Get Your Basics Right



Launched 35 years ago as a fully-fledged Sri Lankan company to offer air conditioning solutions, Civimech has been installing, maintaining and repairing air conditioners around the country. They are guided by a discipline to provide innovative, high quality products accompanied by an efficient and reliable after sales service. Dhanusha Soysa, Managing Director, Civimech, outlined the values that his organisation has adhered to since its inception to become a leading entity in the industry.

By Jennifer Paldano Goonewardena
Photography Mahesh Bandara and Geeth Viduranga

Could you trace the beginning of Civimech?
Civimech was started in 1982 by my father the late Deshamanya Ravindra Soysa and and my mother, Mrs Durga Soysa. My father was employed in a company providing air conditioning solutions before he decided to venture out on his own. Securing the first job for his company was very critical as he did not have prior experience. He was wandering virtually everywhere in search of a potential client when one day he had met a friend who had given him his first job at the Edna factory. From then onwards he was able to build upon this opportunity to grow the company to where it is today.

Initially we had the authorised dealership for Carrier, followed by Hitachi and now we are the authorised dealer for Daikin Industries-Japan.

What are the Daikin products that you offer?
Our air-conditioning solutions are for residential, commercial and industrial complexes. We have a range of HVAC systems to cater to all of these sectors, including domestic split type air conditioners for households and small businesses to the ultramodern VRV air conditioning system with the latest power saving technology. Our diverse catalogue of products enable us to provide HVAC solutions that are custom designed to cater to a requirement of any capacity. Civimech is

proud to have been the HVAC service provider for the largest project that has been completed to date under the Ministry of Defense, ‘Suhurupaya’ in 2015. This building now houses the passport office and the office of registration of persons. Prior to that some of the major industrial projects included the Kandy City Centre, Iceland Residencies, Hambantota Port Administration Building, Omega Line and Benji Limited.

Maintenance And After-Sales Service Is The Heart Of Our Business. We Are A Professional Engineering Company And Every Aspect Of Our Business Is Handled By Teams Of Engineers And Qualified Technicians.

Our expert services include the design of HVAC systems to meet the customer’s requirement, supply and installation of equipment and most importantly the servicing and maintenance of those systems.

What can you tell us about your after-sales services?
Maintenance and after-sales service is the heart of our business. We are a professional engineering company and every aspect of our business is handled by teams of engineers and qualified technicians. My father got his start to the company due to a personal relationship and that has been the basis on which we built our customer service strategy. We build relationships with clients that go beyond the simple installation of an HVAC system. Our exceptional after-sales service and personal touch has guaranteed that our customers make Civimech their preferred HVAC service provider. For example, it has been over ten years since we designed and installed a complete HVAC system, which included water cooled chillers, AHUs, FCUs, cooling towers and water pumps at the Kandy City Centre (KCC) and we continue to provide after-sales service and new equipment for them. It has been the same with large scale apparel manufacturers such as Omega Line and MAS Holdings who we have been working with for over 15 years.

We have based our technicians around the island in towns such as Jaffna, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Kandy, Hambantota and in other locations that cover the length and breadth of Sri Lanka. Upon the request of clients, we also base technicians on site to provide uninterrupted service 24/7. This is to ensure that there is minimum disruption to operations in the event of a failure and to conduct planned maintenance in a timely manner. Clients such as KCC and many manufacturing

facilities have availed themselves of this service.

I believe that the primary challenge facing the industry is the difficulty in offering efficient and high quality after sales service. I also see that there is space for improvement in the quality of installation of products in the industry. Civimech operations have been built around six key values – health and safety, accountability, people, teamwork, customer service and results.

You are involved in offering air-conditioning solutions to commercial, industrial and residential places. Where do you see the limitations among the three segments?

Other countries have in place a lengthy process before the registration of a service provider. For instance, registration would be given only after the regulator has ascertained, among others, the standards, the people employed, and their background and the financial stability. This is a long and detailed process. In the absence of such a system, which is the case in Sri Lanka, we find other entities forwarding quotations for projects with vastly different capabilities and experience than us. This can have a significant impact on the cost of the project and there is a lot of undercutting that takes place. The market being competitive, a lot of clients will consider the price and make that a deciding factor. However, it is only when the client encounters problems after installation and when the after-sales service is poor that they realise their mistake. Issues such as this create a negative perception about the industry and impacts the reputation of all. This however does not happen with commercial and industrial clients, but more with domestic clients.

These Certifications Have Helped Us To Continuously Improve On Our Performance Indicators. The Feedback From Our Clients Is Also An Essential Tool For Us To Improve Our Service Levels.

In order to address these challenges, the authorities should establish a criteria based on which service providers in specialised areas are registered. Until this becomes a reality, Civimech will continue to utilize our experience, technical capabilities and specialised equipment to maintain the high standards that we hold ourselves accountable to in order to provide the best possible equipment and service that is required by our clients.

During your 35 years of service what standards in quality assurance have you adhered to?
We are an ISO 9001-2008 certified organisation. We have been certified with EM Grade 1 in Mechanical Ventilation and Air-Conditioning (MVAC) by ICTAD. By the end of 2017 we will be obtaining the ISO 14001:2015 certification as well as OSHAS 18001 to ensure the safety of our staff and customers. These certifications have helped us to continuously improve on our performance indicators. The feedback from our clients is also an essential tool for us to improve our service levels.

We have invested in an ERP system in order to streamline the processes and information flow that enables us to have visibility of all aspects of our ongoing projects and regular operations.

The health and safety of our team is priority number one for us. A project cannot be considered successfully completed if even a single person gets hurt in the implementation of it. Therefore, we consistently train and educate our employees, especially those out on the field, on the importance of approaching any task after understanding the risks associated with it and putting in place the necessary controls. Basic PPE is a must on all our job sites and in some instances, this becomes a challenge as some clients do not want technicians entering their homes with shoes on. However, this focus on health and safety is appreciated by our foreign clients and works in our favour when we put forward proposals for projects.

The Sri Lankan Chapter of ASHRAE recognised Civimech as the ‘HVAC Contractor of the Year’ for the excellent performance and delivery of quality workmanship in the HVAC industry.

To be ahead in the market what initiatives do you take in training your staff?
We believe that employees should be well trained, which includes training them in discipline and interpersonal communication as well. As I mentioned before, customer service is very important to us and we ensure that all our engineers are exposed to training programmes in the area.

We conduct in-house training as well as overseas training. Daikin has their factories in Japan, Thailand, India and China and their own training institutes. We send a group of technicians twice a year to their facilities in order for them to expand on their technical competencies, specifically on new products, troubleshooting and new installation methods. We also have representatives from Daikin coming to Sri Lanka to conduct seminars for our employees. The in-house training on industry updates is a fixed monthly exercise. This monthly training includes looking at new products, and how to work with them, troubleshooting and health and safety.

Civimech has diversified into agro, automobile and green solutions. Could you explain the motivation to launch into these areas?

My father was a petrol-head and started a small garage with his friends just after his A/Ls. This passion manifested again in the form of 'Civimech Automobile' in 1996 and was established to maintain our own fleet of vehicles. It was only in early 2000 that we opened it for outside repairs. Today we are a fully equipped automobile solutions provider that includes the full range of mechanical repairs, vehicle servicing and collision repairs, which include tinkering, painting and repairs for insurance claims.

Sri Lanka Must Focus On Developing Its Infrastructure. We Must Get Our Basics Right To Reach The Level We Aspire To Be At.

'Civimech Agro' was a result of my father's dream as he was fond of agriculture. We grow fruits and vegetables in 215 acres situated in Girandurukotte, which is 16 kilometres from Mahiyangana town. When we entered in 2002, the war was on and no company had been there. At that time the area was completely covered by forest. The people in the area had nothing. My father thought about their plight when he wanted to invest in the land. He wanted to give something back to the country, because our main business is to import and install, which means money is sent out of our country. Therefore he wanted to do something that would generate money for the country. We grow banana, passion fruit, papaya, melon and dragon fruit. A percentage of that is for the export market. We employ about 70 people from the area and you can see the difference in their lives compared to how they were. Today they have motorbikes and three wheelers to travel about. We provide their primary livelihood. We have welfare programmes in place for them, such as sponsoring their children's education. Our services in the area have extended to renovating the resting area in the Mahiyangana hospital for the benefit of the

people who travel from a distance for treatment and have no place to stay.

‘Civimech Green Solutions’ was launched in 2013 to provide industrial and domestic customers with energy saving solutions, which is mainly in the form of solar powered panels. The demand for solar panels is growing fast. With the ‘Soorya Bala Sangramaya’ initiated by the President we have been receiving many inquiries and we have taken on many projects. Many opt for solar panels because there is a big benefit for them, as well as for the Government. They invest on behalf of the Government and they also receive the benefits of their investment after two to three years.

Earlier, the initial investment in solar panels was quite high. But with the government encouraging solar power by waiving off duty for the importation of solar panels the price has become very competitive. The payback for the investment in solar panels is accrued in less than five years, whereas the warranty for solar panels is 25 years. The guarantee period for the inverter is five years. We are responsible to maintain the inverter for the five year guarantee period. But unlike before people get a payback for their investment in less than five years. For industrial installations the payback earlier was around 12 years, which has reduced to five years today.

We have also combined the HVAC arm and Green Solutions to provide a sustainable solution to domestic and industrial clients who require an environmentally friendly cooling solution.

What are the CSR projects that your company has initiated and has reached out to change the lives of people for the better?

We maintain a special fund for our CSR projects. My father always encouraged us to do such projects, although at the time our community initiatives were not formally defined as CSR, as this definition was not something that was mainstream. After the end of the civil war we built houses for disabled soldiers, got involved in flood relief activities and assisted in the resettlement of tsunami victims. These were not performed to gain good mileage for the Company, but because it was something we could do to positively impact the lives of those in need.

We Have Come A Long Way In Our Core Area Of Business And Have Become The Preferred HVAC Solution Provider In Sri Lanka

Our children are the future of our nation and we must do all that is in our power to ensure that they have the best possible future that we can provide for them. This is why one of our primary focus areas for CSR activities has always been to support the education of underprivileged children. This also includes supporting students who need assistance to follow a university education. A good education can build a strong foundation and we do our bit to make sure this foundation is solid in order to put our nation in safe hands.

We have started an Annual Blood Donation Program in my father's memory and thus far have had over 100 participants each year.

Is there a conducive environment for business in Sri Lanka?
Whilst there was a bit of a slowdown in the construction industry during the transition period when the new Government came into power, we are seeing an improvement this year. However, I feel that in future foreign investments on large projects, a provision must be made to ensure that preference should be given to local contractors over foreign companies. We have the capacity and the capability to execute large scale projects and this will create jobs and retain the foreign currency within the country without sending it overseas.

Sri Lanka must focus on developing its infrastructure. We must get our basics right to reach the level we aspire to be.

What would be your message to entrepreneurs and new comers to the industry?
Being a HVAC service provider who consistently provided after-sales service for the past 35 years without marring the Civimech name in the market was not an easy task. Providing HVAC solutions, job execution and system maintenance are all part and parcel of our deliverables due to the technical qualification, dedication and professionalism of our team of engineers and technicians. We should also always maintain ethical practices to ensure the sustainability of the industry.

As specialised HVAC contractors we must always educate our clients for the best possible solution based on the application, keeping in mind the financial and environmental impact to ensure that clients are not mislead and taken advantage of by showing short term benefits and not being transparent of the long-term costs. Trust is something that can take a lifetime to earn, but can be lost because of one bad decision.

Companies that have built their reputations based on trust and quality will be the ones that can weather any storm and grow.

What are the future plans for your company?
We have come a long way in our core area of business and have become the preferred HVAC solution provider in Sri Lanka.

I would like to expand our operations beyond our shores and make Civimech the preferred HVAC solution provider in South Asia. We are confident that we will be able to achieve this as we progress ahead.

