

Sri Lanka's biggest business summit, the 41st National Conference of Chartered Accountants was ceremoniously inaugurated on Monday, 18th January 2021 at the Shangri-La Hotel, Colombo by Hon Ajith Nivard Cabraal, State Minister of Money, Capital Markets and State Enterprise Reforms, Hon. Bandula Gunawardena, Minister of Trade and Senior Prof. Sampath Amaratunge, Chairman of the University Grants Commission.

The National Conference organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka (CA Sri Lanka) which was conducted via a virtual platform for the first time in its four-decade long history, received an overwhelming response from Chartered Accountants in Sri Lanka as well as overseas, with over 2000 participants including business leaders and c-suite executives from multiple industries connecting with the event through the live webcast.

The inauguration ceremony was held with a limited number of special invitees at the venue in line with the guidelines issued by the Health Authorities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference will conclude on 20th January 2021 following three days of technical sessions featuring an exciting line up of globally and locally acclaimed speakers and panelists who will steer the conference along this year's thought-provoking theme "Abnormal: Navigating Through Shattered Norms."

Ms. Selyna Peiris, Director, Business Development, SELYN Exporters (Pvt) Ltd will set the stage for the 3-day event with an inspiring keynote speech on "Walk the Talk," encouraging the corporate world to adopt a sustainable business model which gives equal importance to people, profit, and planet.

During the technical sessions, speakers and panelists will help defy the positive effects of "Abnormal" and inspire the business community to overcome the challenges of COVID-19, while deliberating changes, opportunities and new directions stemming from the crisis, with the aim of exploring new and stronger business and professional practices to succeed in these abnormal times.

Speaking at the inauguration, Mr. Manil Jayasinghe, President of CA Sri Lanka said that while it is important to acknowledge the challenges following the pandemic, it is also essential to focus on the new opportunities the pandemic has created for businesses.

"If not for COVID today, tomorrow we will face a new challenge, so adapting and being innovative are two ways of overcoming the challenges we face whether it be today or tomorrow. Abnormal is going to be our new normal, so we must understand the importance of being innovative and agile and embrace the abnormal while rising above to rebuild better and stronger businesses, which will be a key contributor to our economy," he said.

Mr. Jayasinghe also urged the accounting community to increasingly focus on their ethical responsibility. "Factual financial reporting and independent auditing will definitely play a key role in managing the outcomes of such a crisis," he added.

Mr. Tishan Subasinghe, Chairman of the National Conference Committee of CA Sri Lanka said that what the world experienced during 2020 was not normal, and it may likely be a once in a lifetime experience for our generation. It has been abnormal for us but we must not forget that amidst chaos we can find opportunities if we are optimistic.

"The past months have been a learning curve to us. While the virus encircled us in bleakness, the truth is, it also became the hotspot for new innovations, amidst disruptions thereby creating a new paradigm shift," he said."

Chairperson of the National Conference Technical Committee Ms. Anoji De Silva said that as the thought leaders to the nation, CA Sri Lanka decided to adopt "Abnormal" as the conference theme to challenge the negativity surrounding the word and to start a conversation within the business community on how to rethink and craft the future to build better businesses.

"At a time like this, we need to navigate through shattered norms as one country, one team, united by our common goal to contribute to our nation. Our focus this year will be on how we can redefine and refocus the corporate culture incorporating some of the values practiced by the SME and public sectors - two sectors which has renewed respect and focus from the nation for being agile and stepping up during the pandemic," she added.

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