

Written by Basura Rathnayake

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An exciting line up of thought leaders as well as high profile speakers and panelists will set the tone for the 41st National Conference of Chartered Accountants organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka (CA Sri Lanka), as they help defy the new normal and inspire Chartered Accountants including Business Leaders and C-Suite Executives to overcome the challenges following COVID-19. The 3-day conference will be held from 18th to 20th January 2021.

The National Conference dubbed as Sri Lanka's biggest business summit will be inaugurated on Monday, 18th January 2021 under the patronage of Mr. Ajith Nivard Cabraal, State Minister of Money, Capital Markets and State Enterprise Reforms and Prof. Sampath Amaratunge, Chairman of the University Grants Commission at the Shangri-La Hotel, Colombo with a limited number of special invitees in line with health protocols.

However, over 1700 participants from Sri Lanka and overseas will connect virtually with the proceedings of the conference which will be held under the theme "Abnormal." The conference is held on a virtual platform for the first time in its four-decade long history due to the ongoing global pandemic and the related regulations imposed by health authorities.

The conference which will conclude on 20th January 2021 following two days of technical sessions will feature locally and globally acclaimed speakers and panelists who will deliberate the changes, opportunities and abnormalities stemming from the COVID-19 crisis, with the aim of stimulating the intellectual curiosity of the participants while also exploring new business and professional practices to succeed in these abnormal times.

The 3-day event will kick off with an inspiring keynote speech delivered by Ms. Selyna Peiris, Director, Business Development, SELYN Exporters (Pvt) Ltd who will revolve her speech on 'Walk the Talk.' In her keynote, she will share her experience on managing the culture, operations and most importantly the people within the organisation, specially during these

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challenging times and how her leadership helped the business remain steady and relevant.

The technical sessions will kick off on 19th January 2021 with the first session on 'Defying the Normal' with Dr. Ravi Fernando, Chairman/Chief Executive Officer, Global Strategic Corporate Sustainability Pvt. Ltd paying focus to how the pandemic has exposed cracks and left business with little choice but to regroup, rehash and revitalise.

During the session, Dr. Fernando will help craft out the different elements of the triple bottom line and set out a practical framework which 21st century leaders can follow while meeting the expectations of stakeholders with the unique ability to rise to face unforeseen challenges successfully. Mr. Suranga Herath, Chief Executive Officer, English Tea Shop and Mr. Mahesh Nanayakkara, Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer, Citizens Development Business Finance PLC will contribute as panelists, while Mr. Moiz Rehmanjee, Group Chief Financial Officer, Hela Clothing will moderate the session.

COVID-19 has pushed the world towards deep recession, the impact of which has been devastating. Governments across the world responded to this by offering huge stimulus packages defying all known theories. The second technical session on "New Economic Order" will feature Dr. Nishan De Mel, Executive Director, Head of Research, Verité Research Pvt. Ltd who will shed light on the effects of these bail out strategies in the aftermath of COVID. Mr. Prabash Subasinghe, Managing Director, Global Rubber Industries (Pvt) Ltd and Mr. Thulci Aluwihare, Head of Strategy & Business Development, CHEC Port City Colombo (Pvt) Ltd will share their insights as panelists, while Mr. Tishan Subasinghe, Managing Director, Moore Stephens Consulting (Pvt) Ltd, Chairman, SANASA Insurance Co. Ltd, Director, Amana Bank PLC will moderate the session.

The third session on 'The Perfect Link' will showcase Ms. Gayani De Alwis, Global Chairperson, WiLAT, Immediate Past Chairperson, Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT), Non-Executive Independent Director, Singer Sri Lanka PLC and Management Consultant who will speak on the future of supply chains and the increasing need to rethink and innovate flexible supply chains with new models. The session will be complemented with two panelists Mr. Hanif Yusoof, Group Chief Executive Officer, Expolanka Holdings PLC and Ms. Jayanthi Dharmasena, Managing Director, Hayleys Agriculture Holdings Limited, while Mr. Channa Gunasekera, Finance & Operations Consultant will moderate the session.

Mr. Thilak Piyadigama, Chief Executive Officer, SDB Bank will steer the fourth session on 'Adopt Me' where he will shed insights on how technology is forming the bedrock for businesses to navigate through the pandemic and the increasing need for businesses to be more digitally ready if they are to stay ahead and wish to future proof their business. Mr. Suren Fernando, Chief Executive Officer, MAS Holdings (Pvt) Ltd, Mr. Nikhil Advani Chief Executive Officer, AIA Insurance Lanka Limited, and Ms. Jayomi Lokuliyana, Co-Founder/Chief Executive Officer, zMessenger Pvt Ltd, Chairperson, MYMED International (Pvt) Ltd, Chairperson, Women's Chamber for Digital Sri Lanka will contribute as panelists while Mr. Naresh Abeysekara, Founder/Chief Executive Officer, SECQUORO will be the moderator.

The fifth session on 'Financial Integrity in Uncertain Times' will be jointly presented by Mr. Manil

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Jayasinghe, President, CA Sri Lanka, Senior Partner, Ernst & Young Sri Lanka and Mr. David Matthews, President, Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales who will emphasize on how Chartered Accountants should maintain financial integrity and sustain the reliability of information reported to stakeholders amidst the volatile business environment. The session will be moderated by Ms. Nilanthi Sivapragasam, Chief Financial Officer, Aitken Spence PLC.

'The Most Valuable Resource?' will be the spotlight of the sixth and final session, where the challenges faced by companies due to COVID-19 global pandemic will be discussed at length along with how companies are adapting to the future dynamics of work. The session will be presented by Dr. Archana Arcot, Associate Vice President, Head of Client Business & Talent Integration, Infosys McCamish Systems LLC. The session will conclude with a panel discussion featuring Mr. Mahendra Jayasekera, Managing Director, Lanka Tiles PLC, Ms. Chandi H. Dharmaratne Vice President, Human Resources, Virtusa (Pvt) Ltd and Prof. Ajantha Dharmasiri, Director/Chairman of the Board of Management, Postgraduate Institute of Management as panelists, while Ms. Shyamali Kirinde, Senior Manager Strategic Services, Brandix Apparel Ltd will moderate the session.