

SLIA Annual Sessions And CAA Congress



Architecture – Rethinking sustainability

The Annual Sessions of the Sri Lanka Institute of Architects (SLIA) will be held this month in conjunction with the Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) Congress 2010. Determined to maintain the dynamism within the construction industry at a time the industry is faced with many challenges, the Annual Sessions, titled, The Architect 2010, together with CAA 2010, promises to explore new avenues, explains Architect Chandana Edirisuriya, President of SLIA.

By Madhushala Senaratne | Photography by Menaka Aravinda

The key features of the Annual Sessions are the National Conference, the Architects' Work and Trade Exhibition and other events such as the fellowship night and the Annual General Meeting.

Conducting the Annual Sessions in conjunction with the CAA Congress is significant as a country and it will be beneficial to the local architects and also to the total construction industry. “While this is the celebration of the architecture fraternity, the event is organised aiming at maintaining a momentum in the construction industry. SLIA will act as a catalyst in the whole process,” explained Archt Edirisuriya.

The SLIA is a founder member of the CAA and at the same time is a member of other international architectural organisations. “Hosting the CAA Congress in Colombo will give more opportunities for sharing professional knowledge and it will give more professional exposure to Sri Lankan architects and opportunities to access knowledge,” Archt Edirisuriya asserted. Around 100-125 delegates from Commonwealth countries including New Zealand, Australia, UK and India are expected to participate.

The inauguration ceremony of Architect 2010 will take place on February 17 at Water’s Edge, while the National Conference will be held on February 18 and 19 at the Cinnamon Grand Hotel. The Architect Exhibition will be held from February 17 to 21 at the BMICH. The exhibition will be open to the public from February 18.

The theme of this year’s National Conference is ‘Architecture: Rethinking Sustainability’. Explaining the reason behind the theme, Archt Edirisuriya stated that while we constantly hear about global warming, climatic change and rising of sea levels, sustainability becomes the order of the day in every field and architects have a leading role to play in creating a sustainable future. “If you look at the world resource base, we’re using resources that are limited. While we slowly come to accept the danger of depleting resources in the planet, it is recognised that buildings are consuming more than 60 percent of resources. If you take the usage of energy of the whole world, buildings consume more than 60% too,” he said.

It is heartening to note that contemporary architecture has seen successful examples where architects have used their creative skills, research and knowledge of tradition and technology to come up with truly wonderful solutions in addressing sustainability, commented Archt Edirisuriya, adding that the conference would be focused on sharing these ideas.

He further explained that sustainability has been an integral part in Sri Lanka's cultural system, yet new ways of thinking and new concepts have emerged and the architects as well as the public should be made aware of these. The knowledge gained during the conference will be further enhanced by subsequent academic programmes.

"We have to make everybody aware of the importance of sustainability and that is the key to its success. The architects and the public should also be able to use it in practice," he said. "We are in the process of promoting green concepts and initiating a green building council in Sri Lanka."
Several international and local speakers will deliberate at the conference. These include Keynote Speakers Archt Gordon Chong from the USA, Archt Kenneth Yang from Malaysia and Archt Gaeten Sue, who is the Immediate Past President of the World Body of Architecture, while local architects Archt Melroy Perera, Archt Ismath Rahim and Archt Vinod Jayasinghe will also speak. "These speakers, especially Archt Gordon Chong and Archt Kenneth Yang have done extensive research on sustainability in architecture and successfully incorporated them into the buildings," he said. Louis Cox, the President of the Union of International Architects; the World Body of Architects will also be present during the Sessions.

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Explaining the significance of the Annual Sessions, particularly the Architect's Work and Trade Exhibition, Archt Edirisuriya states that it creates a platform for the architects to portray what they are capable of, and the trade to introduce new technologies and showcase their products to the construction professionals and also to the public. At the same time it helps raise awareness of current issues in the industry and provides the opportunity for members of the construction industry to meet with each other as well as the public. In addition, at a time when the industry is making slow progress, an exhibition such as this helps build momentum. "With this, the industry will develop and the contractors, suppliers, the architects, other service professionals as well as the public will receive the benefit," he explained.

With regard to the National Conference, Archt Edirisuriya noted that every year the conference focuses on a theme which is current and relevant. "That helps to keep our members and even the public informed and updated about the opportunities

and the developments taking place in the profession, the new thinking and new concepts," he stated

SLIA has developed an Annual Awards Scheme. These include a Product Award system to promote the local industries, the Annual Design Awards for Architects, the Young Architect of the Year Award, Research and Publication awards, the Presidential Award on Architecture and the SLIA Gold Medal. Trade will also be recognised, and awards will be presented in the Best Stall Display category. The presentation of awards will also take place during the inauguration ceremony.

"With the stall awards, we advice them to come up with an innovative stall, which would look more dynamic and bright rather than having a stereotype 10 x 10 space," Archt Edirisuriya stated.

The SLIA will honour three eminent members of the institute, he said. While past president Archt Lalith de Silva will be conferred with the Honorary Fellowship of the SLIA, Archt Valentyne Gunesaekara and Prof Nimal de Siva will also be conferred with honours.

Unlike in previous years, The Architect 2010 will focus on the integration of the Members' Work Exhibition with the Trade Exhibition. While in the Members' Work Exhibition, architects will have the opportunity to showcase their projects including buildings, interiors, the landscape, master plans and urban design proposals for cityscapes, in the Trade category, the building materials and new technologies will be on display. Other services such as banks, construction technologies and contracting services will also be available during the exhibition which will will feature over 300 stalls.

Awareness programmes relating to the profession and architectural education will also be held. The SLIA Information Centre will provide guidance to the public and students, especially those who aspire to study architecture. The exhibition will feature students' work from two schools of architecture in Sri Lanka and the conference will include students' presentations.

“We are organising architectural tours for the CAA delegates. During the course of the week, in addition to the formal events, there’ll be evening events and a Fellowship Night on the last day,” said Archt Edirisuriya.

Looking back on the journey so far, Archt Edirisuriya recalled, “the exhibition and conference was started in 1981, and over the years it has developed and it is the only exhibition as far as I know which has been held continuously for such a long time in Sri Lanka.”

Commenting on the role of SLIA, he noted that the objectives of the institute are to regulate the architectural education in this country and also the architecture profession and practice. Although the institution has the expertise and tools to conduct a successful Annual Session having held it for the past 27 years, it was more challenging this year combining that with the CAA Congress.

At a time other countries were hesitant to host a CAA summit in Sri Lanka, SLIA was able to persuade the CAA to hold it’s Congress.

Archt Edirisuriya went on to say, “the construction industry was rather lacklustre. But, we took up the challenge and worked harder to get the participation of as many organisations as possible from the construction industry. Now we have been successful. I think the industry is looking at the future and they must be sensing a better future, so they are coming forward, they are coming out.”

“The SLIA is determined to have a successful event so that the construction industry and the public will receive the benefit. Therefore, it’s an open invitation for everyone to visit the exhibition,” he concluded.