

## II. OPENING STATEMENTS

This chapter contains the statements made by Mr. Omar Kamil, Mayor of Colombo; Dr. Masaru Yoshitomi, Dean of the ADB Institute; Dr. Sarat Chandran, Secretary General of the Colombo Plan Secretariat; and the Honorable S. Alavi Mowlana, Minister of Provincial Council and Local Government in Sri Lanka, during the Opening Session of the Forum.

Mayor Kamil welcomes the participants to Colombo, and encourages them to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the Forum to engage in dialogues and share experiences among local government leaders. Next, on behalf of the ADB Institute, Dr. Masaru Yoshitomi outlines the structure of the Forum and its objectives: building relationships among city leaders, sharing information and experiences on strategic and municipal service, and supporting ADB's Benchmarking Project. He also stresses the importance of collaboration among partners to ensure sustainable and continuous exchange of information for better municipal service delivery. Dr. Sarat Chandran observes that efficient urban governance entails the right skills and expertise, resources, and wisdom of those directly involved in the process. Finally, Mr. Mowlana encourages everyone to learn as much as possible from the discussions, and to continue coordinating and cooperating with one another for the betterment of humankind.

**Omar Z. Kamil**

Mayor, Colombo, Sri Lanka

I welcome with a very warm heart the mayors and municipal leaders from the cities of the Asian region who have taken time off from their busy schedules back home for this forum. I welcome with appreciation the resource persons who have offered their valuable time and expertise to articulate the issues, and I welcome with gratitude the many sponsors whose generous support has made this all possible. To you Excellencies, honorable members, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I extend a very warm and cordial welcome.

We are meeting in the City of Colombo today, and the citizens of Colombo welcome you all with the typical Sri Lankan hospitality. It is a pleasant city with an abundance of fauna and flora, where a rich history, a modest way of life, and a vibrant modernity have met conveniently and with mutual respect. Since our former Mayor Hon. Karu Jayasuriya, who initiated this Asian forum of mayors, took office as Mayor of Colombo, the city has regained a new life, and I am in a better position with his support to welcome you to a city with many changes yet maintaining the traditional Sri Lankan hospitality, the smile of its people, and the greenery of its landscape.

The Colombo Municipal Council is the largest local authority in Sri Lanka and one of the oldest in Southeast Asia. We are 134-years old and during this period the city has developed into the commercial capital of this country. We are faced with many challenges and opportunities and our vision is to make Colombo a model city in Asia, providing a high quality of life to the people.

Colombo has a mixed ethnic population, which we see as a potential for development, a resource and source of color for its vibrant city life, and as offering opportunities for mutual interaction

and progress. The Colombo you see today is a result of the labor of love of many people, many mayors before me, its citizens, a dedicated and committed team of top and middle management, and hard-working staff of the Colombo Municipal Council. They work very hard to maintain the city's infrastructure and innovate solutions to its many problems. Our vision has been to improve collectively the quality of life of people while retaining the culture, heritage, social system, and physical fabric.

I believe this Forum offers us the opportunity to engage in dialogue among ourselves on issues that confront us individually, in our own city offices, and to share the experiences that we have gained in resolving them within our own cultural settings. But I am sure we will learn that there are interesting similarities and that there are common experiences that we can share for the betterment of cities in the Asian Region.

This is an opportunity to exchange ideas that can provide us the insights, understanding, and energy that we need to face up to the day-to-day issues that confront us as much as the ones that we will have to face together in the years ahead. It offers us the opportunity to recognize our mistakes, learn from the experiences of others, and build a broader understanding about our people, urban problems, urban potentials, and urban futures.

Today we are at the doorstep of the next millennium, and it is widely believed that the next millennium belongs to Asia, and in particular, to the cities in Asia. The people in this region will look for new technologies, new social reforms, new urban developments, and new visions for organizing their life styles.

It is in this context that we are meeting today, and it is in this spirit that we are going to engage ourselves in this forum. As the Mayor of Colombo City, and on behalf of the citizens, let me

*It is widely believed that the next millennium belongs to Asia, and in particular, to the cities in Asia.*

once again offer a very warm welcome to all of you and wish that you will have a pleasant stay here. I also wish that you will find this forum fruitful, exciting, invigorating, and offering opportunities for greater cooperation among our cities and our countries.

**Dr. Masaru Yoshitomi**

Dean, ADB Institute

On behalf of the ADB Institute, let me extend a very warm welcome to you to this Mayors' Forum. The ADB Institute is indeed pleased to have this opportunity to organize this forum with our co-sponsors, ADB Headquarters, Colombo Plan Secretariat, USAID Regional Urban Development Office for South Asia, US-Asia Environmental Partnership Program, the UNDP/UNCHS Urban Management Program, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), and, of course, the Colombo Municipal Council. We are particularly grateful to the Colombo Municipal Council for the excellent arrangements and warm hospitality.

*Governance has been recognized as critical for the long-term sustainable development of all developing countries.*

The involvement of the ADB Institute in the Mayors' Forum is to lend support to ADB Headquarters' work on governance. This is because governance has been recognized as critical for the long-term sustainable development of all developing countries. We also recognize that a way of improving governance is to build capacity in the areas of first, public administration and second, public expenditure management, both of which are central to core governance. Therefore, contributions by the ADB Institute to build capacity in these two areas, both at the federal and provincial level, could go a long way towards helping developing countries achieve sustainable economic development. For these reasons, we have included in our work

program three integrated programs to build capacity in the public management area. One of these is the Municipal Management program, which we are co-hosting with other donors in the form of this Asian Mayors' Forum.

This is the second forum that the ADB Institute has sponsored. The first was held in Cebu, Philippines, in December 1998, co-sponsored by the ADB Headquarters and the City Government of Cebu, where we had a gathering of around 10 Mayors. Mayor Garcia, whom I am very pleased to see again here today, hosted that forum wonderfully.

In organizing such gatherings, the question of sustainability and continuity of the undertaking has always been in our minds. So following last year's forum, we established a World Wide Web site for the mayors and their coordinators to gain access to a vast knowledge base on best practices of local governments, to participate in worldwide discussion forums, and to exchange experiences long after the forums are over. We have indicated that the mayors' group had to be expanded so that the sharing of experiences could be widened. By this process, we hope that learning from one another through the Internet can take off. It was for this reason that we decided to sponsor the second Asian Mayors' Forum with an increase in the number of participating mayors. In today's forum, the number of mayors represented has trebled. I am happy to be advised of the very good response and interests expressed by many for this gathering. I am even happier to note that the number of sponsors has more than trebled compared to the previous occasion. This is an indication that we are moving in the right direction.

Now that we have some indication of success, it might be appropriate to remind ourselves of the key objective of the forums, and that is to help cities improve the living standards of the

general population. This could be achieved through the following three steps:

- **Building** relationships among participating city leaders so that through the friendships established in this gathering, we are better able to help one another manage the many challenges facing mayors and city administrators throughout Asia.
- **Sharing** information and experiences on strategic and municipal service issues so that we can apply this knowledge to enhancing the services that each municipality offers to its residents.
- **Supporting** ADB's concurrent project on benchmarking selected municipal services, which is taking place in 10 of the cities represented here today. This project aims to demonstrate that cities can achieve better services for their citizens by comparing their service performances with one another and then using this information to improve selected services to their citizens.

In today's gathering, there are 32 city leaders from 12 countries and 10 resource speakers with outstanding credentials in urban management. Organizing such an event is no small task. We were able to do this because of the tremendous amount of cooperation that is evident here today. To make this Forum a reality has not only required the efforts and resources of the Institute but also partnerships with our co-sponsors and, of course, our gracious host, the Colombo Municipal Council. We are most grateful for the Council's dedicated effort in answering our many queries and tirelessly organizing a host of activities for the occasion.

They, like us, perceive that to succeed we increasingly need to learn from one another because we do not have the luxury of time to experiment, to make mistakes, or simply muddle through. We need to partner with others to create collective strength greater than the simple sum of our individual capacities and efforts.

The forum is organized to help participants answer the following key questions:

- What are the good practices of urban management?
- What lessons can we learn from what others have done?
- What have been the challenges faced by others? and
- What are the factors for success?

The program has been designed so that each participant may leave Colombo equipped with new insights on how to address appropriately the key issues that are critically important in the performance of mayoral duties.

This morning, the focus will be on changing the organization's culture to remove major barriers to improved service delivery, and on getting organizations to work in a cooperative, customer-oriented or customer-focused manner. Then the program moves to discussions on how to harness the capabilities of residents through a participatory approach to help enhance service delivery. As a group, you will look for better ways to work with central and provincial government counterparts, through their various public agencies, and with adjacent cities, to achieve your objectives.

Funding has always been a constraint on the kind of services you can provide. This issue will be explored through an in-depth analysis of how public-private sector partnerships can be tapped as a means to overcome funding constraints.

*To succeed we increasingly need to learn from one another because we do not have the luxury of time to experiment, to make mistakes, or simply muddle through.*

Different modes of public-private sector partnerships will be discussed and their applicability for different services examined. This will be followed by a session on evaluation of appropriate techniques for better resource management. Next, there will be an update on the progress of the benchmarking of services in ten cities, and finally a session is included to identify clearly some emerging issues and possible solutions for cities as we move into a new millennium. Included in most of the sessions are practical examples of how issues are addressed and problems resolved.

You will recall that we wish to foster professional friendships among cities to encourage their sharing of knowledge as the need arises. This forum will provide part of that opportunity through breaking up into small group sessions. This feature has been introduced as a result of feedback from the Cebu forum.

The second innovation of this forum is to introduce all of you to the World Wide Web, to demonstrate how relatively easy it is today to obtain extremely useful information, whether it be serious local government matters, world cricket, or online newspapers. Using E-mail as an effective and inexpensive tool to communicate and exchange experiences with one another will also be covered. I trust you will enjoy this experience, which you will find surprisingly easy.

We need your active participation and particularly your assessment of what we could do better to help you, your city, your country, and your region. I sincerely hope that this forum will contribute to further your efforts to enhance municipal service delivery. In the longer term, we hope there will be increasing involvement by some cities, maybe joining forces together to co-host such a gathering with the Institute and others, and helping organize meetings and other friendship gatherings as well. This will result in sustainability and continuity of the program in the future.

**Dr. Sarat Chandran, Secretary-General**

Colombo Plan Secretariat

The Asian Mayors' Forum has provided an opportunity for the Colombo Plan to collaborate with other organizations like ADB, ADB Institute, USAID, and UNDP, to focus on capacity and institution building and governance issues, which form an important sphere of activity and specialization of the Colombo Plan.

As you may all know, the Colombo Plan is one of the oldest intergovernmental organizations in this region. It was established in 1951 for the cooperative economic and social development of the countries of Asia and the Pacific. It started as an initiative of seven Commonwealth countries and evolved in the same pattern as the Marshall Plan for the speedy economic and social development of Asian countries. I must say that Sri Lanka played a very crucial role in setting up this organization, which has over the years grown from a strength of 7 to 25 countries spanning Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Pacific.

The Colombo Plan is one of the few inter-governmental organizations that fashions its programs and activities around the theme of human capital development. Human capital is going to be even more crucial in the coming millennium because the world is entering into an age of information and knowledge revelation. The Colombo Plan is also one of the few inter-governmental organizations, specializing in south-south cooperation. It has a unique comparative advantage in this field because its member countries are in varying stages of economic development and integration with the global economy, and each has its special developmental expertise to share. In this context, the Asian Mayors' Forum provides a special opportunity for countries in the region to share with one another experiences

in the complex management of cities and provision of urban infrastructure. Hopefully, out of the discussions and debate, new paradigms will evolve for better governance practices, resulting in greater efficiency and cost reduction.

The efficient running of a city and its infrastructure is extremely challenging and daunting. It is as complex as, or more complex than, running the most elaborate industrial enterprises. Many issues are involved in the efficient and orderly functioning of a city, including the delivery of infrastructure and related services, waste management and pollution control, providing for the safety of citizens and facilities for entertainment and other civic amenities, transparency and accountability, and strategic planning for the future. The aspects involved are so multifaceted and multidimensional that the human capital skills required in the management of modern cities are immense. In view of this, all of you representing different cities around the globe bring together expertise and experience rarely assembled in one place.

*The human capital skills required in the management of modern cities are immense.*

The cities in this region have become borderless, and one critical issue they face is the overburdening of their infrastructure. The increasing population growth and migration in search of better civic amenities and employment have also put pressure on them. Therefore, the development of the city and its periphery should go hand in hand. City management cannot be looked at in isolation; its strategic planning should take into account how the issue of improving infrastructure can be tackled.

City administration is often faced with the problem of raising adequate resources to meet the costs of services for residents. Since most tax revenues are within the ambit of national and state governments, flexibility available to cities in the area of taxation is rather limited. Cities have to use extremely innovative schemes for increasing

resources that do not adversely affect efficiency and investments. Evolving financial products to generate long-term funds for infrastructure projects is also a challenge cities face. This is another important area that the mayors in this forum will be addressing.

The issue of good governance is as important in city management as it is to a private corporation, or for that matter, a state or national government. Transparency of rules, citizens' participation in city administration, effective grievance redressal mechanisms, and financial accountability all contribute to efficient functioning of a city.

Coordination plays a very vital element in the efficient running of a city. Many activities need to be coordinated to precision. In the coming years, information technology tools will play a greater role in city coordination. Therefore, skill development of personnel involved in the management of a city needs to be given close attention.

I have touched upon a few important aspects that go into the efficient functioning of a modern city. In the next few days you will be having fruitful dialogue and interaction and exchange of ideas on these as well as many other important matters, in trying to evolve a set of best practices for city administration.

Before I conclude, let me leave a thought with you. In the coming millennium we should all aspire to make our cities more efficient and more humane, places where citizens can live comfortably and in the right environment to develop their full potential as human beings. To achieve this, we should not only have the skills to face the challenges of the future, but also the expertise, the resources, and the wisdom to shape and fashion the future for the benefit of all.

*In the coming years, information technology tools will play a greater role in city coordination.*

**Hon. S. Alavi Mowlana**

Minister, Ministry of Provincial Council  
and Local Government  
Sri Lanka

It gives me great pleasure to be associated with you all on this memorable occasion. First of all, let me extend my gratitude to the organizers of this distinguished gathering of about 70 delegates from 10 Asian countries: the People's Republic of China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The Asian continent can boast of many successes this year in contributing to the betterment of humankind. However, the nations in the region are still classified as third-world countries. I hope we can qualify as developed countries in the near future; gatherings of this sort will enable us to discuss matters that will help us achieve our objectives and assist us to take our due place in the world arena.

I see in the audience a galaxy of talents—mayors and other officials who will coordinate and cooperate in order that institutions can operate. For me, that is the most important factor.

I am fully aware of the enormous tasks before the mayors of our region. Because of urbanization, mayors become financially constrained and unable to provide adequate facilities, proper garbage disposal, safe drinking water, etc. They are faced with the urgent need to enhance the delivery of municipal services and develop the capability of their cities to handle such situations. They have to find solutions to these seemingly insurmountable problems within a short span of time. They spend sleepless nights trying to find the right mix to solve these problems.

Mayors also have to contend with opposition around them, but at the same time being conscious of the fact that criticism should be taken in good

spirit, and used to restructure for a successful administration. In Colombo, for instance, the media are very quick to criticize new concepts, but we always allow them to express their views. The opposition in the Colombo Municipal Council is also encouraged to coordinate and cooperate with the present administration to find solutions to our problems. We believe that if we listen, we can improve. After all, the true test of a good leader is being able to win the opposition and critics by making them partners in planning and implementation of government programs.

This gathering will allow us to discuss our common problems and share different solutions that will enable our respective cities to move forward to the future. Our approaches may be different, but we can learn from each other and improve the welfare of our own people.

*The true test of a good leader is being able to win the opposition and critics by making them partners in planning and implementation of government programs.*