

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT. DROUPADI MURMU
AT MAHATMA GANDHI INSTITUTE, MAURITIUS**

Moka: 11 March, 2024

It is a great privilege and honour to be present here today at the prestigious Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka on this auspicious day. 12th March is special for both our countries - the day on which the historic Dandi March was led by Mahatma Gandhi in India in 1930, and the date adopted as Mauritius' Independence Day. Allow me to convey my heartfelt wishes and congratulations, as well as from the people of India, to all of you on this joyful occasion.

Dear friends,

Mauritius and India enjoy special and unique ties. Nearly 70 percent of its population is of Indian origin, which has continued to maintain strong links in all spheres with India. It gives me a great sense of pride to see that this island, where the first batch of indentured labourers arrived from India nearly 190 years ago, has been transformed into a strong, prosperous, democratic and modern country. Mauritius is one of Africa's most prosperous and secure countries, and a financial powerhouse.

This impressive transformation is a result of immense struggle and hard work by you and your ancestors in a difficult environment. Initially brought as labourers, the aspirational route towards acquiring stakes in the country's polity and its leadership was long, and indeed very remarkable, with very few parallels in history. The political empowerment of the masses, as emphasized by Mahatma Gandhi ji during his historic transit through Mauritius, has brought dividends for Mauritius, which I could see today. The remarkable strides made by Indian diaspora in Mauritius is a matter of pride not only for us in India but is an example worth emulating for Indians around the world.

मॉरीशस के मेरे प्यारे भाईयों और बहनों,

यहां उपस्थित आप सभी लोगों ने, न केवल अपने दिलों में, बल्कि जीवन के हर क्षेत्र में, भारतीय परंपराओं और संस्कृतियों को जीवित रखकर इस सफलता की कहानी में बहुत महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है। जिस उत्साह और उल्लास के साथ मॉरीशस के लोग महा शिवरात्रि, कवडी, गणेश चतुर्थी, ईद, होली, दिवाली आदि जैसे त्योहार मनाते हैं, वह देखने लायक है। मुझे बताया गया है कि मॉरीशस के कई लोग चारधाम यात्रा के लिए भारत आते हैं। भारत के साथ-साथ, मॉरीशस में भी लोगों ने राम मंदिर प्राण प्रतिष्ठा समारोह पर उत्सव मनाया।

यह स्वाभाविक ही था, कि जनवरी 2023 में इंदौर में प्रवासी भारतीय दिवस में, 500 से अधिक प्रतिनिधियों के साथ, सबसे बड़े प्रतिनिधिमंडलों में से एक, मॉरीशस से आया। हमारे दोनों देशों के बीच विशेष बंधन को संजोने के लिए, मैं आप सभी के प्रति अपना स्नेह व्यक्त करना चाहती हूँ।

Dear friends,

The new Bharat of today is making giant strides in all spheres. It is dynamic, progressive, assertive, and is firmly on the way to becoming one of the top three global economies. This opens up new avenues and opportunities for the youth of Mauritius. I am pleased to announce that with the extension of OCI Card eligibility to Indian origin Mauritians of the 7th generation, many more young Mauritians will be able to reconnect to the land of their ancestors.

India has always stood by Mauritius and Mauritians in the past, and will continue to stand by you in future. Our ties are comprehensive, covering every aspect of cooperation. Our decades-long development partnership is a shining example of India's commitment to contribute towards the developmental journey of Mauritius and enhance the quality of life for common people in Mauritius.

I had the opportunity to travel in the Metro just before my arrival here, and I was moved by the special gesture of the Government of Mauritius

of naming the station at Reduit after Mahatma Gandhi – as well as depicting the famous Dandi March at the station, that holds special significance to both our countries.

Similarly, our economic ties have grown from strength to strength. We are delighted to have signed the first Free Trade Agreement with Mauritius, a first for African Countries, when the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement was signed in 2021. This will not only boost bilateral trade and economic ties, but will also help us expand our economic linkages with Africa, through Mauritius.

Defence and maritime ties form another important pillar of our special relations, with India extending whatever support, Mauritius needs, be it provisioning of defence platforms, deputation of officials, capacity building initiatives, or HADR support.

Recent initiatives such as the launch of UPI and Rupay card, inauguration of projects in Agalega, supply of generic medicines and launch of several community development projects are further examples of our continuing development partnership.

Let me reassure you all that we cherish our ties with Mauritius and we will continue to do so with the same care and affection, to ensure that the special bonds between our two countries are strengthened in the time to come.

As India continues to intensify its commitment towards this special relationship, I use this forum today to request the Mahatma Gandhi Institute to provide more avenues for the Mauritian youth to connect with India - not only culturally and linguistically, but also by providing them with educational and business opportunities. I also request the various language speaking unions to work even harder to keep up the good work in terms of preserving and promoting Indian languages in Mauritius. India will always welcome you with open arms and a warm heart.

I thank everyone at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for the gracious reception and offer my heartfelt greetings to all of you on your National Day.

Jai Hind! Jai Mauritius!

Thank you!