



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

27, RUE JULES LEJEUNE, 1050 BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

TEL: (0032.2)344 5394. (0032.2)344 5585 FAX: (0032.2)344 6737 E-MAIL: secretariat@srilankaembassy.be

Comprehensive Sri Lanka promotion in Europe launched in Brussels

The Sri Lanka Embassy in Brussels in collaboration with Sri Lanka Tourism is holding a week long promotion of Sri Lanka in Brussels this week, a programme intended to be replicated in other European capitals. Centered on Sri Lanka's participation as the host country at the BELASIA annual travel fair which projects over 25 Asian countries as a tourist destinations, it included tourism and travel promotion, a Sri Lanka Food festival, performances by a Sri Lankan dance troupe and Sri Lankan lace, masks, handicrafts and gem displays.

Inaugurating the BELASIA on Saturday (20 February 2010) in the presence of Asian Ambassadors in Belgium, representatives of the tourist and travel trade, media and visitors, Minister of State of the Belgian Government Jos Chabert Recalling his three visits to Sri Lanka with fond memories, said he saw Sri Lanka as the "Paradise of Asia" and was happy to see it forge ahead. He commended the sense of partnership generated by BELASIA to bring the East and West together and saw it as an opportunity to learn from each other's capacities and advantages, to stimulate synergies and raise confidence in relations. He hoped that this exposure of Asia in Belgium, this year particularly highlighting Sri Lanka, would stimulate the Belgians to visit these countries and build strong partnerships in the future.

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union Ravinatha Aryasintha said Sri Lanka was honored to have been selected as the host country of BELASIA, a key event in the tourism calendar of Belgium. He said this exhibition could not have come at a better time, for having overcome both the natural calamity caused by the tsunami and the man made damage caused by 30 years of terrorism, Sri Lanka tourism was gathering unprecedented momentum. Observing that in January 2010, tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka had increased by 32% over the corresponding period last year, he said "tourists to Sri Lanka had clearly voted with their feet". He said Belgians from all walks of life and cutting across age brackets were regular visitors to Sri Lanka over the years, and expressed confidence that BELASIA would serve as a catalyst in further promoting Sri Lanka in Belgium, as well as in other parts of Europe.

The Managing Director of Sri Lanka Tourism, Dileep Mudadeniya observed that there is an increased demand with the expected increase of air seats by the national carrier for Paris. Sri

Lanka Tourism will be able to recover the lost market share from Belgium in the past. Europe has come back strongly with an overall increase of 36.3% in January 2010. Europeans always look for sunny, warm weather with diversity. Sri Lanka will be the ideal destination for them. It was extremely encouraging to notice the renewed interest of the Belgian visitors for the destination Sri Lanka. Also Sri Lankan Airlines got very positive feedback from the visitors on the renewed non-stop operations between Paris and Colombo from 02nd July onwards. The Belgian travellers have always privileged travelling via Paris, either by train or coach and therefore this reinstated nonstop service comes exactly at the right time.

Robrecht Willaert who was appointed Honorary Director of Sri Lanka Tourism in Belgium at this event, addressing the gathering said Sri Lanka has gained a special place in his heart as he has been associated with Sri Lanka for the past 25 years. He said Belgium had a strong and loyal partnership with Sri Lanka and he would harness all his energy to further it into a new level.

Especially for this occasion, Sri Lankan Airlines flew in a complete Sri Lankan dance troupe from the Channa-Upuli dance academy and handicraft specialists (lace & masks) and to complete the food festival taking place during the same week at the Radisson BLU hotel in Brussels, two Sri Lankan chefs from the Mount Lavinia Hotel, flown from Colombo to delight the Belgian public. The Channa-Upuli dance troupe mesmerised the Belgian public at the Belasia Fair and during the week long food festival at the Radisson BLU Hotel. They also performed at the British School of Brussels in aid of the Debaraweva Junior School, as 'Sri Lankan Cares' project.

Sri Lanka Tourism, Sri Lankan Airlines, Andrews Travels, Mt.Lavinia Hotel, Raddison Blu Royal Hotel of Brussels and Rail Belgium co-sponsored the Sri Lanka promotion.

Embassy of Sri Lanka
Brussels

20 February 2010