

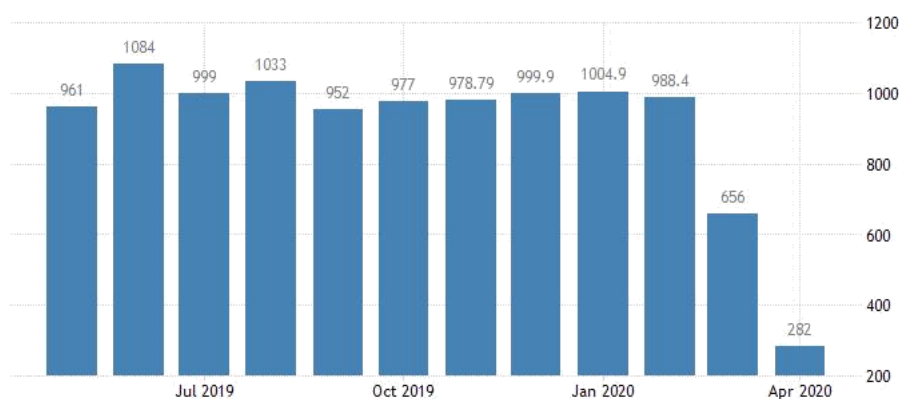
Post Lockdown Strategies for Sri Lanka

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When the outbreak started, it began to beat the Sri Lankan economy, well-being and prosperity by several means such as declining economic growth, limiting people to people relationship, restrictions on travelling between districts and banning of gatherings. Though the new coronavirus started spreading at the end of November 2019 in Wuhan, no one can predict when the pandemic will end. Therefore a “post-COVID world” is a far cry from healing the whole world from COVID-19 and it is necessary to change our lifestyles and live along with it until the situation becomes normal. Hence, we are entering into a “post lockdown world” instead of “post COVID world” as we are still experiencing the worst from the pandemic in certain countries and we need to live with such a threat. In the present context, Sri Lanka is endeavoring to tackle the pandemic by a strategy of 3T (Testing, Tracing and Treatment) as an operational and exit strategies¹.

Commencing from 26th of May, the island-wide curfew was partially removed after a two-month-long lockdown period and it was completely removed on 28th of June. Due to the outbreak, the stock market and global trade has been on the decline and it has directly impacted major economic sectors including travel, tourism, manufacturing, apparel and textiles, construction and engineering, retails and consumer, banking and finance, goods and service industries. The pandemic has created a huge decline in economic activities and it is predicted that a recession will happen which will be worse than the global financial crisis in 2008. This has directly impacted the economic downturn in Sri Lanka. The tourism sector has been drastically affected and Sri Lanka needs more strategies to increase the downturn of the aftermath.



SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | CENTRAL BANK OF SRI LANKA

Figure 1:- Exports in Sri Lanka decreased to 282 USD Million in April from 656 USD Million in March of 2020.

Source: -<https://tradingeconomics.com/sri-lanka/exports>

Aimed at controlling the pandemic, the government enforced a strict strategy for detection and identification of contacts, quarantine, travel restrictions and isolation of houses /small villages etc, which has so far been successful in confining the epidemic to only a few identified clusters. The most important strategy in the post lockdown period is to avoid a spike of new cases. So far Sri Lanka has repatriated immigrants from 75 different countries around the world. According to the health reports significant amount of immigrants were tested for COVID- 19 and being positive. Therefore the priority should be adhering to guidelines given by the health authorities such as maintaining social distancing even it is difficult to maintain with limited resources and infrastructure facilities in Sri Lanka. Several industries in the country have scaled-down operations due to the aftermath of coronavirus, but now it is high time to restart all the industries with a new hope to advance their capabilities in a more strategic way. Especially these industries should focus on surviving to thriving with remained opportunities from post lockdown.

During the lockdown period, the most popular word among the society was “self-sufficiency”. When the slowbalised² world expands, the minds of the people should concentrate to make the best out of available resources and capabilities of their advanced technologies rather than focusing on global level. In Sri Lanka, it is possible to have improvements in agriculture to secure the food security which will create another major job opportunity for the unemployed. As per the specialists “a mix of macroeconomic, structural, pro-poor and climate-friendly economic Policies are required to build a post-COVID-19 Sri Lankan economy”³. Therefore Sri Lanka should focus on long term and short term strategies to overcome the economic downturn. As a result of trade and economic downturn, global demand for most of Sri Lanka’s export products and services will probably stagnate in considerable amount. Hence, Sri Lanka should focus on its export market opportunities in available market conditions such as exporting health infrastructure production.

It would be a wise and possible strategy for Sri Lanka's exporters and tourism companies to seek all ways to maximize local revenues by attracting local tourists into their destinations. In here Sri Lanka could focus on medical tourism and safe tourism where the Turkish Culture and Tourism Ministry has been experimented as an initial step to develop and protect the tourism industry. By then agricultural exporters can focus on local consumers, apparel exporters can modernize their production lines to supply personal protection equipment (PPE), uniforms and other local clothing needs. Sri Lanka needs to more focus on domestic production and local innovation including goods, service and industrial sector. Most of the infrastructure development projects had stopped while the country was maintaining a curfew situation and this is a high time to renew the infrastructure facilities by utilizing those mechanisms.

The COVID-19 has highlighted the social inequality and the disproportionateness of public well-being. This is the real issue that is wrapping up inside of the society and gradually came out as only a positive outcome. People have realized that there will not be permanent anarchy in the world order and power capabilities will depend not only on the military or economic development but with the domestic capabilities to protect their people. While using the internal strengthens to minimize the weaknesses of the economic sector due to the repercussions of the unforeseen enemy, Sri Lanka needs to pay attention to secure human security of the nation. When it comes to transportation as a basic need of the people, government and responsible authorizes have to take a proper monitoring system and provide enough transport services to the people by implementing required rules and regulations. Further, Sri Lanka could introduce new methods of transportations instead of using public transportations. Since maintaining the social distancing is essential to mitigate the spread of coronavirus from people to people, limiting public transportation would not be the effective response. While increasing public transportation government can encourage people to use alternative methods of transportations such as cycling. Cycling would be most attractive and healthy solution for maintaining appropriate social distancing and it will create another major attraction for tourist arrivals and their entertainment. It is the responsibility of the government to facilitate people for better public well-being. Hence, it is required to have a well-organized and proper communication system in every sector.

Focusing on digitalization would be another wise strategy to maintain social distance while improving the efficiency of all services. Nowadays with the new normal situation, people are

using digitalized mechanisms to facilitate their day to day life activities all over the world. Sri Lanka needs to move forward by introducing digital tools to facilitate their services and digital literacy level should be increased by using public and private institutions. There are multiple technological tools that are engaging with the society like zoom, meet and cisco to maintain continuous communication with people from all over the world. We can use these technical tools to make people's lives more comfortable and convenient. Furthermore, e- governing, e-trade, and e-money would be the profoundly enhanced instruments in the society to steer up and regulate in a direction that is more beneficial to dealing with the world as post lockdown strategies in Sri Lanka. It is time to regulate the digital platform which is more effective to maintain social distancing while continuing the good health practices to prevent the spread of the global pandemic.

Even though the international order will not be the same as what it was, multilateralism would be the best option to survive to thrive with cooperation and coordination among the countries. Sri Lanka should not focus on aligning with one particular country but non- aligned foreign policy practices need to be practiced when engaged with foreign relations. Since Sri Lanka is already in a debt crisis, it should not rely on loans and consider developing on the available resources that we have with us. To strengthen the government, public officers and grass root level officers need to be more efficient in doing their duties and responsibilities. According to the WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo; this crisis is first and foremost a health crisis that has forced governments to take unprecedented measures to protect people's lives to secure human security. Therefore we all have the responsibility as Sri Lankans without any discrimination to accelerate the plunged economic integration and assist to mitigate the possible post lockdown threat of COVID-19.

Mrs K. A. Waruni Madhubhashini served as a Research Assistant at the Institute of National Security Studies (INSS), the premier think tank on National Security established under the Ministry of Defence. The opinion expressed in this article are her own and not necessarily reflective of the INSS.



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