Address

by

Hon. Jayeshwur Raj Dayal, CSK, PDSM, QPM

Minister of Environment, National Emergency Centre and Beach Authority

SirSeewoosagurRamgoolamBotanicalGarden

Pamplemousses

Monday 5 January 2015 at 10 30 hours
My Colleagues:
Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security
Hon. Soodesh Callichurn, Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training
Hon. Ramkaun Sharvanand, PPS
Hon. Teeluckdharry Kalidass, member of the National Assembly
President of District Council of Pamplemousses, Mr. Deeraj Sookur
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment, National Emergency Centre and Beach Authority
Representatives of the Private Sector and NGOs
Distinguished guests
My dear children
Ladies and gentlemen
It gives me much pleasure to address you this morning on the occasion of this symbolic tree planting ceremony organised by my Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Agro-industry and Food Security at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Garden.

Allow me to quote the English Philosopher, Scientist and Jurist Francis Bacon who said I quote “The best part of beauty is that which no picture can express” unquote - this is what trees are all about.

Yes, indeed, my message on the very first working day for the New Year 2015 is a message of commitment, hard work and duty to nurture our environment for a prosperous, cleaner, greener and safer Mauritius.
We take pride for the promises that we hold. This tree planting symbolizes optimism and a legacy for a better future. Ancestral ethos passed on from generations to generations whereby it was inculcated that whenever a tree is felled down it has to be replaced immediately and this should be perpetuated as it is enshrined in our Environment Protection Act as environment stewardship, that is a sense of responsibility and respect towards the ecosystem. At the same time it is our pledge to restore the natural pristine beauty of Mauritius.

**Ladies and gentlemen**

More than ever, the country is facing many environmental challenges- be it the impacts of climate change; flash floods; loss of our rich biodiversity; water and air pollution; wastage and inefficient use of our resources such as energy and water; damage to our ecosystems; erosion of our
beautiful beaches; irresponsible and unsustainable practices; indiscriminate littering and dumping of wastes and the list goes on.

As we gather today, let us recognize that we are all at a cross-road and we need to pull together and in the same direction by putting our energy and resources for the consolidation and progress by delivering results. Indeed, unless we reinforce our strategies to put the green into growth, we are in danger of repeating the mistakes of the past which have led to a great extent to the current environmental degradation.

We are devising the right strategies to avail of latent opportunities, and they are huge. We are taking **bold and quick decisions** to reverse the prevailing situations.
To this, I make a special plea to the private sector and NGOs to establish meaningful partnerships with the Government in mobilising efforts on critical environmental issues.

*I am sure that this prayer will be blessed.*

**Ladies and gentlemen**

As any Small Island Developing State, Mauritius has fragile ecosystems and just to name one; we are left with less than 2% of our native forests.

At the global level, trees and forests are closely linked with weather patterns and also the maintenance of a crucial balance in nature. You will perhaps appreciate that if the temperature in Port Louis has not gone that much up today is due to the fact that in the late sixties a lot of tree planting was initiated in Port Louis. *Had we sustain the campaign a much better result would have been obtained.*
On and above, the tree is one of humankind's most powerful symbol. It is the embodiment of life in all its realms: the point of union between heaven, earth and water. In most ancient religious imagery, the tree was believed to have an abundance of divine creative energy. In short trees represent abundance in all its form.

Examples of trees in sacred text are:

• In Hinduism, Bilwa or Wood apple also known as the Bel Tree is associated with Lord Shiva.

• the Banyan (FicusIndica)is the sacred tree of immortality. It is also known in India as Sasthi the goddess of fertility.

• ThePeepal (Ficusreligiosa) is extensively used in rituals, its wood is used to light the Yagna fire.
• Gautam Buddha and other saints achieved enlightenment under the Asoka.

• The modern custom of the Christmas Tree has its source in Germanic tradition, as well as the traditional use of the palm tree and the olive tree.

• the Tree of Knowledge of Judaism and Christianity; and

• the Bodhi tree in Buddhism

The energy of trees can also positively influence our mental, emotional and spiritual energy. Consider for example the peace and serenity people feel when they sit under a tree or walk through a forest. And what about the feelings of joy and excitement that children feel when climbing a tree.
Let me also quote late Prof. AngaraMatthauwhom you know, became the first African woman in 2004, to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace. I quote

“Until you dig a hole, you plant a tree, you water it and make it survive; you haven't done a thing. You are just talking.” Unquote.

Today, we are not only talking but stepping the talk with concrete measures.

We all know that trees are the lungs of the planet. They provide oxygen and support life. Very important, they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store them through the photosynthesis process. They are, therefore, vital mitigating agents for climate change. They retain water and prevent erosion and flooding.
The list of benefits of trees and forests is long. They are very much our investment for the future generations. If we do not plant trees, we will soon be living in a world that cannot sustain us. Hence, the task of environment protection is a universal responsibility for one and all.

This tree planting today calls us to pay tribute to our unique natural flora and to our historical rich biodiversity that we need to restore. I would like to highlight that for the purpose of today’s tree planting, we have selected Bois d’éponge, which is an endemic and endangered plant.

**Ladies and gentlemen**

It is a bitter truth that with urbanisation and development, this country has experienced rapid deforestation and the loss of our pristine forest
cover. We have an urgent task ahead. We have no other choice than to reverse the situation. We cannot forget the recent flooding episodes in Mauritius which bear testimony of our vulnerability to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change.

I recognize all efforts which have already been made by my Ministry to plant trees for clean air and create mini-forests across the island. The ongoing tree planting campaign has positively influence the climatic flux based on land breezes. However, I am happy to take the challenge to further increase our green canopy for a greener, cleaner and safer Mauritius, with a special focus on restoring our endemic trees, which represent our unique natural flora and our historical rich biodiversity that we have inherited from God.

It is my firm intention to complete the plantation of
the remaining 70 000 trees by May 2015 instead of the set target of December 2015.

Let me end here by another quote from Nelson Henderson.

I quote “The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.” Unquote.

However, we believe that when tomorrow the coming generations will benefit from the shade, it will remind them of the sacrifices made today by this generation under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister Sir Aneerood Jugnauth and hopefully they will be thankful to all of us.

I thank you all for your kind attention.
J.R.D