

Message from Chairman, National Science Foundation



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It affords me great pleasure to send this message to the National Conference on **“COVID-19: Impact, Mitigation, Opportunities and Building Resilience”** to be held on 27-28 January, 2021 under the theme **“From Adversity to Serendipity”**. The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most defining moments of our times and it has upended life and established systems across the globe with devastating and far-reaching impacts not only on health but on the economy, society, multilateral trade, cooperation and aid.

While those disruptions can be destabilising, they can also give rise to opportunities to discover and develop new models in many areas, including health, education, business, agriculture and trade. Every dark cloud has a silver lining and as Winston Churchill once said “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty”. We are prudently and cautiously optimistic. Dr Mehmet Yildiz, a technologist, says adversity is a blessing in disguise because it helps to create new neural pathways in the brain, which is an essential factor for neuroplasticity and resilience. We as a nation have missed many an opportunity in the past. One telling example is our failure to take advantage of the tsunami as an impetus for development. However, this time, we will not allow the opportunity to slip and will leverage it to leapfrog to development.

It is not the crisis that cripples our economy, but our response to it. When confronted with a crisis, there is a choice to make. Be a “Cry-sis” or be a “Try-sis”. We embrace the latter. As scientists and professionals, we cannot leave this situation entirely to the Government and stand aloof from it. In this decisive and critical hour, we, scientists and professionals, have an inescapable responsibility and a profound moral obligation to the nation and its people.

It is in this context that the National Science Foundation (NSF), the premier national institution mandated to promote Science and Technology (S&T) in the country, came forward and organised this event with a view to bringing together scientists, academics, professionals, economists, planners, and policy makers, as well as movers and shakers of industry to address high priority economic and social issues in a holistic manner. Through their participation we may seize the emerging opportunities through a trans-disciplinary approach to minimizing the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and people of Sri Lanka and to building a better future. This endeavour has been augmented by drawing upon the knowledge and expertise

of top-flight Sri Lankan scientists across the globe, thereby giving the event an international dimension. We firmly believe that during a pandemic, we cannot work in isolation and that global collaboration and cooperation is imperative for tackling the crisis.

As Shih Choog Fong, former President of the National University of Singapore said it takes a shared destiny to create a nation. We know that a shared destiny is the outcome of the collective and cumulative efforts of the whole community to shape society and the nation. A shared destiny also comprises the hopes and aspirations of the people for the future and pulling together to move forward through promise and peril. Sri Lanka and the NSF have a shared destiny. The NSF will rise and fall with Sri Lanka. Others may come and go with the weather but the NSF is here to stay. While reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the nation in this decisive hour, I wish the conference a resounding success.