

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE FIRST ICT-BPO CONFERENCE
AND
NETWORKING FORUM**

**LE MERIDIEN HOTEL
POINTE AUX PIMENTS**

WEDNESDAY 05 OCTOBER 2011

09 30 HRS

SPEECH

BY

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

**Colleague Ministers,
The CEO and Managing Director of Infosys BPO,
Distinguished Delegates,**

It gives me great pleasure to address the opening session of this first edition of the ICT-BPO Conference and Networking Forum.

Having looked at the list of participants and the panelists as well as the topics to be discussed, I am convinced this conference will be a stimulating and productive one.

I would like to congratulate my colleague, Honourable Pillay Chedumbrum, the Minister of Information and Communication Technology for his initiative which is timely and promising. On multiple occasions, I have stated our ambition to be in the forefront of development and to position Mauritius in a leading role in the ICT sector in the region.

The wide experience and insight of industry leaders will assist us to further chart our future course of action. Our ambition is to make of ICT a strong pillar of the economy. We have, therefore, as far as possible, factored in all the key elements to help us achieve our goal. We are trying to bring together the resources needed and to create the necessary conditions for success.

We are promoting investment not only to create new jobs for our young people, but also to attract higher competencies from overseas so that our ICT industry moves to a higher level of value-added operations.

Over the past few years, we have seen that the ICT-BPO industry can contribute very positively to the national economy and provide employment to thousands of our youth. When I first expressed my vision of transforming Mauritius into an ICT-BPO hub, in 1999, many thought that this would not be possible.

But if you believe in a vision, you must never listen to people who say it can't be done.

Since the setting up of a Ministry dedicated to Information and Communication Technology in 1997, we have made substantial progress.

Today, this industry is not only coming of age, in terms of investment and employment, but is also having a positive multiplier effect on other sectors. It is a most promising sector which contributed 6.4% to our GDP in 2010 and employs some 15,000 people.

I assure you that I will take a personal interest in your discussions and look forward to your recommendations to help Government give an additional impetus to this new growth pole. Government's role is to map the way forward and act as a facilitator. Investors should be able to tap external expertise and skills to consolidate their existing operations and to expand the knowledge-based economy.

Our past achievements give us confidence in our future. Our island only started to move from a mono-crop agricultural economy in the early seventies. A few decades later, through

strategic diversification, the promotion of tourism and the creation of the Export Processing Zone, we have a multi-sector economy. Today, we are classified as a middle-income economy. ICT and the Financial Services sectors are poised to take us up the next rung of the development ladder.

The foundation stone of the knowledge-based economy, which we are in the process of building, was laid in 1977 by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the Father of the Nation, when he granted free education to all Mauritians, again when many were saying it was unsustainable.

That was a turning point for Mauritius. It was a crucial step in the development of our human capital. Education has enabled our people to acquire the necessary knowledge in the new economy. Education will play an even more determining role in the digital future.

Several factors contribute towards making Mauritius an ideal place for ICT-BPO activities: amongst others, its political stability, its institutions, the rule of law, the protection of investors' interests, a conducive macroeconomic and regulatory framework.

There were some gloomy predictions, made by several learned scholars about the future of Mauritius in the 1960's. In spite of a dire scarcity of capital and practically non-existent raw materials, we have survived and progressed, thanks to our emphasis on our human resources.

The message I want to convey to all of you and to prospective investors is that we have the potential to make of Mauritius a global player in the ICT-BPO sector. The Government is sparing no effort in putting in place all the necessary facilities for the translation of this vision into reality.

The task ahead must be jointly shouldered by the Government and the private sector. The magnitude of the task, however, should not deter us. To achieve our goals, we will have to build on our strengths.

The ICT-BPO sector represents a significant market, and we have not yet fully tapped our potentials.

During the last six years, my Government has implemented concrete measures which have boosted the development of this industry, helped in bridging the digital divide and encouraged greater social cohesion at the national level. International connectivity costs for leased lines have continually decreased. It has gone down from US \$ 39,112 in 2001 to US \$ 4,100 in 2010.

Optical fibre connectivity is already provided to the business community and the Government. The Fibre to Home project will soon be realized. This will bring about a revolution in telecommunications in the country.

Today the penetration of mobile telephone has reached nearly 100%, 90% of households have a fixed line, and with more than 100,000 broadband access lines, Mauritius is the leader in this part of the world.

For the ICT-BPO sector, reliable, resilient and high capacity international connectivity is crucial. Mauritius is already equipped with two submarine cable stations providing the country with a highly competitive access to the world.

I am pleased to learn that an iconic brand in the sector, Hewlett Packard, has chosen to open an office in Mauritius. This augurs well for the future of the sector.

My Government is creating the right environment to ensure that flagship companies like Accenture, TNT, Hinduja, Orange Business services, Ceridian and Infosys, and of course, domestic companies continue to grow, re-invest, create new jobs and bring greater value addition to Mauritius.

The business ecosystem is being constantly fine-tuned. The creation of the ICT Academy, for example, will cater to the manpower needs of the industry. My Government is also keen to fully operationalize the "Open Access policy" with a view to providing broadband to homes and corporate offices at faster and more reliable speed and at lower cost.

This first ICT-BPO Conference, which we are hosting, is one of the many initiatives underway. It will showcase the Mauritian potential to the outside world. It is our clear intent to upgrade national infrastructure and to broaden the range of the services we offer to the world market.

At the same time, we shall be leveraging Mauritian expertise to export ICT services to the African region. By using technology for innovative development, we plan to make the best of any opportunities which arise.

My Government is committed to supporting this thriving sector so as to ensure inclusive growth and to enhance efficiency. The ICT-BPO industry will continue to figure high on my agenda.

We will further upgrade our human capital by systematically updating our education system in line with the economic imperatives of the day.

Mauritius is providing intelligent infrastructure for supporting the creation, diffusion and exchange of knowledge, encouraging partnership between private and public sectors, amongst firms, between domestic and foreign partners and supporting a number of regional initiatives pertaining to ICT.

We have, with the assistance of friendly countries, facilitated networking through the creation of clusters and technology parks. Our modern regulatory framework provides clear and transparent rules for conducting business. Intellectual Property Protection, Data Protection, Internet Governance, ICT policies, labour policies and Cyber security mechanisms are constantly being reviewed.

My Government wants to build an intelligent Mauritius. I am also determined to increase the ICT penetration rate and encourage the use of ICT and internet in all parts of Mauritius. The smart identity card project will soon become a reality along with the e-judiciary project. All these initiatives form part of the Government's phase 2 and 3 projects and will help in realizing the vision of transforming Mauritius into a Cyber island.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the same time that I was defining my vision for the ICT sector in 1999, Larry Page and Sergey Brin were busy in their garage setting up Google ! Nobody could have imagined the sort of changes that the world would witness since.

And we all know, that this is a sector that is evolving at a very rapid pace.

That is why we cannot sit on our laurels and allow inertia to set in.

We must adapt, innovate and continue to look for a competitive edge so that we are not left behind.

That is true for Companies as it is true for Governments.

I can assure you that my Government will continue to provide the world class leadership required to bring about the changes that are necessary to take our country to new heights of development.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and I am pleased to officially declare the conference open.

I thank you for your attention.
