



Republic of **Mauritius**

**BANQUET IN HONOUR OF HIS EXCELLENCY THE
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE**

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL
CONVENTION CENTRE, PAILLES**

MONDAY 06 JUNE 2011

19 30 HRS

SPEECH

BY

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

Your Excellency, Mr Nathan, President of the Republic of Singapore and Mrs Nathan, Distinguished Guests,

On behalf of the Government and people of Mauritius, and in my personal name and that of my wife, Veena, I would like to extend a heartfelt welcome to you Mr President, and to your spouse, Mrs Nathan, as well as to the distinguished members of your delegation.

I would like to acknowledge the presence in your delegation of three newly elected members of the Singapore Parliament including the Minister of State of Foreign and Home Affairs.

Excellency,

In 1979, we had the distinct honour to welcome Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew to Mauritius.

That visit still remains vivid in our minds.

32 years later, we are delighted to welcome you to our shores.

Excellency,

Your life and career serve as an inspiration to those who believe in the value of hard work and in the spirit of public service. Indeed, even before completing your studies, you started to work and rose through the ranks of the civil service from a Medical Social Worker to Director of Security and Intelligence, Permanent Secretary and Ambassador before taking up high positions in the private sector. In each and every position in which you served, you left an indelible and durable mark.

We recall your exceptional act of bravery during the Laju incident off the coast of Singapore in January 1974, when you volunteered to be held hostage by the notorious Japanese Red Army terrorists in order to secure the release of civilian hostages.

In each of your responsibilities, you would exceed the call of duty.

The high responsibilities entrusted to you as President of the Republic of Singapore since 1999, are a be-fitting recognition of your achievements and of your own personal merit.

Your accession to the Presidency has been yet another opportunity for you to continue contributing to the advancement of your country and, in particular in the building of a caring society for Singapore.

The creation of the President's Challenge Initiative, in 2000, which has already raised over 80 million dollars for the least fortunate, reflects your humanitarian nature and your deep conviction that Singapore must evolve as an inclusive and cohesive society.

I would like personally to salute your initiative. I initiated a similar fund – the Prime Minister's Relief Fund which addresses difficult humanitarian situations that cannot always be resolved by existing social policies.

Excellency,

I firmly believe that while our two countries continue on the path of economic progress, it is important that we never forget that prosperity and GDP growth only make sense if they are inclusive and everyone shares in that progress.

Let me seize this opportunity to renew our congratulations to you and to the people of Singapore for the successful holding of general elections recently and to re-iterate through you, our best wishes to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for the well deserved renewal of his mandate.

In his swearing-in speech at Istana a few weeks back, Prime Minister Lee recalled that *“policies are meant to make our lives better and when they have unintended consequences, we should put things right promptly.”*

At the same time, he underscored the need for a more flexible, thoughtful and compassionate approach by Government.

I believe, those sentiments are exactly right.

Excellency,

The world acclaims Singapore as one of the most dynamic and prosperous economies. Yours is a country which has, through sheer hard work and discipline, carved a place for itself in the international arena against formidable odds and challenges.

No doubt, the ambitious vision of the Singapore leadership for the Island State and their determination to turn that vision into reality has been instrumental to your country's success. This has demanded perseverance, sacrifices and strong work ethics and values imbued in the people.

The motto of Singapore – *Majulah Singapura – Onward Singapore* – reflects perfectly the drive that has guided the people of your country.

Excellency,

The relations between Mauritius and Singapore go back a long way. The special friendship that existed between the founding father of Singapore, former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and the Father of our Nation, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam laid the solid foundation for our future relations. Both of these men led their countries to independence within a few years of each other, taking in hand the destinies of their newly freed nations.

It was an uphill task for both our countries:

- **Both small multi-ethnic island states with no natural resources except our people.**
- **Yet thanks to the leadership and vision of our two founding fathers and the efforts and industriousness of our people, we can be proud of what we have achieved.**

We, in Mauritius, often draw on the example of Singapore. The innovative mindset and resilient spirit of the people of Singapore inspire much admiration.

You will find this resilient spirit in the people of Mauritius too.

We believe that no obstacle is too high to overcome, no challenge is unsurmountable if we remain determined, disciplined and clear in our vision of what we want to achieve in the future.

When one looks at a world map, our two Island States are generally represented by dots. How many know that Singapore has sixty-three islands and that Mauritius is made up of multiple islands and archipelagos scattered across the Indian Ocean ?

Yet, both our countries have belied their sizes and inherent frailties to develop buoyant economies.

We, in Mauritius, would not be so presumptuous as to pretend we are in the same league as Singapore but we are determined to make further progress, drawing on the Singaporean experience. For there is much that binds our two countries:

- **our diverse cultures and languages;**
- **our tapestry of ethnic groups and religions; and**

- that ingrained sense of unity in diversity.

In a context of severe political turmoil in different parts of the world, it is a matter of satisfaction that our peoples have re-affirmed their faith in democracy, tolerance and peaceful co-existence based on the understanding that we belong to a common humanity.

The vision of Singapore and Mauritius converge on a number of fundamental values and we are embarked on similar trajectories, although we have different levels of development and social, political and geographical realities.

Our small island geography coupled with a lack of natural resources, have made us continually strive to enlarge our economic space; hence, our common commitment to Regional Integration.

Singapore has been a prime mover of ASEAN, whilst Mauritius – as part of Africa – is a firm adherent to regional integration, which encompasses SADC, COMESA, the Indian Ocean Commission and the Indian Ocean Rim.

We are therefore pleased at the increasing interest of Singapore in Africa.

I would like, Excellency, to congratulate your country for hosting the largest African delegation to date at the Inaugural Africa Singapore Business Forum last July. Mauritius was pleased to be able to participate in that event which brought together dignitaries, Government officials and business and opinion leaders. We believe that an ASEAN-Africa Forum of a similar nature could further boost greater cooperation between Africa and Asia.

Excellency,

The diversity of the Mauritian nation, our ancestral links with Asia and Africa have always encouraged us to view ourselves as a natural gateway between Africa and

Asia. Singaporean investments are already present in Mauritius and we would certainly welcome greater economic engagement between our two countries. We would, however, also invite investors from Singapore to use our location and avail of Mauritius membership of SADC, COMESA and IOC to do business in Africa.

We are encouraged that your delegation includes some very high profile business persons from a wide range of activities. We hope that they have been able to gauge for themselves investment and strategic partnership opportunities in Mauritius and the potential for leveraging on the locational advantage of our country.

The two memoranda of understanding signed this morning between the Singapore Business Federation and the Board of Investment and the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry respectively, should provide an added impetus to business relations between our countries.

These relations can be further deepened by the early establishment of a Free Trade Agreement between our two countries.

Excellency,

Mauritius and Singapore are called upon to work together with other Small Island Developing States and developed countries to carve out a special status for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and for the adoption and implementation of global actions in their favour.

Environment and climate change remain one such area where small islands face high risks. Whilst Mauritius and Singapore have both taken strong stands on the issue of sustainable development, we need to have our efforts supported by international commitments.

Singapore has adopted an environmentally cautious approach taking into consideration its constraints and limitations as far as natural and physical resources are concerned.

In the case of Mauritius, the Maurice-Ile-Durable project clearly aims at mainstreaming sustainable development across all sectors. The Mauritian Government has set a target of increasing the share of renewable energy to 35% by 2025.

Excellency,

The maritime nations that we are, have committed us to a strong interest in the safety and security of the oceans – the arteries of our trade. Your country has acquired significant experience in dealing with threats to shipping in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, the main seaway connecting the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea. This route, which has heavy maritime traffic, is, indeed, a target for piracy and terrorist attacks. Given the increasing threat of piracy in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius can, I am sure, benefit from Singapore's experience and expertise.

The discussions I have had with you and with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, last year, proved very fruitful as the Government of Singapore promptly responded to our request for cooperation in various fields, including the implementation of a Mauritius National Identity Card Project, the Light Rail Transport project, a review of the security system in our prisons, and the reform of our water sector.

I must express our appreciation at the swiftness with which most evaluations have been conducted. We are keenly awaiting the concrete implementation of these projects. We are also looking forward to strengthening our cooperation with Singapore following the assistance already granted to us under different programmes, including Communications and Transport, Education, Urban Development, Information Technology, Health and the Environment amongst others.

Excellency,

Your historical visit will, I have no doubt, reinforce and strengthen our relations for the mutual benefit of our peoples. We look forward to working closely with the Government of Singapore to optimise on the tremendous opportunities that this innovative partnership offers.

I wish you and members of your delegation a pleasant and fruitful stay in our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I invite you to join me, in a toast to :-

- the health and well-being of His Excellency, Mr Nathan and Mrs Nathan;
- the happiness and prosperity of the Singaporean people; and to
- the abiding friendship between Singapore and Mauritius.

Long live Singapore!

Long live Mauritius!

I thank you for your attention.
