

Independence Day Diplomatic Event

**Address by Sashikala Premawardhane, High
Commissioner of Sri Lanka**

**Hon Dr Janil Puthuchery, Senior Minister of State,
Ministry of Communications and Information & Ministry
of Transport**

**Mr Sitoh Yih Pin, Member of Parliament for Potong Pasir
SMC and Mr Lim Biow Chuan, Member of Parliament for
Mountbatten SMC**

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

**It is with great pleasure that I extend a very warm welcome
to all those present here, on this joyous occasion, to
commemorate the 72nd Anniversary of Sri Lanka's
Independence.**

To our Guest of Honour, Hon Dr Janil Puthucheary and Honorable Members of Parliament Mr Sitoh Yih Pin, and Mr Lim Biow Chuan we are deeply honoured by your presence and I sincerely thank you for joining us at this important occasion.

On the 4th of February, 1948, after nearly 500 years of imperialist colonial rule, Sri Lanka became independent. Our forefathers from the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Malay and Burgher communities played a vital role in the independence movement, and in the path towards Sri Lanka achieving independence. On this occasion, we recognise with gratitude, the tremendous contributions that they have made.

Sri Lanka is one of Asia's oldest democracies and is a unitary state. We have enjoyed universal adult franchise since 1931. Sri Lanka is also a country steeped in ancient history nurtured by the Buddhist philosophy. It is a country in which people of all ethnicities and religious beliefs have shaped its society and way of life. The multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of our society is one which is fiercely protected and promoted and one which we treasure.

At Independence Square, where national Independence Day celebrations were held this year on the 4th, just two days ago, His Excellency Gotabaya Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka addressing the Nation emphasized the right of all citizens of Sri Lanka to live freely and securely. He highlighted the freedoms enshrined in the Constitution of Sri Lanka and stated that the Government was committed to ensuring that these rights would be protected for all of Sri Lanka's citizens as they are the rights of all human beings that no one can challenge. His vision for Sri Lanka's future, outlined in the National Policy framework of the Government "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour" is aimed at achieving a fourfold outcome of a productive citizenry, a contented family, a disciplined and just society and a prosperous nation. The framework outlines key policies, giving due consideration to socio, economic, environmental and political aspects. The National Policy Framework also gives foremost priority to ensuring National Security. It clearly spells out that new methodologies will be adopted to safeguard the country and its people without compromising the democratic space available to its people. The Framework also proposes progressive reforms on the

economic front such as a new tax policy, capital market reforms, and an effective government mechanism. While targeting an average GDP growth rate of 6.5% percent or higher, up to 2025, a tax system which will help promote production and entrepreneurship is to be introduced.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sri Lanka is rapidly consolidating its status as a country on the rise, characterised by considerable growth potential. Despite many challenges over the years, our economy has remained strong and resilient. Sri Lanka has shown steady growth over the last decade and is now categorised as an upper middle-income country. The economy grew at an average of 5.6 percent during the period of 2010-2018, reflecting a peace dividend and a determined policy thrust towards reconstruction and growth; although growth has slowed down in the last few years. Sri Lanka is also fast emerging as a key centre of knowledge and services, logistics and manufacturing in Asia. Sri Lanka has a highly literate population and its social indicators rank among the highest in South Asia. Sri Lanka has gained a reputation for providing the best value-for-money ICT talent in Asia.

The Island is one of the best destinations for providing off-shore services for Information Technology Enabled Service (ITEs) as well as services related to Finance and Accounting, Legal, Insurance, Banking and Telecommunications. The value-for-money factor is derived through a high quality talent pool, which is especially attractive to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) who are unable to afford the premiums charged by the larger players in the ICT Industry. Global strategy and management consulting firm A.T. Kearney ranked Sri Lanka at No. 25 in the 2019 edition of the Global Services Location Index™ (GSLI), which is a ranking of 50 countries based on their potential and fit to deliver business services to global companies.

Sri Lanka is also strategically located in the Indian Ocean straddling the vital sea lanes of communication which have become the major artery of global trade.

In recent years, Sri Lanka is also becoming an increasingly popular tourism destination which was ranked world no. 1 destination to travel to in 2019 by Lonely Planet and as best island to visit in 2019 by Travel+Leisure. It continues to be ranked a top destination this year as well. Sri Lanka today

therefore, represents a unique value proposition in terms of location, resources, and human capital.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Sri Lanka and Singapore enjoy a warm and abiding friendship, underpinned by mutual respect and understanding, shared cultural values and strong people-to-people linkages. This is also a very important year for us as Sri Lanka and Singapore celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations this year. Our formal celebrations of this milestone in bilateral relations will commence tonight with the digital launch of the 50th anniversary logo. We have lined up several events throughout the year, highlighting the unique and wonderful relationship that our two countries and peoples share.

Bilateral relations between the two countries has been on an upward trajectory for the past few years with several high level visits including the visit of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in 2018. This was the first visit by a Singapore Prime Minister to Sri Lanka after 14 years. We acknowledge with gratitude the assistance extended by the

Government of Singapore in the immediate aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. The Easter Sunday attack can be noted as the deadliest single day violence experienced by Sri Lanka and it has been the first experience for Sri Lanka in dealing with religious, radicalized youth. On behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka I wish to express sincere appreciation to the Government of Singapore for the extensive assistance provided in the aftermath of the attacks through the Internal Security Department (ISD) of the Ministry of Home Affairs of Singapore and the high-level support extended through the visits of Hon K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs & Law. Minister Shanmugam was most recently in Sri Lanka in January this year on the invitation of the President of Sri Lanka.

The bilateral trade in goods between Sri Lanka and Singapore in 2019 was valued at US\$ 883 million. Sri Lanka's main exports to Singapore are mineral fuel and oils, textiles, tea, precious and semi-precious stones, seafood and ships and boats.

Singapore is at present the 7th largest investor in Sri Lanka. It has invested a total of US\$ 658 million during the period

of 2005 -2017. Around 100 Singaporean businesses operate in Sri Lanka involved in various sectors such as manufacturing, real estate, and infrastructure development. Sri Lanka and Singapore also signed a Free Trade Agreement in 2018.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge with deep appreciation the assistance that the Government of Singapore has continued to provide through numerous cooperation programmes. Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has extended unstinted cooperation in providing technical and capacity building assistance through the Singapore Cooperation Programme in numerous fields of training. We also appreciate the cooperation extended by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Enterprise Singapore and Economic Development Board in the trade, investment and economic spheres. We have had several business delegations exchanged between the two countries in the past few years leading to closer cooperation and augmenting trade and investment ties. We also greatly appreciate the support extended by the Ministry of Manpower, and the Ministry of Home Affairs, including the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority.

We also thank the Temasek Foundation International and the Civil Services College of Singapore for developing and carrying out a comprehensive public sector training programme for Sri Lankan civil servants. The Singapore Cooperation Enterprise (SCE), the Centre for Liveable Cities, the E-Government Leadership Centre of Singapore, the ITE Education Services (ITEES), Singhealth, the Singapore Red Cross, the Lee Kuan Yew (LKY) School of Public Policy and the Institute of South Asian Studies of the National University of Singapore, the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and other agencies and institutions have closely collaborated with us in multiple sectors and we thank them all for their continued cooperation.

I also avail of this opportunity to thank all Sri Lankans including those of Sri Lankan origin in Singapore and our Singaporean friends for their contribution towards strengthening the relationship between our two countries.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Sri Lanka is a beautiful island paradise just 4 short hours away from Singapore with 31 flights a week connecting us. There are many beautiful countries in the world. What we hope you will see, if you do decide to visit, is that Sri Lanka is truly a unique experience. We are blessed with pristine nature, civilizational history, and island life, three things which have contributed to shaping our world view and defining us as distinct peoples of the world. Tonight we hope to give a glimpse of Sri Lanka through its cuisine and dance. We have flown down Master Chef Dr Publis Silva in order to present to you an authentic Sri Lankan Culinary experience. Similarly, tonight you will also see traditional Sri Lankan dance forms by famous dance exponent Chandana Wickremesighe and his troupe. I hope you will stay a while and enjoy this feast for the senses. A Sri Lankan Food Festival will also be held from 7-14 February at the Mandarin Orchard as a part of our 50th anniversary celebrations.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity to thank our sponsors and well-wishers, the Shangri La hotel and its staff

and the staff of my High Commission for making possible this beautiful event. I thank you once again for your gracious presence here today, and for your friendship with Sri Lanka.

Following the National Anthem of Singapore, I would like to propose a toast to the good health and well-being of Her Excellency Madam Halimah Yacob, President of the Republic of Singapore.