

FEATURE ADDRESS

BY

SEN. THE HON. PAULA GOPEE-SCOON

MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

**SM JALEEL'S 100th ANNIVERSARY AND LONG
SERVICE AWARDS FUNCTION**

ACHIEVORS BANQUET HALL, SAN FERNANDO
12 OCTOBER 2024 | 2:30 PM

SALUTATIONS

- Dr. Aleem Mohammed – Chairman, S.M. Jaleel & Company Limited
- Mrs. Anna Mohammed – Chief Operating Office, S.M. Jaleel & Company Limited
- Members of the respective Chambers of Commerce
- Members of the Executive Leadership Team of S.M. Jaleel & Company Limited
- Awardees
- Specially invited guests
- Family members
- Members of the Media
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon everyone,

I am delighted to be here today as we commemorate SM Jaleel's 100th Anniversary and Long Service Awards—a remarkable milestone representing a century of excellence, innovation, and unwavering dedication to community and country.

This centennial celebration is more than just an achievement, it is a testament to family, foresight and fortitude. From humble beginnings to a modern enterprise that boasts a truly global reach, SM Jaleel has showcased the strength of the company's innovation and industry on the world stage.

History and Evolution

The remarkable story of SM Jaleel began in 1924, when a young visionary, Sheik Mohammed Jaleel, worked in his father-in-law's Aerated and Bottling Works factory in San Fernando. He eventually left to start his own company, with modest operations at his home. With a dedicated 25-member staff, the company soon produced its first product, Jaleel Beverages, which was

distributed using a traditional horse and cart. This entrepreneurial spirit laid the foundation for what has become one of the oldest and largest manufacturers of non-alcoholic drinks in the English-speaking Caribbean.

The origin of SM Jaleel is well documented, but I'd like you to appreciate the extraordinary steps that were taken during its formative years. From worker to owner, from employee to employer, even the move from Mucarapo Street to Prince Alfred Street, his home—all point to Sheik Jaleel's vision and plan, and his strength of will to make them a reality, with additives of spirituality and faith.

Over the decades, SM Jaleel grew and matured as it catered to new tastes and attitudes in the post-war and post-independence era. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the company introduced iconic products like Red Spot, while in the 1980s and 1990s the popular Fruta juice drinks were launched. During this time, the company forged partnerships to manufacture and distribute major names

such as 7UP, PepsiCo and Schweppes. SM Jaleel was not just another local producer, it became special and now had the capacity, expertise and reputation to cater for international brands, with *international* standards.

By the late 1990s, bold steps were taken to expand internationally, forming joint ventures in Canada, Barbados, and Guyana, demonstrating the strategic vision and confidence to enter foreign markets, with similar cultural backgrounds and strong diasporic connections.

In the 2000s, the company continued to innovate, launching products like the Oasis Water and Turbo Energy Drinks, while also establishing a presence in South Africa and acquiring the Trinidad Juice Company. Despite a surge in competition from local and foreign brands, SM Jaleel adapted and endured, understanding what consumers wanted and providing the best quality product possible.

Today, SM Jaleel directly employs over 1,500 people in Trinidad and Tobago and across its global operations, and provides countless other indirect jobs to those who deliver the goods and services that support this thriving ecosystem. Although the impact is greatest in South Trinidad, where SM Jaleel is firmly and proudly planted, its operations have had an enduring influence on Trinidad and Tobago's non-energy sector, and more specifically, its manufacturing sector.

Manufacturing, Exports and Innovation

Trinidad and Tobago's manufacturing sector has been a key driver of economic growth. Over the past decade, the non-energy manufacturing sector has experienced remarkable growth, in large part due to the food and beverage subsector. Between 2015 and 2023, Food and Beverage exports grew by **49 percent, from TT\$2.1 billion to TT\$3.2 billion**, with non-alcoholic beverage exports rising by **TT\$188 million** over that period. SM Jaleel is one of the largest non-oil exporters,

accounting for **12 percent** of the country's Food and Beverage exports in 2023.

You would be pleased to note that of the over 65 countries that SM Jaleel exports to, Caribbean markets are by far the largest. The top five export destinations of SM Jaleel products –Jamaica, Guyana, Suriname, Barbados and St. Lucia (in that order)—account for over 80 percent of the company's total exports for the period 2019 to 2024. I hope that the demand for our products in the Caribbean market, as well as other markets outside the region, continue to grow in the years and decades ahead.

Apart from the astute direction of its principals, a major reason for SM Jaleel's phenomenal success is its constant improvement and innovation. It was:

- the first in the Caribbean to manufacture hot fill P.E.T bottles for the Fruta and Caribbean Cool ranges;

- the first in the world to market fruit juices in two-piece aluminium cans using nitrogen and eliminating the use of artificial preservatives;
- and the only one in the world that can take ownership of the world-famous ‘Chubby’ soft drink, specially designed for children, and sold in over 65 countries around the world.

SM Jaleel has also been a master marketer, creating the “Joe Luis Punch” in 1938 in honour of the world heavyweight champion, and also creating a brand so ubiquitous and powerful, that the term “Jaliter” became a generic name for 2-litre bottles. SM Jaleel was ahead of its time, which often made it ahead of its game.

Government’s Commitment

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago remains firmly committed to supporting businesses, small and large alike. One of the ways in which we have been assisting businesses is through the hosting of trade missions and exhibitions, facilitating

their expansion into international markets. Just last month I led a total of 27 companies to Canada, including SM Jaleel, with very encouraging outcomes. We have also established Commercial Offices and appointed Commercial Officers and Trade Attaches across and outside the region to help companies navigate and better exploit external markets.

The new Special Economic Zones (SEZ) regime seeks to transform Trinidad and Tobago's economic landscape, by encouraging new investments across Trinidad and Tobago in specially designated zones. I welcome SM Jaleel's investment at the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate, which has been conditionally designated as a Special Economic Zone. These and other initiatives are geared towards creating an environment in which firms can grow and succeed as SM Jaleel did and continues to do.

The People of SM Jaleel

Just as SM Jaleel started with one man and one dream, 100 years requires a cadre of trusted, dedicated people. This includes not only the executives and managers, but also the engineers, lab technicians, assembly line workers, truck drivers, and everyone who has poured their hearts into making SM Jaleel what it is today.

The Long Service Awards recognizes the commitment, passion and service of those who have devoted themselves to building this remarkable brand. Each honouree represents not just years of service, but a wealth of experience, knowledge, and dedication that has contributed to SMJ's success over the years. Your commitment is the lifeblood of this organization.

To continue acquiring the best and brightest, I am pleased to learn about SM Jaleel's new Internship Programme, aptly themed "Inspiring Excellence through Experience." This new programme will help your company retain young, skilled

individuals who will carry the company into the future, and perhaps one day, inspire them to create something of their own.

Conclusion

Once again, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we congratulate SM Jaleel on 100 extraordinary years of business! SM Jaleel is living proof that dedication and innovation yield remarkable results. This company is truly a source of national pride and inspiration with products that find their way to millions of people around the world.

Before I close, I'd like to put this achievement into perspective. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 36 percent of companies last 10 years and about 21 percent survive to see their 20th anniversary. Beyond that, only about 12 percent of companies are older than 26 years. The prevailing theory, though unconfirmed, is that only about half a percent (0.5%) of all companies have what it takes to last 100 years. This means

that centennial firms are truly rare and unique, and something to be treasured.

SM Jaleel is one of a handful of companies locally, and indeed worldwide, that have survived and thrived over a century, and just like them, has made its mark. To better appreciate this, here are a few other corporations that are also celebrating their centenaries this year:

- Dole, the fruit and vegetable multinational;
- Duracell, the battery manufacturer;
- Metro-Goldwyn Meyer, the media company;
- Simon & Schuster, the publishing giant; and
- Universal Studios, the media and entertainment conglomerate.

So SM Jaleel, you are in outstanding company.

Today, I congratulate the astute leadership of Dr. Aleem Mohammed, Mrs. Ana Mohammed and the executive team, as

we celebrate the people of SM Jaleel and your collective journey of excellence that has influenced and shaped the landscape of our nation. We wish you continued success and a future that is rich, flavourful and vibrant as the products you produce.

I thank you.