



SPEECH

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

EVENT: FACES OF MAURITIUS - PHOTO EXHIBITION

**VENUE: MEDIA TRUST, RIVER COURT, SAINT DENIS
STREET, PORT LOUIS**

DATE: 17 MARCH 2026

TIME: 18:45 HOURS

Protocol

Mr. Shehzad Joomun, Board Secretary of the Media Trust;
Members of the Board of the Media Trust,
Esteemed Photojournalists,
Distinguished Guests,
Members of the Press,

All Protocols Observed.

Introduction

Bonsoir, good evening to you all.

Thank you for your kind invitation and the opportunity to make an address.

When I assumed office as President of the Republic in December 2024, in my inaugural address, I underlined the vital and indispensable role of the Media in keeping the link between the Government and the governed.

This evening's event is an important facet of the Media world and how the power of pictures that anchor news items or any event, can be so invaluable.

(Saying)

One picture is worth a thousand words; just like a good sketch is better than a long speech.

They can convey complex thoughts feelings and moods which can have a long lasting profound impact.

Flag-Raising at State House

Last Tuesday, at State House, we held a flag-raising ceremony with our staffs to mark our 58th Independence and 34th Republic Day celebrations.

The photographs and a short video that accompanied the Facebook post on our official page captured not only the ceremony that reminds us of 12th March 1968 and 1992, but also the often-unseen faces of the Presidency - our SMF and Police officers, security services, and all the staffs.

They keep the institution running with quiet dedication, but are behind the scenes, often unnoticed, unrecognized.

The State House Facebook posts are otherwise often about official meetings and functions. But we are experimenting, changing and innovating.

The images of our flag-raising ceremony were very well received by the population at large.

Not because they were dramatic. But because they were authentic and people centric.

They portrayed the people, their conversations, their smiles and joys as well as the spirit of that special day.

People felt proud of being part of the event; they felt recognized, valued; in the photos they found a natural connection, something familiar in them and perhaps a reflection of themselves; everyday heroes whose stories of resilience and dignity remind us that our nation is carried forward not only by those in the spotlight, but equally by those who serve it quietly and faithfully every day.

They are often the unsung, silent heroes and heroines of events that shape our destinies.

This small experimentation and innovation created an authentic impact, and engagement, and I thank my State House team for leveraging pictures and photos in a very creative and meaningful manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is in that same ethos and the same spirit that I address you this evening for the opening of the exhibition “Faces of Mauritius” by the Media Trust, a photographic tribute to the men, women, and children who embody the spirit of our rainbow nation, in their everyday life and activities, captured through the lens of our local photojournalists.

Media Trust

Allow me at the outset to thank the Media Trust for this laudable initiative to recognize and celebrate our local photojournalists.

Since its formal establishment in 1994, the Trust continues to contribute to the advancement of ethical and meaningful journalism in our Republic and has served as a vital platform for strengthening professional capacity within the media sector.

I am aware that its recent initiatives have included training programmes for journalists and exhibitions showcasing the work of photojournalists, addressing important themes such as climate change, natural disasters and civic responsibility.

All this to empower and enhance the professionalism of our media personnel.

I wish to acknowledge, in particular, the efforts of Mr Shehzad Joomun, Board Secretary, in ensuring the continuity of the Trust’s work during its transitional period and in fostering collaborations

with international partners, including UNESCO, positioning itself as a centre for journalism training in the Indian Ocean region.

Faces Of Mauritius: A Celebration of Diversity, Culture & Spirit

As President of the Republic, this is my first visit to the Media Trust. My engagement with the media, however, spans many years.

On 7th December 2024, in my first press statement, I remarked that there are different sides to an event, a story.

There are multiple angles, perspectives, multiple narratives, and ultimately, it is the authentic dimension - unbiased, honest, complete, respecting ethical standards and which can stand the test of scrutiny, that **must** prevail.

This exhibition, organized in the context of our Independence Day celebrations, is therefore both timely and significant, and serves as a reminder on our nation's journey, capturing the very ethos of its people's pleasures and preoccupations, their moods and aspirations.

It provides us with a candid glimpse of our typical and unique Mauritian way of life as it unfolds, as the time clock keeps ticking along.

For example:

- It tells the story of Premanand Katowah who spent decades in the cane fields of Belle Vue before joining Grays.
- In Beau Champs, four women harvest eggplants under the relentless sun.
- The tradition, skill, and dedication behind the making of Mauritian Briyani is beautifully portrayed.
- And in St Antoine, seventy-three-year-old Pierre Leung continues to serve generations of customers at Paksan shop.

The exhibition also brings into rightful focus the lives of the Chagossian community; fishermen, healthcare professionals, street cleaners, religious leaders, youth, and elders - each a vital thread in the rich, multicultural tapestry of our society.

Together, they reflect resilience, dignity, shared humanity, solidarity and harmony - values that must compel us to recognise, respect, and support every member of our national community.

Tribute to Photojournalists

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As American journalist Walter Cronkite observed, “Freedom of the press is not just important to democracy; it is democracy.”

Democracy is about the voices of the people.

While reporters are often publicly recognised through bylines and headlines, photojournalists - the men and women behind the lens - frequently remain less visible, despite their essential contribution to our understanding of events.

Often, they are mere footnotes to Headlines or Breaking news.

Paradoxically, as scholarship consistently demonstrates, and as pointed out earlier, it is their images that speak to our collective conscience, illuminate shared humanity, and convey the responsibilities we bear as a society.

So, allow me therefore to recognize, commend, congratulate and thank the photojournalists shaping the core of this exhibition.

I understand that there are thirteen of you, representing both Government and private media organisations.

As Guardian of our Constitution and the pillars of our democracy, I would like to acknowledge you, the custodians of truth and visual

historians of our time, in recognition of the dedication, skill, and professionalism you have rightfully earned.

I thank you for your sustained commitment to capturing the essence of our society, its people, and its stories with integrity and discernment, and for the crucial role you play in our shared journey of nation-building.

Reflections

But let me also share with you a couple of reflections that may be useful in your engagement as photojournalists.

Ethics

In today's rapidly evolving media landscape, traditional gatekeeping of information is being challenged as never before. The power of citizen journalism must be recognized - from conflict zones such as Gaza and Ukraine to countries closer to home, and our own.

Yet, we must acknowledge in all honesty that not every individual with a camera or a social media account can claim the mantle of a photojournalist.

We must be clear: if society is to remain cognizant, engaged, and resilient, journalism must continue to inform, educate, and entertain, while upholding the highest standards of accuracy, ethics, responsibility and discernment.

In an era of rapid digital dissemination and AI-generated imagery, you are therefore called upon to ensure that the public perceives not only events, but their context, human impact, and broader significance.

AI can replace almost everything except the human conscience.

You must therefore remain the guardians of human conscience.

Mental Health

You must also keep in mind the health issues, physical and mental, that you will face in view of the increasing demands and pressures to which you will be subjected.

The European Federation of Journalists (2025) and the Reuters Institute (2020) report that up to 70 percent of journalists experience psychological distress, burnout and mental health challenges.

Al Jazeera's Journalism Review (2025) highlights similar findings, emphasizing the urgent need for systemic support, emotional safety, and sustainable practices within newsrooms.

Mauritius is not immune.

I call upon editors, directors, and media institutions to invest in the overall well-being of media professionals, not just through technology or equipment, but comprehensive mental health support, accessible counselling, and a workplace culture that is destigmatised, resilient, human-centric and conducive.

If we are to strengthen our democracy, the well-being of those who constitute its pillars cannot remain optional; it must become an essential condition.

Advocacy and Nation-Building

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Globally, news consumption is undergoing profound change.

Nearly four in ten people now consciously avoid news, often overwhelmed by negativity and sensationalism, while digital platforms increasingly rely on what the Oxford University Press calls "rage bait" to drive engagement.

In this context, Mauritius has both an opportunity - and a responsibility - to set an example.

Our small island nation thrives when every voice is heard, and when social and religious harmony guide our shared life.

Together, we must rise to the challenge - reporting not only the problems we face, but also the solutions we champion, the progress we make, and the resilience of our communities.

Concluding Remarks

The exhibition and photographs show exactly this: that Mauritius is not just seas, sand, and sun, but our people in all its diversity and its ingenuity, its joie de vivre.

Our Republic is not only about violence, crime, drugs, but also about resilience, peace, justice, liberty, and the dedication of our institutions and its citizens.

Yes, challenges exist, but Government is committed to addressing them through several initiatives like:

The Constitutional Review Commission, the National Crime Agency Bill, a Freedom of Information Act, and other important measures - as I stated when I presented the Government Programme 2025-2029.

Media has a tremendous role in influencing and shaping our Republic's destiny.

A nation's future cannot be shaped by a daily diet of bad news. Our media also has the responsibility of conveying good news.

Like this lively, colourful and memorable photo exhibition.

Closing

On this thoughtful note, allow me to commend our photojournalists once again for their remarkable work.

I encourage the Media Trust, as its name suggests, to continue fulfilling its vital role responsibly, ethically and trustfully.

[Trust] is vital for a collective society to function.

Rachel E. Moran in "The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism"(2022)

I hope that this exhibition will inspire reflection, spark dialogue, and bring the spirit of being truly Mauritian among all our citizens.

Together, let us build a stronger, more resilient Republic - As One People, as One Nation.

Merci et bonne continuation.