

Government Programme 2005-2010

Address by the President of the Republic

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

1. I am pleased to welcome you to the First Session of the Fourth National Assembly. In particular, I wish to bid a special welcome to the newly elected Members of Parliament.

2. The people have voted for change. My Government will initiate a process of change at various levels of our society, which I will broadly set out in this address.

3. My Government sought and obtained a mandate from the people to take all necessary measures to create a society where there are opportunities for all, a more inclusive society, a society where there is equality of treatment before the law and by all agencies whether public or private. My Government has a clear mandate to bring in a new economic model through the democratization of the Mauritian economy.

4. My Government aims at gearing our country towards a future that is prosperous for all, where economic success will be equally characterized by equity, ethics and social justice.

5. My Government believes in PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST.

6. It is my Government's steadfast conviction that regardless of gender, creed, ethnic origin or class, each Mauritian citizen has the basic right to citizenship with dignity. My Government's economic and social model will ensure that there is optimum use of our resources particularly with regard to human capital. Government will mobilize all creative energies towards the establishment of a modern, innovative and entrepreneurial society.

7. Today, beyond a moral justification for a fair society, challenging the distortions caused by inequities is also heralded as a rational economic imperative. This new economic model, which reconciles economic efficiency and social justice, has particular resonance for Mauritius committed to remove the hurdles which threaten to curb our future progress.

8. In order to face oncoming challenges, to reverse the current socio-economic decline and to deliver on Government's commitment to economic efficiency, equity and social justice, the very first and crucial step will be to rally all Mauritians around a national project to garner all our willpower and energy to shape a prosperous nation where our unique cultural mix is a source of pride and inspiration rather than a platform for compartmentalizing the nation.

9. This new spirit, this new mindset, characterised by a resolve to make things happen, by a sense of renewal and optimism for the future, will pave the way to a fertile ground for business development, fair competition and world-class standards. To spur this mindset, it is critical to restore deep respect, confidence and trust in our institutions while reconnecting government with citizens.

10. Moving the nation forward will require more than a set of sound and well-intentioned policies. These will have to be implemented in a climate of institutional trust as well as unflinching belief in our capacity for excellence. Government is therefore committed to bring back respect and integrity to our institutions. This will naturally entail a relentless fight against corruption and an unequivocal subscription to public governance characterised by transparency and accountability, without which economic growth per se will be meaningless.

11. My Government will bring about changes in the way our nation lives, works, educates its youth, procures its health services, looks after its elderly, the disabled and the less fortunate, manages its environment, creates and distributes wealth, recruits and rewards workers, and decides on its future.

12. The object of change is to improve the quality of life. To improve quality of life first and foremost some people need jobs, others need better jobs and still others will need to be better rewarded for the jobs they have. Our nation does not only need jobs. It needs employment.

13. My Government will not only help in creating jobs but will pursue a vigorous policy of creating employment. Self-employment and Entrepreneurship from the smallest trader or artisan or mechanic to the small start-ups in trade or manufacturing or services create employment for entrepreneurs, and then jobs for their co-workers.

14. My Government will work towards the creation of more employment by promoting investment in all sectors, by facilitating self-employment and SME's through innovative policies and practices, by ensuring that the right skills training is made available and by adopting the right fiscal policies that encourage and not penalise self-employment.

15. My Government will ensure that there is equity in the recruitment and career path of all employees, whether in the private or public sector. In the first year of my Government's mandate an Equal Opportunities Act will be adopted providing for equal opportunities in employment and in access to resources. Access to land will be one of the major features of our equal opportunity and economic empowerment policies. My Government will also adopt empowerment schemes that will enable all public sector agencies to award contracts for goods and services on a preferential basis to enterprises, which contribute to economic democratisation and qualify under the empowerment schemes.

16. My Government will initiate a comprehensive review of consumer policies and legislation with a view to better protecting the interests of consumers and promote fair trade and boost economic activity in the country.

Honourable Members,

17. My Government is conscious of the deterioration of law and order in the country and its social and economic consequences. It impacts on the security and comfort of our citizens and visitors but also on the image of our country as a place to invest.
18. Government will take all necessary steps to consolidate law and order, and will ensure that law enforcement agencies are provided with the necessary modern equipment and properly trained human resources to be utilized in the fight against crime.
19. Government is fully conscious of the fact that the Police has a major role to play in society to help create a congenial climate of peace and harmony conducive to social progress and economic development.
20. Government will pursue the reforms started in 1999-2000 in the field of police training and institutional build-up.
21. Government will amend the Police Act and adopt a Policing Charter, which will lay the foundation for customer-based policing. The Charter will provide for commitments from the police to the public at large, and to suspects and detainees in particular.
22. Government will set up a National Criminal Intelligence Service which will deal exclusively with intelligence relating to criminal activity and which will play a key role in combating crime and maintaining law and order in the country.
23. Government will introduce a new personnel management, appraisal and promotional selection system in the Police Department. A special transport scheme will be introduced to enable Police Officers to return home after night duty, and the extension of the payment of a risk allowance to other deserving units/branches of the Force will be introduced.
24. Government will give special attention to the working environment of Police Officers and in this context, several Police stations will be extended or renovated, and new Police buildings will be constructed according to new security norms and customer-care orientation.
25. Government will arrange for Closed Circuit Television Surveillance Systems to be installed in commercial and high-risk areas.
26. Government will undertake a thorough review of the Police Department with a view to transferring non-core activities to other departments so as to enable police officers to devote more resources to fighting crime and maintaining law and order.
27. Government will set up Regional Police Advisory Councils under the aegis of a Mauritius Police Authority which will provide a permanent platform for exchange of views between the police, the forces vives, economic players, opinion leaders and other persons from the region on policing issues in the region concerned.

28. Government will appoint a Drug Tsar to oversee all action undertaken by Government Departments and other agencies and institutions to combat drug use and trafficking. Institutional cohesiveness will enhance national effort to combat drug addiction and trafficking.

29. My Government is convinced that the fight against fraud and corruption requires not only the appropriate legal framework but also the political will which has been lacking in recent years.

30. My Government will leave no stone unturned to show its strong and unflinching commitment to fight fraud and corruption and leave no doubt in the minds of all concerned about its determination to fight fraud and corruption. My Ministers will adhere to a Code of Ethics and Integrity and will invite senior public officials and managers of the private sector to do the same.

31. The law setting up the ICAC will be reviewed and the investigation and prosecution of fraudulent or corrupt acts will have to take place within a legal framework that is more certain and result-oriented.

Honourable Members,

32. My Government will ensure that Public Officers are sensitized on the essential need to improve procedures in the Government Machinery with a view to providing our citizens with more efficient, effective, excellent and seamless public services.

33. My Government will adopt a Master Plan for the modernization of government offices, to improve and enhance the work environment of public officers and transform the Mauritius Public Service into a quality Public Service.

34. The setting up of a Civil Service college will set the foundation and framework for the promotion of institutional capacity to ensure life long learning, ICT training, e-learning and also multi-skilling.

35. My Government will ensure that meritocracy prevails at all levels of the Civil Service, and will review and implement new career structures for civil servants.

36. My Government will provide for a right of appeal against decisions of the Public Service Commission, the Disciplined Forces Service Commission as well as the Local Government Service Commission.

37. To ensure greater transparency my Government will appoint trade union representatives to the Service Commissions.

38. My Government will adopt a Citizen's Charter that will prescribe the standards that have to be met by all civil service departments, the time frames for provision of services and also the right of citizens to be informed of the progress of their applications, requests or other matters being processed by public authorities.

39. The role and functions of Citizen Advice Bureau will be revamped so that along with greater e-government services available to our citizens, greater access to government information and administrative services is available in all our towns and villages.

40. My Government will appoint a Reform Unit in each Ministry and major department to drive administrative and other reforms with a view to providing timely and quality services to citizens who are their customers

Honourable Members,

41. The concentration of ownership of assets, especially over the last years, is one of the factors accounting for the present downturn in the national economic situation. This concentration of ownership of assets is not only unfair, but also gives rise to misallocation and inefficiency in the utilization of resources and thus impedes growth.

42. My Government's economic democratization project has a two-fold objective. It intends to bring reforms to the national economic structure that will open the doors of economic opportunities to the majority of the population. This will in turn contribute to mobilizing the overall competitive advantage of the whole population to create more wealth.

43. Government's economic democratization objectives should be broadly translated in the following long-term socio-economic objectives for the majority of the population: Firstly direct participation in mainstream economic activities; secondly greater access to land; thirdly management and control positions in meaningful private sector companies as well as equity of job-access and career-development opportunities in both the public and the private sectors through a meritocratic policy; and fourthly the emergence of an entrepreneurial nation through concerted access to entrepreneurship opportunities.

44. The key to economic democratization is empowerment. My Government will open up and broaden the entrepreneurship base through a diversified range of empowerment initiatives.

45. My Government has set up a Commission on the Democratisation of the Economy that will make recommendations to Government on policies, programmes and action plans to implement Government's Mandate on the democratisation of the economy.

46. My Government's mandate on the democratisation of the economy is to improve the efficiency of our economy and its strategic objectives are:

I. to open up opportunities of access to mainstream economic resources to a larger section of the population;

II. to undertake a comprehensive land reform;

III. to promote meritocracy and equality of employment and career development in the public and private sector;

IV. to improve our institutional framework with a view to creating an investor - friendly environment; and

V. to promote and facilitate the emergence of a nation of creative and innovative entrepreneurs.

47. The notion of the State as facilitator will be revisited in the context of formulating the policies required to effect the quantum socio-economic change that my Government proposes. The role of the State will be redefined from a Facilitator State to a State-Agent of Social Change.

Honourable Members,

48. My Government recognises the importance of maintaining a stable macro-economic environment, so critical to boost investor confidence and fuel investment. On numerous fronts, the economy has deteriorated - all key macro-economic indicators are in the red. Unemployment has soared to unprecedented levels; Inflation, balance of payments disequilibrium and rising public debt continue to impact adversely on the economy; Social inequality keeps widening. Our international competitiveness continues to be seriously eroded. Government believes a strong economy is the foundation of prosperity.

49. My Government has taken the pledge to correct these weaknesses and set it back on the trajectory of high sustainable growth. It will implement a coherent pragmatic programme with a view to getting macroeconomic fundamentals right. Government's main goals are to combat unemployment, achieve external balance equilibrium, bring fiscal deficit to a reasonable share of GDP, and reduce public debt and inflation to manageable levels in line with those of our trading partners.

50. Government is aware that development cannot take place without modernising infrastructure and enhancing institutional capacity. It is imperative that Mauritius becomes a competitive nation to sustain high economic growth of at least 6 % in order to absorb the new entrants in the labour market.

51. Boosting the economy requires the restoring of confidence in the management of the economy and getting the key macroeconomic fundamentals right. Government will:

- i. Establish a friendly and predictable business environment;
- ii. Remove all bureaucratic constraints in terms of access to finance and capacity;
- iii. Define a clear policy for trade liberalisation; and
- iv. Ensure transparency in the governance of the public and private sectors in order to instill confidence in local and international investors. It will accordingly come along with a new procurement regulation based on international best practices.

52. Government will consolidate the existing pillars of the economy while diversifying the economy by setting up new pillars of development such as the exploration of marine resources. It will promote research and explore new avenues of growth such as oceanography, tap alternative sources of energy and study the setting up of a pharmaceutical village. It will attach much higher importance on technology, innovation and human capital development.

53. Government will vigorously pursue a policy of bringing education in the economic fold through the establishment of international educational institutions in partnership with reputed international institutions to cater for overseas students, particularly those in the region.

Government will also foster freeport activities through our economic diplomacy and strengthening the Asia-Mauritius- Africa axis.

54. Monetary policy has not had the desirable effect on economic operators. An effective monetary and exchange rate policy consistent with sustaining international competitiveness, stimulating savings and investment as well as modernising the capital market will be introduced. Government will step up efforts to diversify the economy and promote the New Economy including IT and the financial sector.

55. Government will review its investment programme to provide value-for-money services. Government will establish a public-private sector task group that will recommend the best long-term approach to stay competitive, create jobs as well as promote high technology and innovation. This is expected to create the type of investor-friendly environment so critical to set the economy back on the trajectory of high economic growth. More specifically, Government will launch a National Shared Investment Strategy in consultation and partnership with stakeholders in both the public and private sectors.

56. Government will create an environment conducive to the growth and development of a strong, diversified, dynamic and vigorous private sector. This is vital for a rapid pick up of the economy. Government will revamp initiatives to stimulate entrepreneurship development. The Small and Medium Enterprises will be strengthened. Initiatives will be introduced to consolidate High Performing Growth Enterprises to trigger domestic investment. Greater efforts will be made to spark a potential Nation Brand Image to sell Mauritius more vigorously. In the same vein, an aggressive marketing benchmarked against international best practices will be launched.

57. To free socio-economic stakeholders from unnecessary red tape, Government will create a permanent red-tape watchdog with the mandate to subject all regulations to a strict business-impact test. The investment road map will be clearly defined, time-bound and governed by set guidelines. A Deemed-Approved Framework will be introduced to qualify projects for which the required clearances are not obtained within the established time frame. The onus will thus be shifted from the investor to the public sector agencies.

Honourable Members,

58. Little progress has been achieved in harnessing fiscal deficit. The job of controlling the size and cost of government never ends. Government will step up efforts to ensure that fiscal deficit does not exceed well-defined targets.

59. My Government will take appropriate measures to improve public finances after taking stock of the state of the economy. It will intensify its efforts to minimise wastage and optimise its resources in its drive to achieve its fiscal targets. As a first step, the number of Ministers and Private Parliamentary Secretaries has been reduced from 24 to 19 and from 10 to 5 respectively. A proper mechanism will be set up for close monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations of the Director of Audit Report to obtain better value for money. Government will strengthen capacity for monitoring of major projects since inception to completion with a view to avoiding cost overruns.

60. Government will pursue the implementation of the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). Its operationalization will bring greater fiscal discipline and reduce wastage in public expenditure.

61. Government will consolidate the Asset Management Unit and lay down procedures to enable effective management of public assets.

62. Public Debt is absorbing a substantial proportion of Government Revenue and is a serious obstacle to reducing fiscal deficit. Government will monitor public debt closely, and will take steps for gradually reducing it to a sustainable level.

63. My Government is committed to implement the necessary reforms in both our taxation system and tax administration with a view to achieving a more equitable distribution of the tax burden and more efficient revenue collection.

64. Government will put in place a tax expenditure framework for greater transparency in tax policy formulation and will simplify and rationalise investment tax incentives while ensuring they remain competitive.

65. Government is determined to effectively tackle fraud and other forms of tax evasion, particularly at Customs and income tax level. In this connection, it will make of the Mauritius Revenue Authority an effective instrument towards fairer and more efficient operation of the revenue laws and better delivery of services to the public.

66. Government will relieve the fiscal burden of those earning up to Rs 25,000 per month. This will increase the purchasing power of our citizens and positively impact on the economy.

67. Government will open up the equity capital of state-owned enterprises to the general public with a view to strengthening the development of the capital market and integrating it in the global financial system.

68. Government will lay greater emphasis on the consolidation and promotion of the financial services sector. A new marketing strategy will be developed with a view to tapping the full potential of our financial services sector including the global business sector. Government will undertake a thorough review of the legal framework relating to the global business sector, to ensure a more business-friendly outlook to its regulation. The thrust of the legislative amendment will be to shift the emphasis from licensing to certification.

69. Government considers that it is imperative to boost the corporate image of Mauritius as a safe and well-regulated jurisdiction. It will accordingly put in place modern and efficient institutional and regulatory frameworks that would facilitate trade and investment and provide comfort to investors.

Honourable Members,

70. It is a cause for concern that pockets of poverty have increased in many parts of our society. Vulnerable groups do not have access to resources and facilities enjoyed by most of our citizens and continue to lag behind in the mainstream of sustainable development. This has led to the serious problem of social exclusion.

71. Any society is judged by the way it deals with the issue of poverty. Government is conscious of the growing pockets of poverty in the State of Mauritius. Government is determined to alleviate poverty and will ensure that its economic democratisation programme permeates to all citizens. It will work out a comprehensive Master Plan to tackle the issue with the participation of all socio-economic interest groups.

72. My Government will take up the challenge of fighting poverty while at the same time encourage the involvement of non state actors including non-governmental organisations and associations as well as the civil society at large in this endeavour. This broad-based participatory approach will help promote the integration of the vulnerable groups in the mainstream of development, foster inclusion and contribute to the national building process.

73. Government will also ensure that there is greater synergy and coordination in its poverty-reduction strategies and programmes to achieve higher efficiency and effectiveness in the national drive against poverty.

Honourable Members,

74. In line with its vision to create a nation of creative and innovative entrepreneurs, Government will provide an integrated package with a series of bold and innovative measures, and promote the development of SME's.

75. My Government will take steps to promote a deep entrepreneurial culture, and will invite the collaboration of the private sector for the sustained growth and development of SMEs.

76. Government will establish an Enterprise Empowerment Scheme and introduce a revised SME certificate to enable the SMEs to have access to the required benefit from market opportunities and support.

77. A Pro-Enterprise Panel will be set up to constantly review conditions for encouraging enterprises and adopting pro-active and preventive measures and to reduce bureaucracy.

78. Government will establish an SME Consultancy services, made available to SME's for the preparation of their Business plans and to facilitate access of SMEs to finance.

79. Government will facilitate and democratize access to finance through the establishment of appropriate Empowerment and Equity Funds.

80. Specialised zones for the benefit of SMEs with the appropriate support will be established in each district.

81. Government will encourage the Mauritian Co-operative movement to participate in the democratisation process of the economy by providing the appropriate framework and structures.

82. Cooperative societies will be encouraged to branch into new socio-economic activities, and women cooperative societies will be given special attention and encouragement.

83. Government will give special attention to fishermen cooperatives and cooperatives in the pig-breeding sector as further engines of growth in the SME sector.

Honourable Members,

84. My Government is fully aware of the numerous challenges facing the industrial sector, particularly the textiles and apparel sub-sector which has withered over the last few years.

85. Government, conscious of the importance of this sector to the national economy and to the standards of living of all those involved in the sector, will make the relaunch of this sector one of its key priorities.

86. The overall strategic thrust of Government is to create a strong and modern industrial base that is efficient, competitive, integrated and capable of meeting the challenges of the new economic order through higher value added product, targeted to niche markets. In this context, every effort will be made to promote an integrated industrial structure. Networks, clusters and strategic partnerships among industrial stakeholders for easier entry into global value chains will be facilitated. Innovative measures will be implemented to attract new investors in the sector and enhance its competitiveness.

87. Government will optimize opportunities emanating from regional cooperation to develop a regional supply chain where Mauritius can play a leading role. The potential of Mauritius will be developed as a centre for outsourcing, export of services and expertise. This regional strategy will also aim at transforming Mauritius into a premier regional sourcing hub for textile products and apparel. A new strategy will be devised to enable Mauritius to derive maximum benefits under the third country fabrics derogation.

88. Government will play a key role in promoting a technology driven industry, through acquisition, diffusion and transfer of Information Technology in both production and logistics as a means to improve design and production, product quality, marketing and response time. A Design and Fashion Institute will also be established to develop the creativity and talents of Mauritian entrepreneurs and promote fashionable and differentiated products. A Modernisation Fund will be set up to provide financial and technical assistance.

89. Government will set up an office of Fair Trade and Consumer Protection to create a conducive environment and fair trading practices for the welfare of consumers and the public at large. Its main role would be to act as a watchdog against restrictive business practices, to establish norms and guidelines with the power to take sanctions, to deal with complaints and to regulate the advertising sector. It will also supervise activities related to promotion sales, fairs and educate the public as well as advise authorities on legal and regulatory frameworks. In this connection, a Competition Commission will also be set up.

Honourable Members,

90. It is imperative that, whilst strengthening our industrial base, we utilise our centuries-long tradition and know-how in agriculture to modernise the agricultural sector and to reconvert it into a flourishing pillar of our economy which will allow the whole of the population to draw benefits therefrom.

91. Through its fundamental reform policy aiming at democratizing the economy and promoting access to land, we will make available to the population agricultural lands to be exploited in the framework of an overall programme of revalorisation of agriculture. This programme will include training, provision of technical assistance, mentoring and marketing counseling. In this context, Government will create Model Farms, across the country. Government will also establish a Dairy Farm through a BOT scheme which will provide jobs as well as fresh milk.

92. Government will restructure the Planters Welfare Fund namely to provide better assistance to planters and vegetable growers in particular, in case of natural disasters. Vegetable growers will be provided with enhanced facilities with regard to greenhouses and biotechnology.

93. The law relating to use and sale of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers will also be reviewed. Government will cause the State Trading Corporation to supply fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides to the local market to enable planters to obtain these products at more competitive rates.

94. In the sugar sector, my Government will considerably strengthen its diplomatic endeavours vis-à-vis the European Union and the World Trade Organisation in order to negotiate the best possible terms for the protection of the sugar sector.

95. Government will furthermore promote a fast-track modernisation and diversification of the sugar sector to convert the sugar industry into an efficient cane industry geared towards the production of sugar, high added-value sugar by-products and energy. We will furthermore promote an optimal use of bagasse, molasses and an increased production of special sugars.

96. Government will institute a consultative mechanism including all sugar cane stakeholders with the aim of introducing a democratisation process in order to bring necessary reforms to the sugar cane sector. These reforms are essential to ensure a broader participation of small planters in sugar milling as well as in energy production and to make it easier for small planters to purchase and sell agricultural lands.

97. Government will ensure, in cooperation with all stakeholders that reforms aimed at reducing production costs are carried out in ways that are socially acceptable.

98. Government will take measures to ensure the survival of small planters confronted by the impending sugar price crisis. Two billion rupees will be invested over the next five years in derocking and irrigation schemes for small planters. A Land Swapping System will be introduced to facilitate financing of the modernisation of the sector as well as regrouping of small planters. The financial mechanism of the Sugar Cess will be reviewed to be better adapted to the needs of the industry.

99. Government will actively promote the development of an export-oriented non-sugar cane agriculture and of an agro-industry. In this respect, Government will establish an Agricultural Export Promotion Board, which will assist stakeholders in the agro-industry in an export-oriented agro-production, including conservation techniques, value-addition, packaging techniques and market research and access.

100. My Government will also set up a Central Marketing Management Information Unit to assist agro-producers in marketing their products abroad as well as a National Biotechnology Laboratory to assist them in improving their productivity, quality and output.

Honourable Members,

101. My Government is conscious that with an Exclusive Economic Zone of nearly two million square kilometres, which is about one thousand times larger than our land area, our maritime territory holds a huge economic potential and should be made to play a vital role in the development of Mauritius.

102. Government will ensure that the geophysical studies and bathymetric measurements to enable the identification of the outer limits of our continental shelf are completed in time to substantiate the claim for additional maritime territory to the United Nations Commission on the Outer Limits of the Continental Shelf. This will give Mauritius rights over a larger territory than its Exclusive Economic Zone.

103. Government will promote a rational use of our vast marine resources to foster economic development based on these resources. Incentives will be provided to facilitate the acquisition of medium tonnage, high-sea fishing vessels as well as to further the development of a ship-building industry aimed at coastal and low-tonnage high sea fishing and that of fishing equipment for the local and the regional market.

104. Government will institute a mix of financial, fiscal and institutional regimes to encourage entrepreneurship in the development of marine resources.

105. A Fishermen Investment Trust will be set up to enable fishermen to manage through fishing entitlements the resources around St Brandon, Agalega and Associated Banks. This Trust will target artisanal fishermen, bank fishermen and ex-sand miners to promote the development and diversification of fishing operations around St Brandon, Agalega and associated banks.

106. Government will, with the cooperation of friendly countries, set up joint ventures to speed up acquisition of know-how in the marine industry. This will be done in conjunction with the University of Mauritius, the University of Technology, the IVTB and other training institutions.

107. Government will facilitate the setting up of fish farms and will provide necessary technical assistance to investors including cooperatives and SME's in this respect. The various existing research centres will be upgraded and will be primarily geared towards assisting cooperatives and SME's engaged in the sector.

Honourable Members,

108. My Government is concerned that over the last years our Tourism Industry has neither been given the means to meet its potential nor has secured the involvement of the population at large in its development. Government is fully committed to creating the necessary conditions to encourage sustainable growth in the tourism sector through a more coherent strategy involving all stakeholders.

109. This will ensure that tourism becomes one of the main engines of growth in the short to medium term, not only as a generator of foreign exchange earnings and private investment but also for a major source of new jobs and opportunities in line with Government's economic democratization commitments.

110. Growth in tourist arrivals depends crucially on air access. Government will urgently revisit our Air Access policy to give a new dynamism to the tourism sector whilst safeguarding national interests.

111. Government will review the legal framework relating to tourism and will adopt a new Master Plan for tourism development for Mauritius and Rodrigues.

112. Government will ensure higher visibility and effectiveness in marketing campaigns promoting Mauritius as a unique brand.

113. Government will establish the necessary conditions, such as proper competition, infrastructure needs, know-how and capacity building to encourage duty free shopping facilities, which will be aggressively marketed in the region.

114. The Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority will be re-structured to give it greater dynamism and effectiveness and to enable it to assume a leadership role in the industry, gathering industry best practices and market intelligence worldwide and disseminating same to local operators.

115. Government will ensure that our people, the nation's greatest asset, obtain more opportunities to participate in, and have the right opportunities for employment and advancement to the highest echelons of the hotel and tourism industry, through better training involvement in the supply chain of the industry and the guarantee of equal opportunities.

116. In line with the World Tourism Organisation's policy regarding poverty alleviation through tourism, Government will encourage participation and empower the local community in our tourism development strategy.

117. Government will encourage companies engaged in the sector to open their share capital and ensure that the right environment is created for the emergence of small and medium enterprises to provide support and sub-contract services to sustain the tourism industry and will actively encourage all hotel groups to diversify their sources of supply. Allocation of state land for tourism projects will be reviewed in line with Government Policy of democratisation of our economy.

Honourable Members,

118. My Government is fully conscious of the importance of the new economy including ICT to countries like ours. Government is fully committed to provide the stakeholders in this sector with the opportunity to develop it into the fifth pillar of our economy.

119. ICT will help increase national wealth, create new opportunities and jobs as well as promote and democratize access to information. A clear vision, coherent incentive schemes and improved facilities will be put in place to attract international partnerships and train our people. A High-level Strategic Steering Committee will be set up to elaborate and drive at the earliest an aggressive strategy for the optimal development of the ICT sector.

120. Measures will be taken for the accelerated deployment of broadband across the country to decentralize the ICT and IT enabled services industry, to encourage the development of local content and creativity and to facilitate broadband access to companies operating outside BPML's premises. The ICT Incubator Scheme will be reviewed and consolidated to create a more conducive environment for the promotion of a local entrepreneurial culture. Investment in the sector will be further encouraged through the setting up of Venture Capital and Equity Funds. New legislation will be introduced to regulate working conditions in the ICT sector and to promote Business Process Virtualisation.

121. Government will take appropriate measures to promote the export of ICT products and services both on the regional and international markets. A new boost will also be given to Mauritian investment in the region, particularly by Mauritius Telecom as a regional player.

122. Special programmes will be developed for the training of our young people to increase their employability in the ICT sector and to meet the demand of the industry in terms of qualified manpower. A new approach to universal access will be adopted with a view to providing free Internet access to all schools, public libraries and community centres and a common gateway for Internet connectivity to tertiary institutions.

123. Government will encourage the setting up of a National Internet Exchange Point to enable peering of local ISPs and to ensure an efficient usage of Internet bandwidth. A National Information Security Policy based on EU and PIPEDAT (North America) standards will be defined to build and sustain trust for e-Government and e-Commerce applications as well as to develop our ICT industry. A new costing model will be introduced with a view to reducing prices of telecommunication services at the retail level for the benefit of consumers. The introduction of new technologies including wireless technology (WIFI) will be encouraged to enable productivity gains. E-Commerce will be promoted to create new opportunities and employment.

124. Government will take necessary steps to propagate ICT culture and facilitate the emergence of an Information Society and to reduce the digital divide. New incentive schemes for the purchase of PCs will be introduced with a view to increasing the PC penetration rate in the country. The introduction of digital and interactive television and multimedia services such as TV on ADSL and interactive services will be accelerated.

125. Government will encourage the setting up of private television channels to enhance pluralism of the media.

126. Government will review the scope of ICTA, NCB and the National Proficiency Programme to ensure optimal performance. The establishment of e-Government will be accelerated and priority given to its introduction in some Ministries and Institutions. The role and scope of Central Informatics Bureau and Central Information Systems Division will be reviewed.

127. My Government will honour the undertaking given to employees of Mauritius Telecom, to enable them to acquire 1% of the shares of the company.

Honourable Members,

128. In view of the dramatic increase in the number of vehicles, urgent consideration will be given to the problem of traffic congestion. This problem is multi-faceted and a package of short, medium and long-term measures will be formulated to address it.

129. Government will work on a viable Road Infrastructure Programme to upgrade and extend road and associated infrastructure to facilitate inland communication, taking into account development underway in different parts of the country.

130. Government will give urgent attention to proposals concerning Alternative Modes of Transport and adopt the appropriate policy in the light of the medium-term and long-term interests of the country.

131. Government is committed to adopting strong measures to improving safety on our roads. Conditions relating to granting of driving licences and law enforcement by traffic police will be reviewed and penalties for road traffic offences will be made stricter.

Honourable Members,

132. The Building Act will be reviewed to update and consolidate the legal framework relating to construction, thus giving a new momentum to the Construction Industry and to Infrastructure development.

133. My Government will promote BOT projects as part of its overall policy to boost Infrastructure Development and encouragement will be given for capacity building to make of our country a regional hub for Professional engineering, Architecture and Quantity Surveying services.

Honourable Members,

134. Government will step up its efforts to enhance the regulatory functions of the Civil Aviation Department. The creation of a separate body to oversee matters pertaining to air navigation services will also be considered. Furthermore the Mauritian Flight Information Region which extends over an area of 9 million square km will be reviewed.

135. Airport facilities will continue to be upgraded in order to handle growth in passenger and aircraft movement and freight volumes. Government will revisit the studies regarding the feasibility of an airport in the North.

136. Air transportation plays a critical role in the value chain of the tourism and leisure industry. Government will therefore continue working with all the stakeholders, including airlines, hotels, tour operators and the airport authorities to ensure a sustainable growth of the air transportation sector.

137. Government will encourage Air Mauritius to further strengthen its cooperation arrangements with selected major airlines.

138. With a view to sustaining Government's strategy to diversify the economy and improve economic performance, investment in port infrastructure development will be a high priority.

139. Security measures over the Port area will be further consolidated in line with the recommendations of the International Maritime Organisation.

140. Government will take measures to consolidate Port Louis as a hub port for transshipment activities in the region. The competitive edge of Port Louis over other ports will also be maintained and strengthened.

Honourable Members,

141. In view of the constantly growing energy needs of the country, Government will take action for the timely commissioning of additional power generating plants. The CEB will be encouraged to increase its own production capacity and to ensure security and reliability of supply, at the lowest possible costs. Emphasis will be laid on an enhanced exploitation of renewable energy sources. The potential which exists in Mauritius for wind energy will be optimally exploited to reduce not only the green house effect but also to mitigate reliance on fossil fuel for electricity generation.

142. Government will assess the availability of water resources and apply water management measures geared towards providing a round-the-clock potable water supply to the population throughout the year.

143. Pending the eventual implementation of the Bagatelle Dam Project, the chronic problems affecting water supply in Port Louis will be addressed by the diversion of surplus water from the Midlands Dam. To match the increasing water demand in the west coast region, major infrastructural development works will be implemented including the construction of an important dam and upgrading of the distribution networks.

144. My Government will review the mechanism to ensure timely and economical implementation of wastewater projects. Government will implement free house connection programme in already

sewered areas. These efforts aim at increasing the level of coverage by the public sewer system to 50% before the year 2010, thus enhancing sanitation in the country.

145. Government will elaborate a Master Plan to cater for sewerage infrastructural development in major unsewered residential agglomerations.

146. Government will devise the appropriate instrument and create the necessary conditions for major structural reforms to be brought about in the utility sector. In the process, sector-specific legislations will be passed to allow for harmonization of 22 the utility services operations with the functions of a Utility Regulatory Body. The new framework will create the necessary environment for a free and fair interaction of market forces for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Honourable Members,

147. My Government is committed to carrying out fundamental reforms in education with a view to providing World Class Quality education to enable young Mauritians to be employable in new sectors of the economy, to have more fulfilling jobs and also to be competitive at the international level.

148. Government will undertake a comprehensive review of the curriculum at primary and secondary levels in the light of developments world-wide and our national needs. Government will also review the training and career paths of teachers to enable them to play a key and enhanced role in educational reforms.

149. Government will ensure that teaching of science and technology is given a major boost at all levels so that Mauritians can participate fully in a knowledge-based economy and in research and development programmes in the agro-industrial, pharmaceutical and other sectors.

150. Educational reforms must also include skills enhancement and vocational training as part of the universal provision of world-class education.

151. Government will set up new Polytechnics (Instituts de Formation et d'Education Tertiaire) which will provide post-SC training leading to a Higher National Diploma in areas like tourism, agro-industry, electronics and Information Technology.

152. The role and functions of the Pre-School Trust Fund will be reviewed. A centre for Early Childhood Development will be set up. A phased programme for providing primary schools with a preprimary section will be implemented.

153. Government will take steps to help pupils who experience learning difficulties. A scheme will be set up with the collaboration of volunteers and retired teachers to provide them with the necessary pedagogical support and counselling. Government will also implement a scheme for disabled children to meet their specific requirements.

154. For the holistic development of our school going children, Regional Health and Education Councils will be set up to coordinate all issues pertaining to their health and education.

155. In order to ensure continuity in the provision of education and ensure an optimal learning environment, secondary institutions will house Forms I to Form VI students.

156. As a logical extension of the introduction of free secondary education in 1977, my Government will ensure that students are provided with free transport to schools. Free public transport will be provided to young Mauritians attending schools and tertiary institutions as from September 2005.

157. Government will formulate a national Human Resource Development (HRD) Plan, which will indicate the human resource requirements and projections for the short and medium terms.

158. Government will encourage the setting up of a *Chambre des Métiers* for small businesses to have a platform for promoting the interests of artisans and small enterprises.

159. The Levy Grant Scheme will be reviewed with a view to ensuring that a 'value for money' approach is adopted in the promotion of training and Human Resource Development.

160. The current training system will be reviewed to give new directions to Technical, Vocational and Educational Training (TVET).

161. Government will undertake a national study to promote human resource development in small and medium enterprises with a view to supporting growth in that sector.

162. Government will put in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure that training dispensed is in line with international norms and standards.

163. At the tertiary level, a new strategy for enhancing research and development responsive to national needs will be formulated. Government will publish a White Paper on the future of tertiary education.

164. The mission and role of the two existing universities will be reviewed such that their activities will focus on undergraduate and post-graduate studies, research and development and consultancy. Our Universities should emerge as reputable regional and international institutions.

165. A Tertiary Education Loan Scheme will be introduced with a view to ensuring equity of access of students wishing to pursue post-HSC studies in both the public and recognised private institutions in Mauritius.

Honourable Members,

166. Government's central priority will be to provide universal, accessible and efficient health services with due emphasis on the concept of 'customer care'. My Government will put in place the required infrastructure for each patient to be served with compassion, efficiency and courtesy. In this context a fully equipped Directorate of Medical Services will be set up for the global

management of health services and to follow up on projects. A Patient's Charter setting out the rights of the patient to information and quality care will also be implemented.

167. In view of providing quality health care, Government will reform the casualty units with adequately trained personnel in order to relieve casualty service from bottlenecks and ensure they are geared towards patient-friendliness and professionalized service. Services in health care centres will be computerised with the aim of providing patient and management information as well as enabling the elimination of resource wastage.

168. Government will set up a Medical Trust Fund to replace the existing scheme in order to provide assistance to deserving patients who require investigation and treatment overseas.

169. During the last few years, health services have been characterised by a lack of a global vision and a lack of attention to targeted primary health care. With a view to revamping primary health care my Government will place due emphasis on a rigorous and efficient system of preventive health care via the delivery of specific services such as school health education and the larger dissemination of health information to the public.

170. HIV / AIDS proliferation statistics are alarming and show that this matter has been sorely neglected. Government will treat this as a major concern of utmost priority. In this context, significant reforms will be brought to the 'AIDS Unit' and to the 'Sexually Transmissible Diseases Unit' in order to tackle this concern with the focus and seriousness it deserves. Government will also set up a modern de-intoxication centre.

171. Government will set up a National Service Framework for Diabetes. The necessary structure, with comprehensive and achievable objectives will be set up both at national level and in the hospital regions.

172. My Government will place special emphasis on the health and proper development of children. To this end, a specialised Children's Hospital staffed with specially trained personnel will be set up. Government will also review Maternity services and will set up intensive neo-natal services at the Nehru and Jeetoo hospitals.

173. My Government will implement measures to promote the well being of health care professionals and to prevent the current brain drain in this sector. An incentive system for doctors covering insurance, home-loans and education-loans will be set up. Moreover, Government will promote and encourage the setting up of Private Colleges of Nursing.

174. My Government will also undertake several other projects pertaining to the review and upgrading of Physical Infrastructure with the aim of modernising health services across the country. In this context, the Jeetoo, Mahebourg and Flacq hospitals will be revamped and modernised.

175. Government will give active support to animal welfare and encourage the upgrading of facilities to provide for a proper Animal Hospital

Honourable Members,

176. With a steadily ageing population we face daunting challenges in social security. My Government's policy underpinned by a deeply humanist philosophy and determination to ensure that our elders enjoy dignity and respect in their retirement. In this context Government will end the humiliation previously imposed on pensioners by abolishing the targeted approach and reinstating universal pension to all pensioners. My Government will also provide free public transport to pensioners during specific time periods.

177. In order to boost activities in private retirement schemes, Government will provide additional fiscal incentives to those contributing to individual pension plans. To the same end, the eligibility criterion for the portability of occupational pension plans will be reduced from 5 years to 2 years.

178. In view of the looming pension funding challenge Government will spearhead a discussion forum with relevant stakeholders or their representatives in order to review the reforms required to ensure the long-term sustainability of our universal retirement system.

179. Government will conduct a regulatory audit of all existing legislations concerning pension plans in view of rationalising the regulatory framework for this sector.

180. Government will pay particular attention to measures which will help in providing the right living environment for pensioners. In this context fiscal incentives will be provided to young couples taking responsibility under their roof for care given in respect of their elders. The setting up of private homes will also be encouraged through appropriate Development Certificates in the health sector.

181. Government will adopt a series of measures pertaining to the enhancement of the quality of life for pensioners. These will cover education, enhanced legal protection against violence and inter-generational solidarity.

182. My Government wishes to promote the concept of an inclusive society and thus physically-challenged people will need to be better integrated in mainstream society. Government will implement a host of measures to that effect. These will include the active promotion of the recruitment of physically challenged people throughout all spheres of employment.

183. Government will promote national solidarity through a number of measures including the setting up of an NGO Academy, which will act as a forum for voluntary work and other civil society activities.

Honourable Members,

184. My Government is committed to creating the necessary conditions for the setting up of decent social housing at a reasonable and affordable cost. This will include adequate planning of living space, basic services and amenities, security and access to transport, shopping facilities and education.

185. My government will protect the rights of every family to a house as well as protection against the disintegration of the family unit, against violence and insecurity.

186. Government will therefore lay emphasis on the construction and development of social housing.

187. A systematic planning of land availability and utilisation will be introduced and a Land Bank for housing will be set up.

188. Government will remove the legal and socio-economic constraints to equitable access to land ownership and will particularly facilitate, through fiscal incentives, the access of women to land ownership.

Honourable Members,

189. My Government is fully committed to the cause of environmental protection as an essential component of its economic development policy and will undertake a review of the National Environmental Strategies (NES) to incorporate and facilitate implementation of recent commitments taken at regional and international level, among others.

190. Government will ensure, by providing the necessary institutional and legal framework, that our obligations under various multilateral environmental agreements especially on chemicals, biodiversity, climate change, sea level rise, ozone, and hazardous wastes, are met.

191. The Environment Protection Act will be reviewed so as to provide for an enhanced legal framework. Strategic Environment Assessment of major national developmental projects would provide the required tools for better environmental planning.

192. Government firmly believes that the implementation of sustainable development activities can only be successful through enhanced consultation with and participation of all stakeholders inclusive of the civil society. A consultative network mechanism will be set up to that effect.

193. As a Small Island Developing State, Government will give due consideration to resource accounting and the development of vulnerability and sustainability indices.

194. Government is committed to upgrade the physical environment across the country with a view to improving quality of life and the aesthetic and social values of our environment. Special attention will be given to the state of our rivers, including the causes of pollution and degradation. These amenities will also provide for additional leisure, which can also boost the tourism sector.

195. Government will ensure that risk assessment and management of extreme weather events, through the exchange of meteorological information between the National Meteorological Services in the region and the world, are done more rapidly and effectively.

196. Government will also ensure that, following the UNESCO meeting on the establishment of a Regional Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System in the Indian Ocean, a National Tsunami Warning Centre will be set up in Mauritius; an inundation map will be prepared with a view to defining the vulnerable areas of the coastal region in the event of a Tsunami and an Evacuation Plan will be established. A public awareness campaign will also be put into place to sensitise the population, as well as foreigners visiting the Republic of Mauritius, on mitigation measures to be taken whenever there is a threat of a Tsunami or other natural disasters.

197. Government will acquire the necessary and most appropriate instruments, such as a seismometer to monitor seismic activities in the region.

198. Government will strengthen the role of the National Development Unit with a view to making it more effective in providing basic infrastructural needs and amenities to our people especially those living in deprived regions.

199. A survey will be carried out to identify the most pressing needs of the population in terms of road network, sports infrastructure, cremation grounds, community centers, market fairs, multi-purpose complexes, drains and other social amenities.

200. A five year plan will be prepared in consultation with the Parliamentary Private Secretaries and forces vives in respect of each constituency and Government will embark on the implementation of the projects so identified on a phased basis with priority being given to the most urgent projects.

201. Government will rehabilitate and modernize the existing basic infrastructural facilities and amenities. Such initiatives are fundamentally aimed at enhancing the quality of life of people and at reducing the gap between rural and urban areas. Government will also accelerate the implementation of the Land Drainage Programme to alleviate flooding problems in flood prone areas.

202. My Government is committed to a long-term policy to decentralise economic and administrative activities across the country. This will enable more of our fellow countrymen to work closer home and in a more conducive environment, will reduce traffic on our roads, give a boost to regeneration of local economies and reduce disparities between various regions of the country. To this end Government will appoint a Decentralisation Task Force within the Prime Minister's Office to monitor and drive efforts to spread administrative and economic activities across the country.

203. My Government will introduce reforms in the industrial relation framework with a view to ensuring our international competitiveness and maintaining our social and economic stability.

204. For an effective tripartism, my Government will strengthen dialogue with social partners.

205. Government will set up an Employment Equity Commission to oversee the application of equitable principles with regard to employment in both the private and public sectors.

206. Appropriate amendments will be made to the Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare Act with a view to enhancing the standards of Occupational Safety and Health at places of work. New regulations will be promulgated pertaining to noise at work, electricity, safety signs and colours, control of Asbestos and hazardous substances. More emphasis will be put on preventive inspections in existing sectors such as agriculture, construction, manufacturing, transport and communication. In this context, more attention will be given to emerging sectors like IT and call centres. Processing time of accident investigation cases will be cut down to enable quicker relief to employees.

207. Welfare schemes to improve the standard of living of EPZ workers and their families will be strengthened. In order to complement government effort in forging IT culture, the computer loan scheme will be consolidated for the benefit of the workers and their families.

208. With a view to promoting employment, entrepreneurship and training of vulnerable groups, sensitization programs will continue to be organized in vulnerable areas with the collaboration of NGO's.

209. Government will set up a Cité des Metiers which will act as a resource center and one stop shop for jobseekers, students, workers, and members of the public who seek information on job opportunities, training and further education, lifelong learning possibilities, career guidance, change of profession and self-employment. Government will also support schemes for the training of jobseekers in the textile sector.

210. Government will ensure that comprehensive job vacancies surveys are carried out so as to gather data that will facilitate job placement.

Honourable Members,

211. In line with the Government's philosophy to promote social justice, gender equity and human development, it is essential to mainstream gender in all Government's programmes and policies.

212. Conscious of the need to enhance women's advancement, Government will sustain its actions towards the social, economic and political empowerment of women. Projects will be geared towards entrepreneurship development whilst the emphasis will be on capacity building, with specific schemes for non-working mothers. Government will implement policies and programmes tailored to the specific health-related needs of women.

213. In view of Government's commitment to reinforce the institution of the family, Government will adopt a National Policy on Family. Concurrently, the enforcement mechanism of the Protection from Domestic Violence Act will be strengthened to provide better services to victims of domestic violence. A Family Court will be set up where family-related disputes will be settled in a more conducive and specialised environment.

214. To better safeguard the rights of children, Government will adopt an appropriate National Children's Policy and an action Plan, whilst focusing on early Childhood Development and Parental Empowerment Programme. In order to promote support services to enable women

reconcile work and family responsibilities, Government will consolidate Day Care Centre facilities.

215. With a view to addressing the scourge of commercial sexual exploitation of children and substance abuse, Government will initiate related projects coupled with aggressive sensitization campaigns.

Honourable Members,

216. With a view to enabling the development and general welfare of the youth who constitute the pillar upon which a nation is built, youth policies will be reviewed. Emphasis will be laid on national unity, social integration of youth, empowerment and skills improvement as well as creation of opportunities for their personal growth.

217. The operation of Youth Centres will be revisited and the present network will be expanded so as to cover all regions of the country in order to bring their services closer to young people.

218. Government will lay emphasis on the need to diversify, democratise and develop a wide range of new recreational activities. More opportunities will be provided for young people to benefit from training courses in entrepreneurship and business practices.

219. Government will create the necessary environment and conditions for the democratisation of sports with a view to encouraging the development of a sports culture. Government will adopt a National Sports Policy with a view to giving a new orientation and boost to the sports sector and for optimum utilization and proper maintenance of sports facilities.

220. The sports cadre will be reorganized with a view to enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of different services and technical support to the sporting community. The concept of regionalization will be reviewed with the active partnership of all the stakeholders. Measures will be taken to enable the public to have greater access to government-owned sports infrastructure.

221. Special attention will be given to the provision of appropriate equipment and technical back up in sports installations to enable users to train in the best possible conditions. An audit of existing sports infrastructure will be carried out with a view to establishing a database for better planning and coordination at national level with regard to construction of new sports complexes.

222. The operation of the organizations falling under the aegis of the Ministry will be revamped in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness in providing better and quality services to the different stakeholders.

223. Appropriate incentives will be provided to High Level athletes to encourage them to achieve excellence in their performance at international level. The Ecoles des Sports and National Training Centres will be revisited in order to provide effective coaching and advanced training opportunities to promising young athletes as well as to top athletes.

224. Greater attention will be given to the participation and involvement of women and persons with disabilities in sports. A new impetus will be given to school sports as this provides a breeding ground for potential and upcoming High Level athletes.

225. The Sports Act will be revisited to ensure that it meets the aspirations of the sporting community.

226. Leisure activities are an essential component of a balanced society. Government will initiate action for the setting up of the appropriate leisure infrastructure and activities nationwide with emphasis on accessibility and affordability.

Honourable Members,

227. Our cultural pluralism has always been a source of great pride. Government will focus on reinforcing our multiculturalism, on celebrating our cultural and linguistic diversity as well as our multiple identities. Government will not follow the past practice of compartmentalising and fragmenting our social fabric, and will instead implement policies aimed at promoting national unity.

228. Government will promote artistic creation in various forms such as painting, sculpture, music, drama, theatre, writing etc. A Musée de l'Image will be set up after consultations with relevant stakeholders. In addition Government will also facilitate the setting up of a Concert Hall in Port Louis as a BOT project.

229. Our historical heritage is of great value and is in need of greater understanding, promotion and dissemination. In this context a Genealogy Institute and an Immigration Museum will be set up. Government will also regroup the National Archives, the National Art Gallery and the National Library under one roof.

230. Government will encourage the development of cinematographic art through the emergence of a Mauritian cinematographic industry with international partners. New legislation on the cinema industry will be introduced.

231. In order to address issues pertaining to historical grievances, Government will set up a Truth and Justice Commission to establish the facts regarding slavery and indentured labourers and to make recommendations with respect to reparations for the descendants of slaves and indentured labourers.

Honourable Members,

232. Conscious of the fact that the Local Government Act 2003 will create injustice, Government will repeal the Act and replace it by a new Local Government Act based on democratic principles and providing greater autonomy in the management of the affairs of local authorities.

233. Local Government elections will be held as early as possible and the grant-in-aid formula will be reviewed so as to eliminate overlapping and thereby reducing all disparities between urban and rural areas.

234. Government will strive to ensure community participation in the management of the affairs of local authorities and to provide a decentralized on-line service.

235. Government will review the constitution and powers of the Local Government Service Commission so as to ensure equity and justice in recruitment.

Honourable Members,

236. My Government will propose a Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Amendment) Bill to address the issues that have cropped up in the course of the last three years since the establishment of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

237. Special attention will be given to the development of Rodrigues and full support will be extended to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and to the Outer Islands Development Corporation to sustain social and economic development of all parts of the territory of Mauritius. In this respect, Government will review leases and concessions granted over Agalega to ensure that national interests are safeguarded.

238. Projects to further improve the living conditions of the residents of Agalega will be implemented and residents will be encouraged to develop small business activities.

239. Mauritius has experienced tremendous increase in fire hazard as result of its development. It is, therefore, imperative to develop the Fire Services, both in terms of static and dynamic resources, to meet the new challenges. New fire stations will be constructed and dynamic resources will be reinforced and upgraded.

240. Government will pay particular attention to the actualisation of the National Solid Waste Management Programme and implementation of a waste management system based on reduction/minimisation initiatives. Emphasis will initially be laid on waste reduction, sorting and an improved collection system and subsequently on recovery through recycling, composting and re-use. Furthermore, Government will consider sympathetically the plight of the inhabitants of Mare Chicose in the light of the findings made in earlier reports.

241. Government will set up two green waste composting plants as this is likely to divert a significant amount of organic wastes from the waste streams, thus lessening the reliance on land filling.

242. Government will pay special attention to the construction of new waste management facilities and the modernization of existing ones. Consideration will be given to the construction of a hazardous wastes interim storage facility. Government will also construct new transfer stations to replace the existing ones, which have very limited possibilities for upgrading and extension.

243. Government will provide appropriate infrastructure and facilities on public beaches in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and wider public-private partnership schemes.

Honourable Members,

244. My Government is alive to the need for a system of justice, which is efficient, accessible to the Mauritian nation which it purports to serve and contributes to the stability and unity of the nation. My Government will put an end to justice à deux vitesses.

245. The Mackay Commission reported in 1997 on the structure and operation of the judicial system and legal profession of Mauritius. A number of the recommendations contained in the Mackay Report have already been implemented during the period 1997-2000. Government intends to pursue the implementation of the other recommendations contained in the Mackay Report, notably the creation of a separate Court of Appeal forming part of the Supreme Court with jurisdiction to hear exclusively all appeals from Courts and Tribunals in Mauritius. This measure will entail the provision of an additional new Court and office premises for the Supreme Court and appointment of more Judges and Magistrates.

246. Government proposes to review the Legal Aid Act with a view to ensuring, as far as possible, that legal aid is available in serious criminal cases and civil cases to all those who are genuinely unable to afford legal representation on their own.

247. In this context, Government will set up Legal Advisory Units or Law Centres in the offices of the Citizen Advice Bureau. A network of trained volunteers will be constituted to service the legal advisory units or law centers. This will be yet another step in the process of affording access to justice to citizens of our country, especially the less fortunate ones.

248. Government is alive to the existence of procedural complexities, which are formidable barriers to the obtention of justice by the citizens. Such complexities may contribute to undermine confidence in the justice system. Government will take appropriate measures with a view to reducing delays in completing pre-trial procedures and Court proceedings.

249. Government will introduce measures to strengthen the powers of the National Human Rights Commission and broaden the scope of its activities.

250. Government will put in place a system of Juge d'Instruction in order to ensure greater transparency and professionalism in the

conduct of criminal investigations in the light of the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission.

251. Government will also review the laws and procedures relating to arrest and bail to ensure a better protection of the constitutional rights of suspects.

252. Government will increase the number of State Law Officers. The cases of State Law officers on secondment to the Magistracy will be reviewed. This process will enable the Director of Public Prosecution's Office to be staffed by State Law Officers who will devote their time exclusively to criminal matters. In the same vein, it is proposed that the State Law Office will be housed in a separate building of its own - this will not only ensure greater security to officers and official files,

but will also save public funds, given that some 10 million rupees are being spent annually on rental of the premises.

253. Furthermore, better opportunities for training will be provided to State Law Officers so that they may better assist the Government in executing its projects and fulfilling obligations in an efficient manner as well as in meeting legal challenges both at domestic and international levels.

254. Government will introduce legislation with a view to promoting Mauritius as a centre for international commercial conciliation and arbitration. For that purpose, Government will ensure that adequate training is given to local professionals to act as arbitrators, counsel and to service the centre.

255. Despite the introduction of fixed penalties for road traffic offences, the backlog of road traffic offences cases is still a matter for concern. Government proposes to introduce measures for the Courts to deal with those cases more expeditiously and efficiently.

256. Government will also introduce legislation to review the structure of the Law Reform Commission to make it a more efficient vehicle in the process of law reform and research.

Honourable Members,

257. My Government is committed to reform the electoral system to further consolidate democracy and ensure a more equitable parliamentary representation. My Government is also committed to the final decision on electoral reform being made by the people of Mauritius. To this end voters will be invited to approve reform of the electoral system by way of a referendum.

258. Reform of the electoral system will be implemented along with changes in the supervision of the electoral process to ensure that abuses of state machinery and electoral bribes as witnessed during the last electoral campaign are monitored and checked by the Electoral Supervisory Commission. The Commission will also be given the power to ensure that acts binding the State are not done by an outgoing Government during an electoral campaign except where these are urgently required.

259. Government will appoint a Constitutional Commission to review the mode of election of the President of the Republic and the powers, duties and functions of the presidency and make recommendations to Government.

260. My Government will reinforce the law relating to Commission of Enquiry to enable comprehensive investigation and follow-up on past abuses of state machinery, influence peddling, benefits derived by political parties and related entities from fraudulent and corrupt acts and misuse of discretionary powers by public officials.

261. My Government will provide citizens with a right of access to personal information held by State agencies and to information relating to government business by enacting a Freedom of Information Act.

262. Government will amend the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act to establish a Media Commission in lieu of the Independent Broadcasting Authority which will monitor and enforce legal provisions relating to the media in general.

Honourable Members,

263. Government will re-engineer its foreign policy with the prime objective of promoting and protecting our national interests. Due regard will be paid to our acquis and the enlargement of our economic base as well as new and untapped opportunities.

264. The pursuit of our national interest will be carried out with determination, pragmatism and realism. In this process, Government will focus on its fundamental foreign policy objective centered on the well being of the common man through job creation and economic development.

265. As a matter of both strategy and priority, Mauritius will engage its traditional friends to enhance and deepen our bilateral relations and develop a new generation of cooperation instruments, founded on real partnerships, particularly in the areas of trade and sustainable development, in full consonance with our economic trajectories.

266. Government will initiate fresh and constructive bilateral dialogues aimed at restoring and enjoying our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago and Tromelin.

267. Whilst relations with our traditional partners of the developed world will feature prominently in our foreign policy, Government will forge new strategic partnerships with member States of the ASEAN and SAARC as well as Latin America. As a first step, Government will redouble its efforts to conclude negotiations on a new generation of economic and trade partnership agreements with both India and Pakistan.

268. Mauritius will also be an active member of the African community of nations and participate fully in furthering the development agenda of the continent, while giving a new impetus to the processes of intra regional integration and the integration of the region as a whole in the world economy.

269. In our immediate neighbourhood, Government will accelerate co-operation with and within the Indian Ocean region with specific emphasis on an operationally effective regional agenda.

270. Government will maintain membership of and full cooperation with the Commonwealth and will also foster a new impetus for more active participation in the Commonwealth, La Francophonie and the Indian Ocean Commission with a view to reasserting the rightful place of Mauritius in these historical organizations.

271. In the international fora, and at the United Nations in particular, the position of Mauritius will be determined by our national interest and the need to promote our ethical values and the democratic principles we espouse. The achievement of the Millennium Goals, in particular the eradication of poverty, will be an underlying policy advocacy in our interaction with the UN and development partners.

272. Economic diplomacy will feature high in the foreign policy agenda of Mauritius. Both at the WTO and at the level of ACP EU relations Government will spare no efforts in defending our fundamental economic interest on which the livelihoods and survival of thousands of Mauritians depend.

273. Furthermore, given the importance of multifunctional sugar as one of the fundamental pillars of our economy both in terms of predictable and stable earnings and food security, 'sugar diplomacy' will continue to play an integral and cross cutting dimension of our diplomacy. Concerned by the recent proposals for a drastic reform of the EU Sugar Régime by the European Commission, Government will mobilize all its efforts and energy in requesting the European community to fully uphold the commitments enshrined in the Sugar Protocol.

274. At the same time the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation will ensure that its personnel has the necessary high level of training and the necessary skills and discernment to best defend the country's interests at all levels, bilateral, regional and multilateral.

275. In the light of these policy objectives, Government will establish a Foreign Policy Advisory Council comprising representatives of different sectors with a view to formulating recommendations on the conduct of our foreign policy.

276. In the same vein, Government will set up a Parliamentary Committee to increase consensus building on foreign policy objectives and its accountability to the National Assembly.

Honourable Members,

277. The task that lies ahead is enormous. The people have voted for change. My Government has the mandate, the will and the determination to face the challenges along with the people of Mauritius.

278. My Government is committed to bold Reforms - Reform of Institutions, Reform of the Electoral System, Reform of Economic sectors to restore confidence and re-launch the economy for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

279. My Government is leading by example and will provide strong leadership in steering the nation forward. In so doing, Government will maintain a permanent dialogue with all stakeholders and will ensure prior consultation on issues of national interest.

280. My Government is strongly committed to National Unity and nation building will be a guiding principle of Government policy over its five-year mandate. Government will govern with the people and will at all times PUT PEOPLE FIRST.

Honourable Members,

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