

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
SINGAPORE, MR S. R. NATHAN**

**The President of the Republic of Singapore:**

Your Excellency, Rajkeswur Purryag,

Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Mauritius,

Your Excellency, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius,

Your Excellency, Paul Raymond Bérenger,

Leader of the Opposition,

Honourable Ministers of Mauritius,

Honourable Members of the National Assembly of Mauritius,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for your gracious words of welcome and honouring me with this opportunity to address the Members of this august House. On behalf of the Government and people of Singapore, I would like to convey my warm greetings to the people of Mauritius.

I am indeed very privileged to be here. This is my first visit and I am struck by the beauty of your island nation. The Botanical Garden and the Ganga Talao, which I visited yesterday, are splendid sights. I now fully understand what Mark Twain meant when he wrote in 1896, that: “you gather the idea that Mauritius was made first and then heaven, and that heaven was copied after Mauritius.”

Since my arrival, I have been touched by the warmth and hospitality of the people of Mauritius. I was also impressed to learn about Mauritius’ rich heritage, which is a result of the blending of many cultures from your history. From the first discovery as an uninhabited island by Arab sailors in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, Mauritius was re-discovered by the Portuguese in 1505 and subsequently settled by the Dutch, French and British before you gained your independence in 1968.

It is particularly interesting to me that your early beginnings and growth story since independence is one that mirrors Singapore’s own transformation from a fishing village in a

colony to a bustling economy. Mauritius, like Singapore and other newly independent States, entered the post-colonial era with a high level of poverty. But since then, Mauritius has grown to what it is today, as remarked by renowned economist and Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz, the “Mauritian economic miracle”. In 43 years, Mauritius transformed itself from a poor single crop economy into one of the most successful countries in Africa. It was largely through Mauritius’ combination of political stability, strong institutional frameworks and favourable regulatory environment that provided the foundation for this growth. In 2010, Mauritius was ranked first in Africa in the World Bank Doing Business Survey and this has consistently topped the Ibrahim Index of African Governance since 2007.

This remarkable success, I believe, did not come easily. Your visionary founding father, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, had reiterated the constant need to cultivate the spirit of unity and peace in the formative years of Mauritius’ independence. He set the path for Mauritius to be a functioning multi-racial and multi-communal State. Today, Mauritius is home to descendants from diverse places such as Africa, China, Europe and South Asia, with different faiths and religions all living in harmony. A prominent example is Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam himself, the son of a poor Indian immigrant, who became a leading figure in the independence movement and rose to become your first Prime Minister. Under his guidance, Mauritius progressed to achieve stability, democracy and significant levels of economic growth. This is indeed a remarkable achievement.

Today, both our countries are hailed as economic miracles, perhaps because conventional wisdom had doomed us to failure after independence. But we know that it was more than just a miracle. It was because our founding fathers boldly defied the odds to build improbable countries from mere islands lacking in natural resources. They succeeded through political will, strong visionary leadership, hard work and good governance. Indeed, the multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of the Mauritian people reflects the true spirit of representative democracy and is testament to the truth that diversity need not necessarily be incompatible with democracy, but rather, an essential counterpart. In this regard, Mauritius’ parliamentary democracy is remarkable for the ability of parliamentary system to work together across party lines to reach consensus on what is the national interest for the betterment of your country.

Honourable Speaker, both our countries have forged close bonds of friendship and cooperation that date back to the personal friendship between our two founding fathers, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam and Singapore’s first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew who visited

Mauritius in 1979 as a guest of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. The similarities we share in terms of our vision and outlook have helped us to understand each other better and have brought our countries together. I am confident that this will stand us in good stead and lead to a continued strengthening of our relations for many more years to come.

Honourable Speaker, as I conclude my speech, I want to commend Mauritius for being a beacon of success in Africa. I am deeply impressed by your stellar record of governance, economic reforms and effective management of State and business relations. All these have enabled neighbouring States to hold Mauritius in high regard and desire to emulate your development experience. Singapore, as a friend and a partner of Mauritius, is pleased to continue to work together with Mauritius to achieve the shared goals of peace, prosperity and stability in our respective regions and the world.

Honourable Speaker, I thank you once again for giving me this privilege to address this august Assembly.

*(Applause)*