Future of Batiks

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Batik and Handloom have been identified as important sectors of the economy in Sri Lanka. Thus, a separate Ministry has been formed to revive and promote these industries. Jayasiri Jayasekara, State Minister of Batik, Handloom and Local Apparel Products, shares his thoughts on the work done so far.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe. | **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda.



Dayasiri Jayasekara, State Minister, Batik, Handloom and Apparel Products.

“It is the first time that a Government has created such a Ministry in Sri Lanka. As

soon as I was appointed, the first task that I set upon was to learn and understand about the industry by speaking to those who have been involved in the industry for years", explained the Minister. He visited the Batik producing areas and also discussed with industry pioneers and leaders on the best way to venture forward in the revival on the industry.

Batik had been a thriving industry more than 40 years ago, and the credit for the decision to revive the industry should go to the President stated the Minister, "I must thank His Excellency Gotabaya Rajapaksa because he has the vision. He thought in a different way. That is why he created this type of a Ministry." He further explained, "I believe it is going to be a good thing to develop the industry and export Sri Lankan Batik and Handloom products. We have to look at the niche market while focusing on other markets as well in the world."There is a need for Batik designs to be changed to suit the modern requirements of the people. "For years we have used the same technique and designs, we need to modernize these areas", he said. Training will be provided to designers, who are coming out of the various designs schools and they will part of the Design Center and will be sent to villages to train those who have been in the Batik industry for many years. Furthermore, the Minister is also looking at obtaining quality and environmentally friendly dyes as the Batik industry uses large quantity of dye for its work.

The Minister envisages to provide recognition and certification to those who create Batik and Handloom. Furthermore, marketing of the product has also been identified as an important area. The Minister says that he will continue to seek the support of the veterans of the industry. Salu Sala has been identified as the mechanism to sell Batik and Handloom. The aim is to export products to the world as well. "We will provide franchise of Salu Sala to those who are interested in countries such as Australia, UK, Europe and other destinations. The response so far has been really good. There is great interest in Batik and Handloom", explained the Minister.

The manner in which the Minister hopes to encourage people to wear Batik and Handloom is by introducing themes for festivals and ceremonies. "On December 25th mass, we are re-questing all Catholic and Christians to wear an attire in Batik or Handloom. Another initiative is on January 1st we will ask all employees of the public sector to wear Batik or Handloom. On Feb 4, 2021, the National flag will be done in Batik and for Vesak, the Buddhist flag and specially designed lanterns will be done in Batik. There are so many things that we can do. Event by event, our aim is to promote Batik as a ceremonial attire. We are going to promote this craft to the

entire world.” The Minister further elaborated, “We are also looking at the possibility of decorating SriLankan Airlines flights and also the crew’s attire in Batik. We have to develop this industry by introducing new things to the system.”Working with those who have been in the industry as well as getting them involved in the process has been a priority. As a result, Batik will also be introduced as a segment in Miss Sri Lanka. “There are so many people who are willing to help. And, I have been talking to them to develop this industry,” explained the Minister.