

The Prime Minister of the Republic of India:

Honourable Speaker, Sir, Honourable Prime Minister, Distinguished Members of the National Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank you for your most gracious words of welcome as also for honouring me with the opportunity to address this august House.

This Assembly stands tall, symbolising the resolute commitment of the Mauritian people to representative democracy. The remarkable success of the Mauritian democratic experience seems doubly impressive, given the immense diversity of the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-religious character of your people. Demographic and social diversity is not an obstacle to democracy, but rather it is its essential counterpart.

The natural tendency of our times is towards pluralism within a framework that ensures an inclusive polity and a caring society. There is growing awareness that globalization requires, and in fact demands, an expanding terrain of open, inclusive and diverse societies co-existing in harmony and inter-dependence. Our success in ushering a new paradigm of a co-operative international order depends on the success we achieve in expanding space for multi-cultural societies living in peace, harmony and prosperity.

India and Mauritius should lead the way in showing history and humankind that pluralism works, that pluralism is the order of the day and that in embracing pluralism we embrace global security. Mr Speaker, Sir, we live in a world where pluralism is buffeted by forces, which are inimical to peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationships within societies. India and Mauritius, through the rich and successful experience of managing diversity and pluralism in an inclusive framework, stand out as beacons of hope for the future.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay my tribute to the memory of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, a visionary Statesman, who embodied the best values of a global citizen. Not only was he the Father of the Mauritian nation but was also a cherished friend of India. The imprint of his personality is still visible in the bonds that unite the people of our two countries.

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam has been the founder of a unique experiment in democratic governance and institution building in a society characterised by exceptional diversity, phenomenal barriers to trade with the rest of the world in terms of sheer distances and constraints imposed by limited natural resources.

This unique experiment has flowered and blossomed in a manner not easily foreseen when it was begun. Despite considerable odds, Mauritius has demonstrated to the world that through hard work and enterprise, it is possible to build a rainbow nation based on a robust democratic record, social harmony and provide respectable standards of living for all its people.

An authoritative study by the IMF examining alternative explanations for economic growth, terms this as the “Mauritian Miracle”. It attributes the miracle to your success in managing diversity through appropriate institutional responses. This is today quoted widely as an example of the importance of institutions in nation building processes. The credit goes to Sir Seewoosagur and the founding fathers of your nation for setting in motion processes, which the rest of the world looks up to with admiration. We, in India, rejoice in the success of Mauritius, particularly because of the many bonds of kinship, which we share with you.

Mr Speaker, Sir, India and Mauritius are inextricably knit together by abiding bonds of friendship, cultural, religious and shared historical experience. In India, we are marking the 75th Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi’s historic Dandi March. Mauritius celebrated its National Day on March 12. What better testimony can there be to the closeness and special bonds between our two countries? It will be an honour for India to be associated with the refurbishment of the Aapravasi Ghat, a site visited by Gandhiji, which truly deserves to be a World Heritage Site.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our bilateral relations are manifested in the exceptionally rich lodes of bilateral cooperation on which we draw, and equally but also in the common positions that we have adopted with respect to most of the pressing issues before the international community. We hold the well-being, prosperity and development of Mauritius as among our highest foreign policy priorities.

We take joy and pride in your achievements and pledge once again that our historical bonds of friendship place on us the duty to carry forward our cooperation in this still young century.

On the economic front, Mauritius has grown at an average rate of 5 to 6% over the last decade. This robust performance was helped by your remarkable sugar and textile industries and your enviable tourism sector is in no small measure due to the outstanding leadership provided by the successive Governments of your Republic.

Even as we celebrate the abiding warmth of our ties and success of our existing collaboration, we must be conscious that winds of change are blowing all over the world. The relentless forces of globalisation provide challenges as well as new opportunities. India and Mauritius are both affected by these winds of change and we need to prepare ourselves to meet these two challenges deadline ahead. Mauritius has embarked on a remarkable effort to reinvent itself in the face of a fast changing international environment – nurturing new skills, diversifying into high value added products and services and by anchoring itself into the wider regional markets. This provides both our countries new opportunities to engage in mutually beneficial economic cooperation whereby we can build on our complementary strengths to achieve our common goal of building prosperous societies.

During my present visit, we are further augmenting the existing architecture of our cooperation, by concluding agreements in various fields. The proposed Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement between India and Mauritius will turn a new leaf to our bilateral relationship. We have accepted the recommendations of the Joint Study Group and have agreed to constitute an Empowered Negotiating Team to translate these into reality. I am confident that the Free Trade Agreement around which this partnership agreement is to be anchored becomes the harbinger of a deeper economic relationship between our two countries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to assure this august House that India, as always, will continue to stand by the side of Mauritius in this brave and glorious venture, as you make a transition to new strengths and capabilities in your country's economy.

One of the key economic sectors that you have identified as vital to the growth and prosperity of your country is Information Technology. The Cyber Tower, which it will be my pleasure to inaugurate later, is yet another example of what Mauritius and India can build together.

Human Resource Development is a key tool for national development. We will help Mauritius establish Institutions of Excellence, on the lines of the best Technology and Medical Institutions in our country. The ITEC programme will be expanded in a manner that suits the requirements of Mauritius.

Similar collaborative ventures are possible in health, pharmaceuticals, education, professional training, finance and management and small and medium enterprises.

The vast Mauritian Exclusive Economic Zone is largely an unexplored asset. India will support Mauritius in ensuring the security and sovereignty of its land and maritime territory.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our partnership, I sincerely believe, is vital to meeting the multifarious challenges of the new millennium. The catastrophic effects of the Tsunami on December 26 last year, once again brought into sharp focus the vulnerability of Small Island Developing States and low lying coastal areas to natural disasters. We thank Mauritius for its solidarity and support extended to the victims of Tsunami.

These events were a grim reminder that the international community needs to act expeditiously in order to assist Small Island Developing States in dealing with their special circumstances and vulnerabilities including building their national capabilities in their efforts to meet the challenge of adaptation to climate change and sea level rise.

During his address to the Pan African Parliament last year, the President of India, Dr. Abdul Kalam, proposed that all countries of the African Union be connected by the seamless and integrated satellite and fiber optic network to be provided by India at an initial cost of \$ 50 million. We are happy that Mauritius will be one of the countries in this connectivity mission.

We have great regard for the leadership of Mauritius in the launching and functioning of Indian Ocean Rim Association of Regional Cooperation, the South African Development Community and in the African Union. Even as Mauritius deepens its economic linkages with neighbouring markets, we see our economic relationship with Mauritius as a mutually beneficial partnership which will enable both our countries to benefit from an expanding circle of economic relationships.

Mr Speaker, we believe that the UN is the critical link in cooperative multilateral efforts to manage the challenges of global interdependence. India has the will and the capacity to be a Permanent Member of the Security Council. Our membership will enhance the Security Council's effectiveness, credibility and legitimacy. We deeply appreciate the long standing and consistent stand taken by Mauritius in support of India's candidature as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our shores are washed by the waters of the same Indian Ocean. In an interdependent world, the destinies of our countries are inter-twined. Indian immigrants have travelled far and wide to seek a livelihood in distant lands, but I can assure you they are never distant from our minds or from our affections. Mauritius occupies a special place in this regard. On behalf of the Government and people of India, I would like to pledge the continued friendship and commitment to the well-being and prosperity of Mauritius.

Once again, Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the high honour of addressing this distinguished Assembly.

Thank you very much.