

*Speech for Dr Mahamood Shougee, the Minister of Education,  
Republic of Maldives at the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony of  
the Central Library of the Maldives College of Higher Education,  
Male'.*

*18 January 2004; 10 am.*

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

الحمد لله رب العالمين اللهم صل وسلم علي نبينا محمد  
وعلي آله واصحابه اجمعين

Honourable Mr Fathhulla Jameel,

His Excellency Mr. Tyrone Fernando,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the  
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka,

Ministers, Distinguished Visitors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

*Assalaam Alaikum*

On behalf of the Maldivian Government, let me  
welcome again the Honourable Minister of Foreign  
Affairs of Sri Lanka and his delegation to the  
Maldives. I thank the leading officials of the  
University Grants Commission, State Engineering  
Corporation and the Contractors for the efforts they  
have made in bringing this important project to the  
implementation phase.

Today we have made history.

The foundation stone of the Central Library of the College — the pre-cursor to the Maldives First University has just been laid.

It is both fitting and proper that this enduring symbol of the good relations between the peoples of the Maldives and Sri Lanka be in the form of a library. We share traditional bonds of friendship and trade that go as far back as when the country was first settled four thousand years ago. The sounds of our languages are easy and familiar on each other's ears. The friendly faces of our people are recognizable almost as blood relatives. In third countries where our students reside and study, Maldivians and Sri Lankans share a natural nearness that forms an instant bond of companionship. Maldives provides employment to thousands of Sri Lankans. Trade between Maldives and Sri Lanka has multiplied. Sri Lanka is home to many of our families. As time went by this closeness has only grown firmer.

But in no sphere of cooperation is the contribution of Sri Lanka felt as significantly as in education. Indeed, in schools everywhere in the country, Sri Lankan teachers are working on educating our children. Thus it is altogether appropriate that this relationship should take the material form of an educational institution — a gracious gift of the Sri Lankan Government to our present and future students.

Up till now, for almost all our citizens, the only opportunities available for higher education and training have been overseas. With most of the population at the schooling and training age, the social

demand for higher education will never again be as great as now. A good library is an urgent and long felt need of the country. As you all know a university can be built around a library.

The Central Library of the Maldives College of Higher Education will ultimately become the central Library of the first university of the Maldives. Many scholars, students and businessmen will seek knowledge within its portals. They will meet with peers, learn new things, and expose themselves to the thoughts and views of people – present and past – from Maldives, Sri Lanka and around the world. Generations of Maldivians will broaden their minds and acquire intellectual depth through the Library.

In fact, the Central Library will become the repository of the nation's knowledge. It will also be a link to the knowledge of the world. The literary works housed within will stir the imagination, and energize our people to new heights of cultural achievement. The library will leave an indelible and positive imprint in the hearts and minds of all our citizens. And through it all, the library will remind them of the friendship of our two peoples and foster greater links of corporation.

Before I close, it is a particular delight for me to thank the Government of Sri Lanka, particularly, Her Excellency Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga who initiated this project, Prime Minister Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe who expedited the project implementation. Our special thanks also go to the former Minister of Education and Higher Education,

Mr. Richard Pathirana, the High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in the Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Shasudhdheen and the former Sri Lankan High Commissioner. We are grateful to Mr. Rodrigo from the implementation agency, Mr. Ferdinando the Consultant and Mrs Gamage the architect. I am confident that the Contractors will do justice to the thought and planning that have gone to the design and engineering of this beautiful building.

I am especially delighted that the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, Mr. Tyrone Fernando has honoured us by his presence here today // and appreciate the efforts he made to join us as our officiating co-guest. As the head of the executing agency, he has taken special interest in the speedy execution of the project.

It is my hope that, when built, the Central Library will be a place for contemplation and search for enlightenment, where people come together to share knowledge and wisdom. It will be a place of peace, of order, of hope and of brotherhood, radiating those thoughts, attitudes and sentiments which unite and uplift the mind and the spirit.

And above all, I hope that it will remain as a symbol of the lasting friendship between the people of Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Thank you very much.

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