

Address by the President-Year 1995

Address by the President at the Opening of the Second Session of the First National Assembly of Mauritius on Friday 7 April 1995

Mr. Speaker,
Honourable Members,

1. It is my privilege to welcome you to the formal opening of the Second Session of the First National Assembly. I am specially honoured to be the first President of the Republic to address the Assembly on this auspicious occasion. I wish to extend a special welcome to the newly elected Members and to Sir Maurice Rault, Kt, QC as Attorney-General and Minister of Justice.

2. We will pursue with determination the objectives of combining sound economic development with greater social equity whilst preserving national unity, providing equal opportunities to all citizens, maintaining social harmony, enhancing quality of life and pursuing a relentless fight against social evils.

3. We are conscious of the necessity to have a policy of openness and constant dialogue with the population at large in steering our young Republic in the difficult and challenging time ahead, as we enter the next millennium.

4. The consolidation of democracy will continue to be our prime objective. In this context, appropriate electoral reforms will be undertaken to ensure modernisation and more transparency in the process.

5. Government will take necessary measures to review and amend the Mauritius Citizenship Act. The amendments will provide our young Republic with the appropriate legal environment to meet the requirements of a modern society and provide redress where the law results in injustice.

6. The policy of freedom of information will be enhanced. Information, vital for democracy, will be further liberalised. In this context, necessary legislation will be passed to set up an Independent Broadcasting Council to ensure that private broadcasters operate in an environment of fair competition while respecting our cultural ethos.

7. In line with its stated policy for social justice and equity appropriate measures will be taken to alleviate the hardships of the needy segments of our population. Special care and attention

will continue to be provided to the elderly, the widows, the disabled and the orphans. Government will pursue its policy of providing free and comprehensive medical services to all the citizens of our country, free education to the young population, "un toit pour chaque famille", and gainful employment.

8. On the international scene, we will give our entire support for the promotion of greater tolerance among peoples and nations of the world. Government will also continue to consolidate its bilateral relations with our traditional partners and promote further co-operation with other friendly States.

9. Government will intensify its participation in the work and deliberations of the United Nations and its specialised bodies as well as in other international instances such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth, the Francophonie group and the Organization of African Unity. Our prime objective will be to strive for justice, democracy and peace. Government will continue to uphold respect of Human Rights and encourage efforts conducive to good governance, conflict-prevention and achievement of a nuclear-weapon free world, encompassing inter alia, the zone of Africa.

10. We will pursue our diplomatic efforts to uphold our just and legitimate claim on our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago and the Tromelin Island.

11. Our diplomacy will step up efforts to promote the economic interest of our country.

12. Government will maintain its commitment to the Indian Ocean Commission and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa while looking forward to become a member of the Southern African Development Community. This will create greater opportunities for intra-regional trade and investment. A programme on Cross-border Initiative involving countries of the Eastern and Southern Africa region is already under way and measures are being taken to promote greater co-operation among countries of the region.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

13. It has been a matter of great pride and honour for our country to take a pioneering role in the establishment of the Indian Ocean Rim Association. In this context, Mauritius hosted, last week, a high level meeting that has charted a new course in the modern history of the Indian Ocean. We intend to pursue our efforts on the implementation of this ambitious initiative.

14. Government will continue to attach great importance to North-South co-operation more particularly to ACP/EU relations and the Lomé Convention. In this connection, Government is ready to host the signature ceremony of the second Financial Protocol of the Lomé IV Convention.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

15. On the domestic front, Government places utmost importance on maintaining a stable macro-economic environment, which is essential for creating confidence and for spurring greater investment, both domestic and foreign. Inflationary pressures have been kept under control and appropriate policy instruments will continue to be directed to bring it further down.

16. In the area of monetary policy, Government will take adequate measures to develop further the financial market. In regard to foreign currency, Honourable Members will recall that we have completely abolished exchange control. Further policies will be directed to foster stability of our currency.

17. Government will continue to modernise, harmonise, and simplify our tax system to meet the requirements of an open, expanding, market-oriented and competitive economy. Measures will be taken to further strengthen fiscal policy to provide a conducive environment for the development of all sectors.

18. Government is attaching vital importance to the development of the Offshore and Freeport sectors as part of its global economic diversification strategy. These new activities will play a catalytic role in integrating Mauritius in the international financial system while promoting our country as a viable regional business hub. Our new policies will now be directed towards the gradual integration of the Offshore sector with the domestic sector. As regards the Freeport, Government is actively establishing the necessary infrastructure to enable operators to handle a much greater volume of business within a fully-fledged warehousing, marketing and distribution centre.

19. With a view to supporting the programme of liberalisation of the economy and democratising the share ownership in public enterprises, Government will continue to open up the equity capital of State-owned enterprises to the general public with priority in allotment to small investors. This will reinforce efforts towards the further development of the capital market and help its integration in the global financial system. Specifically, it will boost activities on the Stock Exchange, which will be called upon to play an increasing role in stimulating savings and investment.

20. In this context, Government will introduce inter alia the following bills into the National Assembly: a Financial Services Authority Bill, a Securities and Exchange Bill, a Specialist Financial Institutions Bill and a Foreign Exchange Dealers Bill. A new Companies Bill will also be introduced to provide the basic framework consistent with modern practices in the industrialised countries.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

21. The emergence of the Information Super Highway will introduce a new dimension to the conduct of future activities. The numerous initiatives taken by Government in Information Technology and Telecommunications will enable Mauritius to tap the opportunities offered by this new environment.

22. Government will thus pursue its objective of moving Mauritius towards an Information based economy and will promote wider use of state of the art technology. Major Information Technology applications in several key departments are being established within the Public Sector.

23. The availability of high-quality telecommunications infrastructure and services is essential for the rapid emergence of competitive information-based economic activities. Government will introduce legislation for a modern and liberal framework to provide for both a world-class telecommunications services and a strengthened regulatory body.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

24. Our priorities in the agricultural sector are guided by developments in the global trade environment and by our need to respond to these developments through an effective coalition of all partners.

25. Government will continue to evolve new diplomatic initiatives to safeguard our sugar exports. Efforts will be stepped up to ensure the long-term viability of the sugar industry through a strategy of modernisation, diversification and rationalisation.

26. Government will continue to support the vulnerable partners of the sugar industry, especially the small planters and the workers. Regarding the planting community, further action will be taken to foster regrouping, derocking and mechanisation whilst maintaining subsidies in respect of key inputs. The activities of the various parastatal bodies serving to

small planters will be restructures to render them more effective and customer-g geared. The acquisition of shares by small planters and employees in all the sugar milling companies through the Sugar Investment Trust and their representation on the Board of Directors of each milling company are unprecedented initiatives aimed at ushering in a new era of collaboration between millers, planters and employees for the benefit of the industry. Government is also pursuing its efforts towards doing away with the sugar estate camps.

27. A White Paper on Agricultural Diversification will be released shortly to address the structural problems of that sector.

28. Government is implementing a social action plan to enable small tea holders to prepare their land and switch over to other crops like sugarcane, vegetables and fruits or livestock production.

29. To assist small operators in the livestock sector, the existing incentive frameworks being reviewed to facilitate the scaling up of livestock farming into a more remunerative occupation.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

30. A Fisheries and Marine Resources Bill will be introduced to provide for the conservation, protection and management of our marine resources.

31. Government will pursue its efforts through the recently established British-Mauritian Fisheries Commission for the conservation and sustainable development of fisheries and marine resources of the Chagos Waters. Fishing Agreements with other Indian Ocean countries and organisations will be negotiated with a view to sharing experience in the Fisheries Sector.

32. The setting up of a Fishermen Welfare Fund to cater for the general welfare of Registered Artisanal Professional Fishermen, including Banks Fishermen is being considered.

33. A series of measures will be undertaken to provide better security at sea for our fishermen, such as enlarging the passes to enable safe access to fishermen and providing floating buoys to indicate exact points of exits and entries within the reefs. In order to rationalise wages in the Banks Fishing Sector, a Remuneration Order for Banks Fishermen will be promulgated.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

34. Government will implement a programme in the co-operative sector to render it more dynamic and effective. In this context, Co-operative Community Centres will be set up throughout the island and Rodrigues.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

35. In the industrial sector, the main challenge in the post GATT period is the need to remain competitive in the world market. We will pursue forcefully our strategy for the consolidation and modernisation of existing industries and the diversification of the industrial base. Special efforts will be made to accelerate the integration of the EPZ and non-EPZ sectors.

36. Government fully conscious that the continued success of our manufacturing sector rests heavily on pivotal elements such as production re-engineering, productivity improvement, quality, creativity and design. In the same context, institutional support for enhancing technology diffusion will be strengthened. High priority is being given to the establishment of an effective national quality assurance programme to encourage enterprises to adopt ISO 9000 standards.

37. Diversification into higher technology and more capital intensive industries will remain a priority. The whole business environment including access to finance will be reviewed to make it more investor friendly.

38. To promote market diversification. MEDIA will explore the market potential arising from changes occurring in the European Community and the Eastern and Central Europe. Efforts to tap markets of the countries in the COMESA region are also being stepped up through the establishment of liaison offices in selected African countries.

39. Integration of small and medium enterprises will be facilitated by the establishment of a Sub-contracting Exchange Centre which will develop inter-industry linkages by inducing large enterprises to source inputs from small and medium firms.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

40. As regards tourism, we will continue to promote Mauritius as an up-market, selective destination as this is the best option for maintaining the long-term sustainability of that industry. Our strategy will be based on the development of quality products and services, the

preservation and enhancement of our environmental resources, safeguarding the moral and cultural values of our people and the achievement of excellence in all tourism operations.

41. To keep abreast of changes taking place on the international scene, steps will be taken to diversify our tourism product base, by giving particular attention to the development of inland ecotourism facilities which blend harmoniously with the natural surroundings.

42. Development in identified coastal tourist zones will be monitored more effectively. Planning controls will be strengthened to ensure that all developments satisfy standards that are in line with the image of Mauritius as an up-market destination.

43. Government will take steps to enrich the tourist experience through the promotion of our history and culture. Moreover, with a view to increasing tourist spending, additional duty-free shopping facilities will be made available. The National Handicraft Centre will continue to provide support services to our artisans.

44. 1995 has been declared the International Year of the Traveller by the World Customs Organisation. This Opportunity will be seized to sensitise our tourism service providers in the Public and Private Sectors on the need of providing customer-oriented services of the highest level.

45. To enable the Mauritian community to participate and benefit from tourism development and ensure high quality products and services, steps will be taken for bungalows which are rented out to tourists, to be given adequate promotional support, where they meet the exigencies of a high-class destination.

46. A new entity will be set up to implement an appropriate Information Technology based central hotel reservation system as well as a destination and market information data base.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

47. In line with the objective to enhance port productivity and efficiency and to facilitate the emergence of the port of Port Louis as a regional trade centre and transshipment base, a number of studies have recently been carried out. Based on the findings of these studies, Government will draw up a detailed and comprehensive port modernisation programme, which will integrate the social and human element.

48. The role and functions of the Mauritius Marine Authority will be redefined. It will be the sole port and maritime authority in the country in addition to performing the functions of a landlord port. The Ports Act of 1973 will be modified accordingly.

49. Government will review the role and functions of the Cargo Handling Corporation. It will be encouraged to become a full-fledged port operator in its own right.

50. The modernisation of the port infrastructure will include the construction of a new container terminal, an oil terminal, container parks and related buildings, internal road network, acquisition of necessary equipment, and the setting up of a new cement terminal with a shore-based unloading system. Negotiations will shortly begin with international financing agencies to secure necessary funding for the programme.

51. Government will expand and modernise the airport infrastructure to cope with the ever-increasing air traffic and to handle the new generation of aircraft. New developments will include extension of the passenger terminal, the runway and the apron. An Area Control Centre will be set up to exercise better air traffic control over an extended zone within the Air Flight Information Region.

52. A new institutional framework has been created to deal with diverse civil aviation issues in an integrated manner. Key organisation of the new institutional arrangements include the Civil Aviation Department, the Airport Development Corporation and the Airport Management Services Ltd. Government will provide the three agencies with the necessary means to discharge their functions in a cost-effective way.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

53. With the intensification of activities in the building infrastructure, the risk of hazardous fires is on the increase. Government, therefore, intends to provide the fire service with additional sophisticated equipment. Government will also embark on a project of constructing six additional fire stations. The first one to be ready around January 1996 will be situated at the Coromandel Industrial Zone. Government will introduce a Fire Services (Amendment) Bill for the merger of the Port Louis Fire Brigade with the Government Fire Services.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

54. Government will encourage greater private sector participation in the generation of electricity with emphasis on utilization of local and renewable sources of energy, in particular, bagasse. Such an approach is guided by our national interest to optimise the use of local sources of energy. Medium and long term projection of our power and electricity requirement will be formulated so that timely and least cost investment could be effected. Massive investment especially in respect of the Fort George extension is currently being made to meet the future electricity demand of our country.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

55. Government will continue to ensure that competing demands for water from the various sectors of the economy are met at reasonable cost. The recently set up National Water Commission will develop medium-and-long term strategies to address the issues of water management as the country is moving towards a water stressed economy. Additional resources will be harnessed, through the construction of new dams and increasing the storage capacity of existing ones to improve surface water availability. Plans for the construction of the Midlands Dam are at an advanced stage. Efforts to reduce leakages in the water networks will be actively pursued through application of novel technologies.

56. Government will endeavour to provide treated water according to international standards. Within the ambit of these objectives, major investments are envisaged in order to increase and improve treatment capacity and rehabilitate water distribution networks.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

57. Government will pursue its road improvement programme. In this context, the Third Highway Project which consists of upgrading the main road between Rose Hill and Providence and the reconstruction of the Reduit roundabout will be undertaken.

58. In accordance with the recommendations of the National Physical Development Plan, studies will be carried out for the construction of a new road network, namely the Northern Tourist Zone Roads, the Goodlands and the Central Flacq bypass.

59. A feasibility study will be carried out for the construction of a new road from Belle Mare to Mahebourg and for the construction of a bridge at Maconde.

60. The Coleville Deverell Bridge along the Motorway will be widened to allow the free flow of traffic following the construction of the Crawler lane.

61. Government proposes to reorganise the National Transport Authority to make it more responsive to future needs and challenges and in this context, the Road Traffic Act will be reviewed.

62. Conscious of the fact that the present system of road transport will not be able to cope with the demand in the long run, and that the process of economic development cannot be sustained without an efficient transport system. Government is currently studying the various options and will take a decision shortly.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

63. In the relentless fight against fraud and corruption, an Anti-Corruption Tribunal has been set up. Government will provide all the necessary additional resources to the Tribunal to strengthen its capacity with a view to discharging its statutory functions speedily and efficiently.

64. The Civil Service will be provided with the necessary means to enable it to act as a catalyst for change. The restructure of the Public Service will be pursued with renewed vigour. The Institute of Public Administration and Management will become operational soon. A series of measures will be implemented in the Service with a view to increasing productivity. These changes will be geared to turn the Public Service into a cost-effective, efficient and customer-oriented organisation responsive to the needs of the nation. In line with the above philosophy, Government has set up a task force to reappraise the "raison d'être", objectives and mode of functioning of para-statal organizations, including State-controlled public sector enterprises.

65. Government has launched a programme for the procurement and management of assets in the public sector. A Central Tender Board has been set up as a new institution, based on the principles of transparency and good governance with duties and responsibilities to approve contracts for Ministries, Departments, Local Authorities, Para-statals and Government-owned companies.

66. A Public Complaints Bureau will be set up to ensure that all complaints received from the public on Government administrative actions and on the conduct of public officers are dealt with promptly. A code of Ethics will be published to supplement the existing rules and regulations for the conduct of Public Service business.

67. Fraud and Corruption are not the monopoly of any particular sector. They permeate the whole of our society and have therefore to be fought at all levels and by all sectors including the private sector.

68. A project to rationalise the management of land information by various Government agencies that would provide for effective decision making on land use will be implemented soon.

69. Government will review existing legislation to enhance the functioning capabilities of local authorities.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

70. Education is a basic human right on which depends among other things economic progress, social peace, democracy and cultural understanding. We will, therefore, continue with our effort to reduce inequalities, improve access to educational and enhance the quality and relevance of education.

71. Government is committed to the development of education and will continue to invest in the implementation of the Master Plan with the participation and collaboration of all the educational partners. A major review of the implementation will be carried out this year to evaluate progress, identify difficulties and adapt the Plan to the changing circumstances and needs.

72. In this context, a report on the restructure of the Secondary School System has recently been published. This Report proposes the eventual elimination of the ranking system at CPE level and the regionalisation of admission to secondary schools. Government will provide full opportunities for a national debate on this issue.

73. In order to improve access to higher quality education, the number of seats in secondary schools will be significantly increased with the construction of six new State Secondary Schools, the extension and renovation of 22 existing ones, and the upgrading of the private secondary schools through government grants and loans.

74. Pre-primary education will continue to receive Government support. 25 primary schools will be extended and 4 new ones will be constructed.

75. Conscious of the importance of Science and technology in the improvement of the conditions of living and in the process of modernisation, Government will further promote the teaching of science and technical subjects by setting up a Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre in Bell Village, the laying of the foundation stone ceremony of which was held on 6 April in the presence of Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, a second Lycée Polytechnique in Rose Hill, and a non-engineering polytechnic at Pamplemousses.

76. With the completion of a new academic complex at the University of Mauritius, the number of under-graduates and post-graduates students is expected to increase from 2,500 to 5,000 by the year 2000. Opportunities for adult and continued education will be increased through broad range of distance education courses.

77. The Mauritius Research Council in collaboration with the University of Mauritius and other research institutions will establish the proper framework to ensure that research and Development and competitiveness. The Mauritius Research Council will support active participation of the private sector to set up the right interface between Government, the University and the Private sector.

78. Human Resource Development will be increasingly geared towards the lead sectors of the economy with emphasis to induce the economy to be highly productive through motivation, productivity enhancement, quality control and the familiarization with a whole range of new concepts of achieving excellence such as just-in-time management, flexitime management, zero defects and cost effectiveness.

79. Government will support the achievement of these goals by inculcating a culture of continuous upgrading and innovation at every level of society through a process of re-engineering to strive for excellence within an environment of interaction, dialogue, incentives, work ethics and healthy competition.

80. The role of the Industrial Vocational training Board will be further enhanced by the functioning of new schools, amongst which the Hotel and Catering School at Ebene. In the field of training, Government will set up a Resource Centre to respond to the growing demand for skilled workers.

81. Government is presently examining the possibility of setting up an appropriate mechanism for ensuring equal employment opportunities.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

82. In the context of the consolidation of the Welfare State, a Health Sector Reform Programme is underway to bring about drastic improvement to the service.

83. To improve Health Care through community based programmed the NCD Unit, the HIV/Aids Unit and the Nutrition Unit will be decentralised and will function under the direct supervision of Regional Health Directors.

84. The Preventive Medicine Sector will be re-inforced to maintain a healthy population. A new Environmental Health Laboratory will be set up at Reduit to assist in the monitoring of environmental health hazards and the enforcement of environmental standards.

85. Government proposes to introduce the Food Bill, the Dangerous Chemicals Bill, the Mental Health Bill, the Medical Council (Amendment) Bill and the Dental Council (Amendment) Bill to ensure, inter alia, a more effective control of dangerous chemicals, pesticides and food distribution for the safeguard of public health and ensuring maximum protection to consumers.

86. Government will set up a special scheme to support renal patients. An Organ Transplant Bill will be introduced shortly to establish the necessary criteria and also to regulate the use of organs from donors for transplantation.

87. In a bid to provide a health service, which is more accessible to the population, measures are being taken to keep open the Area and the Community Health Centres after normal working hours and during weekends.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

88. Government stands committed to the protection of the Environment and the concept of sustainable development. The strategy for the implementation of clean technology will be reinforced. Legally enforceable standards for drinking water and air emissions will be promulgated in line with the policy to reduce pollution. In the context of the Solid Waste Management Programme, a sanitary landfill will be built at Mare Chicose and two additional transfer stations will be put up at Mapou and La Martinière. Quality of Life will continue to be improved through physical amenities and green spaces. Action is being undertaken to safeguard our biological heritage for future generation.

89. The programme of works for beach protection will be extended to address erosion problems along the coastline. Efforts will also be made to honour our obligations under global and regional conventions to which Mauritius is a Party. In the same context, a study will be undertaken to find a long-term solution to the coastal erosion problems.

90. Government will ratify the International Convention on the Prevention of Pollution from Ships. In this context, a study will be carried out to determine the requirements for facilities, which Mauritius will have to install, as part of its obligations under the Convention for oil wastes from ships and their treatment.

91. The quality of the living environment of our fellow citizens in CHA Estates is also our prime concern. Government has already made heavy investment to render the quality of life in a number of such estates healthier and more pleasant. A second phase of this estate improvement programme is already underway, focussing on sewerage and surface water drainage.

92. Government will implement the recommendations of the Sewerage Master Plan, with emphasis on the rehabilitation of the existing sewerage network. There are however a number of urgent issues which need to be tackled immediately. These are the Grand Baie and Baie du Tombeau Sewerage Projects and the rehabilitation of the St Martin Project - Phase I.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

93. The primary role of the Police is to preserve and uphold law and order. The Police Force will continue to provide security to the citizens, defend our territory and prevent any ingress affecting the territorial sanctity of the State. The National Coast Guard as a unit of the Police Force will be better equipped for the surveillance of our Exclusive Economic Zone. In fact by next year an Offshore Patrol Vessel and a twin engine helicopter will be acquired which will considerably enhance the operational capability of the unit at sea.

94. Many provisions of our Law of Evidence are obsolete. A comprehensive Evidence Act will be prepared which will enable our courts to deliver justice without being obstructed by artificial restrictions.

95. The probation and after care service, through the setting up of family courts, will intensify its activities so that appropriate and timely intervention can be provided to families. The present legislation pertaining to young offenders, that is the Probation of Offenders Act, the

Juvenile Offenders Act and the Reform Institutions Act will be up-dated in line with developments that have taken place in the rehabilitation of young offenders. Our action towards the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts will be intensified.

96. In its pitiless fight against drug traffickers and money launderers, Government will pass a new and more effective Dangerous Drugs Bill and a Prevention of Money Laundering Bill. The law, as it stands, enables us to catch underlings, but drug barons go on peacefully enjoying the fruits of their crimes.

97. The new laws will hit the drug barons where they are most vulnerable: when they try to disguise their ill-gotten gains as legitimate earnings. Banks and other financial institutions, which realise that they have a public duty not to become accessories by inaction, have readily agreed to report to a Money Laundering Control Service, money transactions, which cannot be explained except by fraudulent activities.

98. Law-enforcement agencies will thus be provided with adequate and efficient means to unmask major criminals and dismantle their gangs. People who have occasion to observe drug traffickers operating in their neighbourhood will be encouraged to come forward to share their information with the proper authorities, with the knowledge that, first they will be protected, and second, that swift and merciless action will be taken against the criminals who in order to get rich quick, do not stop at inflicting untold misery on our families, particularly our children. But the best law is only as good as those who enforce it. We must not let the Police alone or the customs along go into battle. The war will be won when in a great surge of enthusiasm the population, indeed the whole nation, knowing that its soul is at stake, rises against the common enemies of mankind.

99. Let this be considered as a special appeal we are making to the Nation at large so that together we may eradicate the drug scourge from our society.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

100. Through the National Development Unit, Government will continue in its effort to bridge the gap between the rural and urban areas and ensure that the citizens benefit from a sound and equitable economic prosperity.

101. The National Development Unit will continue to contribute for the provision of a better infrastructure through the improvement of road and electricity supply, adequate water supply, social facilities for community development and recreational opportunities for youngsters to improve their talents.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

102. Government proposes to set up appropriate institutional framework to promote and develop leisure activities and amenities in Mauritius and Rodrigues. The objectives will be to enlist the support of the private sector to create a leisure industry to improve the quality of life of the population.

103. In its determination to provide better recreational facilities at the seaside, Government will continue to upgrade public beaches through the provision of better amenities.

104. Government is considering to set up a Turf Authority for the control and supervision of horse racing and betting in Mauritius.

105. Committed to the promotion of arts and culture, Government will consolidate the sustainable arts and culture development strategies through a series of measure and incentives. The National Arts Council will assume a predominant role in enhancing artistic creativity and cultural development. Artistic and cultural exchanges with friendly countries will be given a new impetus.

106. The Copyright (Amendment) Bill and the National Library Bill will be introduced into the Assembly.

107. Government will intensify its policies and programmes to promote youth development. A National Youth Council will be set up to formulate and implement national programmes. New measures are being introduced to create the necessary dynamism to allow the "Centres de Jeunesse" to function as regional institutions. National Youth Council Bill will be introduced into the Assembly soon. A white Paper will be published to define medium and long-term strategies for Arts and Youth Development.

108. Government stands committed to its policy of encouraging our best young sportsmen to achieve excellence in their chosen sports field by establishing National Training Centres in as many disciplines as possible.

109. In order to continue decentralising sports, Government will be starting very soon the building of new infrastructures in several disciplines in order to cater for as many sports federations as possible.

110. Government will continue to encourage the greatest number of Mauritians and Rodriguans to practise sports activities as a means for a better and healthier life. Sports facilities, all over the country will be put at the disposal of the population with special emphasis on the importance of encouraging all the members of the family to get involved in outdoor and indoor sports activities. We view with great concern hooliganism in places of public recreation and entertainment. Government will spare no efforts to curb and combat such antisocial behaviour and social evils.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

111. We are fully committed to the policy of "un toît pour chaque famille" and already about 80 percent of families own their houses. In line with its stated policy of providing greater access to housing for low income groups, Government will invest in the construction programme of a further stock of 2,800 housing units, both in urban and rural areas.

112. As regards the accessibility issue, loan conditions and procedures are being reviewed to cater for the target groups. In the same spirit, a very low cost housing project is now being implemented for the most underprivileged income groups.

113. Government is also conscious that the land market presently makes it difficult for lower and middle class income earners to purchase residential plots. Government will study various methods by which first time buyers may purchase land at more reasonable prices.

114. To consolidate the Welfare State, Government will provide maximum protection to the vulnerable groups of our society. The welfare of Senior Citizens will continue to be in the forefront of our national policies. In this context, the construction of the recreational Centre for the Elderly at Pointe aux Sables will start soon. Special efforts will be made to integrate disabled children in mainstream schools.

115. Following the Copenhagen Declaration of the World Summit for Social Development which has laid emphasis on the need to integrate deprived and marginalised groups, the rehabilitation and integration programme in favour of citizens with disabilities is being given a new impetus. Government is undertaking a study to identify the pockets of poverty, assess the cost-effectiveness of existing social services and design new and more effective policies.

116. Government as a caring one will continue in its endeavour for more equity among the social partners with a view to consolidating social justice. Legal provision on industrial relations will be reviewed, and great emphasis will be laid on the improvement of the working environment. Special attention will be given to working women.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

117. Consistent with its policy of removing all gender discrimination, Government will amend Sections 16, 20 and 22 of the Constitution. This is seen as a decisive step in the process of placing women on an equal footing.

118. Government fully recognises the private role played by women in the economic and social development of the country and reaffirms its unflinching commitment to reinforce measures, which will continue to create an enabling environment for their further emancipation and progress. The policy-framework enunciated in the White Paper for Women in Development will be translated into programmes and projects geared towards the empowerment of women through improved access to education, and specialised health services. Government has prepared a "Survey on Women's Role in Economic Activity". The study proposes several measures, which will improve women's involvement in the labour market, while retaining the quality of family life.

119. To face the new situation created by a number of women joining the labour force, Government will extend the provision of childcare facilities. Measures will be taken to ensure that adequate and up to the required level of care is provided to children in creche and other day-care centres.

120. After the boost provided by the International Year of the Family, we intend to pursue the efforts started and to encourage new initiatives with a view to fostering the family spirit and to protecting the family against the threats of materialism and individualism and other evils of society.

121. Government will introduce a Domestic Violence Bill to discourage domestic violence and will continue to develop and strengthen support services for such victims. The Family Counseling Service will be expanded and improved and the Shelter for Women and Children in Distress will become fully operational. An in-depth survey on Child Abuse will be carried out to evolve a plan of action to combat this scourge.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

122. Government will ensure that the interests of consumers are fully safeguarded. In this context, consideration is being given to the introduction of appropriate mechanism to deal more expeditiously with consumer complaints. In addition, the policy to combat monopolistic and restrictive trade practices will be reviewed to instill a greater measure of competition, which will be in the overall interest of consumers. More emphasis will also be placed on consumer education so those consumers are fully aware of their rights.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

123. Government will review the management and development of the Outer Islands to enhance the quality of life of its residents to ensure a rational exploitation of the resources. In regard to the St. Brandon group of islands, the restoration programme of the islets and its surrounding lagoons will be undertaken.

124. The present legislation will be amended to give executive powers to the Rodrigues Local Council in order to enable local representatives to take and implement decisions to meet the aspirations of the population of Rodrigues.

125. As far as development of the Island of Rodrigues is concerned, a study is underway to develop and integrated market strategy for the agricultural sector. The report will map out a marketing development plan for crops, livestock, fishing and other agricultural produce available in Rodrigues. The Venture Capital Fund which will be launched very soon will assist fishermen, small scale enterprises, farmers and planters to acquire better quality equipment in order to increase production. The programmes for reforestation and coastal protection will be strengthened in order to limit damage caused by erosion. A Rodrigues Physical Development Plan will be published soon to ensure the judicious utilisation of the resources of the Island.

126. A master plan for the development of the port area and the newly reclaimed land in the region of Port Mathurin has been prepared. The recommendations include the construction of a passenger terminal/administrative block, a new quay, a store and a container park. The recommendations are under consideration and implementation will be in a phased manner.

127. Work in progress at the Plaine Corail airport will be completed to allow night flights. Changes will be brought to the terminal building to allow a better flow of passengers and ensure effective control.

128. A master plan for the management of water in Rodrigues is under preparation with assistance from the Food and Agricultural Organisation. The construction, rehabilitation and covering of reservoirs will continue and steps will be taken to improve the secondary network and to complete installation for filtration and chlorination of water.

129. The new secondary school at Grande Montagne will be extended and three new primary schools will be constructed. Attention will also be given to the provision of sports infrastructure and the construction of an Administrative/Outpatient Department at Creve-Coeur hospital. Efforts will also be made to ensure that the development of tourism is made in a rational and harmonious way. The present housing programme will continue. Moreover, it is proposed to put up housing facilities for Mauritian school teachers working in Rodrigues.

130. Following the recent torrential rains, Government has finalised a programme of action for the rehabilitation of roads, bridges and rivers. Infrastructural works are being undertaken to avoid flooding particularly in populated and other flood prone areas. Loans will be granted to farmers, fishermen and other small entrepreneurs under a special scheme to enable them continue their activities.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

131. Government will provide vision and leadership for continued growth and development shared by all our citizens and a quality of life enhanced by the optimum use of our human, natural and financial resources.

132. There are numerous challenges ahead as Mauritius enters into the 21st Century. We have no doubt that the Mauritian nation will live up to these formidable tasks. With dedication to hard work, discipline and commitment Mauritius will go a long way.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS

133. I pray that the blessings of the Almighty may rest upon your counsels