

In Brussels, Sri Lanka re-brands itself to be ready to take off to reach its full economic potential



Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha has said, at this time when the challenge of terrorism was ending and Sri Lankans are seeing light at the end of the tunnel, it is important that the country re-brands itself and is ready to take off and reach its full economic potential. Noting that despite adversity, in recent years Sri Lanka sustained economic growth at around 6%, and continued to draw steady flows of foreign investment and tourists, he said Sri Lanka was better prepared to shift gears in its race towards prosperity.

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union (EU) made these observations when he addressed the launch of a comprehensive Sri Lanka Economic Promotion Programme in Brussels, which commenced with a 3 day Sri Lanka Sea Food Festival on 27 April 2009 at the Raddison BLU Hotel, under the patronage of the Governor of Brussels Hugo Nys.

The Belgian Government was represented by Ambassador Christian Tanghe of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, while the Chairman of the Friends of Sri Lanka Group of the European Parliament MEP Geoffrey Van Orden represented the European Union institutions, at this event. Sri Lanka's Honorary Consul in Belgium Mrs. Monique De Decker-Deprez and Honorary Consul (Designate) in Luxembourg Mr. Jean Marie Verlaine, were associated at the event.

Ambassador Aryasinha said, the comprehensive Sri Lanka economic promotion program that was being launched by the Sri Lanka Embassy in Brussels had many facets. Besides the Sea Food Festival with the participation of two Sri Lanka Chefs from Mt. Lavinia Hotel, for the first time Sri Lanka was participating at the European Sea Food Exposition which centers on one of the fastest growing exports from Sri Lanka to the European market within an unified 'Sri Lanka Pavilion'. The Mission was also supporting the re-branding of Sri Lanka Tourism – "Sri Lanka: The Small Miracle" and the launch of "Buy One, Get One Free" – the Sri Lankan Airlines new promotion package targeting the European Traveler. A Sri Lanka Investment Seminar is to be held in Brussels on 3 June 2009, in collaboration with the Board of Investment (BOI) and the Brussels Enterprises Commerce and Industry (BECI), which will be followed with interactions with the Business

communities in the city of Antwerp and Luxembourg. He said additionally, the Belgolux-Sri Lanka Business Council re-launched during the visit to Brussels by Foreign Minister Rohitha

Bogollagama in January 2009, has embarked on an ambitious programme for product specific promotions including Ceylon Tea and a visit of a Trade & Investment Mission from Belgium & Luxembourg to Sri Lanka during the course of the year.

The Ambassador thanked friends of Sri Lanka who have kept faith in Sri Lanka through these difficult years, and appealed to those who have yet to explore Sri Lanka whether as a trade, investment or travel destination, to do so. He emphasized that by doing so, EU member states and companies will not only be engaging an economy with which Europe has had historic relations and from which it presently received more than a third of Sri Lanka's exports, they will also be enabling Sri Lanka meet its Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and ensure economic empowerment and restoration of normalcy to the lives of people particularly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces who are yearning to move forward after two decades of subjugation by the LTTE.

Governor of Brussels Hugo Nys inaugurating the event observed that such a promotional effort was being undertaken in Brussels by the Sri Lanka Government after more than 15 years. Pointing out that Diamonds remained a key value added export to Belgium from Sri Lanka, and that "diamonds are for ever", Governor Nys said he was confident that friendship between Sri Lanka and Belgium will also be forever.

Ambassador Christian Tanghe speaking on behalf of the Belgian Government said he had visited Sri Lanka several times and was enchanted by the people, the variety of attractions it had to offer, as well as its cuisine. He saw the event as the beginning of a process that will further strengthen the relationship between the two countries.

MEP Geoffrey Van Orden addressing the gathering re-inforced the hope that Sri Lanka having got on top of the terrorist situation, could now get back on track and restore normality to the lives of its people. He said he was particularly pleased to see the fisheries sector get back to normal after the devastation it faced a few years ago during the tsunami. He too commended Sri Lanka as a "great tourist destination".

Associated with this event was a press conference for travel agents and travel writers/producers, where the re-branding of Sri Lanka Tourism – "Sri Lanka: Small Miracle" was presented by Mrs. Saroja Sirisena, Counsellor/Head of Chancery of Sri Lanka Embassy in Brussels, while the Sri Lankan Airlines Promotional activities – "Buy One Get One Free Offer", was introduced by Mr. Danny Schepers, Office Manager, Sri Lankan Airlines. Dr. Dayaratna de Silva, Minister (Commercial & Economic) and Mr. Senerath Dissanayake, First Secretary, were associated in this event.

Embassy of Sri Lanka
Brussels

30 April 2009