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on Geographic Names**

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REPORT OF THE DIVISIONS

Situation Report – Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean extending from the southern tip of India having an area of 65,610 sq.km, with a large number of smaller islands around the main land, and having population over 1.9 m. Sri Lanka can claim a long history of civilization based on irrigation and agriculture over 2500 years.

Geographic Names plays an important role in Sri Lanka too as for any other country, in terms of historical, cultural, economical, administrative, ethnic, religious and languages points of view. Sri Lanka is a country whose country name has been changed from 'Sinhala' to 'Ceylon' in English or 'Lankawa' in Sinhalese during the British colonization period. The country gained independence in 1948. The name was changed again to the present name, 'Sri Lanka' in 1972.

The Survey Department being the National Survey and Mapping Organisation established in 1800 by the British administration, has established a geodetic control network and mapped the whole country during the first half of the 19th century.

The most popular topographic map series was the 1" map series on the scale of 1 inch to 1 mile. It contains all the geographical names that are in practical use at the time of preparation of the map series in respect of place/village names, natural or man made topographical features, administrative areas etc. There are 72 maps in this series.

After Sri Lanka converted it self in to the metric system of measurements in 1982, a new topographic map series was published on the scale of 1: 50,000. This was basically a metric version of former 1" series with up to date information collected from Aerial Photographs or from field. There are 92 map sheets in this series. The first edition of this series was completed in mid 1990s, and second edition is in progress.

Sri Lanka is also in the process of preparation another series of topographic maps on a larger scale of 1: 10,000. A little over 30% of the series has been completed and 20% is on different stages of production.

Sri Lanka is one of the participant countries in the Global Mapping programme organized by the International Steering Committee for Global Mapping and a small scale data set of Sri Lanka is available in the ISCGM web site.

We have published a National Atlas in 1988, and the production of second edition of the Atlas is now in progress.

With regard to the Geographic Names, A Gazetteer has been prepared in the office of Geography, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C in June 1960 containing official standard names approved by the United States Board on Geographic Names, as well as unapproved variant names. This gazetteer contains about 29,600 entries for places and features in the country, based on 1” map series. It also contains a glossary of generic terms of Sinhalese and Tamil words.

There is another publication called ‘Village List’ available on Province basis used mainly for cadastral purposes. These lists contain the Village Names with their reference to the cadastral index map and to the administrative divisions.

During the last 2-3 years we have digitized the entire 92 maps in the 1:50,000 map series and created a topographic vector database for GIS applications and Digital Mapping. This database is designed to contain many layers, where ‘PLACES’, ‘ADMIN’ and ‘HYDRO’ layers contain the names as an attribute.

This database has been used to create a digital Gazetteer of PLACES that contains the names and coordinates of places in a few different coordinate systems namely the standard grid coordinate system used in the map series, WGS, Everest and UTM.

Issues

The country has many different types of geographical names.

- Names of the different levels of administrative divisions.
- Names of Natural and manmade geographical features like Islands, Reservoirs, Tanks, Lagoons, Lakes, Streams etc.
- Names of Village, Places, Peaks, Estates, Trig Stations.
- Names of Land Parcels.
- Names of Roads, Lanes & Paths

The names have been generated by one of the three main languages in use, namely Sinhalese, Tamil or English. The standardization of geographical names is a complicated issue in some cases where certain place names are spelt and pronounced differently in different languages mentioned above.