

## **Honourable Members,**

We are singularly honoured and privileged to welcome in our midst today, at this special sitting of the House, Her Excellency Smt. Pratibha Devisingh PATIL, the first woman to hold the office of President of the Republic of India, one of the largest democracies in the world.

Her Excellency, Smt. Patil has had a long and distinguished career. Before joining active politics, Her Excellency had been practising as a lawyer. She also devoted herself to various social activities in favour of the downtrodden and needy population of India.

Her Excellency joined the Indian Congress Party in the early sixties and has continuously served the Maharashtra State Legislature from 1962 to 1980. She became the first woman to serve as Leader of the Opposition from July 1979 to February 1980.

At the national level, Her Excellency was a Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha from 1985 to 1990.

In 1991, Her Excellency was elected as Member of Parliament in the Lok Sabha and she served in that capacity until 1996. In 2004, she was appointed Governor of the State of Rajasthan, again the first woman in Indian politics to obtain such a high distinction.

The rich career of Her Excellency, both in the political and social fields, culminated in her election as the 12<sup>th</sup> President of the Republic of India. Her presence among us this morning heralds a new era in the already existing relations between India and Mauritius.

Your Excellency on behalf of the Honourable Members of the National Assembly, let me take this opportunity to extend a special and very warm welcome to you, to Dr. Devisingh Ramsingh Shekhawat, your spouse as well as to all members of your delegation.

It is my pleasure now to invite Your Excellency to address this august Assembly.

Thank you.