

Qatar can play vital role in Sri Lanka's strategic expansion, says EDB chief

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar can play a vital role in Sri Lanka's strategic expansion as the South Asian country seeks to diversify its markets in the Middle East region and beyond, Sri Lanka Exports Development Board's Director General Chitranjali Dissanayake has said at a webinar on the 'Bilateral and Synergistic Opportunities between Qatar and Sri Lanka' hosted by Doha Bank yesterday.

During the event, Dissanayake spoke on the topic of 'Potential exports from Sri Lanka to Qatar and the Country's Export Strategy', while reiterating that the two countries have had cordial diplomatic relations for the past four decades.

"Sri Lanka aims to be a prominent and efficient trade hub in the South Asian region. Currently, Sri Lanka exports agriculture products to Qatar. Imports include plastic and petroleum. Export opportunities for Sri Lanka to Qatar also include agriculture, fisheries and apparel. Joint venture opportunities in Qatar can also be looked," she added.

Doha Bank CEO Dr. R.



Doha Bank CEO Dr R Seetharaman (top left), and Sri Lanka Exports Development Board's Director General Chitranjali Dissanayake, with other officials during the webinar, yesterday.

Seetharaman also highlighted the bilateral relationship between the two countries. He said: "The Sri Lankan economy is expected to contract by 0.5 percent in 2020. Sri Lanka Vision 2025 has given thrust on FDI and exports and to improve per-capita income. Sri Lanka can support Qatar in the food sector. Qatar Airways and Sri Lankan Airlines also announced a significant codeshare expansion in December 2019".

Also speaking during the event, Sanjay Mohottala,

Director General of the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka, said that Sri Lanka which is going through interesting period for investments, seeks to have 6-7 percent GDP growth in 10 years.

He added that the country is a global hub for hotels chains, and has a skilled workforce where education and reskilling is vital. "Sri Lanka has cost effective labour and has the lowest tax rate for companies. The country has much higher quality of life index in South Asia and provides connectivity to

South Asia, Africa and East Asia," said Mohottala.

Dr. Chandranath Amarasekara, Director of Economic Research Department at the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, highlighted the 'Macroeconomic developments and debt service obligations and financing arrangements' in the country. He said Sri Lanka was able to contain the COVID-19 pandemic due to people-centric policies.

He added that exports have seen a V-shaped recovery, while imports have witnessed decline due to restrictions imposed. "The economy is seeing a narrow trade deficit. Domestic production is improving. Workers' remittances is a huge chunk of the economy at \$7bn annually. It witnessed a dip in March to May 2020. Tourism sector is the most affected sector. The exchange rate has stabilised since April 2020. Official reserves reached \$7bn by the end of July 2020. Inflation is under control and by the fourth quarter of 2020, we expect the economic activity to accelerate and go back to normalcy by next year," he added.