

Government Programme 2010 – 2015

Address by Honourable Ashit Kumar Gungah, Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms on the debate on the Address of the President on the 10th August 2010 in the National Assembly.

Mr Speaker Sir,

Allow me first of all to congratulate you for your reelection as Speaker of the National Assembly which gathered unanimity. Je suis aussi ravi de l'élection à l'unanimité du vice-président de la Chambre, l'Honorable Pradeep Roopun, qui a d'ailleurs été mon colistier pour les élections de 2005. Before entering dans le vif du sujet, I would like to thank the Prime Minister and the Leader of "L'Alliance de l'Avenir", Dr the Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam and also my leader the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Honourable Pravind Jugnauth for their trust in me by conferring to me the responsibility of Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms.

Monsieur le Président,

J'effectue un retour après 5 années hors de l'Assemblée Nationale. Pendant ces cinq années j'ai travaillé sur le terrain tout en développant des assises solides en terme d'une communion avec le peuple. Je dois dire que c'est pour moi un honneur de représenter la circonscription numéro 6 qui est une circonscription modèle. Les résultats des dernières élections en sont la preuve, de par le score des 3 premiers candidats et des 3 suivants. Et la, je profite pour remercier mes 2 colistiers notamment l'Honorable Lormus Bundhoo et l'Honorable Mokhesswar Choonee pour la campagne formidable que nous avons vécu ensemble en équipe. Nous sommes d'ailleurs tout à fait conscients de l'attente de l'électorat de Grand Baie-Poudre D'or. Et c'est de notre devoir de respecter et d'honorer les engagements pris et ainsi être à la hauteur de la confiance placée en nous.

My thanks also go to all the people of Mauritius for their positive attitude by granting a clear mandate to our team in the May 2010 General Elections. The Mandate of 2010-2015 is a bond of trust between our people and the Government and we pledge not to betray this trust.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government under the able stewardship of the Honourable Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, represents the aspirations of each and every segment of our society and by extension our great nation. The team which is at the helm of Government is a vibrant reflection of multi ethnicity of Mauritius along with all its diversity. We can safely claim to represent the unity in diversity.

Mr. Speaker Sir, since the first day of the debate, I have been listening to the Honourable Members on the other side of the House, some said that there were no free and fair elections. To say the least, I am puzzled by such a statement and I would simply call it 'demagogy'.

Mr Speaker Sir, we have had election observers during the election campaign from many reputed international organizations, and they have found that Mauritius has reliable and lively democratic institutions. They have noted that our people have, by their very behaviour, ensured that the elections take place in a spirit of fairplay and with no abuses.

L'honorable Ganoo avait d'ailleurs présenté certains calculs en ce qui concerne le nombre d'électeurs ayant voté pour l'Alliance de l'Avenir. Suivant sa logique, si 43 pourcent de la population a voté pour l'Alliance MMM-UN-MMSD, alors qu'on compte 78 pourcent du taux de participation, cela voudrait dire, que seulement 33 pourcent de la population ont voté en faveur de l'Alliance MMM-UN-MMSD. Donc 2 tiers des électeurs ont voté CONTRE ou n'ont pas voté pour l'Alliance MMM-UN-MMSD, et ont élu l'Alliance de l'Avenir.

Here I would invite the Honourable Member to look at the results as they are and not as he would have wished them to be. We should not forget that in a democratic system the verdict of the electorate is final and irrevocable. It should be duly respected.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Free and Fair elections are the lifeblood of a democracy. It is a matter of great pride for all of us that our nation has once again demonstrated their unshakable commitment to uphold the principles of democracy and their unflinching support to “L’Alliance de l’Avenir”. Let us not, by our uncontrolled reflexes, say things that can dent the image of our country. Our sense of PATRIOTISM pleads in favour of each and every Mauritian doing his best to project our country high on the spectrum of international consideration.

But now that elections are behind, I sincerely invite the opposition to act as “de bon patriote”, and to sweep away the acrimony and bitterness. The energy should be used to undertake the task of nation-building. If someone were to behave otherwise, it cannot but be “time and opportunity lost”. So let us not engage in a ‘campagne de dénigrement qui ternirait la réputation du pays et en ce faisant causerait un tort immense à tout un chacun’.

We all have a common commitment: To give to our country, our motherland a stable, responsible and performing Government. Monsieur le Président, aujourd’hui en tant que membre de l’Assemblée Nationale, nous avons une grande responsabilité envers la population et nous ne devons pas laisser le pouvoir nous guider. We should always speak the truth, be the truth and live the truth as we are men and women of integrity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our main concern and priority should be to make laws, which will create the necessary conditions for our country to develop properly and to ensure security and peace of mind of our population. And most of all, laws, that each and every citizen will understand, accept and respect.

Monsieur, Le Président, nous ne devons pas oublier que le « Pouvoir est un instrument qu'il nous faut toujours bien gérer. C'est pour cela, que nous devons avoir une opposition responsable, qui participe aux débats, mais surtout, une opposition qui fait également des propositions. »

Constructive criticism is an essential input for the advancement of a country. Consensus on national issues is necessary. Il est souhaitable donc de voir une opposition qui ne soit pas démagogue, sachant très bien que le pays appartient à tout le monde, que ce soit de ce coté de la chambre, ou de l'autre.

Mr Speaker Sir, let me now come to the presidential address delivered on the 8th of June. I firmly believe that *avec les grandes lignes énoncées* we will enter a new era of challenges and opportunities. We are a Government that cares, a Government that will reach out to the last person in the last row. For me, this Government Programme represents the highest common factor between this Government and the people and certainly not the lowest common denominator.

Mr Speaker Sir, my other colleagues have already elaborated on the different aspects of the 2010-2015 Government Programme and, by now, the House stands convinced of the good faith of this present Government and its determination to achieve its objectives. It is a programme with an enlightened vision, a new philosophy, driven by the emerging needs of our citizens. The Honourable Prime Minister reiterated throughout the electoral campaign that "L'Alliance de L'Avenir" will do its best to build a society based on the guiding principles of Unity, Equity and Modernity. This Government Programme enunciates in a nutshell the measures that Government will take to translate them into practical reality.

Mr Speaker Sir, being "*un homme de terrain*", always close to the stark realities of the population, I can say with confidence that the measures announced in this programme have been gratified by the appreciation of the citizens. People have acclaimed the abolition of the NRPT and tax on interest while at the same time congratulating government for maintaining

free bus transport for the students, the elderly and the disabled in spite of a gloomy world economic outlook.

Mr Speaker Sir, on another front, I would like to state that any Government machinery cannot run efficiently and smoothly if its different parts are not well lubricated and undergo regular servicing and maintenance. We cannot achieve our objectives of building an equitable, united and modern society when our Public Service, as an institution, is not properly equipped to respond to the needs of our citizens and other stakeholders. The public sector is not only a provider of essential services but it is a key facilitator in the provision of services and production of goods.

The Public Service in Mauritius has played a crucial role in the modernization of our country and in promoting the developmental objectives of Government. Over the years, it has built a relationship based on trust with the private sector. By now, the public and private sectors have almost blended into a powerful engine and they are complementary to each other in the developmental process of our economy. Partnership between the two sectors must continue to grow and develop for the benefit and welfare of our people. The Public Sector is called upon more than ever to intervene in order to facilitate economic growth and provide timely and quality services to all our citizens and other stakeholders.

Mr Speaker Sir,

As the environment keeps on changing, as the needs of our people keep on growing and as the challenges are becoming more and more daunting, there is an absolute necessity to train our people to face these emerging situations. Our public sector must keep pace with these changes. To be able to realize these objectives we have to make our civil service more efficient and result oriented. The civil service operates with public funds. The public is becoming more and more demanding and they urge for a more accountable and transparent civil service, where good governance practices prevail. At the end of the day, the public looks for a cost-effective public service which is fully responsive to their needs in terms of improving their quality of life.

Mr. Speaker Sir,

This Government is determined to get the reform programme in the Civil Service to move forward more effectively. In this connection, I would like to highlight three key issues that I believe will have profound effects for the development and progress of the Civil Service in coming years.

First - There is an urgent need for the setting up of a modern **Public Service Training Centre** to promote lifelong learning.

In a constantly changing business environment, organizations, be it public or private, need to adapt to survive. They need to actively maintain a competitive edge by anticipating future developments in the wake of unprecedented challenges. To this end, training has become a burning need for the Civil Service because knowledge base is constantly changing. Research and practice are never static. What is leading edge today becomes conventional in some years. So it is imperative that a modern Civil Service learns and relearns its trade.

I am sure that Honorable Members know very well this old Chinese proverb which says:

“You give a man a fish you feed him for a day. You teach a man how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.”

This no longer holds good with the daunting challenges of the 21st century which we are facing. The reasons are that:

- first, in the modern world, new species of fish are constantly emerging in the oceans,
- second, the water currents are becoming unpredictable especially at a time when we are witnessing the phenomenon of climate change,
- and last the rival fishermen are more competitive than ever before.

Hence, Mr Speaker Sir, the fisherman must constantly relearn and upgrade his skills to take home a decent catch. So it goes for the Public Officers who have to be prepared for continuous learning or lifelong learning if they want to keep themselves abreast with latest developments in their respective fields.

This is the reason why my Ministry is working towards promotion of life-long learning in the civil service. However, this objective cannot be achieved unless the appropriate institutional framework and infrastructure are put in place to help the Civil Service to progress and move forward towards improving service delivery and enhancing performance.

I must point out here that some progress has already been made on the project since a plot of land of an extent of about 7 acres has already been earmarked at Ebene by the Ministry of Housing and Lands. I will actively pursue this matter with the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for this project to take off.

Just as Benjamin Disraeli, the former conservative British Prime Minister said, I quote “Upon the education of the people, the future of this country depends”. I would say that “Upon the training of Public Officers, the future of the Civil Service depends”.

Mr. Speaker Sir,

The second point I wish to make is that we need to provide a conducive working environment to public officers. This is a pre-requisite for an effective and efficient Civil Service, as we must ensure that public officers are provided with a decent workplace and environment as well as the necessary tools and equipment. I must inform the House that quite a number of reform measures, are being implemented in the Civil Service right now. Two major reforms are the Performance Management System and the Programme-Based Budget. These reforms are geared towards enhancing performance of organizations as well as individual officers.

If we want the Civil Service to perform and to deliver for people and communities with rising aspirations and expectations, we have to provide the basic office infrastructure, amenities and tools to encourage public officers to perform better.

In this context, I am proposing to arrange for an item “Enhancement of work environment” to be included in the next budget for each Ministry/Department under which

funds will be made available to cater for all Occupational Safety and Health issues with a view to ensuring that public sector organizations are fully compliant with the provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my third issue which I consider very essential for a healthy Civil Service is to develop an enhanced and meaningful dialogue with all the stakeholders. Here, I have specifically in mind the Federations and the Unions who represent the public officers.

Monsieur le Président,

Ceux qui s'engagent dans la fonction publique sont des personnes de qualité, que ce soit au niveau de la moralité ou sur le plan professionnel. Ils ont intégré la fonction publique parce qu'ils sont animé par la passion de servir. En tant que ministre, je souhaite que nul d'entre eux ne regrette leur choix, que nul ne soit déçu, chacun doit se sentir heureux parce qu'il est utile, respecté, reconnu pour ses mérites, ses talents et ses compétences.

Car les fonctionnaires jouent un rôle très important dans le développement du pays; ce qui entraîne dans la foulée la prospérité de la nation.

Mr Speaker Sir, all these can only be achieved when we have all the stakeholders on Board. To this end, my Ministry will strive to continually promote a harmonious dialogue with the Unions and Federations. Since assuming office, I have made it a point to establish communication network with all the Unions and Federations concerned. I make an appeal to these stakeholders to join hands with us to keep on enhancing the working conditions of Public Officers for a still better public service.

Mr Speaker Sir,

An important element in the overall structure of the Public Service is the Human Resource function which has long adopted a passive and operational approach to people management with little input into strategic decisions. To support the broader aims of the public service reform, the Human Resource function should become more strategic, proactive and result-oriented. To this end, Mr Speaker Sir, my Ministry will formulate a Human Resource

Strategy that will give new orientations and constitute a roadmap for the efficient use of Human Resource in the Public Sector in the coming years.

Mr Speaker Sir,

It's high time that the Public Service shifts to the state of the art technology to survive and compete in this globalised and digital world. We have at present a few Government Departments which already have an on-line presence and also offer e-services. My Ministry will continue to encourage and assist Ministries and Government Departments to go high-tech with fully computerized operations, increase in the number of e-services and the use of the SMS to bring services and information within hand reach of the Public. Public Sector Reforms in terms of technology are long overdue. We will have to act fast on this.

Mr Speaker Sir, my ministry is very well concerned with the welfare of the Public Officers. In this context the Public Officers' Welfare Council, operating under the aegis of my Ministry, provides the necessary platform for public officers and their families to interact among themselves in a relaxed and friendly environment. Government has recently put a building near Gymkhana Grounds in Vacoas at the disposal of the Public Officers' Welfare Council. This facility will be used to organise more activities that will bring about a quality work-life balance for public officers.

Mr. Speaker Sir,

After having said all these, it becomes obvious that the vision of this Government is to transform the Civil Service into a Smarter Civil Service. How can this be achieved?

I am inspired by the Civil Service in Britain as our Civil Service is based on the Westminsterian model. I believe that we need to have a Civil Service that must be underpinned by the following characteristics. I will call them the 4P's. The first P, Mr Speaker, Sir, is

Pace : By pace I mean a Civil Service that provides rapid responses to problems and delivering the right solutions that meet the expectations and aspirations of the Mauritian population.

The second P , Mr Speaker, Sir, is

Passion: Our Civil Service, through public officers, should be passionate about providing high quality public service For all.

The 3rd P is,

Pride : Mr Speaker, Sir, Public Officers must take pride in what they do and ensuring that the country is proud of its Civil Service.

And the last P is,

Professionalism: Mr Speaker, Sir, Public Officers must demonstrate highest degree of professionalism in the way they formulate policies and deliver services.

- The combination of the enduring values in the Civil Service coupled with the 4Ps, I have just highlighted, will no doubt pave the way for a Smarter Civil Service. In the 21st Century, we are witnessing a return of public sector ethos around the world. The Civil Service is a reliable force which is more important than ever.

To conclude Mr. Speaker Sir, I would say that this Government Programme reflects the vision of this government as to where we want to take Mauritius in years ahead.

This programme constitutes the measures announced in the electoral manifesto of L'Alliance de l'Avenir which was approved by the population through the results of the General Elections 2010.

The Programme sets out NOT only the existing measures, such as alleviation of poverty, empowering the Citizens, fair and equitable distribution of wealth, democratization of the economy, among others, on which efforts have to be redoubled and the pace accelerated, but it also enunciates new measures such as democratization of electricity generation, transforming Mauritius into a duty-free island and abolition of the National Residential Property Tax and tax on interest and also other innovative measures.

Mr. Speaker Sir,

I must point out that we have looked beyond our horizon when working out these measures. We have gone beyond our shores in this programme. The measures announced has taken into account the Millenium Development Goals set for the economic and social advancement and progress of all the Nations, especially the developing ones around the world.

Under the leadership of the Honorable Prime Minister, we shall forge ahead to bridge the gaps existing between the different rungs of our social ladder. This is the advocated policy of this Government. We have a broad array of options but the preferred ones will be those which favour the social dimension and which forcefully push back the pangs of poverty which mercilessly pinch our less fortunate countrymen.

Comme on dit, Monsieur le Président:

“LA OU IL Y A UNE VOLONTE, IL Y A UN CHEMIN”

Avec ces mots, Monsieur le Président, je vous remercie pour votre attention.

