



SPEECH

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

**EVENT: NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2025 -
“MENTAL WELLBEING FOR ALL”**

VENUE: IGCIC AUDITORIUM, PHOENIX

DATE: 25 OCTOBER 2025

TIME: 17:30 HOURS

Protocol

Honourable Ministers, Junior Ministers and MPs

His Excellency Shri Anurag Srivastava, High Commissioner of India

Excellencies- Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps

Respected officials of the Ministry of Health and Wellness; the IGCIC-ICCR and the High Commission of India

Mr. Manish Domah, President of the Abhyas School of Yoga

Esteemed representatives of government and private-sector organisations

Respected Speakers, Experts and Participants,

Distinguished Guests,

Members of the media,

All Protocol Observed

Introduction

Good evening and thank you for inviting me in your midst.

Our progress is often measured by how much we produce, how fast we grow, or how technologically advanced we become.

Yet, it is my conviction that the true measure of a nation's progress lies in something far quieter but profound: the state of mind and the overall well-being of its people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking the organisers and all participants for your invitation and for giving me the opportunity, as President of the Republic, to address you as we conclude this national conference on mental health.

I understand that today's event is on the theme "Access to Services – Mental Health in Catastrophes and Emergencies", - an initiative of the

Abhyas School of Yoga in collaboration with the IGCIC- ICCR and the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

I commend the organisers for this laudable initiative, as the theme “Mental Health” connects with a contemporary concern in many parts of the world where societies are confronted with complex and multiple political, economic, technological and social challenges, which are impacting on the health and well-being of people and which require urgent reflections and concerted actions.

The subject covers a vast and comprehensive spectrum of issues relating to mental health.

The speakers, who have been chosen with great care, possess enormous expertise and experience, and I have no doubt that their valuable inputs will help us better understand and deal with issues related to mental health and well-being.

I commend the work that the Abhyas School of Yoga has carried out across Mauritius over the past years— grassroots initiatives in villages, specialised programs for children with disabilities, prisoners, and individuals recovering from substance abuse; yoga, counselling, and collaboration with educational institutions.

I would now like to share my own reflections which I hope will contribute meaningfully to the collective understanding that has been nurtured here today.

Statistics: Local and Global

The figures are well-known and alarming:

- Globally, over one billion people live with a mental health condition, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME).

- According to the American Psychological Association, stigma surrounding mental health prevents up to 83% of people living with mental health conditions from seeking help.
- Each year, more than 720,000 people die by suicide, with over 70% of these deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries.
- Yet, in more than three-quarters of these countries, people with mental health conditions remain untreated, underscoring a vast and persistent treatment gap.
- In Mauritius, approximately 100,000 people are affected by mental health issues or substance use disorders.
- In 2022 alone, there were over 80,000 psychiatric consultations recorded across our hospitals, health centres, and clinics.
- In 2023, Brown Sequard Hospital treated over 2,700 patients. The most common conditions were: Schizophrenia, Mental and behavioural disorders due to multiple drug use and other psychoactive substances, and depression.

I would like to pay my tribute to all healthcare professionals who dedicate themselves tirelessly to the care of those living with mental health conditions, often under challenging circumstances.

- Just last Tuesday, *L'Express* highlighted the phenomenon of “quiet cracking” in the workplace, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This silent erosion of energy, motivation, and engagement is triggered by stress, lack of recognition, or misalignment with values, and is leading to emotional exhaustion and reduced productivity.

These are not just numbers - they represent real lives and real struggles. And these figures do not reflect the full reality, as many cases go unreported and families bear the collateral consequences in silence.

Access to Services: Mental Health in Catastrophes and Emergencies

All of these realities underscore the urgent need for human-centered support and coordinated mental health management across every sector of society.

Mauritius is not immune to these challenges, particularly in times of catastrophes and emergencies.

It is therefore fitting that the theme of this conference, “Access to Services - Mental Health in Catastrophes and Emergencies,” is not just a slogan, but a call for collective reflection, evidence-based planning, and multistakeholder collaboration to ensure that timely and effective mental health support reaches those who need it most.

Stereotypes

One thing that both science and traditional wisdom agree on is that mental health cannot improve through big slogans or motivational talk, but through consistent, sustained daily practices.

Mental well-being is not only about clinical depression or major life crises.

It is also shaped by the smaller, everyday pressures we all face: stress, unspoken expectations, and repeated micro-crises that quietly build up over time.

Few Examples:

A) Too often, we respond to pain or difficulty with phrases like “*Just stay positive*” or “*Don’t stress.*”

Though well-intentioned, these words make people feel that their negative emotions are wrong and must be erased, rather than processed and understood.

B) Similarly, societal messages like “*Boys don’t cry*” or “*Girls are too emotional*” discourage openness and help-seeking, and lead to violence perpetration and tolerance.

C) Elderly persons also experience dismissive attitudes, such as “*You are too old; stop troubling us,*” which can exacerbate stress and isolation during times of crisis.

Solutions: Proposals for Mental Well-being

But there are simple, intentional practices that can make a profound difference:

- Practising empathy and active listening.
- Engaging in mindfulness, yoga, or breathing exercises.
- Encouraging responsible and aware parenting.
- Promoting respect for elders and intergenerational understanding.
- Using art, poetry, and music therapy.

Beyond individual practices, we must also strengthen the **systems** that support mental well-being.

We often celebrate the courage of frontline workers: doctors, nurses, firefighters, police officers, journalists, who face crisis and trauma daily. But who takes care of their mental health?

Our workplaces and institutions must become spaces that promote psychological safety and emotional balance.

This means:

- Workplace counselling, resilience training, and mindfulness programmes for all, especially for frontline workers.
- Integrating mental health, gender awareness, and holistic wellness into mainstream school curricula rather than extra-curricular activities.
- Adopting an inter-disciplinary approach to link yoga with biology, ethics with social studies, psychology with literature in schools.
- Expanding access to counselling, arts, and movement therapies in workplaces and community centres.
- Encouraging post-release mentorship and community engagement for prisoners to promote reintegration, reduce stigma and recidivism.

The convergence between science, art, and Vedic or spiritual wisdom is both striking and promising and needs to be explored further.

Yet, our actions must be grounded in evidence-based science.

At the same time, we must also recognise that mental health is never a “one-size-fits-all” matter: what brings recovery and strength to one person, may not work for another.

It is imperative therefore that these diverse approaches work in harmony rather than in isolation, complementing one another in nurturing the mind, body, and spirit as one integrated whole.

Closing Remarks

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As President of the Republic, my foremost mission is nation-building, and this requires the participation of all.

The Government Programme 2025–2029, which I presented in January 2025, highlights significant measures where the well-being of citizens shapes national policy.

But no one can achieve this alone.

This is precisely where the efforts of organisations like the Abhyas School of Yoga, and the commitment of each one of you, take on even greater significance.

Government bodies, institutions like the National Agency for Drug Control and the National Human Rights Commission, civil society, and all communities must come together to create a Republic where mental well-being is a reality for all - As One People, As One Nation.

It is my sincere hope that today's fruitful deliberations will not remain mere discussions, but will be formally recorded in proceedings that capture all insights, which can act as a compass to guide future actions and policies on mental health and well-being.

I congratulate the Abhyas School of Yoga, all organisers and participants once again, and wish you every success in your continued endeavours.

May God bless our Republic.

Thank you for your attention.