

***Address by the Acting Prime Minister on the occasion of the
Annual Dinner of the Institution of Engineers, Mauritius
(13 September 2005)***

***My Colleague the Minister of Public Utilities
Mr Ponnusamy, Senior Chief Executive
Mr Desai, President of the Institution of Engineers, Mauritius
Members of the Engineering Profession
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen***

I am thankful to the President of the Institution of Engineers Mauritius for having invited me at the annual dinner of the Institution of Engineers Mauritius which coincides with the Engineers' Day.

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address this distinguished audience, made up mainly of Engineers from both the public and the private sectors. I can state without any fear of contradiction that the members of the engineering profession have been closely associated with the socio-economic development of Mauritius since the colonial era.

It has been said that the history of civilization is the history of Engineering. Certainly it is true that highly developed civilizations are noted for accomplishments in engineering. The Romans succeeded to build more than 50,000 miles of roads across Europe on engineering principles that are still in use to-day. The Egyptians not only built the famous Great Pyramids but also designed a sophisticated water distribution system (both for irrigation and drinking) using River Nile water. With time, science and technology have evolved and several branches of engineering have emerged. Fields of engineering no longer comprise only the traditional ones such as Civil and Mechanical Engineering, but include also the latest trends such as Software Engineering or Genetic Engineering.

Engineering is a blend of art and science. It calls for the systematic application of knowledge and skill according to a set of rules. Engineering requires ingenuity, craftsmanship, a judgment in adapting scientific knowledge to practical purposes.

The first visitors to Mauritius did not settle here definitely mainly because of the lack of infrastructure. It is only when French Governor Mahé de Labourdonnais decided to start the construction of the first roads and buildings that long-term settlement started. Just as with all civilizations, the Mauritian society owes a lot to the engineering profession. To-day, some four decades after independence, Mauritius is at a cross-road of its development.

My Ministry will work closely with the Institution of Engineers. To this end, we will revamp the Construction Industry Development Board and dynamise its operations.

My colleague the Minister of Public Utilities and myself are privileged to head the two Ministries employing the largest number of Engineers. We have a new Government and its chief objective is to provide a better life for each Mauritian. We need to develop the infrastructure further. We need to build more educational and health facilities, improve our networks of water supply, waste water, telephone/internet, electricity and roads. It is a never-ending process.

The improvement of infrastructure is not without difficulties and we are conscious of the new challenges faced by the Engineers. These are:-

ECONOMICAL. With the increase in oil prices on the world market and the problem of decreasing sugar prices, we shall face a huge challenge to finance infrastructural development in the coming years. On the one side, funds are becoming rare and on the other side, the cost of infrastructure development is constantly on the rise. Engineers must weigh very carefully different options in their design and propose the most cost-effective one.

SOCIAL. The quality of life in Mauritius is much better than it was a few decades ago. People's aspirations in terms of comfort, safety and value for money have increased significantly. For example, Engineers can design a road that is more comfortable but at the same time this raises a problem of road safety due to the higher speed.

ENVIRONMENTAL. Major projects must take into consideration the protection of flora and fauna, keep air and noise pollution at bay, protect the bio diversity of the lagoons etc.

HUMAN RESOURCES. Whenever there is a shortage of Engineers on the market, the Public Service resorts to recruitment from overseas as a short term solution. The long term solution would be for Mauritius to 'produce' an adequate number of Engineers in all fields. The Government is putting a high premium on Science and Technology. It encourages more students to turn to science subjects. We rely on the Institution of Engineers to come up with activities likely to attract youngsters to the engineering sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As politicians, when we meet every day our constituents and other stakeholders, we feel that the public is becoming more and more demanding in every aspect. You the Engineers must also feel the same way when you meet your clients who want you to provide the best services and also the latest technology. It is imperative that we do our utmost to satisfy our

clients. Meeting the clients demands should be considered as a source of great satisfaction.

I should like to end by sharing with you an 'engineering' joke:

Four Engineers were sitting around one day trying to figure out who might have designed the human body.

The first fellow says "I think it might be a Mechanical Engineer, because of joints and muscle and sense of balance." The other three nod their heads and say "Yeah, could be."

The second fellow says "I think it might be an Electrical Engineer, because of the nervous system and neural network." The other three nod their heads and say "Yeah, could be."

The third fellow says "I think it might be a Chemical Engineer, because of hormonal balances and metabolism.' The other three nod their heads and say "Yeah, could be."

The fourth fellow snaps his fingers and shouts out "I know, it HAD to have been a Civil Engineer!" The other three ask "Why?"

"Well" says the fourth fellow "who else would put a waste water drainage right through a recreational area!"

I wish the Institution of Engineers Mauritius plenty of success in the coming years.

I thank you for your attention.