

## **Sri Lanka Army-Manufactured Air-conditioned Mali-bound Unibuffels Ready for Shipment**

Sri Lanka Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (SLEME) troops of the Army adding a milestone to the annals of Army inventions handed over the SLEME-produced 9 modernized Unibuffels (improved version of Unicorns), one recovery vehicle and 3 containers to the shippers for passage to the Combat Convoy Company (CCC) of the Sri Lankan UN Peace-Keepers serving in Mali, a landlocked nation in West Africa, affected by ethnic strifes.

Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva, Chief of Defence Staff, Commander of the Army and Head of the National Operation Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak as the Chief Guest for the occasion after formal receipt of those vehicles and accessories at the Army HQ this morning (26) handed them back symbolically to Mr Rahileen Booram, Line Manager of Ben Line Shipping Agencies (Pvt) Ltd for onward shipping arrangements.

Those landmine-resistant vehicles and equipment, produced locally using technical expertise of SLEME troops, save a large chunk of foreign exchange to the government and the Army as they have been produced using imported spares on par with international standards to match with UN specifications. The SLEME has been instrumental in producing those vehicles, identical to the South African ones for several years.

Speaking to Media personnel, the Chief Guest commented: "We are very happy to have been able to ship this consignment of 9 Unibuffels and one foreign-manufactured recovery vehicle for use of 243 heroic Sri Lankan Combat Convoy troops serving UN Peace Keeping missions in Mali for the last two years. We have reached an understanding with the UN over the number of such vehicles that should be made available to those troops. Earlier, imported WMAZ vehicles, each costing about Rs 40 million was purchased for those UN troops which are very expensive. Those combat squadrons are generally supplied with those vehicles, but our skilled SLEME troops spending nearly one fourth of that expenditure, managed to produce those vehicles in an impressive manner even before this stock."

"These Unibuffels have similarities with those WMAZ vehicles but the numbers that can move in these Sri Lankan ones are more and they are fully air-conditioned as against imported ones sans air-conditioning in accordance with UN needs and specifications. It is very easy to move seated inside these vehicles and we have ensured maximum comfort for our troops since movement of operations in Mali cover many thousands of kilometers. Unlike in other Unibuffels, we have placed two guns in each vehicle, although only one gun operator is facilitated in other vehicles. Our troops who have expertise in de-mining roles are performing commendable duties in Mali and other overseas assignments. During COVID-19 crisis, our great Sri Lankans without wasting time while being confined home, produced and invented an assortment of innovations and new products which would save millions for us if we continue to produce them here. We believe that once this message of our capabilities is communicated, there could be a demand for them even from foreign nations in future since a Unibuffel serves a very essential accessory to infantry troops," so said, Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva in the voice cut to Media personnel at the venue.

Presently, 243 Sri Lankan UN Peacekeepers, including 20 officers and 223 other ranks, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Nihal Gallage, together with 65 vehicles are serving the Mali Combat Squadron. These vehicles and equipment were closely inspected by Major General W.A.S.S Wanasingha, Director General Overseas Operations on Thursday (25) at the Base workshop in Katubedda before they were handed over to the Commander of the Army today (26).

Principal Staff Officers, Senior Officers, Director EME and Officers witnessed the formal handover ceremony at the Army HQ.