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That we will now welcome the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. The Prime Minister of Sri Lanka will be addressing the parliament. So, I will now request the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka to address the Maldives Parliament. The Prime Minister.

Hon. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe:

Honourable Speaker of the People’s Majlis, my good friend Mohamed Nasheed, honourable Members of the People’s Majlis, distinguished guests. It is indeed a great honour to address the People’s Majlis of Maldives islands at the time when the people of Maldives enjoy the privileges of Parliamentary democracy and when parliament is headed by former President of Maldives, a democracy campaigner, and a longtime friend of Sri Lanka. I must first thank the honourable Speaker and the Members of the Majlis for inviting me to address People’s Majlis. Even though diplomatic relations between our countries started on 26 July 1965, the very first day that Maldives gained independence, the relationship between the peoples of Sri Lanka and Maldives is back many centuries. According to Mahavamsa the great Sri Lankan chronicle the Maldives was known as Mahinda-dvipa and this is supposed to be where part of the group that came with Prince Vijaya settled down. The people of our nations also share common attributes of culture, food and linguistic. Our languages Dhivehi and Sinhalese have common origin alookpragit. Sri Lanka is considered to be second home for many Maldivians, providing shared experiences in education, and medical service. Many Sri Lankans work in the Maldives, while all of us relish the famous Maldives fish product known as “umbalakada”. But honourable Speaker, our commonalities are not limited to culture, food and trade. Both our people have strong commitment to the democracy. At the outset I would like to congratulate President Solih and Speaker Nasheed who are frontrunners of democratic movement in the Maldives for having strengthened people’s powers and rights in Maldives. I would like to make use of this opportunity to explain to you the major strides taken to strengthen democracy and ensure freedom of society in Sri Lanka during the last few years of our government. In other countries executive power is vested in the President. But in Sri Lanka, it is the cabinet of Ministers including the President that is in charge of direction and control of Parliament. The cabinet Ministers are also collectively responsible to the Parliament. The President is asked to appoint a Prime Minister, the person who is likely to command the most support in Parliament. This position was upheld by the court of appeal in 2018, when it issued an interim order restraining Mahinda Rajapaksa, the former President from functioning as the Prime Minister despite being appointed by the President

since 122 of the 225 members of parliament were oppose to him. Earlier the President also had the discretionary power to appoint ministers from among the members of parliament which was contrary to the Westminster's tradition. With the 19th amendment we corrected this position by requiring the President to appoint ministers on the advice of Prime Minister. This reinforces the collective responsibility of the cabinet of the ministers to parliament. Today the major feature of Westminster parliament government exists side by side with the executive presidency which we are committed to abolish due to his profound powers that have been often been exploited and abused by incumbents with impunity. The 19th amendment further strengthens parliament by restricting the President's power to dissolve parliament, the President cannot dissolve parliament for four and half years unless parliament requests dissolution by 2/3 majority, in this we copied from the UK parliament. In October 2018, the President purported to dissolve parliament without such a resolution, but the Supreme Court held the dissolution of the parliament was unconstitutional. Another important provision enacted under the 19th amendment restricts the terms of President and Parliament to 5 years from an earlier term of 6 years. Prior to the 19th amendment the President has in total immunity from suits. This was restricted by the 19th amendment which provided for access to the President to the reviewable by the Supreme Court under the fundamental rights jurisdiction, the dissolution of parliament in 2018 was declared unconstitutional under this provision. The 19th amendment was deemed necessary as I said, because of the flagrant violation of constitution under the previous regime. For instance, then the Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranayake was removed in 2013 without a proper resolution of impeachment today I note, that's was the first time this Majlis is approving appointment of 2 female judges to the Supreme Court; congratulations. Similarly, there was a high level of politicization in the public service and the police. The 19th amendment addresses these issues by establishing an independent judicial service commission, an independent police commission, an independent public service commission, an election commission, finance commission, to determine funding for provincial councils and a national audit commission. The members of these commissions are now appointed by the constitutional council which also approves the appointment of the Chief Justice, the judges of Supreme courts, the Inspector General of Police, and the Attorney General. Today, the constitutional council can refer back to the President, name the recommended by him to get alternative recommendations. Constitutional Council includes the Speaker, the Prime Minister, the leader of opposition, representative of President and the civil society members. Furthermore, honourable Speaker, the legislative exercise of parliament was enriched and expanded by introducing the sectorial lower house committee system. Accordingly, 16 the sectorial lower house committees comprising members of parliament was established to assist parliament in

the analysis, appraisal and evaluation of the application, administration, execution and effectiveness of legislation passed by parliament. It means they can take up any law passed 50 years ago and determine how effective it is or whether it has been replaced. All bills, resolutions, treaties and reports are referred to the relevant oversight committee for report prior to being considered by parliament. Honourable Speaker; very soon we will be tabling the bill to establish a parliamentary budget office, one of the important offices in the democracy people's rights to information. It has been included as a fundamental right in the 19th amendment. The right to information act passed by parliament recognized the one of the strongest such laws in the world. But laws alone do not strengthen democracy. Laws can be repealed or ignored. The strengthening of key democratic institutions and their implementing mechanism also necessary. We achieved the independence of these institutions through the power mentioned constitutional council. The appointees were no longer dependent on the executive. They had the space to act independently. This is how we secured the independence of judiciary. But challenges are not over. The abuse of democratic space for example through hate speech and fake news are some of the new dangers. The social media is like a god of ancient times, both the creator and destroyer. It has the ability to strengthen the message of freedom as well as passion and emotions that lead to destruction. It is the dilemma of the cyber space and democracy. The frightening ability to create the thousand Hitlers, setting fire to thousand steps. Finding a balance between democratization news and the legal obligations of the user to prevent harm is the complex question that which we, you and many countries to grapple with. The final solution requires an educated public, aware of their freedoms and the threats that are opposed by the net and the webs. Honourable Speaker; Sri Lanka has been subject to 25 years of terrorism nevertheless the Eastern Sudan bombing by the sympathisers of ISIS was a radically different terrorist attack. We have learnt a lot from this strategic experience and today, Sri Lanka stands ready to work with all stakeholders to establish an effective mechanism for regional cooperation to counter ISIS terrorism. I must express my interest at this young junction to your delegation who visited Sri Lanka after the bomb explosion. Honourable Speaker; you gave us much needed support at a critical junction. Historically Sri Lanka and the Maldives maintained a convenient and supportive bilateral relationship. In recent times Sri Lanka has been assisting Maldives in the areas of education and capacity building of Maldivian military and police. Of course, Maldives and Sri Lanka joint commission which was established in 1984 has also been working out mutual cooperation in the areas of tourism, fisheries, education, health, skills development, sports and employment and cultural cooperation. Today the diversification of trade is a strong component of the bilateral relation between Sri Lanka and Maldives. The Maldives is the third largest export destination for Sri Lanka among SAARC countries after India and

Pakistan. The value of total trade between the 2 countries are 271 million US dollars in 2017, it increased 304 million US dollars in 2018. Hundreds of Sri Lankan professionals and skilled workers accordingly received in Maldives. Later, there has been increasing the number of employment opportunities for Sri Lankans in the Maldives. I have no doubt that Sri Lankans can supply more professional and skilled workers, particularly in the field of construction, hospitality and education. In order to fortify the mutual relationship between our countries further, several agreements of cooperation in the areas of visa facilitation, water supply, youth development, vocational training, higher education and social empowerment were signed between our two countries during my visit. In addition, parents and guardians of students study in Sri Lanka will be now able to get guardian visas till the student reach the age of 18 years with no lower age limit. As a special arrangement visa for grand parents of the students also will be facilitated. So they could stay and spend time with their grand children in Sri Lanka. Maldivians can now undergo organ transplanting in Sri Lanka including kidney and liver transplant in all private hospitals in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka also will assist the Maldives to setup the drug rehabilitation centre in Addu atoll and provide all necessary assistance setting up that facility. As mentioned the President Ibrahim Mohamed Solh during his state visit to Sri Lanka, we will also be assisting setting up two schools in the Maldives. The relevant authority of both countries will coordinate this initiative in moving forward. We also signed an agreement on higher education and vocational training yesterday. When I was the Minister of education I initiated the scheme to permit Sri Lankan teachers to teach in your schools. Today as Prime Minister, I seek to go further to brush up your vocational education sector by extending our assistance to train your trainers in numerous occupational skills. We are also looking at offering more higher education opportunities in Sri Lanka for Maldivian students and more educational opportunities for Maldivian and Sri Lankan students in Maldives. Just before I came to this August assembly, the honourable speaker and the delegation and our delegation discussed, how our two legislative assemblies could work together in the common ground. We have already appointed one of our members of parliament, honourable Rauf, to initiate the discussion on behalf of Sri Lanka. So, we look forward to more fruitful discussions and outcomes as the result of two parliaments taking the initiative. Honourable Speaker; Sri Lanka and Maldives are two neutral nations situated in the crossroad of the Indian Ocean face with rising regional tensions, terrorism, piracy, and drug trafficking. Therefore, we must strengthen our bilateral in this fear and seek cooperating and overcoming these threats. Today, climate change is an impending threat to all of us. We are cognizant of the particular vulnerability of the Maldives to rising sea level and very real danger of your island coming underwater. Let me reassure you that we stand ready to support fully in

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מגילת אסתר וראשי תיבות:

سِرَتِ رَسُوْلٍ

بِرَأْسِ الْكَلِمَاتِ وَرَأْسِ الْأَقْسَامِ:

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والحمد لله رب العالمين. وَرَأْسُهَا الرَّحْمٰنُ الرَّحِيْمِ.
