

**Speech by the Minister of Youth & Sports,
Hon. Sylvio Hock Sheen Tang Wah Hing on the Government's Programme 2005-
2010**

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

I would like, at the very outset, to fulfil a pleasant duty, in association with my colleagues, to congratulate you on your election as Speaker and equally extend my congratulation to the Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chairman of Committees.

In July 2005, this Government has been given a clear mandate on the basis of a programme that has been clearly explained to the population. About three months later, the urban population have confirmed in unparalled proportion their confidence in the "Alliance Sociale" by entrusting to us the governance of the five Municipalities, some of which were in the past regarded as the private property of the opposition. Such magnificent and complete victory has destroyed a myth.

The "Alliance Sociale" has made National Unity a reality today. This Government, with its socialist programme will continue to strengthen and consolidate this Unity. Boys and Girls, men and women, young and old, able and less able-bodied persons, need to find their place in our society, need to feel comfortable, need to feel at home, need to feel wanted, need to feel that they can contribute to build a better Mauritius, need to feel that they are properly cared for. In more simple words, they need to be considered as persons, as human beings, with rights and obligations (Rights that have to be respected and obligations that they can understand and be helped to fulfil).

That is precisely the underlying philosophy behind "putting people first" as indicated in the Government programme 2005-2010. The Government programme provides a clear vision of our commitment and determination to change the life of the Mauritian people. Not after 5 years but in a very short span of time.

In this context, this Government has made certain promises to the people and our Prime Minister made it clear that people will feel the effect of change within the first 100 days of his mandate. What has happened during those first 100 days? The whole Mauritian population has witnessed the seriousness of this Government to honour those promises which have resulted in a significant change in the life of the population.

The restoration of the welfare state, initiated by the Labour Party, has brought relief and satisfaction to our old people who have previously been harassed to filling forms to be entitled to their old age pension. The possibility of travelling free of charge has been extended to them as well as to the disabled persons. What a change! An air of freedom now prevails. The presently elderly persons have at sometime been young and active and have contributed to make the country what it is today. Even now, they are contributing in

various ways to the family unit and to society by their experience and their maturity, by bringing care and harmony within the family and society.

We should still remember that one of the fundamental aspects of human rights is access to education. The Labour Party, in its philosophy and vision, introduced free education to all in 1976. It has in 2005 within the first 100 days of its mandate, completed the process by providing free transport to all students at all levels. One can never imagine the number of school going-age children who could not attend school regularly because of the inability of their parents to provide transport fare.

There are others who do attend school, but have to absent themselves frequently because of the same problem.

In addition to free transport, ADSL facilities are being extended to schools so that students can further their knowledge and undertake research work without any cost.

People have felt highly relieved with price control of some basic necessities, both for themselves and for their children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

I think it is hardly necessary for me to stress what has been done in other sectors by my colleagues. Measures taken are widely known and fully appreciated. We all know that we have an uphill task, but we have the determination and political will to forge ahead in order to attain the objectives which we have set ourselves and for which the country voted us to power.

Despite the serious economic conditions we have inherited, we are determined to adopt a pragmatic approach so that every citizen of this country can lead a normal and satisfactory life for himself and his family and be proud to be a citizen of this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

The programme of the Government for the Youth and Sports sector provides for increasing emphasis on regionalisation and democratisation of Youth and Sport activities as well as upgrading and modernising of sport facilities.

It also provides for revisiting the existing Youth programme with a view to ensuring that they meet the increasing aspiration of our Youth and cater for all regions with special attention to the disadvantage groups.

In this context, since the very first day we took office, we wasted no time. At the level of my Ministry, I requested that an audit of all our youth and sports infrastructures be carried out.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

While taking cognizance of the report of this audit, I noted that rehabilitation and upgrading of the existing infrastructures would cost around Rs 150 million, without taking into consideration new ones that need to be undertaken. This is indicative of the challenging task lying ahead of us.

Mr Speaker Sir,

In the Government programme, the policy regarding the Youth is spelt out in no uncertain terms. I quote:

“With a view to enabling the development and general welfare of the Youth who constitute the pillar upon which a nation is built, Youth policies will be reviewed. Emphasis will be laid on national unity, social integration of Youth, empowerment and skills improvement as well as creation of opportunities for their personal growth.”
Unquote.

We have therefore started revisiting the programme “Special Vacances” which young people indulge in during the august holidays. My Ministry has set itself to listen to the youth to know their feelings and aspirations. Any programme aimed at them should be made in consultation with them. For the first time, the youngsters had the opportunity to come forward with proposals for the “Special Vacances” programme. In addition to the usual activities, some 1000 participants renewed with traditional games, whereas some 600 undertook itineraries for the discovery of the towns of Vacoas and Curepipe. Others participated in residential camps as well as in Community activities. Students from “le Bocage High School” went on a bicycle expedition around the island.

Based on this experience, the “Special Vacances” programme will henceforth be more responsive to the aspirations of our youth. Empowering young people to take initiatives so as to sensitize their friends and the community at large, on the effects of drugs, HIV/AIDS, alcohol and smoking, is among the priorities of my Ministry.

We would not like our youth to lose their sense of orientation. We have therefore to be along with them, listen to them, guide them and equip them to face the challenges ahead. My Ministry, in collaboration with other Ministries, has to this end, organized various training sessions for peer groups and members of social organizations on leadership, social problems and counselling.

Life skills management is in our view of paramount importance. Youth from the regions of Plaine Verte, Tranquebar and Cite Madelaine had the opportunity to come forward with proposals for sensitizing people on the various aspects that affect their lives. Some 250 students from pre-vocational schools of Black River and Case Noyale participated in the programmes where they sensitized their friends on social problems. Some 600 young people in the regions of Baie du Tombeau and Tamarin were initiated in information technology. Such programmes are ongoing in all youth centres throughout the island.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

While we are promoting IT culture, we should also be at the forefront of development. To this end, the traditional dial up connections which have been in place in the youth centres are being replaced by ADSL. These are put at the disposal of youth for their research and knowledge acquisition. All the youth centres are being upgraded and provided with modern facilities.

Equipping our youth and sensitizing them is a relentless exercise and no effort will be spared to achieve this end. My Ministry is to this effect working on a national programme for creativity throughout the youth centres, schools and social organizations. The aim of this programme will be to prepare the youth for the world of work. Stimulation and empowerment are our objectives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

With regard to the Sport sector, we have set as objectives to democratise sports, provide decent sports facilities, decentralize activities, encourage mass sports for a healthy life-style, encourage and assist elite sportsmen and sportswomen, promote new disciplines and revalorize the secondary schools sports.

I am glad that for the four months that I am heading the Ministry of Youth & Sports, I have been able to clench various actions which form the basis for reengineering the youth and sports sector. To start with, the legislative framework within which my Ministry operates falls short of public expectations.

The Sports Act which has been decried by various organizations will be amended for the betterment of sports. Already a task force at the level of my Ministry has started working on the amendments and all stakeholders will be invited shortly to join in this exercise.

With regard to the reactivating of Sports at Secondary School Level, a committee comprising representatives of the Ministry of Education & Human Resources, Mauritius Secondary School Sports Association (MSSSA) and my Ministry has also started working on the modalities for an appropriate formula acceptable to all stakeholders for the holding of Inter-colleges competitions. In fact, we consider this as vital for the preparation of future athletes to represent Mauritius both at national and international competitions.

In the Government programme 2005-2010 mention has been made about measures to be taken for the public to have greater access to sports facilities. In this context, a committee comprising representatives of the Ministry of Education & Human Resources, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Public Infrastructure and my Ministry has identified some ten State Secondary Schools in the first instance, where Sports Federations and members of the public will be given the opportunity to utilize the sports facilities at these sites. This project has reached an advanced stage and will be implemented very shortly.

On the other hand, preparations for the participation of Mauritius in the Francophonie Games to be held in Niger from 7th to 17th December 2005 and in the Commonwealth Games to be held in Melbourne, Australia from 15th to 26th March 2006 have already started. All arrangements are being finalized to ensure that our participation in these competitions is made in the best possible conditions. The training of the athletes concerned is being closely monitored with a view to ensuring that they are fully prepared for these events so that they may achieve the best performance. An amount of Rs 3 million has been earmarked for our participation in these events.

On the other hand, my Ministry has started making serious preparation for the hosting of the “Jeux de la CJSOI” from 31st July to 5th August next year. Some 800 participants from the neighbouring islands are expected to take part in the Games. The organisation of this event will cost around Rs 9 million. Since last August, an Organising Committee under my chairmanship has already started working on the related arrangements to be made for the Games which will help promoting friendship and solidarity among the Youth of the Indian Ocean.

My Ministry attaches much importance to this game which can be considered as a mini “Jeux des Îles”. Accordingly, I am personally monitoring all the preparations of athletes for this game. I already met the federations concerned and have impressed upon them the necessity to ensure that our athletes are provided all necessary facilities and support to ensure good performances at this game.

In the same context, the “Jeux des Îles de l’Océan Indien” to be held in Madagascar 2007 is another important event to which my Ministry is giving serious attention. I propose to meet all sports federations in early January 2006 to review with them preparations for the game. Here again, we will do our level best to ensure that all facilities are provided to the federations to ensure the optimum preparation of our athletes for participation in the game.

The preparations for the “Jeux des Iles” will also serve as a stepping stone in our preparations for the Olympics Games to be held in Beijing in 2008.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

My Ministry will spare no effort in providing the necessary facilities to ensure that our athletes are properly prepared and equipped for a successful participation, for the ‘immediate’, Francophonie Game in December 2005 and the Commonwealth Games in March 2006. Simultaneously, we are closely monitoring together with the sports federations, the preparations of our athletes for the CJSOI Games in August 2006 and eventually for the “Jeux des Îles” in August 2007.

All these preparations will culminate in our participation in the Olympics Games in Beijing in 2008.

The challenges in front of us are, indeed, enormous. However, with the support and collaboration of all stakeholders concerned and the Mauritian population in general, we should be in a position to respond effectively to these challenges.

On the other hand, Mauritius will have the singular honour to host the Senior African Athletic Championships from 9th to 13th August 2006. This event will attract more than 1000 top athletes from some 50 African countries. My Ministry is providing the necessary facilities to the Mauritius Amateur Athletic Association (MAAA) to ensure that the Championship is organised in the best possible conditions. An amount of Rs 8 million has been earmarked for meeting the costs for infrastructural works at Germain Commarmond Stadium, Bambous.

Regarding the infrastructure works, as I mentioned earlier, we need to provide decent facilities to all. Major works have already started in various infrastructures. The Harry Latour stadium in Mahebourg is a shame for all sportsmen. May we be reminded that for the last two years, this stadium has not been utilised. Despite several requests by the Football Federation, nothing was done. I am glad to say that the decision was taken some four weeks back, to undertake essential works to make it operational again for competitions. Works have already started and will be completed shortly.

Other sport facilities at Petit Raffray, Flacq, Quartier Militaire, Curepipe, Bambous and Mapou will undergo various improvements. My Ministry is also working with other Ministries and local authorities for improved facilities and promotion of sports in all regions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

I will now come to specific measures which I have taken in my Ministry. We fully realise that sports cannot be promoted without the collaboration of the stakeholders. This year, the budgetary allocation to the sports federations has been increased by 20% compared to last year, from Rs 27 million to Rs 35.5 million this year. This substantial increase will enable the federations to better develop their disciplines and undertake their preparation for national, regional and international competitions.

As reported in the press, all Sports Federations have welcomed this decision and feel reassured of the commitment of this Government to support the Sports Sector.

Nine sports federations, namely, football, Athletics, Badminton, Judo, Boxing, Table Tennis, Tae Kwon Do, Volleyball and Surfing have been granted more autonomy for the management of their "Écoles de Sport". This measure will give flexibility to the federations for the recruitment and payment of allowances to trainers and thus empower them to take decisions regarding those non-performing trainers and ensure value for money. In the past, these federations had to send their claims to the Ministry on a monthly or quarterly basis for payments and which had for consequence delays in settling claims.

Sir, over the past few years, two martial arts disciplines Wushu and Sumo had obtained recognition but have not been provided with any grant. These two federations will now receive an annual grant of Rs 275.000 / each from my Ministry.

On the other hand, the High Level Sports Unit of my ministry which grants monthly allowances to high level athletes as an incentive to encourage them to achieve better results has been revamped. This Unit has already revisited the various schemes offered and now proposed that some team sports also be allocated incentives. These measures will be implemented shortly for the benefit of those athletes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

We are surrounded by sea, yet the irony of it all is that the majority of our countrymen do not know how to swim. To palliate this shortcoming, my Ministry has embarked on a mass swimming campaign. This started in four public beaches on the 16th October 2005 for a period of three months and would be extended to other regions. This exercise will henceforth be repeated twice a year.

Regarding decentralization of sports, as a first step, weightlifting which was confined to Vacoas only, has now been proposed to regional centres at Bambous, Anjalay Stadium, Auguste Vollaire at Flacq and George V Stadium in Curepipe. This measure will encourage a greater number of sportsmen for this discipline and avoid them the hassle of long travelling time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are all aware that over the past years, football has undergone a serious decline. Government is conscious about this and has therefore set up an inter-Ministerial committee to look into ways and means for reactivating this sport discipline. The inter- Ministerial Committee has already started its work.

We are also aware that the future resides in our youth. For this reason, they have to be better equipped. If previously, Rs 1 million was spent for the training of 50 football players at the National Training Centre for Football at Réduit, this money will now be judiciously used by the four regional training centres at Rose Belle, Anjalay, Flacq and Bambous. This will enable us to have more elites and promote training at the grass root level.

My ministry has also decided to finance the participation of two Football Clubs, namely l'ASPL2000 (Champion) and PAS Mates (Coupe de Coupe) in the "Competition Africaine des clubs". The former Government clearly indicated that it would not finance such participation. But this Government firmly believes that such international interactions would be an important additional boost for Football promotion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Rodrigues which forms an integral part of the Republic of Mauritius has not been forgotten. We are aware that Rodrigues which has produced high calibre athletes such as Eric Milazar has the potential to produce such high performers. The island can also be a nursery for our national teams. However, the expansion of sports

with the exception of a few disciplines has been restrained by internal conflicts with the Sports Federations and appropriate framework within the provisions of the Sports Act.

I visited Rodrigues in September 2005 to attend the inter-islands cadets championship which is an annual athletic competition organized since 1983 and held every alternate year in Mauritius and Reunion island respectively. For the first time this year, this event was held in Rodrigues with the participation of some 30 athletes from Reunion Island and Mauritius respectively. Some ten Rodriguan athletes formed part of the Mauritian delegation. The event has met with tremendous success and has helped to reinforce solidarity among the athletes from Reunion Island, Mauritius and Rodrigues.

In the course of my visit, I had the opportunity to discuss with the members of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and the relevant sports federations about their constraints for the upliftment of sports and agreed to send necessary follow up missions in Rodrigues to deal with these constraints. Accordingly, a delegation comprising officials of my Ministry, the Judo and Wrestling federations and the “Commission Nationale du Sport Féminin” (CNSF) proceeded to Rodrigues in October 2005.

I am glad to inform the House that the various problems arising between the Regional Committees and the federations are now of the past and new working relations including licensing of athletes, High Level Sports and participation in National, Regional and International competitions and training have been established in consultation with the Commission for Youth & Sports of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. The “Commission Nationale du Sport Féminin” on its part will, in consultation with Rodrigues Regional Assembly provide training for women to practise sports for leisure and recreation.

Green light has been given for the participation of 6 athletes in Wrestling in a training session organised by CONFEJES in Madagascar from 8 to 17 November. Two participants from Rodrigues form part of the delegation which proceeded to Madagascar on 7 November.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

The targets we had set ourselves can only be achieved with the full support and commitment of the staff of my Ministry. Accordingly since I assumed the function of Minister, I have paid a close attention to the opinion of my staff. Two brainstorming sessions one for the Youth Section and the other one for the sports Section were held with my staff. In the course of these sessions, all the relevant staff had the opportunity to submit their suggestions and proposals for improvements. The suggestions made are being taken on board for the reengineering of both the Youth and Sports Sections of my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

May I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude and thanks to the electorate of constituency No 2 for having put their trust in my colleagues and myself. In fact, the

electorate, after some 27 years, have placed their confidence in this Government. In recognition for this popular support which has served to send the required signal to the whole of Mauritius, our Prime minister has given to that constituency the singular honour of designating the members of that constituency as Deputy Prime minister, the No 2 of this Government, a minister of Youth and Sports and equally a Lord Mayor after the recent municipal elections.

It is said that trust begets trust. I would like to reassure them: You have been with us. We shall be with you.

As a matter of fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, the magnificent victory obtained by “Alliance Sociale” at the July General Elections is to great extent due to the trust and confidence that the youth of this country has in our Prime minister who has at heart the interest of our young people.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

With this Government, changes there have been. Changes there will be. By now, the population has seen the difference between this government and the previous one, which reminds us of the film Kaal ho na ho - meaning There may not be a tomorrow.

In sharp contrast, the present government will ensure that the life of the people of this country continues to undergo positive changes and that they do live better tomorrows.

As for my part, I personally pledge to give all my time, my energy, my willingness to the sportsmen and sportswomen of this country. Never ever will I dare to jeopardise in whatever form the future of our youngsters through lack of commitment.

Under the leadership of our Prime minister, I am sure that this country will see and witness very interesting times.

May God bless our young people, sportsmen and sportswomen. May God bless this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.