Bomb-ravaged Fort area to get a facelift

The bomb-ravaged Colombo Fort area will receive a new lease of life shortly. The companies owning the buildings that suffered severe damage due to the January 31 terrorist attack, have now initiated plans to rebuild and reconstruct them. In addition, a UDA (Urban Development Authority)-led team of affected companies will come together as Centre Point Colombo Group to monitor the development of the buildings and distribute funding that has been pledged by foreign donors and the government.

The construction and development of the buildings will be done according to an overall master plan formulated by Millennium Consortium, a team of architects, urban planners and analysts based in Sri Lanka. The Consortium submitted their proposal to the UDA when they advertised for private sector companies to put forward a conceptual design for the re-development of the Colombo Fort. Milleniun Consortium won this competition with their long term 30 year development plan for the city of Colombo. They are now working in the capacity of consultants to oversee the progress of the master plan.

The Consortium worked with three foreign partners in developing their winning proposal-namely Short Ford Associates, Ove Arup & Partners from the United Kingdom and Mario Cucinella of France.

These proposals are based on keeping Colombo’s identity in a historical sense while gearing the city to become a major financial centre. It places great emphasis on beautifying Colombo’s environment and energy-efficient structures. The Consortium will also act
as a consultant overseeing the work of the Centre Point Group. The group comprises, Ceylinco Company, Hotels Corporation, Interlink and several other companies, like Carsons who are also willing to join. Already, several companies-Carsons, Cargo Boat and George Stuarts have commenced work on their damaged buildings. For this, the companies have been granted monetary assistance by the government for upto 75 percent of the damage assessment.

Apart from this, Centre Point Group will be receiving nearly 8110 million from the

United States as a loan to the government, Ragi Kadirgamar of Millenium Consortium said. There will be more such foreign aid packages from other countries who have by now expressed interest to finance the effort. “The exact details of distributing the funding has not been worked out yet”, Kadirgamar said.

He added that while there is no time-frame specified on paper, Millenium Consortium would like to see ‘certain things’-like the Janadhipathi Mawatha rehabilitation and development of the immediate surrounding area-done within the next three years, in anticipation of the dawn of the new millenium.

Nalaka Fernando, of Carsons told Business Today that they have already commenced work on the interior of their building, named Equity Two, recently. When the government fund releases the allocated amount, the work on the entire building could be completed. “The Police and Defence Ministry is very co-operative, but sometimes there is a lack of communication to the ranks guarding the Janadhipathi Mawatha and we have problems when we bring in trucks of hardware”, Fernando said. He said that the Treasury has made arrangements to make the payment through the Bank of Ceylon.

P Dharmabandu of the Central Bank which was the bomber’s target last July, said that engineers at the bank were now involved in assessing the damage and the best way to rehabilitate the building. “They are still working on it”, he said. “When the assessment is done we will know how much of the building needs to be demolished and how the reconstruction should begin. He said that since the building was not insured for terrorist activities, the rebuilding will be done by the Bank’s own fund. “When we begin work, it will take around one and a half years to complete it”, he said.