

## FIDIC ASPAC CONFERENCE 2018 – COLOMBO SRI LANKA

By Hugh Tait, YPFSC member- Australia

The 2018 FIDIC ASPAC Conference was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from the 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> July 2018, at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH). The conference theme was, “Infrastructure Connectivity in the ASPAC Region” and with the continued growth in the region, volume of infrastructure projects and the growing ability for consulting engineers to work globally this is a very important topic.

The conference had more than 200 delegates attend over the two and a half days, with a noticeably large contingent from China of over 50 and a vibrant contingent of local Young Professionals (YPs).

Arriving on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup>, I took the chance to go exploring around Colombo, including a few tuk tuk trips which gave an interesting perspective to the road rules or at least the local interpretation, as it would appear there is little use for the line markings!



Riding around Colombo in a Tuk Tuk

Registration for the conference started in the middle of the day on Sunday followed by a number of meetings for the various committees, a business forum and ending with the ‘meet and greet’ welcome reception hosted by the Sri Lankan YPs.

The ASPAC YPFSC Meeting was held and chaired by Takashi Matsuo, ASPAC YP Chair. A large proportion of the Sri Lankan YPs attended along with a mix of the other YPs and interested individuals. Some key points discussed were:

- Sri Lankan YP Forum started recently for the ASPAC Conference, with 18 members now.
- There is a growing challenge to make YP’s relevant & get support from member firms.
- The disruptive nature of the industry is a challenge, but an opportunity for YP’s which are typically more dynamic.

After the YP Meeting the ASPAC Executive Committee Meeting was held concurrently with a Business Forum.



Sri Lankan YPs at the YP Hosted Welcome Reception

I attended the business forum to listen to the local businesses, what they do and what projects they have been involved in. I really didn’t know what to expect going into this forum, however was really impressed by the passion of each of the presenters on their businesses, the wide variety of projects and the scope of services offered locally. It was great to see the amount of local involvement with a significant number of large scale developments and highway projects going on throughout the Country and in particular Colombo.

We concluded the day with a wonderful welcome function hosted by the Sri Lankan YPs, with some local food, although the beer was unfortunately not so local and treated to traditional Sri Lankan performances throughout the evening.



The conference started with the entrance of the Hon. Patali Champika Ranawaka, Minister of Megapolis and Western Development, accompanied by other dignitaries. This was followed by the traditional oil lamp lighting and national anthem.

Then we were welcomed by the President ACESL Eng. Kirthi S Senanayake, Chairman FIDIC ASPAC Mr. Liu Luobing and FIDIC Executive Committee Member Mr. Anthony Barry. During his welcome Mr. Anthony Barry made a statement regarding young professionals that really had relevance, young professionals need to be allowed to “Take charge in creating the world they want not the world we give them”.

From my discussions with a wide variety of delegates at the conference (both young and not so young) it was quite clear to me that there is not consistency across the ASPAC Region in allowing young professionals to take charge of the industry. It would appear that this has a little to do with the cultures and practices in each country and also the drive from the young professionals to do so in each country.

The papers presented on day 1 of the conference were all insightful, technically focused and very interesting. With papers including topics on FIDIC Contracts, new technologies and the current investment in Sri Lankan infrastructure. The papers that I took strong messages away from were:

- Dr. Pradeep Perera, ‘Renewable Energy Capacity Procurement Policy of India and Lessons Learnt’.
- Dr. Tissa Liyanage, ‘Implications due to an Integration of Public Transport Terminals for overall Efficiency of Transport Network’.
- Eng Major Nisshanka Wijeratne, ‘Infrastructure Development in Sri Lankan Perspective’.

Dr. Perera outlined the journey India has taken in growing their reliance on renewable energy to the extent they now have targets of 30-35% renewables. The growing renewable demand has resulted in a competitive market place with renewables now a more cost effective source of power than coal! Dr. Liyanage’s statement that, “More roads equals more traffic.....always”, was deliberately provocative and accurate. With Eng Wijeratne, outlining some of Sri Lanka’s transport constraints, with the railway network having not changed since its construction 85 years ago and the cost of new highways being constructed now accounting for 20% of foreign debt and growing quickly.



**Traditional Dancing at the Welcome Reception**

Day 1 ended with the Welcome Reception, which was held at the Western Terrace of BMICH. This event allowed for a wonderful opportunity to network with the other delegates over a drink, whilst being entertained with amazing local performances and enjoying a vast array of local food.



**Traditional Candle Lighting Ceremony, Hon. Patali Champika Ranawaka**

At the end of last session of day 1 Enrico Vink, FIDIC CEO, approached me and asked me to fill in for him as the moderator for the first session on day 2, which I excitedly accepted and I was given the briefing notes for the three presenters to read up on.



It was great to be able to moderate the first session of the second day, having read about the presenters the night before it was pleasure to meet them and get the session started. The three speakers during my session were speaking about quite diverse topics, from Japan, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka, being:

- Atsushi Nishikori, 'Marmaray Railway Project'.
- Ir. Ian Chung, 'How Infrastructures benefit the Community from Hong Kong Experience'.
- Prof. Rangika Halwatura, 'Carrying the Legacy Forward'.

The Marmaray Railway Tunnel is a very interesting project, but more importantly it epitomises everything about the conference theme as it is a 13.5km tunnel connecting Asia to Europe. This was a project that used a significant amount of ASPAC Region technology to create a project that had been over 150 years in the making. During the Ir. Chung's presentation on Hong Kong was the population density, with it being in places more than 50 times greater per square kilometre than Sydney in Australia where I live. The scale of the infrastructure projects in Hong Kong are significant and in many ways unique, though with many lessons for the APSAC region as it continue to grow.



**Hugh Tait Moderating Session 1 - Day 2**

Prof. Halwatura's presentation really brought the focus back from mega projects connecting the region to engineers connecting the communities in the region with the bare essentials they need to live a better life. It was certainly a presentation that I will not forget for a long time and reminded me, and hopefully everyone

else at the conference, the power engineers have in making the lives of those in our communities not only better but humane.



**Takashi Matsuo Co-Hosting the YP Forum**

The session after lunch was the Young Professionals Open Forum, which was chaired by Prof. Rangika Halwatura and Takashi Matsuo. Takashi gave an update on what the ASPAC YP Group had been able to achieve in the past year, which was followed by the announcement of a new ASPAC YP Award which will be presented for the first time at the FIDIC ASPAC Conference 2019.

There were then three papers presented by YPs, which was a great opportunity for all three presenters and they were selected from quite a hotly contested field of papers submitted, being:

- Dr. Zhou Sheng, 'Engineering Consultancy in the New Era of Everything Connected'.
- Chatura Sanjeewa, 'Nature based Solutions for Water from the perspective of Young Water Professionals Sri Lanka'.
- Himalsha Rupasinghe, 'Vertical Greening – A sustainable approach for Greener Cities'.

It was a really great experience to have the Young Professionals Forum as part of the main conference program, with the interest shown by the whole conference delegation validating its inclusion.



The Gala Dinner was held at the conference hotel the, Cinnamon Lakeside Hotel, where we not only once again were fed and watered extremely well, but got to see some unique entertainment and further closing addresses. The music for the evening was provided by the Engineers Band, made up completely of Sri Lankan Engineers!

Being my first time in Sri Lanka, I sought advice before coming from my Sri Lankan friends in Australia, who all recommended getting out of Colombo and seeing the countryside. After looking at the three technical tour options the 2 day tour looked great so I signed up! We had a small group of four for the tour which worked very well, with 2 guides and the delegates being from Japan, India and myself from Australia.



**Sri Lankan Engineers Band at the Gala Dinner**

We were picked up early Wednesday morning which was a bit rigorous for all of us after enjoying the Gala Dinner the night before, however we were quickly on the road with the traffic being better than normal due to it being the Poson Full Moon Poya holiday. This holiday commemorates the introduction of Buddhism into Sri Lanka. One of the interesting traditions on this holiday is the giving away of food and drink by the villages on the side of the road, with the stalls attracting long queues of people and somewhat slowing down the traffic with cars pulling over to receive their servings.



**Elephants at the Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage**

The first stop on the tour was the Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage which gives you the opportunity to see a number of elephants together and up close. It certainly did not disappoint as we were able to get within touching distance of the elephants (though respectfully not touching them). The tour notes gave more information about the history of the elephant orphanage, "The orphanage was established in 1975 and commenced with seven orphaned elephants. Today some of these orphans enjoy the fortune of seeing their calves born in the same location. Assisted by local and foreign elephant experts, Pinnawala commenced a successful captive breeding program and the first baby elephant was born in 1984."

We had lunch at one of the motels overlooking the elephants, which was very peaceful and relaxing, having spent a few days in Colombo and then the long drive to get there. After a bit of souvenir shopping, we went on to see the elephant feeding where the baby elephants are bottle fed.

We proceeded onto Kandy where we were to see a bit of the city and also visit the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, however when we arrived at the Temple the queues were hours long due to the Poson Full Moon Poya holiday. Our guides suggested we postpone our Temple tour until the morning, proposing to instead have a walk around the Kandy Lake. The walk around the lake allowed us to see the Temple from a different perspective of the Temple and experience local stalls and entertainers, which included a snake charmer which I had never seen in person before.

The tour notes gave us more information on the importance of Kandy, "Kandy was the last capital of the Sri Lankan Kings, and is a World Heritage Site. The name Kandy conjures visions of splendour and magnificence. Many of the legends, traditions and folklore are still lovingly kept alive. Drive around the Kandy Lake built by the last Sinhala King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe in 1798."



We stayed at Hotel Topaz which although out the main Kandy town centre, preventing us being able to have a look around, was up on an adjacent hill giving us excellent views and a very peaceful evening.



**Tooth Relic**

We all got going early to make up time lost by not being able to see the Tooth Relic the afternoon before, but it was well worth it! The long queues were gone (in fact no queues at all) and we had much better access to see the Tooth Relic and the rest of the temple. With shoes off at the entrance, we explored the many sections of the temple, with a highlight being a storyline of the history of the tooth relic, with it having being taken and given back by the British amongst a long and storied history. We also learnt that the temple had been attacked in the form of a massive truck bomb and significantly damaged in 1998.

As we got on our way from Kandy to the Moragahakanda Dam, our guides offered us the chance to have a quick stop at a Gem Museum which we accepted. It was very interesting to understand that traditional mining techniques are still used, with the museum including a mock mine shaft, a video on the mining techniques and a wide variety of gems from not only Sri Lanka, but around the World.

We arrived at the Moragahakanda Dam, and were given a personal tour of the dam and power generation facilities, by some young engineers who had worked on the project. Water from the Moragahakanda Reservoir is primarily used to support agricultural needs downstream and this restricts the power generation to some degree. The Hydroelectric Power Station is capable of producing 25 megawatts produced via four turbines, two 7.5 megawatt and two 5 megawatt. Due to the constraints of the agricultural needs the power station has only been tested at full capacity during commissioning and typically runs currently with the two 7.5 megawatt turbines at half capacity.



**The Downstream Side of the Moragahakanda Dam**

The tour notes gave us more information about the dam, "The Moragahakanda Dam is a large gravity dam, and the main component of the larger and more complex Moragahakanda – Kalu Ganga Project, currently under construction across the Amban River at Elahera, in the Matale District of Sri Lanka. Construction began on 25 January 2007. The maiden waters of the dam were released

in January 2017. Morgahakanda/Kaluganga project is the last of the Great Mahaveli project."



**Tour Group drinking Fresh Coconuts**

The last stop on the tour was at a spice garden, which gave us a chance to see all the different spices growing in one garden, as well as some of the products made from the spices.

The tour notes gave more information about the history and importance of spices to Sri Lanka, "Spices are an essential element of the cuisine of Sri Lanka and the Ayurvedic tradition. Visit a garden specializes in the cultivation of these



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substances and get to know excellent the purposes and new uses of certain ingredients. You will find cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, vanilla, cardamom, black pepper and many more in the spice garden. During the period of Dutch, Sri Lanka was very famous for spices and we exported to different countries. That has earned the country the name of 'Island of the spices'."

After visiting the spice farm we had earned ourselves a long trip back to Colombo, with the holiday from the day before now over the traffic was back and we were travelling at the end of the business day. As we got close to Kandy the traffic was so bad we detoured on a longer route to the northwest which took us towards to the airport and then the motorway back into Colombo.

I would like to really thank our two guides Fazil and Nadeeka, who made the 2 days a really good experience. They were able to tailor on the fly to our needs and even had a reasonable sense of humour when it came to the seemingly endless traffic jam!

My first visit to Sri Lanka was a wonderful experience, with everyone I met being very welcoming and enthusiastic to share their culture. I found of particular interest the volume of construction in Colombo which I hadn't expected and am particularly fascinated by the Port City Development.

The conference was extremely well run with very interesting papers, albeit mostly very technical (I know we were all engineers). I couldn't cover everything in this article, but I hope you enjoyed reading about my highlights!

I would like to thank Dr Kamal Laksiri and his Sri Lankan organising committee for hosting a wonderful conference and being extremely welcoming and willing to assist.

A great deal of thanks must also go to Enrico Vink and FIDIC for continuing to support the young professionals forum.



**FIDIC ASPAC Conference Stage Beginning of Day 1**