



SPEECH

**His Excellency Mr Dharambeer Gokhool G.C.S.K.,
President of the Republic of Mauritius**

**EVENT: Launching of the Book- ‘Fighting Injustice for Indian
Indentured Immigrants: A Tribute to Adolphe de Plevitz
(1837–1893)’**

**VENUE: Subramania Bharati Lecture Theatre-
Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI), Moka**

DATE: Saturday 08 November 2025

TIME: 10.50 hrs

Protocol

Mr. Sukhend Ramdass, Chairperson of the Apravasi Ghat Trust Fund,
and Mr. Satyendra Peerthum,

Dr. Anjalee Chintamunnee, Chairperson of the Hindi Speaking Union

Dr. Sarita Boodhoo, G.O.S.K.,

Mr. Yvan Martial,

Mr. Pahlad Ramsurrun,

Mr. Geeanduth Gopee,

Distinguished guests

Dear Friends

Introduction

Good Morning and Thank you for your kind invitation.

It is with great pleasure that I join you today for the launch of the book entitled *“Fighting Injustice for Indian Indentured Immigrants: A Tribute to Adolphe de Plevitz”* authored by Mr. Geeanduth Gopee.

This is not simply the presentation of a book. It is a moment of historical remembrance, a rediscovery of conscience, and a reaffirmation of justice - values that have shaped the soul of Mauritius.

Before me, you have had the pleasure of listening to the previous speakers who are not only fond of history but are also keen observers, researchers and writers’ historical themes and events.

They know the importance of history and historicity.

They have provided us with invaluable insights about the invaluable contribution of Adolph de Plevitz in shaping the destiny of our country.

Adolphe de Plevitz

In my remarks, I shall try to avoid overlapping and repetition as far as possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is a saying which goes as follows:

“The only thing necessary for men of evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.”

To overcome adversity, physical courage is not enough; it requires great courage, first to reject exploitation and humiliation imposed on oneself by others and to come forward to stand by the side of those who are helpless and in need of compassion.

Adolphe de Plevitz formed part of the colonial elite and therefore belonged to the Privileged Class.

But he faced prosecution, physical assault and conspiracy. He suffered injustice and humility.

And in a rare act of moral courage, he decided to side with good and oppose evil.

Because at heart he was a humanist and an upholder of truth and justice.

Between 1826 and 1910, more than 462,800 Indian and non-Indian immigrants arrived in Mauritius. They built our economy, shaped our culture, and transformed our island into one of the leading sugar-producing colonies in the world.

Yet their lives were marked by hardship, repression, and relentless surveillance.

The Labour Law No. 31 of 1867 and the vagrancy ordinances gave planters and police the power to control every aspect of workers' lives. Between 1861 and 1871, more than 200,000 immigrants and Indo-Mauritians were arrested for "vagrancy" or "illegal absence."

It was within a climate of fear and repression that Adolphe de Plevitz and the thousands who followed him found the courage to act.

In 1871, he drafted and submitted to Governor Sir Hamilton Gordon the famous de Plevitz Petition, signed by over 9,400 Indian immigrants. It was the first collective act of defiance against the injustices of the indenture system - a document that gave voice to the voiceless and restored dignity to those who had been dehumanized.

Their petition led to the Police Commission of Inquiry in 1872 and, later, the Royal Commission of 1875, whose findings confirmed the truth of de Plevitz's claims.

After 18 months of investigation, the Commission concluded that the allegations of injustice and cruelty were well-founded. This moment marked the first great victory of conscience over colonial power, and it altered the course of Mauritian history.

Adolphe de Plevitz, a man of German origin who lived in Mauritius for only about a decade, left behind a moral legacy that has endured for generations.

Adolphe de Plevitz was more than a reformer; he was a humanist ahead of his time, guided by moral conviction. He faced persecution, physical assault, and conspiracy, yet he never abandoned the cause of justice.

He reminds us that true leadership is not about privilege, but about moral courage - the willingness to confront oppression and defend truth, even when it is unpopular or dangerous.

The author's contribution

I shall now turn to the author himself and his remarkable effort in bringing to light, for this generation and the generations to come, the story of a courageous man and the values he embodied.

This book is both scholarly and deeply human, a rare and valuable attempt to deepen our understanding of de Plevitz's life and the age in which he lived. It highlights two essential dimensions of his legacy: the man himself, and his actions.

Thoroughly researched and written in a style which make for pleasant reading.

What makes this book particularly compelling is the author's personal journey of discovery and inspiration to write about de Plevitz.

Mr. Gopee, a member of the Association of Mauritian Writers for over two decades, first heard about Adolphe de Plevitz during one of the

Association's meetings. A fellow member recommended that they read a biography of de Plevitz and that simple suggestion changed the direction of his intellectual journey.

When he discovered the story of de Plevitz - a man who confronted the injustices of the plantocracy and Franco-Mauritian elite, and who fought for the dignity of both slaves and Indian immigrants - he felt a profound connection with the journey of his own family and ancestors.

He realised, as he often says, that he had never been taught this part of history at school.

I open a parenthesis here to say a few words about the importance of History.

Those who do not know their history are like a ship without a rudder.

(Ceux qui ne connaissent pas leur histoire sont comme un navire sans gouvernail.)

It is important that we arouse the same kind of curiosity among our younger generation for history that inspired Mr. Gopee to delve deeper.

That discovery became a mission. Over more than five years, he worked with dedication and discipline to research, document, and write this book - a true labour of love and scholarship.

This is not a work of fiction; it is a true story, built upon facts, figures, archival records, and illustrations.

It stands as a guide for the younger generation - to learn from history, to recognise injustice, and to act against it.

As the author notes on the back cover, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

This book is a source of inspiration for all who believe in truth, fairness, and human rights - for those who, like de Plevitz, are prepared to challenge powerful forces in defence of progress.

The Man behind the Book

But who is the man behind this book - Mr. Geeanduth Gopee?

He is, above all, an exemplary citizen and civil servant whose life has been devoted to public service and to the moral and intellectual development of our society.

Coming from a modest family background, he has risen through merit, discipline, and integrity to occupy some of the most responsible positions in the Mauritian civil service.

Mr. Gopee served with distinction as **Director of the Mauritius Audit Bureau (MAB)**, where he upheld the highest standards of accountability and transparency, and later as **Director General of the Office of Public Sector Governance (OPSG)**, where he symbolized integrity and good leadership.

Throughout his long career, he has remained untouched by controversy - his record is unblemished, his conduct honourable, his reputation impeccable.

Even in retirement, he continues to contribute meaningfully to national life: as a thinker, writer, and mentor.

He epitomizes the revered class of civil servants whose ethos of public service does not end with their retirement from employment.

His books on **corporate governance**, including “*Corporate Governance - The Unfinished Revolution*,” as well as works on **History and Self-management**, reflect a lifelong commitment to ethics and excellence.

A respected member of the Association of Writers of Mauritius for over two decades, Mr. Gopee has earned the esteem of his peers for his intellectual honesty and social insight. He writes not for fame or favour, but from conviction - to share knowledge, to provoke reflection, and to inspire improvement.

In “*Fighting Injustice for Indian Indentured Immigrants*,” he combines the historian’s precision with the humanist’s empathy.

Mr. Gopee’s book reminds us that **history is not only about the past**. It is a **mirror that reflects who we are today** and **who we aspire to be**. It calls upon all Mauritians, especially our youth, to embrace justice as a living value and to see conscience as the foundation of progress.

Through this book, Mr. Gopee has rendered justice to a man who fought for justice itself.

This is a work that every Mauritian will cherish - a book you will love, because it speaks not only to intellect but also to the heart.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In reviving the legacy of Adolphe de Plevitz, Mr. Geeanduth Gopee has given our nation a gift - a work that **bridges** history, conscience, and solidarity beyond identity.

This book is being launched only days after we celebrated the **191st anniversary of the arrival of Indian indentured labourers on 2 November 2025**- a day of remembrance and gratitude.

At the *Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site*, we honoured their courage and resilience.

Today, through this book, we honour also those who defended their rights and fought for their dignity. In doing so, we keep their memory alive and relevant to the present.

I extend my warmest congratulations to the author for this outstanding contribution to **Mauritian historiography**, and to the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) for hosting this memorable event.

May this book inspire us all **to uphold justice** wherever it is threatened, and to honour, through knowledge and compassion, the men and women who made Mauritius the *Star and Key of the Indian Ocean*.

Thank you.