**Business Continuity and the Ongoing Management of Risk**

From inception, the government had declared logistics as an essential service. Sri Lanka Port Authority (SLPA) took the lead and declared that Port permits and CHA Licenses could be used as official curfew passes for drivers/helpers to report for duty. The Port Chairman and his team also facilitated the transport from certain locations for any company workers wishing to reach Colombo. There were restrictions on returning to work as cross district travel is controlled to a certain degree to date.

As a result of these initiatives, and the support of industry associations engaged in haulage, the issue of transporting goods were well mitigated. All those who reported to work were strictly advised to adhere to governmental regulations pertaining to social distancing, wearing of masks and washing hands on a regular basis. Most owners if not all owners had issued their staff masks, gloves and even sanitizers.

Food was an issue, but SLPA took the initiative to keep some of their canteen open throughout and even had certain vendors serving the truck queue with food parcels to be purchased if required.

As a result, SLPA was able to facilitate clearing of containers as well as cater to export requirements. There may have been certain delays owing to skeletal staff operations at various other related stakeholders, but things were relatively smooth. More importantly there was an open dialogue with all stake holders to identify bottlenecks and provide practical solutions in an expeditious manner.

**Warehousing**

Within a week of lockdown, the authorities relaxed curfew restrictions to operate warehouses. The process was facilitated by the area Public Heath Inspectors and area Police Stations. Of course, the cadre was limited and strict health guidelines were imposed. Most of the warehouses were operational albeit at reduced staff and curtailed operational hours. But considering the circumstances, the operations went relatively smoothly.

Most sensitive cargo such as perishables, which required cold storage facilities, were handled without much delay. Also those yards which were able to handle reefer containers acted as a buffer to mitigate loading and unloading delays. Overall the systems in place worked well with all stakeholders communicating and working as one to resolve issues.

**Logistics**

A similar situation to that of warehouses was experienced by all other logistics service providers. Skeletal staff were allowed to operate through the issuance of curfew passes facilitated by Public Health Inspector, Area Police and Area Grama Sevaka (area government officers). At inception, things may have not flowed smoothly due to limited working hours and the banking sector not been accessible. However, one or two weeks into lockdown, most of the processes when dealing with government authorities were streamlined with most adopting online submissions. As usual only the natural learning curve was an impediment but things started improving. Still the system is being improved as and when bottlenecks and barriers appear.

The contribution made to facilitate the trade by SLPA Chairman and his team must be mentioned at this point. SLPA together with the two private terminals gave leadership and acted as the focal point to address and resolve many issues. They were in turn supported by the Minister of Ports and Shipping, enabling them to bring in other government institutes, which are stakeholders in this process, in line and develop systems to facilitate the desires of the trade. Sri Lanka Customs took the necessary steps to consult various trade bodies and address their grievances in a timely manner to lessen the impact on trade or logistics activities.

Covid-19 also contributed to the adoption of online submission, approvals and payments, which were in discussion for many years. Overall, Sri Lanka was more or less open to the trading world despite the global pandemic.

**The need to drive Technology**

The Covid-19 work paradigm has meant the sector has had a great opportunity to test the paperless processes.  Many stakeholders, including public sector institutes once labeled as “bureaucratic” came forward to test available technology/facilities to minimize human intervention through online platforms.

In continuity, this is the best opportunity to make “Single Window” a reality.  This is the key to a post-pandemic recovery in the logistics sector, and to the nation as a whole. The reduction in corruption and malpractice will eventually bring down the landing cost in greater percentages, resulting in a lower cost of living to the public.

**The need for synergy, particularly between local administrative authorities of Sri Lanka**.

At the very beginning of the lock down period, it was utter chaos trying to obtain curfew passes for the stakeholders of essential services.  SLPA took the initiative to advise Sri Lanka Police of the possibility of using Port Entry Permits as a valid curfew pass.  Had there been a common platform between Sri Lanka Police, Sri Lanka Ports Authority, Sri Lanka Customs, Department for registration of Persons, the outcomes and the impact of the effort to combat Covid-19 would have been much better. So, for business continuity its important this kind of synergy on a common platform among local administrative bodies is further promoted.

The need to develop distribution channels and transportation, especially the packing solutions for perishables (fruits & vegetables)  currently wasted in big quantities has been an eye opener. Consumers have paid heavily for many intermediate costs between farmer and the shelf, including wastage. During lockdown it was pity that the both ends of the supply chain (producer and consumer) were suffering whilst a large proportion of the production was wasted moving between the two.