

Address by the President-Year 1996

Address by the President at the Opening of the First Session of the Third National Assembly of the Republic of Mauritius on Friday 12 January 1996

Mr. Speaker,
Honourable Members,

1. It gives me very great pleasure to welcome you to the formal Opening of the First Session of the Second National Assembly. I wish to bid a special welcome to the 41 new Members.
2. Government, mindful of the fact that attempts to foment tension and confrontation can threaten the social fabric of the nation, resolves to consolidate national unity and solidarity and to fully restore the peace, harmony and serenity which has made Mauritius a miracle of peaceful co-existence.
3. Government will amend the Criminal Code to provide for severe penalties against persons guilty of stirring up religious or communal hatred and will strive to eradicate communalism from mass sports and from all aspects of national life.
4. Government will implement a diplomatic policy which will be at the service of the economic interests of the country and which will promote the social and democratic values to which we are committed.
5. Government will pursue a sound and realistic foreign policy adapted to cater for unprecedented changes in the wake of the end of the Cold War and the restructuring of international trade arrangements following the establishment of the World Trade Organisation.
6. Government will work actively towards strengthening the role of the United Nations and its agencies in international relations.
7. Government will support the reform of the United Nations Organisation especially the United Nations Security Council with the inclusion of India and South Africa amongst others as permanent members to make it more representative.
8. Government, while welcoming the changes in the Organisation of African Unity for preventive diplomacy especially in the area of conflict management, will adopt an active stand for greater understanding among Member States to put the Continent back on the path of economic growth, social progress and democratisation. Government will open a diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa. A diplomatic mission will also be opened in Beijing in the course of this year.
9. Government will join the efforts of the Commonwealth for the safeguard, promotion and respect of human rights, democracy and good governance as enshrined in the Commonwealth Harare Declaration of 1991.
10. Government will support the principles, objectives and orientation of the Non-Aligned Movement geared towards South-South Cooperation and the furtherance of universal democratic rights.

11. Government will contribute to the enhancement of the political dimension of "la Francophonie".

12. Government welcomes the positive development in the Middle East through the Peace Accord in Washington signed by the Palestine Liberalisation Organisation and Israel and will encourage all efforts for enduring peace and stability in the area where the rights of all parties concerned are safeguarded.

13. Government will work towards the strengthening of our links within regional groupings such as the Indian Ocean Commission, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the Southern African Development Community to which we belong.

14. Government will strengthen our cooperation with the Malagasy Republic and Mozambique and will seek new economic partners, especially in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean.

15. Government will be actively engaged in the materialisation of the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative with Mauritius playing a pivotal role.

16. Government is determined to continue to press for the valid claim of Mauritius on our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago and to ensure that the economic resources of the area are exploited for the benefit of our country.

17. Government will also continue discussions with France on our sovereignty over Tromelin Island with a view to achieving an early and satisfactory solution.

Honourable Members

18. Government will strive to preserve the vital ACP-EU partnership and work with all members of the ACP Group of countries in the search for a new and equitable deal with the European Union beyond the life of the LOME IV Convention.

Honourable Members

19. Government strongly affirms its commitments to the goals of a fair, tolerant and democratic Mauritius.

20. Government will ensure that the principle of separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary are strictly adhered to.

21. Government will amend the Constitution, the Representation of the People Act and related legislation to guarantee really free and fair elections.

22. Government will see to it that the National Assembly is able to discharge fully its responsibility towards the nation. The Constitution will be amended to give the Assembly the possibility of choosing the Speaker either from its Members or from outside the Assembly.

23. The Standing Orders of the Assembly will be reviewed to enable Members to play a full and effective role in the business of Parliament. Government will introduce an Anti-Defection Bill to render illegal the crossing of the floor by Members of the National Assembly. The legislation relating to pension rights of Ministers and members of Parliament will be reviewed.

24. Government is committed to the creation of a Second Chamber of Parliament to permit more thorough scrutiny of proposed legislation, to bring people of expertise and experience into the debate and to allow better participation of the community in the legislative process. Government will shortly publish a White Paper containing preliminary proposals for this important reform.

25. Government will review the functions of the Offices of the President and Vice-President of the Republic in the light of the creation of a new bicameral Parliament.

26. The functions of the Law Reform Commission will be reviewed to give it adequate operational capacity.

27. In the context of greater responsibilities falling on Ministers and the need to ensure quick and efficient decision-making, Government will propose the appointment of Junior Ministers. The posts of Parliamentary Private Secretaries will be abolished and all Members of Parliament will be given the opportunity to contribute fully to the development of their constituencies.

28. Government is anxious to ensure that Mauritius is a modern democracy, which protects and provides equal rights and opportunities for all its citizens. Government will bring forward legislation to implement a policy, subject only to appropriate exceptions, of equal opportunity in employment and education. It will create an Equal Opportunities Commission to eradicate discriminatory practices in employment.

29. Government is committed to promoting changes in our law, institutions and attitudes so as to remove remaining barriers to the upliftment of women in all walks of life. A Sex Discrimination Act and legislation to protect the rights of women at the workplace will be introduced. Special efforts will be made to promote gender awareness in all sectors of our society and to introduce the concept of gender planning in policy-making, generally.

30. The functioning of the Public Service Commission will be reviewed and a right of appeal against its decisions with less cumbersome procedures will be provided for.

31. Government will also strive to find a solution to the issue of the Muslim Personal Law through dialogue and concertation.

32. Government is concerned with the influence of private political funding on political parties and its potential effect on the decision-making process. In this context, Government will initiate discussions with all appropriate bodies in order to explore the possibility of political parties being funded by government contributions and hence being guaranteed financial independence in their political orientations, subject to complete transparency and public auditing of political parties' accounts.

33. Government firmly believes that an independent judiciary is one of the pillars of democracy. Government will provide appropriate funding to the Judiciary in order to increase the number of magistrates, improve the conditions of service of judges, magistrates and judicial personnel, modernise the administration of the courts and create new institutions such as the Family Court and a Small Claim Tribunal. In order to democratise access to justice, Government will create a service of legal assistance through citizens Advice Bureaus and will revise the system of legal aid. A Presidential Commission chaired by a retired judge of the Supreme Court will be appointed to review the administration of justice and the training of judicial and quasi-judicial personnel.

34. The Police Force will be modernised and properly equipped to enable it to fully shoulder its responsibility of maintaining law and order.

35. A National Intelligence Unit (NIU) Act will be passed to establish an acceptable framework within which the Unit will be called to operate. In the same context, a Police and Criminal Evidence Act will be passed.

36. A Police Complaints Board, with adequate resources and operating independently of the Police Force will be created. A training programme for police officers of all grades to improve the image of the police will be implemented.

37. Government will give special priority to combat fraud and corruption. Among measures to attain this end, Government will adopt a Prevention of Corruption Act, and will set up an Anti-Corruption Commission and will examine the possibility of creating an Anti-Corruption Division of the Supreme Court to expedite cases involving fraud and corruption.

38. The Declaration of Assets Act will be replaced by a new legislation providing for Members of the National Assembly, members of local authorities, designated civil servants, directors and high officials of parastatal bodies and private companies set up with public funds, their spouses and minor children, to declare their assets at regular intervals.

39. Legislation enabling the seizure of properties of those who have enriched themselves through fraud and corruption will be passed.

40. Government is fully aware of the urgent need to tackle the problem of dangerous drugs in Mauritius. Government will ensure an integrated policy approach based on prevention, repression and rehabilitation.

41. A Narcotics Bureau will be created to supervise organisations engaged in the fight against drugs. The policy of prevention will be based on special efforts in high-risk geographical areas and towards vulnerable segments of the population. The school going population will be better sensitised to the ill-effects and dangers of drug addiction.

42. The law against drug offenders will be revised to strengthen the preventive aspect of the fight against drugs. This new legislation will respect the fundamental rights of individuals while enabling an effective fight against crime. The anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit of the Police Department will be re-organised. It will be provided with specialised manpower and all necessary equipment. Greater emphasis will be laid on rehabilitation of drug addicts. The Trust Fund for Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts will be completely re-organised.

43. Government will introduce a new Prevention of Money Laundering Bill, which will be in line with the recommendations of the International Financial Action Task Force. This Bill will be an effective tool in combating drug trafficking as well as projecting a clean and credible image of our financial services centre.

Honourable Members

44. Government will amend the MBC Act to make the MBC an independent, professional, creative and credible public service organisation.

45. Government is committed to the policy of liberalisation of broadcasting, which will strengthen our democratic framework and allow pluralistic expression of views. Government

will create an Independent Broadcasting Authority, which will allocate frequencies, ensure impartiality of operators towards all shades of opinion and ensure the quality and diversity of programmes. Government will make adequate provision to prevent any unhealthy concentration of control or ownership of the media.

46. Changes will be brought to the Media Trust and adequate resources will be provided to enable it to function effectively and promote the training of local journalists in the attainment of higher professional standards.

Honourable Members

47. Government is concerned that in the new world trade environment our priority must be to enhance our capacity to stand and win against the strongest international competitors. Government's economic approach is rooted in the belief that a strong and flourishing economy demands a strong and just society. A prosperous private sector and an efficient public service constitute the cornerstone of a modern and thriving economy.

48. Government will adopt a stable and consistent approach to economic policy making. It will establish a robust and firm framework of monetary and fiscal discipline for sustainable long-term growth. Government will maintain an inflation target alongside a medium-term objective to raise the trend rate of economic growth. Monetary and fiscal policies will ensure that inflation remains within its target range. The Bank of Mauritius Act will be reviewed to allow the Bank to carry out its functions in an open and accountable manner.

49. Government will soon publish a full and comprehensive review of the state of the public finances along with the latest available figures of the country's national accounts and the state of the economy generally. The pre-electoral promise of the former Government of granting a 15-per-cent increase to the public service will be disposed of against this background.

50. A fiscal Responsibility Bill will be presented in the National Assembly making provision for a judicious use of Government's public finances and outlawing pre-electoral abuses by outgoing Governments.

51. Government will publish its medium-term financial strategy as an indication of its orientation. Government will also publish regular and timely information on fiscal performance and on the balance of payments.

52. Government is concerned at the lack of buoyancy in the tax system, which has resulted in major revenue shortfalls. Government will examine options for a further reform of the tax system. A White Paper on the subject will be published.

53. Government will ensure greater coherence in the economic performance and management of all enterprises in the public sector irrespective of legal status. A Public Enterprise Division will be created in the Ministry of Finance to issue guidelines, establish targets and monitor performance. In this context, Government proposes to review and streamline its representations on Boards and Committees to make them more pro-active, results-oriented and efficient.

54. To root out waste and inefficiency, a National Audit Commission will be set up to make all such enterprises accountable to Parliament in the utilisation made of public funds.

55. Government will further integrate the national economy with the world economy in order that we may benefit from the new opportunities inherent in the new trade provisions following the establishment of the World Trade Organisation. To this end, Government will adopt fiscal, trade, tariff and monetary policies that are in conformity with the prevailing best practice in competitive countries.

56. Government is committed to modernize and upgrade the public service to make it more responsive to the needs of the economy and the aspirations of the people. In this context, appropriate measures will be taken to improve managerial efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector.

57. Government is further committed to provide training to all officers at all levels to help them enhance their performance. The Mauritius Institute of Public Administration and Management will become operational soon and Government will ensure that it is sufficiently equipped to meet the training needs of the public sector.

58. Government will place greater emphasis on building institutional capacity to strengthen policy analysis and evaluation in the public sector. In this context a Central Policy Analysis and Evaluation Unit will be set up.

59. Government will review the performance of the 1992-94 National Development Plan. Work will be initiated on a new National Development Plan together with a rolling Public Sector Investment Programme, which will be better integrated with the annual capital budget.

60. More detailed work on the National Long-Term Perspective Study (NLTPS) which outlines the vision of Mauritius for the year 2020 will be undertaken.

61. Government is strongly committed to promote investment in industry, in skills development and in the upgrading of social and economic infrastructure. Government will play a crucial role as a partner, coordinator and catalyst in encouraging an investment culture.

62. Government is aware that the people's aspirations for rising standards of living have to be continuously matched by higher productivity and efficiency if the country is to hold its rank in the increasingly competitive international environment.

63. In this context, Government will review the pay and wage determination machinery. A White Paper on the subject will be published in the light of recommendations to be made by the National Economic Development Council, which will be empowered to make proposals on the subject.

64. Government will play fully its role of facilitator and economic regulator and will ensure a fairer distribution of income and a better quality of life.

Honourable Members

65. The structural problems of the sugar industry require a new policy in that sector. Government will encourage the modernisation of the sugar industry and a more rational use of land resources while ensuring that the interests of planters and workers are fully protected. The existing set-up of the Sugar Insurance Fund Board (SIFB) will be restructured to provide an improved service to the planting community. Agricultural diversification as well as milk and meat production will be encouraged through research and the application of new technology. An Agricultural Products Export Promotion Council will be set up.

66. Special attention will be given to the fishing industry. An assessment of past effort to identify and tap existing marine resources will be carried out and an Action Plan for the next decade will be drawn up. Measures to ensure the modernisation of the industry - having regard more specially to bank and lagoon fishing, aquaculture, handling and processing of fish as well as regional co-operation - will be adopted. Measure will also be taken to alleviate the hardship faced by fishermen and to encourage them to acquire the necessary skills and equipment for outer-lagoon fishing.

67. The Co-operative Sector will be given a new impetus and a different social dimension with a view to helping the co-operative community in improving and diversifying its production and marketing processes. The emphasis will be on professionalism and necessary institutional support will be provided by Government. Government is pre-occupied with the situation at the MCCB Ltd. and timely and appropriate measures will be taken to safeguard the interests of the Bank and depositors.

Honourable Members

68. Government is fully conscious of the need to make urgent reforms necessary to ensure the continued growth of the manufacturing sector. The ultimate objective of Government is to create a modern, flexible, adaptable and more productive industrial sector, which will help the integration of domestic and export manufacturing.

69. In order to increase the flow of direct foreign investment, Government will take necessary steps to eliminate administrative red tape and streamline procedures for investment approval and new business start-ups. Government will enact a consolidated investment code and establish a Board of Investment for processing all inward investment.

70. An aggressive promotion of the label "Made in Mauritius" will be undertaken to project a better image overseas of Mauritius and all Mauritian products and services generally.

71. The textiles and garments sub-sector will be encouraged to move up-market. Diversification of our sources of investments, markets and products will constitute the cornerstone of Government's policy for furthering industrialisation. Government will take necessary steps to ensure that design, technical, managerial and financial skills are available to meet the requirements of existing and new entrepreneurs.

72. Government is aware that the tourism industry is destined to become the world's major industry by the year 2000. Government's policy in the tourism sector will be based, in priority, on high-spending tourism and low environmental impact and will promote Mauritius as an exclusive holiday resort. Schemes will be devised to encourage the upgrading of the standard of service and of infrastructure in all categories of establishments.

73. A Master Plan for tourism development which will set specific long-term strategic plans for the sound development of the sector at the national level will be elaborated.

74. A Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority responsible for management, marketing and technical capacity building will be set up. The organisation of major world events with high media exposure as well as development of rural, cultural and eco-tourism will also be undertaken.

75. Air Access policy will be given a new orientation to ensure easy access to and from Mauritius without adverse impact on the profitability of the national carrier. Existing airline

route networks will be improved and the policy to extend the network with additional links will be explored.

76. Urgent attention will be given to the promotion of tourist attractions of Rodrigues as a complementary destination to Mauritius. A tourist office will be opened in Rodrigues.

Honourable Members

77. Government believes that in the fast emerging international economic context, the services sector will need to occupy a priority place as one of the main engines of economic growth. With a view to attaining this objective, Government will encourage the application of modern international business practices and the adoption of state-of-the-art technology.

78. Government will foster the development of the capital market, especially by creating a functioning bond market as well as an enhanced regulatory structure to inspire greater public confidence in capital market activities. The development of collective investment schemes such as mutual funds and unit trusts will be further emphasized to increase public participation in long term investment. Mauritian expertise in Fund Management will be built up to support investment activities in the offshore sector and for the provision of investment in the region.

79. Government will promote the development of other non-bank financial sectors notably by the setting up finance houses, building societies, factoring companies, merchant banks, leasing companies and venture capital funds along with appropriate legislation to regulate these new emerging sectors.

80. Government will further consolidate the insurance sector as well as pension business in order that the public contractual savings are properly utilised. The regulatory framework for the insurance sector will be improved.

81. As regards the Freeport, Government will ensure a rapid development of the infrastructure to cater for a much higher level of Freeport activities and an aggressive marketing campaign in the region will be undertaken.

82. A modernisation of our legislative framework will be undertaken to ensure a more balanced development of our financial services sector.

83. Government will take steps to democratise the economy. A Monopolies and Mergers Commission will be established to prevent over-concentration of economic power and the abuse thereof through market dominance. Anti-trust legislation will also be introduced. A Director of Fair Trading and a consumer Ombudsman will be appointed to ensure real market competition and the protection of the rights of consumers. The possibility of introducing legislation to enable individual consumers to undertake class-action suits on behalf of all consumers in case of unfair trading practices or consumer exploitation will be examined.

84. As part of Government's policy against consumer exploitation, the activities of the State Trading corporation will be reviewed to ensure that no supply shortages exist in critical areas. Appropriate amendments will be brought to the State Trading Corporation Act with a view to having greater transparency, stimulating competition and providing a better service to the consumers.

85. Government will publish a Master Plan on Privatisation of State-owned assets to define its policy and to support the democratisation of ownership. Government will ensure that, in the

context of a mixed economy, strategic enterprises with public participation will be properly managed. New legislation will be introduced to enable Government through a "golden share" to ensure that major decisions of privatised enterprises deemed to be strategic are in the national interest.

86. Government, in concertation with all the social partners, will, as a matter of priority, promote a productivity and performance culture at all levels.

87. Government will usher in a skills revolution at all levels and in all sectors in order to ensure an optimal development and utilisation of our human resources. A National Productivity Board will be set up to better prepare our citizens to the challenges of competition and technological change.

88. A Charter for Employment, which will redefine the rules and regulations concerning recruitment, hours of work and salary, will be introduced so as to better reinforce the socio-economic development of the country. Special attention will be given to introducing urgently the system of part-time work.

89. In its task of ensuring economic growth and improvement in the conditions of employment of the labour force, Government will maintain a permanent social dialogue. In this context, a new legislative framework will be introduced to regulate industrial relations, encourage participation of workers in both the management and capital of enterprises, and promote security at work. A new Labour Act will be introduced.

90. A Trade Union Trust Fund will be created to support Trade Unions. The National Economic Development Council will become a privileged forum for dialogue including the promotion of healthy industrial relations and for developing consensus on issue of national significance.

Honourable Members

91. Mauritius will have to move up the technology ladder if it is to remain competitive internationally, cut out a special place for itself in the world market and expand income and output. This can best be achieved by a strategy targeted at promoting the development and application of science and technology (S & T) in all areas of economic importance. Government will publish an S & T strategy in the near future. The Mauritius Research Council will be called upon to work closely with other research institutions such as the Food and Agricultural Research Council, the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute as well as the Tertiary Education Commission.

92. A National Information Technology Plan for the next ten years will be formulated. This Plan will establish the basis for the new hi-tech Mauritian society. The structure, role and functions of the National Computer Board and all institutions involved in informatics in the public sector will be reviewed and rationalised.

93. In the field of telecommunications, Government will facilitate the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector and reform the laws governing the Mauritius Telecommunications Authority in order to create a level playing field for all operators. In order to secure connectivity with the rest of the world, a second International Gateway will be established to accommodate a new Satellite Earth Station. The selection of the new site will take into account the need to eventually land submarine cables. Mauritius will in fact be proposed as a candidate for an intermediate landing point for submarine cable systems currently in the pipeline and likely to cross the southern Indian Ocean area. Such cable landings will firmly place the

country on the major information super-highways. Connectivity with Rodrigues will be strengthened by additional satellite circuits while the domestic network on the island will be doubled to cater for existing and future demand.

94. In this drive to modernise and expand the various sectors of economic activity, Government will ensure that special attention is given to the state of the environment. The fight against environmental degradation will be stepped up.

95. Our national heritage will be protected, particularly our flora and fauna. Special attention will be given to the protection of lagoons and coastal zones. The possibility of providing financial and other incentives to combat pollution and the setting up of a police of the environment will be examined.

Honourable Members

96. The challenges that must be addressed as part of our economic strategy for the next millennium are enormous and demanding. However, Government will ensure that all our actions and philosophy will have as prime objective the development of the Mauritian citizen. The progress of our nation will be undertaken by every one of us and will be for the benefit of future generations. In this endeavour, every attempt will be made to ensure the most appropriate balance between economic growth, social justice and the preservation of human values.

97. Government recognises that the underlying economic and social welfare conditions have changed fundamentally since the origin of the Welfare State in the country. The most vulnerable social categories have to be identified, their needs determined and welfare provisions planned in terms of the anticipated evolution of our society. Government will publish a White Paper on the Welfare State.

98. Government will spare no effort to assist the reinsertion of those who have been left out of the mainstream of economic and social development. A multi-disciplinary study is being undertaken to analyse the real causes of the phenomenon of exclusion and marginalisation. In the light of this study, appropriate measure will be taken in both urban and rural areas to combat this phenomenon.

99. Government will propose a "Marshall Plan" to provide pathways out of poverty and deprivation for the poorer sections of our community. This Plan will provide an integrated approach to the development of whole neglected regions with the provision of special classes for low-performing students, nurseries, pre-primary schools, day-care centres, schools sports and leisure activities, upgrading of infrastructure and community centres. Priority will be given to the rehabilitation of some 50 CHA housing estate as well as the Dockers Flats through infrastructural works in sewerage disposal and the provision of drains, roads, lighting, water supply and telephones. The phasing-out of sugar estate camps will be accelerated. The sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Housing Estates will also be rehabilitated.

Honourable Members

100. The aim of Government is to enable every Mauritian citizen to have access to proper medical care through a better utilisation of resources. The medical services will be decentralised and modernised with a view to rendering them more accessible to the poorer classes of our citizens. In this context, a Public Health Management Act will be passed.

101. A feasibility study with a view to introducing the concept of the family doctor service through a National Health Insurance Scheme will be undertaken. A Patients Charter will be introduced to enable health consumers to have access to an efficient and equitable health service.

102. The setting up of private health institutions will be encouraged. Government will ensure that private health care institutions provide an efficient and quality service in conformity with acceptable norms.

103. Government will publish a White Paper on options for a comprehensive reform of the health sector and will follow it up with an Action Plan for health sector reform.

Honourable Members

104. Recognising that education is a pre-requisite for modernising our society and for economic development, Government will review the education system as a whole to ensure that quality education is provided at all levels starting at pre-primary schools where all children will have the full benefits of free education. Teacher training will be given high priority. Zones for Priority Education - targeting low-performing schools - will be established with a view to providing them with additional support. A system of remedial education will be implemented at the primary level. Educational psychologists, social workers and specialised teachers will be recruited to cater for children with special needs and learning problems.

105. The Mauritius College of the Air will be reorganised so as to more effectively democratise education by bringing it to the home of all Mauritians.

106. Government will make proposals for a reform of the Certificate of Primary Education examination. Oriental languages will be included for ranking at the CPE without prejudice to the rights of other children not offering these languages.

107. At the secondary level, emphasis will be on science teaching, professional training and on increasing student intake at the Form I Level through the construction of more State Colleges and the provision of additional classrooms in existing ones. Private Secondary Schools will be encouraged to improve their infrastructure through a system of concessional rate loans from the Development Bank of Mauritius.

108. At the tertiary level, the Tertiary Education Commission will be called upon to draw up an overall plan of action for all tertiary institutions so as to ensure maximum utilisation of existing resources. A Fellowship scheme will be instituted for graduates to continue post-graduate studies and specialised courses of excellence throughout the world.

Honourable Members

109. Government is conscious of the strains, which the evolution of the socio-economic situation in recent years has put on the family. Government will implement a policy aimed at enabling every child to evolve in an effective and materially secure environment, encouraging the financial independence of women, developing the sense of responsibility of the man as a father and husband and at providing social services as an essential support for the family.

110. The Child Protection Act will be revised to give more powers to the police to act in cases of child violence and abuse and the exploitation of children. The activities of the National

Children's Council will be decentralised. A Domestic Violence Act will be passed for the protection of women and children.

111. With the gradual ageing of our society, Government will evolve a policy for the old aged person based on an active solidarity towards aged persons of limited means and the construction of homes for old people without adequate family support. Government will also take necessary steps so that old people have access to appropriate leisure activities.

112. Government will also pay a special attention to the plight of Ex-Servicemen, who by their participation at different levels in the Second World War, have honoured our country.

113. Government firmly believes that arts and culture constitute a powerful instrument to bring down barriers between man and man. Government will provide for arts and culture to play a greater role in fostering understanding and tolerance. It will also take the necessary steps to consolidate the unique position of Mauritius as a crossroad of cultures.

114. Government's policy in the area of leisure will take into account the specific needs and constraints of various groups of people and individuals. Government will encourage the development of a dynamic leisure industry. Young people will be provided greater facilities to be initiated to the arts and other hobbies. At the same time parents who work long hours and our senior citizens will be given better opportunities to participate in various leisure activities.

115. Government will review the existing set-up in the sports sector and will also redefine its objectives. Emphasis will be laid on the development of mass sports. Encouragement will be given to our sports elite to enable them to reach higher performance. Attention will be given to the creation of easily accessible sports infrastructure in all regions. Consideration will also be given to addressing the needs and aspiration of under-privileged young people.

Honourable Members

116. The provision of decent housing to each family will be a key priority of Government. Towards this end, a comprehensive programme of housing development aimed at responding especially to the housing needs of low and middle-income groups will be elaborated and implemented.

117. The undertaking of Government to redeploy the workers of the ex-CHA will be implemented.

118. Land, which is a scarce resource in Mauritius, has come under severe pressure as a result of competing demands from various sectors. Proper management of our land resources is necessary to ensure that the sectors most requiring land are not starved. Government will carefully manage the use of available land within the framework of National Physical Development Plan.

119. In line with rapid changes in the social and economic environment of the country, efforts will be made to facilitate progressive and balanced development in the property market. Thus, the existing legislation governing this sector, namely the Landlord and Tenant Act, which dates back to 1960, will be reviewed and appropriate enactment will be made to stimulate property development and create a modern and healthy environment, while at the same time affording protection to the tenants.

Honourable Members

120. Conscious of the problems of traffic congestion and the growing number of road accidents, Government will elaborate an action plan on traffic management and road safety.

121. As our present public transport system does not adequately respond to the development needs of the country, government will establish a National Transport Policy which, among other things, will examine the various options for an alternative mode of mass transit in the Port Louis - Curepipe corridor. A review of the organisational set-up of individual bus operators will be carried out.

122. The infrastructure for the Vehicle Examination Centres will be modernised. Priority projects to upgrade road and traffic infrastructure will be implemented.

123. A comprehensive programme focusing on policy reforms and infrastructure improvements will be undertaken in consultation with employees' representatives to further enhance the productivity and efficiency of the port of Port Louis. The implementation of this programme will help the port to become internationally competitive and will provide a boost to efforts to make Mauritius a regional trade centre and transshipment base.

124. Major infrastructure works for the modernisation of the airport will be carried out and a blueprint prepared for further airport expansion and development. Particular emphasis will be laid on provision of facilities for passenger safety and security.

125. Government will encourage a more systematic and strategic approach to future developments in the energy sector including a medium-term and a long-term energy plan, with a greater participation of private capital. The Central Electricity Board will be restructured for greater efficiency and the Central Electricity Board Act will be updated.

126. More efforts will be made to optimise the use of renewable sources of energy such as bagasse and solar energy. Energy-saving habits among consumers will be actively promoted.

127. Government will review the structure and management of the water sector with a view to greater co-ordination and effectiveness. The Central Water Authority will be re-organised to cope cost-effectively with the competing demands for water. Major investments will be made in infrastructure for water resource development. The quality of drinking water, the reduction of losses in the network as well as efficient irrigation systems will be accorded greater attention.

128. Government will ensure the timely implementation of the priority projects identified in the Sewerage Master Plan including the Grand Baie, Baie du Tombeau and St. Martin projects. The project aimed at the treatment of waste water for re-use in agriculture will be accelerated.

129. Efforts to protect and preserve the quality of the marine environment will be further reinforced. A Coastal and Marine Conservation and Management Project aimed at monitoring the quality of the marine environment and the establishment of marine parks will be implemented and the coastal zone management plan extended.

Honourable Members

130. Government is aware that no true democracy can exist without local democracy. In this context, Government proposes to grant a new status to local government authorities through greater decentralisation. Real powers will, therefore, be given to local authorities in fields, which include internal management, physical planning and environmental control.

131. A real partnership between the Central Government and Local Government authorities will be set up for the implementation of policies for youth, sports, arts, culture and leisure. The local authorities will be provided with adequate resources, human and financial, to enable them to meet their new responsibilities. The powers of the Local Government Service Commission will be reviewed to give the local authorities adequate control over staff matters. A new Local Government Act will be passed to reflect this new approach. A decision concerning the holding of municipal by-elections or municipal elections due in October will be taken in the light of the new policy.

Honourable Members

132. Government is conscious of the need to recognise the specificities of the Island of Rodrigues and its people. Government believes that the inhabitants of Rodrigues should participate fully in the socio-economic development of the island. In this context, a larger degree of autonomy, within the context of the policy of decentralisation, will be given to Rodrigues. A framework to enable the private sector to join more actively in the development effort will also be put in place.

133. An integrated approach to the development of tourism, handicraft, agro-industries and fisheries will be the cornerstone of Government's policy for Rodrigues. Particular attention will be given to the protection of the environment and the fight against erosion.

134. Greater emphasis will be put on communications between Rodrigues and Mauritius and within Rodrigues itself. An audio-visual project, within a policy of building closer links between the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues will be implemented.

135. As regards the outer islands, Government will make every effort to raise the standard of living and the quality of life of the residents, with a special attention to the island of Agalega. Efforts will be directed to improve communications between the outer islands and the mainland.

136. Government proposes to undertake a techno-economic survey to assess the potential of the island of St Brandon and its surroundings.

Honourable Members

137. The numerous strategies and policy objectives enunciated to-day will prepare our country to meet the challenges of the emerging world economic, social and political order as we enter confidently the next millennium. With its new mandate, Government will strive with unflinching commitment to achieve the goals of economic development, social justice and national unity in the interest of the nation at large. Together, with the support of the population we shall build a united and strong nation, where people of different religious and cultural backgrounds can prosper in mutual respect, peace and harmony.

138. A new era will thus emerge, characterised by high standards of transparency and public accountability, a deep sense of fair play and good governance with a leadership devoid of arrogance of power and close to the aspirations of the common people.

Honourable Members

139. I pray that the blessing of the Almighty may rest upon your counsels.