

■ Pure Cinnamon Director Kumar Puvanakumar makes steady progress in his quest

Following his four-year journey in investigating and exploring the nutritious and wholesome value of Ceylon Cinnamon, Pure Cinnamon Ltd. Director Kumar Puvanakumar has made steady progress in his quest to position 'Ceylon Cinnamon' as an international brand and is garnering considerable public interest in the process. In an exclusive interview with the Daily FT Puvanakumar shared his vision and experience so far in making 'Ceylon Cinnamon' an international brand.

Following are excerpts of the interview:

By CHARUMINI DE SILVA

Q.What inspired you to start promoting Ceylon Cinnamon in New Zealand?

A.I have been living in New Zealand and Australia for the past 20 years and I have noticed how prominently they have promoted their own natural products such as Manuka honey for its healthy properties. Ceylon Cinnamon has great potential to develop similarly and I have come to know through my own research and interactions with food scientists and nutritionists regarding the health effects of Ceylon Cinnamon.

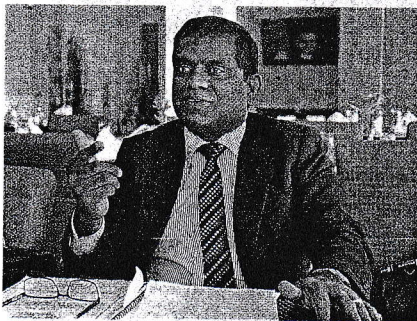
Ceylon Cinnamon, also known as 'True Cinnamon,' may be the finest in the world, but despite its excellence, long history and the extensive list of benefits, it has failed to reach its deserved top spot on an international scale. During the past four years, I came to Sri Lanka three to four times a year and visited cinnamon growers and producers in the areas of Ambalangoda and Matara. I approached G.P. De Silva and Sons International Ltd., one of the leading cinnamon growers and exporters in the country because they have the knowledge and experience. After my research, I decided that it was important to raise public awareness about our valuable natural product overseas, given the relatively low knowledge about Ceylon Cinnamon.

Early this year, I ran a Cinnamon Trade Show event in Auckland, New Zealand which attracted 33,000 individuals who had a first-hand experience of cinnamon and its related products like cinnamon chocolate, cinnamon tea, cinnamon infused drinks, and body care products. At this trade show, I created a lot of valuable contacts with herbal scientists and other product manufacturers. I came to Sri Lanka and met with the Export Development Board (EDB) Chairperson and Chief Executive Indira Malwatte as well as the industry stakeholders and explained my vision, which they all encouraged. I want to promote Ceylon Cinnamon overseas and create a face value for it.

Q.What are the products that you have developed so far?

A.Several value added cinnamon products have been developed in the past two years with the contacts I made at the trade show as well as with other collaborations with food scientists and manufacturers in New Zealand and Australia which includes cinnamon-flavoured chocolate, honey, sugar, perfumes, vodka, gin, drinks and the list goes on. I also had the chance to share some of the value added cinnamon products with our Premier Ranil Wickremesinghe and other dignitaries during his visit to New Zealand. This product development has also involved the input of EDB and the Spice Council. The collective goal is

Going the extra mile to promote Ceylon Cinnamon



Pure Cinnamon Director Kumar Puvanakumar



Pure Cinnamon Director Kumar Puvanakumar sharing some of the value added cinnamon products with Premier Ranil Wickremesinghe

to promote the multi-purpose use and benefits of Ceylon Cinnamon and to expand its consumption globally.

Q.How have you mitigated the misunderstanding in the consumers about cinnamon and cassia?

A.Well...in most of these countries pure cinnamon is not sold in markets. There are instances where people sell cinnamon under made in Sri Lanka tag and because people are unaware of it, they buy those products. This is the very reason why we need to promote Ceylon Cinnamon and its wholesome value to the consumers' world over. I am not going against cassia, but I want to change the trend and showcase the strength of Ceylon Cinnamon.

Q.What prospects do you see for cinnamon industry?

A.Overall, I think cinnamon is underperforming in Sri Lanka. Our cinnamon is mainly exported to Mexico, Spain and USA, but it is not exported on the same scale to other important markets such as Australia, Canada and Europe, which is a pity. At present we generate around \$125 million, which in my opinion should go up to around \$500 million to \$750 million.

There is a lot of room for improvement in the industry and with the right promotion, I think it is not impossible to reach that level or even higher level. However, we have to go that extra mile to promote Ceylon Cinnamon as we are already lagging behind. Cinnamon producers get between Rs. 1,800 to Rs. 2,000 per kilo, but with proper marketing and demand in the next three years they would be able to earn around Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 5,000 per kilo.

It is not about the money all the time, but also about the livelihood of those people engaged in this industry. Although there is a labour shortage, if the industry grows from \$100 million to \$1 billion, more people would be interested to enter into the industry and has potential to create around 100,000 job opportunities. Except the hill countries, all the other parts of the island like Anuradhapura, Chilaw, Polonnaruwa have the potential to grow cinnamon, although it is now limited to the southern part of the country. If we can cultivate more, we can export more.

Cinnamon has a high yield income — it is just that you need peelers, institutes and good manufacturing practices to venture into these high-end markets with capacity. However, with technological advances, automated systems will be introduced and new inventions will be made in time to come.

Q.The EDB is emphasising on exporting value added cinnamon rather than exporting it in bulk form. What are your thoughts on this?

A.Well, in value addition, there are few issues because Ceylon Cinnamon has not been marketed sufficiently with proper packing standards, manufacturing standards, adulteration and authenticity. Therefore it is

first to upgrade on these areas because although many companies claim they have different standard certificates, they are not being practiced enough in real terms. However, the SMEs have to build it overtime and we cannot do it immediately.

Q.Could you share some of your experience at the World Export Development Forum (WEDF) 2016?

A.I think it was a great platform for Sri Lanka to showcase its hidden jewels and for exporters like us to network and share knowledge. Hosting an event of this magnitude which brought in a lot of attention to Sri Lanka itself was a great success and it was very well organised. I have attended a couple of trade shows in Dubai, Melbourne, and Sydney.

Q.How would you rate Sri Lanka's opportunity as a country for exports and bilateral ties between Sri Lanka and New Zealand?

A.The two leaders of the countries visited each other and created ground for further bilateral relations which were significant. As a result of that, the first step towards enhancing trade between the two countries, is Sri Lanka and New Zealand opening a trade mission next year. At the moment New Zealand is exporting to Sri Lanka goods worth \$350 million to \$400 million, whereas Sri Lanka exports only \$40 million to \$50 million. There is a huge trade deficit in our trade between the countries and we have an advantage to persuade the New Zealand Government to open

FT Quote

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up more barriers, in allowing us to export seasonal, tropical fresh fruits and fresh vegetables. Being a small country we cannot cater to all the markets, but if we aim for the high-end market with value added quality products, it would not be impossible and there is a lot of potential for exporters in this sector.

Q.How much have you invested on promoting thus far and what are the other markets you are targeting in future?

A.I have invested over New Zealand \$60,000 so far and all these events were held at my own expense without any external financial/physical aid. These events served as a reminder for everyone about the evolving scope and use of cinnamon. In terms of new markets, immediately I plan to promote in European countries as well as in all other countries where Ceylon Cinnamon is not established. I have dedicated a significant amount of time in a voluntary capacity to study and carve out a niche for Ceylon Cinnamon to the world.

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Products by Pure Cinnamon

