

ADDRESS TO THE RODRIGUES REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

SPEECH BY HON PRAVIND KUMAR JUGNAUTH

PRIME MINISTER

TUESDAY 30 AUGUST 2022 AT 1030 HRS

(HON PRIME MINISTER TO ARRIVE AT 1030 HRS)

**VENUE: REGIONAL ASSEMBLY,
PASSENGER TERMINAL BUILDING,
PORT MATHURIN**

Mr Chairperson,

The Chief Commissioner,

The Minority Leader,

**The Members of the Rodrigues Regional
Assembly,**

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good Morning.

I wish first of all to thank the Chief Commissioner for inviting me, during our meeting in my office in March, to visit Rodrigues at my convenience.

I wish to thank the people of Rodrigues for the very warm welcome they have extended to me and to my delegation since our arrival on Sunday. Indeed, I cherish Rodrigues very much and as I said in my speech at the airport, Rodrigues is close to my heart.

It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I address this august Assembly following the regional elections held on 27 February 2022. I seize this opportunity to congratulate the elected members on both sides of the House and to also convey my best wishes to the

Regional Assembly in fulfilling the aspirations of our Rodriguan brothers and sisters.

Mr Chairperson,

My last visit to Rodrigues was in the context of the celebration of the 18th Anniversary of the Autonomy of Rodrigues in 2020. Since then, I could not visit my Rodriguan brothers and sisters due to the then prevailing sanitary restrictions in view of the outbreak of COVID-19 in Mauritius and Rodrigues. Now that the borders are no longer closed and the portfolio of Rodrigues being high on my agenda, I have made it a duty to visit the island and address the Regional Assembly.

Since my arrival, I have had the opportunity:

- (i) to attend the opening ceremony of the new Departure Lounge and Duty-Free Shop at Plaine Corail Airport and lay the foundation stone of the Rodrigues Duty Free Paradise Warehouse and Office Complex;
- (ii) to lay the foundation stone of the Bank of Mauritius Building at Port Mathurin; and
- (iii) to launch the MBC Channels and the CSU Radio Programme at Citronelle.

Yesterday, I had a very fruitful session with the Chief Commissioner and Members of the Executive Council. We discussed about priority sectors like

water, tourism, the airport, port, ICT sector, renewable energy, and bio agriculture.

It is a fact that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the economy of Rodrigues. With the resurgence of cases of COVID-19 in Mauritius as from Friday 05 March 2021, we had taken the decision to suspend all flights to Rodrigues as from Sunday 07 March 2021 so as to keep the island free from COVID-19. Government has been very sensitive to the plight of our Rodriguan brothers and sisters who were stranded in Mauritius due to the suspension of flights to Rodrigues. To that effect, financial assistance was provided to all those residents of Rodrigues who were stranded in Mauritius and who were in dire need.

Accordingly, around Rs 2,100,000 had been disbursed to 210 heads of households. Moreover, pending the resumption of commercial flights, 19 repatriation flights to Rodrigues had been effected and around 1,175 passengers stranded in Mauritius have been repatriated for the period 01 July to 24 December 2021.

With a view to combatting the virus and putting the economy of Rodrigues back on track, the Ministry of Health and Wellness had several visits to the island to provide further technical assistance to the medical team regarding the implementation of treatment protocols and contingency planning.

As you know, **Mr Chairperson**, Rodrigues has witnessed unparalleled development during the periods when late Sir Anerood Jugnauth had been the Prime Minister. Be it the development of roads and other infrastructure, social amenities, health services, education facilities or law and order issues.

To follow in the footsteps of late Sir Anerood Jugnauth and to demonstrate my commitment for the continued development of Rodrigues, I have, in spite of all economic difficulties, already initiated action on the implementation of various developmental projects, namely the availability of fibre optic for high speed internet, the re-designing of the port infrastructure, the first TechnoPark at Baladirou, the

future construction of a new runway at the airport of Plaine Corail, amongst others, in collaboration with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to modernise the economic infrastructure of the island and to further improve the standard of living of my Rodriguan brothers and sisters.

To that effect, Government has provided in this financial year, an amount of Rs 4.79 billion to Rodrigues, of which some Rs 4.63 billion in the budget of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, Rs 100 million from the COVID-19 Projects Development Fund for the funding of track roads and Rs 60 million from the National Environment and

Climate Change Fund for the implementation of environmental projects.

In order to ensure that all the appropriate conditions prevail for the sustainable socio-economic development of the island, there was an urgent need to review and update the ten-year Sustainable and Integrated Development Plan for Rodrigues Report of 2009 in the light of the changing environment of the island.

This study had as major objective, to develop strategies, programmes, projects and propose policies to be implemented in each sector to make Rodrigues become a sustainable island.

The aim of such an integrated plan is to contribute to employment creation, poverty reduction, and improved standard of living while making sustainable use and conservation of the environmental and natural resources of Rodrigues.

To that effect, funds have been made available by the European Union under the Technical Cooperation Facility for the updating of the following documents:

- ten-year Strategic Plan, the Sustainable Integrated Development Plan for Rodrigues along with a Five Year costed Action Plan;
- Tourism Development Plan for Rodrigues which dates back to 2001; and

- Rodrigues Physical Development Strategy and Land Use Plan dating to 2010.

The Contract for this assignment has been awarded to COWI Belgium and the final deliverables are expected to be submitted by December 2022.

Mr Chairperson,

Improving water production, storage, and distribution with a view to enabling all Rodriguans to have access to adequate water on a more regular basis remains a priority for my Government.

In fact, my Government has always provided full support to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to

implement various measures and projects towards solving water issues in the island, including construction of five desalination plants, setting up of the *Observatoire de l'Eau*, Development of Rodrigues Water Resources Strategy and the definition of Priority Action Plan, amongst others.

Moreover, in order to further address the long-standing water shortage in the island, Rs 1 billion will be invested in desalination plants by the Mauritius Investment Corporation. The aim of this measure is to bridge the gap between water supply and demand in Rodrigues and will comprise construction of desalination plants which will be strategically located

at Anse Quittor, Baie Malgache, Pointe Venus, Pointe Cotton, and Songe.

Accordingly, the Rodrigues Public Utilities Corporation has been launched on 23 July 2022, which will be the executive arm of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly in the field of water production. The modalities for the financing and implementation of the additional desalination plants project are being worked out by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and the Mauritius Investment Corporation.

Moreover, an amount of Rs 36.3 million has been provided in the budget of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly for the construction and upgrading of

reservoirs, dams, and boreholes. Also, the rainwater harvesting scheme for all eligible households will be renewed.

Mr Chairperson,

As part of the transformational development of the island, a new runway at Plaine Corail Airport will be constructed, enabling the development and the diversification of its economic activities. Thus, this landmark project will further improve air connectivity, boost tourism development, and significantly enhance socio-economic conditions in Rodrigues. Government is fully committed to implement this strategic project. Negotiations are underway by the

Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development with a view to contracting a loan to finance the construction of the runway.

Additionally, a Technopark is being constructed at Baladirou to promote entrepreneurship and employment in the field of ICT. The contract for the construction of the Technopark project was awarded to Laxmanbhai & Co (Mauritius) Ltd on 08 January 2021 for the amount of Rs 255 million and construction works have already started in February 2021 with a duration of 18 months. An amount of Rs 125 million is being provided for the completion of this project in early 2023.

Moreover, to further boost up economic development in the island, it is also imperative to address the issue of the cost of freight between Mauritius and Rodrigues. In this respect, the 20 percent rebate on the cost of freight between Mauritius and Rodrigues announced last year has been maintained. To increase competitiveness of local manufacturing products, exports from Rodrigues to Mauritius will also benefit from the Freight Rebate Scheme and the Trade Promotion and Marketing Scheme managed by the Economic Development Board.

Mr Chairperson,

An amount of Rs 20 million has also been provided under the budget of the Ministry of Agro Industry and Food Security for the operationalisation of a slaughter house. The existing building at Baie Diamant will be refurbished and equipped to allow the slaughtering of cattle, goat, and sheep according to norms.

An additional amount of Rs 5 million has also been earmarked under the budget of the latter Ministry for the extension of all schemes for the agricultural and livestock sector to Rodrigues.

Furthermore, with a view to supporting the tourism industry in Rodrigues, the subsidy on Special

Rodrigues Holiday Package and Subsidy on Airfare has been extended up to September 2023.

Mr Chairperson,

These key game-changing projects and initiatives are expected to trigger major financial, socio-economic, and cultural development of Rodrigues with a dynamic economic growth and promote a shift from a traditional economy to a modern one.

The current economic and sanitary crises have brought to the fore the need to restore competitiveness and reinforce inclusiveness. The Assembly will agree that the future we face is definitely a very challenging one but our most

important of assets being our human resources, we are confident to overcome the obstacles and pursue in our resolve to build a better future for our citizens in all the islands of the Republic of Mauritius.

I wish the Regional Assembly all success in its endeavours.

Thank you for your kind attention.
