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Prime Minister's remarks at the Banquet hosted by the President of Sri Lanka (March 13, 2015)

March 13, 2015

Your Excellency President Maithripala Sirisena,
Mrs. Jayanthi Sirisena,
Hon'ble Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for your kind words. Thank you for your wonderful hospitality.

Since the time we arrived this morning, we have experienced the wonderful hospitality and the warmth of your welcome at every step. We are touched by the affection of the people. We can travel around the world. But, nothing compares with the feeling of comfort and belonging that I get in a neighbouring country

A country with the gifts of nature, a rich culture and warm and welcoming people is a blessed one. This is Sri Lanka, the paradise on earth. I thank you, Mr. President, your Government and the people of Sri Lanka.

Mr. President, it is a unique moment in the history of our relations.

We are grateful to you for visiting us so soon after your election. We were honoured that you chose India as your first destination. It is my privilege to visit Sri Lanka just a month later – and to be your first guest. Sri Lankans and Indians will always turn to each other with the natural instincts of friendship and kinship.

Mr. President, you won a historic victory in a remarkable election. Your mandate carried the collective voice of Sri Lanka; and, the aspirations of every section of this richly diverse nation.

You and the entire political leadership have shown great wisdom and courage in uniting behind a common purpose. And, together you have taken bold steps towards a future of a more united, more inclusive and a more prosperous Sri Lanka.

You carry with you the good wishes and hopes of 1.25 billion friends across the Palk Strait. In South Asia, we all tend to be emotional about friendship.

So, we are grateful for the friendship you have shown us. The trust, confidence and friendship of Sri Lanka mean a great deal to us. To know that we live not only in proximity, but also in each other's hearts is very comforting.

We owe it to our shared inheritance that is nearly as ancient as human life in these parts of the world - to the time of Prince Vijaya, or the five Isvarams, the five Abodes of Shiva in Sri Lanka, also revered in ancient India; or, the great age of Ashoka.

We love our cricket and we pray at the same shrines. We are nurtured by the same clouds. Today, we often battle similar challenges; and, we seek the same future for our people. We are two countries that have much to learn from each other; and, so much more to do together.

I have been blessed to experience so much today. Tomorrow, I am excited about visiting Anuradhapur, Jaffna and Talaimanar - places that are symbols of our multifaceted relationship. Sri Lanka's great Gandhian Shri Ariaratne had spoken about blending science and technology and spiritualism for a nobler, more just and more peaceful world. India and Sri Lanka have their shared spiritual heritage and the tools of the modern world to make a difference.

After my discussions with President, Prime Minister and people from different walks of life, I am confident that we can do it. We are better placed and prepared to seize the opportunities and shoulder the responsibilities of our partnership – for the prosperity of our people; and, the larger good of South Asia and our wider maritime neighbourhood.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, may I request you to join me in raising a toast

- to the good health of His Excellency, President Maithripala Sirisena;
- to the continued progress and prosperity of the Sri Lankan people; and
- to closer friendship and cooperation between India and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Thank you.



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