Address by His Excellency Mr. Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK, President of the Republic of Mauritius, on the occasion of the Book Launch of Collection Maurice, on Thursday 20 November at 18 00 hours, Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel, Port Louis

Mr. Cassam Uteem, former President of the Republic
The Deputy High Commissioner of the Republic of South Africa
Mr. Rama Poonoosamy, Director of IM MEDIA and members of the Staff
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening!

It’s such a pleasure to be in your midst to-night and to participate in the launching of the 26th title of Collection Maurice.

I wish to thank Rama Poonoosamy for his invitation.

I would also like to congratulate him for his excellent initiative in promoting the creative and literary works of our local writers.

I had a look at Collection Maurice over the last 21 years.

I must say that I have been pleasantly struck by the variety of the themes which I found both exciting and challenging.

This year's choice is perhaps one of the most felicitous and wittiest of them all.

“Bouquet de Saveurs”, so very French in its connotations.

In English, “Dining and Wining”, so British and to the point.

But surely, the cherry on the cake is the Mauritian Kreol Palé Oulé which I think is a masterpiece in its own right!

This year's “Collection Maurice” is for me an invitation to a banquet.

When I open the book the first thing that greets me is Rama's “Sans se saoûler”.

As you may or may not know, “être 21” in our number language means “être saoûl”.
And Rama points out that the Immedia team produced the 21 titles of “La Collection Maurice” “sans se saouler”.

Maybe after this launch, Rama and the Immedia team could afford to be “21”.

They deserve it!

Rama's welcome is like an “entrée”.

The appetizer is served by Jeanine Trublet-Descroizilles who is a self-confessed “gourmande incorrigible”, who lives to eat and as she says:

“Je flaire, j’attaque, je dévore, j’avale et je déguste la vie en la croquant à belles dents jour après jour.”

This celebration “de la gourmandise” sets the tone and the mood for the rest of the book which is a real “festin” served by 30 Mauritian authors in French, English and Mauritian Creole “à s’en lecher les babines”.

After savouring some of the dishes, I have come to the conclusion that the art of writing has many things in common with the art of cooking.

Authors are not very different from chefs. “Zot fer enn zistwar kouma fer enn bon pla!”

Only that whereas a chef uses meats, veggies and secret recipes as in “A la poursuite de l’epice perdue” of Melhia Bissiere, an author uses words, sentences and figures of speech.

Instead of herbs and spices, an author uses adjectives and invectives.

The chef uses fire and heat to prepare his dishes, the writer uses passion and imagination.

And just like a chef uses his art and science, the author uses his craft and experience to create a work that he hopes others will enjoy reading.

And recipes elaborated by a great chef and creations of a great author can last a lifetime and in many cases beyond the grave.

This 21st Collection Maurice evokes what I call “L’Ile Maurice à Table” or “A Taste of Mauritius”.

It gives pride of place to Mauritian cuisine.

Mauritian dishes include not only Indian, Chinese, Creole, English and French dishes, they also include Italian pastas and pizzas and a fusion of different cuisines.
To give you a flavour of the variety, the specificity and the cosmopolitanism of this “Bouquet de Saveurs”, I cannot do better than quote brief extracts from a few of the authors:

Like the others, Jean Claude Andou creates the setting:

“C'était à la tombée de la nuit que la rue aux milles saveurs se transformait petit à petit, montrant son vrai visage...

Dans l'air, les fumets des épices et légumes sautés se propageaient alors que d'agréables grésillements de friture et frémissements de fricassées s'élevaient...

La section de la cuisine indienne faisait saliver avec ses odeurs de manteg chauffé et de légumes et épices roussis.

On pouvait y déguster un riz safrané, un kalia poul, ou un briyani pwason. Il y avait aussi les incontournables et savoureux farata et ti-pouri, accompagnés de légumes et d'achards que les diners dévoraient...

Les amoureux de la cuisine créole avaient le choix entre un riz blanc accompagné d'une fricassée de lentilles, rougay de viande salée ou de saucisses et un bouillon de poisson, tektek ou crabes...”

There follows an interesting description of the foods that Mauritians consume including fast food together with the utensils used, the ingredients and the mode of preparation.

But let me continue the “degustation” of Mauritian cuisine from another author, this time from Ramesh Ramdoyal in our national language.

The setting is a Chinese restaurant in the 1950’s:

Like other authors, Ramesh Ramdoyal creates the atmosphere:

“Nou swiv Gros Piti dan so lakwizinn, nou trouv kat gro krab ankor vivan atasé avek lakord koko ar lipié latab. Shiv swazir dé krab ki pli fringan ki lezot pou nou bouyon.

Apré apepré vin minit, Gros Piti aparet avek dé gran bol an porslenn blan ranpli ek bouyon krab, so parfin mont avek lavaper vag lor vag, ranpli narinn, parfim kabinn, penetré bann sens, inond ou lekor, koumadir ou dan enn bin lavaper.

Mo versé mo get dan mo bol. Kifer mo koz manti, bouyon-la ti kouma enn ti lamer an minyatir...”
Unfortunately constraints of time do not allow me to do justice to all the authors who fully deserve to be congratulated for their imaginative, sometimes highly unexpected but always captivating short stories.

But now I have to touch on what I call Mauritian exotic dishes.

There are many references to “vinday ourit, pwason sounouk, bomli sek, kari trip, salmi tang, satini gato pima” and so on.

There is also “kari viscieres”, that I know means little to you.

But if I call it in our incomparable Creole “kari andan”, some of you will certainly know what it’s all about!

Sedley Assonne even relishes “Dodo roti”, miles beneath the earth’s crust!

There’s also exotic Mauritian fish, but beware some can be poisonous and often deadly.

Like in Dini Lallah’s “Boultang”, a superb “suspense” short story.

We have so far been taken on a guided tour of Mauritian cuisine. Our hosts have been creative, versatile, witty and entertaining.

Then without warning, we are plunged into the underworld of a Mauritian port-side “Taverne” with “Kari Disan”.

Our host at the “taverne”, as you most probably have guessed is Ananda Devi, “égale à elle-même.”

But there’s more to this Collection than only food.

Almost all the authors have been able to weave a human interest in their stories.

Food is intimately linked with culture and tradition.

Through the stories, you learn about multicultural Mauritius, its people and their rich and diverse heritage.

In “Até Anvil” of Kavinien Karupudayyan, we accompany “Até Anvil” all the way from Port Louis to Surinam to organize the preparation of the traditional “set kari” in a “mariaz Madras”.

Our “culture métissée” is also reflected in our “cuisine métissée”.

This is brought out in many texts as in the following extract from “Savoureusement exotique” of Jocelyn Siou:
“Je crois qu’à Maurice, chaque culture ancestrale a son riz spécial. Certains ont leur briyani ou leur riz cantonais, d’autres ont leur pilau, leur kichri ou leur salade de riz.

La culture Mauricienne métissée prend le meilleur de toutes les cultures. Dans la cuisine créole il y a le riz roc-en-bol.”

The theme “Dining, Wining” comes up in all the stories, but although they give pride of place to Mauritian cuisine, they are also sometimes woven around food in other parts of the world -- in Ireland, the traditional food served on St Patrick’s day; in UK and other parts of the world.

Lindsay Dookhit even takes us to a culinary adventure on our outer island Saint Brandon.

We also learn the way the dishes are prepared, and even also the peculiar way they are sometimes eaten.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As I continued reading, I began to feel hungry.

As I read on I became hungrier.

There are books I read at night when I can’t sleep.

They are better than sleeping pills.

After two pages I fall asleep!

The 21st edition of La Collection Maurice should be read before dinner. The stories make you salivate.

Again, I must congratulate Rama Poonoosamy and his Immedia team to have taken us to the 21st title of Collection Maurice, a record for any literary collection since our island was discovered centuries ago.

‘Kudos’ to all the Mauritian authors here and abroad, who have contributed to Collection Maurice, “c’est une fierté pour notre pays”. Bravo, chers amis, et bonne continuation car la littérature Mauricienne compte sur vous.

Je tiens également à féliciter les sponsors qui, depuis des années, soutiennent la Collection Maurice...

It’s now my pleasure to officially launch “Bouquet de saveurs – Dining and wining – Palé oulé” which I strongly commend to all our readers.

I thank you for your attention.