Architect 2011 Architectsâ€™: Contribution Towards National Development



By: Madhushala Senaratne

Adopting the theme of “Architecture for All – City + Community”, this year’s Annual Sessions of the Sri Lanka Institute of Architects (SLIA) will focus on the role of the architects in national development. “With Sri Lanka stepping into an era of rapid development, which has seen the implementation of infrastructure projects, large-scale community development and tourism projects, the country’s architectural community has much to offer in nation building efforts,” says Architect Chandana Edirisuriya, President of Sri Lanka Institute of Architects, urging the Government to utilise the expertise and services of the local architects.

Held for the 29th consecutive year, the Annual Sessions of SLIA, a celebration of

architecture, strive to create a platform for architects, members of the construction industry, trade and the public to interact. It also generates greater awareness of the profession and introduces new trends, technologies and creations. Titled, Architect 2011, the Annual Sessions consist of several key components: inauguration ceremony, architects' work and trade exhibition, National Conference, the Annual General Meeting and the fellowship night.

The inauguration, on February 23 at the BMICH, is expected to be graced by Basil Rajapaksa, Minister of Economic Development, Wimal Weerawansa, Minister of Housing, Construction and Engineering Services and Ashok K Kantha, High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka as guests of honour. Ruth Reid, President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, Archt Mubasshar Hussain, President of the Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) will also be present. This will be followed by the ceremonial opening of the Architect Trade and Work Exhibition at 8 pm, which will be open to the public from February 24 to 27 from 10 am to 9 pm.

Minister Wimal Weerawansa will be the Chief Guest at the National Conference, on February 24 at the BMICH. Lasantha Alagiyawanna Deputy Minister of Housing, Construction and Engineering Services and Mubasshar Hussain, will be the guests of honour.

Elaborating on this year's theme, Archt Edirisuriya says, the Government has initiated a number of large-scale development projects focused on benefiting the community, such as urban resettlement programmes and mass housing. A greater participation of architects on these projects is important. The architectural profession has often assisted the government in its rebuilding efforts, especially in the times of the Tsunami and floods. The new developments taken place after the Tsunami in the East and South are ample testimony to this. Well-planned cities and buildings have become catalysts for changing the lives of the communities. Being a creative profession, with sensitivity to socio cultural, environmental and technological challenges, architects are trained to cater to the present and the future. An architecturally creative person, with five years academic study and two years structured training will equip himself with necessary skills and knowledge to perform this task.

In this light, this year's National Conference will highlight the past achievements in community architecture, development of architectural philosophies that had shaped towns and cities, emerging issues that call for creative approaches, responding to changing circumstances and widening the scope of architects' role. Eminent

speakers from Brazil, India, Vietnam and Portugal and local architects will make presentations. Keynote speaker, Jamie Lerner, the Brazilian architect and mayor whose ‘urban revolution’ saw a grim, congested city being transformed into a model city of green living and innovation will present a case study.

The Architect Trade and Exhibition will showcase new creations, building materials, products, and technologies. The exhibition will feature 315 stalls by 260 companies, student works, information centre and a career guidance desk. “Having grown into the premium exhibition in the construction industry, it is anticipated both by the public and the construction industry, drawing close to 70,000 people in some years,” says Archt Edirisuriya.

A new council of the SLIA will be elected at this year’s AGM (on February 26) where issues relating to the profession and membership, progress and future plans will be discussed.

Several awards will be presented in the categories of Product, Design, Colour, Research, Publication, Young Architect of the Year, Best Stall Display and Best Display of Architects’ Panels. An Honourary Fellowship and a special award for excellence in contribution to architectural education will be conferred to two distinguished members of the profession, while 75 architects who will be entering the membership will receive their scrolls at the inauguration.

Having been engaged in activities of the Institute for years, Archt Edirisuriya possesses wide experiences. He has held several positions including that of senior vice president, SLIA and Chairman, Board of Management. He is the Chief Architect/Managing Director of Design Link Associates and was recently elected the Vice President Asia of CAA.

As for future plans, the Institute strives to take the profession of architecture to the regions more effectively. A Resource Centre of SLIA is planned to be opened in Anuradapura. Often, many tend to look at this profession, not as an essential ingredient, but as a luxury. However, this is not so. “It is an investment of which you reap the benefit soon,” concludes Archt Edirisuriya.