Deakin Law School Oration Dinner

Thursday 16 February, 2017

The Honourable Prime Minister and Professor Wickramasinghe and distinguished members of your delegation

Speaker the Honourable Telmo Languiller MP

Members of Parliament

Chancellor and Mrs Stanhope

Vice-Chancellor and Dr den Hollander AO,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us this evening.

Well, what an honour and pleasure it is for me to welcome Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and Professor Wickramasinghe to Victoria.

Prime Minister, may I take this opportunity to thank you for your stimulating oration this evening, to acknowledge your very distinguished public life across several decades, and to note that it is a particular pleasure to be able to have you join us early in this year, the 70th anniversary year of formal diplomatic relations between our two countries.

During this anniversary year, we can reflect upon and celebrate the rich history that we have shared.
It is of course underpinned by our links to the Commonwealth, as well as our mutual strategic, trade, investment and sporting interests. And yes, I must congratulate Sri Lanka on its impressive win against our Prime Minister’s XI last night in Canberra.

But, most importantly, our relationship rests on the people to people connections between us.

More than 40,000 Victorians of Sri Lankan birth contribute enormously to every aspect of life in our State.

One holds a very special connection with my Vice-Regal office here in Victoria. Former Governor Professor David de Kretser AC – a brilliant medical researcher and contributor to our State - was born in Colombo.

Multiculturalism is truly at the heart of our identity. We are comprised of people from over 200 different countries, who speak more than 250 different languages and have more than 130 different faiths. We understand the strength that diversity brings.

We understand too that the bright future that we shall share will be championed by the clever and worldly young people of both our countries.

I am proud to say that Victorian schools and universities have the largest number of Sri Lankan students in Australia – with enrolments in higher education almost doubling over the past two years.
I am confident that just as your youngsters learn about, and indeed become a part of our community, ours in turn learn about your country and culture, and are inspired to visit and to learn more.

Together, they will be the informal ambassadors for our respective jurisdictions, and partnership opportunities - whether in trade, research or investment - will naturally flow.

It gives us great optimism for the next 70 years, in which our relationship will undoubtedly continue to develop and flourish.

As for the immediate future, having observed your heavy workload in the course of this visit, may I just wish you both a relaxing dinner and evening.