

Address by Hon. Ashit Kumar Gungah, Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms - Award Ceremony - Public Service Excellence Award 2009 at Le Meridien Hotel on Wednesday 24 November 2010.

Mr. Suresh Seeballuck, Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service,
Mr. Sateaved Seebaluck, Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry,
Mrs. Krishnawtee Beegun, Vice Chairperson of the Panel of Jury and Former Senior Chief Executive,
Permanent Secretaries,
Heads of Departments,
Representatives of Federations and Unions,
Members of the Press,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Evening to all of you.

First and foremost, I wish to express my deep and sincere condolences to Mrs Aisha Timol, the Chairperson of the Panel of Jury and Chief Executive of the Mauritius Bankers Association, who is not among us tonight because of the demise of her father lately.

King Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes tells us that:

“There is a time for everything, and season for every activity under Heaven” and among other things he says “There is time to speak”.

So, I am very pleased to be in your midst tonight to address you on this occasion of the Public Service Excellence Award 2009 to reward Civil Service organizations and the teams of officers working in these organizations for their outstanding performance in service delivery to the public.

Although the winners are yet to be proclaimed, let me congratulate all the organizations and their officers who have participated in this important Award for the Public Service.

The Public Service in Mauritius plays a key role in the lives of Mauritians and in building and maintaining the competitiveness of our economy. Through the work it does, the Public Service provides

for infrastructure, housing, education, health services, law and order, poverty alleviation and creates the right environment for our people to earn a good living, raise a family and lead a fulfilling life.

The world does not stand still and neither can Mauritius afford to do so. Now more than ever, the Mauritian Public Service needs to remain relevant and responsive in its service and have the courage and initiative to make changes to do things better. Hence, my vision to build a Smarter Civil Service.

This task of building a smarter Civil Service is not only for me, nor for you only, but for all of us. We require the cooperation, collaboration, efforts and energy of all stakeholders in this tremendous task that we have set to ourselves.

We need to have a Smarter Civil Service that knows where and how people live, what they think and which acts fast, efficiently and effectively on the issues they raise. We must keep in touch with the population. We are all aware of the demands of the public, that is, “Better life for all, through accelerated and result- oriented service delivery”. So my message to you tonight is that we should leave behind us “Business As Usual” and start working differently for “an effective, efficient, development-oriented public service.”

As we face increasing resource constraints, public sector organisations should facilitate Government’s drive towards productivity by streamlining and simplifying administrative processes and procedures, and reducing the cost burden to business. Our public officers should strive in the relentless pursuit of excellence and innovation.

As Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms, I have great expectation and hope on you. This is why in the 2011 Budget, I personally took some issues with the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Pravind Jugnauth to improve the Civil Service. Today I am pleased to announce that the provisions for the Work Environment Enhancement Programme have been retained. Through this programme, my Ministry will see to it that your work places and working environment are safe and healthy. Furthermore, with the upcoming Civil Service College, my Ministry will pursue its task of capacity building within the civil service so that Public Officers are in a better position to respond more positively to the priorities of the Government.

As you are aware, Mauritius has topped the Mo Ibrahim Foundation once again this year. We have been ranked 6th in the 2010 Environmental Performance Index. For the third year in a row, Mauritius ranks highest in the African Region on the overall regulatory Ease of Doing Business, according to the World Bank. All these achievements would not have been possible without the active contributions of both the public and the private sectors. Here I must point out that most public officers, from the lowest to the highest rungs of the ladder, work from behind the curtain quietly, diligently and unnoticed. Thousands of you serve the country everyday. It was the Prime Minister's vision to create this award: to reward those ministries and departments who are performing with excellence.

The theme for the 2009 edition of the Public Service Excellence Award is "Sustainable Development through Organisational Excellence". This theme has been aptly chosen to reflect the concern and commitment of the Government to put environmental issues high on its agenda. In line with the "Maurice Ile Durable" initiative, public service organizations are being sensitized on the urgent need to adopt and adapt to environmentally friendly policies to ensure the long term socio-economic and sustainable development of the country. To achieve operational excellence, environmental considerations should be mainstreamed into the main policy framework.

When we talk of rewarding excellence, we aim to recognize the efforts and achievements of those organisations where leaders have a clear vision of what they want to achieve, how successful they have been in motivating their officers as a dedicated team, where the spirit of innovation prevails and where high quality services, that are tuned to the needs of the Public, are delivered.

High performing organizations are intent not only on meeting objectives set up by Government, but also focus on providing customer-oriented services that meet the aspirations and needs of the public. With limited resources, they strive and manage to deliver. They should serve as examples to Public Officers, whether operating at the frontline or in the back office.

I am also pleased to inform you that my Ministry has come up with a revised "Code of Ethics for Public Officers". This revised code of ethics, which I am having the privilege of launching tonight, will now cover the following three additional areas:-

- First: the prohibition by law of smoking and consuming alcoholic drinks at the workplace;
- Second: the adoption of a Green Behaviour; and
- Third: the conduct of officers during a pre-election period.

The main aim of the Code is to ensure good governance through the promotion of an ethical culture within the Civil Service. I call upon Public Officers to have recourse to this revised “Code of Ethics” and to renew their commitment to uphold a green Public Service.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need a culture of excellence at all levels. It is this culture of excellence that will strengthen public trust in the Civil Service. And trust in the Public Service is vital for the ongoing development of a democratic and stable society.

Our Public Service exists to serve Mauritians and Mauritius. It is not enough for us to have well-crafted policies. Good policy implementation is even more important. This is why our public-facing officers have a critical role to play in ensuring that our policies are well explained to our citizens and well implemented on the ground.

We are aware that we have skilful and talented public officers who have contributed, are contributing and will contribute to enhance the public service. My appeal to them is to make full use of their knowledge and skills to take initiative, anticipate needs and concerns of the public and constantly challenge themselves to bring further improvements.

However, knowledge and skills alone will not do. What we require more from our public officers is ‘Attitude’. Here I wish to share with you a very simple but interesting anecdote which is as follows:-

Three people were laying bricks and a passer-by asked them what they were doing.

- The first one replied, “Don’t you see I am making a living?”
- The second one said, “Don’t you see I am laying bricks?”
- The third one said, “I am building a beautiful monument.”

Three people doing the same work gave totally different replies. The question is:

“Did they have different attitudes? And would their attitude affect their performance?” The answer is a clear ‘YES’. Excellence comes when the performer takes pride in doing his best. Every job is a self-portrait of the person who does it, regardless of what the job is.

You will agree with me that we cannot build the Mauritius of tomorrow with the Civil Service of yesterday. In this increasingly globalised and competitive world, the capacity to adapt to a fast pace of change is a prerequisite if we want to survive. Hence a change in mindset is called for.

I wish to avail of this opportunity to thank all Public Officers present here tonight, for your unreserved response to the needs of Government and the daily challenges facing the Civil Service. I am proud of your dedicated service to the Government and the Nation at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to convey my deepest thanks to Mrs Aisha Timol, Chairperson of the Panel of Jury, although she is not among us tonight. She has very ably handled the difficult task of adjudication despite her very busy schedules. I wish to thank also the Members of the Jury:

Mrs Krishnawtee Beegun, Vice Chairperson of the Panel of Jury and Former Senior Chief Executive,

Dr Rajcoomar Jhurry, President Mauritian Quality Institute,

Dr Dambeegan Padachi, Senior Lecturer, Head of Department of Economics and Finance, University of Technology, Mauritius, and

Mr Radhakrishna Sadien, General President, State and Other Employees Federation.

My warmest congratulations to the winner of the Public Service Excellence Award 2009. Well done. Keep it up!!! I hope that many others will emulate your example.

My sincere congratulations also go to the winners of the sub category awards. I wish you all the best in your quest for excellence. I am sure that with the dedication and commitment shown by each and every participant of the Public Service Excellence Award, we will move confidently onto the path of excellence. I commend your participation in this competition and invite other public sector organizations to muster the courage to join this quest for excellence by participating in the next edition of the Public Service Excellence Award.

I thank you for your attention.