

PUBLIC SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARD 2008

SPEECH OF PROF. DONALD AH-CHUEN

Dr the Honourable Balkissoon Hookoom, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms,

Mr S. Seebaluck, Head of Civil Service and Secretary to Cabinet,

Mr Fokeer, Director General of the University of Technology, Mauritius,

Mr S.K. Pather, Supervising Officer of the Ministry,

Mr A.K. Hoolass, Principal Assistant Secretary, and Staff of the Ministry,

Fellow Members of the Jury, Directors and Heads of the participating organisations

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by saying what a great pleasure and privilege it is for me to be with you here to-day on this special occasion of the Annual Public Service Excellence Award, in my capacity first and foremost as an ordinary citizen of this country and beneficiary of all the basic but vital services provided by Government and needed by us for our daily life. We take for granted without realising and taking time to think what our life would be if suddenly public transport was to cease operating, if water was to stop flowing from our taps, if as is happening in South Africa, we have to endure frequent power black-outs and resort to torch lights in shopping centres and at home, and if our hospitals and schools were to shut down, and if the

port and the airport were to close down, with the food and other goods of necessity being blocked on arrival in Mauritius.

When we ask ourselves what is the role and responsibility of the Civil Service and the Public Servants, I think we have the simple answer if we bother to think about what we need everyday for our survival and for our socio-economic activities and well-being. But of course, as our country and our people move ahead and our institutions and infrastructures develop, and our economy grows and expands, in line with the march of civilization and progress, it is important that we encourage and motivate our Public Service organisations and ensure that they are provided with the means to improve their standard and quality of service to society.

And it is in that context that the Public Service Excellence Award was set up, at the initiative of the Prime Minister, Dr Navin Ramgoolam, and I am indeed honoured and grateful to have been called this year to be the Chairman of the Jury, with Mrs Beegun as the Vice-Chairperson, and with Mr Jhurry, Mr Toolsiraj Benydin, and Dr Chittoo as fellow members of the Jury.

Our exercise as a Jury has been pleasant but not easy, as some of the participants were really very close to each other in terms of their leadership, organisation, team work, and achievements. I am pleased that we had a large number of participants, 28 in all, from various sectors ranging from schools, hospitals, laboratories, the Prisons Service, Civil Aviation, the Energy Services Division and Citizens Advice Bureaux, to Police Stations, Meteo Dept, Legal Metrology Service, and the Cane Planters and Millers Arbitration and Control Board. I mention this last one with some nostalgia as I joined the Civil Service in that Department when I left school

in 1953 before undertaking my tertiary studies overseas, which you will appreciate was not too long ago!

Speaking for myself, although I am quite sure my fellow members of the Jury share the same feeling, I have learned a great deal from my visits at the participating organisations and from my interaction with their management and staff. I am much impressed by the good standard of the organisation and service of many of the departments and my initial perception, which unfortunately prevails in the Mauritian society, has now considerably changed. There is of course room for improvement and it is also important that those organisations which are not yet in that standard should strive to move up, and one definite practical way to achieve this objective is for them to participate in this Annual Excellence Award as it will enable them to focus on their own organizations and training set-up, their vision, mission and goals. They could also visit those organisations which have been successful and read their submissions and use them as their models. I should also like to point out that our country now exists in a totally global competitive context, which means that we have to constantly uplift our standards. We cannot afford to benchmark against Africa only. We need to assess ourselves globally in order to survive and progress. But the global reality has also its advantages. It means that we are not alone, and technology, know-how and funding are available from other countries and from international organisations and agencies, and we must learn to harness them. It is also important to envisage collaboration and net-working at both regional and international levels. Mauritius may be small but we have the brain power and versatility of our people. The departments which can establish such net-working and can be bold to reach out of Mauritius will be those which will be the more progressive and successful.

Well, if I have taken you into the future for a few moments, let me now take you quickly back to earth, to the present. We live in a world of extremes and contradictions. Man has been able to land on the moon, but we still haven't found the remedy against cancer, arthritis, Parkinson disease, and alzheimer. In the same way, while we concentrate on the application of technology and management improvement in the Public Service, let us not neglect the importance of improvement in basic simple things, such as cleanliness, the physical environment at the workplace, the reception desk and the accueil of the receptionist, the signs for directing the public, and ... the state of the toilets, which do require regular maintenance. If a visitor comes to your house, believe me your nice and comfortable lounge and sofas may well impress him, but if your bathroom and toilet are in a poor state, all his first good impression of your place will be lost!

Another observation I wish to make is that more than 60 years after I paid my Cambridge Exam fees, I notice that the Cashier's Office still closes at 2.30 p.m. or 2.45 p.m. and that one must come with the exact amount of notes and coins. As we move towards 24/7, I think that we need here to put "la pendule a l'heure" or we will be out of tune!

I hope I will be forgiven for these little observations which may perhaps appear to be out of place, and so let me come back to the Award.

I would like to offer my very warm congratulations to the winners of the Award and to wish them well in their future endeavours.

I wish also to thank all the participants and to tell them how much my fellow members of the Jury and I have appreciated the immense efforts put in by them and to continue improving.

Finally, let us all remember that there are no losers in this competition for the ultimate purpose of improving is to provide the optimal superior service to society at large for the well-being of all the citizens, and that includes all of us, who are the real winners!

May I end by placing on record my gratitude to my fellow members of the Jury for their excellent collaboration, and my great appreciation to Mr Pather, Mr Hoolass, Miss Auladin and the staff of the Ministry for all their help, guidance and logistics support in our task. Thank you for your kind attention.