

**INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF THE CUSTOM HOUSE**

**CUSTOM HOUSE  
MER ROUGE**

**WEDNESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2011**

**18 30 HRS**

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**SPEECH**

**BY**

**DR THE HON NAVINCHANDRA RAMGOOLAM, GCSK, FRCP  
PRIME MINISTER**

Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the 20<sup>th</sup> April 2006, almost five years ago, I laid the foundation stone of this New Custom House.

Today we are here for the inauguration ceremony, which is only a few days before the celebration of the International Customs Day.

This opening also coincides with the two hundredth anniversary of the appointment, by the British, of the very first Collector of Custom.

Our country has travelled a long way since. The Custom is, indeed, one of our oldest public institutions. It has played a significant role in our country's development – assisting the profound changes that have taken place in our industrial landscape, in our trade relations and in the diversification and expansion of our economy.

The New Custom House, which has cost around Rs 234 million brings under one roof all revenue departments. It is an illustration of the significant modernisation that our country's infrastructure is undergoing. It so happens that, in this House, 36% of total Government revenues are collected.

Besides revenue collection, Customs, as gatekeepers, face the twin challenges of facilitating trade and protecting our border from illegal and illicit trade.

In 2008, my Government introduced wide ranging reforms in the administration of Customs when we acceded to the Revised Kyoto Convention. These reforms yielded important results and, in 2011, our country was ranked 22<sup>nd</sup>, out of more than 175 countries in the World Bank 'Doing Business' Report, with regard to trading across borders.

However, in this world of global trade and the ever increasing movement of capital, people and goods, it is not only honest businesses that are taking advantage of the new opportunities.

Crooks, smugglers and terrorists have identified the opportunities too and have been quick to seize upon them, using more and more sophisticated ways. For this reason Customs, like all our agencies that have a law enforcement role, are urged to continue to improve and to be in tune with all new developments.

I believe that such institutions have to establish a strategic network among themselves and to work in a spirit of collaboration and partnership to ensure that we maintain a credible and strong defence against drug smuggling, terrorism, money laundering and cross border crime.

It is sometimes difficult for a single institution to tackle complex problems that require diverse competences and different levels of interventions. Specialisation and collaboration are both essential to achieve greater efficiency.

Customs Officers are often the first people travellers and tourists meet when they come to our country. It is imperative that you exhibit the highest professional standards in the performance of your duties, for first impressions matter.

You are expected to be courteous and to work with speed and accuracy. Don't rush to act on hearsay and anonymous letters, as if they are necessarily true. You must think of people's reputation as well.

You must analyse the information you receive and act in a professional manner.

Very often this is done by competitors, in order to harm honest and hard working businessmen and women.

You have to ensure that there is no mediocrity, no conflict of interest, no extortion and no bribery, especially as, now, you are equipped with the best technology, physical and human capital.

I understand that the new human resource framework focuses on merit and selection rather than just seniority and promotion. And I feel confident that the information management system will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation.

Let no one doubt my determination to confront all critical integrity issues that can undermine transparency in service delivery!

Sustainable growth is also about preventing the illegal entry of goods while facilitating lawful trade.

We should all be aware of the corroding impact that transnational crimes have on governance, business and development.

Contemporary forms of organised white-collar crime take the form of a complex and multi-faceted process including fraud, corruption and money laundering.

Sometimes, the complexity of the schemes by which financial and economic crimes are committed makes it difficult to detect illicit commerce. This is why capacity to track and respond to such frauds is a major issue. The challenge is to prevent criminals from being ahead of the curve!!

Smuggling and illegal importation of goods and counterfeit commodities are two of the most common

organised crimes afflicting the world today. This implies non-declaration of goods, bribing officials or transporting goods through illegal entry points.

You can count on my full support in your mission to transform the Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) into a pillar of integrity in the governance landscape of our country.

This forms part of my vision to make of Mauritius an island of Integrity. Government cannot attain this objective by itself. We need the active participation of all stakeholders including civil society.

Before concluding let me congratulate all the staff of the MRA for the good work they are doing.

In 2006, the Custom Department was the first winner of the ICAC award for having the best anti-corruption framework. You were again the proud winner of the award in 2010.

You also won two further awards in Integrity Management and Management Commitment.

I hope you continue to be fully mindful of your responsibilities to all stakeholders both in the private and public sectors and continue to do your work in a fair manner without fear or favour.

I am confident that the management, the board members and all the staff of MRA will continue to ensure good governance and work hard to promote ethics and professionalism in the Custom services.

I thank you for your attention.

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