

The President of the Republic of India:

Your Excellency, Rajkeswur Purryag, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Mauritius,

Your Excellency, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius,

Your Excellency, Paul Raymond Bérenger, Leader of the Opposition,

Hon. Ministers of Mauritius,

Minister of Shipping of India, G. K. Vasan,

Members of the National Assembly of Mauritius,

Members of the Parliament of India,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the hon. Speaker of the National Assembly for giving me this opportunity to address Members of this august House. From this democratic forum, at the outset, I convey warm greetings of the people of India, to the people of Mauritius.

I am delighted to be in Mauritius, a beautiful and progressive country, with friendly people. Our two countries have many similarities, shared values and indeed, are inspired by legacies of freedom and democracy, bequeathed to us by the founding fathers of our Nations.

Over six decades ago, on the eve of the historical occasion of India's independence, India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru spoke of

India's Tryst with Destiny, and that the future would be one of incessant work to fulfil pledges. Among these were the building of India as a prosperous democratic and progressive nation, and a pledge that India will cooperate with people of the world in furthering peace, freedom and democracy. On the momentous occasion of Mauritius's Independence on March 12, 1968, the Father of your Nation, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, spoke of the respect of Mauritius for democratic principles, its love for justice and liberty which, he said, would be the guiding lights of your country's national policy. It is this democratic imperative which brings us together and binds us together.

In a democracy, parliamentary institutions play a very important role. These symbolise a national purpose, and are representative of the aspirations of the people. Every election marks a new mandate and is a renewal of democracy itself. I congratulate Mauritius for the successful conduct of its electoral processes. The democratic spirit that Mauritius has always believed in resonates in your august National Assembly, which is the citadel of democracy, freedom and justice. I congratulate Mauritius for holding aloft the torch of democracy with conviction.

In India, the roots of democracy are deep and abiding. We are the largest democracy in the world with an unwavering faith in a democratic way of life. We have held 15 nationwide general elections since our independence. Following the verdict of the people, each time there has been a peaceful government transition. Organising elections in India is an unparalleled exercise of management and coordination. In the last parliamentary elections in May 2009 with a 716 million electorate, nearly 800,000 polling booths were set up, involving 5 million polling staff. The democratic experience in India is also remarkable, because democracy has been carried to the grassroots level right down to more than 600,000 villages in the form of Panchayati Raj institutions. In today's world, this is undoubtedly the

largest expression of popular will in running the affairs of a country. The essence of democracy also lies in tolerance and harmony, values which have the ability to weave together the extensive plurality that exists in a country as large and diverse as India into a composite whole.

India is a country of more than one billion people. One out of every six human beings in the world lives in India. 22 Indian languages are listed in our Constitution and about 1,700 dialects are spoken in India. Every religion has its followers in India. We celebrate our varied cultures, festivals and religions with great joy and festivity. In Mauritius too, there exists vibrancy in the celebration of festivals, some of them similar to those in India. This is but natural, as India and Mauritius have a shared history and a common purpose. Also, both are democratic and pluralistic societies. We are multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic nations, where the goal of governance is to provide for the welfare of all citizens.

We, in India, have admired the progress made by Mauritius over the years. We take pride in the achievements of Mauritius. This has been possible due to the hard work of its people, who have been guided by a vision of inclusive prosperity. I have no doubt that it was in the National Assembly that many of the policies and approaches of development would have been discussed and debated. I congratulate each and every one of you for carrying forward the torch of progress with democratic values.

Our bilateral relations are rooted in mutual respect and mutual benefit. Our ties are extensive in scope and comprehensive in content. India will continue to remain a valued and trusted partner of Mauritius, in its multifaceted comprehensive development. We would be happy to participate in various aspects of the growth story of your country. Our exchange of experience in tackling climate change has

been fruitful. Our participation in conceptualising, in elaborating and in tackling the various issues confronting the 21st Century world has been mutually beneficial.

Ladies and gentlemen,

India has a linkage of a common past with Africa. We continue to seek to build on our historical ties and to deepen our exchanges with the continent of Africa. Our partnership is developing through various bilateral arrangements and, at a broader level, through the India-Africa Forum Summit. The Second India-Africa Forum Summit to be held next month in Addis Ababa would develop new areas of cooperation and provide a trajectory for further growth of our cherished relations. The Indian Ocean is the region to which we belong to, and both India and Mauritius would have an important role to play in this regard. I am particularly pleased that my first visit to Africa is to the friendly country of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, before I conclude, I would like to say that India values the continued support given by Mauritius to India's concerns and aspirations. We are determined to confront the global menace of terrorism and piracy along with our international partners to eliminate this scourge. India also appreciates the strong and consistent support of Mauritius to India's candidature for permanent membership of an expanded United Nations Security Council.

On behalf of the Government and people of India, I would like to reiterate that Mauritius and India are bound together by strong, unbreakable links and will stay together. I also reaffirm the commitment of the people of India for the welfare, peace, progress and prosperity of Mauritius and its people, and for continuance of our historical partnership towards realisation of our many objectives and dreams.

Mr Speaker, once again, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to address this august House.

Thank you.

(Applause)