

India-Mauritius Global Partnership Forum

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**India and Mauritius – Structuring a New Vision
to Enhance Trade, Industries, Financial Services and
Investment**

By

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**Members of the India Mauritius Trade and Cultural
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**Members of the Business Community of India and
Mauritius**

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning,

It is indeed a great pleasure to address all of you at this India-Mauritius Global Partnership Forum. Let me first extend a warm welcome to the participants who have come from abroad.

As many of you are probably aware, as Minister of Finance and Economic Development, I am due to

deliver the second budget speech of the present Government in a few days. Meeting the expectations of each and every one will surely be a challenge the more so that we are facing an uncertain global economic environment. Brexit is a harsh reminder that the world economy and economic relations between countries are on a challenging new course, where uncertainty rules the day.

However, the India-Mauritius relationship has always been a strong and special one. The visit of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, in March 2015, further cemented that relationship.

Five agreements for cooperation were signed, namely in the fields of Ocean Economy, Culture, Agriculture, Traditional Medicine & Homeopathy and Sea & Air Facilities in Agalega, one of our outer islands. India also extended a line of credit of USD 500 million for the expansion of infrastructure.

One month later, the India-Mauritius Global Partnership Forum was launched to further boost cooperation between India and Mauritius in the fields of trade and arts and culture.

This Partnership Forum is yet another powerful mechanism to build on the mutual trust and the historical and long lasting business relation between our two

countries, which extends across sectors such as investment, trade, culture, education, health, defense and security.

India has always been one of our major trading partners. In 2015, around 18% of our imports were from India. This includes a substantial amount of raw materials.

As our exports to India have historically been rather limited, we are hoping that we will be able to carve a greater share of the Indian import market. We also believe that a strong bilateral trade agreement, which aims at lowering tariffs, amongst others, would be mutually beneficial.

Having said so, I am as convinced as you are that the time is now ripe for a deep reflection on structuring a new vision to further boost Trade and Investment between Mauritius and India.

The foundations have already been laid, last October, through the launching of an office of the Board of Investment in New Delhi.

Mauritius has a lot to offer, both on our own shores and on the African continent. We have successfully diversified our economy from four sectors and we now have more than 10, which are contributing to our GDP. Our economy is resilient and stable. This, coupled with

our political stability and business friendly environment, which stand out in the region, allows us, and our partners, to fully seize the opportunities offered by our strategic location between India and Africa.

The Government's commitment to bringing together the two continents is also reflected in the introduction of the Asia-Africa Air Corridor, which will further improve air access to the continent. In doing so, we are taking the bold steps needed to become a regional aviation hub.

Furthermore, as a member of SADC and COMESA, and as a signatory of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), we offer a wide array of opportunities for investors wishing to use Mauritius as a gateway to Africa and its market, which is projected to expand to \$1.4 trillion by 2020. Our role is set to grow in the near future, driven by the Special Economic Zones which Mauritius is developing, in partnership with African states, in order to enlarge our economic space, drive more cross-border investment and create jobs. This will open up new opportunities for Indian companies to partner with Government and Mauritian businesses.

Mauritius also offers the advantage of being a sound and well-regulated platform for Indian firms looking to increase their presence in Africa. Numerous opportunities exist for setting up regional headquarters in Mauritius to serve the Sub-Saharan African region.

We are widely seen as a reliable and trusted trading partner, offering a transparent legal framework, and access to a highly skilled, multi-lingual work force. This is reflected in various international indices, including the Ease of Doing Business Index, the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance and the Global Competitiveness Index, where Mauritius leads the way in the Sub-Saharan African region.

Present success is, however, no guarantee of a bright future. This is why our country is continually reinventing itself. Visionary reforms, underpinned by a policy to attract foreign talents and expertise, have enhanced business facilitation and improved the overall investment climate. Now, with the implementation of streamlined procedures, an investor can start a business in 3 working days. In addition, there is no minimum capital requirement and a company can now be 100% foreign-owned.

Together, Mauritius and India can contribute to the development of the services economy throughout the region. Sectors of interest include Financial Services, ICT/BPO, the Freeport, Seafood, Agriculture and Food processing, Education, Healthcare and Property Development, amongst others.

Our country has become an International Financial Centre of choice for many global corporates and multinationals. The Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty, which has been reviewed in a spirit of mutual cooperation, will open up new opportunities that will further reaffirm Mauritius as an attractive jurisdiction. We also benefit from a growing network of Double Taxation Avoidance Treaties and Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements with several countries in Africa. Furthermore, the Mauritius International Arbitration Centre is emerging as a regional centre in its own right, with the capacity and expertise to resolve disputes.

In the ICT/BPO sector, the Government is working to boost growth through innovation and Research & Development. I therefore wish to take this opportunity to encourage Indian tech firms to invest and partner with us for the expansion of business activities in this promising industry.

We also invite you to invest in what we firmly believe will be the next pillar of the economic expansion of Mauritius. To fully exploit the huge opportunities provided by our maritime zone of 2.3 million square kilometres, we have adopted a national policy on the Ocean Economy. In the same breath, our Freeport sector offers logistics infrastructure and transshipment facilities, which assist in building supply networks with the ports of SADC and COMESA.

Tourism also remains an essential component of our economy. In a bid to enhance the appeal of the Mauritian destination to wider markets, we are broadening our tourism portfolio to include eco-tourism, medical and wellness tourism, shopping tourism, and cultural and heritage tourism.

Mauritius also strives to cater to the needs of the Indian Film Industry. Our Film Rebate Scheme has attracted the production of some 10 Indian feature films over the past few years, and there are opportunities to set up film studios on the island.

Finally, with over 4,200 startups by end 2015, India is one of the leading startup communities in the world. Together, our two countries can explore new areas of collaboration and transfer of knowledge in the fields of SME, Research & Development, Ocean Knowledge and Smart City developments.

I am confident that the investors present here today will build a strong network in Mauritius and Africa, and I pledge the support of my Ministry for the swift implementation of your projects. I also assure you that the Government of Mauritius will continue to act as a facilitator for the business community.

I strongly believe that this Forum, which bears out our shared commitments to the socio-economic development of our two nations, will help to further stimulate and promote partnership opportunities.

I welcome you all to join us on this exciting journey and to engage in sustainable development.

I wish you a great conference and an equally pleasant stay in Mauritius.

I thank you for your attention.