

STATEMENT RE: PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO MAURITIUS

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE): Sir, as the House is aware, Mauritius and India have enjoyed a very close and traditional friendship. This has been continuously fostered through visits at the highest level. I was invited by Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, the Prime Minister of Mauritius to be the Chief Guest on the occasion of the first Independence Day celebrations in the new millennium. It is symbolic that 12 March was chosen by the leaders and people of Mauritius as their Independence Day to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi Salt March. This is testimony to their commitment to the values of Mahatma Gandhi and friendship with India.

My visit from 10-12 March provided an opportunity to renew contacts at the highest level with Mauritius and to sustain the momentum in our special relationship which is deeply rooted in the strong foundation of linkages of religion, language, culture and our shared civilisational heritage.

During my stay in Mauritius, I had meetings with the President, the Prime Minister and the Vice-President of Mauritius as well as the Speaker the Assembly and leaders of political parties. The talks further widened the deep understanding and commonality of approach on bilateral and international issues which characterises our relations. It has always been our endeavour to share our expertise and experience with the Government and people of Mauritius. During my visit, three Agreements on bilateral cooperation in the field of trade and commerce, information technology and supply of coastal surveillance equipment with a credit of U.S. \$ 9 million and a Memorandum of Understanding in the field of oceanography were signed. Through these Agreements, our cooperative ties in these important areas will be further strengthened.

It was also announced during the visit that direct air links will be established between Port Louis and Chennai. This has been greatly appreciated by the people of Mauritius.

During the visit, I had the opportunity to inaugurate the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture in Mauritius which has been set up with assistance from our Indian Council of Cultural Relations. This new complex will further boost our bilateral cultural exchanges. The Centre is also expected to become a hub for cultural activities for the benefit of the Indian community in this region.

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Alongwith Prime Minister Ramgoolam, I also had the privilege to lay the foundation of an educational-cum-cultural institution named after Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore at Ilot village in the Northern part of Mauritius. The Government of India would contribute US \$1 million towards implementing this project. A civic reception was organised on this occasion. Recalling our historic bonds, I assured the people of Mauritius that India will always stand by the people of Mauritius in their hour of need.

The visit helped to further cement our bilateral relations which are indeed a shining example of the close and deep mutual understanding between the two countries. It would be the policy of the Government to continue to build upon this relationship in the future.

(ends)

श्री श्यामाचरण शुक्ल (महासमुन्द) : हम तो आपके हिन्दी के भाषण सुनने के लिए तर्सते रहते हैं। कभी-कभी अंग्रेजी के बाद हिन्दी में भी बोल दिया करिये।

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY (CALCUTTA NORTH WEST): Sir, in addition to this, the President of the United States Mr. Bill Clinton is also visiting India.

MR. SPEAKER: How is it related to this?

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY (CALCUTTA NORTH WEST): We express our total good wishes that the trip be successful. We are all eagerly waiting for the trip. We hope, this will be a memorable occasion and that Indo-US relations will get a new direction.