

# Exporters want delayed EDRS paid

*Exporters Association Chief calls for Govt. to honour its promise, says encouragements for SMEs important*

By UDITHA JAYASINGHE

THE long-overdue Export Development Reward Scheme (EDRS) came into the limelight on Wednesday as the newly-appointed Exporters Association Chairperson Dawn Austin stressed the importance of the Government completing the payment and appealed for its completion in the near future.

The EDRS was introduced by the Government in 2008 as the global financial crisis hit exporters hard. It was an incentive for companies to keep their staff intact and maintain high exports with the support

of the rewards scheme. However, despite the lapse of almost three years, the Government has not completed the promised payment.

"There has been extreme disappointment that funds expected from the EDRS for the third and fourth quarters have not been forthcoming. Companies that managed to keep the same number of employees and significant exports need to be encouraged. Moreover, the small and medium enterprises, which form a large part of the export industry, need support to continue expanding," she said.

Insisting the EDRS would make a huge difference for com-

panies that did not fare well during the tenuous period, Austin appealed to Chief Guest Economic Development Minister Basil Rajapaksa and Guest of Honour Central Bank Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal to solve this recurring issue as soon as possible.

However, Austin was clear that in future the export industry should not depend on Government subsidies for support and instead stressed on the need to become independent. For this, she advocated expanding products and services as well as branching out to emerging markets.

More Page 14

## Exporters...

Doing more business with China and India was also commented upon since Sri Lanka currently has around 1% of exports to China and 5% to India, two of the fastest growing economies of the world. Taking advantage of the free trade agreements between these countries was highlighted as one avenue for export growth.

"As an industry we will have to pay more attention to compliance since new markets will mean new regulations. It is important to find new products and promote opportunities so that new ranks of entrepreneurs will be born. In addition the industry needs to address labour shortages and with the rapidly escalating per capita income high overhead costs."

Applauding the Government's stance to increase infrastructure, she made an appeal for railway transport to be increased at least up to 30% so that costs will decrease and efficiency will rise. She also called for the establishment of fast-track problem solving structures and their ready access for industry stakeholders.