



The importance of agriculture in economic recovery

By **ATHULA JAYASEKERA**

IT is already in corporate talk circles that we should be a part of the global manufacturing chain, as the production dynamics today do not give advantage to any country to manufacture one single product. If so, where can we have the comparative advantage, in what kind of components or accessories of industrial products can we specialize on? Do we have the know-how and capacity to do so?

Since time immemorial, Sri Lanka right throughout has been an agricultural country. Paddy cultivation can be tracked down to beyond 100 BC, and continues to date with changes in the inputs, processes and methods. The land use had been mainly for agriculture throughout history. To date this sector has been able to ensure food security by supplying the basic foods despite the increase in population. At one time there had even been a surplus production according to historical records. With the surplus and the visionary thinking of a few kings, Sri Lanka was engaging in export and entrepôt trade of agricultural outputs such as paddy, for some time. This entrepôt trade and the export of rice and spices would have given the country the much-needed purchasing power at that time.

After James Taylor's success with the plantation of 'Tea', the country's import requirements were successfully looked after by tea, and ably supported by rubber and coconut for more than 150 years. Due to poor and irrational decisions made by those in power in certain eras these two sectors, (agriculture and plantation) started having serious issues. Yet, these are the sectors that need more attention. Agricultural exports still play a vital role in economic development, contributing significantly to the export income. Certainly, new technologies to enhance productivity and quality need to be introduced. Sri Lanka should manage its agricul-

tural resources efficiently to achieve a higher production, embracing new technology to overcome inherent structural weaknesses. This would be costly and time consuming, yet, there is no other option but to invest on such high-tech equipment. This is where the Sri Lankan Banks can come together to assist the ailing industries. The country's land is fragmented too much, including the land used for agriculture. Family obligations and the absence of a system to divide land among the family members had resulted in this unwarranted fragmentation. Hence, there are many smallholder farmers. A need for defragmentation (without affecting land ownership) or technology sharing with a system of target-oriented production planning has to be introduced, without hurting individual farmers. Small agricultural plots should be annexed to each other to make a large area for cultivation. This would give the cost advantage to the industry as cultivating large land tracts would be more advantageous than cultivating small plots.

Agriculture has set and influenced the culture of Sri Lanka. It has introduced many traditions that are being followed to date. Most of the Sinhala and Tamil New Year traditions developed with the expansion of agriculture in the country so that the country has a rich cultural heritage.

Sri Lanka lies near the Equator and enjoys a tropical climate considered ideal for agriculture. Around 30% of the population is employed in the agricultural sector, and for ages rice has been considered as the staple food of the people. Agriculture is the primary income source for the majority of the rural poor in the country. These less educated gullible farmer community that form an aging workforce, is often the victims of exploitation due to non-availability of a fully-fledged rural financial system and lack of financial literacy. The young adults of the farming community do not show much interest in employment in this sector and therefore the industry is no more lucrative.

The main reason for poor compensation is the high cost of production and the inability to market their produce as the markets are far away from the place of produce. The supply chain plays a vital role, facilitating the supply of the required fertiliser to the farmer and transporting the produce to the markets that are mainly urban and sub urban based.

Sri Lanka receives its annual rainfall from monsoonal and conventional rains. Monsoonal rains are experi-

enced through the Maha and Yala seasons. The Maha season is during the north-east monsoon from September to March in the following year. The Yala season is during the south-west monsoon from May to August. Yet, in the past couple of years the country has been experiencing extreme weather patterns of unseasonal rains, droughts, etc. This has negatively impacted the production of crops and the smooth flow of the agricultural production processes.

Lankan agricultural land is either rain-fed and or irrigated or both. As the country lacks significant deposits of industrial raw material, it must utilise the available resource to the optimum. Arable land is one such natural resource that needs to be optimally utilised. Sri Lanka has a fertile tropical landmass with enormous potential for cultivation and the processing of a variety of crops. Ingrained issues such as, low profitability and productivity has hindered the growth of this industry. These issues need to be addressed using new technology of 4thIR ensuring to provide inputs on time, with improved logistics facilities including, storage and transport along with easy market access for the produce to reach the consumer speedily.

Value addition to the agricultural produce of the country is a must and needs to be encouraged at all times. The investment in value addition processes should be incentivised to attract investors. Similarly, the cost of production ought to be reduced and always be mindful of a hectare as a yardstick. This should be maintained below the pre-determined levels that will encourage the farming community to continue in business.

Technological advances and new developments along with high profitability may attract a new generation of farming fraternity to the industry. The stigmas attached to the job of a farmer could be removed with the new outlook of professionals coming into the sector. This type of change will provide farmers with a sustainable livelihood and a much more prestigious employment opportunity. Proper planning and concern for environmental degradation will avoid the depletion of natural resources.

(The writer is a founder member and a past President of the Board of Management of TMC and first Chairman of TMC Colombo. He is also an ex-Banker)

About TMC

THE Management Club (TMC) formed in 2001 under the auspices of the Chartered Management Institute - UK Sri Lanka branch is a forum dedicated to uplift management practices in Sri Lanka on par with the best international standards and strives to achieve this by providing constant opportunities for member interaction and

participation at appropriate business and personal enhancement programs in the varied disciplines that make up the field of management.

Partners of TMC are: DFCC Bank PLC, UB Finance, CIMA, Peoples Insurance PLC, Sunquick Lanka Ltd., Wurth Lanka Ltd., Lakarcade Ltd., Coffee

Bean and Dankotuwa Porcelain PLC,

Service Partners: Daily Financial Times, Mobitel Ltd., Colombo Map, Evensta, Sign Tech Advertising Services Ltd., Nine Hearts Colour Labs (Paper), Sharp Graphics, Soft Logic IT and Office Automation.

TMC operates its Principal Club at the Galadari Hotel

(011 5860000) and (071-5860000) Suite 206. Its associate Clubs are based at the Berjaya Mt. Royal Beach Hotel, Camelot Beach Hotel Negombo, the Hibiscus Kalutara and Ramadia Ranmal Holiday Resort Moratuwa. Inquiries for membership to The Management Club by email to: tmsecretariat2012@gmail.com/fs@maritimesl.com.

"My Career Compass" event guides professionals towards success

THE Management Club Jaffna hosted a distinctive and timely evening program, "My Career Compass," at the HNB Auditorium. The event featured a presentation by Rajendra Theagarajah, a prominent figure in the realms of Banking and Finance.

Theagarajah, renowned for his role as HNB and Cargills Bank former MD, as well as his position on the boards of various esteemed organizations. He holds the distinguished title of the Asian Bankers' Association Chairman Emeritus and Ceylon Chamber of Commerce past Chairman.

Theagarajah delivered an eloquent presentation on Personal and Career



Development perspectives, captivating the audience of approximately 100 attendees. His insights were not only interesting but very informative, providing valuable guidance to professionals navigating their career paths.

The evening concluded with an engaging interactive session, fostering networking opportunities and camaraderie among the participants. Attendees enjoyed refreshing moments of connection and knowledge



HEALTH care industry trends: Opportunities and challenges to the Sri Lankan economy

The third Members Meet event for the year 2023/2024 of TMC Mt.Lavinia will be held on 27 February 2024 at the Hotel Galadari TMC suite. Baur Life Sciences Director and distinguished TMC Mt.Lavinia executive committee member Gehan Seneviratne will grace the occasion as the keynote speaker at the event. He will share his thoughts on

Knowledge sharing session

the topic of Health care industry trends: Opportunities and challenges to the Sri Lankan economy. Seneviratne is an eminent corporate leader with over 28 years of experience in strategic planning, sales and marketing, business development, channel management, key accounts management, client relationship management and team management.

He is currently associated with A. Baur and Co. Ltd, Sri Lanka as Baur Life Sciences Ltd. Director, is adept in managing business operations acting as profit centre head with focus on top-line and bottom-line performance. He holds an MBA in (International Business) from Edith Cowan University, ABCT Campus, Australia, Postgraduate Diploma in Marketing in

SLIM and Certified Professional Marketer (CPM) ASIA. Currently he also serves as Sri Lanka Chamber of Medical Devices Industry Vice President, the Lions Club of Peyliyagoda, Secretary and a member of Sri Lanka Institute of Directors. Since this is a TMC Member only event all members are kindly requested to reserve their seats in advance to avoid disappoint-



Gehan Seneviratne ment, as seats are strictly allocated on a first come first served basis. The event will be followed by cocktails and a networking session.

TMC Mt. Lavinia Members Meet event

THE second Members Meet event for the year 2023/2024 of TMC Mt.Lavinia was held on 22 November 2023 at the Hotel Galadari TMC suite. Members Meet is a quarterly event conducted by the club to meet and greet members of the club and share knowledge on a current topic that is of interest to the members. The session was well attended by distinguished members of TMC Mt.Lavinia and

Members of the Board of Management. It was also used as platform to welcome and orient new members to the club.

The Members Meet event this month coincided with a knowledge sharing session on: "Igniting Sri Lanka's Cinematic Renaissance: Cinemas as a driving force for economic growth". The session was conducted by distinguished TMC member Director/CEO



Thushan Meemanage and Chassy Cortes at the discussion

Thushan Meemanage and Marketing Scope Cinemas Ltd. Head Chassy Cortes. This relatively novel topic created much interest among the audience as

new trends, opportunities and challenges in the cinema industry were discussed at length.

The knowledge sharing session was

followed by cocktails being served to the audience. The event provided great networking opportunity to all those who attended.

Exclusive discounts and benefits for TMC members

Galadari Hotel, TMC Colombo Host Hotel benefits for TMC Members

1. Suite rooms 202, 204 and 206 on the second floor of the Galadari Hotel exclusive to TMC members and includes a lounge area with satellite TV, WIFI, bottle bar and a meeting room with OHP facilities to seat around 15 members.
2. Food and beverage discounts up to 20% at TMC Lounge and at all Hotel outlets except Cafe 64 and during Happy Hours, every third Thursday of the month at Margarita Blue : 50% discount on beverages and the usual 20% discount on food.

Galadari Hotel for Platinum Card members only

3. Modern laundry with discounted rates, currently at 20%.
4. Specially discounted rates for TMC organised events and preferred rates for members' private function at the discretion of the Hotel management
5. Paid up members may book their space at the bottle bar special rates.
6. An annual membership with Gym/Pool facilities at a specially discounted rate of 40% discount, such facility to be availed through TMC only.
7. Room upgrades for self and guests at the discretion of the Hotel management.

Exclusive offers currently at

Galadari Hotel for Platinum Card members only

1. 30% discount on food and beverage at all restaurants excluding Café 64 and High Tea.
2. Laundry 30% discount at the Modern Laundry.
3. Special commissions for Platinum Card holders of TMC and the organisations they represent for private banquet functions.
4. Annual membership for Gym/Pool facilities at a very special discounted rate of 50%.
5. Special discounted rates for single/ double room with breakfast on executive floors for direct booking for Platinum Card holders and the organisations they represent.

6. Executive Club Lounge located at the 12th floor for a minimum spend of Rs.5,000/- net per booking and the reservation could be coordinated through TMC/ Room service.
7. 20% discount on food during week days and 15% discount on food during weekends for private banquet functions. This offer is applicable for standard rates only.
8. Free bottle bank facility for a period of 10 years (two cabinets free)
9. ree use of Boardroom and Meeting room up to 2 hours (twice a month)
10. Further exclusive benefits being negotiated.