

Speech: Celebrating 70 years of UK-Sri Lanka friendship: Speech by H.E. James Dauris

Honourable Minister, Faiszer Mustapha, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Suba sandiawak weeva, Elorukum Vanakam, Asalam Alaikum

This evening, Helen and I, together with all of our colleagues in the High Commission and in the British Council, are honoured to have so many friends here together. Some of you have travelled a long way to be with us tonight. A special welcome to [former President Nasheed and] our other guests from Maldives, neighbour of Sri Lanka and long-standing friend of both of our countries.

I recently came across a useful bit of advice for people giving speeches. It was this: "Make sure you have finished speaking before your audience has finished listening."

The Minister and I will do our best to finish speaking before you have finished listening, but we will need your cooperation. In advance, thank you.

The playwright Oscar Wilde commented: "I can resist everything except temptation".

This evening I can resist almost everything except the temptation to tell you something about why seventy years of the relationship between Sri Lanka and the UK gives us lots of good reasons to celebrate.

1948 was not, of course, the beginning of our relationship. But with Independence came the beginning of a new chapter. Throughout the past seventy years ours is a relationship that many people have valued, invested in and cherished.

We have many reasons to celebrate today:

- We are proud of our people to people links, and of the hundreds of thousands of people of Sri Lankan origin living in the UK who help to make our country as successful as it is today.
- We are proud of our links through parliamentary traditions, the law and the Commonwealth. It's a pleasure to have Members of Parliament who have recently been in London with us tonight. We were very pleased to have President Sirisena lead Sri Lanka's delegation at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London in April.
- We are proud of our flourishing educational and cultural links, a large but by no means the only part of the important work being done by the British Council in Sri Lanka, ably represented by its director, Gill Caldicott, and members of her team this evening. It's good to lots of

the many Sri Lankan organisations that make these educational and cultural faces of our relationship as successful as they are with us.

- We are proud too of our links through sports. We are looking forward to having the England cricket team here (and will be hoping they fare better than did against Scotland last weekend).
- We are proud of the many business links we enjoy, some of them more than a century old, others new and equally exciting.
- And we are proud of the work that our High Commission does, with all the organisations we work with and the projects we fund, from supporting Sri Lanka to achieve its objective of being free of mines by 2020, to promoting inter-religious dialogues in Trincomalee and Batticaloa, from working with the Sri Lankan Police Service on tackling violence against women, to supporting Sri Lanka's Peacebuilding Priority plan. The British government is currently providing more than £50 million of funding to development support in Sri Lanka. My special thanks to all of my colleagues on the High Commission team, without whose talent and hard work we could not do what we are doing.

Mention of the businesses that link us gives me an opportune moment to thank our five sponsors this evening for their generous support.

De La Rue – one of the world's leading producers of secure documents, a company that manufactures here in Colombo and exports from Sri Lanka to the region.

Finlays – a company whose relationship with Sri Lanka goes back more than a hundred years. If you have had the good fortune to try one of our tea cocktails tonight it was made with Finlays' Earl Grey tea.

HSBC – HSBC needs no real introduction. With a history spanning well over a century in Sri Lanka, they are the oldest bank in the country as well as a global ambassador for Britain's financial services industries.

Jaguar Land Rover and their authorised local distributor, SML Frontier Automotive. This year Land Rover, one of UK industry's most iconic brands, celebrates its 70th birthday as well as 70 years in Sri Lanka.

And Unilever, alphabetically last but by no means least – another champion of the UK's long trading relationship with this country, in the local market since the nineteenth century and a manufacturer here for the last 80 years.

They deserve our applause.

These companies' stories of successful investment in Sri Lanka illustrate the traditional and the modern in the business our two countries are doing together. Each of their successes tells its own tale of commitment, talent, opportunity and ambition. Theirs are exciting examples that illustrate the possibilities for doing business in Sri Lanka today, opportunities that will only grow with sensible economic reform.

As many of you will know, we don't have a national day in the UK. But we do celebrate Her Majesty The Queen's birthday. This year we celebrate her 92nd

birthday and her 66 years – two thirds of a century – on the throne. We were delighted that Prince Edward and the Countess of Wessex were able to represent The Queen at the official celebration of Sri Lanka's 70th anniversary of independence in February.

Winston Churchill, historian as much as politician, commented: "If we open a quarrel between the past and the present we shall find that we have lost the future."

It think it can equally be said that if we continue today to build on friendships founded in the past, they will be stronger still in the future in ways that benefit us all. And that is our firm ambition.

Ladies and gentlemen, can I ask you to join me in a toast:

To His Excellency, Maithripala Sirisena, President of Sri Lanka and to the people of Sri Lanka.