

Drip Irrigation Technology – Increase Agricultural Productivity in Sri Lanka

Wicky Wickramatunga



Work is His Passion

After many decades, agriculture has been given a greater focus by the Government, as described in the Saubagyaya Dekma policy document. Sri Lanka is looking at producing its agricultural requirements within the country as opposed to importation. Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage is in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture, and during this short time, he has been able to make great strides in the sector. From increased seed production to cultivation and the introduction of technology to the farmers, there is much activity in the agricultural industry. The Minister adopts a hands-on approach, thereby ensuring results. Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage has always been straightforward and spoken about what he believes in. His work is his passion.



Sri Lanka is a Gem

Saman Upasena, Chairman, KDU Group, is confident about Sri Lanka. He says the country has many opportunities that would bring prosperity. Saman Upasena has expanded the tea business his father founded to become Sri Lanka's largest orthodox black tea manufacturer. Starting from one tea factory, the Group has grown to include eight factories that support more than 20,000 tea smallholders. The Group has expanded under his leadership into power generation through mini-hydropower plants. Venturing into the hospitality sector through challenging times with the iconic DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort, Saman Upasena has shown that with determination much can be achieved. The Resort has seamlessly conserved the environment while providing a luxurious setting. Saman Upasena says that Sri Lanka is a gem and an asset.



Daring to Dream: Connecting Silicon Valley to Sri Lanka

Mangala Karunaratne is the Founder and CEO of Calcey Technologies. He is a former Silicon Valley veteran who launched his software product engineering services company that caters to a global clientele nearly 19 years ago in Sri Lanka.

Data Science and the Potential for Sri Lanka

Dr. Sapumal Ahangama, Data Architect and Founder of Xeptagon, speaks about the emerging trends and opportunities in data science and technology. He stressed on the increasing importance of cryptocurrencies.



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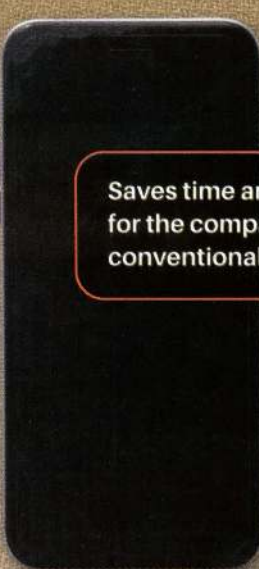
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20 RELIGIOUS CEREMONY AT SIRI ALANMATHINIYARAMA TEMPLE

An alms giving ceremony was held at the Siri Alanmathiniyarama Temple in Kirulapone under the direction of Ven Uduwe Dhammaloka Thero to mark the opening of the newly constructed buildings at the Temple. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Madam Ioma Rajapaksa, Basil Rajapaksa, Head of the Task Force on Economic Revival and Poverty Eradication, and Mrs Pushpa Rajapaksa were also present on this occasion.



24 SRI LANKA IS A GEM

Saman Upasena, Chairman, KDU Group, is confident about Sri Lanka. He says the country has many opportunities that would bring prosperity. He has expanded the tea business his father founded to become Sri Lanka's largest orthodox black tea manufacturer. Starting from one tea factory, the Group has grown to include eight factories that support more than 20,000 tea smallholders. The Group has expanded into power generation through mini-hydropower plants. Venturing into the hospitality sector through challenging times with the iconic DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort, Saman Upasena has shown that with determination much can be achieved.

DFCC Bank takes digital-first approach for Annual Report 2020, in line with 'new normal,' and twingoals of being customer-centric and digitally-enabled



DFCC Bank, having long championed the use of multiple mediums and formats for their annual report, adapted to the times by taking the extra step of holding a digital-first launch for its annual report 2020. This step ensured that stakeholders received the link to the annual report instantaneously after its release. The digital-first approach consisted of:

- ➔ The comprehensive integrated annual report in online HTML format (at the core)
- ➔ The concise integrated annual report in print PDF for archiving and for statutory filing purposes
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- ➔ The Updater Portal and a complementary annual report Updater App which the Bank was the first to offer – for important post-annual report information updates



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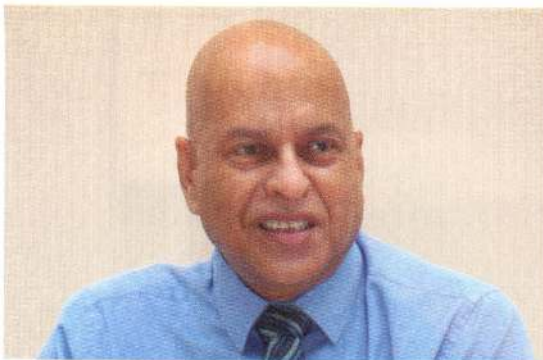


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Despite 2020 being a year of many challenges with lockdowns following the COVID-19 outbreak, the Bank of Ceylon has stamped its resilient leadership position by recording the highest industry profit in 2020.

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Dr. Sapumal Ahangama, Data Architect and Founder of Xeptagon, speaks about the emerging trends and opportunities in data science and technology. With Sri Lanka having a well-skilled and educated cadre of IT professionals, the country can venture into high-end software and product development. Dr Ahangama also stressed the emerging importance of cryptocurrencies, where Sri Lanka should formulate policy in this area so that it is not lagging in the global journey.



46 DRIP IRRIGATION TECHNOLOGY: INCREASE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY IN SRI LANKA

Drip Irrigation provides maximum control over environmental variability and it is the most efficient water and nutrient delivery system for growing crops. It delivers water and nutrients directly to the plant's root zone, in the right amounts, at the right time, so each plant gets exactly what it needs, when it needs it, to grow optimally. Drip Irrigation is the best means of water conservation.

54 DARING TO DREAM: CONNECTING SILICON VALLEY TO SRI LANKA

A former Silicon Valley veteran, who launched his product engineering services company nearly 19 years ago, Mangala Karunaratne, is the Founder and CEO of Calcey Technologies. He spoke about the beginning of Calcey, the journey, the work they do, and their culture and the future as they set their sights on an accelerated growth trajectory.



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WORK IS HIS PASSION

After many decades, agriculture has been given a greater focus by the Government, as described in the Saubagyaye Dekma policy document. Sri Lanka is looking at producing its agricultural requirements within the country as opposed to importation. Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage is in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture, and during this short time, he has been able to make great strides in the sector. From increased seed production to cultivation and the introduction of technology to the farmers, there is much activity in the agricultural industry. The Minister adopts a hands-on approach, thereby ensuring results. Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage has always been straightforward and spoken about what he believes in. His work is his passion.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe.

Photography Menaka Aravinda.

Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage, Minister of Agriculture.

In this Government, you are in charge of a critical Ministry as the Minister of Agriculture. Can you tell us about the progress made so far?

During the last few years, we have been highly dependent on imports. The situation was such that the Government also imported even the agricultural produce we could cultivate in Sri Lanka. We have spent about 250 billion rupees per year on imports. Our Government policy is that we want to stop all imports and grow our requirements.

We are currently spending USD one million per day to import milk, which we can produce in Sri Lanka. We also import the entire requirement of dry chili. In the 1970s, we were cultivating chili in Sri Lanka. It is the same scenario with onions, potatoes, and other such agricultural products. Therefore, our Government policy is to grow agricultural produce in Sri Lanka. We received a large allocation from the Budget to develop agriculture. We are focusing on curtailing the importation of agricultural goods, seeds, and milk powder. If we take chili seeds, for example, we can produce these seeds in Sri Lanka. But we are spending two billion rupees to import seeds. Therefore, our plan for the next four years is to curtail the importation of agricultural food items that we can produce in Sri Lanka. We would not be able to stop importing all food items, but whatever we can, we will focus on cultivating those in Sri Lanka. We want to curtail 85 percent of agricultural imports.

We have developed a comprehensive plan. This year, we are planning to stop up to 35 percent of the importation of chili. We have already established seed villages. We currently have three seed villages; one in Kandy for chili, one in Dambulla for onions, and one in Nuwara Eliya for potatoes. In this manner, we have started the production of seeds because that is our first requirement. Then, we have identified land for cultivation, especially in the North and the East. We need 5,000 ha of chili and 14,000 ha for potatoes. Therefore, we have identified the required land and the beneficiary farmers. Seventy percent of the population in Sri Lanka are directly or indirectly involved in agriculture. The biggest problem that we are facing is that we do not have a national policy. In this country, we have nine Provincial Councils where they follow their procedures in agriculture. Then, the Mahaweli Authority does their program, and the Ministry of Agriculture implements another program. As

For the first time in history, the Ministry of Agriculture, Mahaweli Authority, and the nine Provincial Councils are all working together. We have a policy and a plan. Therefore, we are all working to achieve the same goal.

soon as I was appointed the Minister of Agriculture, the first action we took was developing a national policy on agriculture. We are at the completion stages of the national policy.

The other challenge we face is that it is difficult to plan because we do not have a comprehensive database. We have almost completed the development of the database as well. We will be providing up to 15,000 tabs so that all our agricultural officers will update the data. Therefore, you will obtain all the required information when you enter the farmer's national ID number. The agriculture officers have targets, and it is their responsibility to update the data and ensure the completion of all activities.

The trend has been that each successive Government would change their agricultural policy. Therefore, when there is a national policy, it does not change according to the Government in power; that is why we focus on developing the national policy. We can work now because the national policy is at the completion stages, and we have the database functioning. We now know where we are in terms of progress. In the future, anyone can see the plan and the progress made, and they can continue from that point.

For the past five years, the entire agriculture sector was stagnant, and we had to reactivate the whole machinery. We have more than 52,000 staff, which is more than sufficient. But, we did not have a plan. Every GS division has an agriculture officer. We have given everyone their responsibilities in writing, and they are now accountable for their actions. In the last month, we cultivated 28,000 acres of paddy in a day. We have 535 Govijana Seva organizations. I instructed that everyone has to start developing ten acres. And, I said before commencing to give all the information to the Deputy Commissioners. They have sent me all the information. I also noted that on the day that the work begins, I require the photographs as well. Therefore, no one can give false figures, and everyone is accountable.

For the first time in history, the Ministry of Agriculture, Mahaweli Authority, and the nine Provincial Councils are all working together. We have a policy and a plan. Therefore, we are all working to achieve the same goal. In the 1970s, agriculture contributed 34 percent to GDP, and today it is seven percent. By 2024, the people will see the difference and the development in the agricultural sector. We will regain the glory and be a significant contributor to the economy.

How practical is it to work with many organizations?

Agriculture is a devolved subject; therefore, we have to work with the Provincial Councils. The Ministry has the funding and the technology, and the Provincial Councils have the required human resources and access to the farming community. For example, we have developed advanced technology in the agricultural sector, but this has not reached the farmer. Why? It is the responsibility of the Provincial Council to disperse the technology. The technology has remained in the laboratories and has not reached the farmers because the Ministry cannot directly access the farmers. Currently, what we do is that we meet every three months and we plan our activities. It is very effective and convenient when we all work together.

The Government's decision to focus on import substitution in agriculture, was it a response to the global pandemic, or was it a long-term strategy?

Developing the agricultural sector to produce our country's requirements is a long-term policy decision of the Government. It is not as a response to the global pandemic or the pressure on the US Dollar. If we can cultivate these food items, why should we import them? Agriculture has also become a good source of income and business. We have many large companies approaching us for land and inquiring on whether there are any opportunities.

There is a massive demand for mangoes, bananas, pineapples, and Ceylon Cinnamon for export purposes. Therefore, the increased focus on cultivation is to fulfill the local requirement and cater to the export market. We are planning to supply for export as well. The President aims to curtail imports and increase exports in the agricultural sector.

This year, our paddy cultivation reached 764,000 ha, and we produced 3.2 million metric tons of paddy. In the 'Yala' season, we hope to cultivate another 1.8 million metric tons of paddy. Therefore, in total, for the year 2021, we want to produce five million metric tons of paddy. It is equal to three million metric tons of rice. The country's requirement is only 2.4 million metric tons. Therefore, we have 0.6 million metric tons of rice in excess in 2021, which we can export. Even chili we may be able to ship this year. Many private companies are also interested in agriculture,



The President aims to curtail imports and increase exports in the agricultural sector.

which could be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Agriculture has become a good investment, and there are significant returns as well.

How are you supporting those who are engaged in agriculture?

We are providing 100 percent duty-free for businesses in the agriculture sector. For example, the importation of machinery is duty-free. Furthermore, if a person is investing in agriculture, we provide loans at the rate of four percent interest and provide land from the Government. The Mahaweli Authority has advertised the availability of 20,000 ha of land for agricultural purposes. Furthermore, through the JDB, we have provided land for agriculture.

We are planning to implement an agriculture land bank. There is sufficient land in Sri Lanka for agriculture. The LRC, JDB, SPC, and all the plantation companies, and the Mahaweli Authority all have land. We want to distribute the land from one focal point. We can give businesses the land, provide them with low-interest bank loans, technology, and provide them with the export market.

We are helping individual farmers in many ways. We have our modernization projects. For example, we are looking at stopping the importation of chili; to do that, we need to cultivate 5,000 ha. We give each farmer; if he is growing chili on one acre, we give him 350,000 rupees for one acre. We also provide them with the drip irrigation system, the fence, and the seeds. We provide for private land as well. This program is currently in place in Anuradhapura.

We have 500 acres from Mullativu, 500 acres from Jaffna, 500 acres from Vavuniya, and another 500 acres from Batticaloa. That is 2,000 acres in total. We are hoping to work with former LTTE cadres. I have requested the GA to select the beneficiaries. We will be giving them all necessary items to cultivate, and we are giving them a buy-back guarantee.

Even at the Cabinet meeting, I have informed the President that we have to focus on the North and East if we want to do agriculture. There's plenty of lands, and the soil is fertile, and it is effortless to work with the people.

In Batticaloa, farmers are cultivating chili in 1,200 acres in one village. Every single farmer is growing chili without any support from the Government. The Government needs to have a policy; we should provide the farmers with the technology and guide them on the right path.

We are producing seeds as well. To create the quantity, we give the farmer a grant of two million rupees. We provide them with a tunnel with modern technology, and it is 2,000 sqft, and they can each produce 30kg of seeds within tunnels in Dambulla and Nawalapitiya. Many said that it is an impossible task, but I took the challenge and first started the project in Nawalapitiya. I now have 100,000 sqft of tunnels in Nawalapitiya, and we will produce 1,200kg of seeds for the first time. In this manner, we assist the farmer.

The Agrarian Bank comes under the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture through the Govijana Seva. We use to give only 50,000 rupees, which I have increased to 500,000 rupees. Any farmer can obtain the loan; therefore, they do not need to get money from any third party. We have initiated this process as well.

The most important way we support the farmer is by providing them with the right price and the best seeds. We are also looking at removing the middle man so that the farmer and consumer get the right price. We have economic centers. The reason why the Government established the

The most important way we support the farmer is by providing them with the right price and the best seeds. We are also looking at removing the middle man so that the farmer and consumer get the right price. We have economic centers. The reason why the Government established the economic centers is to provide the right price to the farmers.

economic centers is to provide the right price to the farmers. It has become a supermarket; what has happened is that the farmers have rented out their shops. I will be opening economic centers in Vavuniya, Batticaloa, and Jaffna. We will be giving ten shops each to the farmer associations.

If we provide the farmers with the seeds, technology, the market, and the right price, they will do well.

How effective is the implementation of new technology in the agriculture sector?

The Government has the technology, and we have spent millions to develop the required technology. For instance, in Bathalegoda, we have the paddy technology farm. I do not believe that any other country has such innovation in this sector. Unfortunately, the technology isn't going to the farmers. We have started that process. We have officers known as AIs. We have taught them the technology, and it is their responsibility to take the technology to the villages. We have one AI for a particular AG division. But, we need at least five AIs for one AG division. We are advertising, and we will recruit more, and we will provide them with the training. In another year's time, we can transfer the entire technology to the farmers.

If you take the seeds program, it is providing the technology to the farmers. Previously we had an issue with the water supply, but today, we give the drip irrigation system to all the farmers. I have allocated two billion rupees for the provision of drip irrigation systems.

We have a system to monitor that all the facilities we provide reach the farmer. We have our Director-General, then we have district-wise Deputy Commissioners, and we have officers in the AG and GS divisions. The Provincial Councils are syncing with us well.

How do you break the mafia?

The biggest mafia is in agriculture. There are five groups; seeds, rice, paddy, vegetable, and fertilizer. During the tenure of the last Government, they had imported low-quality fertilizer. The Auditor General's report mentions this. As soon as I became the Minister of Agriculture, we changed the specifications of the fertilizer. Therefore, none in the mafia could come into the tender. They could not supply to our specifications.

We were able to break the first mafia, which is in rice. The mill owners earn about 50 million





rupees from each cultivation season. Our fixed price is 50 rupees; whatever the farmer's paddy, they buy 80–90 percent at the rate of 50 rupees. They buy ten percent at the rate of 70 rupees. They tell the Government that they purchased it at 70 rupees and want to sell it at 120 rupees. I informed the Cabinet that we need to have a buffer stock of at least 300,000 metric tons. I received approval to proceed, and the Cabinet allocated 26 billion rupees for this purpose.

Our price is 50 rupees, I went to the market, and the seller increased it to 59 rupees. I spoke to the Cabinet, and they said to be competitive. Therefore I raised the price to 56.50 rupees, and we were able to purchase paddy. We currently have 62,000 metric tons of paddy. From April 1st onwards, I distributed the paddy to 2,500 cooperatives, 416 CWE outlets, Food City, Keells, and Laugfs. From April 1st, we are selling naadu rice for 96 rupees and red and white kekulu rice for 92 rupees. If we had not taken this action, the prices would have increased rapidly. One person controls paddy, egg by another, maize by two people, and chicken by four people. The

The reason why the President appointed me to this Ministry is to break the mafia. And, I will do so. I have been able to break the rice mafia, and I will break the rest as well.

Government needs to take control. The reason why the President appointed me to this Ministry is to break the mafia. And, I will do so. I have been able to break the rice mafia, and I will break the rest as well.

What is the status of the dairy sector?

We are currently producing only 40 percent of our milk requirement. We have 1.5 million cattle, but only 250,000 can produce milk, and their average production per animal per day is two liters. If you can provide adequate water and food, we can increase the quantity to five liters. We have advertised for mega-farms through the BOI, inviting investors. Currently, we are looking at two projects where we will bring 15,000 animals to the country. We will initiate the first project in Nawalapitiya, where we have the best estate known as Galaboda. It has the best water. Initially, the investor will bring 5,000 animals from the Netherlands, and it will take three years to complete the farm. It will have 100 percent modern technology, and even the animals will be kept in air-conditioned facilities. We are also

looking at providing treatment to 500,000 cattle currently in the country who cannot conceive. Through this project, we will increase the number of milk-producing cows to 750,000.

We are the largest importer of milk powder; thus, we are looking at producing our milk requirement within Sri Lanka. We can achieve this because we have good farms. I am looking at signing an agreement with all the milk collectors, where we will implement a flat rate of 80 rupees per liter. Similar to rice, the milk farmers too will have a guaranteed price.

You have been in politics for 30 years. You gave forgiveness to people who had done wrong to you in the past few years, which is a first by any politician. What can you tell us about this?

During the last five years, I suffered greatly. I was a target because I always questioned the Government's actions as a member of the Opposition. When we lost in 2015, President Mahinda Rajapaksa returned to Medamulana in Hambantota. Six of us went to Hambantota and spoke to him. He said he would not come back, but I disagreed and said that he had to come back. After that, we started the campaign. At the first Hyde Park rally, I was the chairman. I was the chairman of the Kandy to Colombo walk and the chairman of the Nugegoda meeting.

Even personally, they harassed my family and me. My son was studying in the UK, the CID questioned him as well. They put me in jail. At that time, my son and daughter did not feel comfortable going to school. I know the difficulty and the mental stress. Therefore, I cannot agree with incarcerating a person for political reasons. We should stop this culture, and I thought I should start the process.

Who is Mahindananda Aluthgamage?

I am always 100 percent with my leader. When I entered politics, I gave my full support to Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, after that to President Mahinda Rajapaksa, and now, I am 100 percent with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. I never go behind other people or have any different agendas. I am always with one leader.

I always work. I am a workaholic; if you visit Nawalapitiya, my electorate, you will see that I have transformed Nawalapitiya. I was the Chairman of the Kandy District City Development Committee. I did much development work such

My main objective in these five years ahead of us, is to meet our national goals and bring agriculture back to the forefront of our country through our various programs.

as making the roads four-lanes and constructing the new bus stand. Therefore, people know me as a person who works, and they know they can meet me anytime. I have three public days a week, and I meet at least 5,000 people during that time. I meet at least 1,000-1,500 a day, and I speak with people till late at night. Not many can do this, but I can. As a politician, the people know that they can meet me, speak to me and they know I will help them. I have that credibility.

I visit all the areas so even my officials know that they cannot mislead me. I always keep notes, and I check on the progress. At least two days of the week, I visit the districts. I am always with the farmers; I see them and inquire about their progress and requirements. Now everyone knows that I visit the field, in agriculture that is a must. You need to adopt a hands-on approach. I enjoy this sector immensely. The President also has the confidence that I will deliver on the targets that we have set.

My father was a Member of Parliament from 1970 to 1977. He was a very laid-back person, not like me. I am very direct in my approach. I will always say what I believe is right even to the President and the Cabinet. The President is a good listener, and he always makes the right decision. I have always been the same during my over 30-year career in politics. Most of the time, being direct has backfired on me, but I will always say what I believe is right. It is good to be so because I can live with my conscience.

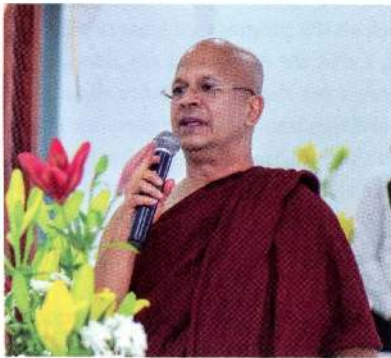
I read a lot, and I am always prepared. I will always attend a television debate or speak in Parliament if I have prepared myself with the relevant details. I have a comprehensive library where I have all the information I require. My work is my passion.

My main objective in these five years ahead of us, is to meet our national goals and bring agriculture back to the forefront of our country through our various programs. I will also show the full capacity of how efficiently we can work if we all work together towards one goal without any personal agenda, which may hinder any progress.

The previous Government made various claims against me, which were baseless and driven by political revenge. I will set an example against this culture. In these five years I will work and prove myself to the people through my work. I will continue to perform at my fullest capacity to serve our nation. ☐

RELIGIOUS CEREMONY AT SIRI ALANMATHINIYARAMA TEMPLE

An alms giving ceremony was held at the Siri Alanmathiniyarama Temple in Kirulapone under the direction of Ven Uduwe Dhammaloka Thero to mark the opening of the newly constructed buildings at the Temple. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Madam Ioma Rajapaksa participated on this special occasion.



Ven Uduwe Dhammaloka Thero.



The alms giving and religious ceremonies were held to commemorate the newly constructed Alms Hall, Gini Hal Geya, Awasa Mandhiraya and Sakman Mediation Garden at the Siri Alanmathiniyarama Temple. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa upon arrival engaged in religious observances and thereafter participated in the alms giving ceremony and served alms to the Maha Sangha.

Basil Rajapaksa, Head of the Task Force on Economic Revival and Poverty Eradication, and Mrs Pushpa Rajapaksa were also present on this occasion. Minister Sarath Weerasekera, Nalin Fernando, MP and Defence Secretary General (Retd) Kamal Gunaratne were also some of the invitees.

The religious ceremony was held to bless Ven Uduwe Dhammaloka Thero and his Mother for their birthdays as well.

The alms giving ceremony was held under the patronage of Anunayake Theros of Malwathu Chapter Most Ven Dimbulkumbure Wimaladhamma Thero, Most Ven Dr Niyangoda Vijitha Siri



Thero, Anunayake of the Asgiriya Chapter Most Ven Veduruwe Upali Thero and Anunayake of the Amarapura Culawansika Maha Nikaya, Chief Incumbent of the Siri Alanmathiniyaramaya Temple in Kirulapone Ven Yogiyan Sobitha Thero.

Most Ven Dimbulkumbure Wimaladhamma Thero, Anunayake of the Malwathu Chapter presented a souvenir to the President. ☐





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DFCC Bank Encouraging Cycling to Work



'Achieving Sustainable Work-Lifestyles by 2030' is one of the big goals that DFCC Bank has identified in its sustainability strategy for 2020 – 2030.

The Bank seeks to advance sustainable workplaces and lifestyles via governance, including sustainable workplace practices and lifestyles for clients and staff in general.

This aim includes a range of elements from promoting diversity and inclusivity to

productivity-oriented wellness and sustainable consumption and lifestyle practices. In this regard, the new 'Bike to Work' initiative, which the Bank's wellness committee launched, 'OMMM', was the latest bank-wide initiative launched to encourage its employees to maintain a sustainable and healthy lifestyle.

This initiative is not a one-off activity as a "Bike to Work" day but organized each month to

propagate a healthy lifestyle across the Bank network.

DFCC Bank has also committed to giving cycling high priority by encouraging staff to take on cycling as a hobby. As this was the first time a bank of this magnitude arranged an official cycle to work day, DFCC Bank intends to dominate the country's cycling space and make it a lifestyle choice. This initiative demonstrates DFCC Bank's

strong commitment to nurturing its staff's well-being, and it also highlights the financial institution's stance on caring for the environment.

As cycling to work has an undeniable impact on reducing the Bank's carbon footprint, the 'Bike to Work' initiative aligns well with the DFCC Bank's focus on ensuring a meaningful and sustainable contribution to climate change mitigation responsible resource utilization. The OMMM initiative, launched by DFCC Bank in 2021, will be introducing many more projects designed to focus on the mental and physical health and well-being of staff and their families.

DFCC Bank is ranked amongst Business Today's Top 30 Corporates in Sri Lanka.

Sampath Bank Hosts Central Bank's 'MatarataQR'



(L-R): Thilak Piyadigama, Chairman, Central Bank of Sri Lanka appointed LANKAQR Committee; Nanda Fernando, Managing Director, Sampath Bank; Chief Guest, Dullas Alahapperuma, Minister of Power; D Kumaratunga, Director – Payments and Settlements, Central Bank of Sri Lanka; and Tharaka Ranwala, Senior DGM – Operations/Group Chief Marketing Officer, Sampath Bank.

Nanda Fernando, Managing Director, Sampath Bank speaking at the event.

Sampath Bank hosted the Central Bank of Sri Lanka's (CBSL) MatarataQR event to drive awareness and increase acceptance and usage of LANKAQR, the Quick Response (QR) code standard in the country.

The event's main objective was to encourage customers to

adapt to QR codes in their day-to-day transactions. Chief Guest, Dullas Alahapperuma, Minister of Power and Guest of Honor, D Kumaratunga, Director – Payments and Settlements, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, senior officials' from the CBSL, other commercial banks, and financial institutions were present at

Matarata. Nanda Fernando, Managing Director; Tharaka Ranwala, Senior Deputy General Manager – Operations/Group Chief Marketing Officer; and Ajith Salgado, Group Chief Information Officer, represented Sampath Bank.

At the event, Sampath Bank actively promoted its 'WePay'

mobile wallet, which helped attract more customers while also onboarding new merchants. A 25 percent cashback was on offer for payments at over 200 merchants in Matara on the day, made via the LANKAQR enabled WePay digital mobile payment app.

Commenting on the event, Nanda Fernando, Managing Director, Sampath Bank said, "We are very proud to partner with the Central Bank to host this event that will highlight the safety, convenience, and speed of getting onboard the LANKAQR payment standard to the people of Matara. These benefits, coupled with the advanced digital banking solutions offered by Sampath Bank, make it a simple choice to migrate to digital payment technology. We warmly invite the merchants in Matara to come to experience the benefits of adopting this new method of payments."

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SRI LANKA IS A GEM

Saman Upasena, Chairman, KDU Group, is confident about Sri Lanka. He says the country has many opportunities that would bring prosperity. Born and bred in Ratnapura, Saman Upasena has expanded the tea business his father founded to become Sri Lanka's largest orthodox black tea manufacturer. Starting from one tea factory, the Group has grown to include eight factories with a fleet of over 250 vehicles that collects tea leaves from more than 20,000 tea smallholders. Furthermore, the Group has expanded under Saman Upasena's leadership into power generation through mini-hydropower plants. Venturing into the hospitality sector through challenging times with the iconic DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort, Saman Upasena has shown that with determination much can be achieved. The Resort has seamlessly conserved the environment while providing a luxurious setting. Saman Upasena says that Sri Lanka is a gem and an asset.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe.

Photography Menaka Aravinda.



Saman Upasena, Chairman, KDU Group.



Can you tell us about the story of KDU Group?

My father, the late Mr. K D Upasena was the Founder and Chairman of the Group. He received his education at St Joseph's College, Bandarawela. My father was a vegetable trader by profession. He was also engaged in gem mining and trading when he found a beautiful cat's-eye gemstone in the Denavaka river in Pelmadulla. We have seven in the family, including myself. My mother had urged my father to invest in a long-term plan to secure the children's future. Thus, they decided to purchase a tea factory. The factory was known as the 'Maha Kade Istoruwa' and we converted it to Galpadithanne, the largest tea-producing factory in Sri Lanka. My father started with one tea factory, but today we have eight tea factories as a Group, and we are the biggest tea producer in Sri Lanka. My brother, Thushan, and I expanded the company.

I completed my education at St Benedict's College. After that, I did my management training at Bartleet House. Then I joined with my father and learned the business from him.

As we advanced, we have diversified into hydropower, tea exports and a Sri Lankan brand

My father started with one tea factory, but today we have eight tea factories as a Group, and we are the biggest tea producer in Sri Lanka.

called 'Tea Jar', and hospitality. DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort is our first initiative in the 5-star hotel category. My initial plan was to manage the property by myself, but later we decided to tie up with the Hilton brand. We knew that a globally recognized brand would serve us better to go forward. The location was ideal in the Hambantota district in the Southern Province. We have a 1.4-megawatt hydropower plant, and I plan to build another five-megawatt hydropower plants very soon.

The Kuttapitiya estate in Pelmadulla is significant, and it has the seventh longest waterfall on the property. The estate belonged to the Siri Pada temple, but it was abandoned, and I was asked to take over. Today, the factory produces more than one million kilos of black tea per annum. But we are looking after the people and maintaining the property. We turned it around.

Today, we have the technology, but in those days, they did everything manually. My parents thinking patterns were far better than ours. As a family, we are very close; even my sisters are very supportive. We are very loyal to the family.

My brother, Thushan, manages four tea factories, but he will never go beyond my word. My wife Lakshi and my children have been a great support to me. My parents would be proud of our achievements.

KDU Group is the largest producer of orthodox black tea. What can you tell us about the tea industry and how you operate?

Tea is doing very well. Previously the tea auction was held at the Chamber of Commerce with everyone's participation, but today with the COVID-19 pandemic, we hold the tea auction online. We have converted 137 years of the tea auction to an online auction, which helps us go forward without any interruptions weekly. Then, the buyer's interest has not diminished. We face some issues with the shipping schedules, but other than that, the demand is good, and the prices are stable. The dollar is appreciating, and the rupee is depreciating; however, we can gain sufficient revenue as manufacturers and exporters.

More than 20,000 smallholders provide tea leaves to the KDU Group. The majority of the tea we process we source from smallholders. The tea from our estates does not reach even five percent. It is not easy to handle 20,000 smallholders. We have tied up with ATMs of DFCC Bank, and we are the first to introduce an online weighing and payment system. Our lorries travel to the interior and venture off-road to collect tea. As soon as smallholders supply the tea leaves, we will record the quantity on our server, and the payment is transferred directly to the ATM Card, which DFCC Bank manages. That was the first such initiative in this industry. There are no third-party involvements because we purchase the tea directly from the grower, and we are the only tea company to receive tea leaves from over 20,000 smallholders. Many other companies obtain their tea from their tea collectors. But, we are operating over 250 lorries in the region of the Ratnapura district to collect tea from the source.

Technology-wise we are the first to automate our manufacturing processes in the tea factories. We are the first to bring more than 100 four-wheel lorries to Sri Lanka as well. We support the national economy by purchasing tea leaves from over 20,000 smallholders, and we are also employing directly and indirectly over 4,000 people. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not cut any salaries of the staff. We

We support the national economy by purchasing tea leaves from over 20,000 smallholders, and we are also employing directly and indirectly over 4,000 people.

continued to deliver on all payments. Last year during the Sinhala and Tamil New Year, people could not move around due to the lockdown. We generally give a gift to our staff, and last year we gave them dry rations. We do many CSR projects as well. From time to time, we do different things.

I do my tea batches every Sunday. It is not an easy task to do during the week because I have many responsibilities, especially the day-to-day correspondences and decisions. Every Sunday, I do my tea batch and also have one-to-one meetings with my managers. Whatever they want to discuss with me, they can do so on that day. In Sri Lanka, tea companies sell their tea through tea brokers as a practice; many of the planters or owners would come to Colombo, and they meet the tea brokers at their offices, and they share their knowledge to both parties and offer the tea to the auction. But in my case, we don't go to brokers, or we don't go to buyers. I do my tea batch at my premises, with my managers, and communicate our pricing. Up to now, there have been no discrepancies. They accept my valuations, and they sell my teas at the price that I expect.

How is the export market?

Recently, the US removed certain sanctions on Iran, which is a good move. Turkey has introduced some taxations. The Russian market is maintaining its orders even in this current environment. Seasonally, if we look at the winter season, there was a drop in tea volumes ordered, but overall the demand and supply are stable. Our main hurdle is Kenya; their market is growing fast, and the need for their tea is high, but they make a lot of CTC teas. As we are orthodox tea producers, our performance is satisfactory.

What should we do to make the industry go forward, considering that the operating environment is different?

A primary requirement in the tea industry is that it is essential to start replanting the tea bushes. In most of the plantations, their harvest is significantly less. Therefore, we need to have a replanting plan. I believe that the authorities have taken measures, and they are giving subsidies for plantations to engage in replanting. We have started, and there is a plan to grow more tea in the next ten years. Other than that,

the biggest challenge is labor, not only for the tea industry but also for any industry. There is a massive shortage of workforce. In the hospitality sector, we can cope because currently, the tourism industry is at a low. But, once normalcy returns, there will be a massive vacuum of skilled workers.

You entered the hospitality industry recently. What made you make that decision?

As we are a manufacturer and exporter, tea is always our homegrown product from Sri Lanka. It is Ceylon Tea. Taking hospitality, South East Asia is becoming an iconic location for tourism. Therefore, I am sure that Sri Lankan tourism will boom in the future. That was the reason we ventured into hospitality. We selected Hambantota because it is not densely populated. There are many resources considering the future, such as the international airport, port, convention center, national parks, the ocean, and the Southern Expressway. With all these infrastructure facilities, I felt that it was an excellent opportunity to venture into hospitality to develop our business. As we advance, we will have a promising future in the hospitality sector.

As the investor, you are very much involved in the hotel's planning, designing, and day-to-day operations. You have adopted a very hands-on approach. Why is that?

I am proud to say that I am fully involved. You can hire companies, architects, and all the staff, but you can feel it when you are hands-on and walk around the property. The initial plan for DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort was to build 70 rooms with all the luxuries with a budget of 600 million rupees. After that, I thought I would have to be either below the 3-star category or move up to the 5-star classification with the infrastructure development and other international chains establishing themselves. After that, the whole idea changed, and I wanted a nature-loving location. The property has a 270-degree view of Weerawila Lake. Hambantota is in the dry zone, so if you have much green, people living in commercial cities such as Colombo want to have greenery and a water-front when they want to go outstation for relaxation. Therefore, I changed my plan, and I designed everything with my architects. Our initial budget of 600 million rupees went up to six billion rupees to offer a

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5-star resort. I am proud to say that we are still a free-hold property.

The hotel is well spread out across the property, with 78 rooms taking ten acres. It is generally debatable whether a resort should provide banquet facilities, but that is another revenue-generating area. We built it in a separate location so it does not disturb the hotel and main lobby. All in all, I believe we have created a lovely holiday destination.

In the interior, we have decorated certain spaces in the hotel with Sri Lankan traditional instruments such as the 'rabana' and 'udekki'. The reason being is that I wanted guests to feel and remember the cultural pageants of our country, such as the Dalada Perahera in Kandy.

The pool has a length of 97m; it is one of the longest pools found in the country. Once again, we did not remove any trees, and there are many hangout spaces near the pool, and we have lovely gazebos near the lake, which gives guests relaxation. You can see birds because the property is home to migrant birds. If you go in the morning, you will see Pelicans and Spoonbills, one of the most popular birds found in the Sanctuary. That is why we named the all-day dining restaurant, Spoonbill.

You gave priority to the environment when constructing the resort. Can you elaborate?

I will give a simple example; we had an all-night Pirith ceremony on September 20, 2020. The day before, there was heavy rain, and it was windy. Suddenly a big tree had fallen into the swimming pool. The General Manager wanted to get some advice from me because I was in Colombo to cut the tree. I advised him not to and said that if a person injures his leg, we do not cut it off.

Similarly, I instructed him not to cut the tree because it is the beauty of the property. As soon as the function was over, we lifted the tree and held it upright with steel crutches. I did a nice story, which said the tree talks to the people. That is just one example of how we look after the trees. We did not even remove the old logs, and we have kept them where they are. We designed the entire resort so that we did not cut any trees during its construction.

Why did you decide to go with Hilton?

The name of the property includes Rajawarna. The Rajawarna tree is prevalent in that area, but

I have not seen it in other regions except for the one tree on the property. We were going to manage by ourselves and name the property Rajawarna. There are many international brands available in Sri Lanka, and there is one in the Hambantota district. Then other large Sri Lankan hospitality chains also have their properties in Hambantota. We need to build at least to the same level, or we would not be successful. That was the idea to tie up with Hilton. Without having an international brand locally, yes, we would be able to do well, but it is challenging to capture the market internationally.

What has the response been so far?

The response has been excellent. As we opened during the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not expect such a response. But many people are unable to travel overseas at this time. They wish to travel within Sri Lanka and stay in luxury properties. From December 2020 up to April 2021, our performance is satisfactory. Initially, Hilton wanted a three months working capital. But we refused, and they agreed to one month's working capital. You can see how the progress has been because the hotel managed the rest of the expenses.

You didn't stop but continued through the challenges?

We were able to continue because of our tea business. It was a blessing. Even though the entire country was on lockdown, the Government gave special permission for the tea industry to work. We were able to bring the tea leaves and do the processing. That was the turning point. We continued with the business, and the people were with us. When they announced the lockdown for the entire country last year, we had some foreign employees working for us at the hotel site and could not move out of the country. I spoke to the relevant authorities, and they permitted us. Even the contractor was willing to work in-house, and we had to create a bubble with all the COVID-19 health regulations we managed to keep employees inside the premises. I have to thank Hotel General Manager, Krishantha Damunupola; he was with us for three and a half years. He took the challenge and the initiative and said that he would stay with them and ensure that the work continues. And, also my son Deelaka. Both together, they were excellent support and the Group CEO, Dr. Susantha Pinto, as well. That was a turning point.



We were able to continue because of our tea business. It was a blessing. Even though the entire country was on lockdown...

From March 2020, we focused entirely on the hotel pre-opening, and we achieved our target on November 24, 2020.

Silver Ray has been an iconic stopover when traveling via Ratnapura. What was the thinking behind this restaurant?

Silver Ray is located in Lellopitiya in the Ratnapura district. People who travel to Ella, Udawalawe, and Nuwara Eliya pass through this location, and many visit the famous Saman Devalaya in Ratnapura as well. Silver Ray is a known place by everyone. If anyone travels on that route, Silver Ray is the place they stop to relax and refresh. I built Silver Ray because my children would be unhappy whenever they came home to Ratnapura from Colombo, saying no place to hang out. Then, I thought there has to be a place for families to go out and enjoy themselves. We provide clean washroom facilities and good refreshments that we serve at a reasonable price. We maintained high standards from the very beginning.



We have a Grand Piano at Silver Ray. It requires space, and generally, we would keep a Grand Piano in a hotel lobby. But in a restaurant, it is a challenging task to do so. It takes the space of about eight to ten covers. When people are traveling and stop for refreshments, they do not want to listen to loud music. We wanted to provide them with subtle oriental music. Sometimes I have seen young girls and boys listen to music and sing songs. They want to play the piano. We have to cater to the requirements of the clients. That is why everyone remembers Silver Ray. If you see the food spread, it is apparent that we have not considered the cost. It is impossible to serve fresh juice with meat/seafood items with rice, noodles, or pasta for 500–600 rupees. But we must have a long-term objective. If you serve good food at your restaurant, then your banquet facilities will automatically be full. It gives you a good reputation.

We aim to offer a 1,000 seating banquet known as Grand Silver Ray, and it will be


With the resources we have, Sri Lanka is a lucrative location with many opportunities. We have that confidence... This country is an asset and a gem.

coming up in September 2021. That will be the only hall in without any pillars having the capacity to accommodate 1,000 seating.

How do you manage everything?

If you are a person who is concerned about the time and works according to a schedule, it is possible. If you are enjoying your business or job, you do not feel the time pass. I can do more work during the day.

Do you feel confident with the challenging period?

Globally, it is a challenge for everyone. With the resources we have, Sri Lanka is a lucrative location with many opportunities. We have that confidence. I was born in Ratnapura, but I have built mini-hydropower plants, hotels, and tea factories. We have been able to maintain the name as the largest orthodox black tea manufacturer in Sri Lanka. This country is an asset and a gem. 



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Samsung Launches Galaxy A52 and Galaxy A72



Samsung announced the sale of the Galaxy A52 and Galaxy A72 in Sri Lanka. The latest Galaxy A Series combines everything smartphone users want in a unique and affordable package.

The Galaxy A series will also enhance your mobile experience by providing access to the broader Galaxy ecosystem of connected devices, such as Galaxy Buds Pro, Galaxy Smart Tag, and Galaxy Tab.

The Galaxy A52 and Galaxy A72 feature a refreshed design that is simple yet purposeful with a soft-edge design,

minimal camera housing, and unified color for the camera and body. They are available in two colors, black and blue, with a soft haze finish. The Galaxy A52 and Galaxy A72 are water and dust resistant, with an IP67 rating for the device's carefree usage.

Enjoy uninterrupted content on the Super AMOLED Infinity-O display screen. For absolute smooth scrolling, the series sports a 90Hz refresh rate. Keep browsing and scrolling social media even outdoors with the increased 800 units of luminance. The Galaxy A52

sports a 6.5-inch screen, while the Galaxy A72 sports a 6.7-inch screen. The Galaxy A52 and Galaxy A72 automatically adjust the display color temperature based on smartphone usage patterns to reduce eye fatigue with Eye Comfort Shield.

The new Galaxy A series smartphones sport a 64MP quad-camera set-up with an ultra-wide lens and a macro lens to shoot vivid, crisp photos and videos. Turn your favorite moments from 4K videos into 8MP high-resolution images with the 4K video snap feature. Samsung uses advanced AI to enhance color, brightness, and sharpness with the Scene Optimizer feature. Optical Image Stabilization reduces accidental blurs, ensuring photos and videos are sharp and stable in addition to the night mode feature that uses multi-frame processing. The Galaxy A72 camera goes a step further by including a telephoto lens enabling three times Optimal Zoom. The Galaxy A52 and Galaxy A72 both come with a 32MP front camera for high-resolution selfies. It also comes with a 4500mAh battery in the

Galaxy A52 and a 5000mAh battery in the Galaxy A72. Along with this, adaptive power saving adjusts to usage by leveraging AI to manage and analyze battery consumption patterns. It comes with a 2.2GHz octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 720G 8nm processor.

For advanced gaming and performance, there is Game Booster. The redesigned One UI 3.1 interface enables intuitive experiences and consistent interactions by increasing speeds and reducing distractions.

The new Galaxy A series comes with Samsung's defense-grade security platform Samsung Knox to safeguard personal information and data in real-time. Samsung the Galaxy A security further by extending updates for at least four years. The Galaxy A52 is available at 74,999 rupees for 8GB+128GB, and the starting price of the Galaxy A72 is 89,999 rupees for an 8GB+128GB memory variant. It is available in an 8GB+256GB memory variant. The series is available at island-wide authorized dealers at authorized partners and via the online portals.

DFCC Bank Donates Handwashing Booths to 65 Rural Schools

As a part of 65th anniversary celebrations, DFCC Bank donated and installed handwashing booths in 65 rural schools spread across the island to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

To curb the spread and flatten the curve of COVID cases, sanitation and hand hygiene are vital in protecting oneself and those around you. In a school environment, the enforcement of proper hand hygiene will significantly reduce the spread of the virus.

To execute this vision of giving the children of Sri Lanka a safe and hygienic experience on school premises, DFCC Bank obtained the

support of the Ministry of Education.

A significant amount of ground-level research was conducted by representatives from DFCC Bank to select 65 of the most rural schools that needed the support of the bank's helping hand.

DFCC Bank's Sustainability purpose is to 'Contribute towards a resilient Sri Lanka', and building 'Resilient Communities' is one of the three key sustainability dimensions under its sustainability strategy.

In addition, the Bank also focuses on six crosscutting themes for implementing its

sustainability strategy, namely: education, elderly, entrepreneurship, environment, emergency relief, and exercise. Thus, the Bank is always committed to conducting CSR projects of this nature, supporting the country's education system and as an emergency relief.

As a socially responsible financial institution, the 65th anniversary celebrations of the Bank were a humble affair as its primary objective was to give back to the Sri Lankan community at large.

Together with the many other CSR initiatives conducted because of its 65th anniversary,

this project set an example to other corporates as DFCC Bank truly identifies the real needs of the country's rural communities.

These donations were undoubtedly well-received as numerous schools that benefited from this initiative reached out with heartfelt letters, expressing their gratitude towards DFCC Bank. It is expected that as the year progresses, DFCC Bank will identify and provide for even more of the country's rural communities.

DFCC Bank was ranked amongst Business Today's Top 30 Corporates in Sri Lanka.



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Despite 2020 being a year of many challenges with lockdowns following the COVID-19 outbreak, the Bank of Ceylon has stamped its resilient leadership position by recording the highest industry profit in 2020.



(L-R): M R N Rohana Kumara, DGM – Recovery Provinces; R M N Jeewantha, DGM – International Treasury and Investment; M P Ruwan Kumara, DGM – Finance and Planning; W P Russel Fonseka, CFO; Kanchana Ratwatte, Chairman; D P K Gunasekera, General Manager; K E D Sumanasiri, Senior DGM – HR; and W N P Suranimala, DGM – Corporate and Offshore Banking.

The Bank's operating profit for 2020 was 29 billion rupees. Profit before Tax was 23.6 billion rupees, and Profit after Tax was 17.8 billion rupees. The asset base grew by 24 percent to 2.9 trillion rupees, primarily backed by an increase of 28 percent in the loan book. Crossing two trillion rupees in its loan book was another milestone. Government and private sector lending contributed to growth during the year, while working capital and personal lending showed a boost in all segments, including retail and corporate financing.

Kanchana Ratwatte, Chairman, Bank of Ceylon, said, "The year 2020 was a challenging year amidst the pandemic, but we stood up to the challenges and the demands and came up with new ideas to serve the masses. The figures that we have released today show that we are the undisputed leader in the industry.

We reached the landmark asset declaration of one trillion rupees in 2012, which we have increased to three trillion rupees as of present."

"The Bank of Ceylon continued its leadership position throughout 2020. We had a triple achievement of 24 percent in asset growth, 28 percent increase in loans and advances, and 23 percent in deposit growth. As a State bank, Bank of Ceylon had to assist the Government's efforts to sustain the economy amidst the challenging pandemic-hit environment. Hence, we ensured that selected branches remained open throughout the lockdown phases for essential banking activities. The Corporate Branch, Trade Services and Treasury were operating throughout without full closure on a single day," said D P K Gunasekera, GM, BOC.

Russel Fonseka, CFO, said, "BOC's long-term development and sustainable

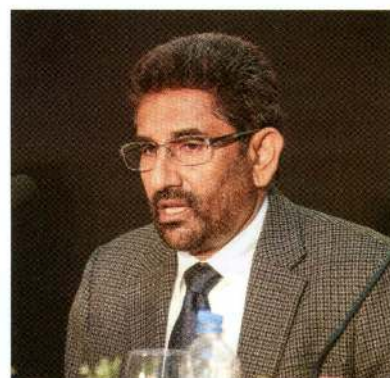


Kanchana Ratwatte, Chairman, BOC.

operations ensured that we were able to function as normally as possible in 2020. At the end of the first quarter of 2021, BOC has successfully increased its asset base above three trillion rupees. We are

grateful to our customers, stakeholders, our staff, and the Government for assisting us in this journey. This three trillion rupee is more than a number; it is more than just capital, it consists of assets that belong to the Bank spread throughout the country; it represents the entire economy of the country. The Bank's benefits also trickled down to the SME sector and the large scale enterprises, which we believe is in line with the Government's Vistas of Prosperity program. There has been a revival in the

and create new and indirect job opportunities while protecting our customer base. We have extended easy, and tailor-made settlement plans to these underperforming businesses, thereby enabling them to repay their monthly dues." Ruwan Kumara, DGM – Finance and Planning, said, "In reaching our asset base of three trillion rupees, which was an increase of 24 percent, we were able to increase our credit portfolio by 28.3 percent. I believe this is the largest increase reported in recent history by any



D P K Gunasekera, GM, BOC.



*W P Russel Fonseka,
CFO, BOC.*



*M P Ruwan Kumara,
DGM – Finance and
Planning, BOC.*



*R M N Jeewantha,
DGM – International Treasury
and Investment, BOC.*



*M R N Rohana Kumara,
DGM – Recovery Provinces,
BOC.*



*K E D Sumanasiri,
Senior DGM – HR, BOC.*

post-COVID period with the emergence of new entrepreneurs, while existing entrepreneurs have changed the way they did business. So as a Bank, we are ready to assist them on their new journey. We will continue to work towards increasing our asset base further from its current lead."

M R N Rohana Kumara, DGM – Recovery Provinces, said, "The Government and the CBSL had introduced several credit support schemes in the form of moratoriums for various sectors. Under these schemes, we have given the maximum concessions to all the affected parties. We established a fully-fledged Business Revival Unit recently, which has reached out to underperforming and struggling entities to revive them. We have more than 40 large-scale businesses; up to now, we have rehabilitated nine of them with loan facilities of up to 25 million rupees, and we hope to deal with the rest of the businesses shortly. Our intervention is not only helping the revival of the economy. Still, it helps to protect employment in these businesses

bank in the country. Bank of Ceylon achieved this milestone in its second quarter of 2020. We hope that the benefits would be reflected in the second quarter of 2021. BOC increased its investment portfolio by 26 percent because as our bottom line improved, we maintained our liquid assets at a substantial level, the benefits of which, we hope, will be reflected in the Bank's 2021 performance." Despite the pandemic, the Bank had an excess of dollars from foreign remittances and export conversions, said R M N Jeewantha, DGM, International Treasury and Investment. "In terms of dollar liquidity, the institutions that we used to borrow dollars from were reluctant to part with foreign currency during the pandemic. In the meantime, we also had been downgraded, while other countries had imposed restrictions on overseas money remittances. This caused us a few issues in terms of dollar liquidity because we accept many inward remittances. Still, BOC continues to have the biggest market share in terms of inward remittances, which was a massive 2.8 billion dollars'

worth in 2020, which is substantial in terms of the 7.1 billion dollars' worth of remittances received by the country last year, which was a six percent increase. The BOC created this growth because we have maintained our market share of over 40 percent in inward remittances for the past five to six years. The BOC is holding the market share for the 1.3 billion dollars' worth of inward remittances so far for 2021, and this has been possible because of the instant and efficient services provided by the Bank to our overseas employees to remit money; without a hassle."

K E D Sumanasiri, Senior DGM – HR said, "This achievement was a result of our staff who have worked tirelessly and with the dedication to help uplift struggling businesses and to enable inward remittances from our migrant workers. We followed stipulated health guidelines, including sanitizing and the use of sanitizer and safety gear and devices, and thereby created a safe environment for our employees to work in." ■



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Arugambay PodBay is a novel concept that comprises compact convertibles (NapPods) in pastel hues, HomePods and Bay rooms. The seaside hotel has one of the largest swimming pools in the area (WaterPod), and the restaurant PodPod serves a range of cuisine and beverages in an area ideal for relaxation.

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8 DECADES OF TRUSTED DIMO AFTER-SALES SERVICE

DATA SCIENCE AND THE POTENTIAL FOR SRI LANKA

Dr. Sapumal Ahangama, Data Architect and Founder of Xeptagon, speaks about the emerging trends and opportunities in data science and technology. With Sri Lanka having a well-skilled and educated cadre of IT professionals, the country can venture into high-end software and product development. Dr. Ahangama also stressed the emerging importance of cryptocurrencies, where Sri Lanka should formulate policy in this area so that it is not lagging in the global journey.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe. Assisted by Swetha Ratnajothi. Photography Menaka Aravinda.



Dr. Sapumal Ahangama, Data Architect and Founder of Xeptagon.

How important is data science for Sri Lanka?

I will explain by taking an example; if we look at the manufacturing industry, Sri Lanka has competition from countries like China and India. They have low labor costs and might have an advantage when it comes to raw material sourcing. One way that we can improve our performance and cost reduction is through the use of insights generated from data. We can achieve the targets by optimizing the production schedules using AI based real-time scheduling software. For example, in a large manufacturing facility, if we save a minimum of one percent of the cost, the savings will be in multi millions. There are many other examples from Sri Lanka where data science can be used to solve multiple issues. The applications vary from agriculture management, healthcare services, traffic control, finance, fisheries, and tourism among many others.

Xeptagon, our data science consultancy, predominantly has clients from overseas, but in Sri Lanka, we see the interest growing. Some big companies are taking the initiative. For example, recently, we had a conversation with a telecommunication company and an insurance company in Sri Lanka that needed to streamline some tasks using data driven approaches. Another manufacturing company is already implementing one of our AI driven applications into its processes. It is a good move that Sri Lankan companies are more interested in these solutions; otherwise, we will not survive globally.

The Government, in its policy direction, is taking a long-term view in the technology sector. How will this take Sri Lanka forward?

The President and the Government are pushing for IT education, which is one key factor in Sri Lanka. I have seen the Government's efforts where they want to increase the computer science-related students' intake for higher education. Other initiatives include the facilitation of studying for an IT degree while working, through programs offered by state universities and other affiliated institutions. The Government's focus on developing IT Parks and providing tax reductions for IT companies should be commended as the industry generates a lot of foreign exchange.

What are your thoughts on the human resources in this sector?

We have highly skilled graduates passing out from universities and other institutes providing

The President and the Government are pushing for IT education, which is one key factor in Sri Lanka. I have seen the Government's efforts where they want to increase the computer science-related students' intake for higher education.

higher education and training at various levels. We have graduates from the Faculties of Engineering and Information Technology of the University of Moratuwa, the University of Peradeniya, the University of Colombo, and institutes like SLIIT among many others. There are many such institutes, and we have a large pool of graduates with a variety of skills and talent. Very often, it is hard to find good resources because many companies compete for high quality resources. We hope that the output numbers will increase over time while maintaining the quality of the graduates. Another challenge is that many graduates migrate overseas seeking better opportunities after receiving four to five years' experience. Therefore, we need to address the issue of retaining good talent in Sri Lanka.

What is the potential for this sector in Sri Lanka?

In Sri Lanka, we need to identify our specialized areas. Our target should not be to do simple business processes outsourcing or having call centers as they can be done cheaper elsewhere. We have to make sure that we target the high-end clientele and develop high-end products. For example, if we take companies such as MillenniumIT, WSO2 and other similar grade companies, they produce advanced software products. We should keep heading where we develop software engineers and other specialists to work on advanced software products. Whenever a foreign country wants to build an advanced product of high quality, they should remember Sri Lanka's name to consider. Thus, we should push for higher quality advanced system development in Sri Lanka.

Today, in Sri Lanka, we find Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, and data science becoming part of the conversation. How relevant do you think it is for Sri Lanka?

AI has become part of day-to-day life and it will continue to be a part of our lives. Most of the applications that we use on social media run on AI. If you watch a YouTube video, based on what you watch, you will receive recommendations. Let's say you search for something on Google, and then you receive related advertisements. These programs run on machine learning.

As I mentioned earlier, application of AI is highly relevant to Sri Lanka. It is the field where we haven't still utilized the full potential. Many problems surrounding the day to day lives may

have a solution if we think differently and apply AI after a proper analysis of the problem. We may use AI and data science to achieve higher productivity in the fields of healthcare, transportation, agriculture, fisheries among many others. The applications are diverse; diseases such as dengue could be controlled by identifying the spread patterns, using real time smart traffic control solutions, traffic congestions can be eased in cities, planning complete land allocation for agriculture and estimating the output, and identifying the most profitable areas for fishing are some examples.

There are many start-ups in this area. How do we compare globally?

We do have start-ups building great products as well as supporting overseas clients in their product development. Talent wise we can compete globally. However, so far, we have not seen big product brands originating from Sri Lanka in the IT sector. We haven't heard of companies in the scale of Facebook, Twitter, DropBox, or Zoom coming up from Sri Lanka. There have been several global companies, of course, and we have local tech companies supporting their development. We need to see unicorn start-ups valued more than one billion dollars coming up from Sri Lanka. It requires a great effort to build something of that scale. It is not only technical development, you also need a great idea, a good team, mentoring and investment support.

Can you tell us about Xeptagon and the services it offers?

Xeptagon is a startup that focuses on specialized software development. The office is located at the Colombo Innovation Tower. Our skill set includes capabilities of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning and Data Science. We also have a full stack engineering team that can develop complete end-to-end software from requirement gathering to deployment and maintenance.

I established Xeptagon with the support from my professors in the National University of Singapore and Hong Kong University, where we do cutting-edge consultancy work and technology implementation in Sri Lanka. Around 16 engineers are working with us now although we started operation about a year ago. We support various high-tech software developments such as low latency products, scalable applications, machine

An exciting topic these days is blockchain and cryptocurrency. It is not yet widespread in Sri Lanka, and many are not using bitcoin or cryptocurrency as yet. But globally, it is picking up.

learning solutions, and fintech application, which requires immense engineering effort. Recently, we ventured into the blockchain and cryptocurrency side too. We want to build a core engineering team in Sri Lanka, which will help to develop advanced software solutions in Sri Lanka.

Xeptagon currently provides software development services to several renowned companies including listed companies and enterprise system development consultants based in Singapore, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Norway, and Hungary.

Can you tell us about your research and the emergence of cryptocurrency?

I am currently working with my professors from the National University of Singapore and Hong Kong University. An exciting topic these days is blockchain and cryptocurrency. It is not yet widespread in Sri Lanka, and many are not using bitcoin or cryptocurrency as yet. But globally, it is picking up.

Our company, Xeptagon, is also supporting development in this area. One project that we are working on is NFT, a Non-Fungible Token where you can buy and sell digital art. Our team also supported a Norwegian blockchain startup in the supply chain field by carrying out software development work in Sri Lanka. We are discussing with another company where they want to release their own token, and we are supporting its development in Sri Lanka.

Although not widespread, I see a small growing community in Sri Lanka interested in Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies mainly for financial gains. With bitcoin currently at an all-time high around USD 60,000, the interest is growing.

In the Sri Lankan context, we do not see a state policy on cryptocurrency, which is essential. In 2017 and early 2018, when bitcoin hit around USD 20,000, the Central Bank warned people of the risks and to engage in cryptocurrencies at their own risk. I see similar media articles recently with the prices surging again. The Government may need to formulate a clear policy on this subject. Countries such as USA, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea have their own policies, which were drafted several years back. We need to focus on this area and take a forward approach similar to Singapore, South Korea or Japan rather than a backward approach similar to what is proposed in India. There are cycles in business trends.




Bitcoin started with a value of less than one dollar, and today within a decade, it has reached up to USD 60,000. Initially, bankers and financial experts believed it to be a scam and that it did not have a future. It was mainly due to the lack of understanding. But today, many large organizations have started to see the potential, and they are joining the process. For example, you can buy cryptocurrencies using PayPal in selected countries, and you will also be able to spend on various online retailers soon. Top class investment firms such as BlackRock, Ruffer, Goldman Sachs, and DBS Bank in Singapore are gradually moving in this direction. We see a lot of institutional investments from companies such as Tesla and MicroStrategy.

Sri Lanka should take a serious look at the potential of cryptocurrency because the world is adopting it. Japan, China, South Korea, the USA, and some European countries are adopting cryptocurrency; thus, we cannot be left behind. It will be the future of finance, especially with concepts like decentralized finance (DeFi), where you can do many advanced finance processes using blockchain technology. Many applications will emerge surrounding this concept. For example, with cryptocurrency, the middleman is eliminated from the equation. Therefore, if we take the transaction of giving a loan, only the

Sri Lanka should take a serious look at the potential of cryptocurrency because the world is adopting it... It will be the future of finance, especially with concepts like decentralized finance (DeFi), where you can do many advanced finance processes using blockchain technology.

lender and the loan recipient will be involved. You can define how you are going to lend as a smart contract. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw many countries printing money. This is not the case with Bitcoin. Predefined algorithms will control inflation. We should have a roadmap because it might most probably be the future of finance, and we should be ready before it's too late.

Can you tell us about yourself?

I studied up to O/levels at S. Thomas Prep, Colombo 3 and then went to Royal College, Colombo 7, for A/levels. I completed my undergraduate degree at the Department of Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering, University of Moratuwa. After that, I worked in Sri Lanka for a few years at MilleniumIT. Then, I decided to pursue my Post-graduate studies leading to Ph.D. at the Department of Information Systems and Analytics, School of Computing, National University of Singapore. I returned back to Sri Lanka after completing my Ph.D. program in late 2019. Currently I am lecturing on a contract basis at the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, University of Moratuwa. I also established Xeptagon with the support of my professors in the National University of Singapore and Hong Kong University. 

DFCC Bank Enhances Website Services

Income Tax Calculator

DFCC Bank Personal Income Tax calculator is made available for you as a self-help tool for independent use and to help prepare your tax returns. This tool is for illustrative purposes only.

Click > If you wish to expand the main sections and calculate in detail

Scan to Experience Now

Employment Income

Salary Income LKR 0.00 Monthly Annually

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Business Income LKR 0.00 Monthly Annually

Other Income LKR 0.00 Monthly Annually

Total Qualifying Payments LKR 0.00

TOTAL TAX LIABILITY FOR Yr 2020/2021 0.00

Total Annual Income 0.00 LKR

Total Qualifying payments (Tax credit) 0.00 LKR

Total Taxable Income 0.00 LKR

Click here to apply

Open a savings account

As a part of DFCC Bank's ongoing effort to enhance its digital service offerings via the Bank's dedicated website, the Bank introduced a new income tax calculator tool. The debut of this tool complements the existing gamut of interactive services and tools made available to customers through their industry-leading website.

The income tax calculator has features that can be optimized according to the

customer's inputs. In addition to that, the values in LKR can be entered according to various income forms, including employment, investment, and business income. Additional fields such as other income and qualifying payments are also available for input, making the entire customer-specific.

The collapsible fields also allow for customers to segregate each form of income. As a bank that understands the

uniqueness of each customer's income, the collapsible areas enable inputs to be made in subcategories such as rent, dividends, and consultation income, among many other options.

Customers are also given the preference to input the income as a monthly or annual figure. If the form of payment is input as a monthly figure, the tool automatically converts the amount as a yearly figure for the computation process.

Additional queries are addressed via the tips option, which elaborates more on how values should be input. Upon a successful calculation, the tabulated result can be printed or downloaded in a PDF format for the customer's reference.

Voicing his thoughts on the reason behind the addition of this tool, Lakshman Silva, CEO, DFCC Bank had this to say, "The addition of this income tax calculator tool to

our state-of-the-art website all comes down to customer convenience. This tool is a method of value addition that complements our holistic digital approach. It leads us well on our way to becoming the most customer-centric and digitally enabled bank by the year 2025."

The convenient tax calculator tool will be well received by many of the Bank's high income and affluent customers who earn above 250,000 rupees, thus, falling into specific tax brackets.

A significant proportion of these individuals tend to be DFCC Pinnacle, DFCC Prestige customers as well as Infinite and Signature cardholders, together with existing and potential home loan customers with a loan value of over five million rupees.

DFCC Bank was ranked amongst Business Today's Top 30 Corporates in Sri Lanka.

Elegance Expands by Welcoming Publicis Groupe



Elegance Workspaces, one of Sri Lanka's luxury workspace has welcomed yet another global giant and Sri Lanka's most awarded creative network – The Publicis Groupe, to its all-new office complex Rajagiriya.

The new Publicis Groupe office inaugurated in December 2020 is designed to instill the company's Power of One culture, which unites Publicis, Leo Burnett, MSL, Digitas,

Content Factory, and Starcom under one roof to discuss, ideate, and integrate as one dynamic team. The modern open floor plan and state-of-the-art facilities of the new office provide a fresh outlook for Publicis Groupe in Sri Lanka, a powerhouse of energetic talent collaborating and creating new work. The contemporary and aesthetically designed workspace will undoubtedly

prove to be an incubator for award-winning innovation into the future for the forward-thinking organization. The move also provides a launchpad for Groupe to facilitate new and exciting external growth. One such opportunity for external growth is Publicis Incub8, which focuses on providing start-ups with the knowledge they need to successfully position and market their products and services.

Chief Strategy Officer Murtaza A Tajbhoy has spearheaded this project, and it has the potential to create start-up partnerships with Publicis Groupe, Sri Lanka.

Sharing his thoughts, Sanjay Chaudhari, Chief Executive Officer of Publicis Groupe Sri Lanka's said, "Our new location at the ultra-modern Elegance office in Rajagiriya matches the dynamism and

energy of our talent and our name. We look ahead to 2021 and beyond with optimism to elevate our business practices to the next level."

Elegance Workspaces has unveiled its third office complex location, further cementing its position as the country's largest serviced workspace provider.

Located on Queens Road Colombo 3, the new complex brings international-standard office facilities, unmatched services, and access to exclusive events, packages, and privileges to the heart of the city.

The new workspace offers iconic and immersive spaces that maximize functionality and ergonomics, thereby facilitating connections between like-minded professionals and opening the door to new opportunities with its strategic location.

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MARKET LEADER IN TRADE FINANCE BY ASIAMONEY.



For the 3rd consecutive year, the prestigious banking industry publications Euromoney and Asiamoney have ranked HNB as the No.1 Bank in Sri Lanka for Service in Trade Finance. HNB was also ranked by Asiamoney as the Market Leader (Asian Banks) – Sri Lanka for the 3rd consecutive year. Moreover, HNB rounded out its outstanding performance by being declared 'Market Leader in Trade Finance' for 2019 and 2020 by Euromoney, showcasing its unmatched superiority in consistent service excellence.



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DRIP IRRIGATION TECHNOLOGY – INCREASE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY IN SRI LANKA

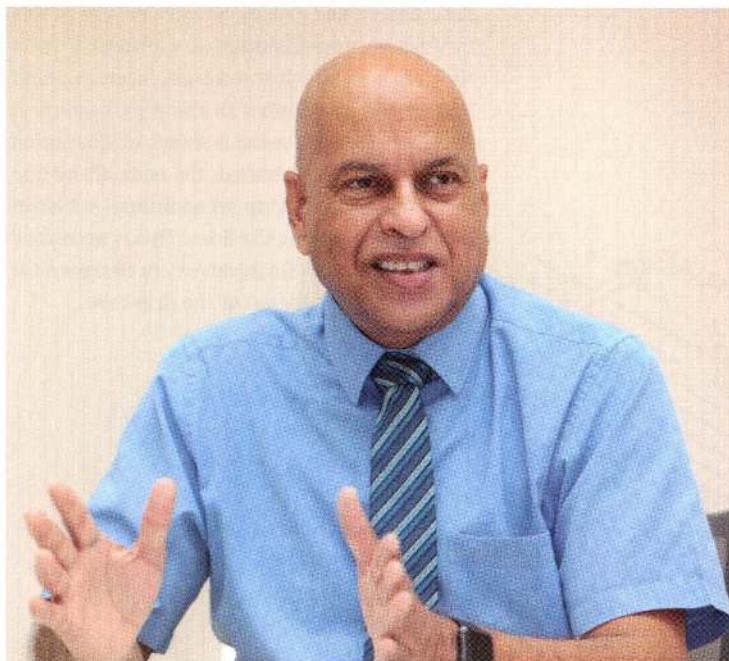
Drip Irrigation sometimes referred to as trickle irrigation, consists of laying low-density polyethylene (LDPE) tubes of small diameter on the surface or subsurface of the field or in greenhouses beside or beneath the plants. Water is delivered to the plants at frequent intervals through small holes called emitters located along the tube. Emitters can be presented as integrated driplines also called as inline drippers (welded to the inner layer of the pipe at pre-designated intervals) or on-line drippers (fixed on the external surface of the pipe). Drip Irrigation provides maximum control over environmental variability, and it is the most efficient water and nutrient delivery system for growing crops. It delivers water and nutrients directly to the plant's root zone, in the right amounts, at the right time, so each plant gets exactly what it needs, and when it needs it, to grow optimally. It enables farmers to produce higher yields while saving on water and fertilizers, energy, and even crop protection products.

By Wicky Wickramatunga.

Drip Irrigation is the best means of water conservation. Generally speaking, application efficiency is 90–95 percent, compared with sprinklers at 70 percent and surface (flood, border, furrow, or basin) irrigation at 60 percent at best, depending on soil type, level of the field, and how water is applied on the surface. Drip Irrigation is strongly recommended for open field crop production, and it is replacing surface irrigation where water is scarce or expensive, the soil is too porous or too impervious for gravity (flood or furrow) irrigation, land leveling is impossible or very costly, water quality is poor, the climate is too windy for sprinkler irrigation, and where trained irrigation labor is not available or too expensive.

Many types of Drip Irrigation systems have been developed. Row lengths may vary from several meters on a mountainside to a thousand meters on level land. Row widths can range from one meter or less in row crops to six meters or more for orchards. The irrigation water may be relatively clean, maybe drawn from open ditches with large amounts of impurities, or come from sources with high salinity. In certain areas where Drip Irrigation is employed, water allotments may be insufficient to irrigate all the land by conventional methods. In some places, crops depend entirely upon irrigation, and in others, crops require only supplemental irrigation.

Along with reduced water use, Drip Irrigation reduces power requirements compared to



Wicky Wickramatunga.

sprinkler irrigation. A typical system operates at the main line pressure of approximately 1.4 to 2 atmospheres (20–30 psi). Less pressure means reduced energy for pumping. Since Drip Irrigation requires approximately half the water compared to other irrigation methods, soluble salt concentration will also be halved. Applying water along the plant row directs the salt away from the plants' root zone towards the furrows, as opposed to furrow irrigation where salts are pushed into the root zone. Rain or heavy irrigation then washes the salts out of the soil profile. Since the irrigation water is applied directly to the plant row and not to the entire field as with sprinkler, furrow, or flood irrigation, weed growth is reduced. Because the furrows remain dry, a farmer can quickly enter the field with labor or tractor equipment for spraying, cultivation, or harvest. Placing the water in the plant row increases the fertilizer efficiency since it is injected into the irrigation water and applied



Drip Irrigation effect in an Orchard.

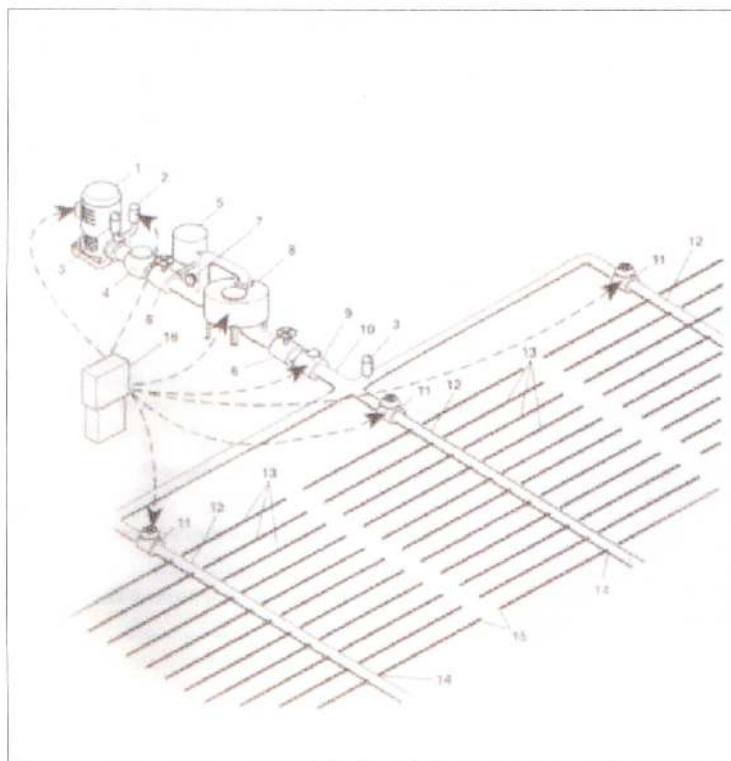


Illustration 1

flow meters, and gauges. Since the water passes through very small outlets in emitters, it is an absolute must that it is screened, filtered or both before it is distributed in the pipe system. A typical drip system layout is shown in Illustration 1. If the drip line is buried, the ends of the line should be connected to an additional submain to facilitate flushing the lines. This is necessary because the drain flush valves are designed for the surface installation of the drip tube.

Illustration 1

- 1 Pump
- 2 Pressure Release Valve Riser
- 3 Air Vents (Release Valves)
- 4 Check Valve
- 5 Fertilizer Injector or Tank
- 6 Mainline Valve
- 7 Pressure Gauges
- 8 Filter
- 9 Flow Meter
10. Main Line
11. Field Control Valves (Manual or Automatic)
12. Submains
13. Drip Laterals
14. Submain to Dripline Connection
15. Drain/Flush Valves
16. System Controller

CHEMICAL & FERTILIZER INJECTION EQUIPMENT

To obtain the optimum benefits of a drip irrigation system, fertilizer (and sometimes chemicals) should be conveyed through irrigation water to the root zone of the crop. Adding fertilizer or chemicals to irrigation water is called fertigation or chemigation. There are four ways to introduce fertilizers or chemicals into a drip system. These are injection pumps (operated by electricity, gasoline or diaphragm and water-powered), venturis, pressure differential tanks, and gravity. However, the most accurate and the currently used method is the injection pumps. All injection pumps require energy to run. In remote areas where electricity is not available, gasoline engines and waterpower may be used. Piston and diaphragm injection pumps are available in various water-powered configurations. However, in irrigation systems installed in greenhouses, water-powered or fully computer-controlled dosing equipment is used to obtain a high level of precision.

directly to the root zone. Plant foliage diseases may be lessened since the foliage is not wetted during irrigation.

The only disadvantage of drip irrigation is the initial cost of equipment per hectare or acre, which may be higher than other irrigation systems. However, these costs must be evaluated with the expected yield enhancements and through comparison with the expenses for land preparation and continued maintenance often required by surface irrigation. Land leveling and canal and drain digging require considerable expenditure. Drip Irrigation requires a higher level of management, not only to operate the drip system, but also to maintain the fertilizer injection equipment and to keep the system properly flushed. Maintenance of good filtration is an absolute must since the small openings in a drip system can be clogged.

FIELD LAYOUT

Basic equipment for Drip Irrigation consists of a pump, the main line, delivery pipes, manifold, and drip laterals or emitters. The head, between the pump and the pipeline network, usually consists of control valves, couplings, filters, timers, fertilizer injectors, pressure regulators,

Drip Irrigation requires a higher level of management, not only to operate the drip system, but also to maintain the fertilizer injection equipment and to keep the system properly flushed.

FILTERS

The filtration system is the heart of the drip irrigation unit. Media filters are tanks, which contain a sand filter bed. These filters are used when the water source is an open or surface one. Media filters are installed as pairs of sand-filled containers. They can be backflushed to clean themselves easily. The need to clean or flush the filters can be determined by the loss of pressure through the filter. Therefore, pressure gauges on either side of the filter are necessary to indicate a loss of pressure and the need to clean or flush the filters. However, the necessity of using media filters has been minimized for most cases by using modern disk filters and screen filters, which have been designed to be highly efficient.

PRESSURE REGULATORS

The use of pressure regulators on the Drip Irrigation system is needed to maintain the required minimum and maximum pressures for the drip tube's efficient function and avoid any chances of rupturing due to high pressures.

MAIN AND SUBMAIN LINES

Main lines may consist of underground PE, PVC Pipe, or above-ground aluminum pipes, most common nowadays is the PVC. For the submain line, it is common to use 'lay flat' polyethylene hoses or high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipes.

DRIP LINES AND EMITTERS

From the submain, the irrigation water flows to the laterals or drip lines, which can be either polyethylene drip hose with online pressure compensated or non-pressure compensated drippers or pressure compensated or non-pressure compensated integrated driplines with in-built drippers.

There are many types of drip emitters. All emitters are designed to reduce the outflow of water to a trickle or drip. Drip tapes or tubes are used most often on row crops such as vegetables and sugarcane. The tubing is shipped flattened on a roll. Most tubing is black polyethylene, 4-15 MILs (100-375 Microns) thick, with emitter holes at pre-set intervals of 15-150cm. In general, the more sandier the soil, the closer the distance between emitters. A 30-cm spacing is most commonly used in vegetable production. The turbulent flow design in the emitter integrated into the drip tube has larger passageways, which are less likely to clog and provides a more

Many developing countries have become acquainted with drip systems and learned how to use them. Israeli companies have predicted that when China and India start using drip systems to their full potential, together, they could be worth the same as all the rest of the world. They have seen tremendous growth in these two countries during the last three decades.

uniform discharge of water on undulating terrain than tapes with conventional laminar flow designs. On-line drippers, Pot drippers, Pressure Compensated Drippers, and Compensating Non-Leakage Drippers are some of the online dripper (emitter) types used in orchards, where dripline tubes or tapes cannot be used.

DRIP IRRIGATION SCHEDULES

Drip Irrigation and fertilization schedules vary with location and crop. With every irrigation, only a small amount of water is applied as needed by the plant, often daily or even more frequent basis, especially in greenhouses. This ensures more economical use of water while obtaining maximum plant production. As the plant grows, it requires larger quantities of water because root systems become more extensive, and more foliage growth is present. Therefore, water needs are increased as the growing season progresses, especially during dry, hot weather periods.

INCREASE IN CROP YIELD

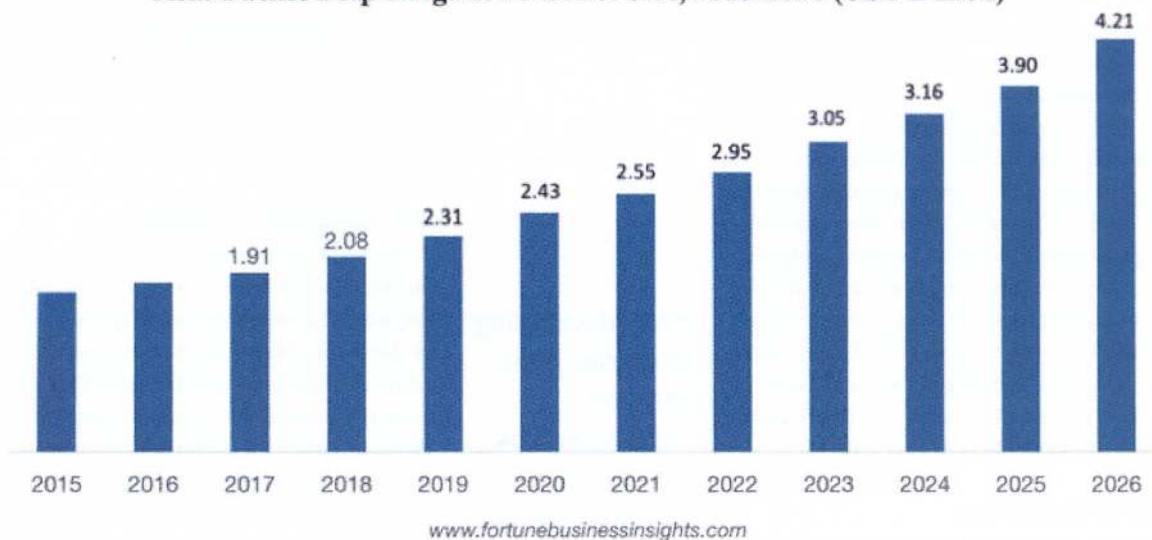
Through Drip Irrigation, both water and fertilizer can be applied on a timely basis, and thereby plant stress is minimized, and yields are maximised. Since Drip Irrigation uses less water than furrow or flood irrigation, more hectares can be watered with the same water supply. The system's success is mainly due to its ability to deliver water and nutrients in precise amounts and at controlled frequencies directly to the plant's root zone and thereby increase crop yields by anything from 35 percent to 200 percent.

WORLD STATUS

Since 1960s, Drip Irrigation has changed the method of irrigating crops in many developed and developing countries in the world. From the time the system was invented by Israeli agri-technologists, it has seen only a dramatic growth in the world irrigation equipment market. The global drip irrigation market size was valued at USD 4.63 billion in 2018 and is projected to reach USD 9.37 billion by 2026, exhibiting a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 9.30% during the forecast period. Graph 1 shows the Asia-Pacific Market Size.

Many developing countries have become acquainted with drip systems and learned how to use them. Israeli companies have predicted that when China and India start using drip systems to their full potential, together, they

Asia-Pacific Drip Irrigation Market Size, 2015-2026 (USD Billion)



Graph 1

could be worth the same as all the rest of the world. They have seen tremendous growth in these two countries during the last three decades. The Governments have well supported the growth by introducing excellent subsidy schemes, especially in India.

STATUS IN SRI LANKA

In 1996, commercial level Drip Irrigation systems came to be established in Sri Lanka when this writer brought in the world's largest Drip Irrigation company Netafim of Israel, to Sri Lanka on a commercial platform. Until then, a few entrepreneurs have brought in a number of systems, but the technology never took off the ground in a commercial scale. Although a quarter of a century has passed since the introduction, the growth of the Drip Irrigation market in the country has been sluggish, and the farming community has not accepted the technology due to a number of reasons.

Selection of Systems : This is the key to success. The irrigation system has to be designed to suit the individual plot of the farmer, and therefore, every system has to be custom designed. Although this is a cumbersome procedure, it has to be done for the sake of the successful operation of the system. Many factors such as the water quality, EC, soil type, source and available volume of water, rate of re-charge

The installation technician has to carefully study the design and install it in the field using his knowledge. Therefore, when selecting a suitable Drip Irrigation system, it is of vital importance to look for the capabilities of the suppliers to make an appropriate design.

(if it is an open well), crop factors, rainfall, and Evapotranspiration (Et), wind velocity are taken into consideration, when a drip irrigation system is designed to suit the needs of an individual plot of a farmer. Regrettably, none of the companies involved in supplying and installation of Drip Irrigation systems follow these basics today. Ironically, state-sponsored agricultural projects too promote substandard systems at farmers' level.

Depending on those factors, a hydraulic design is made, including a correct filtration system (which is the heart of the system), regulators, on-line or in-line drippers, fertigation method, the proper size of main, sub-main, and lateral pipes (either PVC or HDPE). Finally, the installation technician has to carefully study the design and install it in the field using his knowledge. Therefore, when selecting a suitable Drip Irrigation system, it is of vital importance to look for the capabilities of the suppliers to make an appropriate design.

Selection of Farmers : For the program's success, this is one of the most important aspects. If the selected farmer is not interested to use modern technology, however good the system is, he is not going to make use of the same for some time until an innovative farmer in his area obtains better results by using a similar system. Therefore, it is very important to select "early adopters" in

a new area when selecting farmers for introducing irrigation systems. "Open days" should be conducted wherever possible using the selected farmers' operations as demonstrations.

Innovative Technology Coupled with Proper Use : Drip Irrigation systems can deliver incredible results if used properly. Therefore, it is vital to train the farmer (end-user) to use the system most efficiently. Especially where farmers are totally new to the use of these systems, it is vital to introduce a well-trained agronomist cum technician to guide them to obtain the maximum benefits of the system. This guidance should include agronomic aspects as well. His duty should be to give the farmer advice on specific crop recommendations, adaptation of the crop spacing, other cultural practices to suit the Drip Irrigation system, using the best fertigation method to get the maximum benefits of the fertilizers. This is in addition to guiding the farmer on proper maintenance of the irrigation system. Hence the requirement of an agronomist cum technician. A good agronomist can easily train farmers (end users) to do the maintenance of irrigation systems.

Marketing : Since the proper use of modern irrigation systems, especially Drip Irrigation systems, can bring about unexpectedly high yield levels, it is vital to explore the possibility of introducing proper marketing channels to farmers who use the technology. In addition to this, it is very important to bring about an attitude change among them. There should be a mechanism to show them that the increased productivity means a decreased cost of production. Therefore, they should be willing to market the produce at slightly lower prices than the prevailing market prices to penetrate the market effectively. They will also obtain better quality produce, which will have an edge over the produce coming from conventional farms to the market. This should be a prelude to orient them towards commercialisation of agriculture in Sri Lanka, which is the only practical way to survive in the competitive and fast globalizing agricultural commodity market in the world.

Without the above-explained guidance and training, any program to introduce Drip Irrigation systems to small-scale farmers will not have desired results and probably lateral pipes of the irrigation systems can end up on tree branches (as seen on several occasions) within a matter of months, if not for weeks after installation.

As an effective method of reducing the cost of production, Drip Irrigation has played a vital role wherever it has been introduced. Therefore, Drip Irrigation can play a vital role in future agriculture in Sri Lanka, especially in increasing productivity, if successfully introduced.

Farmers will revert to their traditional irrigation methods while blaming the Drip Irrigation technology for their failure. This will have adverse effects on the introduction of modern technologies in the long run.

CONCLUSION

In a situation where the available land area for food production is constantly diminishing, it is of paramount importance to increase crop yield per unit area of available land. This could be achieved only by adopting technologically advanced agriculture, which can contribute to the efficient utilization of agricultural inputs. In most parts of the country, recurring droughts have brought down crop yields, and irrigation water is insufficient for conventional irrigation methods such as flood irrigation and furrow irrigation. The only answer to this problem is Drip Irrigation.

Drip Irrigation can reduce the Cost of Production (CoP) of any agricultural crop by increasing the productivity per unit area of land. During a demonstration conducted recently, it was found that drip irrigation could produce thrice as many tomatoes than furrow or flood irrigation using a lesser amount of water. Another example, as published in the Tea Research Institute's Annual Report of Year 2000, a trial plot of Drip Irrigation and Fertigation on four hectares of tea was conducted by the institute in 1998/99. A phenomenal yield increment from 2,557 kgs of made tea per hectare in the control plot without fertigation to 6,058 kgs per hectare in the fertigated plot has been achieved in the trial. Therefore, the authorities should focus their attention in introducing proper and advanced agricultural technologies, including Drip Irrigation/Fertigation on existing cultivated lands rather than attempting to increase the total cultivated area by clearing shrub jungles.

It is well-known fact that the cost of production of many food items in Sri Lanka is much higher than that of many neighboring Asian countries. This situation creates calamities in the local market when imported food commodities are brought to the market at very low prices. As an effective method of reducing the cost of production, Drip Irrigation has played a vital role wherever it has been introduced. Therefore, Drip Irrigation can play a vital role in future agriculture in Sri Lanka, especially in increasing productivity, if successfully introduced. ☐



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DARING TO DREAM

CONNECTING SILICON VALLEY TO SRI LANKA



Mangala Karunaratne, Founder and CEO, Calcey Technologies.

A former Silicon Valley veteran who launched his software product engineering services company nearly 19 years ago in Sri Lanka, Mangala Karunaratne is the Founder and CEO of Calcey Technologies. The company went from delivering small piecemeal projects to serving more than one hundred enterprises and SMEs in the US, UK, Nordics, and Australia. Among that client base are names such as PayPal, Wikimedia Foundation, and even Stanford University. Mangala Karunaratne spoke about the founding of Calcey, the journey, the work they do, their culture, and the future as they set their sights on an accelerated growth trajectory.

*By Udeshi Amarasinghe. Assisted by Jennifer Paldano Goonewardena.
Photography Menaka Aravinda.*

Can you tell us how it all began?

I worked in Silicon Valley until 2002, and my career there took me through the dot-com boom. Life was good, and making money was easy; it was as close to a rock-star life as it could get. And when the dot-com crash happened, I moved back to Sri Lanka. It was not the perfect time to get married with no job, but we went ahead. At first, I wanted nothing to do with technology and pondered trying my hand at something else simply because I was burned out. But my father advised me to startup in what I know—technology, and then just run a non-tech business as a side venture. I started with two hired employees, which turned out to be a big mistake as we couldn't drum up any business while chasing the local corporates. I'm yet to know what went wrong then; perhaps my approach was at fault. Because, back then in 2002-'03, no one here in Sri Lanka was interested in digital transformation.

For the first three years, business was hard to come by. I reached out to my network of contacts in Silicon Valley to tell them about my new software services company. Gradually, we began receiving small projects that were not more than two hundred to three hundred dollars in value, but we delivered on time without compromising quality. The latter was crucial. Then we started receiving projects that were a few thousand dollars in value, which we also delivered successfully. Over time, the value of the projects that came our way grew. Then came one client from San Francisco who asked us to develop some software on a tight, three-month deadline. We got the job done, and that ended up being a significant turning point. After all, they were a large company, and we were probably smaller than their mailroom operation. That project allowed us to prove ourselves and sowed the seeds of our eventual growth. What was a startup with myself and two other employees is today a company with a 150 strong team. It was very organic but steady growth due to our commitment to quality and on-time delivery.

How would you describe the journey so far?

The first four years were the most challenging, and we were desperately trying to keep our heads above water. We weren't making enough money and had to let go of our first two employees. So almost overnight, we became a company with no employees but had a world-

Gradually, we began receiving small projects that were not more than two hundred to three hundred dollars in value, but we delivered on time without compromising quality. The latter was crucial.

class website for the time. I guess that's the beauty of the internet—it lowers your barriers to getting started. We were always cognizant of the need to survive in a challenging environment, so we created an attractive website to showcase our services. It made much sense at the time because it was our visiting card and the only thing we had to show a potential client. I quickly learned to work with freelancers whenever we got a project. They would all come into our small office on a Friday evening and work until Monday morning. We would regularly squeeze in more than a week's work hours into those two days. We got more done than most people did in a week, and that's how we survived. Those early days were fun despite it being a roller coaster of a journey. Eventually, we could afford to hire people full-time, and things started to change, this time for the better.

I decided to return to Silicon Valley in 2007 as Calcey had grown into a team of thirty by then. I felt that it would be good to be based in Silicon Valley for a few years as it would allow me to work directly with customers, which means we could grow faster. So I moved to California with my young family in tow. With me based in the Valley, we grew into a team of 70 people. I returned to Sri Lanka in 2011. I worked day and night in the US. With the clients during the day and with the team at night. Those efforts paid off. Over the last five years, we've grown by more than 400 percent, tripled the number of active clients, and entered several new markets, including the UK, Sweden, Australia, and, most recently, Japan.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic took us by surprise in its early days, but it didn't take long for us to take back control of our growth momentum. Suddenly, with curfew and lockdowns imposed, people had no way to come to work, and we decided to work virtually. Unlike others, our transition to a remote work model was relatively smooth. In 2019, way before the COVID-19 pandemic, our employees voiced their desire to work from home at least once a week. We started a trial in January 2021, which allowed us to identify any shortfalls we had regarding processes and infrastructure. And when the pandemic hit, our shift to a remote-first model was easy since we had everything in place. It was all because we listened to our employees.

The pandemic also helped change how I saw myself and my role within Calcey. Until 2020, I

remained firmly entrenched in the founder mentality, thinking of myself as a task-oriented 'manager of managers' whose job was to guide and shape day-to-day operations. But with everyone working remotely, our team gained more space to step up and take charge at all levels, which is brilliant. And I also had to give them that space; otherwise, the remote-first model would have come crashing down like a house of cards. Thus, I have learned to lead and focus on the big picture rather than on the mundane. It also allows our team and their complete talents to shine through, which bodes well for the next phase of our growth journey.

All in all, 2020 was a good year for us as a company. There was a time when we were rightfully concerned about the impact on our business. But last year went to become our best in terms of revenue, customer satisfaction, and employee satisfaction. Recently, we were recognized as a Great Place to Work too.

Can you tell us about Calcey's culture?

Although we have managers, we prefer not to create static hierarchies. Instead, Calcey is a flat organization where people can speak up and always be candid. We tend to promote individuals who challenge each other with facts, logic, and reason over those who don't. There's no point in having 'yes' men beside you in a business. We have always had a responsibility and ownership-driven culture. We work hard and play hard. Most importantly, while we don't take ourselves seriously, we take our work seriously.

My end goal is to make this company a satisfying place to work in rather than an easy place to work in because satisfaction comes from overcoming challenges and achievement and supported by science. We encourage people to be themselves, and we listen to our people all the time. That's how our remote work model came about.

I still remember March 2020 vividly. As soon as the pandemic hit, a raft of new clients we had worked hard to sign put their plans on hold. Within two weeks, we lost about 30 percent of our projected revenue for the quarter. I couldn't sleep as we had over 140 people on our payroll at that time. Many IT companies resorted to salary cuts. I was talking to my senior management team about how we could come out of this situation. We considered salary cuts, but I listened to my managers when they advised

The potential of the technology industry far outweighs that of traditional labor-intensive sectors. It is the way forward, and I believe we need to create more universities to teach our children programming to help them figure out ways to join the industry.

against it. They suggested not to preempt the future right away, mainly because we had enough money in the bank and confidence in our ability to weather the storm. Although new clients didn't come through immediately, most of our existing clients grew their engagements with us over time, so the business did very well. I'm glad I listened to my management team.

Would you be able to talk about the clients and the solutions that you offer?

We are a product engineering company that helps bring a client's idea to life through technology. Initially, 100 percent of our business came from tech-oriented clientele in Silicon Valley. Upon my return in 2011, we wanted to expand beyond the US market to the European market. However, we still did not have a sales team as our growth came entirely on the back of our consistency in delivery and customer recommendations. Then we hired a sales professional in a bid to pursue business in Europe, and that worked out very well. Today, we work with large-scale clients like PayPal, Wikipedia, and Stanford University, but most of our recurring revenue comes from small to medium enterprises. In Silicon Valley, the top developers join the big guns like Facebook, Google, Apple, and Twitter, which means SMEs have a hard time finding top talent. Therefore, they collaborate with us to build the software they need.

What are your thoughts on Sri Lanka's flourishing startups in the tech space?

We need to encourage them. As a country, we need to strengthen the digital economy and promote digital and tech startups; it doesn't matter whether it's products or services based; what matters is the number of dollars they earn for the country. The potential of the technology industry far outweighs that of traditional labor-intensive sectors. It is the way forward, and I believe we need to create more universities to teach our children programming to help them figure out ways to join the industry.

The Government is focusing extensively on technology. What are your thoughts?

I am pretty hopeful for the future as the Government has focused on developing this sector, which they have demonstrated by setting up a Ministry for Digital Infrastructure



Development. Industry veterans are also managing the ICTA. I hope that they take progressive actions to ensure that the entire country benefits and that projects are not limited to just the digitization of Government offices. As a proponent of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, if the Government invests and focuses more on promoting STEM education in the country, we will have a lot more people launching more tech companies. The revenue generated by ten people in a successful digital startup will far outweigh the revenue generated by ten people launching a brick-and-mortar business. And that's why I hope the Government's focus on STEM education will bear positively upon the future generation of this country.

I do not think we need to build massive buildings for education institutes; there are

The amount of potential the digitization of everyday processes will unlock is so incredible that it will be an excellent opportunity for the country to mobilize software startups to solve these problems...

plenty of underutilized government buildings. Buildings do not matter in this day and age; the quality of education is what matters. The money that the Government spends on buildings should be on world-class educators. If we educate and guide the next generation on the right path, they will grow to be resilient enough to take care of the future.

What are the new trends globally and locally?

None of us expected such a significant impact from the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced us to rely on technology. We all talk about AI, Machine Learning, electric vehicles, green energy, and more, but I see many day-to-day activities being digitized, which creates tremendous opportunities. The amount of potential the digitization of everyday processes will unlock is so incredible that it will be an excellent opportunity for the country to mobilize software startups to solve these problems or attract some development work to Sri Lanka.

While there is tremendous talent in Sri Lanka, there seems to be something that blocks its potential from being harnessed. What is it?

As a company, we have more work than we can cater to right now, simply because we can't find the right people. I believe that everything will fall into place organically if we educate our children. It does not matter whether young people join a company like ours or venture into a startup. It's going to benefit the economy as there are plenty of opportunities out there. The COVID-19 pandemic has created opportunities for the future generation. For instance, a disadvantaged family that we were assisting had three children learning using one mobile phone, which meant that only one child could follow online lessons on a given day. So we gave them an iPad. We noticed that these little children were very tech-savvy. They knew how to set up apps on the iPad. Remember, these were disadvantaged children who are now digitally savvy, which I believe is a positive outcome of the pandemic. If we could continue with this trend rather than pushing school children completely back to books and exams, I think the next generation may turn out to be a lot more digitally savvy and broader-minded.

If, as a country, we can serve only up to a certain level and not beyond, how are we going to address this bottleneck?

As a whole, the IT services industry in Sri Lanka may employ about 100,000 people. In contrast, TATA and Infosys in India alone may hire 300,000 each, so these companies individually have three times more personnel than we have within the entire country. But I don't believe we should compete on numbers.

Think of IT talent as a three-tier pyramid. The ones at the top are the cream of the crop with the most advanced skills and knowledge, but right now, some of them have no choice but to do work that would perhaps be better left in the hands of someone in a lower tier. So what we need to do as a country is to expand the number of people who can slot into each tier. Essentially, we need to build capacity. That's our main problem.

We need to find a way to create a digital Sri Lanka, which means that the country needs to educate more children in programming. I do not think lack of money is a reason not to do it. If there is a will, there is a way. Like I said earlier, we need to figure out how to educate more young people with the money and the resources we already have. Most Sri Lankans cannot afford to pay for quality private university education, which is costly. However, I am sure we could set up Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and incentivize the private sector to invest in academic programs. For example, Seedstars has shown interest in coming to Sri Lanka and setting up a sustainable yet free education institute using the "01 Edu system", which presents an innovative curriculum in software engineering and programming. 01 Edu system comes with a renowned industry-leading reputation, and the curriculum has been rigorously designed to help students learning the skills necessary to succeed in a digital world. Taking a different approach than the classic teaching methods we have today, learning is facilitated through a collective and co-creative process in a professional environment. As a country, we need to attract these world-class institutes because they allow more young people to pursue education in the digital space.

At Calcey, we once had a self-taught CTO who had only completed his secondary education, which shows that people whose DNA is wired to learn by themselves often do. However, we can't expect everyone to be like that. However, if we have at least one percent of such individuals at the top of the pyramid,

We need to find a way to create a digital Sri Lanka, which means that the country needs to educate more children in programming.

they can empower more mid-tier talent, who will then go on to empower even more lower-tier talent. In that way, the top one percent of people will create a ripple effect that benefits the entire industry.

But do the top-tier people remain in the country?

Like myself, most founders of successful Sri Lankan software companies are returnees or are based elsewhere. I, for some reason, always wanted to return to Sri Lanka. The most significant attrition from our company is to Australia. Rather than stopping people from migrating to Australia, we support them and continue to support them once they move there. Some of them are open about their migration plans when they join us, and we provide them with the required letters for their applications. This way, we still benefit from employing talented young people who will work for us for a few years before migrating. I believe it's unfair to prevent them from leaving because who are we to tell them what to do with their lives?

What can we do to encourage more young people to compete globally? Even in the sphere of e-sports, there are excellent young players here. But they have a hard time making it onto the global stage?

My personal opinion is that traditionally parents want their children to become doctors, engineers, and lawyers. Simultaneously, the constant urge is to study to pass exams, and hence, young people are not encouraged to play games or even spend time in front of a computer or go out there and hone their innate talents. Most people in Sri Lanka see things like playing video games as unfavorable. In the US, children sometimes play games all day, sometimes even foregoing sleep, which makes them insanely good at doing one thing. On the other hand, I don't think our children are allowed to do that. Yes, we can be backward in that sense. We have to be progressive if we want to take this country forward. Let's take the legalization of cannabis. In most major states in the US, industrial cannabis is a big business, and Thailand has legalized it. Some countries, in general, are very open-minded to change. We need to emulate that. While Britain has gone past its Victorian values, we still seem to be clinging on to them, which were imposed on us in the first place. Similarly, if the Government legalizes

cryptocurrency in Sri Lanka, people will not resort to informal buying. While if legalized, the country can impose a tax on the gains. When it comes to decision-making, lawmakers must be bolder and be ready to accept change. I believe that the leadership of this country is trying to bring in changes systematically, which, given the state of our bureaucracy and its red tape, will take much time. By then, we will be a generation behind yet again!

Do you think that we have the necessary environment for returnees to set up business here?

I could have made a lot more money had I stayed back in Silicon Valley. But that would have been led by a pure desire only to make money. What matters is how content you are, wherever you are, and I am content here. It takes a lot more investment to start a business in the US, which also involves a lot more risk, whereas, in Sri Lanka, I can try a new venture at a lower cost and fail. But depending on their product, I advise certain startups to go to the US, as they may not have enough opportunity in Sri Lanka. I say I'm content in Sri Lanka because while I'm managing Calcey, I have also ventured into an investment in Pannala, a farm, and a digital nomad venture in Mirissa. However, I will have to be a dollar billionaire to do the same in the US while working in Silicon Valley, so in Sri Lanka, I can get a lot more done with a lot less.

While I can't complain about my work and life in Sri Lanka, I'm worried about the next generation and the country. I tell startups not to wait till the system changes. As an entrepreneur, I had to think out of the box within a complex system, and so must others. There'll be many people complaining of the system and its failure, but if you are an individual who wants to do something despite the obstacles, then I believe there are opportunities. It's the same everywhere in the world. Many are reluctant to go against systemic barriers because it's hard. But hardworking hustling entrepreneurs figure things out for themselves. Sri Lanka will not be perfect, and neither can we wait for the perfect moment. We have to start somewhere.

At Calcey, we no longer look for people with a university degree when we recruit. Instead, we focus on the individual's ability to do things. The issue in Sri Lanka is that not many people are self-taught. The education system in this country

We want to be seen and recognized as an employer and a launchpad for an immensely successful career in the global IT services industry.

doesn't inculcate the learning mentality in the student. The culture is one of being taught. If teachers guide students in the art of introducing themselves, simple things like going online and googling, the future will be so much brighter. That's where I believe the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a tremendous difference. Suppose young people discover more about YouTube and Google as learning platforms instead of scrolling through their Facebook feed. In that case, it's safe to say that the pandemic has positively impacted the future generation.

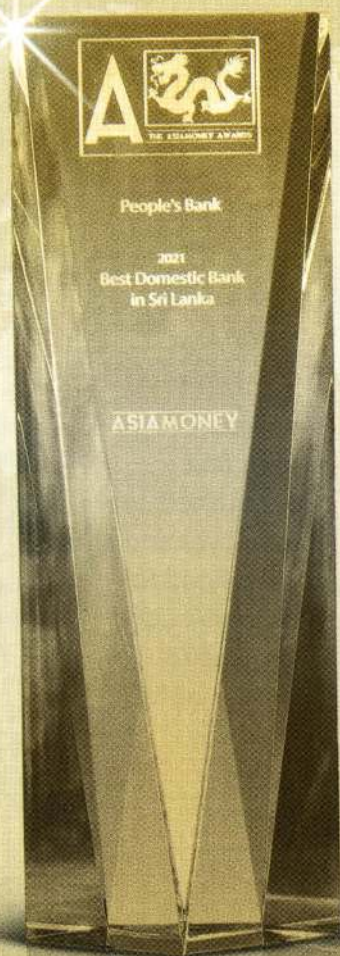
What are Calcey's plans for the future?

We have hired a proven senior executive, Gehan Dias, the former General Manager at London Stock Exchange Technology in Sri Lanka, which means I am relieved of looking into day-to-day operations. We have also added Pete Deemer, a global thought leader in agile development, as an advisor. I focus on the big picture and the growth of the company and find it immensely liberating. The employees have delivered on their responsibilities and, we are focused on growing annually at least by 30 percent. We grew by 400 percent in the last five years, and we can double Calcey's size if we grow by 30 percent in the next three years. As a boutique software firm, we don't want to grow into an organization of 1,000 people. The maximum for us would be 250 to 300 because, under our business model, we offer a personalized service to the customer, and that's why we focus on a realistic growth trajectory. In the meantime, we are adding new capabilities like IoT, AI, and machine learning. We have clients in the US, UK, and Sweden and are now working hard to open up opportunities in Japan. We are also evolving our commercial model, wherein in some cases, we have taken equity in high-potential startups in London and New York. It's an excellent way to expand our bottom line, as we get a big payday if any of them do well. We have done this thrice with product startups who have raised money from Silicon Valley and sign up multi-million-dollar clients.

Three years from now, I wish to see Calcey grow into a company that's twice as large as it is now while also being an employer of choice for Sri Lankan software engineering talent. We want to be seen and recognized as an employer and a launchpad for an immensely successful career in the global IT services industry. ☐

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