

MAURITIUS SIXTH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

SECOND SESSION

Debate No 13 of 1986

Sitting of Saturday 5 July 1986

The Assembly met in the Assembly Chamber, Assembly House, Port Louis, at 11 am, pursuant to notice.

Mr Speaker, accompanied by His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, Shri Rajiv Gandhi and the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Mr Anerood Jugnauth, and preceded by the Sergeant-At-Arms, bearing the Mace, and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, entered the Chamber of Assembly in procession.

Mr Speaker seated His Excellency to his right and the Prime Minister of Mauritius to his left on the dais and took the Chair.

The National Anthems of the Republic of India and of the State of Mauritius were played.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, we are thankful to His Excellency Shri Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, for having accepted to favour this House with his company today. This is not the first time that a Prime Minister of the Republic of India has addressed a sitting of this Assembly. Shri Rajiv's predecessor at such a function, was no less a personality than his distinguished mother, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, who last attended a special sitting of this House on 24 August 1982.

Today, the occasion is clad with particular significance for, on 19 April 1886, the first elected Members of the then Council of Government were sworn in, thus making of this House one of the oldest elected assembly of the Commonwealth. And there could not have been a better way of marking the occasion than to welcome, in the very year of that centenary, the Prime Minister of the largest democracy of the world.

It is therefore a great honour and a great privilege for me to welcome His Excellency Shri Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, and to invite him to now address the Assembly.

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA, SHRI
RAJIV GANDHI

The Prime Minister of India: Hon Speaker, Prime Minister, distinguished Members, it is always a privilege to address a nation's legislature – the chosen guardian of its ideals. I bring you the greetings of the Parliament and the people of India, and their assurances of deep friendship.

I have made a discovery: that Mauritius is a small island country with a big heart. Since my arrival yesterday in your enchanting country, the people of Mauritius have enveloped me in their affection. Their warmth is a reminder both of the old bonds between us and a reaffirmation of our resolve to work together in pursuing our shared objectives.

As I stood at the samadhi of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, I recalled the respect he commanded in the international community and the close bonds of esteem and trust that bound him to my mother, Shrimati Indira Gandhi. It has been a privilege to make the acquaintance of His Excellency Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo, a comrade-in-arms of Dr Ramgoolam, his successor as Governor-General, a statesman of long experience, a man of profound humanity and dedication.

Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth is for me a valued friend and co-worker. He has enhanced the reputation of Mauritius through his dedicated and dynamic efforts to raise the country's economic status and his steadfast adherence to, and enunciation of the principles of, the Non-alignment Movement.

Common experiences bind the peoples of India and Mauritius. Bled by colonial rule, we both yearned and strove for liberty. We are today engaged in the exacting task of building our nations. We subscribe to the same fundamental democratic values – representative government at home and non-alignment abroad. Regular high-level and non-alignment abroad. Regular high-level exchanges have strengthened our ties. What brings us even closer are our historical and cultural links and a common world perspective.

Mauritius is a world in miniature – with its rich diversity of race, language and religion. What happened here in Mauritius over the last two hundred years happened in India over a much longer stretch of time and on a much larger geographical scale. Through the millennia, diverse people mixed and mingled in India to build a vibrant civilization. The endurance of this civilization is due to the manner in which it has embraced all segments and imbued them with a sense of common destiny.

It is not as if the civilization of India was without its weaknesses. It allowed itself to stagnate. The result was colonial subjugation. But the men and women who dreamed of freedom knew that the eradication of social injustices was a prerequisite for national rebirth.

Mahatma Gandhi declared: "I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke... For me the movement for Swaraj is a movement of self-purification". To the Mahatma and his great contemporaries, the spiritual and political equality of all human beings was an axiom, an unalterable article of faith. They regarded freedom as the birthright of all, and not of any elite section. We fought against internal as well as external injustice. India's freedom movement became history's greatest Open Rebellion.

We lost Gandhiji soon after winning our independence. But we had Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to speak his language and continue his work. Jawaharlal Nehru was a democrat every inch of his being and every moment of his life. He built and nurtured institutions through which the people of resurgent India could realize their hopes and aspirations. He also reminded us that liberty found fulfillment only through equality. "The avatars of today";, he had declared as long ago as 1928, "are great ideas which come to inform the world. And the idea of today is social equality";. As Prime Minister, he set about giving social and economic content to political freedom.

The great democrat was also the great modernizer. Under Jawaharlal Nehru's guidance, India adopted planning. The application of technology to agriculture, systematic industrialization and the cultivation of a scientific temper were chosen as the path to the ending of poverty and of mass unemployment, Jawaharlal Nehru laid the secure foundations of self-reliant development. He built wisely and well.

After him it was India's good fortune to have another great builder, Indira Gandhi. Under her inspired leadership, our farmers and scientists wiped out food deficits and built up surplus stocks. India achieved notable successes in nuclear technology, space science and the capital goods sector.

We still have problems. We know their magnitude only too well. But we know also that we have the strength and resilience to overcome them. We appreciate help, welcome cooperation, and yet we have the capacity and the will to be on our own.

Both Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi understood and befriended modern technology and the forces of change. But what marked them out was that they were deeply rooted in Indian

values and the Indian ethos. They knew the limitations of a materialist view of life. They alerted our people to be on guard against greed and violence, two ancient evils aggravated by the technological advances of our age. It is in stressing that our actions should be guided by self-restraint and respect for other's opinions, by compassion and non-violence, and above all by reverence for the eternal values, that there is a grand continuum between Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

The irony is that along with forging weapons which can wipe out life, man has for the first time acquired the power to eradicate hunger and the diseases of poverty. Misery can be erased. Fear can be extinguished. If only the world wants to... if only Man want to - As Indira Gandhi declared at the last Summit of the Non-aligned Movement:

"Our world is small, but it has room for all to live together and to improve the quality of the lives of our peoples in peace and beauty".

Peace has to be protected against conflict; beauty rescued from ugliness; national sovereignty defended against external pressures. Most countries are subjected to pressure of many kinds – whether it is a sub continental nation like India or an island country like Mauritius. But if our resolve is strong, none can dictate to us.

The essence of non-alignment is that independent nations be themselves. We seek friendship with all. Mauritius and India are totally committed to non-alignment. We each have paid the price of our conviction.

Immediately on attaining independence, Mauritius was subjected to the blandishments of the powers who wished to establish and expand their military presence in the Indian Ocean. For a small country, dependent largely on a single crop, the market for which was substantially located in the West, it took courage of conviction and a sturdy independence of mind to firmly resist those blandishments. Three years later, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace. The Declaration has regrettably been honoured mostly in the breach. Instead of diminishing outside military presences with a view to their elimination, both in number and sophistication, there has been a substantial increase in foreign naval presences. New command structures have been put in place. The Non-aligned States of the Indian Ocean littoral and hinterland are sought to be dragged into that very cold war which the policy of non-alignment has been designed to protect us from. Through much of this difficult period, Dr. Ramgoolam and you, Mr Prime Minister, have courageously joined hands with your non-aligned brethren to insist on the immediate convening of the Conference for the implementation of the Declaration on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace. The Chagos Archipelago, which is your territory by right, has been prised loose to make Diego Garcia into a base. You have insisted on its restoration to your sovereignty. We firmly support your demand. The policy of having bases on foreign soil is nothing, but the same old imperialism in a new garb. The new forms of imperialism are no less repugnant than the old.

Not far from your country, in South Africa, we find a combination of the worst perfidies that have disfigured history – racism, colonialism, militarism and tyranny. Under the yoke of Pretoria, the vast majority of the people of South Africa are subjected to unimaginable torture and debasement. Namibia is held in thrall in defiance of the expressed will of the international community.

Only a few weeks ago I visited the Frontline States and received first-hand accounts of the aggressive activities of the Pretoria regime. Since then the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons have submitted their report. None who has read the document can fail to be impressed by the force of the evidence they have gathered, and the historical inevitability of the downfall of the apartheid regime. "As we proceeded with our work", the Group of Eminent Persons say:

"We became convinced that not only was it a matter of the utmost urgency to dismantle apartheid and erect structures of democracy in South Africa in terms of non-racial representative government, but it was also essential to break the cycle of violence in that country".

If this is not done peacefully – which means mandatory sanctions – the world might witness the worst bloodbath since the Second World War.

Through India's long history, her people have always made sacrifices to uphold the fundamental moral and spiritual values that underlie Man's quest for freedom. The battle of the people of South Africa today is the battle of the whole humanity. They have shed their blood and borne much suffering in defence of principles and values they hold dear above everything else. India stands solidly with them. It is for all of us who love freedom and abhor colonialism and racism to see that the South African people emerge victorious at the earliest and without further bloodshed and violence.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, our bilateral relations have been consistently marked by mutual esteem and affection. Mauritius has the resilience and the inner reserves of strength to face any challenge. India will always be with you – with you in building a prosperous and strong Mauritius; with you in working for a peaceful world community.

Thank you. (Applause)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot, but agree with you that there could not have been a more fitting way to commemorate the centenary of the swearing in of our first elected hon. Members than to allow this House and the whole nation to enjoy the benefit of that gracious address which has been delivered by His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, Shri Rajiv Gandhi. I have no doubt that the presence here of our distinguished visitor will be reckoned as another living symbol of that spirit of co-operation and understanding which has always existed between this House and the Prime Minister of India.

We wish our distinguished guest a very happy stay in Mauritius

ADJOURNMENT

(11.34 AM)

The Prime Minister: Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 15 July, 1986 at 11.30 am.

The Deputy Prime Minister: rose and seconded.

At 11.35 am, the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 15 July 1986, at 11.30 am.