

Second quarter GDP estimates delayed till December

Statistics office says delay is due to complexities pertaining to capturing digital economic activities

Also says collecting data on new economic activities such as telemedicine services and running of quarantine centres

Says both 2Q and 3Q GDP estimates will be out by Dec. 15

Pledges this would be the first and final instance that a delay of this nature would occur

The release of the second quarter (2Q) gross domestic product (GDP) estimates are set to get further delayed till December 15 as the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) is capturing economic activities carried out digitally while collecting data on new activities such as telemedicine services and running of quarantine centres as part of the country's economic output.

DCS earlier said it intended to release 2Q GDP estimates by mid-October but the complexities surrounding capturing, compiling and testing such data complicated by the pandemic, has pushed

the publishing date till December.

However, DCS is expected to publish the 2Q GDP estimates together with 3Q GDP estimates on December 15, as it would face fewer complications in compiling 3Q numbers with economic activities reaching normalcy during the July-September period.

"While it is obvious that many economic activities were crippled during that time, there have been instances where some other economic activities have taken place in a different way than usual. Some economic activities were also encouraged by COVID-19," DCS said.

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"In this context, it is imperative to discuss with international consultants the methods of estimating the output value of certain industry and service activities. It was also decided to collect data on some of the above economic activities from other sources," it added.

Leading among other data sources, which were less important in normal times, was the telecommunication companies as DCS said they were working together with all telcos to study the behaviour of the data usage, as office-based work—both in the State and the private sector—education delivery and

healthcare services had shifted online during the lockdowns when people were asked to socially distance.

The ability to capture the work conducted using Information Technology and estimating the new economic activities conducted during 2Q will somewhat soften the deeper economic contraction expected for the second quarter.

The Sri Lankan economy contracted 1.6 percent in the first quarter despite only the last two weeks of March remaining closed due to coronavirus.

Publishing the 2Q GDP estimates are already two months late from its typical 75-day period since the end of a quarter, sparking criticism against the government for suspected foul play by way of attempts to manipulate the numbers.

DCS denied the charges and said Sri Lanka is not the only country to face a delay in publishing its 2Q economic output but said that this would be first and the final instance that a delay of this nature would occur.