

MAURITIUS THIRD LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Third Session
Debate No 13 of 1970
Sitting of Friday 5th June, 1970

The Assembly met in the Assembly Chamber, Assembly House, Port Louis, at 12.05 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Mr Speaker, accompanied by Her Excellency The Prime Minister of India, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, and preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, bearing the Mace, and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, entered the Chamber of Assembly in procession.

Mr Speaker seated Her Excellency to his right on the dais and took the Chair.

(Applause)

**ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA, SHRIMATI
INDIRA GANDHI**

Mr Speaker, Hon. Members of the Assembly,

It is indeed a privilege and a unique honour to be invited to address this august House. It is a tribute not to an individual but to a country, and I should like to think, even more to what India stands for in the eyes of the world.

This image was not made in a day, nor does it have only one aspect. There is the timeless wisdom of our ancient seers. There are the great religious leaders who sought to lift life out of the layer upon layer of ritual, so as once more to reveal the philosophy of tolerance, compassion and non-violence. And in our own times there was Gandhi who showed that these fundamental values were not to be worshipped but to be accepted as a part of everyday life.

This was the basis of our struggle for Independence. It was a fight for social and economic justice and for the dignity of man. We were conscious that we were fighting not for ourselves, but for all the under-privileged and oppressed of the world. Partners in this fight were men and women of all religions. The list of the Presidents of the Indian National Congress reveals the names of Mrs Annie Besant, an English woman, Mrs Sarojini Naidu, a poetess of great charm and personality, Dr Ansari, a revered and capable physician, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a scholar and an intellectual giant, Dadabhai Naroji, a Parsi of Persian descent, and many others.

The advent of Mahatma Gandhi gave our movement a new and dramatic turn. He was a great man but he could be a leader only because the people were ready to follow him.

He was the crest of the wave, but the people themselves were the wave. Never has a political movement been so widespread, joining in comradeship the educated and illiterate in town as well as village. We could not guess when independence could come and most of us did not dream to see it in our lifetime. In those pre-independence days, there was only one badge of honour – that of sacrifice and hardship. That is the spirit in which we wrested our independence. But we were conscious that political freedom was only one part of the battle.

Today we stand committed to democracy, to socialism and to secularism.

What does democracy mean to us? There was some element of democracy in ancient India, in that we had elected village councils even then. This institution was strengthened and given meaning after independence. At the State and national level we have Assemblies elected on adult franchise by the world's largest electorate. In the Fourth General Elections three years

ago, the electorate consisted of 260 million people of whom 60 per cent or 150 million exercised their franchise. But we do not think that democracy means merely the casting of votes at election time, but participation of all sections of the people in the whole process of development and progress, no less than in political decisions. We do not think that democracy can have meaning for the people without socialism. Where there has been such deep-rooted and widespread poverty, we cannot leave development to the whims of market forces. Although there is sometimes controversy over the shortcomings of our State sector, actually, in our circumstances, it was not possible for private enterprise to take over larger industries or public services. They lacked the resources and even interest to undertake projects of long gestation. However, the private sector continues to have a place with wide opportunities in our economy. In fact we are actively encouraging new entrepreneurs especially in small and medium industries.

But we believe that the public sector should be in control of the commanding heights, and the economy as a whole should be subject to the social good.

We have adopted economic planning in order to achieve growth and reconstruction of our economic fabric. As a result of our Five Year Plans, the first of which we launched in 1951, our national income has increased by 90 per cent, and our grain production from 55 million tons to 100 million tons a year. We are now within sight of self-sufficiency in food. Industrial production has increased by 245 per cent. And, even more important, the infrastructure of a strong, self-reliant industrial economy has now been built. Within these twenty years we have begun producing practically all the locomotives, power equipment, textile and sugar machinery that we need. We have also built up shipbuilding, aircraft and machine tool industries. We even export industrial machinery. In atomic energy we rank amongst the advanced countries.

The targets which we have set for our Fourth Plan (1969-74) will give some idea of the size of our effort: grain production 129 million tons, sugar production in terms of refined and unrefined sugar, 15 million tons, steel 10.8 million tons ingot, machine tools Rs1, 650 million worth, petroleum products 26 million tons, nitrogenous fertilizer 2.5 million tons, textiles 10, 850 million metres, coal 93.5 million tons, shipping 3.5 million tons GRT and power 22 million kilowatts of installed capacity.

The advance has been reflected in social gains. We now have 80 million children at school, compared to 27 million twenty years ago. The number of college-going students has increased fivefold. It is now approaching 2 million. Nearly 100,000 villages have been electrified. The life-span has gone up from 32 years to 52 years.

One simple figure will give you an idea of the scale of our problem, namely, that our population is growing at the rate of a million a month. You can calculate the pressures which build up for employment, housing and civic amenities.

The search for human welfare is a never-ending one. When material affluence is achieved there are other social and spiritual horizons to conquer.

I have spoken of secularism being one of the three pillars of our society. By this we do not mean lack of religion but, on the contrary, equal respect to all religions. I find that even Mauritius also cherish this principle. This is necessary in a multi-religious society such as ours. The Hindus might be numerically the largest group in India, numbering about 450 million, but we have also 60 million Muslims, 13 million Christians, 10 million Sikhs and a large number of followers of other religions such as Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Jews. They are all Indians, and contribute to our Indianness.

As our attempt has been for different communities to live peacefully side by side within the country, so in international policy also we have believed in co-existence since with all the

progress in the conquest of space, no one is in a position to migrate to another planet and we must therefore live as neighbours. The logical consequence of co-existence is international cooperation. This is what India has been and is working for.

We have been working through the United Nations and international organizations to resolve conflicts and tensions. We have believed in seeking and strengthening friendships with all nations, especially in developing bilateral relations with other developing countries.

I am glad to say that some concrete projects and schemes have taken final shape as a result of consultations between our two Governments and our experts. Indian experts have studied the Northern Irrigation Project as well as the Civil Airport Modernization Scheme, - their preliminary reports indicate the manner in which further definite steps can be taken to implement them. We shall provide the services of our technicians and such material as is available in India to achieve their realization. We shall also be glad to help the Government of Mauritius in establishing the Industrial Technical Institute and in developing small scale industries on the Island.

The founding of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute will, I am sure, bring us mutual satisfaction. We value the special cultural and historical links with your country and look forward to this Institute becoming a center for the arts, the humanities and sciences. I am also glad to mention that to further foster closer contacts between our two countries, we propose to liberalise travel arrangements for Indians who wish to visit Mauritius. We hope that these increasing contacts would further cement the close friendship that already exists between our two peoples.

I have told you about India. Each country must develop its own distinctive personality which must be conditioned by its history and geography.

Through the ages man has been driven forward by his spirit of enquiry and quest for knowledge, and the urge to pit his strength against something bigger and stronger than himself.

Un grand écrivain a dit: L'homme est un Roseau, mais un roseau qui pense! Dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, les hommes, ainsi que les femmes, réfléchissent de plus en plus sur des problèmes du monde entier, et même des autres mondes!

Soyons unis en pensée et en action pour la justice sociale et économique, pour le bonheur de tous les peuples du monde et pour la paix mondiale.

(Hon. Members rose and applauded)

**ADDRESS OF THANKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER DR. THE HONOURABLE SIR
SEEWOSAGUR RAMGOOLAM**

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a historic day for Mauritius. I should like on your behalf and on my own too, to express our vote of thanks to the Prime Minister of India for having given us such a gracious Address which has benefited all of us and, I am sure, laid the foundation for further understanding and co-operation between this House and the Prime Minister of India.

We wish her a very very happy stay in this country.

(Applause)

Mr Speaker: Will the hon. Prime Minister move the adjournment of the House?

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday, 9 June, 1970 at 11.30 a.m.

Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo rose and seconded.

At 12.42 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday, 9 June, 1970 at 11.30 a.m.