepted as the capital of the Eastern Province.

Population

The estimated population of the Eastern Province is around 1.6 million in 2006, which represents around 8.21% of the total population of Sri Lanka. The population in Eastern Province comprises the three major ethnic groups,

Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims almost close to equal proportions. A significant number of the population has left the Eastern Province and are living in other parts of the country because of the security situation that prevailed. Some of this displaced population have started to return back to their habitats.

Economy

The Eastern Province contributed around 14% to the national GDP in the early eighties which declined to about 8% thereafter because of the unsettled conditions in the Province. However, since the improvement of security situation and re-activation of economy in the Province, it has estimated that this contribution reached again to 16% in last year. The Provincial per capita at present is about Rs.2905/- whereas the National per capita is approximately Rs.3968/- which is 36.5% higher than that of the Eastern Province. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of the Eastern Province and accounts to around 10.2% of the estimated national GDP. Action has been taken to increase these figures with the improvement in the security situation in this province.

Administration

To deliver the services to the people in the Province, the Eastern Provincial Council has organized itself into five ministries and eighteen departments. In addition, 16 institutions are functioning with management and development functions under the purview of the Chief Secretary. The appointment, transfer, dismissal, and disciplinary control of the Provincial officers are exercised by the Governor through the Provincial Public Service.

The Province is constituted with three administrative districts of Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee and includes 45 Divisional Secretary divisions and 1,087 Grama Niladhari divisions. The District Secretariats coordinate certain development activities directed by the Central Government and by the Provincial Council. The District Coordinating Committee also plays a significant role in coordination of development and administration in each District.

Establishment of the Eastern Provincial Council

Though the Provincial Councils were introduced as an initial political settlement to terrorism which was experienced due to the presence of armed groups in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the elected Northern and Eastern Provincial Council, did not function for more than two years and was dissolved in 1991, whilst the Provincial Councils which were installed as per the 13th Amendment

to the Constitution in the other provinces, have continued to function and have passed through four rounds of elections.

Sri Lanka has had a continuous record of settled and civilized life since winning its independence by peaceful process of constitutional evolution. Well organized legislative systems with administrative structure are exercised at national, provincial and local levels. However in view of the conflict situation associated with acts of terrorism, elections could not be held for well over 17 years for the Northern and Eastern Provinces, depriving the people the development and services as in the other parts of the country.

In view of the judgment of the Supreme Court of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on the 16th October 2006, the Northern and Eastern Provincial Council were de-merged to function independently. Eastern Provincial Council commenced functioning from 1st January 2007 with the appointment of Governor, staff and allocating separate infrastructure to house ministries and departments.

13th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka carved out a provincial sphere of devolved governance by specifying an area of legislative, executive and financial competence to be exercised by the Provincial Councils. The responsibility and subject content under the Provincial Councils and the Centre was set out in the provincial and reserved lists respectively. There is a concurrent list containing subjects with overlapping responsibilities.

There had been much confusion in the devolution exercise whilst transferring power, authority and responsibility from a Central driven process to a Provincial driven system. Even though the Provincial Council System had been in existence for almost 20 years, there are still problems unresolved. These issues need to be resolved by the Central Government and the Provincial Councils cordially agreeing with each other.

The absence of the elected Council and inability of utilizing statutory power for Eastern Provincial Council for nearly two decades prevented the implementation of provisions made under the 13th Amendment to fulfil the aspirations of people. One of the effects was the inability of the Provincial Council to retain fully the revenue generated within the Province. It is quite clear that Provincial Council can not work in isolation exercising the responsibilities devolved to the Provinces. Both the Provincial Council and Centre must work in partnership and complement each other through a program of action.

The Eastern Province has all the characteristics of a conflict emerging society and faces several challenges in its development efforts. The destruction, displacement caused as a result of the conflict associated with terrorism and tsunami needs heavy investment. There had been neglect in the rest of the Province too, with little or no development even though such areas were not affected by the conflict.

Naganahira Nawodaya in Mahinda Chinthana

Naganahira Navodaya, which was spelt out in the Mahinda Chinthana of His Excellency the President, as the vision of the Government to develop the Eastern Province, which had been neglected and battered by decades of turmoil, has in deed given a boost to create a “New East” with modern roads, harbours, airports, water supply schemes, rehabilitating tanks and irrigation channels, creating new townships, bringing in new technology, skills and knowledge.

The Naganahira Navodaya also strives to develop the overall Province, with benefit disbursed to all communities in an equitable manner by empowering the people through their own initiatives and own strengths. Such physical and human infrastructure is essential to reduce poverty and to build a diversified economy that will take development closer to a developed province such as the Western Province.

Initiatives for Peace and Harmony

While the settlement of the internally displaced persons, whose life patterns and livelihood had been devastated due to hostilities that prevailed over the past several years, and especially those who were affected recently, was the foremost concern of the Government, the Government has taken all efforts in a very short period to create better environment for peace and enhance security in all areas in the Eastern Province. Large part of displaced people has already been resettled and facilities are being created for the improvement of livelihood for vulnerable population and returnees with the assistance of Government and non Government organizations.

Mega Developments

Government has focused on mega infrastructure facilities in the Province. Coal Power Plant, Industrial Estates, Metro Urban Development plan for Trincomalee, Investment Promotion Zones, Tourism Zones, reconstruction of highway networks are a few such Government’s initiatives.

Recovery and Reconstruction

As a part of the Government's medium term development program, infrastructure destroyed by the conflict, tsunami and the areas which were left and neglected by omission or commission are attended to by utilizing foreign loans and grants under following projects.

- North East Community Restoration and Development Project (NECORD)
- Conflict Affected Area Rehabilitation Project (CAARP)
- North East Coastal Community Development Project (NECCDEP)
- Pro-poor Eastern Infrastructure Project
- Pro-poor Rural Development Project (PROP)
- Pro-poor Economic Advancement and Community Empowerment Project (PEACE)
- Re-awakening Project
- North East Housing Reconstruction Programme (NEHRP)

Agriculture

The economy of the Eastern Province depends mainly on agriculture since it is considered as the main source of income for nearly 70% of the population. The Eastern Province has been traditionally considered as the granary of Sri Lanka and it contributes to 24% of the national paddy production.

The extent of cultivable paddy land in Eastern Province is about 174,335 ha and only 53% of it was cultivated in year 2006 due to unstable security conditions. Additional 17,975 ha was brought under cultivation in 2007. The objective of the agriculture development strategy is to bring 80% of the total cultivable land under production. Increasing the productivity from 4 MT to 5 MT per ha, promoting seed paddy production and introducing appropriate farm mechanization to reduce the cost of production are the other major targets to increase paddy production in the province.

More importance was provided for maize cultivation due to its demand since it is considered as the major ingredient for animal feed. Large scale maize cultivation is being promoted with the provision of hybrid seeds and other assistance including contractual marketing and it proved to be a successful venture. Area under maize cultivation has increased from 8,100 ha in Maha 2006/2007 to 11,354 ha in Maha 2007/2008. The target is to produce 25% of the national maize requirement in the Eastern Province.

It is estimated that 50% of the provincial requirement of vegetable is being produced locally. In order to enhance the vegetable production in the province,

commercial vegetable cultivation and year round production of vegetables under net houses is being promoted. About 10,810 home gardens were established last year to promote the food production drive declared by the Government under the slogan “Let us cultivate and up lift the nation”. About 10,000 vegetable seed packets were issued to farmers. Mushroom cultivation and Bee keeping villages are also being promoted.

Livestock Development

The Eastern Province is one of the major milk producing provinces in the country and consists of nearly 15% of the national cattle population. It is estimated that nearly 11% of the total national milk production is produced from this Province. Suitable farmland and water are available as unutilized resources in the Province and necessary manpower both skilled and unskilled is available in abundance.

Consequent to recent conflict, there has been considerable damage and disruption to milk collection network and loss of animals. This has resulted in gradual decline in livestock production in the Province. On the other hand, lack of essential infrastructure such as veterinary offices, shortage of veterinary surgeons and livestock development officers are identified as factors restraining the growth of livestock sector in this Province.

At present 42 veterinary offices are functioning in the Eastern Province. 22 Livestock Development Officers were recruited into provincial public service and action is being taken to fill up the vacancies of Government veterinary surgeons in near future. Regional Livestock Farm at Uppuvelly was strengthened to increase its production capacity from 4,000 to 12,000 day old chicks a month. About 55,000 abandoned animals were salvaged with the assistance of Security Forces and the Line Ministry of Livestock Development.

The Provincial target is to double the milk production in next five years. Action is being taken to establish 9 Milk Processing Centers, 14 Milk Chilling Centers and 3 Animal Feed Manufacturing Units. To increase the productivity of the local animals, it is proposed to import high yield breeding cattle & goats and to improve the artificial insemination services. Furthermore, it is planned to establish new dairy villages, goat villages, milk sales outlets, cattle breeder farms, integrated model farms, mobile veterinary clinics to enhance livestock production in the Eastern Province.

Irrigation

Provincial authorities deal with operation and maintenance of 41 medium tanks and improvements to head works and channel systems as well as involve in rehabilitation of selected minor tanks.

Irrigation capacity has been improved through the renovation of tanks and irrigation schemes, clearing of channels with the support of rehabilitation projects. 115 minor tanks in the Eastern Province are expected to be rehabilitated in 2008.

Education

A well established provincial education network in the Eastern Province is functioning with 13 Education Zones, 44 Divisional Education Offices and 1015 Schools and providing better education to the communities. Out of these schools 984 are Provincial schools and 31 are National schools.

The schools in the Eastern Province are classified by ethnicity as 441 Tamil schools, 298 Muslim schools and 242 Sinhala schools and by medium of instruction as 716 Tamil medium schools and 242 Sinhala medium schools and the balance 22 schools are mixed with English. At present 377,473 students are continuing their education in the Province through the services of 17, 458 principals and teachers and 2,272 non academic staff.

2,241 teachers have been recruited during the 2006-2007 and 7 schools were opened newly and 40 schools were upgraded to the next higher levels.

23,273 students sat for the year-5 scholarship examination in 2007. Out of this 2,491 students qualified for the scholar ship scheme. Out of 9,213 students who sat GCE (A/L) examination in 2007, 60% have been qualified for university entrance. Similar performance has been shown in 2007 GCE (O/L) examination, two girls have obtained 1st and 5th rank in Tamil medium at national level from Karaitivu and Trincomalee respectively.

Health

The patient care services are delivered to the people by both Provincial and Central health authorities. In addition, the preventative care service is the responsibility of Provincial Health Ministry. This Ministry implements health

programs identified under Five Year Provincial Development Plan in accordance with National Health Policy.

The Provincial Ministry of Health & Indigenous Medicine provides health care services to entire population of the Eastern Province through 120 patient care institutions with established administrative support of the Departments of Health Services and Indigenous Medicine and 04 Regional Director of Health Services. The Health services in the Eastern Province have been inline with the National and Provincial policies and had been able to maintain a satisfactory standard with the limited financial and human resources.

Roads

The road network in the Eastern Province combined by “A” (trunk roads), “B” (main roads connecting towns), “C” (minor roads), “D” (gravelled roads) and “E” (rural roads) class roads.

There are about 1,066 km of C class roads and 370 km of D class roads among the road network in the Eastern Province coming under the purview of the Provincial Department of Road Development. Some of these roads required to be improved to the necessary standards.

However, Road Development Department with the assistance of Road Development Authority had maintained the important roads and bridges in the Province and the rehabilitation of the major road network is planned by the Government under foreign assistance.

Industry

Within the power devolved to the province, action had been taken to improve the regional industries and entrepreneurship. The Provincial Department of Industries provides services and facilities in connection with small industries and entrepreneurs in the form of provision of micro credit, marketing management and technical facilities and legal advise to improve the livelihood of the community in the Province.

To promote the industrial sector and to improve livelihood, 962 youth, who were selected through the Divisional Secretariats in all three Districts have been trained on various fields in 2007. In addition, the Provincial Department conducts training programs for self employment, in collaboration with National

Crafts Council on Handicraft. Necessary steps have already been taken to conduct advanced trainings for selected groups on selected fields.

Cooperative Development

As people's enterprise, the cooperative movement plays a significant role in rehabilitation and development process in the Eastern Province and intervenes in the services essential for community in line with good governance. The Eastern Province has 996 cooperative societies, including 44 Multi Purpose Cooperative Societies under the supervision and guidance of four Assistant Commissioners offices.

In consistent with the national policy, 28 MPCs's have been transformed to '*Co-op Cities*' in the four ACCD divisions in the Province.

Local Government

There are 43 Local Authorities administering and delivering the local government services in the Eastern Province. 2 Municipal Councils 4 Urban Councils and 37 Predishiya Sabas are coming under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of Local Government and Regional Assistant Commissioners of Local Government.

Local Authorities are the development agents in their respective areas and they are playing greater role in development activities at local level in collaboration with Central and Provincial Agencies. The huge volume of work on improvement of community infrastructure, such as rural roads, markets, rural electrification, community water supply, maternity home, pre-schools, community centers etc., are carried out through local authorities based on the priority needs of people.

Conclusion

The successful conclusion of the Eastern Provincial Council election is an important step towards the establishment of a civil administration and restoration of the democratic process in the Province. It is also a step towards the eventual resolution of the national problem and bringing about national integration. The results also impact on the eventual restoration of democracy in the Northern Province.

Setting up of the Provincial administration is only the beginning of the process towards proper devolution of power. His Excellency the President has indicated the necessity to fully implement the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in a systematic manner. The Council should be provided with adequate funds not only for its administration, but also for development work in the Province as well as to strengthen the work of the local government institutions. The Provincial Council as a unit of devolution should be seen as a vehicle through which development of the Province is carried on.

Today we have a Chief Minister, one time member of the LTTE, who had the character and strength to join the democratic stream and serve the people. With him the people in the East are fortunate to have an elected Provincial Council representing various political parties.

For the last 17 years, the Provincial Ministries had been run by the Chief Secretary and Ministry Secretaries under the direction of the Governor due to the absence of the Provincial Council and the Board of Ministers. This situation has changed now, where a dedicated, competent Chief Minister and four other Ministers have been appointed as the Board of Ministers. As they are in a better position to understand the requirement of the people and area for development, I am certain that the Eastern Provincial Council can deliver what could not during the last few years.

I believe that all the Hon. Councilors have in their mind a solitary hope. That is to take part in a democratic process which was absent in the East for a considerable period and to provide the necessary services and development to the people who were suffering untold miseries in the past.

I wish the Chief Minister, Board of Ministers and the Hon elected representatives who are present today, the very best in the challenge they have embarked in.

Thank you.