

SRI LANKA - OMAN

RELATIONS

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



O. L. AMEER AJWAD

Sri Lanka – Oman Relations
Past, Present, and Future

OMAR LEBBE AMEER AJWAD
Ambassador of Sri Lanka
to the Sultanate of Oman



www.blackandwhiteoman.com



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
The Sultan of Oman



H.E. Ranil Wickremesinghe
President of Sri Lanka



Sri Lanka – Oman Relations: Past, Present, and Future

O. L. AMEER AJWAD

Copyright © Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad 2022

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Opinions and views expressed by the author and other resource persons who are quoted in the book, are personal unless otherwise quoted from the official and other sources. All information included in the book is subject to change. All the web links quoted in the book were accessed during the year 2022 and the author or publisher is not responsible for periodical changes and updates therein. All trademarks and trade names mentioned in this book belong to their respective owners.

Black & White Media:

Opinions expressed in the articles and the copyright of the text is of the author and does not necessarily reflect those of the editors or publishers. While the Black & White Media has tried to verify the information published, they do not accept responsibility for its absolute accuracy, nor for its origins. Views expressed in the published articles are of the author/s, and does not reflect that of Black & White Media. We stand indemnified against any claims arising directly or indirectly from the publication of this book.



Published by : Black and White Media and Services LLC

Postal address: P O Box 4111, PC 112, Ruwi, Oman.

Office: Hatat House A, II Floor, Suite No: 212,
Wadi Adai, Sultanate of Oman.

www.blackandwhiteoman.com

Cover Illustration Design: Malinga Mediwake

Pages, Production & Design: Beneek Sirajudeen

Editing: Black and White Media

Printers: Oman Printers & Stationers Ltd. Co. LLC

Photographs: Dilini Abeysekara, B&W Media,

Archives, Sri Lankan Embassy

Published in the Sultanate of Oman in 2022

Ministry of Information: 5317/2022

ISBN No: 978-9-996949-83-8

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS book, which chronicles the relations between Sri Lanka and Oman, and foresees its future outlook, would not have seen the light of the day without the unstinted support and cooperation extended by an array of people who contributed to the making of the book in different ways, directly or indirectly.

I owe a debt of gratitude, first of all, to His Excellency Sayyid Badr Albusaidi, Foreign Minister of the Sultanate of Oman, who readily and graciously agreed to contribute the foreword to this book, despite his busy schedule. I am sincerely grateful for his kind and generous gesture.

While I wish to express my sincere appreciation to H.E. Sheikh Khalifa Al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman for the encouragement and support extended, I am also thankful to H.E. Sheikh Mohamed Al Shanfari, Head of the West Asia Department, and his team at the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman for their kind cooperation and contribution in the process of the publication of this book.

I am also indebted to the Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, Ms. Aruni Wijewardane, as well as to my colleagues, the Additional Secretary Ms. Wijeratne Mendis, the Director General Mr. Kapila Jayaweera, and the Assistant Director Ms. Prarthana Kaushalya of the Middle East Affairs Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, in Colombo, for their kind support and cooperation to make this book possible.

I am sincerely grateful, in particular, to my industrious Counsellor in the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat, Ms. Dilini Abeysekera, for her ardent support and painstaking coordination to bring this project to fruition. I would like to place on record my deepest appreciation

to the members of the Committee from the Sri Lankan Community in Oman, namely Messrs. Lalith Kumara, Hafeez Marrikar, Lalindra Fernando, Malinga Mediwake, Vishva Basnayaka, Ratnasiri Jayayasinghe and Ms. Nadeesha Hemachandra, with whom I entrusted the task of collating information about the Sri Lankan Community in Oman, which is recorded under Chapter IV of this book. I sincerely thank them for their enthusiastic participation and contribution, amidst their professional workload.

I am obliged to the Ministry of Information of the Sultanate of Oman for sourcing rare photographs of early bilateral visits and official events held in Oman in the past. I am also thankful to other institutions and individuals who generously shared photographs from their archives. My sincere thanks are also due to my former colleagues from the Sri Lanka Foreign Service, namely, Ambassador Zarook Samsudeen, Ambassador A.L.A. Azeez and Dr George I. H. Cooke, for extending their generous support at the initial structuring of this book. A special thanks to Mr. Malinga Mediwake, who is a member of my Sri Lankan community in Oman and Co-founder of MIRRORS LLC, for his kind contribution in designing an innovative cover page to this book. I wish to also express my appreciation to Mr. Samuel Kutty, senior editor at the Oman Daily Observer for his generous support extended to this project. I owe gratitude to Ms Priya Arunkumar and her team at Black and White Media and Services LLC, publishers of the book, for the job well done. My sincere thanks are also due to all those who helped me to bring this book to the launchpad.

Last but not least, a special word of gratitude to my wife Asmiya and my children for their patience, understanding and generosity for lending their time to fulfill this daunting task amidst my ambassadorial duties.

FOREWORD

The people of the Sultanate of Oman have always been truly privileged by the ambassadors sent from Sri Lanka. As soon as I met His Excellency Ambassador Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, I knew he was no exception.

I first got to know him in my capacity as Secretary General of Oman's Foreign Ministry, and have since been grateful for the opportunity to work with him more closely in my current role as Foreign Minister. During his time in Oman, he has played an unequivocally positive role in progressing relations between our two countries and this book is a testament not only to the strength of our countries' friendship, but also to Ambassador Ameer Ajwad's strength of character, and the enthusiasm and diligence with which he undertakes each and every one of life's pursuits.

Sri Lanka and Oman's diplomatic journey spans just over four decades. However, the tales in this book show that our bonds go back centuries, if not millennia, into the mists of time. Ambassador Ameer Ajwad presents a comprehensive review of collaborations between our countries, from hockey to fruit, International Tea Day to cricket tournaments, fisheries to technology. His book demonstrates that every step of our countries' journey together has been underpinned by a deep rooted connection between our peoples. It is, and has always been, the cornerstone of the relations between Sri Lanka and Oman.

This book is full of historical references,

expert opinions, and commercial endeavours.

It brought a smile to my face to revisit the story of the Jewel of Muscat, and to hear that Omani Halwa is known as "Halwa Muscat" in Sri Lankan households. Ambassador Ameer Ajwad is a great authority on the Sri Lanka-Oman relationship and this overview of successful bilateral initiatives ensures that every reader will find it informative, accessible, and engaging.

Since early 2020, both Sri Lanka and Oman have faced immense challenges posed by COVID-19. The resilience and resourcefulness with which we have responded, in the spirit of teamwork and social unity, give us great confidence in the future. Over centuries, we have built an unbreakable partnership which enables us to advance the cause of peace, and we look forward to furthering this vision in the years to come. It gives me great pleasure to convey, on behalf of the Government and people of the Sultanate of Oman, our heartfelt greetings to His Excellency Ambassador Ameer Ajwad and our thanks for his unabating determination to strengthen relations between our two countries during his tenure in Oman. I wish him success in his future endeavours.

Last but not least, I wish to take this opportunity to convey my personal and best greetings and good wishes to the friendly people of Sri Lanka including those living and working in Oman.

Badr Albusaidi
Foreign Minister
Sultanate of Oman

PREFACE

SRI LANKA and the Sultanate of Oman celebrated the 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations on 17th February 2021. This was indeed a remarkable milestone in the history of the long standing relations underpinned by shared history and bonds of friendship between the two nations.

As neighbours in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka and Oman trace their links to the mist of history. Geographically located at the centre of the maritime trade route between the Persian Gulf and the Far East in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka had naturally attracted a number of Arab seafarers and seafaring vessels from ancient times. As such, Sri Lanka's contact with the Arab world, dates back to pre- Christian era, primarily driven by trading. Similarly, situated on the eastern coasts of the Arabian Peninsula to the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean, Oman had played a major role in the ancient maritime trading and cultural exchanges. Early documented history records the passage of merchant seafarers from Oman to Sri Lanka and vice versa across the Indian Ocean as well as their service to the world as entrepôts of trade in the ancient Silk Road and Spice Route.

People to people connectivity had been the bedrock of modern Sri Lanka and Oman relations. Sri Lankan Community in the Sultanate has been an important component in forging relations between the two countries. The contribution

by the Sri Lankan community in Oman towards general, as well as certain key aspects in the Sultanate's social progress for over five decades, is well acknowledged. The appointment of late Mr. Felix de Silva, a Sri Lankan national, as the first Inspector General (IGP) of the Royal Omani Police (ROP) and Customs in the year of 1974 by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, bears testimony to the high point of trust bestowed on Sri Lankan nationals by the leadership of the Sultanate.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman has served as a catalyst to enhance and diversify bilateral relations to encompass a wide range of areas over the last four decades.

The commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries has provided an opportunity to take stock of the progress made in the past and to plan for the future.

A number of activities initiated during the commemorative year 2021, despite the unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic, have laid a solid foundation for the future cooperation between the two countries in key areas of mutual interest.

As such, having had the privilege as the first Sri Lankan ambassador to present credentials to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who leads the renewed Renaissance of the Sultanate

with a clear roadmap of Oman's Vision 2040 and its Tanfeedh initiative, I thought to document the enormous prospects that are unfolding under this new era for the future cooperation between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate to become strategic, bilateral, regional and multilateral partners in the years ahead. Such cooperation, I believe, could pave the way for both nations to regain the historic pride that they enjoyed in the past, serving the world as lifelines of international trade.

The objective behind this book, therefore, is to reinvigorate the past, highlight the present, and to chart pathways for the future by providing relevant information with a view to fostering deeper economic engagement between the two countries.

The book sketches Sri Lanka and Oman relationship in five chapters that bring out its past, illustrate its present and forecast its future.

CHAPTER I highlights the Arab - Sri Lanka interactions from the early history and the main factors that attracted Arabs to visit Sri Lanka. It highlights historical linkages between Sri Lanka and Oman providing details of the ancient trade links between the two countries.

CHAPTER II deals with the establishment of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman and highlights the commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with a variety of activities which were organised by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman jointly with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman.

CHAPTER III outlines the bilateral relations that happily exist between the two countries through exchanges of bilateral visits, signing of bilateral agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and provides details of the present status of the bilateral cooperation in multifaceted areas, including trade, investment, labour, defence and multilateral arena.

Chapter IV highlights the long standing people to people ties between the two countries and provides details, which are available with the author, of a few early Sri Lankans in Oman, key Sri Lankan enterprises, key Sri Lankan establishments, key Sri Lankan community organisations in Oman as well as important sectors to which contributions were made by the members of the Sri Lankan community in Oman.

CHAPTER V focuses on the future outlook of the bilateral cooperation between the two countries, which is the primary objective of this book, and identifies highly potential areas for bilateral cooperation such as trade and investment, agriculture and fisheries, tourism, education, maritime and energy sectors that could synergise bilateral cooperation. This chapter also endeavours to provide vital information and/or suggestions by sharing expert opinions under different sectors for the mutual benefits of future cooperation and partnership between the two countries.

Useful information relevant to the identified sectors under Chapter V was extracted from the official websites of different entities in both countries and has been quoted with the indication of its sources. Accordingly, official websites

of Sri Lanka's Board of Investment (BOI), the Export Development Board (EDB), Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLDA), Ministries of Higher Education, Agriculture, Fisheries, Trade, Ports & Shipping, Energy and Tourism of Sri Lanka, as well as the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), were accessed and references have been made to them. Similarly, the official websites of Oman's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MOCIIP), Ministries of Higher Education, Agriculture, and other arms of the Government of Oman, such as Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Madayn, Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), ASYAD Group, and OMRAN Group were also accessed and references have been made to them too.

Moreover, it would not have been possible to provide historical references without those books, scholarly articles and other sources on ancient Arab - Sri Lanka ties, which have been referred to under Chapter I of the book. I am deeply grateful to the authors and publishers of all those books and articles. I owe a debt of gratitude to the resource persons who provided interviews personally and via e-mails, contributing their valuable inputs and independent opinions, views, and suggestions relevant to different identified sectors which are faithfully quoted in the book under Chapter V.

It goes without saying that the strengthening of Sri Lanka - Oman relations would never have been possible without the active role and contributions of all my predecessor Ambassadors of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman as well as the Ambassadors of the Sultanate to

Sri Lanka. They all had demonstrated great commitment to making the bilateral relations between the two countries diverse and substantive.

As Sri Lanka's Envoy to the Sultanate of Oman from the year 2019 to 2022, I have had the distinct honor to serve Sri Lanka in Muscat at the interface of two epochal moments in the history of the Sultanate. This involved the reigns of both their Majesties, Sultan Qaboos and his successor Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. I cherish the memories of these two legendary leaders and their great qualities of leadership. I also cherish the memories of Omani hospitality, helpfulness, and warmth of the people of Oman.

I take this opportunity to extend my best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the friendly People of Oman for their continued progress and prosperity. I wish to also record my appreciation to various Government ministries and institutions of the Sultanate, in particular, to the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman for the unwavering support and cooperation extended to the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat over the decades with a view to enhancing the bilateral relations between the two countries from strength to strength.

I hope that this book will not only provide useful information, but, perhaps, succeed in bringing a further impetus to elevate the already existing time-tested relations between Sri Lanka and Oman to new heights.

Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad
Ambassador of Sri Lanka
to the Sultanate of Oman



Presentation of the Letters of Credence to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, by the Author as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman followed by a Bilateral Meeting



CONTENTS

- Pg 14 TRIBUTE:**
Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said
- Pg 16 CHAPTER I: HISTORICAL RELATIONS**
- Arab Links with Sri Lanka
 - Sri Lanka – Oman Ancient links
- Pg 32 CHAPTER II: DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS**
- Commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations - Highlights
 - Photo Feature – Glimpses
- Pg 50 CHAPTER III: BILATERAL RELATIONS**
- Key Bilateral Interactions
 - Photo Gallery
- Pg 66 CHAPTER IV: SRI LANKAN COMMUNITY IN OMAN**
- Early Sri Lankans
 - Key Sri Lankan Establishments and Enterprises
- Pg 82 CHAPTER V: THE FUTURE OUTLOOK**

A TRIBUTE

His Majesty Sultan
Qaboos bin Said

The Late Sultan of Oman



I arrived in the Sultanate of Oman on 10th July 2019, carrying my Letters of Credence addressed to the architect of modern Oman and the longest served ruler in the Arab world, the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Al Said, as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, where I set foot for the first time.

I was astonished to witness Oman's miraculous transformation into a modern, tolerant, peaceful and prosperous nation under the visionary leadership of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos within a short span of 50 years.

On 10th of January 2020, exactly on the day of my sixth month of stay in the Sultanate, I learnt with profound sorrow the sad news of the passing of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

The late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos was a true friend of Sri Lanka and had placed great trust on Sri Lankan nationals. He provided a large number of Sri Lankan nationals with enormous opportunities to serve the Sultanate of Oman at different levels.

His contribution to bring about peace and harmony to the region, as well as to the world at large, will forever be remembered.

To add value to this book, I wish to pay a tribute to the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Al Said by quoting the following from his wisdom:

“In the area of international relations, our foreign policy is based on firm foundations and principles: support for right and justice and a desire to work together with other peace-loving countries of the world to resolve international conflicts through dialogue and negotiations, so that everyone can enjoy security and stability and all the peoples of the earth can reap the benefits.”

May God Rest his Soul In Peace.



Hon. Susil Premajayantha, Special Envoy of H.E. the President of Sri Lanka, offering the condolence message to the then Foreign Minister of Oman on the demise of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos



Special Envoy and the delegation



Condolence message banner in Sinhala language placed in Sri Lanka by former Sri Lankan expatriates of Oman



Condolences offered by Sri Lankan expatriates residing in Al Buraimi





CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL RELATIONS

ARAB LINKS WITH SRI LANKA

Arab links with Sri Lanka go back to pre-Christian times. Evidently, the initial motivating force was mainly confined to trade and commerce, which eventually led to the growth of cultural relations. Since Sri Lanka was at the center of sea routes connecting China and the South Eastern countries with the Middle East and the Mediterranean countries, it is no surprise that the Island was frequently visited by Arab seafarers from the earliest days itself.

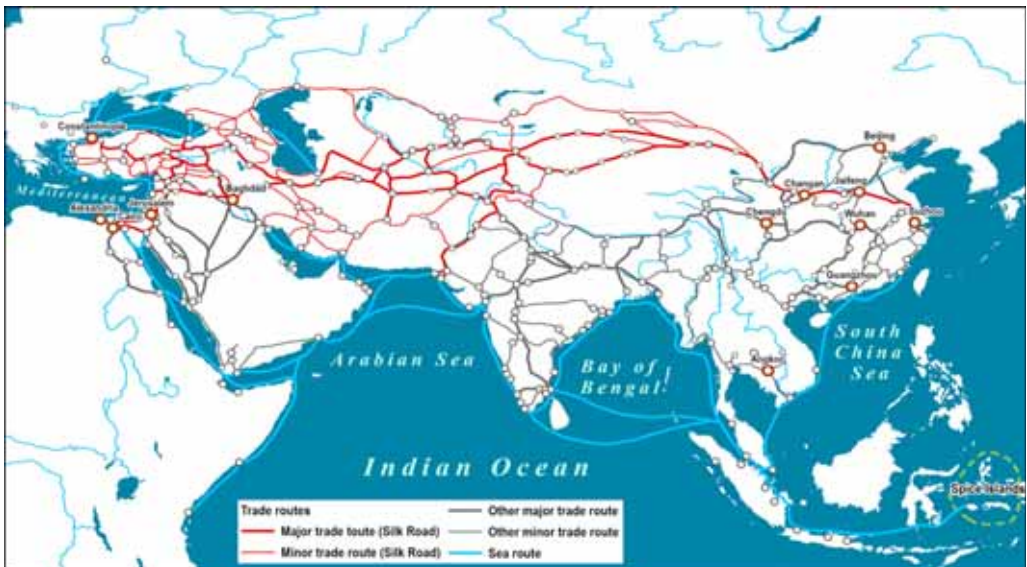
SRI LANKA has been a strategically important island that has facilitated cross border trade for millennia. Its unique location at the centre of the Indian Ocean and the maritime Silk Route between China and Europe, made it a hub for ancient maritime trade.

Arab contact with Sri Lanka goes back to pre-Christian times. Initial motivating force mainly confined to trade and commerce, which eventually led to the growth of cultural relations.¹

A map compiled in 150 A.D. from Cladius

Ptolemy's Geography, names the Daduru Oya as Soana Fluvius, the river of the Arabs, proving the antiquity of the Arab contact with Sri Lanka. Other people who had trading settlements in Sri Lanka, indicated by Ptolemy, were Persians (Mahaweli river - Phasis Fluvius), Abyssinians² (Gin Ganga - Azana Fluvius), etc.

It is sometimes thought that it was perhaps the presence of the Arab traders in Sri Lanka which gave rise to the Mahāvamsa story where King Pandukabhaya³ assigned a special area in Anuradhapura for the *Yonas*.⁴



1 Shukri M.A.M, Arab Contact with Sri Lanka – Sindbad and Ibn Batuta, Ancient Ceylon, Journal of the Archaeological Survey Department of Sri Lanka (Colombo, 1990), p 4

2 Muller, C, Children of the Lion, Penguin Group (New Delhi, 1997), p.473

3 King Pandukabhaya (437–367 BC) the first monarch of the Anuradhapura Kingdom in Sri Lanka, reigned from 437 BC to 367 BC.

4 Mahavāmsa, (ed.), W. Geiger, Pali Text Society, (London, 1950), Ch. X, v. 90, quoted by Rohitha Dasanayaka in "Arabs in Serandib Trade Relations between Sri Lanka and West Asia from Ancient time to 15th Century A. D. Historical and Archaeological Survey", (ISBN 978-955-30-), p.74 - 76



Professor Rohitha Dasanayaka, Head of the Department of History at the University of Peradeniya of Sri Lanka, observes:

Arab geographers and Persian writers called Sri Saheelan, Sarandyb, Taprobani, Sangal-dip, Salabh, Sahilan, Sanga-dib, Langa, Jaziratul- Yakut-Isle of Rubies, Sarandip, etc.

They were much concerned about the physical nature, situation and resources of Sri Lanka. In addition, the Islamic belief that Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka contained their Prophet's footprint had a great impact on them, and therefore those writers never forgot to include Sri Lanka in their travelogues and literary works. Most of the Arab writers usually named Sri Lanka as Sarandib which seems to be derived from the Persian word Serendivi."⁵

Adam's Peak (Siripada)

Adam's Peak, a mountain in southwestern Sri Lanka (Ceylon), 7,360 feet (2,243 m) high and 11 miles (18 km) northeast of Ratnapura, is located in the Sri Lanka hill country. Its conical summit terminates in an oblong platform about 74 by 24 feet (22 by 7 m), on which there is a large hollow resembling the print of a human foot, 5 feet 4 inches by 2 feet 6 inches. The depression is venerated alike by Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus, who regard it as the footprint of the Buddha, Adam, and Śiva, respectively. Many pilgrims of all faiths visit the peak every year. Heavy chains on the mountain's southwestern face, said to have been placed there by Alexander the Great, mark the route to the summit.⁶

Adam's Peak is believed to be associated with Adam's fall from Paradise, and came to

⁵ Dasanayaka R., *Arabs in Serandib Trade Relations between Sri Lanka and West Asia from Ancient time to 15th Century A. D.* Historical and Archaeological Survey, S. Godage & Brothers (Pvt) Ltd Publication, Colombo, 2017, pp 15-16

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Adams-Peak>



Arab Jewellery Box (Polonnaruwa Musium)



*Arabic coins during Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid and Mamluk Periods, found in Sri Lanka
(Courtesy: Arabs in Serandib Trade Relations between Sri Lanka and West Asia from Ancient time to 15th Century A. D. Historical and Archaeological Survey by Prof. Rohitha Dasanayake)*

be venerated as Adam's Peak by the Muslims, who considered Adam, the first human being, as their forefather.⁷ Adam's Peak is well known throughout the Muslim world⁸ as the first spot on earth where Adam set foot when he was driven out of Paradise. The spices which grew on the island are said to have sprung from the leaves of branches that Adam was allowed to bring from Paradise (Encyclopedia of Islam).⁹

Arab Trade with Sri Lanka

Since the latter half of the 1st century B.C., the Sri Lankan coastal region was known to have had contacts with far off places like the Persian Gulf, Sind, Gujarat and the Indonesian ports.¹⁰ In the second century B.C., the trade with the Island was wholly in the hands of Arabs. At the beginning of the 7th century of the Christian era, the trade with China through Ceylon received a great

impetus. With early trade between China and Persia, it was inevitable that Ceylon and South India would become an integral part of the trade network. Sri Lanka was a focal point of Persian trade and it is known that the Sassanian Emperors had maintained diplomatic relations with the court at Anuradhapura in the 5th century A.D.¹¹

Ties with Islamic World

A new dimension was added to these commercial activities with the advent of Islam, when traders of various Arabic speaking races visited the island under the banner of Islam. It is very likely that a large number of pre-Islamic Arabs who were settled in Sri Lanka before the advent of Islam, embraced the new faith of their countrymen in Arabia. It was seen that by the ninth and tenth centuries, sizeable Arab colonies had developed along the coast.

7 Adam is the name given in Genesis 1-5 to the first human, See: Hendel, Ronald S (2000). "Adam". In David Noel Freedman (ed.). Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible. Eerdmans. ISBN 9789053565032. It was also adopted by both Christianity and Islam, and the name of Adam appears in the Christian scriptures and in the Quran. He also features in subsequent folkloric and mystical elaborations in later Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism, See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam#CITEREFHendel2000>

8 Arab travelers such as SulaimanTajir(851 A.D), Ibn Batuta (1344) have recorded about Adam's Peak during their visits.

9 Deweraja L., The Muslims of Sri Lanka One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony(900 - 1915), 1994, p. 30

10 Gunawardana R.A.L.H., Changing Patterns of Navigation in the Indian Ocean and Their Impact on Pre-colonial Sri Lanka, in Satish Chandra, (ed.), The Indian Ocean: Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics, Sage Publication, (New Delhi, 1987), pp. 54-89

11 Iman S.A. , "Ceylon Arab Relations" in Moors Islamic Cultural Home Souvenir 1944-65, pp. 10-13.

Since oceanic traders do not travel with their women, the immigrants who were mainly men, inter-married local women, both Sinhala and Tamil.¹²

Dr. Vernon L.B. Mendis,¹³ observes:

“What could be regarded as the sensational event in the annals of Sri Lankan diplomacy is the reported dispatch of an envoy from Sri Lanka to Medina on a fact finding mission at the time of the holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) to presumably acquaint himself with the new religion and its impacts.

The Prophet had died at the time¹⁴ he arrived, but the envoy met Caliph Omar¹⁵ who briefed him on the situation.

The envoy himself died on his return journey and left it to his servant to report back as best as he could. This incident is reported in the *Ajaib-Al-Hind* of Ibn Shahriyar¹⁶ and one can explain this as masterly diplomatic stroke to assess the nature of the new force, which had arisen in Asia and also to gain the goodwill of the Arab communities in the Island.”¹⁷

Mendis further observes: “With the advent of Islam, a new age dawned in the history of Asia, which transformed the commercial scenario when Muslim traders gained a mastery of the trade originating from the western sector, which they controlled from their successive kingdoms in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere. Sri

Lanka inevitably became a focal point of this trade.

This was the setting of the close ties which developed between the island and the Muslim world where the precious stones of the island earned for it the name *Jazirath Yakut* (emphasis added) and attracted Muslim traders to its hinterland. The island became the subject of the spate of Arab writings.

This is the time when Adam’s Peak became a place of pilgrimage to which an eminent Shaikh from Persia paid a visit in 929, and, in the 10th century, the Caliph of Baghdad sent a religious teacher to the island in response to requests from the local Muslim community, who organised their religious life.

The importance of Sri Lanka as a staging post in the Muslim trade of the region can be judged from the findings in Mantai (regarded as a twin city of Siraf) which make up an impressive range of the choicest items in the international trade of that time.”¹⁸

Moreover, the conquest of Alexandria by the Arabs in 638 A.D. during the then young Muslim state, impaired Sri Lanka’s direct trade with Byzantium Empire, which led to the development of commercial relations of Sri Lanka and Yemen in South Arabia or Hadramaut.¹⁹

12 Dasanayaka R., *Arabs in Serandib Trade Relations between Sri Lanka and West Asia from Ancient time to 15th Century A. D. Historical and Archaeological Survey*, pp 46-47

13 Late Dr. Vernon L. B. Mendis was one of the accomplished Sri Lankan career diplomats from the first batch of Ceylon Overseas Service (1949– 1988) and served as the Secretary General of the 5th Non-Aligned Summit held in Colombo in 1976

14 Holy Prophet Mohammed passed away in 632 A.D. (author's note).

15 633- 644 AD (author's note)

16 *Ajaib-Al-Hind* was written by IbnShahriyar around 953A.D. (author's note)

17 Mendis V.L.B., *Bilateral and Multilateral Factors in Sri Lanka’s Foreign Policy*, published by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike National Memorial Foundation (1997), p21.

18 *Ibid*, pp. 21&22

19 Mendis, G.C., *Early History of Ceylon* (1940). Calcutta

20 Yusuf S.M., *Studies in Islamic History and Culture* (Lahore, 1972) ch. V. p.157

Historians also record Arab – Sri Lanka relations during the Umayyad dynasty (661–750 A.D.). It is believed that a large number of Hashemite Arabs migrated to Sri Lanka with their families in large numbers to evade persecution of Umayyads.²⁰

The existence of Arab settlements in Sri Lanka during this period is also confirmed by the incident narrated by an eminent Arab historian Ahmad Ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri (d 892 A.D.) in his book *Kitab Futuh al- Buldan* (Book of the Conquests of Lands). According to Al-Baladhuri, the king of the “Island of Rubies” (Jazirath-ul-Yaqut)²¹ sent some daughters of Muslim merchants who had died in the island, to the powerful Viceroy of the Umayyads in Iraq, Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf (710 A.D.). The ship carrying the daughters of Muslim was attacked by pirates near Daybal (modern Karachi) and this incidence led to series of raids and resulted in the conquest of Sind in 715 A.D.²²

This description, regardless of the accuracy of its truth, signifies the presence of Moors²³ in Sri Lanka during the advent of Islam in the 7th century AD.²⁴

By about the 9th century, there were Arab trading communities well established in Sri Lanka, especially in the island’s coastal towns enjoying the favour of the rulers and maintaining cordial relations

with the local inhabitants.²⁵ Before the end of the 7th century, a colony of Muslim merchants had established themselves in Ceylon.

These Muslims lived in settlements along the coastal areas of Ceylon in peace and prosperity maintaining contacts, cultural and commercial, with Bagdad and other countries of the Muslim world. It is significant to note that the heyday of the Abbasid dynasty was contemporaneous with the zenith of what Arasaratnam calls “The Classical Age of Sinhalese Power”²⁶

The most important period of Arab-Sri Lanka relations was during the rule of the Abbasid dynasty (750-1260 AD).²⁷ The political ascendancy of the Abbasids during the 9th and 10th centuries, coincides with the Polonnaruwa period of Sri Lankan history.²⁸ Arab Muslims assumed a significant position during the Polonnaruwa period and became a powerful factor in Sri Lanka’s international trade. As evidence suggests, very good relations were maintained during the period of the most powerful and the famous Emperor Harun-al Rashid (A.D.786-809).

The Baghdad Royal Council’s association with Sri Lanka has been proven through literary and archaeological findings. Moreover, the tales of the famous Arabic

21 Authors note

22 Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh – ul- Buldan*, Cairo, 1935, p.423

23 The term 'Moor' used in Sri Lanka to denote Muslims which can be traced to the Spanish word 'Moro' and the Portuguese word 'Mauro'

24 Sebastian A., *A complete Illustrated History – Sri Lanka*, VijithaYapa Publications, (2012), p.555

25 Deweraja, L., *The Muslims of Sri Lanka One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony* (900 – 1915), The Lanka Islamic Foundation, 1994, p. 24

26 Arasaratnam, S., *Ceylon*, New Jersey, 1964, p.423. See also: A.M.A. Azeez, *Education in Ceylon – A centenary Volume 1969 Govt. Press, Colombo*. P.1148.

27 All chronological dates one quoted from Dominique Sourdel, *Medieval Islam*, (trans.), J. Montgomery Watt, Routledge and Kegan Paul, (London, 1983), pp. x-xv

28 Shukri, M.A.M., *Arabia and Persia in Sri Lankan History*, Golden Jubilee National Lecture Series, Ministry of Cultural & Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (Colombo, 1999), p. 5

29 Dasanayaka, R., *Arabs in Serandib Trade Relations between Sri Lanka and West Asia from Ancient time to 15th Century A. D. Historical and Archaeological Survey*, S. Godage & Brothers (Pvt) Ltd Publication, (Colombo, 2017), p 114

book, *Alf Layla Wa Layla* or *Thousand and One Nights* (Sinhala version - “*Arabi Nisollasaya*”), based on the experience of navigators, was composed probably in the early Abbasid period (A.D. 750-850).²⁹

According to Professor Rohitha Dasanayaka, *Sindbad the Sailor*³⁰ came to Sri Lanka when king Harun-al-Rashid was the ruler of Baghdad.³¹ There is a reference in the 7th voyage of *Sindbad the Sailor* of taking presents from the king of Sri Lanka to the Caliph of Bagdad, and the Calcutta text of the same tale refers to the Caliph reciprocating the Sri Lankan king’s gifts. It is recounted that *Sindbad* obtained from



Sri Lanka diamonds, precious stones, sandalwood, camphor, cloves, cinnamon, pepper, coconut, ambergris, and ivory during his voyages.³²

“*Masjidul Abrar*”, an iconic mosque fronted by a large pond, located in Beruwala, a town on the south-west coast of Sri Lanka, 60 km south of Colombo, is believed to be the first mosque in Sri Lanka founded in 920 AD. The mosque is a living symbol to witness that a thriving Islamic community existed in Sri Lanka in 9th century AD. The mosque was built by Arab merchants, who arrived in Sri Lanka to trade with locals in spices, ginger and steel, en route to China.³³

Sri Lankan historian, late Dr (Mrs) Lorna Dewaraja states:

30 According to some sources, the Omani sailor Abu Ubaidah bin Abdullah bin Al Qasim Al-Omani, is believed to be the famous sailor “*Sinbad*”. See: <https://omanspire.com/article/details.php?articleid=446&id=10>

31 Dasanayaka, R., *Arabs in Serandib Trade Relations between Sri Lanka and West Asia from Ancient time to 15th Century A. D.* Historical and Archaeological Survey, S. Godage & Brothers (Pvt) Ltd Publication, Colombo, 2017, p 114

32 Shukri, M.A.M., *Arab Contact with Sri Lanka – Sindbad and Ibn Batuta*, Ancient Ceylon, Journal of the Archaeological Survey Department of Sri Lanka (Colombo, 1990), p 11

33 See also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Abrar_Mosque,_Beruwala; <https://abrar Masjid.com/>

34 Dewaraja L., *The Muslims of Sri Lanka One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony (900 – 1915)*, The Lanka Islamic Foundation, 1994, p. 26



Masjidul Abrar

“Archaeological evidence confirms that Arab trade had increased in volume in the 9th and 10th centuries and sizeable Muslim settlements had emerged on coastal towns.

Special mention should be made of Mantota (which is the ancient Mahatittha and modern Mantai).

Mantota, which was a vital link in the East-West trade when it was under Persian control, maintained for many reasons, its pre-eminent position in the Arab commercial empire.

Mantota was the chief port of the Anuradapura Kingdom and there was a highway connecting it with the capital. Also, this port lay on two international trade routes, one proceeding along the Malabar Coast and thence to Arabia, Persia and Egypt, and the other along the





Coromandal Coast to the Bay of Bengal and to Malacca, Sumatra, Java, Moluccas and China.”³⁴

Dewaraja further states:

“A 10th century Arabic inscription written in Kufic characters found in the National Museum in Colombo proves that the contact with the Arab world was not merely commercial, but religious and cultural as well. The Arab community in Colombo requested the Caliph of Baghdad to send a religious teacher who would instruct them in the tenets and practices of Islam. In response to this request Khalid



Ibn Abu Bakaya, a learned and pious Muslim priest was sent to teach the Muslims of Colombo, organise them into an Islamic community and erect a mosque so as to ensure the continuing

observance of Muslim worship. Having achieved all these objectives, Abu Bakaya died in Colombo in 948 A.D. and was buried

near the mosque he had erected. After his death, the Caliph of Baghdad sent some learned persons to Colombo for the express purpose of engraving an inscription on his tombstone. It remained on his grave for 800 years.³⁵

In and about the 9th and 10th centuries there have been many references to Sri Lanka by Muslim writers. Some of whom were Sulaiman Thajir Ibn Masudi and Ibn Shahriyar. Some of the products of Sri Lanka, mentioned by the writers, are spices, valuable timber, the finest rubies, *kitul treacle* cherished by kings and nobles, medicinal herbs and iron. From the ninth to fifteenth centuries, Sri Lanka was a distributing center for Chinese silk to the Western market.³⁶

Ample of Sri Lankan inscriptions on tomb stones, pottery and Islamic coins are important source materials to prove Arab -Sri Lanka long historical relations.³⁷ The Arab’s predominance in the trade of these waters was based on their sense of adventure and capacity to sail over the seas. This, along with the simplicity of their religious beliefs, earned for them the amicable and friendly treatment from the vast non-Muslim

35 Ibid, p. 28

36 Ibid, p.26

37 Ibid

38 Dasanayaka, R., Arabs in Serandib Trade Relations between Sri Lanka and West Asia from Ancient time to 15th Century A. D. Historical and Archaeological Survey, pp. 25-26



Kitul treacle (The fishtail palm), also known locally as the jaggery palm, is abundant all over Sri Lanka and was cherished by kings and nobles, and was one of the most traded products of Sri Lanka

people of the eastern world.³⁸

An Arabic inscription ascribed to the 13th century, found in the Bhagavalena, a cave about 100 feet below the summit of Adam's Peak is interesting as a memorial of Muslim pilgrims to the Peak. It has attracted further notice since it is written by the side of a Sinhala inscription of King Nissanka Malla (1187- 1196), recording his visit to the Peak and also granting several villages for the maintenance of the shrine. The existence of these two inscriptions side by side, on the recess of the sacred Peak of a Sinhala Buddhist inscription and an Arabic Islamic one, is symbolic of the spirit of religious harmony that prevailed and still continues to pervade the pilgrims of various races and religions while ascending the Holy Mountain.³⁹

Arab authors record that the court of Sri Lanka was particularly noted for its religious tolerance. Idrisi, writing in the 12th century, mentions a council of 16 at the Royal court, consisting of four Buddhists, four Muslims, four Christians and four Jews showing that the people of all faiths were welcomed and respected.⁴⁰ The council referred to was possibly summoned to advise the king on matters of trade.

Arab historians, writing in the 11th century, A.D. referred to diplomatic contacts between the rulers of Sri Lanka and the Iranian emperor Khusrow -1 known to Arabs as Anusharwan. Historian Al Biruni (d.1048 A.D.) in his Kitab Al-Jumahir fi Marifat al Jawahir refers to a diplomatic mission dispatched by the king of Serendib with precious gifts to Anusharwan.⁴¹

The political ascendancy of the Pandians in the 13th century made the Sinhala kings gain close friendship of the Arabs. The growth of spice trade in South East Asia, which was mainly in the hands of Arab Muslims, strengthened their position in the island abounding in spices.⁴² As Sri Lanka's economy during this time increasingly depended on foreign trade, while Egypt was becoming an important trade centre under Mamluks, attempts were made by the Sri Lankan rulers to establish direct contact with Egypt and West Asia. It is under this circumstances that Buwanekabaghu the king of Yapahuwa (1273 -1284 A.D.) sent an embassy to the court of Mamluk Sultan

39 Deweraja, L., The Muslims of Sri Lanka One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony (900 – 1915), The Lanka Islamic Foundation, (Colombo, 1994), p. 33

40 Ibid., P.29. See also: U.H.C., Vol. Part 1, p. 706.

41 Imam, S.A., Cultural Relations between Sri Lanka and Iran, in Sri Lanka and the Silk Route of the Sea, Colombo (1990), P.175

42 Deweraja, L., The Muslims of Sri Lanka One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony (900 – 1915), The Lanka Islamic Foundation, (Colombo, 1994), pp. 35 -37

43 Codrington, H.W., A Sinhalese Embassy of Egypt, Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch, Vol. XXVIII, No. 72,82-85

Qualun of Egypt led by Al-haj Abu Usman in 1283 A.D.⁴³

During the Kandyan Kingdom (c.1600-1815), Muslims were serving as envoys to the Kandyan Kings. Uduma Lebbe, son of Maula Mohandiram, was sent by the Kandyan king to Muhammed Ali, Nawab of the Carnatic, so as to negotiate for British help through him.⁴⁴ In 1765, Kirti Sri Rajasinha had sent his favourite Muslim physician, Gopala Mudaliyar, to Pondicherry soliciting French assistance against the Dutch when the armies of the latter had occupied Kandy.⁴⁵

Dr. Lorna Deweraja observes:

“There are a few Muslim families in the Kandyan areas today who have the family name, Tanapatilagegedara (literally, belonging to the house of the ambassador). Since these family names often indicate profession and official status, it is possible that one of their ancestors served as an ambassador. It could be said therefore that the appointment of Mr. A.C.S. Hameed as the first Sri Lankan Foreign Minister to hold the separate portfolio of Foreign Affairs, which until then had been under the Prime Minister, was in keeping with this tradition.”⁴⁶

According to communications of Alexander Johnstone, “By means of intercourse, which they (Muslims of Ceylon) kept up through the Persian Gulf and Bussorah and all the countries under the Caliphate, with Baghdad on the one side, and through the Arabian Gulf and Egypt with all Mohammedan powers

settled along the Mediterranean and Spain on the other side, they introduced from these countries to Ceylon many original works in Arabic on Mohammedan law and many translations into Arabic of the most valuable of the Greek and Roman classics on Medicine, Science and Literature.”⁴⁷

“Thus, Sri Lanka – Arab contact from pre-Christian times, confined perhaps only to trade, blossomed into a cultural and religious relationship and attained its high water mark in the 14th and 15th centuries,”⁴⁸ observes Dr. M.A.M. Shukri.

Arab – Sri Lankan relations diminished with the progressive increase in European control of the Island from 1505.⁴⁹

Some prominent Arab writers who flourished during the period and whose works throw light on the trade relations between Sri Lanka and West Asia include:

Sulaiman Tajir (a merchant- A.D.851), Mas’udi (died-A.D.956), Ibn-Shahriyar (10th century A.D.), and Ibn Battuta (14th century A.D.) Al-Balazuri (died-A.D.892), Al-Batani Abu Abdulla (A.D.850-929), Ibn Khurdadbeh (A.D.912), Ibn Wahab (9th century A.D.), Abu- Zayd (A.D.916), Istakhri (A.D.951), Al Beruni (A.D.973- 1151), Al- Maqdisi (A.D.1000), Mustawfi, Al-Idrisi (A.D.1153), Ibn-Hawqal (A.D.1193), Al Maqrizi (13th century A.D.), Qazwini, (A.D.1203-1283), Abul-Fida (A.D.1273-1331), Rashi’du-d Din (A.D.1310), and Dimishqi (A.D.1325).

44 Deweraja, L., *The Muslims of Sri Lanka One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony (900 – 1915)*, The Lanka Islamic Foundation, (Colombo, 1994), p. 137

45 Ibid

46 Ibid, p. 8. According to Dr. Deweraja certain other Muslim families in the Kandyan area also have family name Tanapati Mudiyanse. Tanapati means an ambassador and Mudiyanse refers to any high officer. It is possible that these families too had ancestors who served as ambassadors to the Kandyan kings. (Ibid, p. 138)

47 Communications of Alexander Johnstone reproduced in I.L.M. Abdul Azeez’s *Ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon*. (1907) Colombo. pp 51 – 61

48 Shukri M.A.M., *Arab Contact with Sri Lanka – Sindbad and Ibn Batuta*, Ancient Ceylon, Journal of the Archaeological Survey Department of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1990, p 16

49 Ibid, p 16



SRI LANKA AND OMAN ANCIENT LINKS

SRI LANKA and Oman are maritime nations and share Indian Ocean civilisation.

Historical sources record the passage of seafarers over a thousand years ago from Oman to Sri Lanka, and vice versa across Indian Ocean for trading.

By the middle of the 9th century, there was an established trade route between Muscat and trading ports in the Far East. Independent first-hand sources give a reasonably clear picture of this route. Vessels would set off from Muscat, Sohar, Qalhaat or Sur in Oman, crossing the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea, to reach India. From India, passage would be made to modern-day Sri Lanka and then across

the Bay of Bengal to the Strait of Malacca. Merchant ships would then sail between the Malay Peninsula and the island of Sumatra, before heading north towards Vietnam or trading in Singapore.⁵⁰

Trading activities and maritime navigation flourished as Omani ships with skilled navigators sailed to the ports of India, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, the Bay of Bengal to the Malay archipelago. Ships sailing from Oman, and other places from the Persian Gulf converged on a central harbour in Sri Lanka, and the same was endowed by nature and equipped by men with all facilities. This harbour had been a center for hectic commercial activities for the East and West; valuable

⁵⁰ <https://jewelofmuscat.tv/background/the-maritime-trade-route-oman-to-the-far-east/>

gems like rubies, spices, and other commodities were the principal articles of trade.⁵¹

The principal and most profitable goods that were traded in the ancient trade were spices –giving the routes their names. As early as 2000 BC, spices such as cinnamon from Sri Lanka and cassia from China found their way along the Spice Routes to the Middle East.⁵² Oman’s port city of Sumhuram/ Khor Rori, which is located in the southern Governate of Dhofar and dates to the end of the 1st millennium BCE, was amongst the most important ancient ports for the trade of frankincense to neighbouring regions.⁵³

From the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, frankincense became a more widely known commodity as attested to by various historical sources such as Herodotus, Ptolemy, Strabo, Theophrastus, Diodorus, and Siculus. From Oman, frankincense was shipped eastwards to the Indian Subcontinent and the Gulf, as well as westwards along the Yemen coast to Qana

and from Qana to the Red Sea.⁵⁴

Thus, both Sri Lanka and Oman were strongly influenced and transformed by the maritime Silk Route and the Spice Route, which went on to shape the world in more ways than one. It was the desire for spice that made Vasco da Gama employ the master navigator Ibn Majid from Oman, nicknamed the Lion of the Sea, to show him the route from East Africa to the western coast of India in 1495.⁵⁵

The Arab trade and cultural links with Sri Lanka through Omani ports during the 7th century AD are demonstrated by a popular legend of King Cheraman Perumal (622 – 628 CE), who reigned Kerala with Kodungallur as its capital, and who once reportedly witnessed the splitting of the moon, a supernatural event mentioned in the Holy Quran⁵⁶ as a miracle performed by Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) when asked for one by Meccan unbelievers. The bewildered King confirmed with his astrologers that the incident had taken place, but didn’t know what to make of it.⁵⁷



51 Dasanayaka R., Arabs in Serandib Trade Relations between Sri Lanka and West Asia from Ancient time to 15th Century A. D. Historical and Archaeological Survey, p 17

52 <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/what-are-spice-routes>

53 <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/countries-alongside-silk-road-routes/oman>

54 <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/countries-alongside-silk-road-routes/oman>

55 Hussein, A., Chasing Tall Tales And Mystics: Ibn Battuta in Sri Lanka, Published by Sailfish, 2020, p 10

56 Surah Al- Qamar (54: 1 -5)

57 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheraman_Juma_Mosque



A road in the name of Ibn Battuta in Puttalam, situated in the North Western province of Sri Lanka, in remembrance of the visit by the greatest medieval Muslim traveller Ibn Battuta to Sri Lanka in 1344 A.D.

Arab merchants⁵⁸ who had arrived at a Malabar port, a bustling global marketplace, sought audience with the King to have his permission to visit Ceylon.⁵⁹ In conversation with them, the King learnt about Muhammad, made his son the regent of his kingdom and travelled back with the Arab merchants to meet the man himself.

The story goes that Cheraman Perumal arrived in Arabia with a gift of ginger pickles for Muhammad (PBUH) and his



companions⁶⁰ and converted to Islam.”⁶¹ As per Prophet Mohammed’s (PBUH) wish, a team of his companions, led by Malik bin Dinar, reportedly started their journey with the king back to India to propagate Islam in Kerala, but along the way the king fell sick and died at Zafar (Al Baleed ancient city⁶²), present day Salalah, the capital of Dhofar Governorate in Southern Oman, and was buried in Salalah under his local name Abdur Rahiman Samiri.⁶³

Archaeological evidence confirms that Arab trade had increased in volume in the 9th and 10th centuries. Sri Lanka was the collecting and distributing center in the ancient maritime Silk Route.

The story of a 9th century Arabian dhow which was uncovered in 1998 when a team of divers found a wreck of an ancient sewn boat with tens of thousands of pieces of Chinese porcelain, pottery, gold and silver bronze mirrors and spices, off the island of Belitung in

58 Arab merchants were reportedly on their way to visit Adam’s Peak which has the footprint of Adam, as mentioned in the preceding paragraphs under this chapter.

59 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheraman_Juma_Mosque

60 The Hadith (Tradition of Prophet Mohammed) has been reported by Prophet’s companion, Abu Saeed Al Khudri and mentioned in the Hadith by Alhakim in al- Mustadrakah.

61 “The Syncretic Treasure of India’s Oldest Mosque Madras Courier”. Madras Courier. 26 May 2017. See also; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheraman_Juma_Mosque#History. Visit also; “The Kerala king who embraced Islam”. Arab News. 9 February 2012.

62 It is an ancient port city gained popularity from 8th to 16th century due to its geographical location from where frankincense was shipped to Africa, India and China. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site. See: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1010>

63 Kutty S. and Metha S., Oman –India Ties –Across Sea and Space, published by Daily Oman Observer, Muscat, 2020, pp 46 -47. See also; M.H. Illias, Mappila Muslims and the Cultural content of trading Arab diaspora on the Malabar Coast, (2007).



Indonesia, demonstrates the ancient maritime trade ties between Sri Lanka and Oman. A replica of this ship in the name of ‘Jewel of Muscat’⁶⁴ under an initiative launched by the governments of Oman and Singapore, sailed in to the Galle harbour⁶⁵ of Sri Lanka in the year 2010.

Arrival of Jewel of Muscat in Sri Lanka

‘Jewel of Muscat’ sailed following the ancient trade route, in stages, from Port of Sultan Qaboos into the Oman Sea, down through the Arabian Sea, along the western coast of India, via Galle in Sri Lanka across the Bay of Bengal and through the Straits of Malaka to Singapore, in the year 2010. This voyage symbolised the centuries long trade exchanges between Sri Lanka and Oman.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with the Sri Lanka Navy, extended a warm welcome for the Jewel of Muscat and her

international crew, including a Sri Lankan crew member and a sailor, Tuanie Ismail, when they arrived at the Galle Port in April 2010. Hon. Governor of the Southern Province of Sri Lanka, Mayor of Galle, and Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka late Mr. C.R. Jayasinghe represented Sri Lanka side while Under-secretary for Diplomatic Affairs at Oman’s Foreign Ministry, Ahmed bin Yousuf al Harthy and Sultanate’s Ambassador to India and non-resident Ambassador to Sri Lanka, H.E. Sheikh Humaid bin Ali Al Ma’ani represented the Omani side at the welcome ceremony. Hundreds of local Sri Lankan school children waving Omani flags joined a dance troupe and the Sri Lankan Naval band to celebrate the historic visit of the Jewel of Muscat to Galle.⁶⁶

The arrival of the ship and the related

64 <https://jewelofmuscat.tv/home/>

65 Galle harbour is located on the southwest coastal area of Sri Lanka and its history dates back to 545 AC, as one of the most ancient ports recorded in the Cosmography of Cosmas Indicopleustes. In 1344 Ibn Batutta observed Moorish vessels in the Galle harbour.

66 <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/world/jewel-of-muscat-reaches-lankan-port-of-galle>; Visit also: https://www.sundaytimes.lk/100425/Plus/plus_14.html



activities organised to mark this occasion provided an unprecedented opportunity to further enhance people-to-people contact and also displayed the true sense of cultural diplomacy at its highest level.

The journey of Sohar⁶⁷ ship, another replica of a 9th century Omani dhow, hand-built with wood and sewn with coconut-fiber rope, set sail from Sur of Oman to China in 1980, retracing the routes of early Islamic seafarers, such as Sindbad the Sailor who had established what was at the time the longest sea-trading route in the world (9,600 km), via Galle Harbour of Sri Lanka⁶⁸, on 20th June 1981, coinciding with the 10th anniversary celebrations of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos' accession to the throne.

Such initiatives evoke memories of the cultural and trade exchanges that have taken place for over a thousand years

between the Arab world and Sri Lanka, with the sea port of Galle as the regional trade hub connecting both West Asia and East Asia.

According to historians, Ceylon was surrounded by otheaâr small islands in the Bay of Bengal, all of which were quite well acquainted with Omanis. Ambergris and pearls were sought from the shores of Ceylon.⁶⁹ The Arab geographer Abu Abd Muhammad Al Edrisi (1099 – 1166 AD), who compiled a geography in 1154 AD for Roger II, the Norman king of Sicily, informs that men from Yemen and Oman came to Sri Lanka⁶⁹ for the purpose of obtaining fiber of coconut for making cordage.⁷⁰

Trade relations between Sri Lanka and Oman continued to thrive even during the modern Omani history in 19th century. The strength of the Omani economy, which was based on maritime trade during

67 During the Abbasid period, Sohar and Muscat were the most important ports of trade with Arab ships sailing from Muscat to India and China.

68 <https://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/198105/the.sindbad.voyage.htm>

69 Ya'qut Al-Hamawi, Mu'jam Al-Buldan, Silsilat Al Tawarikh and Al-Hamiri, Al-Rawdh Al Mi'tar, p. 313

70 Sebastian A., A complete Illustrated History – Sri Lanka, VijithaYapa Publications, 2012, p.178



the rule of Sultan Sayyid Said bin Sultan (1804 AD), was dependent to a large degree on a huge commercial maritime fleet supported by a remarkable maritime force. In addition to extensive Omani trade with China, South-east Asia, India, Ceylon, and Iran, Sultan Sayyid Said bin Sultan improved his possessions in East Africa.⁷¹

Muscat” is a household name in Sri Lanka. “Omani Halwa” is known as ‘Muscat’ in Sri Lanka. Further, the name of a town believed to be a settlement of Arab descendants in the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka called “Khathan Kudy” (literally, “Khathan Settlement”), can be traced back to “Qahtan” tribe which originates from the Southern Arabian Peninsula that includes Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Oman (Dhofar region). Such traditions demonstrate vibrant people to people interactions between Sri Lanka and Oman for many centuries that have contributed to a rich mosaic of cultures.



*“Muscat” is a household name in Sri Lanka.
“Omani Halwa” is known as ‘Muscat’ in Sri Lanka*

⁷¹ Oman in History, a publication by Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman and Immel Publishing Ltd., London (1995), p.463



CHAPTER II

DIPLOMATIC

RELATIONS



Opening of Sri Lanka Resident Embassy in Muscat by A.C. Shahul Hameed, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka in 1987



SRI LANKA and the Sultanate of Oman established their diplomatic relations on the 17th February in 1981.

Since then, bilateral relations between the two friendly countries have been consolidated over the past many decades by the exchange of high level visits, signing of bilateral agreements/ memorandums of understanding and the vibrant people to people contacts.

Sri Lanka Embassy in Kuwait was concurrently accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, until Sri Lanka established its resident diplomatic Mission, headed by Mr Gamini Gunawardana as Charge d' Affaires, in Muscat, in July 1987.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, late A.C. Shahul Hameed, paid an official visit to Oman for the ceremonial opening of the Embassy, in December 1987.

Ambassadors of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman (From 1984 to 2022)

(i)	H.E. Abdul Cader Hameed Mohamed	(1984) (Resident in Kuwait)
(ii)	H.E. Mr Nimal Wijeratne, Ambassador	(1990)
(iii)	H.E. Mr M.M. Amanul Farouque, Ambassador	(1993)
(iv)	H.E. Mr T.B. Maduwegedara, Ambassador	(1997)
(v)	H.E. Mr Ibrahim Sahib Ansar, Ambassador	(2000)
(vi)	H.E. Dr A.N. Haniffa, Ambassador	(2003)
(vii)	H.E. Mr Meerasahib Mahroof, Ambassador	(2005)
(viii)	H.E. Mr D.M.M. Ranaraja, Ambassador	(2008)
(ix)	H.E. Mr M.A.K. Giriagama, Ambassador	(2011)
(x)	H.E. Mr M.K. Pathmanaathan, Ambassador	(2015)
(xi)	H.E. Mr Omar Lebbe Ameerajwad, Ambassador	(2019)

Ambassadors of the Sultanate of Oman to Sri Lanka

(i)	H.E. Abdullah bin Saed bin Rashid Albalushi (Resident in New Delhi)	(1983)
(ii)	H.E. Salim bin Mohammed bin Salim Alwahibi (Resident in New Delhi)	(1988)
(iii)	H.E. Mohammed bin Taher bin Alawi Aideed (Resident in New Delhi)	(1995)
(iv)	H.E. SheikhKhalifa bin Ali bin Issa Alharthy (Resident in New Delhi)	(1999)
(v)	H.E. Mohammed bin Yousuf bin Daowd Shalwani (Resident in New Delhi)	(2006)
(vi)	H.E. Sheikh Humaidbin Ali bin Sultan Almaani, (Resident in New Delhi)	(2009)
(vii)	H.E. Sheikh Juma bin Hamdan Alshehhi, (Resident in Colombo)	(2014)

The first Resident Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman H.E. Mr Nimal Wijeratne presented his credentials in October 1990.

The Sultanate of Oman opened its Embassy in Colombo in 2013 and the first Resident Ambassador of

the Sultanate of Oman to Sri Lanka, H.E. Sheikh Juma Hamdan Al Shehhi, presented his credentials in 2014. The establishment of Resident Diplomatic Missions in both capitals generated new impetus in the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN SRI LANKA AND OMAN - HIGHLIGHTS



To mark this historic occasion, a memorial logo was jointly launched on 17th February 2021 by H.E. Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali Alharthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of Oman, and H.E. Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, at the premises of the Foreign Ministry

THE Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat, in collaboration with the Foreign Ministries of Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman, organised a special event to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman, on February 17, 2021. To mark this historic occasion, both countries jointly launched a memorial “logo” at the premises of the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman.⁷² Special messages of greetings, issued by the Foreign Ministers of both countries on this significant occasion, were exchanged during the event.

Highlights of the activities organised to mark this significant occasion throughout the commemorative year, include:

Agreement on Visa Exemption

Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman signed an Agreement on the Mutual Exemption of Visa for the Holders of Diplomatic, Special, Service and Official Passports during the above mentioned special event at the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman to coincide with the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations.⁷³

Special Envoy visit

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman organised a visit by Special Representative of Hon. Prime Minister of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman coinciding with 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

Hon. Ajith Nivaard Cabral, State Minister of Finance and Capital Market and State Enterprise Reforms, together with 10 members delegation from Central Bank, State and Private Banks of Sri Lanka, visited Oman from April 7 – 10, 2021.

The Special Representative of Hon. Prime Minister of Sri Lanka carried a special message from the Hon. Prime Minister of Sri Lanka addressed to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, which was delivered to His Highness Sayyid Assad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Interational Relations and Cooperation Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman, by the Special Representative during the audience.⁷⁴

The Special Representative of the Hon. Prime Minister of Sri Lanka held a series of bilateral meetings with H.E. Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion of the Sultanate of Oman, high ranking Government authorities in the Ministry of Finance and Oman Investment Authority (OIA), as well as the Executive President of the Central Bank of the Sultanate, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Madayin and leading private sector banks in Oman.

The discussions were focused on enhancing bilateral economic cooperation and establishing closer collaboration between the banking sectors in both countries. An MoU on Financial Sector Cooperation between the Central Banks of Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman was also proposed.

⁷² A competition was organised by the Embassy among the children of the Sri Lankan School Muscat (SLSM) to design the 40 th Anniversary logo and the winner was awarded.

⁷³ <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/3354/Local/oman-sri-lanka-mark-40th-anniversary-of-diplomatic-relations>

⁷⁴ <https://mfa.gov.lk/special-representative-of-prime-minister-mahinda-rajapaksa-visits-oman/>

MoU between Chambers of Commerce



The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) virtually on July 7, 2021, coinciding with the 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations, with a view to enhancing business exchanges and private sector links to bolster trade and investment between the two countries. A Business Forum with the participation of Government and private sectors from both countries, was also held virtually, followed by B2B meetings where around one hundred companies from both sides participated.⁷⁵

Virtual Ministerial Meeting

A bilateral Ministerial meeting between Hon. Tharaka Balasuriya, State Minister of Regional Cooperation of Sri Lanka, and H.E. Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion of the Sultanate of Oman, was virtually organised by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat, on July 14, 2021, to coincide with the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations

with a view to exploring future economic cooperation, in particular, promotion of trade and investment between the two countries.⁷⁶

Visit by the Minister of Youth & Sports

Minister of Youth and Sports of Sri Lanka, Hon. Namal Rajapaksa, visited the Sultanate of Oman at the invitation extended by H.H. Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman, and participated as a special guest at the inaugural ceremony⁷⁷ of the final qualifiers of T20 Cricket World Cup 2021, hosted for the first time by Oman on October 17, 2021. Hon. Minister of Youth and Sports also held bilateral meetings with H.H. Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said as well as Eng. Saeed bin Hamoud bin Saeed Al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology of the Sultanate of Oman.⁷⁸

Trade Promotional Webinars

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman, jointly with the Sri Lanka Export Development Board (EDB), organised a series of webinars amidst COVID restrictions, with a view to promoting private sector business cooperation in highly potential areas such as ICT & BPM and Food Sector. An introductory webinar was organised in March 2021 to connect Sri Lankan and Omani ICT/BPM sector companies on the ICT/BPM sector, in collaboration with Knowledge Oasis

75 <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1103388/opinion-extras/oman-and-sri-lanka-to-bolster-trade-ties>; Also visit: <https://mfa.gov.lk/sri-lanka-oman-national-chambers-of-commerce-sign-MoU-to-boost-trade-and-investment/>

76 <http://bizenglish.adaderana.lk/state-minister-of-regional-cooperation-holds-discussions-with-minister-of-commerce-industry-and-investment-promotion-of-oman-to-enhance-bilateral-economic-ties/>

77 <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1108327/sports/cricket/sri-lankan-sports-minister-all-praise-for-oman-cricket>

78 <https://www.news.lk/news/political-current-affairs/item/33174-minister-namal-rajapaksa-participates-at-the-inauguration-of-t20-cricket-world-cup-2021-in-oman-as-special-guest>

Muscat (KOM).⁷⁹ A B2B webinar was also organised between Carrefour Oman and eight prominent Sri Lankan fruits and vegetables' exporting companies, in order to boost Sri Lankan exports of a variety of fruits and vegetables to the Carrefour, Oman, which is a large hypermarket chain with more than 12 outlets in the Sultanate of Oman.⁸⁰

Ceylon Tea Promotions

To initiate discussion on a proposal to establish "Ceylon Tea Re-exporting/distributing Hub" in Oman, a virtual meeting was also organised at the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman, on July 8, 2021, between Sri Lanka Tea Board (SLTB) together with the Sri Lanka Tea Exporters Association and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion of the Sultanate of Oman, along with ASYAD Group of Oman. Ways and means to establish such a facility were explored during the discussion.

Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman also launched "Ceylon Cinnamon Tea" at Al Meera Hypermarket in Muscat, on May 21, 2021⁸¹, coinciding with the International Tea Day.

A new Ceylon Tea brand named "Soo Chai", Ceylon masala tea, was also launched at the National Bank of Oman (NBO) headquarters in Muscat, in November 2021.

Investment Promotions

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman organised visits by potential investors

such as Shumookh Investment Services from Oman to Sri Lanka under "invest bubble concept", which was introduced due to COVID travel restrictions, with a view to exploring investment opportunities in Sri Lanka.

The Embassy also facilitated opening of a Restaurant named "OJAYE", an Oman - Sri Lanka joint venture investment, at Al Meera Hypermarket Azaiba in Muscat, in April 2021.

Sri Lanka - Oman T20 ODI Cricket Match

The first ever ODI cricket match between the national cricket teams of Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman, ahead of ICC T20 World Cup 2021, was played at Al Amerat Cricket ground in Muscat, on October 7, 2021, coinciding with the commemorative year of the 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between the two countries.

The cricket match was jointly inaugurated by the Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman and the Omani Cricket Board by ceremonially cutting a cake to mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations.⁸²

Cricket Tournament for 'Sri Lanka Ambassador's Cup'

Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman also organised a Cricket Tournament for the 'Sri Lanka Ambassador's Cup' in Al Buraimi region, on November 21, 2021, to mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

79 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/news/sri-lanka-oman-ict-bpm-sector-collabouration-mooted.html>

80 <https://mfa.gov.lk/b2b-meeting-to-boost-sri-lankan-exports-of-fruits-and-vegetables-to-oman/> Also visit: <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/news/b2b-meeting-to-boost-sri-lankan-exports-of-fruits-and-vegetables-to-oman.html>

81 <https://dailykhaleej.com/region/oman/ceylon-cinnamon-tea-launched-in-oman/>; Visit also: <https://www.universalscurrentaffairs.com/2021/05/ceylon-cinnamon-tea-launched-in-oman.html>;

<https://island.lk/ceylon-cinnamon-tea-launched-in-oman-coinciding-with-international-tea-day/>

82 <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1107884/oman/community/oman-lanka-odi-cricket-marks-40th-year-of-diplomatic-ties>; Visit also: <https://www.islandcricket.lk/news/sri-lanka-vs-oman-odi-cricket-marks-40th-anniversary-of-relations/>



Local cricket clubs participated at this friendly tournament.

Sri Lanka – Oman Hockey Tournament

In collaboration with the Ministry of Sports of Sri Lanka and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman, jointly with the Oman Hockey Association, Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman organised the first ever Sri Lanka – Oman Hockey Tournament, from December 28 -29, 2021, at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat, to mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.⁸³

State Minister of Regional Cooperation Hon. Tharaka Balasuriya representing Sri Lanka, and the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs, H.E. Basil Ahmed Al Rawas, representing the Sultanate of Oman, graced the occasion as chief guests.

Sri Lanka’s Defence Warriors team and Colombo Hockey and Football Club met with Oman’s Sohar Club team and Ahli Sidab Club team. Chairman of Sri Lanka Hockey Federation, Mr Kamal Pushpakumara, and the Chairman of Oman Hockey Association, Dr Marwan Al Juma, coordinated the tournament.⁸⁴ The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman and the Oman Hockey Association, jointly hosted this Hockey Tournament.

Tourism through Golf

A Golf Tournament was also organised by the Embassy in collaboration with the Ghala Golf Club in Muscat, on 11 December 2021, to mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and Oman as part of tourism promotion.⁸⁵ H.E. Ambassador Humaid Al Maani, Head of the Department of Global Affairs of the Foreign Ministry and the Deputy Chairman of the Human Rights Committee of Oman, Ambassadors of Brunei, Pakistan and South Korea to the Sultanate of Oman, Board member of the Ghala Golf Club and Srilankan airlines Regional Manager Fayaz Thaha, graced the occasion as special guests. The winner of the tournament, Ahmed Al Lamki, was presented with business class air ticket to visit Sri Lanka, sponsored by SriLankan Airlines, and a 2-night stay at Mövenpick Hotel in Colombo, sponsored by Esna Holidays Colombo.⁸⁶

83 <https://m.timesofoman.com/article/111156-oman-sri-lanka-celebrate-40th-anniversary-of-diplomatic-ties-with-hockey-match>; Visit also: <https://ol.om/2263733/oman-sri-lanka-celebrate-40th-anniversary-of-diplomatic-ties-with-hockey-match/>

84 <https://thesinhalanews.lk/2022/01/05/state-minister-tharaka-balasuriya-participates-at-sri-lanka-oman-hockey-tournament-organised-to-mark-the-40th-anniversary-of-diplomatic-relations/>

85 <https://mfa.gov.lk/golf-tournament-organised-by-the-embassy-of-sri-lanka-in-oman-to-mark-the-40th-anniversary-of-diplomatic-relations-features-sri-lanka-tourism-promotion/>

86 <https://news.hottourism.lk/2021/12/sl-embassy-in-oman-promotes-tourism-via-golf/>

Tree Planting in Al Buraimi

To mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations, Sri Lanka Embassy organised a tree planting event on November 22, 2021, at Saara Oasis, which is a traditional irrigation system (Falaj) that brings water from 3,000 year old Falaj Al Sarrani in the region of Al Buraimi, in Oman. A Sri Lankan fruit sapling named Canistel fruit (egg fruit) was planted with the participation of the Wali of Al Buraimi Sheikh Dr Hilal bin Ali Al Habsi, and the Wakeel of the Falaj AlSaarani, Eng. Talib Ahmed Al Jabri together with Abdul Mohsen bin Saqr Al- Naimi, member of the State Council of the Sultanate of Oman, Mr. Zahir bin Mohammed Al Kaabi, Chairman of the Buraimi branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.⁸⁷

“Talk with the Ambassador”, Community Outreach Forum

A community outreach forum named “Talk with the Ambassador” was launched by the Embassy of Sri Lanka to reach out to the members of the Sri Lankan expatriate community in Oman and to facilitate them to have direct dialogue with their country’s Ambassador to the Sultanate with a view to discussing their issues and suggestions.⁸⁸

The members of Sri Lankan community in Oman could directly talk to the Ambassador on the last Thursday of every month through a Toll Free telephone number devoted for this purpose. The Forum was inaugurated with effect on 25th November 2021.

Honouring the long-serving Sri Lankan migrant workers

The Embassy of Sri Lanka also initiated a tradition of honouring long-serving Sri Lankan migrant workers in the Sultanate from the commemorative year of the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

Sri Lankan migrant workers who rendered their services for more than 35 years to the host and home countries were honored with presentation of certificates of appreciation.

Special Tribute to late Mrs. Fathima Zaheer, Receptionist of the Embassy

Late Mrs. Fathima Zaheer, who served as the Receptionist in the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat for more than 25 years (01.08.1992 – 07.07.2021), passed away on 7th July 2021. She rendered an honest, dedicated and yeoman service to the Sri Lankan community in Oman. The staff of the Embassy of Sri Lanka paid a special tribute to late Mrs. Fathima for her great and unparalleled services by presenting a memento to her bereaved family.



87 <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1110372/oman/saplings-from-sri-lanka-planted-to-mark-40th-anniversary-of-ties>; Also visit: <https://mfa.gov.lk/ambassador-of-sri-lanka-to-the-sultanate-of-oman-ameer-ajwad-plants-sri-lankan-fruit-sapling-at-saara-oasis-in-buraimi-of-oman-to-mark-the-40th-anniversary-of-diplomatic-relations/>

88 <https://mfa.gov.lk/sri-lanka-embassy-in-oman-launches-a-community-outreach-forum-named-talk-with-the-ambassador/>. See also; <https://timesofoman.com/article/108868-sri-lanka-embassys-initiative-to-reach-out-to-expat-community>

*Message from Sayyid Badr bin Hamad
bin Hamood Albusaidi
Foreign Minister of Sultanate of Oman*

Foreign Ministry



وَزَارَةُ الْخَارِجِيَّةِ

**H.E Dinesh Gunawardena MP
Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

16th February, 2021

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the Government and the people of the Sultanate of Oman, I wish to express my warmest congratulations on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Oman and Sri Lanka are both Indian Ocean maritime nations, and this has contributed to the longstanding historical associations that both countries enjoy. Since the establishment of the diplomatic ties between our two countries on February 17th 1981, our bilateral relations have been developing on a positive trajectory on the basis of the principals of peaceful co-existence, cooperation and respect.

I am fully committed to working with you to expand and widen our bilateral ties even further in various fields and look forward to meeting you when circumstances permit.

I wish you and the people of Sri Lanka every success in fighting the grave challenges posed by Covid-19. I hope that the unity of the international community will overcome the pandemic in the near future.

Yours Sincerely,

**Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood Albusaidi
Foreign Minister**

الرقم: 9503/00/6285 /2021 التاريخ 4 رجب 1442 هـ الموافق 16-02-2021م



දිනේෂ් ගුණවර්ධන - (පා.ම.) - විදේශ අමාත්‍ය
தினேஷ் குணவர்த்தன - (பா.உ.) வெளிநாட்டு அமைச்சர்
Dinesh Gunawardena - (M.P.) Foreign Minister

February 2021

His Excellency H.E. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood Al Busaidi

Foreign Minister of the Sultanate of Oman

Your Excellency,

On the auspicious occasion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman which falls on 17 February 2021, I have the honour and immense pleasure to extend my sincere felicitations and greetings to you and, through you, to the friendly people of the Sultanate of Oman.

As the nations sharing the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka and Oman are bound by long-standing historical relations underpinned by a vibrant tradition of people to people contacts and mutual respect. Our bilateral relations have been further strengthened with the establishment of diplomatic relation between the two countries in 1981 and the opening of the Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman in 1987 and the Embassy of Oman in Colombo in 2013.

Over the past four decades, our bilateral ties have grown from strength to strength in all levels and areas of mutual interest. The bilateral partnership further consolidated with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Consultations between the two Foreign Ministries, which serves as a catalyst to diversify and to encompass a wide array of areas for cooperation.

Sri Lanka and Oman continue to work together on issues of regional and global relevance as being members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) as well as the United Nations (UN).

தலைப்பு/அலுவலகம்/Office: +94-11-2430221, +94-11-2445498, டூயல்/கூஸஸ்/Fax No.: +94-11-2430222

වෙබ් අඩවිය/வலைத்தளம்/Website: www.mfa.gov.lk, மின்ஞல்/மின்தொலைபேசி/E-mail : FMO@mfa.gov.lk

විදේශ අමාත්‍යාංශය, රජයේ මහල, කොළඹ 01, ශ්‍රී ලංකාව.

வெளிநாட்டு அமைச்சு, குடியரசுக் கட்டிடம், கோழம்பு 01, இலங்கை.
Foreign Ministry, Republic Building, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan Community in Oman has been an important component in our bilateral relations and they have played a significant role in furthering the relations between the two countries. I wish to thank the Government and the people of Oman for extending their warm hospitality to the Sri Lankan community in Oman who had the opportunity to contribute towards the Sultanate's progress under the blessed renaissance spearheaded by the wise leadership of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

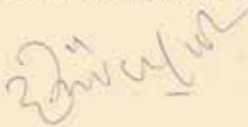
I am certain that our collaboration and partnership will be further enhanced towards the renewed visions of our leaders, with particular focus on our economic diversification drive, in the years ahead.

Sri Lanka looks forward to continue to work closely with the Sultanate of Oman in the regional as well as international frameworks, particularly the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), of which Sri Lanka is the present Vice-Chair from 2021 – 2023 and will assume the Chairmanship from 2023 - 2025.

I take this opportunity to pay a tribute to all who had extended their invaluable contribution in promoting bilateral relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman over the past four decades for the mutual benefits of our peoples.

I also have the honour to extend, through you, my best wishes for the good health, happiness and personal well-being of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and for the continued progress and prosperity of the people of the Sultanate of Oman.

Please accept, Excellency, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.



Dinesh Gunawardena, M.P

Foreign Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka



The first ever ODI cricket between the national cricket teams of Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman ahead of ICC T20 World Cup 2021, was played at Al Amerat Cricket ground





Signing of MoU between Chambers of Commerce









**SRI LANKA ICT/ BPM SECTOR WEBINAR
OMAN MARKET**

ORGANIZED BY
SRI LANKA EXPORT DEVELOPMENT BOARD & EMBASSY OF SRI LANKA IN OMAN

EDB

Tuesday, 2nd March 2021
(Sri Lanka Local Time: 10:30am - 12:00pm)

REGISTER NOW







CHAPTER III

BILATERAL RELATIONS

The bilateral visits at Foreign Ministerial level began with the official visit of late Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka A.C. Shahul Hameed in 1987 for the ceremonial opening of the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat. In February 1996, former Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, late Lakshman Kadirgamar, led a delegation to the Sultanate of Oman for official bilateral discussions between the two countries.

A. POLITICAL TIES

This visit paved the way to a reciprocal official visit of a high level delegation from the Sultanate of Oman led by His Highness Sayyid Thuwainy bin Shihab Al Said, the Personal Representative of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos to Sri Lanka in February 1997, at the invitation by the then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Srimavo Bandaranaike, the first woman Prime Minister in the world. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the present Sultan of Oman, in his then capacity as the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman, visited Sri Lanka, as a member of this high level delegation.

MoU ON BILATERAL POLITICAL CONSULTATION

Bilateral relations between the two countries were further consolidated by the signing of a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Bilateral Consultation between the Foreign Ministries of the two countries. H.E. Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, the former Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs of Oman, undertook an official bilateral visit to Sri Lanka from October 30 to November 1, 2012. He held bilateral consultations with the Minister of External Affairs of

Sri Lanka, Hon. Prof. G.L. Peiris, and both Foreign Ministers signed the MoU on Bilateral Consultations between the two Foreign Ministries on October 31, 2012, with a view to expanding ties in all fields, including political, economic, cultural, technological, scientific and educational relations. This MoU serves as a catalyst for the growing bilateral cooperation in multi-faceted areas between the two countries. The two rounds of political consultation meetings under the said MoU between the Foreign Ministries of the two countries, which were held in Muscat on January 15, 2014 and on August 15, 2018 in Colombo respectively, have identified an array of potential areas for cooperation, including trade, investment, tourism, agriculture, fisheries, higher education, labour, manpower training, skill development, culture, defense, as well as cooperation in oil and gas sectors.

Sri Lanka - Oman Parliamentary Friendship Association

The establishment of the Sri Lanka-Oman Parliamentary Friendship Association by the Parliament of Sri Lanka in August 2016, and the Shura Council (lower house of Parliament of Oman) in November 2017, paved the way for the reciprocal exchange

of high level visits by H.E. Dr. Yahiya Bin Mahfood Al-Manthri, Chairman of the State Council of Oman (Upper House of Parliament of Oman) to Sri Lanka in 2017⁸⁹, and a multi-party Parliamentary delegation led by Hon. Karu Jayasuriya, Speaker of the Parliament of Sri Lanka to Oman, in 2018, respectively.⁹⁰ A range of bilateral areas of mutual interest, including at the legislative level for cooperation were discussed during the visit.

The exchange of other bilateral visits at different levels over the years have facilitated further enhancement of bilateral relations between the two countries in many areas of mutual interest.

Key Bilateral Visits from Sri Lanka to Oman

🇱🇰 Visit by late Hon. A.C. Shahul Hameed, the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, for the ceremonial opening of the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat (December 1987).

🇱🇰 Visit by late Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar, Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, for the first bilateral discussions between Sri Lanka and Oman (February 1996)

🇱🇰 Visit by late Hon. W. J. M. Lokubandara, Speaker of Parliament of Sri Lanka (August 26-30, 2005)

🇱🇰 Hon. Prof. G.L. Peiris, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, to hand over an invitation to the Late His Majesty Sultan

Qaboos bin Said, for a State Visit to Sri Lanka (April 24 – 25, 2011)

🇱🇰 Visit by a delegation from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (December 12 – 15, 2011)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Dilan Perera, Minister of Foreign Employment Promotions & Welfare, (May 17 – 19, 2012) for the enhancement of cooperation in the employment sector

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Mahiepala Herath, Chief Minister of Sabaragamuwa Province (March 14 – 20, 2013)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Ajith Nivad Cabral, Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, and a delegation for investment promotion (February 16-22, 2013)

🇱🇰 Visit by a delegation from

the Central Bank of Sri Lanka for the enhancement of cooperation with the Central Bank of Oman (August 24 – 26, 2013)

🇱🇰 Visit of Hon. Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, Minister of Agriculture, and a delegation (September 24 – 28, 2013)

🇱🇰 Visit of Hon. Neomal Perera, Deputy Minister of External Affairs of Sri Lanka, and a delegation for the first Political Consultation meeting (January 13 – 16, 2014)

🇱🇰 Visit of Hon. Dilan Perera, Minister of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, to sign the MoU between Sri

The exchange of other bilateral visits at different levels over the years have facilitated further enhancement of bilateral relations between the two countries in many areas of mutual interest

89 <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/67512/Localpercent20front/state-council-chief-to-hold-talks-with-lankan-leaders>

90 <https://mfa.gov.lk/sri-lanka-parliament-speaker-concludes-a-successful-visit-to-oman/>

Lanka and Oman in the field of Labour and Training (June 22, 2014)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Thalatha Athukorala, Minister of Foreign Employment for the enhancement of labour relations (February 10 – 12, 2016).

🇱🇰 Visit by Sri Lanka Tourism delegation to attend Sri Lanka Tourism road show at Al-Falaj hotel in Muscat (May 01, 2016)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Thilanga Sumathipala, Deputy Speaker of Parliament and President of the Sri Lanka Cricket, on the invitation extended by Omani Cricket Club to attend the annual prize giving programme of the Oman Cricket Club. (September 27-29, 2016)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Sunil Handunnetti, Chairman of Parliamentary Committee on Public Enterprises of Sri Lanka, to discuss issues related Sri Lanka migrant workers. (November 3 – 6, 2016)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Rishad Bathiudeen, Minister of Industry and Commerce, for trade and investment promotion. (May 9 - 11, 2017)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. N.M.M.K Nanayakkara, Deputy Minister of Foreign Employment, to discuss issues related to Sri lankan migrant workers (August 10 – 13, 2017)

🇱🇰 A delegation from Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau visited Oman for Sri Lanka tourism promotion in Muscat. (October 2017)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Karu Jayasuriya, Speaker of Parliament of Sri Lanka and a Parliamentary delegation (March 11 – 16, 2018)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Harin Fernando, Minister of Digital Infrastructure, Telecommunication and Foreign Employment, and a delegation for the promotion employment opportunities for

Sri Lankans (August 15 – 16, 2018)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Dr Indrajit Coomaraswamy, Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, and a delegation for the promotion of investment in Sovereign Bonds (September 8 – 11, 2018)

🇱🇰 Visit by Sri Lanka Business Delegation to Oman under the Economic Diplomacy Programme (February 4 -6, 2019)

🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Rishad Bathiudeen, Minister of Industry and Commerce, Resettlement of Protracted displaced Persons and Co-operative Development, to explore possibilities for cooperation in the field of oil and gas (February 26 – 30, 2019)


🇱🇰 Visit by Mrs. W. P Sandanayake, Secretary of State Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, to take part in the 19th Conference of the North Indian Ocean Hydrographic Commission in Muscat (March 25, 2019)


🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Kabir Hashim, Minister of Highways, Road Development and Petroleum Resources development, Hon. Malik Samarawickrama, then Minister of Development Strategies and International Trade and Hon. Rishad Bathiudeen, then Minister of Industry and Commerce, Resettlement of Protracted displaced Persons and Co-operative Development, for the follow up to the discussion on strengthening cooperation, discussed at the 2nd Political Consultation held in Colombo (May 4 – 6, 2019)


🇱🇰 Visit by 11 Sri Lankan Food Sector Companies to participate at “Sri Lanka Week at Carrefour Oman” - an In-store Promotion of Sri Lankan Food Products at Carrefour Hypermarket in Oman, organised by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat. (October 1– 5, 2019)


🇱🇰 Visit by Hon. Pavithra Wanniarachchi,

Minister of Health and Indigenous Medicine Services, to attend the Global Meeting of the World Health Organisation (WHO) (December 9-12, 2019)


 Visit by Hon. Susil Premajayantha, Special Envoy of the Government of Sri Lanka, together with Hon. Fizer Musthafa, M.P., to convey condolence messages on the demise of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said from H.E the President and Hon. Prime Minister of Sri Lanka (January 14 – 15, 2020)

 Visit by Hon. Ajith Nivaard Cabral, State Minister of Finance and Capital Market and State Enterprise Reforms, as a Special Representative of Hon. Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, together with a 10-member delegation from Central Bank, State and Private Banks of Sri Lanka delegation (April 7 – 10, 2021)


 Visit by Hon. Namal Rajapaksa, Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs of Sri Lanka, to attend the opening ceremony of the T20 Cricket World Cup as a special guest (October 17 – 18, 2021)


 Visit by Hon. Tharaka Balasuriya, State Minister of Regional Cooperation, to participate at the presentation ceremony of the first ever Sri Lanka – Oman Club Level Hockey Tournament (December 29 – 30, 2021)


 Visit by Mr Shiham Marikkar, Secretary General/ CEO of National Chamber of Exporters of Sri Lanka, to Oman for lobbying Omani business community to visit “Sri Lanka Export Brands” exhibition at Dubai Expo 2020. (January 01 -04, 2022)


 Visit by Hon. Bandula Gunawardena, Minister of Trade of Sri Lanka, together with a 4-member trade delegation (March 28 – 29, 2022)


Key Bilateral Visits from Oman to Sri Lanka


 Visit by Omani High Level delegation to attend the 5th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (August 16–19, 1976)


 Visit by His Highness Sayyid Thuwainy bin Shihab Al Said, Personal Representative of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos to Sri Lanka, together with a high level delegation (February 1997)


 H.E. Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs of Oman, visited Sri Lanka in his capacity as the Chairman of the 3rd IORA-ARC Council of Ministers to present his report to the 4th Council of Ministers Meeting held in Colombo. (October 2003)


 Visit by H.E Mohammed Hamad Al Rumhy, Minister of Oil and Gas of Oman (January 26-28, 2012)

 Visit by a delegation of Military officials (March 30 – April 5, 2014)

 Visit by H.E Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman, for signing the MoU on bilateral consultations between the Foreign Ministries of Sri Lanka and Oman (October 30 – November 1, 2012)

 Visit by H.E Said Saleh Said Al Kiyumi, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), and a delegation, to attend “The Invest in East’ 2nd International Investor Forum held in Colombo on January 28, 2016

 Visit by a delegation from Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry led by H.E Said Saleh Said Al Kiyumi, Chairman of the OCCI (April 4 – 5, 2016)

 Visit by Mr Yusuf Mahfouz Zabanoot and Ms Sahar Mohammed Aslam Al-Zadgali representing the National Youth



Commission (NYC) of Oman to participate at the 'Yowunpura Programme' organised by the National Youth Services Council of Sri Lanka (March 30 – April 3, 2016)

🇨🇦 Visit by Omani Technical Team of the Ministry of Labour under the MoU on Labour & Training (September 19 – 22 2016)

🇨🇦 Visit by Brigadier Lieutenant Ahmed Mohamed Al Fahadi and Colonial Lieutenant Salim Bin Saif al Husnito at the Defence Conference in Colombo (September 1-2, 2016)

🇨🇦 Visit by H.E Dr Mohamed bin Awadh Al Hasan, Acting Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman (August 13 – 17, 2018)

🇨🇦 Visit by H.E Dr Yahya Mahfoodh Salim al Manthri, Chairman of the State Council of the Sultanate of Oman, and a State Council delegation (December 4 – 8, 2017)

🇨🇦 Visit by H.E Mohammed Hamad Al Rumhy, Minister of Oil and Gas of Oman (2 March 3 – 25, 2019)

🇨🇦 Visit by the Royal Yacht Zeinat Al Bahar to Sri Lanka (April 22 -25, 2019)

🇨🇦 Visit by Omani Business Delegation representing 5 companies, on the invitation of the EDB of Sri Lanka (June 2017)

🇨🇦 Visit by H.E Eng. Redha Juma Mohamed Ali Al Saleh, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), and a 17-member high level business delegation (March 5, 2022)

Key Bilateral MoUs/ Agreements

- Air Service Agreement
- Bilateral Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistant and Crime Combating
- Agreement on Double Taxation
- MoU on Bilateral Consultation
- Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and Fiscal Evasion
- Agreement on the Exemption of Visa for Diplomatic, Official, Special and Service Passport Holders
- MoU between National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry

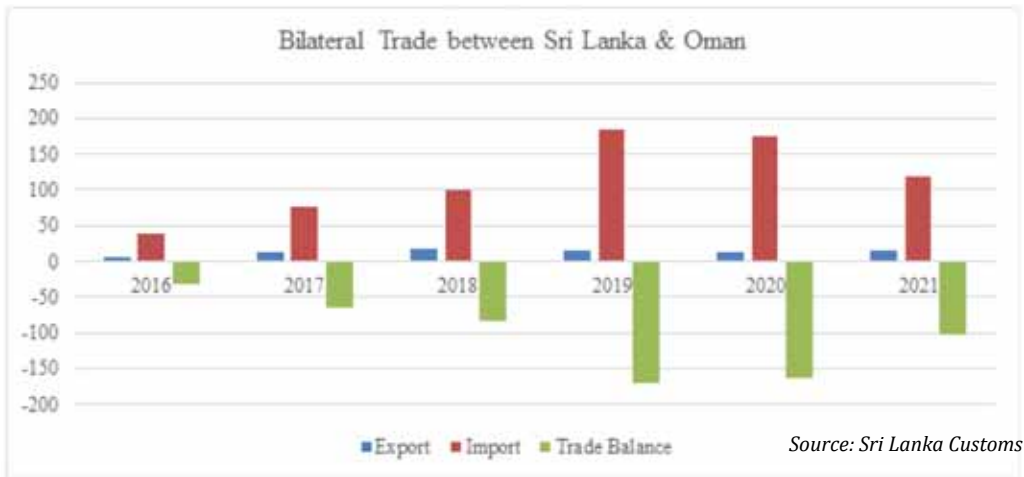
B. ECONOMIC TIES

(i) Trade

Bilateral trade between Sri Lanka and Oman(2016-2021)

Values in USD Millions

Year	Export	Import	Total Trade	Trade Balance
2016	6.53	38.35	44.88	-31.82
2017	12.02	77.43	89.45	-65.41
2018	16.48	100.72	117.2	-84.24
2019	14.63	183.95	198.58	-169.32
2020	12.44	175.68	188.12	-163.24
2021	15.42	117.64	133.06	-102.22



Oman was the 63rd export destination for Sri Lanka in 2021. While the total export value from Sri Lanka to Oman was USD 15.42 Million in 2021, the total imports from Oman to Sri Lanka for the same period were USD 117.64 Million.⁹¹ Oman was the 29th import origin for Sri Lanka in 2021. Sri Lanka's exports to Oman have increased by 21.46 per cent in 2021, when compared to the year 2020. Imports from Oman decreased by 40.11 per cent in 2021, when compared to the year 2020. Accordingly, the total trade balance between the two countries was in favour of Oman in 2021.

Sri Lanka Exports to Oman

Sri Lanka's main export products to Oman in 2021 were apparel, manufactured tobacco, switches, boards and panels, animal feed, fuel wood and charcoal, coco peat, fiber pith products, industrial and surgical gloves of rubber, tea packets, desiccated coconut, products of base metal and fruits and vegetables.



⁹¹ <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/exporters/market-profiles/oman.html>

Top Sri Lankan exporters to Oman 2021

Source: Sri Lanka Customs

No	Company Details	Products Exported within this Period
1	LANKA MARINE SERVICES PVT LTD	Petroleum Oils
2	AL OBAIDANI APPARELS PVT LTD	Apparel, Other Manufactures, Electrical & Electronic Products
3	OSMOSIS PVT LTD	Manufactured Tobacco
4	BALFOUR BEATTY CEYLON PVT LTD	Switches, Boards & Panels, Products of Base Metal
5	GREEN SCAPE COIR EXPORTS PVT LTD	Fuel Wood & Charcoal
6	Y A S LANKA PVT LTD	Fruits, Manioc, Coconut Oil, Melons & Papayas, Other Cereals and its Products
7	ARAVA PVT LTD	Coco Peat, Fiber Pith & Moulded products
8	S M K MILLING ENGINEERS PVT LTD	Animal Feed
9	SRI LANKAN CATERING LTD	Miscellaneous Edible Preparations
10	LALAN RUBBERS PVT LTD	Industrial & Surgical Gloves of Rubber, Apparel
11	HAYLEYS FREE ZONE LTD	Products of Base Metal, Pneumatic & Retreated Rubber Tyres & Tubes
12	AGRO EXTRACT LANKA PVT LTD	Animal Feed
13	ADMAJEE LUKMANJEE PVT LTD	Desiccated Coconut
14	ANSELL LANKA PVT LTD	Industrial & Surgical Gloves of Rubber
15	TOYO CUSHION LANKA PVT LTD	Coir Pads, Yarn and other Textile Articles

Potential Products for Export

Potential Products from Sri Lanka to Oman include solid/cushion tyres, apparel, cinnamon, bran, sharps and other residues of wheat, gloves with plastics/rubber, babies' garments and accessories, new pneumatic tyres, food preparations, preparations used in animal feed, bananas - fresh or dried, surgical gloves, vulcanised rubber, fast moving consumer goods (FMCG), Ayurvedic and herbal products, coconut based products and value added tea products, etc.

Import to Sri Lanka from Oman

Sri Lanka's main imports products from Oman in 2021 were petroleum gases,⁹² mineral products, petroleum oils, products of base metal, fertilizers, products of plastics, fish, organic chemicals, glass and glassware, miscellaneous edible preparations and frozen fish. Potential product for imports from Oman to Sri Lanka are fertilizer (urea), dates, etc.

(ii) Investment

Key Sri Lankan Investments in Oman

Aitken Spence Resorts Middle East

The popular Sri Lankan hospitality sector company, Aitken Spence PLC, has invested in the hospitality sector in Oman. Al-Falaj Hotel in Muscat is a 100 per cent Sri Lankan owned investment by the Aitken Spence Resorts Middle East and the company also presently manages the Luxury Desert Nights Camp, Sur Plaza Hotel and Sohar Al Wadi Hotel in the Sultanate of Oman.

⁹² Oman's Oil Company, OQ has supplied LPG to Sri Lanka's State owned company, Litro Gas Lanka Ltd through international tender.

A seventeen member delegation from the National Defence College of Oman (NDC) led by Air Commodore Nasser Juma Mohamed Al Zadjali, visited Sri Lanka in connection with the Fourth Round International visit of National Defense College from March 18-25, 2017



The 17-member delegation from from the National Defence College (NDC) of Oman along with the LKI team



Key Omani Investment in Sri Lanka

There are two key projects in Sri Lanka, which have Oman's collaboration in commercial operations in Sri Lanka. The cumulative investment from 2008 – 2019 from these two projects would be US\$ 8.13 Million. Thamania (Pvt.) Ltd. has built an office complex for the business community in Sri Lanka, and Al Obaidani Apparels (Pvt) Ltd. manufactures garments for export.

Al Obaidani Group of Companies

Al Obaidani International LLC, a leading Omani manufacturer of uniform clothing and equipment in the entire GCC, has invested in Sri Lanka in apparel sector. Obaidani Apparels (Pvt.) Ltd, Sri Lanka branch was established in 2015 and started its operations under Sri Lankan Board of Investment (BOI).

Al-Obaidani Apparels' main focus is to fulfill Middle East's apparel requirement,

especially traditional Arab Men's cloths and corporate uniforms. Obaidani Apparels operates with fully equipped, the state-of-the-art factory, which is located in Negombo, Sri Lanka. Currently, 350 machines are loaded for 7 lines production as phase 1 and expecting to expand up to 1000 machines. The company is currently exporting its traditional Arab cloths to KSA, UAE, Oman, United Kingdom, and Kenya from Sri Lanka.

C. LABOUR RELATIONS

Sri Lankan expatriate community in the Sultanate of Oman is an important aspect of the bilateral relations between the two countries. The Sri Lankan expatriate community in Oman is estimated to be around 25,000 - 30,000. The majority of them are domestic and semi-skilled workers. The rest include hotel employees, technicians, and professionals such as teachers, quantity surveyors, accountants, doctors, engineers and bankers.

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat extends assistance to the welfare of the Sri Lankan migrant workers in Oman, which includes separate accommodation facility for the female domestic workers who seek assistance from the Embassy.

MoU on Labour and Training

Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the field of Labour and Training on 22 June 2014 with a view to enhancing cooperation through regular dialogue in the fields of labour and training. The MoU was signed on 22 June 2014, by the Minister of Manpower of the Sultanate of Oman, Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser al Bakri, and Minister of Foreign Employment Promotions & Welfare of Sri Lanka, Dilan Perera. The MoU provides for exchange of visits between officials and experts to identify the potentials of two countries in the training and exchange of information; experience, research and studies related to the development of technical education, vocational training and vocational guidance.

A Technical Committee, comprising members from the Ministry of Foreign Employment of Sri Lanka and the Ministry of Manpower of Oman, was set up and it serves as the implementation arm of this MoU.

The Committee holds annual meetings, alternatively in both capitals. The 4th meeting of the Committee was held virtually on 23 December 2020, due to COVID pandemic restrictions.

The Committee discusses ways and means of enhancing cooperation between the two countries in the field of manpower, including cooperation in

combating human trafficking.

D. DEFENCE COOPERATION

The officers of the Royal Navy of Oman have been undergoing technician training in Sri Lanka at the General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University and the Sri Lanka Navy Dockyard in Trincomalee. The duration of their training was one year. Regular interaction between the security establishments of Sri Lanka and Oman was initiated by the arrival of the Royal Navy of Oman ship Khasab at the Colombo Port on a goodwill visit, in July 2016.

A seventeen member delegation from the National Defence College of Oman (NDC), led by Air Commodore Nasser Juma Mohamed Al Zadjali, visited Sri Lanka from 18 - 25 March 2017, in connection with the Fourth Round International visit by National Defence College.

An exclusive program was arranged by the Ministry of Defense of Sri Lanka, including a briefing on Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka, which was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka.

The delegation also visited the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies (LKI), and engaged in a round table discussion related to overseas Sri Lankans in the Middle East as well as the educational dimensions of foreign relations.

The active participation of Omani defense officials in the annual Defense Seminar organised by the Ministry of Defense, and the Galle Dialogue organised by the Sri Lankan Navy, demonstrate close cooperation in defense affairs between the two countries.

E. MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

Sri Lanka and Oman engage with International and regional multilateral fora such as United Nations (UN), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), World Trade Organisation (WTO), World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Non Aligned Movement (NAM), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD), and Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC).

Sri Lanka and Oman formal multilateral cooperation began with the visit of a high level Omani delegation to Sri Lanka to attend the 5th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, hosted by Sri Lanka from August 16–19, 1976, in Colombo.

Both countries continue to work together on common regional and international issues, particularly on the subjects of Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) and the Indian Ocean Marine Affairs Committee (IOMAC). When the Indian

Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) was formally launched in Mauritius in 1997, Sri Lanka was unanimously elected as co-Vice-Chair of IOR-ARC along with the Sultanate of Oman. The Sultanate was the chair of the IOR-ARC from 2001-2002.

H.E. Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, Minister Responsible for the Foreign Affairs of Oman, visited Sri Lanka in 2003 as the outgoing Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the IOR-ARC, to present his report to the 4th Council of Ministers Meeting, hosted by Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka also hosted the 5th Council of Ministers Meeting of the IOR-ARC and other related meetings in Colombo in the year 2004.

The author of this book had the privilege to serve as the Desk Officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka for both 4th and 5th Council of Ministers and other related meetings, of the IOR-ARC, hosted by Sri Lanka consecutively. The IOR-ARC was later renamed as Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in 2013.









Participants of the Fifth Non-Aligned Summit held in Colombo 1976 under the chairpersonship of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. The Conference was attended by 86 Heads of State and Government









CHAPTER IV

SRI LANKAN

COMMUNITY

IN OMAN

People to people contacts had been the bedrock of Sri Lanka - Oman relations. The Sri Lankan Community in Oman has been an important component in furthering the bilateral relations between the two countries. The significant role played by the Sri Lankan community in Oman for the development of the Sultanate, for more than five decades since the blessed Renaissance spearheaded by the visionary leadership of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, has been well acknowledged.



A. EARLY SRI LANKANS IN OMAN

The first Sri Lankan expatriate to arrive in Oman, according to available records, was Mr Felix de Silva, who later became the first Inspector General for Police and Customs of the Sultanate of Oman.

Felix de Silva

Mr Felix de Silva attended St. Aloysius College in Galle, Southern Sri Lanka and left for Britain for police training. He served in police force in Tanganyika from 1949 – 1967. Later, he joined the then called Muscat Police on April 14, 1969, succeeding Major Ockett. He was promoted



For his significant and remarkable contribution to the Royal Oman Police and National Security Mr De Silva was decorated and bestowed the most envious and prestigious awards by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said

to Lieutenant Colonel in June 1972 and later appointed Police Commissioner on December 28, 1972, and then Inspector General for Police and Customs with the rank of Lieutenant General in November 1974. He was the first Inspector General (IGP) of Royal Oman Police (ROP) and held that post until April 1982.⁹³ To meet with the ever increasing demands of the time, Silva systematically planned for the expansion and simultaneous modernisation of the Omani police force. Apart from the traditional and conventional police duties, Customs, Emigration and Immigration, Motor Vehicle Registration and administration, Coastal Security, Desert Surveillance, all came under his purview of the Police.⁹⁴

Mr De Silva organised various branches of the force, providing for specialisation in their respective fields of activity, setting up a Marine and Mounted Division, as well as an Air Wing to effectively serve the needs of a fast growing modern society. When he relinquished his duties in early 1983, the Royal Oman Police was recognised in the international police world as an efficient, sophisticated, highly equipped force with the most up to date techniques/systems and procedures, with an abundance of expertise. It was the best in the Gulf States. In fact, other members of the Gulf Corporation Council regularly sought assistance of the Oman Police to train its personnel⁹⁵. For his significant

and remarkable contribution to the Royal Oman Police and National Security, Mr De Silva was decorated and bestowed the most envious and prestigious awards by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said.⁹⁶ He received many Omani medals and orders, the prominent of which were the Oman Military Order, 2nd Grade in 1974, the Order of Renaissance of Oman in 1975 and the Qaboos Police Order.⁹⁷

Mr De Silva was later appointed as advisor to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Al-Said after guiding the Royal Oman Police (ROP) for over two and a half decades, and was highly respected and admired by the people of Oman. He passed away when he was 74 years old, in the U.S.A. ,on October 23, 2001, and his ashes were interred in Radella cemetery, in Galle.⁹⁸

A few other early Sri Lankan nationals, whose details are available with the author, are as follows:

Anselm Perera

Mr. Anselm Perera is a senior banker and a Sri Lankan entrepreneur in Oman. In 1975 he joined HSBC Oman (the British Bank of the Middle East – BBME). He was a strategic member of the Management Team of HSBC Oman. Anselm is also the Representative of Aitken Spence Plc (ASP) in Sri Lanka, Oman and other Middle Eastern Countries. In February 2008, he introduced Aitken Spence Hotel Holdings PLC (ASHH) to the Sultanate to manage five hotels in Oman. ASHH operated four of

93 Said bin Rashid Al Kalbani, *A Soldier from Oman: Memory's Nectar*, Translated from Arabic by Khalid Al Balushi, Bait AlGhasham Publishers (201) pp. 81-82.

94 <https://www.elanka.co.uk/model-officer-philanthropist-and-perfect-gentleman-f-felix-delip-de-silva-by-sqn-ldr-rex-fernando/>

95 Ibid

96 Ibid

97 Said bin Rashid Al Kalbani, *"A Soldier from Oman: Memory's Nectar"* Translated from Arabic by Khalid Al Balushi, pp. 81-82.

98 <https://www.elanka.co.uk/model-officer-philanthropist-and-perfect-gentleman-f-felix-delip-de-silva-by-sqn-ldr-rex-fernando/>

these hotels in Oman and purchased one of them outright under their newly formed Company, "Aitken Spence Resorts Middle East" (ASRME).

During his 41 years in Oman, he had participated in several community service activities and held various posts in honorary capacities as the President, Sri Lankan Club Salalah (1979-1986) and Chairman, Dhofar Cricket Association, Salalah, Oman (1982-1986). He also served as the President of the Sri Lankan Community Social Club in Oman (2003-2005), a Member of the Steering Committee to establish a Sri Lankan School in Oman (1987-1988) and the Chairman of the Board of Management, Sri Lankan School Muscat (1995-1998). During his tenure as the Chairman of the Board of Management of the Sri Lankan School, in 1996, the School Board was able to successfully build a "state of the art" School Building at the cost of USD1.35 Million.

The Sri Lankan Community in Oman, to date, continues to show their gratitude for the professional leadership and guidance provided by him and the members of the School Board in this project. Mr. Perera continues to be an active member of the Sri Lankan community in Oman, extending his voluntary services and guidance to the community.

Sanath Hemachandra

Sanath Hemachandra joined the Ministry of Finance of the Sultanate of Oman (MOF) as Legacy Mainframe Systems Expert on October 13, 1982. Two other Sri Lankan IT professionals who joined the MOF on the same day were late Mr Percy de Silva and late Mr N. D. Gunasiri.

As a mainframe software professional,

Mr Sanath Hemachandra had shared his expertise in designing, developing and implementing software systems from an era where personal computers and mobile phones were not yet invented.

Hemachandra had also contributed to the development of the mind sport Scrabble in Oman, by first establishing competitive Scrabble from early 1990s with Mr Clifford Lazarus, another Sri Lankan, now domiciled in New Zealand.

Hemachandra was the Oman National Scrabble Champion many times and currently holds that title since 2019. He has also represented Oman in World Scrabble Championships held in Las Vegas in 2001, Mumbai 2007, Prague 2013 and Nairobi in 2017. He was also the winner of the HM Sultan Qaboos Award for Best Government to Government e-Service for MOF's Integrated Financial System in the year of 2011. Mr. Hemachandra is an active member of the Sri Lankan community in Oman contributing to its welfare, whilst volunteering his services to the Sri Lankan School Muscat.

Kamalanathan

Kamalanathan, who is a senior quantity surveyor, joined Taylor Woodrow Towell at Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos, in 1982. He then joined M/s. Khatib & Alami and Partners, Engineering Consultants (K&A), where he had an illustrious career - close to 40 years.

Some of the most notable projects he spearheaded were the construction of general hospitals across Oman, development work on the Duqm port, and the oncology department at the Royal Hospital, Muscat; Qaboos Sports Stadium in Bausher and American Air Base at Masirah Island. In addition, his expertise

was also lent towards the construction of the headquarters of Oman Arab Bank in Ghala and the College of Banking and Finance Studies in Bausher.⁹⁹

Kamalanathan was also an active member of the Sri Lankan community in Oman and extended his contribution to the welfare of the community in various ways. He also offered his voluntary services to the Sri Lankan School Muscat and the Sri Lankan Community Club.

Kamalanathan's services to the Sri Lankan community in Oman was honoured by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman, under its initiative during the commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman, when he left the Sultanate for good, in 2021.

Namiq Azhar Mohideen

Namiq Azhar Mohideen landed in Muscat in 1982, and joined Waleed Catering Services Co LLC; he left Oman for good in 2022, after serving for four decades in different sectors, including oil and gas industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

He was one of the early members of the Sri Lanka Community Social Club and extended his yeoman service to the welfare of the Sri Lankan community in Oman over the decades.¹⁰⁰

Mohideen's services to the Sri Lankan community in Oman was honoured by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman under its initiative of the commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman. He left the Sultanate for good in 2022.

⁹⁹ E-mail interview.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1111611/oman/sri-lankan-expat-bids-goodbye-after-40-years>

¹⁰¹ <http://www.sbt-oman.com/about-us.html>

B. KEY SRI LANKAN ENTERPRISES IN OMAN

Sunset Brightness Trading (SBT) LLC

Mr. Sunil Perera is the founder and Managing Director of SBT LLC in the Sultanate of Oman; it is the 88th Group of companies in Sri Lanka. Mr. Perera is a qualified Mechanical Engineer with more than 38 years of experience in the Sultanate of Oman. SBT LLC is a building construction, maintenance and a project management firm based in Muscat, Oman.

SBT LLC has significant capabilities in electro-mechanical system maintenance, repair, and replacement services. (It is an ISO 9001:2015 registered Company).

The Company has been rendering Engineering Consultancy, Construction and facility management services to prestigious clients in Oman, including one of the best-performing companies listed on the Omani stock market and Oman's largest Oil and Gas Company.

They have a qualified and dedicated team of professional managers, engineers, quantity surveyors, HSE personnel, draftsmen and construction technicians.¹⁰¹

Sunil Perera and his team have been actively contributing to the welfare of the Sri Lankan community in the Sultanate of Oman.

Milcris Private Ltd

Milcris Private Limited is a 100 per cent Sri Lankan registered Construction Consultancy that was established by Millan De Christopher De Silva who arrived in the Sultanate of Oman 36 years ago to work for the Ministry of Defence in hospitality and housekeeping sector.

After five years of his first arrival in the Sultanate of Oman, he changed his career

and became professionally qualified Quantity Surveyor and then developed his business acumen in the Sultanate of Oman by initiating Milcris (Pvt.) Ltd (Oman)¹⁰² in 2007. Within the first two years of the formation of the Company, Milcris managed to obtain the prestigious registration certificate from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) in the UK. As a result, Milcris was the first Quantity Surveying company to be regulated by the RICS in the Sultanate of Oman, after which it was certified with ISO 9001:215.

Milcris is presently headed by Mr. Sunil Ponnampereuma, who is leading the company in the path of success. Mr. Ponnampereuma is an active member of the Sri Lankan community in the Sultanate of Oman and contributes to the welfare of the community as well as the activities organised by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat. Milan De Silva and his team have been actively contributing to the welfare of the Sri Lankan community in the Sultanate of Oman as well to the activities organised by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat.

BPOS Global LLC

Business Process Outsourcing Services LLC is headed by Dr. Amer Al Rawas, Chairman, and managed by Mr. Anselm Perera, CEO and Managing Director of the Company, who spearheaded the formation of the company with Director Mrs. Frances Perera. They are operating in over eight countries with over 37 successful project completion. BPOS was set up to provide non-core activities to the Banks, Government Establishments and other Financial Institutions in the Sultanate.

The BPOS provides banking support systems, human resource management

systems/services, information technology services, project management, event management, trading and company representation.

CPEC Architectural & Engineering Consultancy

CPEC Architectural & Engineering Consultancy is the sole architectural and engineering consultancy in Oman that is managed by a Sri Lankan architect. Following its establishment in 2009 by Sheik Engineer Nasser Ali Al Hasher, CPEC has continued to prosper under the leadership of Sri Lankan Architect Sarath Bandara, who undertook its management in 2013.

CPEC has been providing architectural and engineering consultancy services to a wide range of clients from both private and public sectors. CPEC has successfully delivered design and construction supervision services for a multitude of projects including residential/ commercial developments, hotels, office buildings, factories, warehouses and private villas.

In an effort to expand its business, CPEC opened a branch in the Duqm Free Zone in 2017 and has since executed numerous projects there.

Mr. Bandara is an active member of Sri Lankan community in Oman and has extended his voluntary services to the welfare of the community as well to the activities organised by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat.

Bread Box Bakery and Café

Bread Box, which is a popular bakery and café among the Sri Lankan community in Oman, was established on April 27, 2019, in Wadi Al Kabir, in Muscat, to cater to the Sri Lankan community in Oman. This is a

102 <https://www.milcris.com/>

family entrepreneurship with an initiative by Mr. Chanaka Karanagoda and his wife Dr. Nusrah Begum.

Bread Box also supplies its products to the leading supermarkets in Muscat. Bread Box has opened another branch in Ruwi, Muscat.

C. KEY SRI LANKAN ESTABLISHMENTS IN OMAN

SriLankan Airlines

Sri Lankan Airlines is one of the oldest airline operations to serve the Omani capital. Sri Lankan Airlines has been an award-winning airline for several decades. With the hub at Bandaranaike International Airport in Colombo, the Company has expanded to many locations worldwide. The Airline has a global route of 122 destinations in 55 countries. Sri Lankan Airlines continues to have frequent weekly scheduled flights from many Middle Eastern countries to Colombo and vice versa.

Sri Lankan Airlines upholds its reputation in providing the best and world-class comfort, safety in travelling, reliability in service and punctuality in arrival for all passengers. Given the large expatriate Indian population in Oman, Sri Lankan Airlines is preferred due to its strategic overlay in Sri Lanka and competitive pricing, which adds value to the Indian and Sri Lankan friendship.

The Company also takes measures to ensure that most of the Sri Lankan population in Oman can travel back home during the peak seasons of July and August during the summer holidays for school children, as well as December/January, which is the end of the Year and new year visits by Sri Lankans to and from the country.

Sri Lankan Airlines continues to sponsor significant events in Oman, such as those organised by the Sri Lankan Embassy in Oman, Sinhala Tamil New Year Festival and to fly in notable celebrities and musical artists for Sri Lankan cultural events in Oman.

Aitken Spence

In 2007, one of the most prominent business tycoons in Sri Lanka and the Chairman of the Aitken Spence PLC, Deshamanya Harry Jayawardena, visited Oman on a private trip, which ultimately led to a pioneering business venture, i.e. Aitken Spence PLC - becoming the only Sri Lankan conglomerate with 100% ownership in the Sultanate of Oman. Aitken Spence Resorts Middle East owns 100% of Al Falaj Hotel and presently manages the Luxury Desert Nights Camp, Sur Plaza and Sohar Al Wadi.

Al Falaj Hotel in Muscat serves pure Ceylon tea at its exclusively dedicated “Stassen Tea Lounge” for the benefit of Ceylon tea lovers in Oman.

Aitken Spence is a blue-chip conglomerate anchored to a heritage of excellence spanning over 150 years with an indisputable reputation as one of Sri Lanka’s pioneering corporates.

Listed in the Colombo Stock Exchange since 1983, Aitken Spence is a responsible enterprise driven by over 12,000 employees across 16 industries in 8-countries in hotels, travels, maritime, freight and logistics solutions, plantations, power generation, insurance, printing, apparel, and other services.

Bank of Ceylon (BOC)

Inward remittance from Oman to Sri Lanka has been a crucial means of foreign exchange (FOREX) to the country over the

past few decades. Bank of Ceylon, as the nation's premier Bank, holds leadership positions within the government on assets, deposits, and foreign currency remittances.

The BOC representatives who are based in Muscat are actively involved in providing remittance schemes, BOC smart remit facilities, opening foreign currency accounts, special deposit accounts, Sri Lankan Rupee accounts, and Non-Residential Foreign Currency Accounts (NRFC), and other Foreign Currency Accounts.

The BOC also provides facilities to ensure that both Sri Lankan and Non-Sri Lankan community members can avail such facilities in the Sultanate of Oman.

Commercial Bank

Commercial Bank is the first Sri Lankan bank to be ranked among the Top 1000 banks globally for five consecutive years. Commercial Bank operates a network of 246 branches and 618 ATMs in Sri Lanka. The Bank was ranked the most valuable private sector brand in Sri Lanka in 2014 and has won multiple awards as Sri Lanka's best bank from several international publications. In 2016, Commercial Bank ventured into a strategic partnership with another premier bank, Bank Muscat Oman. Bank Muscat account holders can use the new mobile banking app to instantly send cash remittances and transfer money to any account of Commercial Bank, 24/7. Funds can also be transferred from the Commercial Bank Account to Other Banks within Sri Lanka. A representative of the Commercial Bank of Sri Lanka operates from Muscat to provide banking facilities, including remittances.

People's Bank

People's Bank of Sri Lanka, which is the first bank in Sri Lanka to be accredited with the ISO/IEC 27001:2013 certification, has also entered Oman recently, and its representative have started functioning from Muscat to provide banking facilities, including remittance services.

Trico International Cargo

Trico Group started in the United Kingdom, extended its services to Sri Lanka in 1978 and expanded its operations to the Gulf Region in 1983.¹⁰³

Today, it has evolved as a worldwide operation for moving and caring of cargo as core business, having established branch offices in all the major cities of the world, including Muscat, Sohar and Salalah in Oman.

Trico is now a household name for logistics and transportation among the Sri Lankan Community in Oman. The Company also caters for UPB (Unaccompanied Personal Baggage) by Sea and Air, Airline Ticketing facilities, Courier (Domestic and International), Cargo Exports, Imports, Packaging, Warehousing and Door-to-Door/Port Delivery and Publishing of the in-house magazine "Medaperadiga" in Oman.

D. KEY SRI LANKAN COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN OMAN

Sri Lankan School Muscat (SLSM)

The establishment of the Sri Lankan School Muscat (SLSM) is a milestone in Sri Lanka and Oman relations. The story of SLSM started in June 1988 with a very dedicated and devoted group of individuals whose vision was to see a community school for the Sri Lankans in the Sultanate of Oman. Mr Gamini Gunawardana, the

¹⁰³ <https://tricoworld.com/our-profile.php>



33rd anniversary celebrations



The story of SLSM started in June 1988 with a very dedicated and devoted group of individuals whose vision was to see a community school for the Sri Lankans in the Sultanate of Oman

first head of Mission and the Charge D' Affairs of the Sri Lankan Embassy, the late Mr W D Perera, the Late Mr J L Karunadasa, Mr Upul Siriwardena, Mr S Ramanan and Mr Anslem Perera were the stalwarts behind this magnanimous thought which has borne fruit today and is flourishing and thriving in all its glory. On February 15, 1989, the Sri Lankan School Muscat doors were opened with 37 students, three staff members, Mrs. Vidarshani Jayawardhana, Mrs. Sakuntala Arunesan and Mrs. Zarina Hillur, headed by the Principal Mr Lionel Jayasinghe. As the student numbers grew slowly but steadily, the school moved to a camp structure in Wadi Kabir.

The construction of a new building for the School began in 1996, during the tenure of the Board of Management of the SLSM (1995-1998) headed by Mr Anslem Perera under the patronship of the late H.E. Amanul Farouque, then Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate, who played a major role in designing and constructing the unique building of the SLSM.

The new building was declared opened in 1997, during the patronship of the former Ambassador to the Sultanate, T.B. Maduwegedera.

Over the years, the School has been successfully imparting quality, world-

class British Education to students from the Sri Lankan Community in Oman and students from over 30 different nationalities. Having celebrated more than three decades of existence, the school continues to be a haven for expatriate Sri Lankan parents who can ensure the children are also facilitated by learning their home languages of Sinhala and Tamil. In addition, the school can also teach the Urdu language, given the many Pakistani students who attend Sri Lankan schools for their primary and secondary education.

The school is also one of the first schools in Muscat to be endorsed by World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and the World Scout Movement, equipping young boys and girls with the necessary home and life skills, and preparing them to face the real world independently.

The school also celebrates essential Sri Lankan functions such as the Sinhala Tamil New Year, Sri Lankan Independence Day, Thai Pongal, Vesak, Eid and Christmas Celebrations. Given that Sri Lankan community students are brought up away from their homeland, these special occasions give the students a sense of unity in diversity and belonging to their Motherland, Sri Lanka.

Students also enjoy various other functions in the field of sports, with the most coveted Athletics Meet of the Year, followed by the Inter-House and Inter-school Basketball Tournaments.

The School has also produced world-class players in sports areas, such as athletics, scrabble and quiz competitions. The SLSM, which recently celebrated its



33rd anniversary¹⁰⁴ in 2022, presently serves more than 1200 students belonging to different nationalities. The SLSM is a living icon to represent the Sri Lankan identity in Muscat.

104 A Sri Lankan fruit sapling (Woodapple) was planted in the School premises to mark the occasion.

Sri Lankan Community Social Club (SLCSC)

The Sri Lankan Community Social Club in Oman, which was first established in 1997, under the patronage of the former Sri Lankan Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, late Amanul Farouque, plays an important role in connecting Sri Lankan community in Oman and fostering mutual understanding and co-operation amongst them. The SLCSC also aims at fulfilling social, cultural and sporting needs of Sri Lankan expatriates in Oman.

The annual calendar of the SLCSC comprises various traditional events that attract all Sri Lankan members, and non-members and both non-Sri Lankan expatriates and local citizens get to gather to celebrate their diversity by participating in all Sri Lankan national festivals, namely Sinhala and Tamil New Year, Thai Pongal, Vesak, Eid and Christmas celebrations.

SLCSC also extends support to the welfare of the Sri Lankan community in Oman during their challenging times. The contribution by the SLCSC, headed by Mr. Roy Lasantha and assisted by Mrs. Deanna Zuhiri, as well as the other Board Directors and members of the SLCSC, during the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Oman was remarkable.

Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyors Fraternity (SLQSF) - Oman

Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyors Fraternity (SLQSF) - Oman was established as a non-profit, voluntary, and professional organisation for the benefit, uplift, and progression of the Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyors in the Sultanate of Oman. SLQF was initially formed in 2001 and it became a professional wing of the Sri Lankan Community Social Club in the year



standards. SLQSF also conducts activities such as annual cricket tournament, volleyball tournament, mid-summer -music night, photo competitions, art competitions and a yearly get-together.

Moreover, SLQF lends helping hand to the needy Sri Lankan domestic migrant workers for their repatriation back home through the Sri Lankan Embassy in Oman. SLQF - Oman also donated one ICU bed through the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman to be used in a Government hospital in Sri Lanka for treating COVID-19 patients. In addition, SLQF's "The Hope" project aims

at humanitarian assistance programmes to help destitute people in Sri Lanka.

Sri Sambuddhatwa Jayanthi Viharaya

Buddhist community living in the Sultanate of Oman organise Dhamma sermons at the Buddhist Viharaya, located in the Embassy premises and organises Pirith and annual Vesak celebrations.

Sri Lankan Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Christian communities living in Muscat also organise Dhamma and other religious classes for their children in the Embassy premises.

E. CONTRIBUTIONS BY SRI LANKAN NATIONALS TO KEY SECTORS IN OMAN

Banking and Finance Sector

Since early period of the Blessed Renaissance in Oman, Sri Lankan professionals have been serving the financial and banking sectors of the Sultanate, especially in the field of core banking management, including in the Central Bank, government banks, as well as private banks of the Sultanate of Oman. A large number of Sri Lankan nationals are serving as accountants and financial assistants in private sector companies in Oman.

Health Sector

Over the past many decades, Sri Lankan medical professionals such as doctors, nurses, lab technicians etc., who are recruited by the Ministry of Health of the Sultanate of Oman (MOH), have been serving in different parts of the Sultanate, primarily under the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Ministry of Health (MOH).

It is learnt that when Sultan Qaboos Hospital was inaugurated in Salalah in 1979, around 187 medical staff including



doctors, nurses, and lab technicians were brought from Sri Lanka to Oman by a special aircraft. Dr. Sathgunanathan, a Sri Lankan doctor, was the First Chief Medical Officer at the Salalah Sultan Qaboos Hospital.¹⁰⁵

Sri Lankan Community Blood Donation Programmes

Sri Lankan Community in Oman annually organises massive blood donations to the Omani Central Blood Bank of the Ministry of Health of Oman as a gesture of human solidarity with the people of Oman.

A large number of Sri Lankans volunteer to donate their blood during these programmes.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Personal interview

¹⁰⁶ <https://timesofoman.com/article/117124-maoren-than-100-sri-lankan-expats-in-oman-donate-blood-on-vesak-festival>



Former Sri Lankan Cricket Captain Mahela Jayawardene participates as Special Guest at the 40th Anniversary of Oman Cricket. Mahela Jayawardene, together with Former Indian Cricket Captain Anil Kumble, participated as Special Guests at the celebrations of the 40th Anniversary of Oman Cricket, which was held on 23 September 2019 at Oman Cricket Academy Ground in Al Amerat, Oman.

The Ministry of Health of the Sultanate of Oman recognises this contribution annually by presenting a memento to the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat.¹⁰⁷

Defence Sector

Since the Blessed Renaissance, Sri Lankan nationals have also been rendering their services to the Royal Omani Tri-forces, Military Colleges under the Ministry of Defence (MOD) as well as the Royal Guard of the Sultanate in different capacities, such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, quantity surveyors, financial and technical staff.

Royal Oman Police (ROP)

Sri Lankan nationals have also held senior positions in the Royal Oman Police (ROP). Among them, Mr. Felix de Silva, who was the first Inspector General of

Police (IGP) of Oman, (more details of whom is given under another chapter of this book), Mr. Collin Perera, who served as the Southern Commander in Salalah, and Mr. Basil Rodrigo, who served as the Police Customs Chief, are remembered with respect. Many other Sri Lankan nationals have been rendering their services in different categories to the ROP for last many decades.

Sports

Oman is currently the 38th associate member of the International Cricket Council (ICC), it achieved One-Day International status in April 2019. Oman hosted the first ever opening ceremony of final qualifiers of the T20 Cricket World Cup in October 2021.

Mr. Dulip Mendis, who was the former

¹⁰⁷ <https://mfa.gov.lk/oman-blood-banks-services-department-felicitates-sri-lankas-ambassador-to-oman/>



Buddhist community living in the Sultanate of Oman organise Dhamma sermons at the Buddhist Viharaya located in the Embassy premises and also Pirith and annual Vesak celebrations

test captain of Sri Lankan National Cricket Team and CEO of Sri Lanka Cricket, is the present head coach of the Omani National Cricket Team and the Chief Development Officer of Oman Cricket. At an invitation extended by the present Chairman of Oman Cricket H.E. Pankaj Khimji, Mr. Mendis arrived in Oman in 2012 and since then he has been sharing and offering his expertise as a player, coach, manager and administrator to Oman Cricket for more than a decade. He assisted in building the Omani Cricket infrastructure with two cricket grounds in the middle and with the academy building, with the support extended by the Omani Cricket Board. Apart from building cricket infrastructure, Mr. Mendis also promoted the rise of Oman's national cricket team.

Sri Lankan former cricketers, namely Rumesh Ratnayaka, Ruwan Kalpage and Anusha Samaranyaka also assisted Mr. Mendis in building Oman Cricket.

Oman commemorated the 40th Anniversary of Oman's Cricket on September 23, 2019 at Cricket Academy Ground in Al Amerat, Oman. Former Sri Lankan Cricket Captain Mahela Jayawardene participated as a Special Guest. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin

Tarik, as his then capacity as the Patron-in-Chief of Oman Cricket (OC), graced the Occasion as the Chief Guest

Hospitality Sector

A large number of Sri Lankan nationals have been contributing to the tourism and hospitality sectors in different parts of the Sultanate by providing their services in the hotel management as managers, chefs, front office managers, housekeeping and other technical and supporting staff etc.

Aviation Sector

Many Sri Lanka nationals have also been contributing to the Omani aviation sector in different capacities such as maintenance technicians, licensed aircraft engineers, aircraft training instructors, etc.

Education sector

Sri Lankan nationals have been serving as professors, lecturers and administrative staff in the Sultan Qaboos University. Sri Lankan academic and other administrative staff are also serving in private higher educational institutions as well as Vocational Training Institutions in different parts of the Sultanate of Oman.

Construction sector

Quantity Surveying, an indispensable discipline in the construction industry, has become prominent in the construction



industry of the Sultanate of Oman. A large number of professional and high caliber Quantity Surveyors from Sri Lanka have contributed to the construction industry of Oman for the last more than 40 years, in addition to Sri Lankan architects who have also contributed to the Omani construction sector. Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyors have earned a brand name in Oman for their professional efficiency, honesty, and integrity. Sri Lankan professionals, such as Mr. Ratnasiri Jayasinghe, who served as the Lead Design Architect for the development of Muscat International and Salalah Airports, have left memorable foot prints in Oman.

F. COVID -19 and Sri Lankan Community in Oman

COVID-19 pandemic posed multifaceted challenges to the Sri Lankan community in Oman during the years 2020 and 2021. Pandemic-related lockdowns, closure of workplaces, businesses and resultant loss of jobs; strict health guidelines, travel restrictions, closure of airports caused tremendous hardships to the Sri Lankan expatriates and unprecedented challenges to the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman in handling the welfare of the Sri Lankan community in Oman. 18 members of the Sri Lankan community in Oman succumbed to COVID-19 during the period of 2020 - 2022.



The Embassy of Sri Lanka took a number of measures to manage this unforeseen emergency situation by mobilising Sri Lankan community clubs and well-wishers to support the vulnerable members of the Sri Lankan community in Oman.

Those facilities included: (a) setting up of a special hotline service for the Sri Lankan community members to contact the Embassy for any assistance via a Toll-Free telephone number; (b) video messages in Sinhala, Tamil and English languages were released by the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate through the social media, for the benefit of the Sri Lankan community in Oman, educating them about the Covid-19 guidelines, instructions and preventive measures issued time to time by the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19, established by His Majesty Sultan of Oman; (c) community reach out activities such as distribution of dry rations to those vulnerable members of the community who had no access to food during the lockdowns at their doorsteps; (d) special ambulance services to transport the community members who were affected by the covid pandemic, establishment of a panel of Sri Lankan community doctors to advise



A number of measures were taken to manage COVID 19 emergency situation by mobilising Sri Lankan community clubs and well-wishers to support vulnerable members of the Sri Lankan community in Oman. The Embassy facilitated repatriation of more than 7000 Sri Lankan nationals, who lost their jobs and encountered other COVID related issues, back to Sri Lanka during the period of 2020 – 2021

covid affected patients, in addition to the special accommodation facilities for the stranded male and female Sri Lankan migrant workers in cooperation with the Sri Lanka Community Club.

Moreover, the much needed (e) special flights during pandemic era were also arranged with free quarantine facilities provided by the Government of Sri Lanka to repatriate a large number of stranded migrant workers back home in addition to (f) free vaccination of the needy community members.

The Embassy facilitated repatriation of more than 7000 Sri Lankan nationals who lost their jobs and encountered other COVID related issues back to

Sri Lanka during the period of 2020 - 2021. Demonstrating solidarity and social responsibility with the fellow Sri Lankan citizens back home, the Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman arranged a donation of five fully equipped Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds with the financial contribution made by the Embassy staff and Sri Lankan professionals living in Oman for treating COVID patients in Sri Lanka.

These ICU beds were distributed among the five Government Base hospitals in different parts of Sri Lanka namely, Base Hospitals in Padaviya, Nuwarab Eliya, Mahiyanganaya, Batticaloa and Mullaitivu in Sri Lanka.¹⁰⁸

108 <https://mfa.gov.lk/sri-lanka-embassy-in-oman-arranged-donation-of-icu-beds-to-treat-covid-patients-in-sri-lanka/>



CHAPTER V

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

AS two countries sharing the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman are well poised for greater connectivity and deeper economic engagement. The unique geographical locations that the both countries are naturally blessed with provide immense untapped opportunities for partnership in many areas of mutual interest. While Sri Lanka has embarked on an ambitious



Colombo Port

economic policy to transform the country into a hub of the Indian Ocean with a knowledge-based, highly competitive and social market economy, Oman aspires to become globally recognised as a competitive, diversified and resilient economy guided by Oman Vision 2040.¹⁰⁹

Against this backdrop, Chapter V identifies and focuses on high potential sectors namely trade and investment, agriculture and fisheries, tourism, education, maritime and energy sectors which have greater synergies and complementarities between the two countries for cooperation and partnership.

Although Sri Lanka and Oman bilateral relations have diversified to encompass a wide range of areas over the decades, the current level of bilateral economic cooperation between the two countries does not reflect the true potential of the opportunities available in both countries.

The key factor that the author identifies, having served as Sri Lanka's envoy to the Sultanate for three years, is the lack of awareness of each other's potentials and opportunities available in many areas of mutual interest. This gap could be bridged by the exchange of necessary information and frequent bilateral visits between the public as well as private sector entities of both countries with a view to creating



Port of Duqm

awareness and enabling them to establish bilateral links for forging partnerships. The Foreign Ministries of both countries could fast track the achievement of this objective through their specially devised Economic Diplomacy programmes.

In this context, Chapter V highlights the recent growing momentum in the public and private sector interactions between the two countries and sheds light on some resultant success stories in order to highlight unfolding opportunities for bolstering economic cooperation between the two countries. To this end, the chapter endeavours to provide useful information from relevant official sources of both countries and/or suggestions by bringing independent thoughts and ideas from professionals and sectoral experts in the relevant fields with a view to facilitating bilateral initiatives, collaborations and partnerships in the years ahead.

¹⁰⁹ https://isfu.gov.om/2040/Vision_Documents_En.pdf

A. TRADE AND INVESTMENT

I. TRADE

Trade links between Sri Lanka and Oman date back to many centuries as seen in Chapter I of this book. However, the present volume of trade between the two countries does not reflect the real potential. Sri Lanka and Oman can complement each other in trade. Sri Lanka could serve as a pathway for Oman to enter South and Southeast Asian countries. In turn, Oman could serve as a gateway for Sri Lanka to enter Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions.

For this purpose, Sri Lanka and Oman present numerous trade opportunities and have established favourable conditions to ease trade and to lure investments. The following arrangements that are in place in both countries will help to invigorate bilateral trade and investments.

Free Trade Agreements (FTA)

Sri Lanka has signed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with India,¹¹⁰ Pakistan,¹¹¹ and Singapore.¹¹² FTAs with China, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Bangladesh are being negotiated. Sri Lanka is the only country that has Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with both India and Pakistan. Sri Lanka collectively enjoys 100% exemption from duties on over 4000-plus products into India and Pakistan.¹¹³

Sri Lanka's multilateral trade agreements include WTO, the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA), the South Asia Free

Trade Agreement (SAFTA) and the SAARC Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA). Sri Lanka's Preferential Trade Agreements include the different Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP) programmes which offer additional tariff reduction, administered by a number of developed countries and the Global System of Trade Preferences among Developing countries (GSTP). USA and European Union have granted Sri Lanka GSP and GSP+¹¹⁴ respectively.¹¹⁵ Sri Lanka also ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in May 2016.

These are excellent opportunities for Oman to have market access to larger regional markets through Sri Lanka by utilising her FTAs.

Similarly, Sri Lanka could benefit from Oman's FTAs with USA,¹¹⁶ Singapore, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Lichtenstein¹¹⁷ as well as trade agreements with WTO, GCC common market and GAFTA.

Trade Promotion - Success Stories

The following initiatives that were undertaken recently by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman to promote trade between the two countries have yielded productive outcomes. To name a few:

(a) Export of Sri Lankan Frozen Chicken to Oman

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman organised B2B Meetings between eleven Sri Lankan food sector companies namely,

110 http://www.doc.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43&Itemid=168&lang=en

111 http://www.doc.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30&Itemid=155&lang=en

112 http://www.doc.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=183&Itemid=222&lang=en

113 Sri Lanka Foreign Policy and Economic Diplomacy Dialogue 2018: Summary, (2019) p. 45

114 The trade preferences under GSP+ consists of the full removal of duties on 66 percent of tariff lines, covering a wide array of products including textiles and fisheries.

115 The trade preferences under GSP+ consists of the full removal of duties on 66 percent of tariff lines, covering a wide array of products including textiles and fisheries.

116 The Oman-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) guarantees exporters duty-free access to the US market provided at least 35 per cent of their value is generated in the Sultanate.

117 <https://investinoman.om/#whyinvestinomanintro>





Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman organised a visit of 17 member high-level Omani business delegation from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), headed by its Chairman H.E. Eng. Redha bin Juma Al Saleh, first ever of its kind, to Sri Lanka from March 5- 9 2022. The MOU has served as a launch pad for this productive visit from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) to Sri Lanka.

TradLanka Agricultural Enterprises, Pioneer Tea Exports, Kandrick Tea Beverages Lanka, Ceylon Nutrinut Holdings Pvt Ltd, NelnaAgri Developments (Pvt.) Ltd, Jagro Pvt. Ltd, Nidro Supply (Private) Limited, Eastern & Allied Agencies, Farms Pride (Pvt.) Ltd, Stassen Exports Pvt. Ltd, Possible Green Private Limited, and their Omani counterparts, on 1 October 2019, at Al-Falaj Hotel in Muscat.¹¹⁸

These B2B meetings facilitated both Sri Lanka and Oman private sector companies to establish business links and paved the way to open market for new Sri Lanka export products. Sri Lankan company, named Farms Pride (Pvt.), Ltd exported 30 MT Sri Lanka frozen chicken in June 2020, to the Omani company, Al Hamadi Trading LLC, after having obtained Import License

from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of Oman.¹¹⁹ This was the first ever Sri Lankan poultry export to the Middle East market. The Embassy also organised “Sri Lanka Week at Carrefour Oman” - an In-store Promotion of Sri Lankan Food Products¹²⁰, from 2 – 3 October, 2019, at Carrefour hypermarket in Muscat City Centre¹²¹, and from October 4-5, 2019, at Qurum City Centre¹²², respectively for the visiting eleven Sri Lankan companies. They showcased their respective Sri Lankan food products brought from Sri Lanka for this purpose, during the four day promotional events.¹²³

A wide range of Sri Lankan food products, including rice, spices, fruits, vegetables, processed foods, tea, coconut kernel products, poultry and other

118 <https://mfa.gov.lk/tam/sri-lankan-food-sector-companies-meet-with-their-counterparts-in-oman/>

119 <https://www.news.lk/news/political-current-affairs/item/30266-sri-lanka-embassy-in-oman-initiates-the-first-ever-sri-lankan-export-of-poultry-product-to-oman>; <https://mfa.gov.lk/sri-lankan-chicken-sale-kicks-off-in-omani-market/>

120 <https://timesofoman.com/article/80658-more-sri-lankan-goods-to-be-sold-in-omani-markets>

121 <https://mfa.gov.lk/sri-lanka-week-at-carrefour-oman-ceremonially-opened-at-muscat-city-centre/>

122 <https://mfa.gov.lk/promotion-of-sri-lankan-food-products-at-carrefour-concludes-at-qurum-city-centre-in-oman/>

123 <https://www.ft.lk/Other-Sectors/Sri-Lanka-Week-at-Carrefour-Oman-ceremonially-opened-at-Muscat-City-Centre/57-687665>

varieties of consumer food, were displayed during the events.

The Sri Lankan food producer companies that participated during these promotional events were able to study the Omani market by directly engaging with the consumers and obtaining firsthand information with regard to their requirements and interests. Sri Lankan companies were of the view that Oman was a high potential market for Sri Lankan food products and that it could also serve as an entrepot for Sri Lankan products to enter GCC and MENA regions.

(b) Launch of new Sri Lankan Food Products at SPAR Oman

The Embassy of Sri Lanka organised a virtual B2B meeting between SPAR supermarket chain in Oman and 16 Sri Lankan food and beverage companies, in November 2020, with a view to promoting Sri Lankan exports of food products to Oman.¹²⁴ As a result, more than 75 Sri Lankan food products were introduced to SPAR Oman by the Sri Lankan companies, namely Ceylon Biscuits Limited (CBL) and TradLanka Agricultural Enterprises (pvt) Ltd.

The Embassy of Sri Lanka mooted the idea of facilitating the shipment of these products by the two Sri Lankan companies through a consolidated cargo directly delivered to SPAR Oman supermarket, without the involvement of middle men, to ensure competitive pricing of the products in the local market. An exclusive stall for these Sri Lankan products was opened at the SPAR outlet in Madinat al Sultan

Qaboos in Muscat on 11 May, 2021.¹²⁵ SPAR International, in a statement, said that three-quarters of these Sri Lankan goods that were exported to SPAR Oman under this initiative by the Sri Lankan Embassy in Oman, had been sold after just fifteen days, highlighting the demand and success of this initiative.¹²⁶

The initiative successfully continues currently with the regular imports of those Sri Lankan products by SPAR Oman.

(c) Ceylon Tea Outlet opened in Muscat

An exclusive Ceylon Tea Outlet (Akbar Tea) was opened at Boulevard Boutique Mall in the heart of the capital city of Muscat, on 5th July 2022, as a part of trade promotion of Ceylon Tea in Oman.¹²⁷

(d) Sri Lanka's "Hemas" Consumer Brand introduced to Omani Market

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman facilitated the introduction of Sri Lanka's popular 'Hemas' consumer products to the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Interaction between Chambers of Commerce

To establish links between private sectors of the two countries, Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman facilitated signing of a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (NCCSL), which is one of the oldest chambers in Sri Lanka - founded in 1948, soon after her independence, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), which is the sole representative of the entire private sector in Oman, on 7th July 2021.

124 <https://mfa.gov.lk/sri-lanka-oman-food-sector-companies-hold-b2b-webinar-to-promote-sri-lankan-exports-of-food-products/>

125 <https://timesofoman.com/article/101313-ambassador-opens-exclusive-stall-for-sri-lankan-products>

126 <https://spar-international.com/news/spar-partner-collabouration-brings-sri-lankan-products-to-oman>

127 <https://timesofoman.com/article/118775-akbar-ceylon-tea-outlet-launched-in-the-sultanate>

The key objective of this arrangement is to enhance regular interactions between the business communities of both countries.

OCCI visit to Sri Lanka

To activate the aforesaid MOU, Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman organised a visit of 17 member high-level Omani business delegation from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), headed by its Chairman H.E. Eng. Redha bin Juma Al Saleh, to Sri Lanka, from 5th to 9th March 2022. This was a first ever visit of its kind. In fact, the MoU had served as a launchpad for this productive visit from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) to Sri Lanka. The four day OCCI visit to Sri Lanka with a comprehensive programme had generated a great interest and created much needed awareness about Sri Lanka's business potentials among the members of the apex private sector body of the Sultanate of Oman. The programme included:¹²⁸

A Series of bilateral meetings between Omani business delegation and the Sri Lankan side, including the Hon. Prime Minister, Ministers of Finance, Trade, Labour, State Ministers of Regional Cooperation and Foreign Employment of Sri Lanka. Fruitful discussions with the specialised state agencies such as Board of Investment of Sri Lanka (BOI), Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau (SLBFE), and Sri Lanka State Trading Cooperation (STC), Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) and Sri Lanka Association for Software and Services Companies (SLASSCOM).

Participation at a well - attended

Business Forum, followed by productive B2B meetings between Omani business delegation and their Sri Lankan counterparts, organised by the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) in Colombo. A Letter of Intent (LoI) between Sri Lanka's popular Ayurvedic Company, Siddhalepa (Pvt.) Ltd and Oman's Lama Poly Clinic LLC was signed to introduce Siddhalepa Ayurvedic products and services in the Sultanate of Oman. Familiarisation visit to Sri Lanka's brand new Special Economic Zone, the Colombo Port City, a shiny metropolis high-tech city.

Field visits to the factories of Sri Lanka's popular brands such as Akbar Brother's Tea Packing Centre in Colombo, SMAK Food Processing Factory at Kadawatha, Isabella Apparel Factory at Kattunayake Free Trade Zone and Siddhalepa Ayurveda Hospital at Mount Lavinia. The aforesaid high level OCCI visit to Sri Lanka prompted the following reciprocal outcomes from Sri Lanka fulfilling the objective of the initiative:

(a) Visit of Sri Lanka's Trade Minister to Oman

Trade Minister of Sri Lanka, Hon. Bandula Gunawardane, together with a 4-member delegation, visited Oman from March 28 – 29, 2022, as a follow up visit by the OCCI to Sri Lanka.

The Minister and the delegation held a series of productive meetings, including one with H.E. Dr. Mohammed bin Hamad Al Rumhi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, as well as H.E. Salem bin Mohammed Al Mahrooqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism of Oman.¹²⁹

128 <https://mfa.gov.lk/%E2%80%8Bhigh-level-omani-business-delegation-concludes-productive-visit-to-sri-lanka/>

129 <https://omannews.gov.om/topics/en/80/show/108158/>



The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman organised B2B Meetings between eleven Sri Lankan food sector companies



The delegation also held bilateral discussions on a range of areas of mutual interest with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Ministry of Higher Education of the Sultanate of Oman as well as the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).¹³⁰

The outcome of the aforesaid visit, inter alia, proposed organisation of trade fairs; arranging two-way business delegations; holding joint trade exhibitions to promote products from Sri Lanka such as herbal medicines, kithul syrup, king coconut and coconut water, virgin coconut oil, processed foods and apparel products etc., and products from Oman such as Omani food products including dates and halwa; organising joint-tourism promotional activities in Oman and Sri Lanka; entering into joint-venture opportunities in the higher education as well as energy sectors etc.

Engineer Ridha Bin Jumaa Al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) who led the 17 member OCCI delegation to Sri Lanka, in his message to this book, inter alia, observes:

“In the wake of the evolution of the relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Sri Lanka which underwent successive developments since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two friendly countries 40 years ago, economic cooperation, commercial and investment exchanges between the two countries constitute high priority with the common endeavours to seize

the opportunity and work for further prosperity. The continuous coordination between the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman was one of the key factors for the considerable development of the relations in the recent past between the two countries.”

A high momentum is being generated in the economic cooperation between the two countries, despite pandemic challenges, and it continues to grow further with the relaxation of pandemic restrictions. In this context, the visit by the 17 member OCCI delegation to Sri Lanka in March 2022 following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the OCCI and the NCCSL of Sri Lanka, has become an “eye-opener” for the Omani business community with a view to expanding the scope of business cooperation between the two countries in the years ahead.¹³¹

(b) Visit by Sri Lankan Private Sector Company to Oman

In yet another outcome of the aforesaid OCCI visit to Sri Lanka, a three-member delegation from a Sri Lankan private company named SISILI Projects Consortium Pvt. Ltd, visited Oman on 28 March 2022, at an invitation extended by their Omani counterpart named Muscat Sky Development LLC, who established links with the former at the B2B meeting organised by the NCCSL during the former’s visit to Sri Lanka as a part of OCCI high level business delegation. These two companies have also signed a MoU to promote trade in a range of sectors between the two countries.

¹³⁰ <https://mfa.gov.lk/sri-lanka-trade-minister-concludes-fruitful-bilateral-visit-to-oman/>

¹³¹ Message issued by H.E. Eng. Ridha Bin Jumaa Al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on the publication of this book.



An Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Fiscal Evasion, signed between the two countries in August 2018, laid a solid foundation to promote trade and investments

The quick succession of the exchanges of the above mentioned visits in the same month of March 2022, between the two countries, manifests greater zeal and enthusiasm demonstrated by both the public and private sectors of the two countries in establishing closer business links. Such frequent visits would generate much needed mutual awareness between both the public and private sectors of the two countries and invigorate business to business interactions which will effectively facilitate increasing bilateral trade and investments.

His Highness Khalid Mohamed Al Said, CEO of Khalid Mohamed Development & Investments L.L.C, who was one of the 17 members of the OCCI delegation to Sri Lanka, states the following:

“The recent high level OCCI visit, headed by its Chairman, to Sri Lanka has shed light on the enormous potential and opportunities available in Sri Lanka for Omani business community in a number of targeted sectors, including

tea, spices, food and beverages, apparels, informational technology, e-Commerce, etc., to do business. I see Sri Lanka as an unexplored destination for the Omani business community.

During my recent first visit to Sri Lanka as a part of the OCCI delegation, I was very much impressed by the conducive environment that have been facilitated by the Government of Sri Lanka, the efficiency of the private sector and the quality of Sri Lankan products and services. This prompted our company to engage immediately with a popular Sri Lankan company named SISILI Projects Consortium Pvt. Ltd, whom we met at the Business Forum held at the NCCSL to forge a business collaboration and sign a MoU. As a result, we have already arranged, as a first step, to import a consignment of Sri Lankan spices to Oman.”¹³²

Reactivating the MoU between Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and OCCI

The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and the Omani Chamber of Commerce and

132 E-mail interview



Industry (OCCI) had also signed a MoU in the year 2007 aiming at promoting two way trade and investments between the two countries. This MoU could also be re-activated in order to promote more business to business interactions between the two countries to encompass wider private sector participation and cooperation.

Establishment of Sri Lanka – Oman Business Council

The MoUs between Sri Lanka National Chamber of Commerce and the OCCI could serve as a catalyst for the establishment of a “Joint Sri Lanka - Oman Business Council” aiming at deeper partnerships between the business communities of the two countries in order to capitalize the momentum that was generated by the OCCI visit to Sri Lanka and the subsequent reciprocal visits from Sri Lanka to Oman.

Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA)

Moreover, to increase bilateral trade volumes, Sri Lanka and Oman could explore the possibility of entering into a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) between the two countries with the expectation of expanding it to a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Such an arrangement will also facilitate exports of value-added products through the ports and free trade zones in both countries by plugging into each other’s product and service value chain.

II. INVESTMENT

Sri Lanka and Oman are potential investment destinations and hence it would be mutually beneficial to explore synergies in potential sectors and identify new opportunities for collaboration. This chapter, therefore, endeavours to provide vital information on the strengths of both countries and the opportunities available for investments in order to foster future partnership.

To facilitate this partnership, a bilateral Agreement for Investment Promotion and Protection (BIT) has been proposed between the two countries with an aim of promoting and legally protecting the investments that flow into the respective countries.

In addition, Sri Lanka and Oman have already signed an Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Fiscal Evasion in August 2018.¹³³ Such arrangements will help to increase investor confidence.

¹³³ <https://mjla.gov.om/eng/legislation/decrees/details.aspx?id=537&type=L>

Why invest in Sri Lanka?

Sri Lanka is located at the crossroads of major shipping routes to South Asia, the Far East, and the continents of Europe and America. The country is the home for one of the Top 25 Container Ports in the World and is a key port of call for shipping lines and airfreight services. In addition, Sri Lanka's proximity to the Indian sub-continent positions the country, as a gateway to a market of 1.9 billion people in South Asia alone. These factors combined, generate keen interest for Sri Lanka as a preferred investment destination in the region.¹³⁴

Connectivity in Sri Lanka continues to ramp up via a well thought out rapid expansion of highway networks, while state-of-the-art deep water ports of Colombo and Hambantota (ability to cater to 'Triple E Class' larger ships) continue to ramp up capacity for sea cargo. Hence, investments in Sri Lanka have the potential to connect to global supply chains due to the country's favourable relations with markets across South and East Asia and beyond supported by high - quality port infrastructure.

Moreover, specific investment zones, in the form of a mega industrial zone linked to the Hambantota port, the Colombo Port City (660 acres of reclaimed land, adjacent to the Colombo port), and specific new

industrial parks targeting agricultural, manufacturing and IT exports represent the necessary backbone infrastructure for high-return generating investment projects.

Sri Lanka also continues to build out a quality talent pool and a skilled workforce. Sri Lanka is ranked #1 in South Asia in the 'Human Capital – Skills' criteria in the Global Competitiveness Index, 2019.¹³⁵ Sri Lanka's historic trade links with the Middle East and the Far East, and its growing importance in the Indian Ocean as a key node in East-West trade, in particular China's growing trade with Africa, strategic geographic location close to major shipping lines, access to large regional markets, high quality logistics services, high corporate compliance standards, high literate and trainable workforce, provide a conducive climate for Omani investments.

Investment Opportunities in Sri Lanka

Key sectors¹³⁶ where investment opportunities are available in Sri Lanka include apparel,¹³⁷ auto components,¹³⁸ electrical and electronics,¹³⁹ food processing,¹⁴⁰ information technology,¹⁴¹ logistics,¹⁴² medical and pharmaceuticals,¹⁴³ tourism and leisure.¹⁴⁴

New projects that are unfolding in Sri Lanka include manufacturing,¹⁴⁵ mixed development,¹⁴⁶ port city,¹⁴⁷ hospitality

134 <https://investsrilanka.com/>

135 https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf

136 <https://investsrilanka.com/why-sri-lanka-new/#>

137 <https://investsrilanka.com/apparel-new/>

138 <https://investsrilanka.com/auto-component-industry-new/>

139 <https://investsrilanka.com/electrical-electronics-new/>

140 <https://investsrilanka.com/food-processing-new/>

141 <https://investsrilanka.com/information-technology/>

142 https://investsrilanka.com/logistics_new/

143 <https://investsrilanka.com/medical-and-pharmaceutical/>

144 <https://investsrilanka.com/tourism-leisure-2/>

145 <https://investsrilanka.com/manufacturing/>

146 <https://investsrilanka.com/mixed-development/>

147 <https://investsrilanka.com/port-city-hospitality-and-tourism/>

and tourism,¹⁴⁸ and entertainment.¹⁴⁹ Real estate, property and infrastructure development as well as farming sectors are also high potential areas for investment in Sri Lanka .

Investment Facilitation

The Board of Investment (BOI) of Sri Lanka, which is the apex agency for foreign direct investment in Sri Lanka¹⁵⁰, will provide a team of sector-specific experts supporting every stage of the investment or business cycle – from company registration to the first export. Whether an investor is seeking new ways to invest, setting up a new business unit or wanting to incorporate a business, the BOI will facilitate.

The BOI of Sri Lanka, structured to function as the central facilitation point for investors, is also responsible for permitting Imports and Exports of projects under section 17 of the BOI law as well as providing other investor related services. These facilities are provided by the Investor Services Department of the BOI. If an investor is looking for information regarding investing in Sri Lanka he/she could contact the Investor Facilitation Center.¹⁵¹

BOI Categorisations

Projects with concessions; Under Sec.17 of the BOI Law, BOI is empowered to approve projects and enter into agreements with enterprises granting exemptions from laws such as Customs, subject to fulfilment of the investment

threshold or any other specified requirement.¹⁵²

Sec 17 projects that meet the minimum investment threshold of US\$ 3 Mn upwards, can enjoy special incentives in the form of enhanced capital allowances under the Inland Revenue Act No 24 of 2017.¹⁵³

This can either be a 100 per cent foreign investment or a joint venture investment with a local collaboration. Proposed foreign investments should be effected from funds remitted through an Inward Investment Account (IIA).¹⁵⁴

Projects without concessions; Projects approved under section 16 of BOI Law facilitate the entry of foreign investment without any fiscal concessions. These projects are subject to the normal laws of the country, and regularly facilitate the following:¹⁵⁵

- Entry of foreign investment
- Set up a new company with foreign shareholding
- Transfer/issue new shares in an existing non BOI company to foreign investors

The minimum investment threshold for section 16 is US\$ 250,000. This can either be a 100per cent foreign investment or a joint venture investment with a local collaboration.

Proposed foreign investments should be effected from funds remitted through an Inward Investment Account (IIA).¹⁵⁶

148 <https://investsrilanka.com/hospitality-and-tourism/>

149 <https://investsrilanka.com/entertainment/>

150 There are over 1700 enterprises under the purview of BOI in the span of its 40 years in operation.

151 <https://investsrilanka.com/work-with-us-new/>

152 https://investsrilanka.com/setting-up-in-sri-lanka_new/

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid

156 Ibid.

Investment Threshold¹⁵⁷

Source: Sri Lanka BOI

	Qualifying Criteria Minimum Investment (USD)
Manufacturing	
1.1 Manufacture of non-traditional goods ⁴¹ for export including deemed exports	500,000
1.2 Manufacturing of non-traditional goods using advanced technology (Local Market)	5,000,000
1.3 Large scale manufacturing of non- traditional goods as approved by the Board (Local Market)	5,000,000

Services	
2.1 Information Technology (IT) and/or IT enabled services ⁴²	150,000
2.2 Information Technology (IT) and/or IT enabled services (Local Market)	150,000
2.3 BPO Industry	150,000
2.4 Tourism & Leisure	500,000
2.5 Utilities (Power generation, water supply, waste management etc.)	500,000
2.6 Export-oriented services ⁴³	500,000
2.7 Warehouse, logistic and Supply Chain Management and Cold Storage	500,000
2.8 Training Institutes	100,000
2.9 Research & Development ⁴⁴	100,000
2.10 Large scale service projects as approved by the Board local market	5,000,000
2.11 Regional Operating Headquarters	250,000
2.12 Export Trading House Exporting entirety of locally procured manufactured products or re-exporting the entirety of imported products. Location should be within the EPZ or an approved customs bonded warehouse located outside EPZ	5,000,000 (Annual turnover)

Agriculture⁴⁵ and Agro Processing	
3.1 Agriculture and Agro Processing (Raw materials for the product to be sourced locally) (Export Market)	150,000
3.2 Agriculture and Agro Processing (Raw materials for the product to be sourced locally) (Local Market)	150,000

Infrastructure	
4.1 Small Scale Infrastructure Projects:	
(a) Construction and operation of Hospital	500,000
(b) Any other Infrastructure construction activity as approved by the Board - For Housing Projects	5,000,000 3,000,000
4.2 Large Scale Infrastructure Projects as approved by the Board	12,500,000
- Power generation, transmission & distribution	
- Development of Highways, Sea Ports, Air Ports, Public transport, Railways, Water services	
- Establishment of Industrial Estates including Develop and management of Industrial Estates/ Special Economic Zones	
- Any other Infrastructure projects approved by the Board	

⁴¹ Non-traditional Goods include all goods other than Black tea in bulk, Crepe rubber, Sheet rubber, Scrap rubber, Coconut oil, desiccated coconut (other than Desiccated coconut manufactured using continuous scale automated process technology and marketed with a quality guarantee), Copra, Fresh coconuts, coconut fiber or such other commodity as may be determined by the Board

⁴² IT enabled services includes call centers or contact centers, transcription (data entry) centers, hosting centers, e-governance related projects and any other related activity determined by the Board

⁴³ Export oriented Services includes: Garment washing and finishing plants; Embroidery services, Ship repairing and ship breaking; Textile dyeing and finishing plant; Textile printing; Testing of fabric; Computer aided design for garment and other industries; Bunkering services; Production of films; Air cargo services; International passenger services; Repairing of containers; and Vacuum packing of garments

⁴⁴ Research & Development means Any systematic or intensive study carried out in the field of science or technology with the object of using the result of the study for the production or improvements of materials, devices, products, produce or process **but not include**: Quality control of products or routine testing materials, devices, products or produce; Research in the social sciences or humanities; Routine data collection; Efficiency surveys or management studies; Market research or sales promotion

⁴⁵ Agriculture includes cultivation of plants, animal husbandry and rearing and/or processing of fish but excluding processing of black tea

Investment Incentives¹⁵⁸ offered by Sri Lanka

Source: Sri Lanka BOI

Corporate Income Tax (CIT)



Board of Investment of Sri Lanka has also recently launched five year resident visa programme to provide foreign investors who wish to embark on a journey with the BOI, seamless and convenient services.

Exemptions

Corporate Income Tax



Five Year Resident Visa

Board of Investment (BOI) of Sri Lanka has also recently launched five year resident visa programme to provide a seamless and convenient service for foreign investors who wish to embark on a journey with the BOI.¹⁵⁹

Colombo Port City

The Port City Colombo is a brand new city development, built as an extension of the Central Business District of Sri Lanka’s vibrant commercial capital, Colombo. Spanning 269 hectares of reclaimed land from the sea, Port City Colombo will

158 https://investsrilanka.com/setting-up-in-sri-lanka_new/

159 <https://www.news.lk/news/political-current-affairs/item/34206-boi-launches-long-term-residence-visa-program-for-investors>.



Spanning 269 hectares of reclaimed land from the sea, Port City Colombo will be South Asia's premiere residential, retail and business destination, offering unmatched planned city living along the warm waters of the Indian Ocean.

be South Asia's premiere residential, retail and business destination, offering unmatched planned city living along the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. The development will comprise of 5 different precincts including the Financial District, Central Park Living, Island Living, The Marina and the International Island.

When completed, Port City Colombo will have over 5.6 million square meters of built space, boasting the best in design and standards. Its lifestyle and business offerings will include world-class facilities and spaces in healthcare, education, entertainment, hotels and restaurants, retail and office with an Integrated Resort and a Marina, offering the best in living by the sea. Built on the latest sustainable city designs and smart city concepts, Port City Colombo will be the most livable city in South Asia.¹⁶⁰

The Colombo Port City Special Economic

Zone was set up by the Parliament of Sri Lanka on May 28, 2021.¹⁶¹ The Zone is an international business and services hub.

The Colombo Port City Commission has been established and empowered to register and issue licenses, authorisations and approvals to engage in business within the Zone. The Commission will promote and facilitate economic activity including international trade, shipping, logistics, offshore banking and financial services, IT and BPO, corporate headquarters, regional distribution operations and tourism.

The primary objective of the Colombo Port City is to promote it as a "Special Economic Zone" in the Asian Region and attract enhanced Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Sri Lanka. Investment opportunities are available for instance in the zone in the areas such as luxury hotel development, Port City villa development, mixed use development,¹⁶² etc.

¹⁶⁰ <https://www.portcitycolombo.lk/about/>

¹⁶¹ <https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/bills/gbills/english/6218.pdf>

¹⁶² <https://investsrilanka.com/port-city-villa-main-page/>



Middle East based LULU Group has established its world-class sourcing, food processing & export unit named Y.A.S. Lanka Pvt Ltd in Katanayake Export Processing Zone in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's Export Processing Zones (EPZ)

There are more than 10 key Export Processing Zones (Free Economic Zones)¹⁶³ in Sri Lanka where the foreign direct investments are being attracted. The key EPZs include:

Katunayake EPZ

Katunayake Export Processing Zone (EPZ),¹⁶⁴ which was the first EPZ established in Sri Lanka in 1978, is the largest EPZ in the country with close proximity to the Bandaranaike International Airport, accommodating enterprises from different sectors and declared as a bonded area for Hub operations. The Zone is also connected to rail facilities, bus terminal, and dry Port

facility for import and export cargo.

Middle East based LULU Group has established its world-class sourcing, food processing & export unit¹⁶⁵ named "Y.A.S. Lanka Pvt Ltd"¹⁶⁶ in Katanayake Export Processing Zone in Sri Lanka. This facility primarily serves for sourcing, processing, storing, packaging and exporting of fruits, vegetables and commodities from Sri Lanka to various Lulu operations around the world. This is one of the strategies by LULU Group to have their own sourcing and food processing units around the world to ensure uninterrupted supply and ensure competitive pricing by eliminating middle men.

Other prominent Export Processing Zones¹⁶⁷ include Biyagama EPZ, Koggala EPZ, Wathupitiwela EPZ, Mirigama EPZ, Polgahawela EPZ, Horana EPZ, Mirijjavilla EPZ, Mawathagama EPZ, Malwatte EPZ, Seethawaka EPZ, Kandy IP, etc.

163 <https://investsrilanka.com/locations/>

164 <https://investsrilanka.com/locations/>

165 <https://www.lulugroupinternational.com/news/uae-based-lulu-group-launches-food-processing-export-unit-in-sri-lanka/>

166 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/emarketplace/emarketplace/seller/profile/shop/y-a-s-lanka-pvt-ltd>

167 <https://investsrilanka.com/locations/>

Why invest in Oman?

Oman is located at the center of the east-west nexus, joining markets in Europe, Asia and North America, in addition to its proximity to Africa.

Moreover, the Sultanate is characterised by its political stability, stable economy, strong infrastructure, and qualified human resources that guarantee the easiness of investment in Oman. Further, the Government of Oman focuses on industrialisation and public-private partnerships to diversify the economy away from oil and gas, as envisaged in Oman's Vision 2040.

'Invest in Oman' is the official investment marketing initiative for the Sultanate which is managed by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) who promote Oman as a base for businesses and support facilities.¹⁶⁸

Investment Opportunities in Oman

The Government of Oman pushes ahead with key strategic projects while taking steps to boost the output of the five targeted sectors in the Ninth Five-Year Plan, namely logistics, manufacturing, tourism, fisheries and mining.

Target sectors, ranging from Education to Information Technology, offer potential investment opportunities in tourism, agriculture and fisheries, manufacturing, logistics, mining and education.¹⁶⁹

Further, the Government of Oman has adopted the idea of establishing free zones in different parts of the Sultanate to offer investment opportunities.

The main Free Zones, such as Salalah Free Zone¹⁷⁰ and Sohar Free Zone,¹⁷¹ offer numerous investment opportunities and incentives to the prospective foreign investors. In addition, a newly emerging project named Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) offers massive investment opportunities.

Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD)

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) is located in Al Wusta Governorate in the center of the Sultanate of Oman, at a distance of 550 square kilometers from the capital Muscat.

The SEZAD is the largest in the Middle East and North Africa, with an area of 2000 square kilometers. The SEZAD contains several economic, tourism and service development zones, the most prominent are a multi-purpose port, a dry dock for repairing ships, a fishing port, a regional airport, and tourist, industrial and logistical areas.¹⁷²

The SEZAD offers potential investment opportunities in key sectors such as storage and logistics, commercial offices and residential complexes, industrial properties, and tourism.

The SEZAD also offers 100% foreign ownership, no currency restrictions, no minimum, capital requirement, tax exemption up to 30 years from the date of commencement of operations, renewable for a further 30 years, 100% repatriation of capital and profit is permitted, Usufruct agreements up to 50 years, renewable for similar periods, etc.¹⁷³

168 <https://investinoman.om/>

169 <https://investinoman.om/#investmentopportunities>

170 <https://opaz.gov.om/en/zones/salalah-free-zone>

171 <https://soharportandfreezone.com/en>

172 <https://www.duqm.gov.om/en/sezad/inside-sezad/profile>

173 <https://www.duqm.gov.om/>



Author's meeting with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates – Madayn Sheikh Hilal bin Hamad Al Hasani

Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn)

In addition, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates, known as Madayn¹⁷⁴, which was established under the Royal Decree No. 32/2015¹⁷⁵, manages and operates (10) industrial cities in Sur¹⁷⁶, Suhar¹⁷⁷, Raysut¹⁷⁸, Nizwa¹⁷⁹, Buraimi¹⁸⁰, Rusay¹⁸¹, Samail¹⁸², Ibri¹⁸³, Al Mudhaibi¹⁸⁴, Mahas¹⁸⁵ in addition to Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM)¹⁸⁶ and Al Mazunah¹⁸⁷ Free Zone. Madayn also offers numerous

“Bilateral trade relations and common investment goals have brought Oman and Sri Lanka together over the years. It is time to strengthen these ties through innovative and new channels.” Dr Yousuf Hamed Al Balushi, Chief Economist of Oman Vision 2040 Taskforce and Founder Chairman of Smart Investment Gateway

investment opportunities and incentives to the foreign investors.¹⁸⁸ An investor Guide is available for more information.¹⁸⁹

Madayn also offers numerous investment opportunities and incentives to the foreign investors. An investor Guide is available for more information at the following website provided as footnote.¹⁹⁰

Investment Incentives offered by Oman

Oman seeks to attract foreign investments through numerous incentives¹⁹¹ under its Economic Stimulus Plan and the Vision 2040, such as:

- 100 per cent foreign ownership now available nationwide.
- Custom exemptions on the import of plant machinery and raw materials for five years from commencement of production.
- No restrictions on capital, profit repatriation, currency exchange or dividend transfers.
- Corporate tax is low at just 15 per cent.
- Fully serviced land in industrial estates
- Export credit insurance through Credit Oman

174 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/AboutUs.aspx>; See also; <https://www.colombotimes.net/ambassador-ameer-ajwad-briefs-ceo-of-madayn-on-investment-opportunities-in-sri-lanka/>

175 https://madayn.om/MadaynDocuments/Madayn/Legislations/Legislation_Royal_Decree.pdf

176 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/Sur.aspx>

177 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/Sohar.aspx>

178 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/Raysut.aspx>

179 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/Nizwa.aspx>

180 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/Buraimi.aspx>

181 <https://madayn.om/EN/pages/Rusayl.aspx>

182 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/Smail.aspx>

183 <https://madayn.om/EN/pages/Ibri.aspx>

184 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/AlMudabi.aspx>

185 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/Mahas.aspx>

186 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/KOM.aspx>

187 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/AlMazunah.aspx>

188 <https://madayn.om/EN/Pages/AboutUs.aspx#Facilities>

189 https://madayn.om/Styleper cent20Library/Madayn/Images/Investor_Guide_EN.pdf

190 https://madayn.om/Styleper cent20Library/Madayn/Images/Investor_Guide_EN.pdf

191 <https://investinoman.om/#whyinvestinomanintro> see also: <https://investinoman.om/home/faq>

- Omanisation rate in free zones is less than 20 per cent
- Investor-friendly legislative environment.
- Signatory to WTO, GCC common market, GAFTA, FTAs with USA, Singapore, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Lichtenstein.

Investment Facilitation by Oman

Ministry of Commerce Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP)¹⁹² facilitates prospective investors who choose Oman as an investment destination and business location.¹⁹³ An investor guide is available for more information at the following website provided as footnote.¹⁹⁴

Oman Investment Authority (OIA)



Author's meeting with H.E. Abdulsalam Al Murshidi, President of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA)

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) was established by the Royal Decree 61/2020. OIA has legal personality and enjoys financial and administrative independence. OIA functions as a subordinate to the Council of Ministers. As per the Article V of the Royal Decree,¹⁹⁵ the ownership of all government companies and investments have been transferred from

the Ministry of Finance to the Oman Investment Authority, with the exception of Petroleum Development Oman, government contributions in international organisations, and companies for which an order is issued by His Majesty the Sultan.

OIA also offers to partner with prospective investors in several key investment sectors, such as mining, energy, food & fisheries, logistics and tourism, ICT, aviation, etc¹⁹⁶ which are in line with Oman's economic diversification plans.

Oman Investment Authority has invested in more than 35 countries worldwide.¹⁹⁷ The Investment Fund focuses on two main investment categories namely i) Public Markets Assets (tradable) that include global equity, fixed income bonds and short term assets and ii) Private Markets Assets (non-tradable) which includes private investments in real estate, logistics, services, commercial, and industrial projects.¹⁹⁸ The vital and useful information provided in the preceding paragraphs, which were extracted from official sources of both countries, clearly indicate that there is a wider scope for Sri Lanka and Oman to explore opportunities in trade and investment with a view to fostering economic prosperity for mutual benefits. To bolster this objective independent opinions and suggestions that were expressed, during the interviews with the author, by policy makers, executives, entrepreneurs, and sectoral experts who have long experience in the relevant fields, are quoted below:

192 <https://tejarah.gov.om/eng/index>

193 <https://investinoman.om/guide?id=ourservices>

194 https://investinoman.om/assets/guidepage/document/Investor_Guide.pdf

195 <https://mola.gov.om/Download.aspx?Path=royal/2020-0061%20Formatted.pdf>

196 <https://oia.gov.om/Index.php?r=en%2Fsite%2Fpages&slug=Potential&csr=7644295501501930281>

197 <https://oia.gov.om/Index.php?r=en%2Fsite%2Findex>

198 <https://oia.gov.om/Index.php?r=en%2Fsite%2Fpages&slug=our-investments&csr=9615725386538887900>

Expert Opinion:

Dr Yousuf Hamed Al Balushi,¹⁹⁹
Chief Economist of Oman Vision 2040
Taskforce and Founder Chairman of Smart
Investment Gateway (SIG)²⁰⁰ observes:

“Bilateral trade relations and common investment goals have brought Oman and Sri Lanka together over the years. It is time to strengthen these ties through innovative and new channels.”²⁰¹

Yousuf Al Balushi further observes:

“Attracting FDI and joining hands with friends such as Sri Lanka, who are advanced in certain industries, possessing the know-how, technology and the right team, can fill a lot of gaps Oman aspires to fill. It is essential to note that both countries share many common complimentary features, which require focus to gain better value such as industrial revolution, tourism and manufacturing, which the government of Oman has been actively encouraging investment in.”²⁰²

Mr Anslem Perera, a Sri Lankan entrepreneur in Oman and the CEO of the BPOS Global LLC(Oman), suggests:

“Oman Vision 2040 effectively continues to monitor the progress that is being achieved and the strategic advances in the delivery of the important projects and initiatives of “Economic Diversification” KPIs. The economic and enabling sectors that are being thrust upon are: Manufacturing, Tourism, Logistics, Employability of Omani Youth, Business Environment, Fisheries, ITC, Energy and Mining.

“Towards this end, Sri Lanka should

synergize her strengths focusing on Tourism, Logistics, Employability of Omani Youth, Energy, IT Managed Services and Fisheries Infrastructure by formulating a sustainable Strategic Plan for the development of Trade and Investment between Sri Lanka and Oman.”²⁰³

Mr Ratnasiri Jayasinghe, who served as a Lead Design Architect at Larsen, A&CE in Oman, observes the following:

“Key pillars of development in Oman Vision 2040, focus on enhancement of Scientific and Technological capabilities of Omani population and the sustainable infrastructure development. As per the key economic indicators of recent past, Construction Sector accounts approximately 10% of Oman GNP. In general, it is considered that the construction industry is responsible over 40% energy consumption and therefore development strategies of the Construction sector is vital in SDG initiatives.

“Sri Lankan professionals, the Engineers, Architects and Quantity Surveyors attached to the private sector and government organisations in Oman, have made key contributions towards the development of major construction projects during last 4 decades. Owing to current status of Sri Lankan economy and the Socio-political environment, a surplus of human resources of construction technologists, professional and skilled workers are available as a potential source for the development collaborations. Considering the resource potentials, fresh attention is needed towards the potential Joined Research and

199 <https://www.omaninvestgateway.com/leadership/>

200 <https://www.omaninvestgateway.com/>

201 Personal interview

202 <https://www.omaninvestgateway.com/>

203 Personal interview

development programmes in development of sustainable construction materials and renewable energy. Collaborative investments opportunities in this sector would bring certain benefits to both nations. As a nation with long history of massive construction undertakings such as Massive Stupas, Expansive man-made reservoirs and Irrigation systems, Sri Lanka could be an ideal ground for exploring the possibilities reusing and adopting such sustainable and environmentally friendly technologies. Certainly new researches in to clay products in construction industry would be highly potential areas for consideration of joint collaborative development.”²⁰⁴

**Investment Promotion -
Success stories**

(a) First Sri Lankan investment enters into Omani Free Zone

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman facilitated a Sri Lankan Rubber Company, Lalan Rubbers (Pvt) Ltd,²⁰⁵ which is the largest gloves manufacturing company in Sri Lanka to set up its re-export facility for medical disposable gloves at Sohar Free Zone in Oman.²⁰⁶ This is the first ever Sri Lankan owned plant entering into a Free Zone in Oman. The plant with ETO Facility and Labouratory Unit under one roof, would also produce value added surgical gloves as well as industrial gloves. The Company has signed an agreement with the Sohar Free Zone and a plot of land has been allocated for building their plant when this book went for printing.

Expert Opinion

Damith De Alwis, Lalan Group’s Middle East Representative, observes:



Sri Lankan Rubber Company Lalan Rubbers (Pvt) Ltd, the largest gloves manufacturing company in Sri Lanka, hands over its proposal to set up its re-exporting facility for medical disposable gloves at Sohar Free Zone in Oman

“Oman, situated in a vantage position with its inviting and inclusive culture and values, has been a safe haven for many years in the region for travellers and residents alike. With along standing industry know-how, technical knowledge and in house built technology in manufacturing, service, IT, hospitality and agriculture sectors, Sri Lankan companies have a great opportunity to benefit from the investor friendly policies and market reach advantage that Oman offers. This advantage not only helps in the GCC, MENA and African regions, but also in North America, as Oman is the only Middle Eastern country to have a free trade agreement with USA.

There are also great opportunities to form joint ventures with Omani companies and government institutes looking to venture into non-traditional investments in IT, agriculture, Tourism, Education, Health Care, FMCG/ Retail and Manufacturing sectors, since they are actively seeking partners with knowledge, expertise and technology to

204 E-mail interview

205 <https://lalanrubbers.com/>

206 <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1110807/business/economy/sri-lankan-gloves-manufacturer-to-set-up-re-export-plant-in-sohar-freezone>

contribute towards these well-funded projects. Such expertise / knowledge sharing based joint ventures, are a great way for Sri Lankan companies to gain equity, in these projects and expand their horizons, whilst also providing a solution to limit the brain drain of individual experts/professionals leaving the island.

Sri Lanka also offers many vantage options in oil, maritime, fisheries and tourism sectors for Oman to invest in and draw synergies, that can help grow a mutually beneficial economy, formed on old trade and social ties, fueled with the drive our great nations have for the next phase of sustainable growth.

As new investors in Oman, we look forward to playing a pivotal role in the medical sector, whilst exploring further opportunities and enjoying the fruits of growth in the coming years ahead.”²⁰⁷

(b) Luminex International enters Oman

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman facilitated Sri Lanka’s private sector company, Luminex International to enter into Omani market and to establish its business in telecommunications sector in Oman.

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman had also successfully facilitated business meetings between a popular Sri Lankan IT company named Millennium IT ESP²⁰⁸ and the relevant Omani authorities and private sector companies with a view to exploring opportunities in expanding their businesses in Oman.

Promising sectors for partnership in Trade and Investment:

Sri Lanka and Oman could synergise partnership in a number of promising sectors which could be identified for mutual benefits such as apparel, ship and boat-building, food and beverages, coconut and coconut products, spices, tea, ICT&BPM, electricals and electronic, rubber and rubber based products, etc.

Useful information²⁰⁹ on Sri Lanka’s potential and profile in the aforesaid sectors are reproduced below for the benefit of the entrepreneurs and investors from the official website of the Sri Lanka Export Development Board (EDB),²¹⁰ which is the apex State organisation responsible for the development and promotion of exports.

(a) Apparel

Sri Lankan apparel²¹¹ manufacturers and suppliers have gained a strong reputation worldwide for ethical manufacturing of high-quality apparels trusted by the iconic global fashion brands. Sri Lanka’s apparel and textile manufacturing industry is the most significant and dynamic contributor to the Sri Lanka’s economy.

Entirely privately owned and operated, Sri Lankan apparel and textile manufacturers have successfully utilised the opportunities in the international market to evolve beyond traditional exports and tailoring designs to provide sophisticated and creative solutions through fashion BPO services, research, development and innovation centres.

207 Personal interview

208 <https://www.mitesp.com/>

209 Source: Export Development Board of Sri Lanka (EDB)

210 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/edb/>

211 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/apparel/>

The USA and the United Kingdom have historically been the highest buyers of Sri Lankan apparel, throughout the decades, and they continue to reap the rewards of their long time partnerships. Exports to the USA continue to surpass US\$ 1 billion, and the EU contracts are worth over US \$1.5 billion and have experienced substantial growth year on year.

Several Indian retail brands count on sourcing from Sri Lankan factories and attracting global brands, so as to invest in Sri Lanka as an Indian Sub-Continent Hub.

A large UK retailer watches their cost and lead-time savings grow exponentially and it all began when they set up their regional supply chain logistic hub in Sri Lanka. A number of European and Asian fabric suppliers store their fabric in Sri Lanka to support fast fashion, taking advantage of fast regional shipping times and clearing in less than 24 hours.

Apparel industry is a potential and promising area for cooperation between Sri Lanka and Oman. Sri Lanka Exports of articles of apparel, knit or crocheted to Oman was US\$1.54 Million during 2021, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade.²¹²

Joint Apparel Association Forum (JAAFSL)²¹³ is the apex body which guides Sri Lanka apparel towards its ultimate goal of being the world's number one apparel sourcing destination.

Information on investment opportunities in Sri Lanka in this sector are available at the following website provided as footnote.²¹⁴

Expert Opinion

Dineshkumar Karthigesu, an Expert in apparel sector, who has a long experience in apparel industry in Oman observes:

“The trade volume between Sri Lanka and Oman crossed USD 135 Mn in the year 2021, and apparel exports from Sri Lanka to Oman registered USD 1.5 Mn in the same period. The stitched Omani Dishdasha (Omani men's national costume) is a significant component in Sri Lankan apparel exports to Oman, and on the other hand, Muscat Thread Mills SOAG is exporting a reasonable volume of sewing threads to the Sri Lankan apparel industry. The island's apparel exporters should consider knitted kids clothing, ladies wear, and medical clothes segments for the Middle East and use Oman as a gateway to enter the GCC market. Further, the Omani apparel buying companies should consider Sri Lanka as their buying destination because of its superior qualities and logistic advantages.”²¹⁵

(b) Ship and Boat-building

Sri Lanka's strategic geographical location on a key marine crossroads in the Indian Ocean, the country's fast-expanding technological capacity in boat-building and dry-dock services and its potential for nautical tourism, have given rise to country's ship and boat-building industry. Having utilised its strategic location, highly trainable workforce, low labour cost, and the availability of one of the best natural harbours in the Asian region, Sri Lanka now produces ships and boats that navigate global oceanic channels as well as inland waterways.

212 <https://tradingeconomics.com/sri-lanka/exports/oman/articles-apparel-accessories-knit-crocheted>

213 <https://www.srilankaapparel.com/>

214 <https://investsrilanka.com/apparel-new/>

215 Personal interview

Today, the country serves as a complete maritime service hub, which also offers a complete range of services, including assembly, refueling, refit and repair for numerous types of boats and seagoing and inland watercraft. Boat and ship building²¹⁶ is a leading industry which is driving Sri Lanka towards greater industrialisation. It contributes a significant share in the basket of exports and continues to grow, with a wide variety of products and services being offered to the international markets. The impetus for this industry has been received from the dynamic and burgeoning Ship repair industry which dates back to the early nineteen hundreds.

There are around 20 to 25 active boat yards around the country producing various types of boats. The best known sail makers of the world “North sails” has their factory operating in Sri Lanka. New additions to the product range are the house boats, floating restaurants and bars, pontoons and paddle boats.

Sri Lanka’s major ship building products include, multipurpose platform supply vessels, anchor handling and supply vessels, crew boats, passenger vessels, harbour berthing/ towing tugs, naval/ coast guard vessels, landing crafts, fire fighting vessels, fishing vessels to name a few.

Ship and Boat-building industry has been historically connecting Sri Lanka and Oman as seen in Chapter I of this book, that Sri Lanka had supplied fiber of coconut in the ancient time to make cordages for ships in Oman. As maritime nations, both countries



could draw synergies from ship and boat-building industries as well as nautical tourism for mutual benefits.

Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman organised virtual meetings, between Sri Lankan boatbuilding companies and their Omani counterparts in 2020, with a view to promoting collaboration between the boat-building industries of the two countries and prospective proposals were exchanged.²¹⁷

Expert Opinion

Tuanie Ismail, boatbuilder and a sailor, who was one of the crew members of the Jewel of Muscat, suggests:

“As Oman has now initiated a grand national program to introduce multi day fishing vessel to their existing fishing fleet, this will be a wonderful opportunity for Sri Lankan boat-building companies to tap opportunities in this emerging sector.”²¹⁸

(c) Food & Beverages

With the rise of the healthy, organic and vegan diet patterns among global consumers, Sri Lankan processed food manufacturers are combining innovative food processing methods with highly

216 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/boat-and-ship-building/>

217 <https://mfa.gov.lk/prominent-sri-lankan-and-omani-boat-building-companies-agrees-to-collabourate-at-a-b2b-webinar/>. See also; <https://www.ft.lk/business/Sri-Lanka-Oman-collabouration-in-manufacturing-fiberglass-products-mooted/34-708166>

218 Personal interview

nutritious traditional local ingredients to prepare food and beverage products that are high in taste and goodness. In place of the customary processed food products that are high in sugar, salt and fat, Sri Lankan processed food and beverages²¹⁹ are mainly based on natural fruits, vegetables, and cereals like rice and millet that are naturally gluten-free.

Sri Lankan processed food and beverage sector covers a wide range of products including coconut, vegetables, and fruit-based products, concentrates and juices, semi-cooked food, confectionery, and bakery products, ready-to-serve food, beverages, animal feed, and preparations of cereals and flour.

Sri Lankan Food Manufacturers and Suppliers offer processed fruits, vegetables and juices, confectionery and bakery products, processed food, rice and cereals, animal feed, and residues of the milling industry while Sri Lankan Beverage manufacturers and suppliers (besides tea) export mineral water, bottled drinking water etc.

Potential areas for investment in Sri Lanka under this sector include fruits and vegetables (Canned, frozen, juices, pre-cut and ready-made salads, dried and dehydrated), aquaculture, value added coconut products, value added spice products and confectionery and bakery products.²²⁰

Since processed food and beverages are booming and diversifying sectors in Sri Lanka, there are potential prospects for joint venture opportunities between Sri Lanka and Omani companies in these

sectors. Sri Lankan products are high quality and have healthy characteristics due to the excellence of local raw materials and industry's commitment to improving its market image. Import of such products from Sri Lanka to Oman could contribute to add value and lowering the prices.

(d) Coconut and Coconut Products

Sri Lanka is the fourth-largest exporter of coconut products²²¹ to the world.

Among the most popular Sri Lankan coconut exports to the global market are desiccated coconut, virgin coconut oil and coconut water, while the country's bristle fibre products manufactured through indigenous 'Drum' extraction method and activated carbon made with coconut shells are also in high demand.

Sri Lanka is very popular in the world market for desiccated coconut and Brown fibre. Distinguishable white colour and characteristic taste of Sri Lankan desiccated coconut ranks Sri Lanka at the 4th position of the world export market for all kernel products. Sri Lanka holds the global No.1 for the exports of brown fiber. The drum system used to extract fiber, produces long pure fiber, which are more suitable for the brush industry.

The Coconut Development Authority, Coconut Cultivation Board and Coconut Research Institute are the three major Government Institutions that are responsible for the production and quality improvement, supply development and research respectively.

(e) Spices

Sri Lanka, the only supplier of true cinnamon to the world, had been a

219 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/food-and-beverages>

220 <https://investsrilanka.com/food-processing-new/>

221 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/coconut/>



global destination for the finest quality spices²²² since time immemorial. Global superpowers in the 15th Century waged war over trading rights for Ceylon cinnamon and pepper, making Ceylon spices, the flavour that launched a thousand ships.

Today, Sri Lanka is a leading exporter of Ceylon cinnamon, Ceylon pepper, Ceylon cloves, Ceylon nutmeg and Ceylon cardamom, all branded under the geographical indication of Ceylon spices due to their unique aroma and flavour shaped by the territory of the country. In addition, spice manufacturers in Sri Lanka also supply a range of essential oils and oleoresins derived from the spices grown in Sri Lanka.

Cinnamon was one of the first traded spices of the ancient world. Cinnamon was a popular spice in the ancient Arab world and Arab traders have paved the way for cinnamon to travel a long distance through the spice route to the European market. Cinnamon has motivated many historical voyages to Sri Lanka which is the world's largest producer and exporter of pure cinnamon to the world and pure Ceylon cinnamon suppliers from Sri Lanka claim 90 per cent of global market share.²²³ Ceylon cinnamon is considered to be healthier because it contains a much lower level of coumarin, an organic chemical compound contained in all types of cinnamon, which is believed to have toxic effects when consumed in high doses. Ceylon cinnamon has an immense potential to penetrate into niche market segments in international trade.

222 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/spices/>

223 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/spices/about/cinnamon-cultivation-sri-lanka.html>

224 Personal interview

225 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/tea/about-tea/>

Expert Opinion

Thushara Thenuwara, a young entrepreneur and a promoter of Ceylon cinnamon in Oman, is of the view:

“Sri Lanka is naturally blessed with unique, authentic and native commodities such as cinnamon which have an elevating demand in the world market. Oman could be an enreport for such Sri Lankan products to reach this region and beyond”²²⁴

(f) Ceylon Tea



Reputed for its signature taste and aroma, Sri Lanka has become the world's third largest tea exporter to the world, the country's largest employer and has the distinction of supplying tea to the Olympic and Commonwealth Games.

Sri Lankan tea²²⁵ (known for generations as Ceylon Tea) carries behind it a heritage and success story like no other. A product that began as a diversification experiment in 1867, spanning just 19 acres of land, has today surpassed all geographical borders to satisfy 19 per cent of global demand. Reputed for its signature taste and aroma, Sri Lanka has become the world's third largest tea exporter to the world, the country's largest employer and has the distinction of supplying tea to the Olympic and Commonwealth Games.

It is a great equaliser, demanding attention from the counter of the smallest eatery to the most exclusive tea-bars in the world.

Proposal for Ceylon Tea re-exporting facility in Oman

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs under Chapter II, the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman organised a virtual discussion on the proposal to establish “Ceylon Tea Re-exporting/distributing Hub” in Oman with the relevant stakeholders from both countries to explore the possibility of such a facility. The objective of the proposal is to target re-exportation/distribution of Ceylon tea to the GCC countries, Iran, Iraq, Yemen as well as to the East African countries. The relevant stakeholders suggested potential scope for a joint-venture investment to set up such a facility in the Sultanate which could serve as a hub to produce value added Ceylon tea and tea-based products such as ice tea to serve the region and beyond.

(g) ICT

From providing intricate engineering solutions to building expansive tanks and lofty stupas to innovating scalable solutions, Sri Lankan had been at the forefront in providing simple solutions to big questions.

Today, the inbuilt ingenuity of Sri Lankans are expressed through our cutting edge innovations in the ICT²²⁶ sector and Sri Lankan ICT metal is behind the innovations that power international stock markets, telecommunication and transportation systems in Europe and the UK. ICT services are the 4th largest export earner of the country.

226 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/ict-services/>

227 <https://investsrilanka.com/information-technology/>

228 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/bpm-services/>

The Sri Lankan ICT sector serves a number of Industry verticals with over 300 companies at present. These include communication, apparel and textiles, banking financial services and insurance, healthcare, manufacturing, media, retailing, transportation, travel and leisure and many more.

The industry is adamant on compliance with global labour and environment standards. A highly skilled talent pool combined with the cost-effective operational ability (low priced real estate, wage scale and living) makes Sri Lanka’s ICT Industry one of the most profitable industries to date.

Sri Lanka’s knowledge services industry is the fifth largest export earner for Sri Lanka in 2019 with over 100,000 employees engaged in this industry.²²⁷

(h) BPM²²⁸

A highly-skilled talent pool, a cost effective operational environment, and a sophisticated IT and telecommunication infrastructure set Sri Lanka apart from the Asian competitors.

As one of the best destinations providing off-shore services in customer service management, finance and accounting services, legal, insurance, banking, telecommunication, and other sectors Sri Lanka has been ranked as the “Offshore Destination of the Year” repeatedly by the National Outsourcing Association (NOA) of the UK.

Our growing reputation and compliance with global labour and environment standards makes Sri Lanka one of the best choices in Business Process Management outsourcing.

Expert Opinion

Viraj De Mendis, Vice President of the Millenium IT, a leading IT provider company in Sri Lanka who participated at the COMEX – 2022, Oman’s Annual Official Technology, Communications, Innovation and Digital Transformation Show, held in Muscat, from May 23-25, 2022, opined the following on the potential Sri Lanka – Oman collaboration in the IT sector:

“In alliance with the ‘Oman Vision 2040’, the Sultanate of Oman is in a rapid digital transformation to adapt technology-based economy that is in accordance with global market expectations and demands. As the Government of Oman is rapidly aligning its processes to the above vision, they have become one of the biggest investors in the IT industry, subsequently, through policy changes, the private sector is also expected to accommodate and adjust to an advanced technology landscape.

Telecommunications, large-scale financial and manufacturing businesses have already adapted and are heading towards digital transformation, however, opportunities still exist in new tech areas such as Fintech, Big Data and Analytics, Artificial Intelligence, and Machine Learning based solutions. Further, SMEs are still in their early stages relative to large-scale businesses and with potential for expansion in digitalization.

Furthermore, large scale IT infrastructure projects are in the pipeline with regards to Smart Buildings and Smart Cities and logistics is the next promising sector looking for rapid expansion. The Government of Oman encourages the establishment of IT organisations and the new policies are being formed to ease the

process. Hence, there is great scope for Sri Lankan IT companies to enter in to the IT industry in Oman independently or partnering with local IT companies.”²²⁹

Mohamed Faraj Najimudeen, ICT Account Manager at Ooredoo Business in Oman, is of the following view:

“As the Sultanate of Oman is on a rapid economic development path towards achieving its Vision 2040, I could see a number of emerging opportunities for the Sri Lankan IT/BPM sector professionals. Sultanate’s economic and social development priorities also require various skills for the development of its digital transformation initiatives.

In this context, there are opportunities for potential skills such as functional and technical consultants to develop and customize Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Robotic Process Automation (RPA) Solutions. This is the foundation required to plan and establish a modern digital infrastructure for an organisation. Secondly, there are potential openings in the space of Microsoft such as Net programmers, MS SQL server and Oracle Database administrators.

These resources are needed to customize and maintain the ERP systems that are planned to be implemented in the Sultanate. These skilled resources are mostly needed in Oil and Gas Sector. Thirdly, opportunities are also available for specialised skills in cyber security and network environments. People, who know how to use Artificial Intelligence based security tools and test automation tools, could find opportunities in this sector which are mostly available in financial institutions.

229 E-mail interview

In addition, opportunities are also available for specific skills that are required in infrastructure projects such as Scada operators, Industrial Internet of Things and Microsoft, Azure and Google Cloud specialist, etc.”²³⁰

(i) Electrical and Electronics

With the pace at which technology advances, market conditions change and innovations occur, the industry needs to enhance the ability to foresee, prepare, plan, and respond to the evolving dynamics, at speed. Being able to play in unique global market spaces make the industry sustain, grow, and gain a competitive edge.

The Sri Lankan Electronic and Electrical industry²³¹ continues to grow its brand as a young, dynamic

exporter unafraid of change, embracing the challenges of evolving global markets with resilience, in the true Sri Lankan spirit.

With a reputation as a ‘Design to Delivery Destination’ in the Electronic and Electrical sector, Sri Lanka is a center of excellence for electronics design and development, whilst the industry with vigor has embraced all emerging technologies including IoT, Robotics, Bio-medical, Analytics, and advanced Research and Development. Sri Lanka is progressively stepping into the global value-added supply chain with a range of cutting edge products and services, keeping pace and aligned with emerging global trends of ‘digitisation’, ‘automation’, ‘miniaturisation’,

and ‘development of sustainable green energy’.

Priority areas for investment in Sri Lanka under this sector include solar panel assembling, solar panel component manufacturing and polysilicon manufacturing. Other potential areas for investment include printed circuit board manufacturing, printed circuit board assembling and component manufacturing for printed circuit board (conductors, resistors and many more)²³²

(j) Rubber and Rubber based Products

One of the leading natural rubber producers²³³ in the world, Sri Lanka was the cradle for the rubber industry that

The success stories that were discussed in the preceding paragraphs indicate the viability of such promotional initiatives to yield productive outcomes for mutual benefits between the two countries.

revolutionised many industries across the globe. Renowned for the production of quality natural rubber latex products,

manufacturers and exporters of natural rubber in Sri Lanka, has also specialised in the sustainable production of niche rubber products like solid tires, sole crepe for shoes, and high-quality surgical gloves for the global market.

Trade & Investment Promotions

To promote trade and investment opportunities in the aforementioned sectors, Sri Lanka and Oman could organise Trade and Investment promotional activities alternatively in Muscat and Colombo for creating awareness of the opportunities available in those identified sectors and promote regular exchange of business interactions and B2B networking sessions.

²³⁰ E-mail interview

²³¹ <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/electrical-electronic-services/>

²³² <https://investsrilanka.com/electrical-electronics-new/>

²³³ <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/rubber/>

The success stories that were discussed in the preceding paragraphs indicate the viability of such promotional initiatives to yield productive outcomes for the mutual benefits between the two countries.

B. AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COOPERATION

I. AGRICULTURE COOPERATION

Sri Lanka's moderate climate throughout the year, fertile soil, freely available ground water with fairly distributed river net-work in most parts of the island and two monsoons which bring rains for the two main cultivation seasons are the key ecological factors. These favourable conditions have contributed to the agriculture sector to perform as a major economic force in Sri Lanka by making a significant contribution to the national economy, food security and employment.

The Government of Sri Lanka envisions a vibrant and dynamic agricultural sector for food security and national prosperity by achieving globally competitive production, processing and marketing enterprises through socially acceptable, innovative and commercially-oriented agriculture, through sustainable management of natural resources of the country.²³⁴

Oman's ambitious plan to overhaul its agricultural sector as a national strategic goal under its Vision 2040 promotes food security and self-sufficiency in the country by intensifying agriculture production. In line with this vision, the Government of Oman has set up the Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC) to develop, invest in, and implement programs aimed at boosting farm production and food processing.

In this context, the food sector is a promising area for collaboration between Sri Lanka and Oman.²³⁵ There is great potential for Sri Lankan and Omani private sector companies to collaborate in food processing sector. Sri Lankan fruits and vegetables could be imported directly to Oman, re-manufactured and re-exported as canned products.

Food security is at the hearts of both countries' agricultural policy and both countries have great synergies to harness the enormous potential available in this area.

To facilitate such a cooperation, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the field of agriculture cooperation has been proposed between the two countries. Such an arrangement, once it is signed, will serve as a solid foundation for building the future cooperation and collaboration in the field of agriculture in general and in the food security sector in particular.

The cooperation in the agriculture sector could include encouraging investment projects in the field of agriculture and agri-food; cooperation in the fields of technology transfer, scientific research, joint research, training in the field of agriculture and agri-food; cooperation in the fields of plant protection, quarantine, phytosanitation, agricultural coaching and so on.

Collaboration in Coconut Research

Sri Lanka's name has long been at forefront of the international market for its traditional exports of coconut. Sri Lanka has the world's first research institute dedicated to research in coconut established in 1929.²³⁶

234 <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1100291/business/oman-and-sri-lanka-explore-food-sector-cooperation>

235 <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1100291/business/oman-and-sri-lanka-explore-food-sector-cooperation>

236 <https://cri.gov.lk/en/>



A wide range of crops of fruits and vegetables are cultivated under advanced irrigation techniques in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan coconut is a brand name in Salalah, Dhofar Governorate of Oman. According to a Mission Report on Coconut Germplasm Conservation and Utilisation in the Dhofar Region “the introduction of coconut varieties in the past were a real success.

The King Coconut, Sri Lanka Yellow Dwarf and Sri Lanka Green Dwarf are now widely available....”²³⁷

In Oman, Governorate of Dhofar (Salalah) is rich in many tropical fruit crops and one of them is coconut palm which is grown in the governorate due to appropriate climate conditions. There is a great scope for research and exchange of experience and expertise between Sri Lanka and Oman in this sector for mutual benefits.

Expert Opinion

CEO of Nakheel Oman Development Company, Ali Said Al Uraimi observes:

“In the Gulf region, coconuts are almost exclusively produced from palms growing in the Sultanate of Oman, particularly in the extreme south-eastern coastal plain of the Dhofar Governorate, and specifically within the city limits of Salalah, between the mountains and the

sea. In addition to the local Oman Tall, the varieties include; Yellow Dwarf, Green Dwarf and King Coconut from Sri Lanka, the Malayan Yellow Dwarf and F1 hybrids. The importance of these coconuts is not only agricultural; historically, the Dhofar palms provided the basic materials to build boats for fishermen and traders on, around and eventually beyond the Indian Ocean.

Coconut palms are now one of the main symbols of Salalah city and play a role in both the tourist industry and urban landscaping. Oman is poised to invest in large scale coconut farming for its economic yield as well as the touristic attraction. With the support of Sri Lankan Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman, a research collaboration is being established between Nakheel Oman Development Company and the Coconut Research Institute of Sri Lanka which is the world’s first research institute dedicated to research in coconut established in 1929. Nakheel operates one of the Middle East's leading Tissue Culture centers that produces date palm seedlings along with other crops, and looking to expanding its production to

²³⁷ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274704444_Mission_Report_Coconut_Germplasm_Conservation_and_Utilisation_in_the_Dhofar_Region_of_Sultanate_of_Oman, p.10

coconut in order to supply those seedlings to coconut farming projects in Salalah, including the 50,000 coconut trees which already announced between Oman Food Investment Company (NITA) and Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN).²³⁸

Sri Lanka Embassy initiated a discussion on the collaboration in coconut research between the Chairman of the Coconut Research Institute of Sri Lanka²³⁹ and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Nakheel Oman Development Company during the latter's visit to Sri Lanka as a member of 17 member OCCI business delegation from March 5-9, 2022. Frequent interactions between the authorities and experts in this sector would facilitate forging stronger collaboration in the future.

Cooperation in Horticulture



Sri Lanka and Oman could also explore new areas such as Horticulture for cooperation. A wide range of crops of fruits and vegetables are cultivated under advanced irrigation techniques in Sri Lanka. Indigenous cultivars and land races such as banana cowpea, cucumber, grape,



98 Acres Resort & Spa at Ella, Sri Lanka

maize mango, onion, papaya, pomegranate, etc. have been identified under a variety of development programmes in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka and Oman could collaborate by exchanging plant genetic resources, especially crops mentioned above by concluding a Material Transfer Agreement.

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat organised planting of a Sri Lankan fruit sapling (wood apple fruit/ citrus fruit tree) in the plant nursery of the Directorate General of Agricultural and Animal Research of the Sultanate at Barka in Muscat on the occasion of the 74th Independence Day of Sri Lanka on 4th February 2022.²⁴⁰

II. FISHERIES COOPERATION

The Fisheries sector plays an important role in the economic and social development of the people of Sri Lanka and Oman. Sri Lanka is endowed with an enormous stock of fishing resources, which is almost incalculable. Its territorial waters cover an expanse of 21,500sq. km., the UN-Mandated Exclusive Economic Zone of 517 000sq.km., 260 000ha of freshwater bodies, 158 000ha of lagoons & estuaries, 71 000ha of mangrove zones, mudflats & salt marshes.²⁴¹

238 Personal interview

239 <https://cri.gov.lk/en/>

240 <https://mfa.gov.lk/ambassador-ameer-ajwad-plants-sri-lankan-fruit-sapling-in-muscat-to-mark-the-74th-independence-day-of-sri-lanka/>

241 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/buyers/industry-capability-profile/seafood-products.html>

Sri Lanka is ranked amongst the first 50 countries in the world exports with a total share of 0.2 per cent in the world export market. Sri Lankan seafood such as tuna, prawn, and crab is known for its unique taste and texture, which may owe largely to the unique climatic conditions and the peculiar ecosystem of the Sri Lankan waters. The export market in Sri Lanka is of high demand for the quality of saltwater fish, prawn farming and other ethically sourced sea food exports in the country which continue to grow day by day.²⁴²

The Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources is the main institute, that holds the responsibility for development and management of fisheries sector during different period of time through various methodologies.²⁴³

The National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA) of Sri Lanka is the principal National Institute charged with the responsibility of carrying out and coordinating research, development and management activities on the subject of Aquatic Resources in Sri Lanka. The main objective then was to face the challenges offered by the 200 nautical miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which Sri Lanka was endowed with. The NARA is a statutory body duly established by NARA Act of No. 54 of 1981 and has conducted numerous scientific studies in the field of fisheries and aquatic resources. NARA also provides services for development and sustainable utilisation of living and non-living aquatic resources.²⁴⁴

Oman has a long coastline extending for

about 3165 km, the vast majority of which faces the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. The main economic activity of many coastal communities is fishing which provides an important supply of fish to local communities, urban areas and for the export markets. Oman is one of the largest fish producers in the region and a net exporter of fish and fish products.

Fisheries sector is among the five industries expected to spearhead Oman's diversification programme. The government is hoping to sustainably capitalise on the ocean's food riches and develop a robust fisheries industry that will create jobs, feed the domestic population, and even emerge as an exporter to markets across the Gulf states, Asia and Europe. In 2019, the Omani government rolled out the Live Aquatic Wealth Law, which aims to strengthen commercial fishing and attract investment in seaports, maritime infrastructure and seafood production.²⁴⁵

Oman's Fisheries and Aquaculture Vision 2040 sets a goal to create a profitable world class fisheries sector that is ecologically sustainable and a net contributor to the economy of Oman. Vision 2040 builds upon the Vision 2020 to stimulate private sector led growth in fisheries sector capital and employment.²⁴⁶

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources of Oman has achieved a remarkable development in the field of aquaculture in Oman as a result of a wide range of scientific and applied research.

As two nations naturally blessed with the abundance of oceanic resources and a

242 Ibid.

243 https://www.fisheriesdept.gov.lk/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=106&lang=en

244 <http://www.nara.ac.lk/>

245 <http://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/>

246 Fisheries and Aquaculture Vision 2040 Sustainable Management of the Fisheries Sector in Oman

long coastal line, Sri Lanka and Oman could explore greater synergies and harness the opportunities available in the blue economy by forging collaboration in fisheries sector.

Both countries could also explore entering into joint venture investments in high potential sectors such as aquaculture/ ornamental fish farming. Sri Lanka offers investment opportunities in offshore sea cage farming, marine fish farming and freshwater aquaculture farming as well as sea marine products that have high demand in the Middle East region.

Sri Lanka could provide skilled labour for Omani aquaculture sector as the former is well equipped with advanced technology in this sector.

The joint collaborations could also be established in fisheries sector under the framework of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as both countries are active members of the organisation and the fisheries sector is one of the priority sectors of both countries.

C. TOURISM COOPERATION

I. Sri Lanka Tourism

Marco Polo, in the 13th century, described Sri Lanka as “La più bella isola delle sue dimensioni in tutto il mondo” – the finest island of its size in all the world.²⁴⁷ Sri Lanka is an island of serendipity with the smiling, friendly and hospitable people, a land of chance encounters and adventures, the home of innumerable treasures. Sri Lanka’s rich nature with the abundance of natural beauty, cultural heritage, numerous parks, long beaches, wildlife, adventure spots,

etc, are major attractions²⁴⁸ for tourists. Sri Lanka offers tourists from Middle East eco-friendly, family-focused experiences and offerings, year-round schedule of festivals and special events, luxury resorts and wellness centres, romantic settings for honeymooners and couples and a wonderful array of food and snacks, delectable fruits including the popular mango, pineapple, banana and papaya, and what not.

Wellness Tourism

Sri Lanka’s historical connection to Ayurveda treatment and meditation; its advanced yet affordable modern health system and country’s global popularity as a leading warm-weather tourist destination adds to the country’s appeal as a leading wellness tourism destination.²⁴⁹ With a strong tourist infrastructure and widespread network of Western and Ayurveda medical treatment centres, well regulated by the government, global tourists arriving in Sri Lanka can combine a holistic wellness experience, with an exciting holiday spent among the golden beaches or lush green mountains.²⁵⁰

Visitors to wellness establishments in Sri Lanka are focused on treatment for weight loss, stress relief, detoxing to get away from their busy and stressful life styles in their countries. Most tourists like to experience the powers of meditation and yoga to maintain a perfect mental health and a healthy lifestyle. To promote these elements of wellness tourism, luxury spas, Ayurveda products, herbal treatments, and meditation centers are available in star class hotels, boutique hotels and luxury

247 <https://www.lovesrilanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Sri-Lanka-Tourism-Vision-2025.pdf>

248 <https://www.slttda.gov.lk/en/tourist-attractions>. <https://www.srilanka.travel/#>

249 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/wellness-tourism/industry-information/>

250 Ibid

Source: Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA)

Table I: World Tourist Arrivals by Region

Region	International Tourist Arrivals (Million)					Share 2019*	Change %	
	2010	2015	2017	2018	2019*		18/17	19*/18
Europe	487.0	605.7	676.6	716.1	742.3	50.8	5.8	3.7
Asia & the Pacific	208.2	284.1	324.1	347.7	363.6	24.9	7.3	4.6
Americas	150.4	194.1	210.7	215.7	220.1	15.1	2.4	2.0
Africa	50.4	53.5	63	68.4	71.2	4.9	8.5	4.2
Middle East	55.4	58.1	57.7	59.4	63.9	4.4	3.0	7.6
World	951	1,196	1332	1,407	1,461	100	5.6	3.8

Source: UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, - Volume 18 January 2020 *provisional data

villas across the island. Each of these establishments are closely monitored by Sri Lanka Tourism to ensure quality of products and services.²⁵¹

Sri Lanka continues to emerge as one of the world's best tourist destinations, with accolades from various travel guides, travel magazines and travel web sites including Lonely Planet, Travel lemming web site and Bloomberg website etc.²⁵²

Tourism has traditionally been the third largest foreign exchange earner in Sri Lanka and over 1.9 million tourist arrivals was recorded earning around \$3.5 billion in 2019.²⁵³ Tourist arrivals dropped to 507,704 in 2020 due to the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Sri Lanka ranked 77th out of 141 countries in the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019 of the World Economic Forum. India (19 per cent), United Kingdom (10 per cent), China (9 per cent), Germany (7 per cent) and Australia (5 per cent), France (5 per cent) were Sri Lanka's top six international tourist generating markets in 2019.²⁵⁴ Other countries include Russian

Federation (4 per cent), USA (4 per cent), Maldives (3 per cent) and Canada (2 per cent). Tourist arrivals from Saudi Arabia (15,707), Lebanon (4,304), Oman (4,117), Kuwait (3,239), UAE (3,528 per cent) and Jordan (3,085) were recorded in the year 2019 from the Middle East.²⁵⁵ Highest number of tourists from Oman amounting to 14,216 visited Sri Lanka in 2015. Oman had ranked as the second in arrival of tourists to Sri Lanka from Middle East region in 2016.

Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA)

Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) is the official government institution tasked with regularising the tourism industry in the country, while establishing, positioning, and developing Sri Lanka as a leading destination for international visitors. SLTDA is responsible for tapping into Sri Lanka's natural potential to expand and enhance its tourism offering while benefiting investors and supporting communities, in a sustainable manner.²⁵⁶

251 <https://www.srilanka.travel/wellness-tourism/products.php>

252 <https://www.srilanka.travel/international-endorsements>

253 <https://sltda.gov.lk/en/monthly-tourist-arrivals-reports-2019>

254 https://sltda.gov.lk/storage/common_media/7e6b4e5e3c3b4533cf50350209f3666a.pdf

255 Ibid

256 <https://www.sltda.gov.lk/en/about-us>



Tourism offers both investment and trade opportunities in Sri Lanka. The Investor Relations Unit (IRU) is the centralized facilitation and promotion centre established within SLTDA to assist potential tourism investors, interested in investing in Sri Lanka Tourism. SLTDA projects for investment are available at the SLTDA official website.²⁵⁷

IRU is a one-stop location and point of contact for investors seeking information and assistance on the tourism investments in one of the most sought after holidays destinations in the world, Sri Lanka. Specialised staff of IRU are in collaboration all project approving government agencies to help investors to make their investment project a reality. A comprehensive tourism investor handbook is also available at the official website of the SLTDA.²⁵⁸

Further, as tourism and leisure industry is Sri Lanka's third largest foreign exchange earner, the government has positioned tourism as a central pillar of the economy which is poised to offer great growth and investment potential. Areas potential for investment include tourist accommodation and services (hotels / resorts / villas/

higher-end restaurants), leisure and recreational (golf course, entertainment complexes, theme parks, tourist shopping complexes, eco-lodges, camping, whale and dolphin watching, water sports), adventure and eco-tourism (adventure parks), transportation (yacht marina, coastal ferry services, cruise lines) and skill development: hotel / hospitality training Institutes.²⁵⁹

Omani Investment in Sri Lanka Tourism Sector

An Omani investor has made joint venture investment in villa type tourism resorts in the hill country of Sri Lanka.

II. Oman Tourism

Oman is known for its warm Arabian hospitality, abundant nature, and rich history. It is a serene place of relaxation, unforgettable adventures, and endless exploration. This is a land of unlimited discovery; a place of natural beauty, thriving wildlife. The land is made up of desert, valleys, mountains, and coastline.²⁶⁰ Oman is a home for a variety of beautiful topographical features, incredible mountain ranges, historic forts, warm beaches, ancient aflaj oasis irrigation systems, wadis (stream valleys) etc.

Khareef (Autumn) season in Salalah

The Khareef (Autumn) season in Salalah, the Governorate of Dhofar makes it a destination for tourists from June – September when the onset of the monsoon brings tropical weather, moderate temperatures, mist laden hillsides and overflowing springs turn the governorate into a haven for visitors. Salalah is also home for the tombs of noteworthy prophets namely, Hud, Imran and Ayoub

257 <https://www.slt-da.gov.lk/en/projects#infrastructure-section>

258 https://slt-da.gov.lk/storage/common_media/Investorper cent20Handbook_V1.0_202010141284507053.pdf

259 <https://investsrilanka.com/tourism-leisure-2/>

260 <https://visitoman.om/discover-oman/>



(Job) of Abrahamic religious importance. of Abrahamic religious importance.

Oman is known for being one of the friendliest places on the earth. Omanis are bound together by a sense of tolerance. Visitors are often impressed with Omani hospitality and the warmth of people who treat visitors like family. It is reported that Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) once sent a person to another region of Arabia, where he was insulted and beaten. He returned to the Prophet and told him about it. Thereupon the Prophet praised the residents of Oman by saying: "If you had come to the people of Oman, they would have neither insulted you nor beaten you."²⁶¹

The Sultanate welcomed 3,506,441 visitors in 2019, which was 8.2 per cent

261 Sahih Muslim 2544

262 National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI)

263 <https://mht.gov.om/objectives>

264 <https://www.omran.om/omran/about-omran1/>

more than the 2018 figure of 3,241,757.²⁶² citizens from the GCC countries, India and China were among the top nationalities that visited the Sultanate during this period.

Oman's 2040 National Tourism Strategy

As part of its strategy to diversify the economy away from a heavy reliance on oil and gas revenues, the Oman Government identified the tourism sector as one of the key drivers of future growth for the Sultanate. The 2040 National Tourism strategy unveiled by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism²⁶³ is the groundwork for turning Oman into a prime luxury tourism destination.

Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) was established in 2005 by the government as the executive arm of the Sultanate responsible for delivering the objectives contained in the 2040 National Tourism Strategy. OMRAN Group works closely with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and other Government entities to identify priorities, projects and opportunities that will maximise the potential of the Sultanate's tourism sector.²⁶⁴ OMRAN Group is one of the strategic partners in the Oman Vision 2040, working alongside its partners in the tourism sector and other key sectors to realise its ambitious national objectives.

OMRAN also provides unique investment opportunities for local and global partners, attracting leading hospitality, leisure and cultural brands to the Sultanate.

They work closely with stakeholders and





partners to develop sustainable projects that enable economic diversification. OMRAN engages with private and public developers through joint ventures to promote involvement with some of the most iconic tourism related developments in the country, as well as acting as a catalyst for investment in tourism developments by both national and international partners.²⁶⁵

OMRAN has launched a brand identity of the National Travel Operator 'VisitOman.om' – the first integrated digital platform that will serve travel and trade network in the Sultanate, in line with the National Tourism Strategy 2040 and the tourism distribution strategy.²⁶⁶

Sri Lankan Investment in Omani Hospitality Sector

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs under chapter III, Sri Lanka's popular tourism sector company, Aitken Spence PLC has invested in the hospitality sector of Oman. The company owns Al-Falaj Hotel in Muscat and manages three other hotels namely, the Luxury Desert Nights Camp, Sur Plaza hotel and Sohar Al Wadi hotel in the Sultanate of Oman. There is scope for the prospective investments by Sri Lankan hospitality sector companies in tourism related projects in the Sultanate of Oman.



MoU for Tourism Cooperation

Given Sri Lanka and Oman have placed greater importance for the promotion of tourism in their national strategic frameworks, both countries are well poised to cooperate and complement each other in exchanging their expertise and experiences in promoting tourism industry.

Towards this end, the Ministries of Tourism of Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman have proposed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the

265 <https://www.omran.om/investment/overview/>

266 <https://www.omran.om/brand-identity-of-the-national-travel-operator-visitoman-om-launched/>

two countries for the development of sustainable tourism infrastructure. The MoU is envisaged to facilitate enhancing cooperation in tourism sector once it is signed. Sri Lanka - Oman tourism cooperation could include areas such as:

- sharing of technology and best practices
- organising tourism events
- promoting various forms of tourism
- encouraging mutual investments in tourism projects
- mutual participation in meetings, conferences and exhibitions
- exchange of experiences and studies
- exchange of brochures, promotional materials, films and pictures
- holding seminars, conferences and workshops on the industry
- encouraging exchange of training courses, expert visits and scientific research
- encouraging exchange of authentic tourism practices such as culinary practices and engaging in wellness tourism etc.

Moreover, regular interactions between the Government authorities in tourism sector as well as inbound and outbound tour operations in both countries will further enhance bilateral partnership in this sector.

Collaborative Programme in Tourism

Hospitality sector is a vital component of tourism industry, and therefore, both countries could promote exchange of familiarisation tours for hospitality industry personnel and destination promotion activities. Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management (SLITHM) and Oman Tourism College, for instance,

have already initiated a collaborative programme by nominating an Omani Culinary Chef to conduct Omani Culinary Assistance Train the Trainer Programme at the SLITHM.

Similarly, bilateral cooperation could also be initiated between the botanical gardens of the two countries which are coming under the purview of tourism.

Oman has reportedly initiated the largest 423 hectares botanic garden project at Al Khoudh in Muscat in a bid to attract more tourists to the Sultanate.²⁶⁷ Sri Lanka could share its Floriculture expertise and plants for such projects.

Peradeniya Botanical Garden, which is 200 hundred years old and the largest elegant botanical garden in Kandy, Sri Lanka, for instance, recently gifted a variety of Sri Lankan ornamental plants namely, Orchids, Leather-ferns, Aspidistras, Cane Palms, Butterfly Palms and Cast Iron Plants to the Central Plant Nursery of the Royal Gardens and Farms (Royal Court Affairs) of the Sultanate of Oman located at Zulfa, Mubaila in Muscat. This was arranged by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism of Sri Lanka.²⁶⁸

Moreover, an interesting model for tourism ventures between Sri Lanka and Oman introduced by two Sri Lankan professional expatriates in Oman, namely Mohamed Hafeez Marikkar and Suranga Perera, following the concept of lean management to tourism, is noteworthy. This model will be useful for entrepreneurs who are interested in establishing tourism ventures between the

²⁶⁷ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/gulf-news/oman/2021/08/08/oman-to-create-175m-botanic-garden-to-boost-tourism/>

²⁶⁸ <https://timesofoman.com/article/116450-ornamental-plants-donated-to-central-plant-nursery>

two countries. The model²⁶⁹ was submitted for the Entrepreneurial Skill Research programme of the Postgraduate Institute of Management (PIM) of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

Air Connectivity

Sri Lankan Airlines and Oman Air operate scheduled flights Muscat to Colombo to Muscat throughout the week. SalamAir spread wings to Colombo in 2019²⁷⁰. While Oman Air has been granted 17 frequencies, Sri Lankan Airlines and SalamAir have been granted 5 and 4 frequencies respectively per week. Frequent air connectivity, short duration of flight and attractive tour packages make both countries as preferred destinations by tourists. Frequent air connectivity reinvigorates people to people contacts which will also facilitate bilateral trade.

As seen in the preceding paragraphs, Sri Lanka and Oman have much to offer to the tourists from both countries. Both countries could harness the potential synergies available in this promising sector. Tourism promotion is not only for means of trade, but also to strengthen people to people links between the two countries. Active tourism promotion programmes such as public roadshows, social media campaigns, regular interactions between the inbound and outbound tour operators of both countries as well as attractive and affordable tour packages would increase tourist traffic.

Expert Opinion

Fayaz Thaha, Regional Manager (Middle East – South, Southern Africa & Pakistan), Srilankan Airlines, is of the following view²⁷¹:



Sri Lankan Airlines and Oman Air operate scheduled flights from Muscat to Colombo to Muscat throughout the week. Salam Air spread wings to Colombo in 2019

“Air transport provides a crucial link in contributing to the social and economic prosperity of Nations in the world and it plays an inextricable and a pivotal role in the global supply chain system.

Direct Air link between nations creates a platform to explore and engage in commerce, fosters friendship and tourism. The ability to move people and goods rapidly between two nations has the potential to create economic growth and collaboration to pursue comparative advantages.

269 The proposed model is available for reference at the library of Postgraduate Institute of Management (PIM) of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

270 <https://mfa.gov.lk/oman-based-salamair-launches-its-first-flight-to-sri-lanka/>

271 Personal interview



Availability of easy access through air connectivity is also an influencer in foreign investment decisions by large organisations. SriLankan Airlines and Oman Air are continuing to connect SriLanka and Oman since 1979 and the frequencies that started with a few flights have culminated in a combined frequency of 25 flights per a week pre-Covid providing convenient travel options for the SriLankan expat population to visit their family back home and for leisure travel. Further such connectivity also has facilitated value addition and re-exports particularly perishables.

Both Airlines have facilitated affordable ticket prices for SriLankan workers to travel between the countries. In addition SriLankan Airlines has also actively promoted tourism in the Oman market by organising over the years multitudes of Agents Education Tours and other activities to show case Sri Lanka's lush green mountains, wild life, and the world class Hotel properties located in exotic places in Sri Lanka. There is a sizeable untapped potential to increase tourism from Oman to Sri Lanka and it requires a concerted industry effort by both the airlines, the hoteliers, tourism development authorities of Sri Lanka to harness the true potential of Leisure travel from Oman to Sri Lanka - just 4 hours away!"

272 E-mail interview



Anjalee De Alwis, Aviation Professional at Salam Air observes²⁷²:

"Given the long-standing relationship between Sri Lanka and Oman there has been many notable achievements in the aviation sector. The vision of the late Majesty Sultan Qaboos for the aviation industry in the Sultanate is revolutionary and has opened opportunity and an eco-system for rapid growth in all affiliated industries be it engineering, ground handling, inflight, cargo, tourism, education, medical, and trade has created more job opportunities in both Oman and Sri Lanka. Further opening the skies to the world with the construction of the state-of-the-art Muscat International Airport has made Oman an aviation hub connecting the East and the West while enhancing the GCC movement with superior and more convenient offerings.

Be it the lucrative holiday movement or the labour movement the two countries have gained much stride by way of strong bilateral agreements and the notable relationship the two countries have shared over the years. Oman has been nothing short of an enabling partner to Sri Lanka with two Omani carriers and one Sri Lankan carriers operating direct flights to Colombo, Sri Lanka; aiding not only in the convenience of travel but also in economic growth through its contribution to the local

tourism industry. Sri Lanka continues to be a favored holiday destination for the Omani people and Oman continues to be the most welcoming destination for Sri Lankan white and blue collar labour force.

The aviation industry will see vast developments in the near future, in fulfilling the Vision Oman 2040 under the guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik where the expansion of the aviation sector does not limit itself to Muscat but also the rest of the governorates being connected to the world. The inbound tourism sector is already seeing steady growth while the outbound tourism sector is also seeing much of the youth of Oman travelling for leisure and education. This is an ideal scenario for both countries to benefit and harbour further relations in the aviation industry.”²⁷³

D. EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION

Bilateral cooperation in the field of education contributes to enhance mutual understanding and deepening relations between peoples of the two countries.

I. Higher Education in Sri Lanka

The origins of the modern university system in Sri Lanka dates back to 1921, when the Ceylon University College was established in Colombo affiliated to the University of London. However, the beginning of modern higher education in Ceylon was in 1870, when the Ceylon Medical School was established followed by Colombo Law College (1875), School of Agriculture (1884) and the Government

Technical College (1893).²⁷⁴

There are currently 15 State Universities in Sri Lanka.²⁷⁵ The prominent ones include University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya, University of Ruhuna, University of Kelaniya, University of Sri Jayawardhenapura and University of Moratuwa. In addition, there are a number of public higher educational institutions including Open University of Sri Lanka, degrees programmes²⁷⁶ and recognised foreign universities²⁷⁷ by the University Grants Commission²⁷⁸ of Sri Lanka under the purview of the Ministry of Higher Education of Sri Lanka.²⁷⁹

Non-State Higher Educational Institutes in Sri Lanka

Furthermore, there are a number of non-State and foreign affiliated Higher Educational institutions as well as Technical Educational Institutions in Sri Lanka, which offer a variety of programmes of studies and courses. For more information a list of institutes is available in the website of the Ministry of Higher Education of Sri Lanka.²⁸⁰

II. Higher Education in Oman

The Higher Education Institutions in the Sultanate started to emerge in the early 1980s, with the establishment of the Banking Institute of Oman in 1983 (currently the College of Banking and Financial Studies) to provide the necessary human resources to join the banking sector. In 1984, the Colleges of Teachers (currently the Colleges of Applied Sciences) were

273 E-mail interview

274 https://www.mohe.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=114&Itemid=203&lang=en

275 Ibid.

276 https://www.mohe.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_courses&view=course_details&Itemid=225&lang=en

277 https://www.mohe.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=137&Itemid=227&lang=en

278 <https://www.ugc.ac.lk/>

279 https://www.mohe.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=featured&Itemid=101&lang=en

280 https://www.mohe.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=352&Itemid=336&lang=en#recognized-degrees

established to provide the Sultanate, with diploma graduate teachers to participate in the education of the rising nation.²⁸¹

In the same year 1984, the Industrial Technical College (currently the Higher Technical College) was inaugurated to meet the needs of the local market. The same period also included the establishment of some health institutes for the preparation of Omani nurses to work in government hospitals. The educational march was culminated in the inauguration of the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in 1986.²⁸²

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)

The SQU²⁸³ is a public university in Oman with centers for research and education focusing on all regions of the world and participates in international conferences, workshops, trainings and joint-projects. The University contains nine colleges namely, Agricultural and Marine Science; Art and Social Sciences; Economics and Political Science; Education; Engineering; Law; Nursing; Medicine and Health Science; and Science.²⁸⁴

The International Cooperation Office (ICO) of the SQU assists the institution to achieve its goals through the process of internationalisation. The role of ICO is to engage itself with the agreements signed by international organisations, exchange programs for both students and researchers, joint-workshops, memberships established

with international organisations, global initiatives, etc. The website of the SQU provides an overview of existing networks, partnerships and initiatives, and how the organisation related to internationalisation activities is structured.²⁸⁵

University of Technology and Applied Sciences

University of Technology and Applied Sciences is a Government University in Oman which was established by virtue of Royal Decree No. 76/2020 in August 2020.²⁸⁶ The University has 11 branches in different Governorates of the Sultanate.²⁸⁷

Private Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Oman

Private investors have the opportunity to establish new private universities and colleges in the Sultanate and they are offered a number of incentives. Oman's system of higher education currently includes 27 private universities and colleges.²⁸⁸ There are 8 Vocational Training Institutions in Oman.²⁸⁹

Since the commencement of private investment in higher education, the Government of Oman has recognised the significance of supporting private HEIs and providing appropriate investment atmosphere for such institutions. The Government's support is extended by a number of Royal decrees, bylaws, and legislations in direct and indirect ways for the support of these institutions.

281 <https://www.educouncil.gov.om/en/page.php?scrollto=start&id=17>

282 Ibid.

283 <https://www.squ.edu.om/>

284 <https://www.squ.edu.om/Academics/Colleges>

285 <https://www.squ.edu.om/About/University-Administration/Office-of-the-Assistant-VC-for-International-Cooperation>

286 file:///C:/Users/Pre-Installed%20User/Downloads/2020-0076%20Formatted-1.pdf

287 <https://www.cas.edu.om/>

288 <https://www.moheri.gov.om/InnerPage.aspx?id=9767b8ed-876e-4dfc-9707-c2c3e337c078&culture=en>; See also; 2020 Oman, publication by Oman Ministry of Information.

289 <https://www.moheri.gov.om/InnerPage.aspx?id=f19671a6-83f3-4220-8a27-9b76d584dfff&culture=en>

Indirectly, private HEIs are supported through internal scholarships allocated for students from families of social security funds and 600 internal scholarships for students from needy families.²⁹⁰

Accreditation of educational institutions

It is observed that the higher educational institutions of both countries have not yet been accredited within the panel of each other's accredited foreign higher educational/ technical educational institutions. To bridge this gap, accreditation process of the Sri Lankan higher educational and other technical educational institutions within the panel of accredited foreign higher educational/ technical educational institutions in Oman needs to be initiated. The completion of such process will facilitate the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MHERI) of the Sultanate of Oman to recognise Sri Lankan higher educational and other technical educational institutions and include them in their panel of accredited foreign higher educational/ technical educational institutions. This recognition will help the educational institutions in both countries to formally engage in exchange programmes, collaborations as well as the prospective students to select their HEIs which are recognised in both countries.

Bilateral Cooperation in the field of Higher Education

Sri Lanka and the Sultanate could promote bilateral cooperation in the field of higher education by formally organising exchange programmes of faculty members, students, administrative staff and supportive staff between the higher

educational institutions. Joint educational activities, exchange of study materials as well as exchange of delegations of specialists in higher education sector could also be promoted for the mutual benefits. Scholarship schemes and programmes in different fields of studies could be mooted for the benefits of students in both countries.

The Ministry of Higher Education of the Sultanate of Oman offers one scholarship to Sri Lanka under the 'Scholarship Programme for Cultural and Scientific Cooperation' since 2016.

Cooperation between the University of Peradeniya and Sultan Qaboos University

The University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka offered 14 Omani students from the faculty of Agriculture of Sultan Qaboos University to undertake their Internship Programmes in the Agriculture Education Unit of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya for four consecutive years from 2016 to 2019.

A suggestion has been mooted by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman to propose a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University of Peradeniya and Sultan Qaboos University for fostering international cooperation in the field of higher education and research between the two Universities.

Such an arrangement could facilitate formalising academic exchanges which include professional development, joint research activities, joint scholarly and teaching activities, exchange of faculty members, exchange of students and joint supervision of research candidates, etc., between the two Universities in the future.

²⁹⁰ <https://www.moheri.gov.om/FaqDetails.aspx?id=1&culture=en>

Cooperation between the University of Sri Jayawardenapura and Sultan Qaboos University

The Embassy of Sri Lanka has also recently mooted an idea of collaboration between the faculties of Medical Sciences of the University of Sri Jayawardenapura of Sri Lanka and Sultan Qaboos University. Preliminary discussions have been held between the Departments of Anatomy of both the Universities.

Such initiatives could help establishing stronger collaborations and partnership between the national Universities as well as other higher educational institutions in both countries for the mutual benefits.

Popular Sri Lankan higher educational institutions among Omani Students

(a) Sir John Kothalawala Defence University (KDU)

General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU)²⁹¹ was initially established as the “General Sir John Kotelawala Defence Academy” by the Parliamentary Act No 68 of 1981 and subsequently it was elevated to University status by the amendment Act No 27 of 1988, thereby empowering it to award bachelors’ and postgraduate degrees in defence studies.

KDU is a member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (United Kingdom) and maintains necessary standards, for educating and grooming Officer Cadets to meet the challenges of modern defence management. KDU offers courses²⁹² such as medicine, engineering, defence and strategic studies, technology, etc. As seen in Chapter III of this book, the Officers of the Royal Navy of Oman have

been undergoing technician training in Sri Lanka at the General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University.

This cooperation could be further enhanced in the future to encompass other fields as well.

(b) Sri Lanka Institute for Information Technology (SLIIT)²⁹³

SLIT is a leading (non-State) degree awarding institute approved by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka. SLIT is a member of Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), International Association of Universities (IAU) and accredited the Institution of Engineering and Technology in UK.

SLIIT is keen to promote Sri Lanka as a study destination in Oman and conducts study programs such as engineering, information technology, quantity surveying, architecture and hospitality management related degree programmes offered by foreign universities to complete at SLIIT, Sri Lanka.

Around 20 Omani students followed their Advance Diploma in Hospitality Management as well as in Technology offered by William Angles Institute of Australia, at the Colombo Academy of Hospitality Management which is an associated Institute of SLIIT in the recent past.

SLIIT and Omani Higher Educational Institutes could collaborate in programmes such as knowledge transfer, innovation, and enhanced learning through Student and Lecturing staff “Mobility” (exchange), etc.

(c) Sri Lanka Aviation College

Sri Lankan Aviation College is the

291 <https://www.kdu.ac.lk/the-university/>

292 <https://www.kdu.ac.lk/undergraduate-courses/>

293 <https://www.sliit.lk/>

training arm of the Sri Lankan Airlines and a State certified Institute by ICAN. The College is committed to delivering a career-focused, innovative and comprehensive portfolio of aviation training courses which prepare students for professional and personal success. The College has trained many foreign students including around 10 Omani students who had pursued their engineering and aircraft maintenance training at the Sri Lanka Aviation College.

Prospective Joint Venture Collaboration

Two leading Sri Lankan educational institutions, CINEC Campus²⁹⁴ which is a Maritime Science specialised institution and SLTC Campus²⁹⁵ which is one of the leading non-State higher educational institute in Sri Lanka, have shown keen interest in opening their branches in the Sultanate of Oman in collaboration with prospective joint venture partners. Representatives of both CINEC and SLTC Campuses visited the Sultanate as a part of Sri Lanka Trade Ministerial delegation from 26 – 28 March 2022 and held a series of meetings with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MHERI) of Oman and private sector educational institutions with a view to forging collaborations in the education sector in Oman. Sri Lanka's potential in offering internationally recognised higher educational degrees and diplomas in a cost-effective manner in the fields such as Engineering, IT, Health Science, Nursing, Logistics and International Supply Chain

Management, etc. was highlighted during the discussions.

As such, education sector provides abundance of opportunities to harness the potential for stronger collaborations between the two countries for mutual benefits as their geographic, economic, social, and cultural positioning make complementary advantages for partnership in developing this sector.

Expert Opinion

Ajantha Madurapperuma²⁹⁶, who is a professional with a track record of academic contributions and attached to the banking industry in Oman, observes:

“With a history of high literacy levels and solid foundation of education, including tie ups with universities in more developed markets, coaching of professionals in securing international professional qualifications and wide use of English medium teaching, Sri Lankan education sector has high potential to explore regional markets. This position is complemented by potential for investments by Omani entities in the education sector in partnership with Sri Lankan education institutes.

The educational institutions that are ready for international recognition and competition would be geared to penetrate the regional markets. Sri Lankan institutions with ties ups with international universities and professional bodies would have an advantage arising from such partnerships.

Those who are yet to have accreditations or quality assurance on their programs

294 <https://www.cinec.edu/about-cinec.html>

295 <https://sltc.ac.lk/>

296 Ajantha Madutapperuma CFA FCMA MBA FIB LLB (Hons), who is also author of academic articles, has held senior positions in the banking industry in Sri Lanka as well. He was a former President of CFA Sri Lanka (being a Chartered Financial Analyst, (CFA)), as well a member of the founding Board of CFA Oman.

would need to expedite such processes. In addition to more common areas of studies such as management, finance and banking, engineering and medicine, there are some unique areas such as agriculture and tourism where Sri Lanka has an edge to provide education coupled with practical knowledge. At the same time Oman has high interest in these industries for diversification of economic activities. Research partnerships in these areas would bring mutual benefits.

The strategic positioning is well supported by geographic proximity, within a less than four-hour flight, between the two capital cities Muscat and Colombo. Sri Lanka's climate and greenery would be sought after by Omanis who enjoy Sri Lanka like weather in its southern city of Salalah, during a specific season. Culturally and socially, both the nations share lots of commonalities most important being friendliness, mutual respect, and hospitality. Cultural and ethnic diversity in Sri Lanka and exposure to expatriate communities in Oman make the relationships already familiar. Sharing of knowledge is highly respected by Omani students. Sri Lankan teachers at school level and higher education and professional level as well, are known to be generous in imparting knowledge.²⁹⁷

Vocational Education in Sri Lanka

The Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka (VTA)²⁹⁸ was established in 1995 under the provisions of the Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka Act No.12 of 1995. VTA was established with the

intent to provide skills for employment. The VTA aims at reaching out to the youth of the country and make them to be skillful to find employment opportunities both locally and internationally.

The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)²⁹⁹ has taken necessary steps to introduce the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) System with 7 Levels. The NVQ level 7 is equivalent to the bachelor degree qualification. Students can enroll into the M.Sc. or any other postgraduate programme after completion the NVQ level 7. Students who have successfully completed NVQ level 5, can enter for the 2nd year in most of the foreign universities where the relevant field is available.³⁰⁰

A large number of courses such as agriculture plantation and livestock, automobile repair and, building and construction maintenance, electrical and electronic and telecommunication, fisheries and aquaculture, food technology, gem and jewelry, health and social work, hotel and tourism, information communication and multimedia technology (ict), etc., are offered under this vocational training programmes in Sri Lanka.

A large number of courses such as Agriculture Plantation and Livestock, Automobile Repair, Building and Construction Maintenance, Electrical and Electronic and Telecommunication, Fisheries & Aquaculture, Food Technology, Gem and Jewelry, Health and Social Work, Hotel and Tourism, Information Communication and Multimedia

297 E-mail interview. The views expressed by Mr Madurapperuma are personal and do not reflect any views of the organisations he is attached to.

298 <https://www.vtasl.gov.lk/about-us/overview/>

299 <https://www.tvec.gov.lk/>

300 https://www.tvec.gov.lk/?page_id=140

Technology (ict), etc., are offered under this vocational training programmes in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan Skilled Labour

Sri Lanka has a large output of skilled and trained manpower with secondary (13 years) and tertiary level education. A network of hundreds of A-Grade schools and Universities maintains a high standard of education. The 92 per cent literacy rate is one of the highest in Asia.³⁰¹ Sri Lankans are by nature intelligent, industrious and hard-working and have the ability to adapt themselves easily to new job placements and are quick to grasp any job requirements, which keep foreign recruitment agencies satisfied. Warm hospitable and generous by nature, Sri Lankan employees become quickly acclimatised and oriented in foreign locations.³⁰²

Over the years Sri Lanka has been able to build a strong reputation of being a prime source of trainable, reliable, loyal and cost effective manpower to a number of industries. The liberalisation of trade along with the open economic policies pursued by Sri Lanka's government has greatly encouraged Sri Lankan youth to learn and develop industrial skills. The close monitoring of industrial trends and the usage of modern technology and training methods have ensured that Sri Lankan workers are well-equipped to face any challenge that may come their way. These training programmes also help prospective migrant workers to develop positive work

attitudes and behavioural patterns. In addition, trainees are apprenticed to work with large industries in order to gain on the job experience and to master the high standards needed for placement in foreign countries.³⁰³

As a well-known skilled human resource provider, Sri Lanka could provide technically qualified and trained personnel in different sectors including engineers, accountants, architects, doctors, teachers, lawyers, bankers, hotel /restaurant personnel, receptionists, nurses, paramedics, computer operators, programmers, system analysts, etc.³⁰⁴

Sri Lanka could also provide skilled labour in other categories such as machine operators, factory workers, welders, fitters, motor mechanics, heavy-duty vehicle drivers, dockyard workers, telecommunication technicians, seamen, labourers and domestic workers.

Sri Lanka Foreign Employment

(i) Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau (SLBFE)

The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE)³⁰⁵ which is coming under the purview of the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment of Sri Lanka, is the regulatory authority for the foreign employment sector in Sri Lanka. It has been established under the provisions of the Parliamentary Act No. 21 of 1985.³⁰⁶

(ii) Recruitment Agencies in Sri Lanka

The recruitment for employment overseas in Sri Lanka is handled by the Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Agency

301 <http://www.slbfe.lk/page.php?LID=1&MID=103>

302 Ibid.

303 <http://www.slbfe.lk/page.php?LID=1&MID=44>

304 Ibid.

305 <http://www.slbfe.lk/>

306 <http://www.slbfe.lk/file.php?FID=607>

(Pvt) Ltd.³⁰⁷, a subsidiary of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), as well as many other private sector Foreign Employment Recruitment Agencies that are registered under the SLBFE.

The credentials of these agencies have been carefully scrutinised, approved and processed by the SLBFE which regulates the business of foreign employment in Sri Lanka. A list of authorised agencies is available in the SLBFE official website.³⁰⁸ All these Licensed Foreign Employment Agencies are members of the Association of Licensed Foreign Employment Agencies (ALFEA) and are subjected to supervision by the SLBFE which monitors their activities at all times.

(iii) Online Job Bank

SLBFE promotes the primary strategy, envisioned in the National Human Resources and Employment Policy for Sri Lanka 2012, the skilled migration through better skills training and diversification of skills through the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system. For this purpose, the SLBFE maintains an online job bank which could be accessed at its official website.³⁰⁹

The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment has established corporate and institutional relationships with public and private sector skills development institutions, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Employment, in order to provide information on the overseas labour market and to prepare suitable human resources for the overseas labour market.

The Ministry of Foreign Employment and the Ministry of Skills Development have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to better serve the sector.

As a result, the SLBFE is capable of supplying skilled and competent human resources for the international labour market. SLBFE also provides NVQ – 3 Caregiver training through its accredited training centers.

As Sri Lanka has developed National Qualifications by using internationally recognised standards of competencies for occupations in the technical and vocational sector for several industries, Sri Lanka could provide competent skilled and semi-skilled human resources for the following job categories:

Cleaner (Non-domestic), labour (general), operator (machine), surveyor (quantity), mechanic (general), cook - general (hotel), waiter (general), technician (general), driver (general), doctor, supervisor, engineer, electrician (general), chef, officer (medical), supervisor (general), cleaner - building (female), manager (general), house boy, accountant (general), worker (packing), welder (general), helper (garment), cleaner – male (non domestic), operator (sewing machine), etc.³¹⁰

MoU on Skills Development and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications of Skilled Workers

The National Human Resources and Employment Policy for Sri Lanka 2012 states that National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) standards will be developed on par with international

307 <https://www.slfea.lk/>

308 http://applications.slbfe.lk/feb/la/la_main.asp?&LID=1

309 <http://newapplications.slbfe.lk/?x=dwsa&LID=1>

310 Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE)

standards (equalization and accreditation) and will introduce Mutual Recognition of qualifications into bilateral agreements (MRA) and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

Accordingly, recognising the importance of equalisation of the vocational qualification framework of Sri Lanka to that of the Sultanate of Oman and the need of a Skills Development programme for prospective migrant workers of Sri Lanka, a MoU on Skills Development and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications of Skilled Workers has been proposed between the two countries. This arrangement would facilitate enhancement of future cooperation between the two countries in the field of recruitment of skilled labour.

The Abu Dhabi Dialogue in which Sri Lanka and Oman are participating countries, also calls for improving labour mobility outcomes through the implementation of skill-driven policies.³¹¹ As Sri Lanka and Oman are countries of origin and destination respectively under this framework, they could cooperate with each other to foster information sharing, promote capacity building and technical cooperation for the effective matching of labour demand and supply.

Expert Opinion

Sunil Ponnampereuma, Chief Executive Officer of MILCRIS³¹² is of the following view:

“Sri Lanka has a pool of skillful, trainable and reliable human resources. Sri Lankan workers are well-equipped to face any challenge and are capable of assimilating

new technologies. Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyors, for instance, have earned a brand name in the GCC countries for their professionalism and efficiency in this field.”³¹³

Pamela De Alwis³¹⁴, who was a resident in Oman for long time and a Consultant in skilled labour, has the following observes:

“Sri Lanka shares a great history of collaboration and contribution towards the growth of the Sultanate of Oman, since the times of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. The success of key projects in the Sultanate such as instilling the Royal Oman Police, Oman Air and many infrastructure projects such as the Muscat International Airport and city planning, stands testament of the key contributions made by Sri Lankans playing vital roles as per their various expertise. Today, in finance, health care, tourism and service sectors we still see many Sri Lankan professionals driving business and making vital contributions to the growth of their respective entities.

Sri Lanka offers a unique proposition of a skilled work force with a literacy rate of over 98 per cent of the population and English considered as the third language of the island, we have some of the best ratings in soft skills along with a highly level of education owing to the universities and vocational training facilities made available to all Sri Lankans make them highly skilled in their respective fields of work. The culture and hospitality extended by Omani people make the Sultanate a desired country and homely environment for many job seekers in Sri Lanka.

311 https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/2018-07/abudhabi_dialogue_brief.pdf

312 MILCRIS is a Quantity Surveying and Cost Consultancy Service Provider operating in Oman with its Head Office in Sri Lanka

313 Personal interview

314 Mrs. Pamela De Alwis is a Director at LC International

We have a wealth of professionals in the medical sector from well trained and experienced doctors to nurses and even specialised care givers to elders which I feel is a need of the times and a growing segment. The special diploma programs offered to these caregivers enable them to work in non-hospital settings at home and provide professional care and health support to elders and patients. In the professional category, we also have experienced personal in finance, engineering, fintech, IT Service, hospitality management, education and teaching who have been exposed to working in dynamic environments locally as well as intentionally and have much to offer in terms of on job specialisation and out of the box thinking. With the vocational training institutes playing a vital role of teaching and certifying skilled jobs such as electricians, carpenters, heavy equipment handlers, AC technicians, hospitality service providers, Sri Lanka has an influx of youth seeking opportunities to contribute and gain foreign experience.

Whilst this type of work force is available for the immediate requirements of the Sultanate with the vision of Omanisation in the country, Sri Lanka also offers opportunities for Omani students / professionals to broaden their experience and get certified in the many specialised universities, schools and institutions available such as hotel, schools, vocational training Institutes and specialised universities, which will further help strengthen our economic ties in the years to come.”³¹⁵

K. K. Lalith Kumara, a bank examination Expert, who has a long and rich experience

in finance sector both in Sri Lanka and Oman suggests the following for the prospective win - win situation between Sri Lanka and Oman in the financial sector:

“The Omani banking system, though rich in providing all the financial solutions to the society, there are still more scope for development in human resources, finance to the micro and SME sector, emerging development sector, etc. In-line with the Oman Vision 2040, there are several emerging financial opportunities anticipated in the financial arena, in particular, under the objective of ‘Building World-class Infrastructure and Livable Cities’. Foreign collaboration through foreign direct investment would require a swift and rapid financial supply from various internationally active banks. Syndication of expertise through finance, financial engineering, human resources, would enable mutual benefits.

Over the past two decades, counterparty relationships has been well established between Sri Lanka and Oman to support the remittance services and correspondent banking. These counterparty relationships could now be turned into more rewarding business engagements. One such area that Oman could advantage of Sri Lanka’s strong SME and Micro Financing segment that has had significant growth over the years. Banking the unbanked, financial literacy and financial inclusion are corner stones that have been supporting the Sri Lankan economy in the recent past. Accordingly, harnessing the experience, knowledge and skill available in Sri Lanka could help the Sultanate in reaching out to all corners of the country.

Sri Lankan banking industry, having

315 E-mail interview

been established in late 19th century, has been enriched with vast experience and full of resources. The state-owned Bank of Ceylon and well established other private banks which had pioneered in establishing branches outside Sri Lanka, have vast potential in catering the financial services needed in the Sultanate. As we are in an age of huge interconnectivity, these banks could provide digitalized customer services, in order to promote Sri Lankan entrepreneurs, to invest in various Omani industries such as IT infrastructure & Cyber services, Human Resource development, etc. The development financial arms of DFCC Bank and NDB Bank could contribute in achieving the Oman Vision 2040. DFCC (established in 1955) and NDB (established in 1979), which were incorporated as development banks by Parliamentary Enactments, had played pivotal role in the development of Sri Lanka. These banks could venture into the local banks in the Sultanate and share their managerial intelligence by offering innovative products for the Micro and SME sectors, improving the total quality management to enhance the asset quality in this segment.

Finance and Leasing sector in Oman is also yet another area, where Sri Lankan counterparts could work in partnerships and reap mutual benefits. The technologically powerful Sri Lankan FLCs could promote the sector through door to door service approach, enabling the recipient's access to the financial services. As envisaged in the Vision 2040 statement, the development programmes of the Sultanate would create thousands of job opportunities to the well-educated

Sri Lankan skilled labour force, for which the banks in Sri Lanka should be ready to embrace the foreign currency remittances.

On the other hand, Sri Lankan financial institutions establishing their financial ties with their counterparts in Oman would also benefit channeling the funds of high net worth individuals and corporates into Sri Lanka.

The financial institutions in both countries can directly cater to such financial associations, such as Blue-Chip entities with a global presence, in order to invest and explore the opportunities that would be mutually beneficial. Further, such engagements will help to promote business ventures to take advantage of the economic and geographic benefits that both countries possess in terms of tax concessions, skilled labour, accessibility etc.

Accordingly, Sri Lankan banks could facilitate meeting points for their business community with the Omani counterparts and encourage business partnerships, from which both the countries could reap mutual benefits.

Open Banking and Tech-driven Service that transforms the banking and financial industry globally, would be a reality in the Sultanate in the near future. The multibillion dollar industry globally would empower the banks to collaborate with third party payment service and financial service providers to generate a smoother customer experience, using application programming interface. Sri Lankan banks may join hands with the financial giants in the Sultanate and create competitive edge over the other regional players."³¹⁶

Rakshitha Tudawe, Managing Director at Amrak Institute of Medical Sciences in

316 E-mail interview



As the maritime nations sharing the Indian Ocean as well as the founder members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Marine Affairs Committee (IOMAC), Sri Lanka and Oman are well poised to cooperate closely to nurture closer maritime economic and security cooperation.

Sri Lanka suggests the following as to their capacity in providing Healthcare Workers:

“Amrak Institute of Medical Sciences is one of the foremost premier providers of Nursing Professionals in Sri Lanka. The Institute aims to reshape allied health education which will allow bridging the human resources gap in the global healthcare arena. Amrak Institute is also partnered with the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust for the Clinical Fellowship Programme.

The Institute also trains professional nurses for placement opportunities in the United Kingdom.

With a commitment to excellence, Amrak Institute ensures that their healthcare professionals such as care givers undergo a rigorous acclimatisation program and an understanding of the workplace culture ahead of time so that the caregiver is well prepared with the right frame of mind to seamlessly adapt to the environment they are expected to work. Majority of the care givers have over a decade of experience. Nurses have state recognised

qualifications.

Care givers, nurses and allied health professionals are divided into various categories based on their area of specialisation namely neonatal, operation theatre, chemo and paediatric nurses. Furthermore, there are other categories such as Elderly Care Support Worker, Social caregivers and child caregivers. Amrak also provides training for more technical areas such as Operating Theatre Technician and Cardiac Care Technicians as well.³¹⁷

E. MARITIME COOPERATION

“Oman and Sri Lanka have been founding members of IORA.³¹⁸ Both Oman and Sri Lanka are strategically located in the Indian Ocean and with new and growing ports (Sohar, Salalah ports and the new Duqum ports in Oman and expansion of Colombo port and the new Hambantota port in Sri Lanka) that have direct access to this Ocean, making these countries potentially strong participants in the global trade network...”³¹⁹ suggests a research article contributed by a group of academics from the Department of Natural Resource

317 E-mail interview

318 Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)

319 “Trade Trends: Oman and Sri Lanka in Indian Ocean Rim Association” by Abdallah

Economics, College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences of the Sultan Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman.

Accordingly, the increasing significance of the Indian Ocean as the major supply route for the world's energy supplies and other commercial activities and regular movement of warships has made this region a focal point for all major powers. Hence, the outlook for the Indian Ocean economy is an increasingly important and topical. Indian Ocean is thus an important part of the global economy, and maritime trade has been crucial to its economic success.

As such, Sri Lanka and Oman are well poised to harness the emerging opportunities in maritime sector as they enjoy competitive advantage in international maritime trade by sharing the strategic location in the Indian Ocean.

Maritime Security

Sri Lanka and Oman could also play a vital role to ensure maritime security of the region in collaboration with the other relevant stakeholders. Sri Lanka has played a leading role in Indian Ocean Maritime Security by sponsoring the UNGA Resolution in 1971 on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace (IOPZ) and has always supported peaceful use of the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka promotes Indian Ocean to be a global, free and open, rules-based order.³²⁰ Sri Lanka also annually organises the Galle Dialogue and the Colombo Security Conclave with India and the Maldives and Bangladesh, Mauritius and Seychelles attending as observers.

Sri Lanka maintains that the freedom

of navigation and digital connectivity are important pillars for managing the Indian Ocean. In addition, Sri Lanka recognises that having safe, secure, clean and sustainably – managed oceans requires a foreign policy that encourages all States to use the oceans sustainably for economic benefit. In this context, Sri Lanka hosted landmark Track 1.5 Dialogue in October 2018 entitled 'The Indian Ocean: Defining Our Future'. This brought together littoral states as well as the major users of the Ocean, to discuss common issues they face.³²¹

Given Sri Lanka and the Sultanate are traditionally maintaining a foreign policy of "friendship with all and enmity with none", both countries could jointly work together in promoting peaceful and economically thriving Indian Ocean region.

Blue Economy

The blue economic sector which include fisheries & aquaculture, renewable oceanic energy, shipping, offshore hydrocarbons, seabed minerals, marine biotechnology research & development as well as maritime tourism, provides immense opportunities for both countries to collaborate. This platform could be utilised for shared opportunity and renewed sustainable growth in the Indian Ocean region.

In this context, Sri Lanka and Oman could also work under the framework of Oman's recent initiative, Maritime Confex held under the patronage of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources of Oman in March 2020 at the Oman Convention & Exhibition

Akintola, Houcine Boughanmi, Hemesiri Kotagama and Lokman Zaibet (December 2021) available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357449341_Trade_Trends_Oman_and_Sri_Lanka_in_Indian_Ocean_Rim_Association
320 Sri Lanka chaired the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea in 1973, which led to the adoption of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

321 <https://www.mfa.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/pdfresizer.com-pdf-resize-1.pdf>

Centre (OCEC). Oman Maritime Confex is a platform to connect various industries in this sphere to improve, discuss and exchange experiences with a view to sustainable utilisation of marine resources in terms of the blue economy.

Maritime Connectivity

Maritime transport is at the core of international trade in merchandises. Around 80 per cent of volume of goods exchanged in the world are transported via sea.³²² Seaports are important interfaces in the supply chain between sea and land transportations.

Against this backdrop, establishing closer and direct maritime connectivity between the two countries will serve as an impetus in achieving their ambitious targets in the development of their ports and logistics sectors.

Seaport Connectivity

In an increasingly globalised world, therefore, ports connectivity plays an essential role in international trade and economic development. As such, direct connectivity between the well-established ports of Sri Lanka and Oman which have unique geographical locations in the Indian Ocean and in the Arabian Sea respectively, could create a major trans-shipment hub for their respective regions.

Expert Opinion

Ashan Silva, Business Manager to Gulf Agency Company (Oman) LLC at the Port of Sohar of Oman suggests:

“Colombo Port could act as a trans-shipment hub for India east coast, Bangladesh and for far east and same time Port of Sohar, can act as a trans-shipment hub for Persian Gulf (Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia) being at the gate of Homuz strait for the cargo volumes which are directing towards Persian Gulf and vice versa”³²³

Given the importance of seaports for international trade, this chapter provides details and capacities of the major ports in both countries by reproducing the information from the respective official website of each port.

Ports in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is endowed with natural harbours that were trading hubs during different periods of time, such as Manthai (3rd century BCE to 11th CE) in the northwest, Godawaya (1st century BCE to 10th CE) in the south, and Gokanna in the east.³²⁴

Sri Lanka has four international ports namely Colombo³²⁵, Galle³²⁶, Trincomalee³²⁷ and Hambantota³²⁸ Ports, as well as three domestic ports namely Kankesanthurai, Oluvil and Point Pedro. The Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA)³²⁹ manages all seven ports.

Colombo Port

The recently published second edition of the Global Container Port Performance Index (CPPI) 2021 has ranked the Port of Colombo as the most efficient port in South Asia and the Indian Sub-Continent, 3rd in

322 UNCTAD, 2008

323 Personal interview

324 Post Graduate Institute of Archaeology, 'International Trade with Lanka, from Ancient Times', (3 February 2011), available at: <http://lakdiva.org/muse04/exhibit/start.html> , [accessed on: June 2016].

325 <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/colombo>

326 <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/galle>

327 <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/trincomalee>

328 <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/hip>

329 <https://www.slpa.lk/>

the Indian Ocean rim and 22nd among 370 ports globally. The ranking was developed by the World Bank and S&P Global Market Intelligence and Financial Services.³³⁰

Colombo Port is a rapidly growing maritime hub of the South Asia Region. Cargo originating from and destined to Europe, East and South Asia, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa is conveniently and efficiently connected through the Colombo Port. The Colombo Port is primarily a container port. In 2015, it handled about 5.1 million TEU of containerised cargo.³³¹ The Port's services consist mainly of handling containers, trans-shipment, and cargo. Sri Lanka is the main trans-shipment hub for the Indian Subcontinent and nearly 75 per cent of the traffic handled by the Colombo Port during the last five years was trans-shipment cargo.³³² Colombo Port focuses on the container trans-shipment largely for the textile industry³³³ Sri Lanka also provides a multitude of shipping related services including crew changes, supplying and replenishing victuals and water through its network of major ports in the Western, Eastern and Southern Sri Lanka connecting the international east-west shipping route.³³⁴ Such services may also provide a competitive price for the importers and exporters who are involved in direct trade. Therefore, it would be beneficial for a shipping line which considers trans-shipment at the Port of Colombo.

Galle Port

Galle Port is located in Galle, south-

western coast of Sri Lanka. Currently Galle port serves as one of the most active regional ports in the country and it is also the only Sri Lankan port that provides facilities for pleasure yachts. International yacht societies have recognised Galle harbour as one of the world's best attractions for yachting.³³⁵

Galle harbour was a major harbour in the country, which was in use even during the pre-Christian times, but gained importance after the 12th century. Galle has a strong position in services to main line vessels on the East-West trade route, due to its convenient location near the maritime trade lane.³³⁶

Trincomalee Port

Trincomalee harbour is the second best natural harbour in the world and the available water and land area is about 10 times as much as the Port of Colombo. Trincomalee was tentatively identified to cater for bulk and break bulk cargo and port related industrial activities including heavy industries, tourism and agriculture etc. At present Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) is in the process to re-develop Trincomalee as a metropolis growth centre. SLPA has completed zoning plan to utilise the huge amount of existing unutilised land under its jurisdiction on the outcome of the analysis with the other sectors of the development, such as Urban Development Authority (UDA), Board of Investment (BOI), and Tourist Board etc. SLPA plans to advertise internationally and locally to call for proposals from potential

330 <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/66e3aa5c3be4647add01845ce353992-0190062022/original/Container-Port-Performance-Index-2021.pdf>

331 <https://www.sipa.lk/port-colombo/colombo>

332 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/edb/trade-hub-sri-lanka/>

333 Ibid

334 Ibid

335 <https://www.sipa.lk/port-colombo/galle>

336 Ibid



investors.

Hambantota Port

Hambantota Port is located very close proximity to the major international east-west shipping route and well positioned at a strategic location on maritime gateway to India. Large number of ships passes Sri Lanka daily along this shipping route and creates good business opportunities for providing services like supply of fuel, water, crew change in addition to the usual port operations.³³⁷ On domestic trade perspectives, it is better positioned with direct roadway connection to the southern, central and eastern areas of the island and serves Southern half of the island through linking with the Central and Eastern province by roads.³³⁸

Hambantota Port provides services mainly for vehicle trans-shipment. Japanese, Korean and Indian car makers use the Hambantota for trans-shipping vehicles built in India, Thailand, Japan and China to markets in Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas.³³⁹

Ashan Silva further observes:

“In addition, Hambantota port is acting

as one of the major RO RO transshipment ports in the region. Gulf ports and Sohar port receiving significant RO RO volume via Hambantota (For 2022 Jan till May RO RO Volume from Hambantota to Gulf, average 3250 units per month & Hambantota to Sohar, average 100 units per month) indicating the importance of maritime connectivity.³⁴⁰

Ports in Oman

As a part of Oman’s Vision 2040 to diversify its economy away from the hydrocarbon and improve the overall quality of sea trade, the government has invested heavily in developing its seaport infrastructure. Oman has 3 seaports and 2 industrial ports, with every port adding value to the business environment of the country.

Port of Duqm³⁴¹

The Port of Duqm is part of the ambitious SEZAD project (Special Economic Zone Authority of Duqm) in the Sultanate of Oman. It was established with the objective of diversifying the economy, the port is a Greenfield project and is fast emerging as a hub of economic activity due to its central location. Overlooking the Arabian

337 <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/hip>

338 Ibid

339 <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/edb/trade-hub-sri-lanka/>

340 Email interview

341 <https://www.portofduqm.om/About/Port-of-Duqm>

Sea and the Indian Ocean beyond, the Port of Duqm with its deep draft, lengthy quay walls, and expansive basin is a world-class, multipurpose commercial gateway and is poised to become one of the largest ports of the region in the near future.

The Port of Duqm is being developed into an integrated, multimodal logistics hub, encompassing maritime links, a well-connected road network, and a fully operational airport and railway system making it a strategic strong hold. The Free-Trade Agreements (FTAs) with USA and Singapore add further appeal to the Sultanate of Oman being an investment destination for global investors.

Port of Salalah³⁴²

Port of Salalah recognised globally as a leading transshipment hub positioned among the world's top ports,³⁴³ continues to play a vital role in the economic future of the Sultanate of Oman. The port is partly owned and managed by APM Terminals.

The port is strategically located at the major East-West Shipping Lane and it is viewed as the region's best located port in order to access the Middle East, Indian Subcontinent and East Africa. Port of Salalah is a made up of a Container Terminal with seven berths of up to 18m draft and a General Cargo Terminal of twelve berths of up to 16m draft, with infrastructure to handle the world's largest container vessels, as well as bulk cargo, bunkering and warehousing.

Port of Salalah provides the fastest connection between the Indian Ocean basin and throughout the entire East African-Indian Gulf with the main trade lanes of Asia and Europe. This makes it advantageous

for major shipping lines to use Salalah as a hub for their regional networks and thereby saves cost.

Further, the multibillion dollar railway project, which has been conceived as part of the wider GCC rail network, will open up huge prospects for freight forwarding through the Port of Salalah. As a superhighway for rail-based freight, the network will enhance connectivity between Salalah and the major population centres and markets of the GCC. When the network comes into service Salalah has the potential to become a major gateway to the GCC for fast moving consumer goods and other high value commodities.

The Salalah Free Zone adjacent to the Port, offers zero corporate tax for 30 years and 100 per cent foreign ownership possibilities. The Salalah Airport is just 15 minutes away and is under expansion for both cargo capacity and direct destination links.

Sohar Port³⁴⁴

Sohar Port and Free zone is a deep-sea Port and Free zone in the Sultanate of Oman, joint venture between the Port of Rotterdam and the Sultanate of Oman. Hutchison Port Sohar is the container terminal operator at Sohar Port.

The Port hosts more than 3,000 vessel calls each year with a gross registered tonnage of around 85 million. It is also one of the fastest-growing port operations world-wide, offering variety of added value services and home to Oman's first-ever terminal dedicated to the handling of agricultural bulk, i.e. the food zone which offers the region's first dedicated agro bulk terminal with integrated facilities for food manufacturing, packaging,

342 <https://www.salalahport.com.om/index.php?lang=en&name=Whoper cent20weper cent20are&itemid=65>

343 Port of Salalah was ranked 6th amongst 351 ports globally by the World Bank report on Container Port Performance Index (CPPI 2020)

344 <https://soharportandfreezone.com/en/who-we-are/about-sohar>



and food logistics.³⁴⁵ Sohar is at the heart of global trade routes connecting Europe and Asia. The Port is a 21 million sqm deep-sea hub comprising three established major clusters – logistics, petrochemicals and metals.

The port is within two weeks sail of all major global ports, enabling swift access to the rapidly growing markets of the GCC, India and East-Africa. Sohar Port and its adjacent Freezone host entire supply chains, from production to delivery in one connected and easily accessible area. Sohar offers swift access to the growing Middle East, Indian and east-African markets.³⁴⁶ Recent opening of a land border between Oman and Saudi Arabia closer to the Port of Sohar in addition to its land border with UAE, facilitates to connect the cargo via land.

Proposal on Direct Feeder Service between Sohar and Colombo

The existence of a direct maritime connection has been recognised to play an important role in determining trade costs. Given the strategic location and importance of Sohar Port and the adjacent Freezone as world's fastest-growing port and free zone

which lies at the center of global trade routes between Asia and Europe, the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman initiated a proposal for the establishment of a direct container/ feeder service between the port of Sohar and the port of Colombo with a view to creating a major trans-shipment hub for their respective regions. Such a direct service will help to avoid long delays in transshipment time, space issues and high cost in third destinations.

To initiate discussions on this proposal the Embassy organised a series of brainstorming virtual meetings between the relevant stakeholders in both countries. Sri Lanka Ports Authority has agreed, in principle, to facilitate berthing of a vessels at the Port of Colombo under this proposal and the Omani Shipping Company expressed interest in the proposal subject to the availability of sufficient volume of cargo. Hutchison Ports Sohar has also agreed in principle to facilitate such a service.

Expert Opinion

Ashan Silva³⁴⁷ observes the following on this proposal:

“Maritime is one of the core industries where both the countries are focusing upon. It will create a great value to the world trade if we can connect those two valuable strategically important locations to exchange their maritime values.

Colombo can act as a trans-shipment hub for the cargo routing towards India east coast, Bangladesh and far-east from gulf region. Same time Sultanate of Oman can act as a trans-shipment hub for Persian Gulf being at the gate of Homuz strait for the cargo volumes which are directing towards

³⁴⁵ Ibid

³⁴⁶ Ibid

³⁴⁷ E-mail interview with Ahsan Silva, Business Manager to the Gulf Agency Company (Oman) LLC DBA (ABD) at the Port of Sohar

Persian Gulf via Homuz and mean time said main lines can pick their Persian gulf cargo without diverting their east bound voyage plan towards PG.

This will save significant transit time and cost for their intended east and west bound voyages. As per distance table Colombo is 1720Nm away from Oman (Sohar) and for a vessel with a speed of 18kts can reach to port of Colombo within 4 days and vice versa.

By using these unique geographical positions within Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, Sri Lanka and Sultanate of Oman can exchange their volumes to betterment of shipping trade.

This will be a huge contribution towards the world trade to control their present bottlenecks in supply chain and support all related countries to control some of their trade barriers and inflation levels.”³⁴⁸

To activate this viable proposal, ways and means need to be explored for generating sufficient volume of cargo. A similar arrangement of direct feeder service that has been proposed between the Port of Colombo and the Port of Chittagong of Bangladesh is noteworthy and could be linked to this proposal too.

Since Sri Lanka’s proximity to the Indian sub-continent and a gateway to a market of 1.3 billion people and Oman is the first point of entry to the growing markets of MENA, Indian subcontinent, and Africa, Sri Lanka and Oman are perfectly positioned to serve logistics sector by linking global supply chains.

As such, Sri Lanka and Oman need to actively facilitate regular interactions between the relevant authorities in both countries with a view to developing mutually beneficial initiatives, private sector awareness and partnership by creating

mutual economic opportunities. Further, exchange of professional knowledge by maritime sector professionals in both the countries will also add value to develop the industry and related policies within their respective countries more effectively and efficiently.

In this context, a comprehensive action plan in maritime cooperation through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) could be agreed upon by both the countries covering areas of mutual interest for joint execution such as international and regional Maritime Transport opportunities, container feeder services, gas and new energy projects, commercial and technical management of vessels, port support services, dry-dock and related services, offshore support services, etc.

As members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), both Sri Lanka and Oman could engage in joint venture projects under IORA framework in the areas such as maritime safety, security, and fisheries management. Both countries could also cooperate in ensuring safe sea routes in the region and countering issues such as human smuggling, piracy, and drug trafficking.

Expert Opinion:

T.Z.A. Samsudeen, who was the first Executive Director of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) and former senior diplomat of Sri Lanka, observes:

“Sri Lanka and Oman are pioneer members of the IORA. Both countries have immensely contributed to the Association by providing their leadership in the past.

During her chairmanship the Sultanate of Oman was very active in strengthening cooperation in Fisheries Management

and the Blue Economy as they were critical in ensuring food security as well as conservation of fish stocks. The Sultanate hosted several workshops related to fisheries sector and were keen to explore investment opportunities in the fishery development such as establishing fish farms for commercial exploitation and for conservation. They set up the IOR Fisheries Support Unit (FSU) in Oman which resulted in presenting several technical level evaluation and research papers related to the impact of overfishing as well as climate change which had contributed to the acceleration of reduction of major fish stocks within the Indian Ocean region while cautioning how it could impact on the lives of millions of people engaged in this sector in and around the Indian Ocean both directly and indirectly. Sri Lanka is a regular and active participant at the FSU workshops. The Sultanate was also actively involved in the IOR-ARC initiatives on development of trade and was keen to develop business ties with other Member States.

Oman hosted the first meeting in 2007 to draft a framework to set up a free trade agreement amongst the willing countries among whom Sri Lanka was one of the active participants.

Given Sri Lanka and Oman have strong commitment to the objectives of the IORA and they are traditionally active participants in its programme of actions, both countries could jointly work in harnessing the new opportunities that are unfolding under the framework of the IORA.³⁴⁹

F. ENERGY COOPERATION

To benefit from the competitive advantage that Sri Lanka and Oman blessed with their natural strategic locations, both countries

could also explore opportunities for collaboration in energy sector.

As an oil and gas exporting country, Oman could utilise the strategic location of Sri Lankan ports and emerging Economic Zones in Sri Lanka for establishing oil refineries and gas storages. Joint-ventures in this sector would be mutually beneficial and offer win-win situations. Such a joint-venture project for an oil refinery in Mirijjawila Economic Processing Zone (EPZ) in Hambantota, South of Sri Lanka, was initiated under the purview of the Board of Investment (BOI) of Sri Lanka. Former Minister of Oil and Energy of the Sultanate of Oman H.E. Mohammed bin Hamad Al Rumhy visited Sri Lanka in March 2019 and participated together with the former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Hon. Ranil Wickremesinghe in laying foundation stone for the project.

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman also mooted discussions with the relevant stakeholders in Oman on a proposal to establish possible storage facility for LPG in Sri Lanka. This proposal was also further discussed during the visit of Trade Minister of Sri Lanka to Oman in March 2022. Such proposals could be pursued in the future and a business model could be worked out between the two countries on G2G basis.

Plans are also afoot in Sri Lanka to build LNG based power plants and Oman may seize these opportunities to supply Natural Gas to such plants.

Sri Lanka has also proposed establishment of a “State of the Art” Accredited Testing Laboratory for independent testing of petroleum products, Lubricant and Bitumen, etc. in Sri Lanka in collaboration with the Sultanate of Oman, under the agenda of Political Consultations between the two

349 E-mail interview

Foreign Ministries. Such useful proposals could be followed up under the future rounds of consultations.

Renewable Energy

Renewable energy is a promising sector for collaboration between the two countries. Sri Lanka's position as a tropical country, has led to the presence of high renewable energy resource potentials. Solar, wind, biomass and hydro are the proven resources being commercially developed at present.

Renewable energy resources are a type of natural resources owned by the public, and any development of the particular resource needs to be done in order to meet the needs of the public.

With the establishment of Sri Lanka Sustainable Energy Authority (SLSEA) through Act No. 35 2007, SLSEA³⁵⁰ becomes the custodian of the renewable energy resources, and thus SLSEA is the focal national entity for implementing renewable energy development programmes in the country.³⁵¹

Renewable Energy Resource Development Plan mainly focuses on projects that will be connected to the national electricity grid at high voltage (132 kV) level.³⁵²

Private Sector investors are invited to set up renewable energy projects in Sri Lanka including Solar, Wind and Biomass and supply electrical energy to the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB). A number of Government projects have been advertised in this sector for foreign investments which could be accessed at the following official

website provided as a footnote.³⁵³

The recent amendments³⁵⁴ to the Sri Lanka Electricity Act No. 20 of 2009 which were passed by the Parliament of Sri Lanka on 9th June 2022, allow any person to apply for the issue of a generation license to generate electricity. This is to encourage foreign direct investments (FDIs) as well as opportunities to local developers to participate in the Renewable Energy Plans.

Shumookh Investment and Services S.A.O.C. of Oman has submitted an investment proposal to the Government of Sri Lanka for the development of a 100 MW Solar Park in Siyabalanduwa in Sri Lanka.

Oman Vision 2040 and the National Energy Strategy aims at deriving at least 30 per cent of electricity from renewables by 2030. Oman has embarked on many projects in line with its goal to generate 30 per cent of its electricity from renewables.

These projects include a wind farm in Dhofar; two solar IPPs in Manah; 11 solar-diesel hybrid facilities; and the 'Sahim' initiative to install small-scale solar panels on residential and commercial buildings, among others.³⁵⁵

As such, energy sector is a high potential area to forge Sri Lanka and Oman partnership at Government to Government (G2G) as well as Public Private Partnership (PPP) levels. The prospective proposals suggested in the preceding paragraphs could be closely pursued and effectively implemented sooner than later to reap mutual benefits.

350 <https://www.energy.gov.lk/>

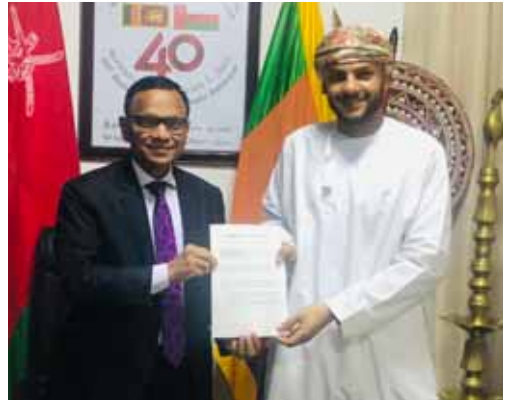
351 Draft Renewable Energy Resource Development Plan 2021-2026 prepared by the Sri Lanka Sustainable Energy Authority (SLSEA)

352 http://powermin.gov.lk/english/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Renewable-Energy-Resource-Development-Plan_E1.pdf

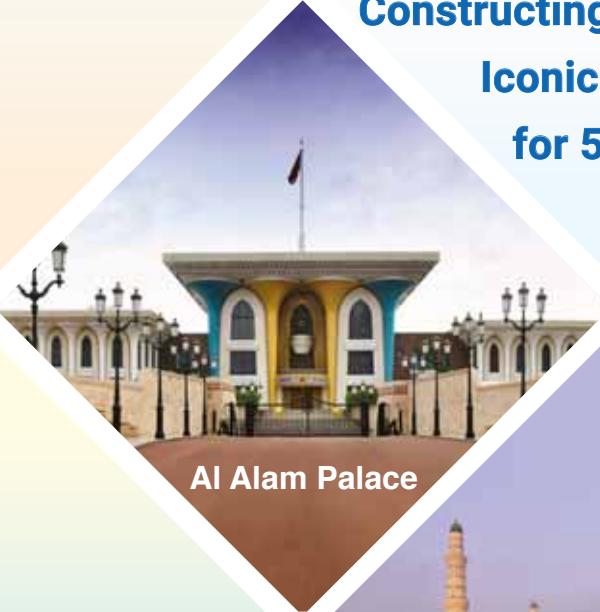
353 <https://www.energy.gov.lk/>

354 http://documents.gov.lk/files/bill/2022/5/203-2022_E.pdf

355 <https://www.trade.gov/market-intelligence/omans-renewable-energy-projects>



**Trusted Legacy of
Excellence in
Constructing & Maintaining
Iconic Projects
for 50 Years**



Al Alam Palace



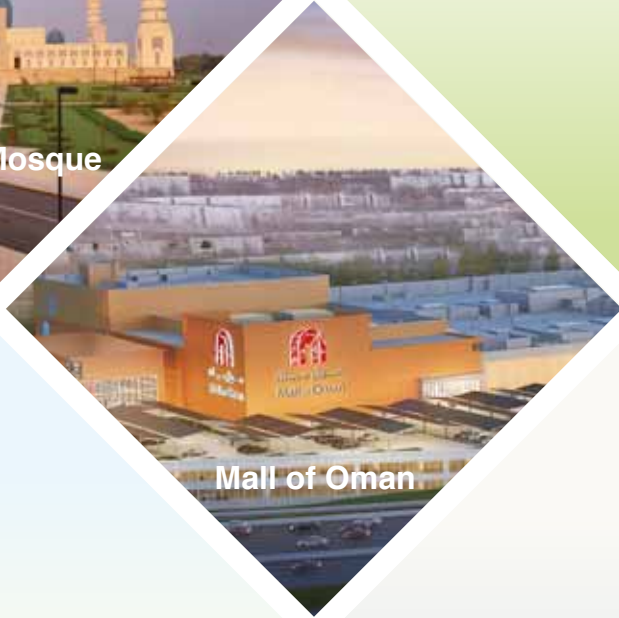
**Oman Across Ages
Museum**



Sohar Mosque



**Oman Convention &
Exhibition Centre**



Mall of Oman

Oman Shapoorji Company LLC
Tel: +968 24 590 297, oscomct@omantel.net.om,
www.shapoorji.in, www.omanshapoorji.com



MILCRIS – PROVIDING THE ESSENTIAL LINK

MILCRIS is pioneered in bridging the essential link among the client, the design engineer and the contractor in the construction activities. Milcris - Oman, which is a chartered cost consultancy, QS consultancy firm, certified by ISO 9001:2015 and regulated by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), is a company that ensures their client's resources are utilised to the best advantage through prudent financial control and project management from initialisation to completion.

MOST PREFERRED

In other words, Milcris understands the need for value that customers face against today's rapidly developing construction industry. And that is why it is becoming the most preferred quantity surveying and cost consultancy service provider in the region.

LEGACY OF MILCRIS

The legacy of Milcris in Oman unfolded in 2007 when it managed to bag the complete cost/QS consultancy services of the Muscat and Salalah International Airports Development Project (MISA). With this entry, Milcris was soon able to draw many other clients in the Sultanate, who did not hesitate to place their projects in the able hands of the company's qualified and experienced quantity surveyors.



Millan De Silva, Founder

100TH LANDMARK

The reputation of Milcris sparked in no time and by 2012 Milcris' project list crossed the 100th landmark, garnering projects from many sectors such as commercial, residential, infrastructure, education, health sector, hospitality and marine.

VISIONARY AND DEDICATED LEADERSHIP

The company owes this success to its visionary and dedicated leaders and the devoted and highly qualified professionals in the Milcris family. It is fitting to mention the name of Mr Millan De Silva, the first and former CEO of Milcris, who laid its foundation and brought it to the heights that it is enjoying now.



Following the same dedicated path is the current leader, Mr Sunil Ponnampereuma, an equally proactive and committed professional, who is ably steering Milcris towards success and glory.

A COMPANY THAT CARES

Milcris, which has its head office in Panadura, Sri Lanka, has pioneered employee care. The 300 plus employees who have been with Milcris at varying amounts of time would vouch for the same. The employees form a diverse pool, hailing from Europe, Africa and other Asian subcontinents. Milcris Oman has 65 employees with a 35 per cent Omanisation rate. Being true to their Sri Lankan identity, Milcris continues to be a caring employer to many Sri Lankan quantity surveyors, who find a home away home at Milcris.

225 PROJECTS AT OMR3.8BN

The company has provided and continues to provide its expertise to more than 225 projects in the Sultanate. Currently, they are handling projects worth a total value of OMR3.8 billion, which includes a mix of mega scale projects such as airports, seaports, museums and smaller projects like star class hotels, town developments, infrastructure, hospitals, clinics, residential, commercial and mixed use properties etc.

Milcris provides its services to a range of clients such as government sector clients (ministries, consular offices, municipalities, royal offices) private sector investors, hoteliers, real estate developers,

The reputation of Milcris sparked in no time and by 2012 Milcris' project list crossed the 100th landmark, garnering projects from many sectors such as commercial, residential, infrastructure, education, health sector, hospitality and marine.



Sunil Ponnampereuma, CEO

bankers, financial institutions, other consultants, contractors, etc. Beyond its strict work ethic and professional delivery of its services, Milcris has managed to build a strong and long-lasting relationship with its clients.

SINGULAR VISION

Guided by a singular vision, the company is dedicated to commercial and contract management of construction

projects and delivering value for money to their clients in accordance with acceptable international quality levels.

Being a company with a Sri Lankan identity, Milcris will continue to keep the flag of their beloved nation flying high.

Milcris builds relationships beyond measure.



Deshamanya Harry Jayawardena
Chairman



Dr. Parakrama Dissanayake
Deputy Chairman & MD



“ *On the momentous occasion, Aitken Spence wishes the two great nations a progressive march forward to strengthening bilateral relations and greater synergies for future cooperation.* ”



	HOTELS		AIRLINE GSA		FREIGHT FORWARDING & COURIER		INTEGRATED LOGISTICS		MARITIME & FREIGHT LOGISTICS		TOURISM
	DESTINATION MANAGEMENT		PLANTATIONS APPAREL MANUFACTURE		PRINTING & PACKAGING POWER GENERATION		MARITIME & PORT SERVICES AIRLINE GSA (CARGO)		SERVICES		INSURANCE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT
	STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS		ELEVATOR AGENCY MONEY TRANSFER SERVICES		TOURISM		MARITIME & FREIGHT LOGISTICS		TOURISM		TOURISM

4 SECTORS 16 BUSINESSES 12,500+ EMPLOYEES 8 COUNTRIES




Aitken Spence PLC | 315 Vauxhall Street, Colombo 2, Sri Lanka | Tel: +94 11 2308 308 | Website: aitkenspence.com

Follow us



Curating inspired travel experiences



Aitken Spence Hotels
www.aitkenspencehotels.com

Badr Al Samaa four A's secret to success

BADR Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, Oman's and perhaps the region's most trusted private sector healthcare brand, has reached this enviable state thanks to its four underlying attributes: affordability, availability, accessibility and accreditation (AAAA).

The four AAAAs have been Badr Al Samaa's open secret of its unparalleled success. And if the journey of the group began in its humble beginnings as a small polyclinic in 2002, today it is the largest private sector healthcare group in the Sultanate.

A HOUSEHOLD NAME IN OMAN

Due credit must be given to the dynamic trio of Abdul Latheef, Dr P A Mohammed and Dr V T Vinod, who made their collective dream, of providing the best private healthcare at an affordable rate to all, come true. The three founder directors began Badr Al Samaa as a small polyclinic in Ruwi and despite the challenges that they faced, it still rose to gigantic heights and today it is a household name in Oman.

From Oman, the group spread its wings to other countries in the region, including Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar. Badr Al Samaa renders quality healthcare services

in more than 25 specialities with the help and support of over 700 professional doctors and 3000 staff at its 14 medical centres and seven hospitals.

HEALTHCARE TO ALL IN NEED

Badr Al Samaa's healthcare services are affordable to all. By reaching out to more and more people, accessibility is ensured. And with new medical centres

and hospitals availability of services and facilities is ensured at every location.

The unprecedented



growth of Oman's private healthcare segment and the demand for specialised care has increased the entry of many private players in the Sultanate. But, Badr Al Samaa has continued to sustain its growth momentum and leadership by providing quality healthcare and

compassionate services at affordable price to thousands in the region and making all speciality

services available.

PATIENTS ARE BADR AL SAMAA'S AMBASSADORS

Prompt and quality services has been the cornerstone of Badr Al Samaa Group's success story and patients who have enjoyed the care and successful treatment at the hospitals and clinics serve as the group's goodwill ambassadors.





Celebrating 20 years of Affordable, Accessible, Available & Accredited Quality Healthcare Services

AFFORDABLE
Improved Quality but Constant Price Since Years

ACCESSIBLE
13 Centres across Oman and Counting All major specialities available under our clinical ambit

AVAILABLE
All major Specialities

ACCREDITED
Quality approved by JCI (USA) & ACHSI (Australia)

Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals “AAAA” promise

مجموعة مستشفيات ومستوصفات بدر الساماء
BADR AL SAMAA
GROUP OF HOSPITALS AND POLYCLINICS
More Than Healthcare ... Humane Care



Ruwi | Al Khoud | Al Khuwair | Barka | Salalah | Nizwa | Falaj | Suhar | Sur | Suwaiq | Duqm | Mabella

Oman | UAE | Bahrain | Kuwait
www.badralsamaahospitals.com | wecare@badralsamaahospitals.com



Regular in-house training programmes are held for the group's various department staff to ensure that sustainable and quality healthcare services are delivered and having the most-advanced technological knowhow and equipment combined with expertise ensures the best in diagnostic, curative as well as preventive aspects of healthcare.

All six hospitals of the group are accredited by either JCI (USA) or ACHSI (Australia), the world's top quality accreditation bodies for healthcare.

QUALITY BENCHMARKED WITH GLOBAL STANDARDS

The hospital has also raised the quality of services on par with world standards. The group's commitment towards superior quality in-patient care and public trust is evident in the various recognitions that the hospital have received, including the accreditation by the Joint Commission International (JCI) USA to its hospitals in Ruwi and Al Khoudh.

The hospitals in Nizwa, Barka, Salalah and Sohar are accredited by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards International (ACHSI), Australia. The hospitals are also accredited by Patient Safety Friendly Hospital Initiative (PSFHI) by the Ministry of Health and World Health Organisation (WHO). Badr Al Samaa was honoured by the Ministry of Health for best practices in infection control and hand hygiene across its 13 establishments. Exceptional patient service coupled with global quality standards helped Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals to win Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award for five consecutive years (2016-2021).



The group has currently six state-of-the-art hospitals and four medical centres, located in Ruwi, Al Khuwair, Al Khoudh, Suwaiq, Sohar, Barka, Sur, Salalah, Nizwa, Falaj al Qabail, Mabella and Duqm.

ADVANCES IN HEALTHCARE

The group has gone from strength to strength, and this is also reflected in its impressive launch of many advanced facilities. And many more are also in the pipeline:

- **Robotic surgery:** The technology will ensure less risk of infection and blood loss, faster recovery, better clinical outcome and engaging clinical expertise from any part of the world.

The final implementation is subject to the approval of the ministry of health.

- **Cath labs:** After establishing a name for introducing interventional cardiology in Muscat region, Badr Al Samaa is now setting up an advanced cath lab in their flagship hospital in Sohar.

- **In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF):** The group is joining hands with a leading Indian IVF chain -- Seeds of Innocence (SOI) -- for setting up an advanced IVF lab in Muscat.

- **Oncology:** Badr Al Samaa has joined hands with Karkinos, India for setting up an advanced oncology centre in Muscat. Viability study of establishing PET CT and Proton Therapy is on the way too.

- **Cardiac MRI:** After the first of its kind MRI with Cardiac MRI facility in Ruwi, the group has recently setup more such Cardiac MRIs in other parts of country like Sohar and Salalah.



40

CELEBRATING GLORIOUS YEARS OF SRI LANKA – OMAN DIPLOMATIC TIES



On this momentous occasion,
Lulu Group wishes two great nations continued
co-operation and strengthening of bilateral
relations in the years to come.



**LULU
HYPER
MARKET
COM**

SHOP ONLINE

DOWNLOAD LULU APP



Download on the
App Store

GET IT ON
Google Play

Lulu  **Where the world comes to shop,
safely!**

لولو
حيث يأتي العالم للتسوق.
بأمان!

Lulu Group – at the cusp of exciting developments in new areas

Global retail conglomerate Lulu Group is at the cusp of several exciting and challenging developments in many new and uncharted areas.

LARGEST RETAILER IN OMAN

The future of Lulu, which has grown to become the largest retailer in Oman with 29 stores spread across the country with a combined floor space of 500,000 square metres, is based on the tenets of the clear framework and roadmap laid out by its visionary leaders, a spokesperson said.

“The group has invested a great deal in innovation, customer centricity, digital disruption, sense of purpose and agility, which will form the backbone of its pursuit of being the leader in the global marketplace in the years to come.”

SOPHISTICATED VEGETABLE EXPORTING FACILITY IN SRI LANKA

Globally, while there has been a surge of operations for the Lulu Group with its 235 stores spread over 22 countries and 57,000 plus people on its rolls, it is worthwhile to note that we have one of the most sophisticated fresh vegetable exporting facility in Sri Lanka, Y.A.S. Lanka (Pvt) Ltd., that caters to the requirements of all the Lulu stores across the world, the spokesman noted.

READY TO SPREAD ITS WINGS

The multinational conglomerate, a Dubai-based company, which was started in 2000 by the Kerala (Thrissur) born M.A. Yusuff Ali, with a massive presence in the UAE and Gulf countries, is all set to spread its wings



to many other countries.

Excerpts:

Lulu has achieved a successful presence in Oman for the last so many years. The group is a force to reckon with in the retail business arena in Oman and have only gone from strength to strength. What has been the biggest driving force of the leaders in the company and how have the employees of Lulu responded to their call to outperform the best in the market?

The constant pursuit for customer recognition leading to customer satisfaction has been the core philosophy of the group. The management and staff have followed the dynamics needed to be upto this task in this competitive business world and stay ahead of the curve. Today’s customers stay loyal to brands that offer great shopping experiences. Today’s consumers have limitless options which is a reason why businesses find it hard to attract prospective customers. As a result, we go to great lengths in keeping our existing customers happy and building a strong relationship.

What are the main goals of Lulu in Oman today and how close is the group



in its bid to achieve this/these goal/goals?

At the heart of our vision, we have embarked on an aggressive outreach programme, which envisages a store presence at not so far off locations for the population. We are constantly identifying possible geographies with different store formats to cater to the needs of the local community. The fruition of these stores not only mean increased sales for us, but also actively helps in generating direct and indirect employment and income generation to the community it belongs.

Lulu has been on the forefront in rendering its topnotch services in the retail segment in Oman. What have been the biggest achievements to date? What are the key milestones that the Lulu group is proud of (in Oman)?

The story of Lulu in Oman is filled with positives to note that the populace has given us a pride of place in their heart, which is most humbling. Being one of the largest employers of Omanis in the private sector has been a very rewarding factor in our growth. Similarly, being recognised as the most preferred brand in the retail sector has been the result of our continuous learning and innovation.

Lulu has a presence in all the six AGCC states... how does Oman fare among them? How many countries, including the AGCC states, does LuLu have a

presence in? How many hypermarkets does LuLu have in Oman and in Sri Lanka?

Oman is a very much admired region in the scheme of the Lulu Group. We have grown to being the largest retailer in Oman with 29 stores spread across the geography with a combined floor space of 500, 000 square meters. In addition, we do have the state-of-the art logistic facility to support this mammoth operation. While there has been a surge of operations for the Lulu Group with its 230+ stores spread over 22 countries and 57,000 plus people on its rolls, it is worthwhile to note that we have one of the most sophisticated fresh vegetable exporting facility in Sri Lanka, established in 2017, that caters to the requirements of all the Lulu stores across the world.

What does the future of Lulu look globally?

Lulu Group is at the cusp of several exciting and challenging developments in many new and uncharted areas. The future of Lulu is based on the tenets of the clear framework and roadmap laid out by its visionary leaders. The group has invested a great deal in innovation, customer centricity, digital disruption, sense of purpose and agility, which will form the backbone of its pursuit of being the leader in the global marketplace in the years to come.

Oman on top with stability, growth and warmth: Lalan Middle East LLC (Oman) representative

OMAN'S steady economic growth, political stability and a warm, welcoming and traditional culture of its friendly people have long drawn other countries and diverse cultures to embrace these unique qualities of the Sultanate.

This has been further endorsed by the Oman representative of one of the foremost and largest business groups of Sri Lanka.

"Oman came on top in comparisons (with other countries in the region) thanks to its stability and the warm and welcoming nature of its people," noted Damith De Alwis, general manager/regional head, Lalan Middle East LLC and Lead Safety General Trading LLC. He was responding to a query on why their company chose the Sultanate in the region to set up their re-exporting plant of medical disposable gloves at the Sohar Port freezone, when he made the above comments.

"Oman is deeply rooted with its strong-trading history and we see the future trade roots to expand on this tradition and wanted to be apart of it," De Alwis added.

FAMILY-OWNED CONGLOMERATE

Lalan Group is an 80-plus-years-old Sri Lankan family-owned conglomerate of 52 companies in seven sectors, employing over 10,000 personnel and having businesses in over 105 countries. All of its operations are centered on its vertically integrated core business of rubber. The group also manufactures mattresses, pillows, rubber bands, and other products.



Damith De Alwis
*General Manager / Regional Head – Lalan Middle East
LLC & Lead Safety General Trading LLC*

CONTRIBUTE TO 2040 VISION

"Our group is 13,000 strong. We hope our facilities will provide job opportunities to Omanis. This will help inculcate new talents and traits and contribute to the 2040 vision of the Sultanate by contributing to Omani exports," De Alwis noted.

To serve birth and motherland

"It is a unique opportunity for me to drive this business in the Sultanate. And being born in Oman and being a Sri Lankan, it gives me great pleasure and pride to be able to contribute and serve my birthland and motherland at the same time," De Alwis enthused.

WHY OMAN

"We have been extremely successful and strong in Europe, North America and Oceania regions but the Middle East and Africa were areas where we still had to grow to our potential. We started looking at having our footprint in the region in 2018 and Oman came on top in comparisons to the rest because of its stability; the warm and welcoming culture of the Omani people and the close relationship to Africa through Zanzibar and Tanzania and its land reach to the two most populated markets (Saudi and Yemen) and also the trade hub of the region, Dubai," De Alwis further noted.

Excerpts:

The Lalan Group made an entry into Oman via Lalan Rubbers (pvt) Ltd, Sri Lanka's largest gloves' manufacturing company, for setting up its re-exporting plant of medical disposable gloves at the Sohar Port freezone. Has the Lalan Group managed to achieve a successful presence in Oman in this short period?

Yes we are more than pleased with the progress we have managed to achieve in a span of less than three years. Starting with a general trading license to gain market insight, we managed to build relationships with key players in the Middle East and now have progressed to setting up our surgical packing and sterilisation plant as well. It has been very rewarding and encouraging, to say the least.

While your group's entry to Oman is just recent, you already have presence in four other countries (other than Oman and of course in your own home country) and conducting business in over 105 countries. The company is a name and a

force to reckon with in the international business arena -- what has been the biggest driving force of the leaders in the company and how have the employees responded to their call to outperform the best in the markets of the world?

We are a family-owned business and we bring this same family culture into our business as well and the team shares the same passion to be the best at whatever we do. We have a family hierarchy and our chairman is very much hands-on working together with us to build on the legacy that started back in 1940. We are blessed with a workforce that has great pride in what they do and is willing to go above and beyond their scope to delight our customers. This has earned us the prestige of being voted the top 50 Great Place To Work (Sri Lanka) as well.

Do you expect Lalan to be at the forefront of the company's re-exporting business here in Oman? What are the company's goals in this respect (in Oman)?

We have already opened our second general trading company in Oman with Sohar Freezone focusing from our end on B2C customers for our non-glove offerings. Oman has given us great confidence to invest more into the MENA (*) region and we would use the Sultanate as our hub for the whole region. We feel in the coming decade the Middle East and the MENA region have great growth potential, whilst the rest of the western and European regions will have a consolidated approach, considering current economic and geopolitical challenges. So we feel we are at the right time at the right place to capitalise on this opportunity.



Great Place To Work (Sri Lanka) as well.

Although it is a short period, what has been the biggest landmark thus far for Lalan in Oman?

Being able to win the confidence of key institutes and players in the market to form joint venture(s) and build on our advantage in the region.

Lalan Group has a presence in four other countries, but with regard to the AGCC states, it only has a presence in Oman? What was the reason for choosing Oman?

We have been extremely successful and strong in Europe, North America and Oceania regions but the Middle East and Africa were areas we had to grow to our potential. We started looking at having our footprint in the region in 2018 and Oman came on top in comparisons to the rest because of its stability; the warm and welcoming culture of the Omani people and the close relationship to Africa through Zanzibar and Tanzania and its land reach to the two most populated markets (Saudi and Yemen) and also the trade hub of the region, Dubai. Oman is deeply rooted with its strong trading history and we see the future trade roots to expand on this tradition and wanted to be a part of it.

How has the company dealt with the recent (and continuing) presence of



the pandemic and has it affected the workings of the Lalan Group? If not, how did it manage to overcome the pandemic challenge?

The pandemic has been quite a bittersweet experience for us. It did pose many operational challenges, but it also opened up a demand drive for our gloves and disinfectants, which gave us the push we needed to make expansions and push our limits beyond known means. Once again it was our team that has made it all possible with their strong determination and grit to enable us to run our factories without any downtime. So we came on top of the pandemic and we had a far better experience with it than most companies.

What does the future of Lalan look like in Oman?

Very bright and very long! We are here to stay, grow and contribute. Oman will serve as our main hub for the majority of our trade business for the whole group.

() Middle East and Northern Africa*

Lalan Group | 8 Sectors of Integrated Expertise

Plantations

- | Rubber
- | Tea
- | Cinnamon
- | Spices
- | Other Crops

Gloves

- | Disposable
- | Household
- | Industrial
- | Surgical
- | Seamless Knitted

Value Added Rubber

- | Centrifuged Organic/FSC® Latex
- | Rubber Bands and Tubes
- | Pillows and Mattresses
- | Crepe Rubber/RSS

Renewable Energy

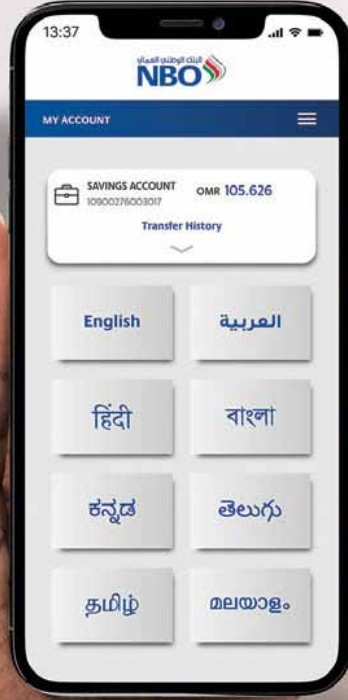
- | Sustainable Biomass
- | Wood Pellets
- | Wood Briquettes

© Lalan Rubbers (Pvt) Ltd | www.lalangroup.com

في أي وقت. أينما كنت.
ANYTIME. ANYWHERE.

الخدمات المصرفية
الإلكترونية
DIGITAL BANKING

We speak your language with **Instant Transfers**



Download the app today.



f @ y t nbo.om

البنك الوطني العماني
NBO



NATIONAL BANK OF OMAN INTRODUCES REMITTANCE SERVICES TO SRI LANKAN COMMUNITY

Striving to connect, build and grow with its customers every day, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) has introduced remittance services at the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat. As one of an expatriate's most important banking tasks, the NBO has made sending money home all the more accessible, convenient and affordable. The Sri Lankan community is now able to make transfers to friends and family using the bank's secure and approved international transfer network.

NBO - MEETING CUSTOMERS' NEEDS

With a growing number of countries including Sri Lanka as well as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Philippines, and Indonesia, the NBO's international remittance continues to meet its customers' distinct needs. With

competitive exchange rates in several currencies, customers can instantly send funds of up to OMR 7,500 from their account, anywhere and at any time, through the award-winning NBO Mobile App. Plus, the first instant transfer is free, and thereafter just OMR 1.500. The beneficiary will then receive the money on the same day, and where possible, instantly.

CONVENIENT, FAST AND EASY

Whether in person or through the app, the NBO's remittance services continue to offer convenient, fast and easy way to send money abroad, safely and securely.

More details about NBO's range of products and services can be found on www.nbo.om at any of the 60 branches located across the Sultanate, or by contacting the NBO Call Centre on +968 24770000.

About the author

Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad is a career diplomat and Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman and non-Resident Ambassador to the Republic of Yemen (2019 - 2022). He joined the Sri Lanka Foreign Service in 1998 and last served as the Head of Political Division of the East Asia and Pacific Affairs from 2015 - 2017 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka. His diplomatic assignments entailed in Singapore as Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to Singapore and Brunei Darussalam (Actg.), Deputy High Commission of Sri Lanka in Chennai, the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva and the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Riyadh. Ambassador Ameer Ajwad had served as the Coordinator/ Spokesperson for the Asian Group Experts of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) during the Institution Building (IB) process of the UNHRC from 2007 to 2008 in Geneva. He also chaired a formal meeting of the UNHRC Preparatory Committee, to negotiate a part of the Outcome Document of the UN Review Conference on the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) on Racism during his stint in Geneva in 2008. Ambassador Ameer Ajwad was selected as 'Person of the Year 2021' by World Growth Forum Magazine (WGF) for creating "milestones in diplomacy and bilateral relations." He holds Master's Degree in Laws (LL.M) from the University of Colombo and Bachelor's Degrees in Arts (BA) and Laws (LLB). He was admitted to the Bar as an Attorney-at-Law of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka in 1997.



"Sri Lanka and Oman maintain an all-weather friendship underpinned by mutual understanding, vibrant tradition of people-to-people contacts and strong diplomatic ties. The commemoration of the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations, is an occasion to be celebrated and to further consolidate our warm and friendly ties. I am pleased to convey a message on the publication of a book on 'Sri Lanka – Oman Relations: Past, Present, and Future' authored by Ambassador Ameer Ajwad, coinciding with the commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman."

Prof. G.L. Peiris, M.P., Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka

"The book titled 'Sri Lanka – Oman Relations: Past, Present, and Future' penned by none other than the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, Ameer Ajwad, who played an extraordinary role during his tenure in the Sultanate to make bridges between the business communities of Oman and Sri Lanka despite pandemic challenges, will no doubt, serve as a 'blueprint' for the future economic cooperation between the two countries."

Eng. Ridha Bin Jumaa Al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI)

"This book is a testimony of the historic relationship between Oman and Sri Lanka and it also provides a roadmap for the potential future cooperation in many areas of mutual interest. The ideas proposed in the book through the self-experience gained by a diplomat who served as Sri Lanka's envoy to the Sultanate of Oman, add value to this book. A long-awaited necessity has been accomplished by Ambassador Ameer Ajwad."

Sheikh Juma bin Hamdan Al Shehhi, Former Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Sri Lanka

"As the longest serving Sri Lankan in Oman for more than 47 years, I witnessed that the period 2020 to 2021 was one of the most challenging and demanding times. Despite the unprecedented critical state of affairs posed by the COVID pandemic, the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman was able to organise a variety of activities to enhance bilateral ties. This book is an 'icing on the cake' of the long-standing relations between the two countries."

Anslem Perera, Chief Executive Officer, BPOS Global



Publishers:

www.blackandwhiteoman.com

