Sri Lanka Tourism

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Dear Editor Sunday Times,

I refer to your headline article in the Business Times of May 15.

The article captioned "Sri Lanka Tourism running out of cash" is chock full of falsehoods, innuendo and confusion.

Sri Lanka Tourism has no shortage of cash i.e., LKR/Rupees, the legal tender in Sri Lanka. However, the country has run out of dollars with which events overseas need be paid for. It is surprising that a business reporter is unaware of this.

The report states "US dollars 1.6 million had been remitted to a dollar account of SLTDA". A categorical statement. Later, in the same article this confidence is contradicted - "if this amount had been received".

This statement of supposed fact is incorrect. Most funds collected for the Covid insurance was collected in LKR as travel agents and hotels claimed they did not have US dollars, also it was costly to transfer in US dollars. They further requested credit periods to pay even the rupees. Several travel agents and hotels have still not paid Sri Lanka Tourism although we have paid the insurance company. These names appear as debtors in SLTDA records.

The article refers to credit facilities being extended from trade show organisers. In the absence of dollars in the banking system, even though SLTDA has the cash to buy the dollars, of course any institution would request credit facilities for foreign currency payments, in the interests of the industry so that they could participate in the show.

The article states that rupees have been remitted to the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry for the embassy in Dubai to represent the country at the Arabian Travel Mart. Foreign trade shows unfortunately do not accept payment in rupees.

The writer refers to the basis of the insurance cover as a "revelation". It may be so to the writer, but full details of the public tender that was issued in 2020 and details of insurance cover available to the industry and international traveler since January 2021.

The writer further states "usually the Treasury makes annual allocations for administration and staff welfare in the annual budget" This is also incorrect. Since Tourism Act No 38 of 2005 the Treasury has made no/zero allocation to the tourism institutions. This is common knowledge amongst those associated with the tourism industry.

The objective of this falsehood packed article clearly was a sensational headline aimed to bring disrepute to Sri Lanka Tourism. As a respected newspaper, it is important that contributors are not prejudiced by third parties and write intelligent articles based on facts.

Yours sincerely,

Kimarli Fernando

Kimarli Fernando
Chairperson