



**THE EMBASSY OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA
TO BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG AND THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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Minister Bathiudeen and private sector delegation explore business opportunities in Antwerp

Minister of Industry & Commerce, Rishad Bathiudeen, accompanied by the Sri Lanka private sector business delegation on a two day official visit to Belgium, last week also visited several business enterprises in Antwerp - the commercial hub of Belgium. Ms. Sujatha Weerakoon, Director General/ Sri Lanka Export Development Board (SLEDB) and senior management representatives of Aloy Expo (Pvt) Ltd, Selta (Pvt) Ltd. Sierra Power (Pvt) Ltd, EW Information Systems Ltd (E-wis), Laugfs Holdings Ltd, Haylex Ltd.(Subsidiary of Hayleys), Thambapanni Cocos (Pvt) Ltd., Lanka Metals Company Ltd. and Andrew's Travels were associated with the Minister in these meetings. The visit of the private sector delegation was coordinated by the SLEDB.

Welcoming the Sri Lanka delegation Mr. Luc Luwel, CEO of the Antwerp Chamber of Commerce briefed them on the attractive business environment in Antwerp and the potential it offers for furthering economic ties between Belgium and Sri Lanka. A detailed presentation about Antwerp and its importance as a trade hub which serves 60% of Europe was made by Ms. Jill Suetens, Manager International Affairs of the Chamber. Minister Bathiudeen addressing the Chamber representatives highlighted Sri Lanka's historical relations with the city of Antwerp, particularly in the context of the diamond trade and seaport operations. He said there is considerable scope for expansion in both these areas, as well as on others, judging by the growing interest that the Belgian Companies have shown to do business with Sri Lanka. Ms. Sujatha Weerakoon, Director General/SLEDB, briefed the Chamber representatives on EXPO 2012, the premier exhibition to be held in Colombo from 28-30 March 2012, highlighting the trade and investment opportunities in the country and facilities extended to overseas participants attending this event.

The delegation visited the World Diamond Centre in Antwerp and had a productive exchange of views with Mr. Philippe Barsamaian, Vice President and the senior officials of the Diamond Centre, where they discussed the future potential in the diamond trade with Sri Lanka. Antwerp accounts for 80% of the rough diamond trade and 50% of the cut & polished diamonds in the World. More than 1800 firms are located in Antwerp's diamond district representing almost all the world's leading diamond manufacturers and wholesalers. Concentrating on the importance of the diamond trade with Belgium, the Minister emphasized the potential for further expansion given the considerable expertise in Sri Lanka for cutting and polishing diamonds.

The delegation also visited a leading Belgium logistics operator NOVA NATIE at the Antwerp port. The group generates a consolidated annual turnover of approximately 120 million Euros. The company briefed the delegation on the possibility of Sri Lankan exporters availing of their expertise in channeling exports across Europe.

The delegation also made an inspection tour of the 'Trade Mart', the trade centre of importers and distributors in Belgium, where local and foreign companies renting space, have access to 44,000 retail outlets in the country. It was viewed as a concept that could be applied in Sri Lanka as well.

The delegation was accompanied in these visits by Sri Lanka Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and to the EU, Ravinatha Aryasinha, Minister (Commerce & Economic) of Sri Lanka Embassy in Brussels R.D.S. Kumararatne, and Hony. Consul of Sri Lanka in Belgium, Monique De Decker.

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