

**Address by the Honourable A. K. Gungah, Minister of Civil Service and
Administrative Reforms**

**Workshop on Modernisation of Civil Service through e-services at
La Cannelle, Domaine Les Pailles
Monday 28 March 2011**

**My Colleague The Hon. Tassarajen Pillay Chedumbrum, Minister of
Information and Communication Technology**

Mr. S. Seebaluck, Senior Chief Executive

Mr. S. Pather, Permanent Secretary

Members of the press

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

In my intervention during the debate in the National Assembly on the Presidential Address, I mentioned that one of the visions of this government is to transform the Civil Service into a SMARTER CIVIL SERVICE.

At the Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms, we firmly believe that e services are a critical element which determines the success of any reforms strategy.

You will thus agree that there is a crying need for the public service to shift to state of the art technologies and be digitally up to date in order to overcome the challenges of globalization. At present, there are very few Government Departments which are present online with offer of e-services. Government operations should have been fully computerized, the number of e-services increased and SMS used to bring services and information within hand reach of the public. Unfortunately, Public Sector Reforms in terms of information technology are lagging behind.

We should be gratified that my colleague the Hon. Tassarajen Pillay Chedumbrum, Minister of Information and Communication Technology has decided to take the bull by the horn and is fully engaged in giving a renewed energy to this sector. I am glad that our two Ministries are working in collaboration to move this agenda forward at an accelerated pace. I thank you for your support and collaboration, Minister.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Last Thursday, I had a very interesting consultative meeting with Supervising Officers of Ministries and officers in charge of Departments. It was interesting to note how much they value e-services. They were calling

for upgrading, updating and modernising of the IT sector in order to help them improve service delivery. However, it came out clearly that neither appropriate resources were available nor was there a proper training strategy. That was probably why there was no sense of ownership in organizations which had online services made available.

E-services are not only about technology. It is my firm belief that e-services are also about change in behavior and organisational structures that replace the traditional way government interacts with its stakeholders. The introduction of the technological hardware and software in the modernization process is, perhaps, the easiest part of this transition. The most challenging aspect is integration of the technology in the functional behavior of governmental institutions to ensure effective service delivery worthy of the 21st century with its load of challenges.

I am aware that some fifty e-services are supposed to be provided through the Government portal. How many are working or working to the satisfaction of both the providers and the customers? What have we done to support the sustainable availability of these services?

Ladies and Gentlemen

Despite, the many advantages offered by e-government and its potential impact on organizations and individuals, it is still difficult to see any results from the immense investments in e-government initiatives. Public e-services are far from reaching their potential in terms of propagation and usage. The public we serve expects Government to offer e-services that they need and desire. However, e-services in Mauritius have largely been developed based on the internal needs of the public sector and technological possibilities, rather than on customer needs and wants. As a result, IT professionals have decided which services should be provided electronically. After development, the e-service has been made accessible online.

This has resulted in a situation where we have in most cases offered e-services that are not used. Therefore, the anticipated gains in efficiency do not appear and consequently, the investments have not generated the expected outcomes. Studies carried out elsewhere reveal that effective public e-services can only be developed if governments offer citizen-centric services that deliver measurable public value. We have to keep the citizens

in focus. This implies that several essential questions about them must be answered, such as:

1. Who they are?
2. How do they differ?
3. What are their needs?
4. How do they use such services?
5. What are their attitudes towards e-services?
6. How can their behavior be influenced?

We also have to study their behaviours, and attitudes. It is important to carry out a survey to find answers to such questions. In fact, Government should adopt marketing strategies to assure the success of government e-services. I honestly believe that the lack of understanding of user's needs explains, to some extent, why the adoption of governmental e-services remains relatively low and why the expected results from e-government initiatives have not yet been achieved.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is paradoxical that lack, or even absence, of communication has been substantially responsible for the low turnout of e-services use. Customers may require education about e-services, while others may be convinced of their utility, and some, perhaps, only need to be made aware of the existence of e-services. We have for too long maintained focus on technology rather than giving equitable weightage to information and communication. We have most of the time taken for granted that the public knows, as if by magic, that such and such services are available to them. It is as if preparing food without serving it; everybody remains hungry.

For e-Government, particularly e-services, to succeed, communication strategies that can influence customers' attitudes and behaviors should be developed. The users should become satisfied with the e-services so that they are attracted by the online alternative and remain loyal users.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The time for action is in fact behind us. If we still do not act now, we shall perish. We need to quickly develop a strategy with an action plan to implement and coordinate e-government initiatives. It is also necessary to establish a simple administration for as many as possible. The action plan should include the service providers' contact with citizens and businesses to ensure its viability and sustainability. It should focus on citizens' and businesses' needs. Otherwise the public sector will continue to be seen as insensitive to the needs of its customers; i.e., the citizens, and will be regarded as large bureaucracies that are characterized as following rules to the letter and fostering impersonal relations with their customers. Citizens expect public services to make a positive impact on their lives. Therefore we must take an approach which is customer-oriented and that increases productivity and reduce routine work while creating added value for customers.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The efforts that my Ministry is deploying to reform the Civil Service will pay dividends only if we have well developed e-services deliveries. It will be pointless to talk about effective or efficient service delivery if we have a weak e service sector. This is why I have personally impressed on the Ministry of Finance to provide funds for the procurement of hardware as well as for training in IT for officers in the service. It is also for this reason that early in the year my colleague the Hon. Pillay Chedumbrum joined hands with me to work towards improving e-services delivery. I am happy that he has taken the issue very seriously and in no time he got the officers of both Ministries working on this workshop.

What I expect from you is not a beautiful showcase of what you have or are doing. You can of course do that if you are convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that your customers are fully satisfied with your services and products. What is more important, though, is to use this opportunity to retrospect on where and why we have failed or are unable to attain the level of satisfaction expected by the public. I know that there are representatives of public sector service providers among you. Instead of

just marketing your products, do use your knowhow to empower your potential clients who in turn have to satisfy a much more important clientele comprising not only the citizens of this country, but of the world over, in tourism as well as other businesses. Marketing is not only about boasting your product, but is as importantly about empowering its users. Your product will be of no or little value if users are unable to use them properly.

To officers of Ministries and Departments participating, I advise you to be open and discuss frankly and openly so that all your partners become fully conscious of your concerns and help you to find their solutions. If you are going to hide behind notional achievements, it is not going to serve any purpose, neither to you nor to your customers. Remember, in this period of cut throat competition only the fittest can survive. We should and can be among the fittest because we have the will, the knowhow and the means. All we need is to put some order in our thoughts and act strategically. I wish you very fruitful deliberations and look forward to your recommendations.

Thank you for your attention