

Ceylon Tea fast becoming the “World’s Cuppa”

Ceylon Tea needs no introduction, being almost synonymous with Sri Lanka. The tea industry, first introduced to the island during colonial times, has remained one of the most consistent foreign income earning industries. The tea market experienced a downward trend in 1992-1994. However, there are signs that the industry is on its way up once again.

Tea is now being marketed as the perfect health drink, and it is drawing in the followers. A Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) funded study on the health benefits of tea will be completed by the end of this year, and all tea producing countries eagerly await the final report, knowing that it can only indicate what generations of consumers have come to realize that drinking tea is good for your health, and has no harmful effects whatsoever.

The major importers of Sri Lankan tea, the former Soviet Union countries, Iraq, Egypt and Pakistan have once again indicated an active interest in purchasing Sri Lankan tea. A Tea Trade Exhibition has been jointly organized by the Tea Board in Moscow during June '96 to promote Sri Lankan tea among the exporters and distributors who supply the emerging *nouveau riche* in Russia, and also the larger number of middle-class consumers.

The Sri Lanka Tea Board is the regulatory body of the tea industry, monitoring the quality of tea which is exported. All export-quality tea have to come under the International Standard Organization's minimum quality level. The Tea Board also has given an added incentive to exporters; tea of excellent quality, and meeting with standards set up by the Tea Board are allowed to carry the lion logo the symbol of the highest quality in Sri Lankan teas.

The Tea Board also encourages exporters to export value added teas, paying more attention to the packaging. Sri Lankan tea in attractive containers and packaging have received much acclaim in the overseas markets.

There is also an increasing demand for the cut, twist and curl (CTC) teas, and the Tea Board has given grants and loans to several companies interested in entering this field. Over 35 such factories are expected to be in operation by the end of the

year. “We had an extremely good production last year, but this. was mainly due to the exceptionally good weather in the CTC growing areas of the country. However, we need to step up production of this form of tea to meet with the market demand, and the new factories will certainly meet this challenge,” said C. S. Ratwatte, Chairman, Sri Lanka Tea Board.

However, orthodox black tea will remain in high demand, and Sri Lankan producers will have to step up production to meet the current market demands. Green tea is also a favourite export tea, especially to eastern countries such as Japan, Morocco and China.

The future does look bright for the tea industry in Sri Lanka, and indications are that if producers can keep up to quality standards and meet the demands of the international market, they will continue to be a forerunner in the world market.