

CLOSING CEREMONY

Closing Address
by the Hon. Basant Rai
Minister of Youth and Sports

It is my pleasure and privilege to address you at the closing session of the Commonwealth Seminar held on the bold and imaginative theme of "Pluralism and Development in Island Communities". It takes a great deal of courage to mount a Seminar on such a sensitive issue and I express my warmest congratulations to the Commonwealth Secretariat and, in particular, to Dr. Maraj, the Commonwealth Assistant Secretary-General and to Mr. P.K. Patnaik, Director of the Youth Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat, for this praiseworthy initiative.

I am sorry that I could not be in your midst for the opening of this Seminar. I was then on mission to India, as a member of the delegation headed by the Prime Minister, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. As this Seminar was on the theme of development, you will be pleased to learn that the economic mission has resulted in substantial assistance for the economic development of Mauritius. We also had the opportunity of attending the World Hindi Convention held in Nagpur. I am thankful to my colleague, Hon. Jean Ah-Chuen, who was in charge of the Ministry of Youth and Sports during my absence, for having presided over the opening ceremony. I am also thankful to the Prime Minister for having done us the honour of opening the Seminar.

Since my return, I have met on various occasions the officials of the Commonwealth Secretariat, the consultants and the participants in the Seminar, and I must say how happy I have been to meet all of you.

This seminar has provided for the participants an excellent opportunity to exercise their minds about two important problems facing island communities. I am happy to note that the seminar is the beginning of an effort which will be extended by increasing interaction among island communities in a variety of fields.

The Seminar has also provided us with the opportunity of sharing our experience for about a fortnight in an atmosphere of brotherhood and comradeship. It has fostered a great degree of understanding among all of you, thereby strengthening the bond of friendship and unity among the island members of the Commonwealth. However, the objectives of the Seminar can only be reached by the willingness and the endeavour on the part of everyone of us to try to translate our ideas into action. Suggestions have been made regarding island communities' forming a common front on the international plane, multilateral and bilateral trade agreements, common research in the utilization of the resources of the sea, and better bargaining for the price of our primary products. I am sure that all the suggestions made at the Seminar will receive due consideration.

Gone are the days of isolation, for no nation is an island unto itself. We are fortunate to be able to meet and discuss our problems in a spirit of cooperation, which is the key to development. As has been pointed out during the course of this Seminar, we do not possess rich minerals in our island communities, yet we have tremendous human resources and development can only have a meaning if we can effectively mobilise and utilize our manpower. In this respect young people are the most important component of our labour force and this is why the accent is placed on youth.

I am happy to note that much consideration has been given to the dimensions of pluralism and its influences on the national, social and economic development of island communities. I can only hope to see the fruition of all these deliberations and decisions materialised in the near future in the respective national programmes and plans of the island members of the Commonwealth.

We have been deeply touched by the confidence placed in us by the Commonwealth Secretariat in choosing Mauritius as the venue for the Seminar. We can assure all of you that no effort has been spared by us to make your stay in our island a pleasant one. I am pleased to learn that you have enjoyed the visits planned for you in different parts of the island and that you have made fruitful contacts with a large number of Mauritian youth leaders.

Islands like Mauritius are transistor continents. They are natural laboratories, where men of different colours and creeds carry out a wide range of experiments in their search for the ideal formula which will weld them into happy and prosperous nations. They are aware that great care is required and that certain errors may provoke disintegration. Let us hope that all of us will succeed in our struggle to achieve unity in diversity. If our experiments help to show the world the way to peace and progress, our efforts will not have been in vain.

I must thank the Commonwealth Secretariat for its kind gesture in making grants aimed at promoting the participation of young Mauritians in the development of this country.

I express my congratulations and hearty thanks to Dr. Maraj and the staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat for their excellent work; to the Hon. Jagatsingh, Professor Braithwaite, Mr. Napier and Mr. McRobie for their inspiring and thought-provoking lead papers; to all the observers and participants for the sustained interest they have taken in the subjects discussed at the seminar; to the University of Mauritius and in particular Dr. Swaisland for the facilities and valuable support provided to us; to the Mauritius National Youth Council and the Youth Federations for their close cooperation; to the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute for the facilities provided to us for the opening ceremony; to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation and the Press for their extensive coverage of the Seminar; to the Police for their valuable assistance; and to all the officers who have contributed to the success of the Seminar.

I now declare the Seminar closed. I wish to all of you, who have travelled a very long way to come to our shores, bon voyage and all the best and the greatest success, when you go back home, in the implementation of the recommendations made in the Seminar.