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MRIA takes wing By Indunil HEWAGE

Heralding a new era in the aviation history of South Asia, Sri Lanka's first reinforced international airport Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA) was opened to the skies by President Mahinda Rajapaksa, at 10.54 am on Monday. National Carrier SriLankan Airlines took the lead by landing the inaugural flight to Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport



while SriLankan Airlines Flight UL226 from Dubai to Mattala was the second flight to land at the airport. Air Arabia flight G 90508 from Sharjah to Mattala became the first international flight to fly to Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport and a flydubai flight from Dubai to Mattala was the second international flight to arrive at the airport. President Mahinda Rajapaksa speaking at the inaugural ceremony of Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport said, "Today is a landmark day in Sri Lankan aviation history and the opening of

Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport will bring much needed economic benefits not only to the region but also to country as a whole. Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport will go down in the history as the first international airport built in Sri Lanka with the target of achieving future development goals. "The newly opened airport would even add value to all the products that are being exported, as well as to the country as a destination", President Rajapaksa said.

Priyankara Jayarathne, Minister of Civil Aviation speaking at the inaugural ceremony said, the opening of Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport would be a new turning point in the Sri Lankan aviation history and this would have a major boost to the economy in South Asia as well as to Sri Lanka in general. The ministry in the meantime has drawn plans to develop the Bandaranaike International Airport under the directions of President Mahinda Rajapaksa and plans were in place to further develop Sri Lanka's tourism industry centralizing the 10 domestic airports across the country.



President Mahinda Rajapaksa unveiling the plaque heralding the opening of the Mattala Mahinda Rajapaksa International Airport

President Rajapaksa also refuted speculations over possible closure of Bandaranaike International Airport and the President emphasized that the government has no intention of closing down the Bandaranaike Airport for any reason.

Chinese government Special Envoy Luo Fuha, Vice Chairman of CPPCC of China speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the Mattala Rajapaksa airport mentioned that the newly appointed government of the People's Republic of China is committed to further strengthen the mutual cooperation between Sri Lankan and China in the fields of economic, social,

political, cultural and other important areas.

He also reiterated the Chinese government's commitment to enhance Chinese investments to Sri Lanka thereby encouraging prospective Chinese investors and industrialists to invest in Sri Lanka. The Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport spreads across 2,000 hectares of land and initial stage of the airport consists of 800 hectares. The construction of the airport started way back in 2009 and it has the capacity to handle one million passengers and 40,000 metric tones of cargo per annum.

Proposed new building for Birmingham Maha Vihara

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