Hambantota, even a few decades ago, was simply a sleepy town with a beautiful beach located conveniently near the Red House that overlooked the great South China Sea. It was known for its salt industry. It offered a convenient stop for those travelling from Colombo to Kataramagama, that shrewdly dyed hilly built to defy Alexander (Iskander) in Persian or Sinhala in Buddhist chronicles. Today Hambantota has become a name which is attracting much international attention.

The mega developments in the area, with its strategically located brand new port, as well as airports and highways which are most certain to come, will position it as the industrial and commercial hub of the South. Meanwhile, Galita will become that beautiful old town for the antiquarians, the literati and the glitterati.

Where does the name “Hambantota” come from? Various dubious etymological explanations for the place name are given in popular discussions. We wish to add our views so that interested readers can bring out their knowledge on this subject. The most likely origin of the name for the coastal town is the word “Sampan” in Sinhala stands for “unloading goods”.

Thus Hak-baan-thota would mean the place where Hak-baan-tota, which has transformed to “Badu-baanava” in Sinhala stands for “unloading goods”). Thus Hak-baan-thota would mean the place where Hak-baan-tota, which has transformed to “Badu-baanava” in Sinhala stands for “unloading goods”). Thus Hak-baan-thota would mean the place where Hak-baan-tota, which has transformed to “Badu-baanava” in Sinhala stands for “unloading goods”). Thus Hak-baan-thota would mean the place where Hak-baan-tota, which has transformed to “Badu-baanava” in Sinhala stands for “unloading goods”).

“Hambantota” is a corruption of “Ambanthota”. It is near Ambagamuva. On the other hand, the coastal town Hambantota is not in a specifically mango-growing area, and it has no special association with “amba” (mango).

“Hambantota” is a name resulting from the conch-shell fishery associated with this location since very ancient times. For a recent scientific report on Chank fishery see Fairaz, M.F.M. and Dumaranatunga. P.R.T; Preliminary investigation of the Chank (Gastropoda: Turbinella pyrum) fishery at Hambantota and Kirinda, Southern Sri Lanka, proceedings of the 9th annual session of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science, December 2002, Colombo. We also mention some of the other "explanations" that have been offered for the origin of the place name. “Hambantota” is sometimes said to be a reference to Muslim or Chinese sailors who used “sampan’ boats and used this harbour. “Sampan” are either Chinese or Moor(Arab) boats, and Muslim people are allegedly called “Hambanta”, based on their use of these boats.

“Sampan” is defined in dictionary as a looser term used in East and South East Asia to designate various small harbour craft and local coastal craft. But early travelers applied the word and its variant forms more widely. We may note that there is a “Hambanta” in Bogawantalawa, casting doubts on simple “sampan”-boat explanations of the place name. The up-country “Hambanta” is a corruption of “Ambantota”.

It is near Ambagamuva. On the other hand, the coastal town Hambantota is not in a specifically mango-growing area, and it has no special association with “amba” (mango). Was Hambantota an ancient harbour? Ananda Guruge has given a discussion (Mahavamsa, 2nd revised edition, p 220) of contacts with Sri Lanka from as far back as 3rd century BCE.

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Leisure Land

by CHANDRE DHARMAWARDANA

Ottawa, Canada

Hambantota, where did the place-name come from?

L

ow public awareness of a major cause of stroke is putting thousands of people at risk, campaigner warns today.

Two-thirds of people surveyed did not know that an irregular heartbeat - known as atrial fibrillation - is a possible warning sign of a future stroke.

About 750,000 people suffer from atrial fibrillation, which is one of the most common heart rhythm disturbances seen by doctors. The most common symptom is a fast, irregular heartbeat, which sometimes speeds up to over 150 beats per minute.

Steve Benveniste of The Stroke Association, which carried out the survey of 1000 members of the public and 3,000 GPs, said awareness of the link was “incredibly low” among the public.

He said: “Atrial fibrillation is a major risk factor for stroke. It accounts for 14% of all stroke and 12,500 strokes a year are thought to be directly linked to the condition."

Professor Gregory Lip, an expert on stroke prevention in atrial fibrillation and Professor of Cardiological Medicine at Birmingham University, said: “We could prevent around four and a half strokes a year in people having a devastating stroke every year if more people had greater awareness of atrial fibrillation and sought out the appropriate treatment from a medical professional.”

Thousands at risk of stroke who don’t know it