

Building a new city from scratch

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MOHAMED SAIMAN was appointed Managing Director of HDC in March 2015 having previously served as Deputy Managing Director, with responsibility to expedite the development of Hulhumalé. He is a graduate of the University of Newcastle and previously worked with the United Nations Development Programme in the Maldives.

The forerunner of the Housing Development Corporation was first established in 2001 as the Hulhumalé Development Unit. Its brief was to undertake the Hulhumalé Development Project which aims at relieving the congestion of the Greater Malé region. The unit was incorporated into Hulhumalé Development Corporation Ltd in 2005. The corporation's mandate was then broadened and its name changed to the Housing Development Corporation Ltd (HDC) in 2009, following a Presidential decree.

The development strategies for the new city have been updated to ensure that Hulhumalé blossoms into a thriving city. Even though HDC is a 100 per cent state-owned company, numerous developments in Hulhumalé are fueled by foreign investments. One example is the residential developments provided via a joint venture with Pruksa International. Several other service providers such as Ooredoo, Dhiraagu and MWSC are foreign investments or have a foreign investment aspect to them. Some of the future developments such as the Tree Top Hospital or the State Trading Organisation hotel are to be managed by foreign parties.

Foreign investors in the Maldives are offered top notch assurances especially via the stability of the political scene and the investment policies in place. These create an ideal environment allowing all parties to benefit. With the modernisation of the investment framework and policies, as well as the introduction of liberal stakes for foreign ownership and full liberty to repatriate earnings, an ideal environment has been created for foreign investors.

The Maldives and its strategic location offers great advantages to the prospective investor. Over the past 25 years, the country has become one of the most visited destinations between the business centres of South East Asia, from Tokyo, Beijing, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur in the East, to Dubai in West. The political stability and the development projects being driven by the government offer a bright future and in particular foreign investors will benefit from the special incentives offered by the Special Economic Zones. The availability of International Arbitration is also a major reassurance for the investor. To invest in the Maldives also means access to a young and dynamic workforce boasting the highest literacy rates in South Asia.

HDC has ambitious plans for the second phase of the expansion of the city of Hulhumalé. The expansion will allow for a total population of 230,000. The diversity of the developments in this new city will ensure its vibrancy. These projects include ones in the tourism, education, financial sector, retail and residential sectors.

The Tourism Island has been designated for tourism-related developments only and its hotels are set to have a capacity of 3,600 rooms, which is higher than any other designated tourism-related facility in the whole region.

The Yacht Marina and the Cruise Terminal planned across the bay of Hulhumalé, and situated among the outer reefs, will be an oasis for visitors. This cruise terminal will be the very first of its kind in Maldives and allow cruise ship to come right to the shores Hulhumalé.

The Heritage Island is intended to be a place of natural beauty and harmonious structures and to act as a place where people can escape from the stress of the city. It will also act as a place where the population can access arts and culture activities. One of its main features will be an amphitheatre for outdoor performances.

Even though the project of Hulhumalé was considered a catalytic development right from the very beginning, it has made progresses that none envisioned back then. The fact is that now at the eleven year mark, the project's population targets are well ahead of schedule. This I believe indicates that the public has taken well to the island. Hulhumalé is already known for the pleasant lifestyle it offers away from the bustle of Malé. Its list of developments is constantly growing to cater for the fast-growing population. Schools, medical facilities, commercial facilities, park areas and facilities for sports have all been completed. Our current focus is on the commercial developments and infrastructure associated with phase two. The opportunities for business and employment are likely to grow exponentially following this phase.

The tourism island, yacht marina and other developments such as the knowledge and IT park not only provide endless opportunities for the young population of the Maldives, but also provide the right sort of environment for foreign investors to profit from the momentous growth that Hulhumalé is powering.