



**Virtual Ministerial Conference on  
“Close the Digital Divides: The Digital Response to COVID-19”**

**01 July 2020**

**Statement by Hon. Dinesh Gunawardena, Minister of Foreign Relations and Skills  
Development, Employment & Labour Relations of Sri Lanka**

Ayubowan !

Hon. Urmas Reinsalu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia,  
Hon. Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Singapore,  
Hon. Ministers and dear friends,

- I thank the Foreign Ministers of Estonia and Singapore for their joint initiative in convening this timely meeting today. Sri Lanka endorses the “Global Declaration on the Digital Response to COVID-19”.
- COVID-19 is a test for all of us, in uncovering both the strengths and weaknesses in our national as well as global systems. While some nations have been successful in keeping the spread of the COVID-19 under control, others are grappling with many challenges in controlling it.
- It is with great satisfaction I inform that Sri Lanka has successfully controlled the community transmission of COVID-19. The country has reported as low as 90 cases per million, with only 0.54% deaths from the reported cases.
- New cases are reported only among returnees from overseas, who have to undergo a mandatory period of quarantine. All returnees are subject to PCR testing at the airport itself, to identify and isolate infected persons for treatment.
- Sri Lanka’s success in both controlling the disease and addressing a wide range of pandemic related issues was partly enabled by the effective use of technology in our whole-of- government approach, guided by the visionary political leadership of H.E. the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Let me briefly outline some of the measures Sri Lanka has taken so far:

- Tracing of contacts of COVID-19 patients, **facilitated by technological tools**, enabled the efficient control of the spread of the diseases within the community, by identifying disease clusters and isolating suspected or vulnerable individuals exposed to these patients within 24 hours.

- **MyHealth Sri Lanka app, and a one-stop COVID site** were used to disseminate up to date, COVID related information from the official sources to citizens.
  - To address the concerns of overseas Sri Lankans, including requests for repatriation, the Ministry of Foreign Relations along with the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) set up a dedicated “**Contact Sri Lanka portal**”. The platform will be available for delivery of e-services in the near future.
  - To make the ‘**Work From Home**’ concept efficient, a dedicated platform namely **meet.gov.lk** was introduced, and all telecommunication operators agreed to provide free access or concessional data charges to use this and other popular online meeting platforms.
  - A pilot project is underway for the use of **Digital Signatures for the State Sector**.
  - Sri Lanka CERT, the national cyber security agency, issued regular guidelines to address the challenges associated with **cyber security**, during this period of increased use of cyberspace.
  - With the support of all telecommunication operators, the Government introduced a cost-free official **E-learning portal** for school children.
  - The online tool ‘**oDoc**’ allowed the patients to connect with doctors for video, audio and chat consultations, free of charge, and also receive prescription, and get medication delivered to the doorstep.
  - Amendments were made to enable the **stock market** to transition from a paper-based to an electronic –based environment.
  - For the first time in 126 years, the **Colombo Tea Auction was held online**.
- I take this opportunity to thank our private sector partners, who have immensely contributed during this crisis period, and hope this partnership will continue in meeting the future digital demands of the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Friends,

- There is no doubt that post-COVID-19 world will be heavily dependent on digital solutions in almost all sectors. Cyber security will be a challenge in this new order, where collective action of all nations will require.

- While we stand proud of our digital responses during this crisis, like many other nations, Sri Lanka is also constrained by resources and facilities in reaping the full benefit of digital technology. This is where we turn to our friends to learn from their best practices and in improving national infrastructure and facilities.
- I hope that our deliberations today will open up avenues for further collaboration to address the digital divides.

Thank you.