

## **World Hindi Day celebrations -**

**13<sup>th</sup> January 2017 at IGCIC, Phoenix**

*Aap sabhi ko Vishwa Hindi Diwas  
ki haardik shubhkaamnaein,*

I would have liked to continue this speech in Hindi but unfortunately for me I'll have to switch to the second best, that's the other official language of India, which is English.

It gives me immense pleasure to extend my greetings to you all on this momentous occasion of World Hindi Day. I feel indeed privileged and honoured to be given this opportunity to celebrate this event amidst all of you, Hindi lovers and scholars.

The first World Hindi Conference was organised in Nagpur, India, on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1975. Subsequently in 2006, the Government of India declared the 10th January as World Hindi

Day with the objective to highlight the importance and relevance of Hindi as an international language. From then on, World Hindi Day is celebrated every year all over the world.

But what is of greater interest to us to-day is to recall that at the first World Hindi Conference in Nagpur, in 1975, our first Prime Minister and Father of Nation, Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, as leader of the Mauritian delegation to the Conference, came up with the brilliant idea of establishing Hindi at the United Nations as an official language, alongside the 6 presently official languages, that is English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Arabic. The proposal was warmly welcomed and it was decided that a permanent World Hindi Secretariat will be set up in Mauritius.

We in Mauritius, feel very proud indeed that our country has been chosen as the seat of the World Hindi Secretariat. It is a joint venture of the Indian Government and the Mauritian Government. The agenda of the World Hindi Secretariat would first and foremost be to establish Hindi at the United Nations as an official language.

The setting up of the World Hindi Secretariat was a beautiful dream of both India and Mauritius and just before the Sixth World Hindi Conference at London, both countries signed the

Memorandum of Understanding to establish the Secretariat in Mauritius. The site of the World Hindi Secretariat is only a few yards from here, in Phoenix. The foundation stone for the building was laid by H.E. the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi in March 2015 when he was the Guest of Honour for our Independence and Republic Day Celebrations. The ground breaking puja ceremony for the construction of the building to house the World Hindi Secretariat has been performed on Saturday 8 October 2016 in the presence of the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of Mauritius, Sir Anerood Jugnauth.

Now the World Hindi Secretariat has become the symbol of our Hindi Prem, as well as the symbol of the mitrataa, common traditions and identity of India and Mauritius.

Today, as we celebrate World Hindi Day, we feel proud, knowing that the whole world acknowledges the strength and importance of Hindi. It is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. It is estimated that nearly half a billion people worldwide speak this beautiful and wonderful language. It is an ancient language that has not only had tremendous impact on world history, but continues to have tremendous impact in the world today.

Hindi is the language of our identity. During the dark days of betrayal, injustice and cruelties, our forefathers maintained their

spirit and morale with the inspiration they received from Ram Charit Manas of Goswami Tulsidas. It is the language of Baithakas, where Jahaji Bhai shared their sorrows and hopes. They preserved their culture and identity with Hindi and its sister languages. That long and arduous voyage of our forefathers from Kolkata to Port Louis, and hence to the sugarcane fields depicts an unfortunate saga characterized by slave trade, indenture labour and colonization. This very difficult and pathetic story filled with tears and sweat gradually got transformed through the years. Through sheer hard work and following Mahatma Gandhi's advice to give great importance to education and to get actively involved in politics, the generations that followed changed the course of history for the better. It is an important fact that our forefathers had to leave their Mother India but it is still more important to remember that even in the worst adverse circumstances they did not relinquish our language, our traditions and our culture. The survival of Hindi and Hinduism in this island of ours is the fruit of their courage, zeal and resilience.

Mauritius stands strongly in support of Hindi. In the early days of Indentured labourer, there were baithakas to teach Hindi to the children, so that they could be rooted and assimilated themselves with age-old values and traditions that have stood the test of time. Thanks to the dedicated work of Manilal Doctor, Prof. Basdeo Bissoondoyal, Dr. Munishwarlal Chintamunee, Sri Abhinmanyu Annuth and others, Hindi has been kept alive and has today

reached the apex of formal and higher academic study centres. Many social organizations and institutions such as the Hindi Pracharini Sabha, the Arya Sabha, the Hindi Speaking Union, the Mahatma Gandhi Sansthan and others have been very active in propagating Hindi language and culture throughout the island. The living example of Hindi interest in Mauritius can be shown in the recorded history of more than 300 publications in Hindi starting from the publication of “The Hindustani” by Manilal Doctor in 1909. There are to date about 100 Hindi writers, who are involved in continuous writing in different genres.

In Mauritius Hindi is currently being taught as a second language at primary, secondary and tertiary levels and in evening schools throughout the country. A number of radio and TV Channels broadcast programs in Hindi.

Friends, Hindi is the carrier of the greatest and oldest culture, intellectual and spiritual traditions of the world. The knowledge of the Vedas, the Upanishadas and the classics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, contained in Devanagri, the divine language Sanskrit, was transferred to Hindi as its heritage.

Hindi dates back to the earliest recorded history and is a direct descendant of Sanskrit. In the Medieval ages a great cultural movement, called the Bhakti movement, had encompassed the whole of India and tied the hearts of the people. It has had an eventful modern history as well. In modern times of multimedia, ICT is used to access Hindi to the global phenomenon. Hindi has made real progress in the information technology sector, with more and more software being written in Hindi and more and more software developed elsewhere requiring translations in Hindi. Information technology alone represents a tremendous career opportunity for those who speak Hindi. Because of the fact that India is emerging as an economic powerhouse, it is a market that no global business can afford to ignore.

Due to its official status and growing popularity around the world, speaking Hindi is quickly becoming one of the most lucrative linguistic skills in today's economy. From scripting to production, editing and media processing jobs to broadcasting and content delivery, the entertainment industry and other aspects of the media such as journalistic endeavours all require Hindi speakers, translation services and other jobs.

The Hindi Language has gained popularity through Indian movies and music. It has become the language par excellence of cinema, media and entertainment. The Indian film industry popularly known as Bollywood is mainly successful worldwide because of the large Hindi speaking diaspora.

Hindi has now proved to be the best communicative means in gaining an in-depth understanding of Indian history, culture, politics, spirituality, ancient way of treating diseases through the Ayurveda and Yoga, art, music and also the Indian psyche. A reader from any part of the world can now access the original religious texts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and many more in Hindi. This explains why Hindi is the most widely spoken and understood Indian language in Asia, and in the diverse Indian Diaspora communities in Mauritius, Surinam, Trinidad & Tobago, Fiji, Netherlands, Caribbean countries, Canada, South Africa and many parts of Europe and Australia.

Mauritius is the only country which is credited with hosting the World Hindi Conference (WHC) twice and it is a matter of great pride for every Mauritian that we have got this opportunity, a third time now and going to host the next 12<sup>th</sup> WHC in Mauritius .We will make all efforts to bring together Hindi scholars, academicians, journalists and Hindi lovers from all over the world.

I am confident that the Indian Government will extend full support for making this Hindi Mahakumbh a big success.

Today I have the privilege to extend a hearty and warm welcome to our Guest Speaker, Professor Jingkui Jiang from Peiking University.

To conclude let me congratulate all the winners and participants of the Elocution Competition organized by the World Hindi Secretariat.

Finally, I would like to quote the touching lines of the well-known Hindi Poet Bhartendu Harishchandra

*Nij bhasha unnati ahe, sab unnati ko mool*

*Bin nij bhasha gyan ke, mitat na hiya ko shul*

*If we really want to progress in life, we have to honour our mother tongue.*

I once again, congratulate you all on this momentous occasion and fervently wish that the World Hindi Secretariat very soon achieve its mission of establishing Hindi as the 7<sup>th</sup> official language at the United Nations.

Jai Hindi Basha

Danyavaad