Indian President’s Visit to Mauritius
Enhancing Mutually Beneficial Strategic Partnership

The State visit of the President of the Republic of India, Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil, from 24 to 28 April 2011, gave the opportunity to both parties to discuss various issues of bilateral and regional importance and enhance their longstanding strategic partnership. Smt Patil led an important delegation comprising a Minister, three Members of Parliament and around 50 members of India’s business community. The President was accompanied by her spouse, Dr Devisingh Ramsingh Shekhawat.
During her visit, Smt. Patil was received by the President of the Republic, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, and had a work session with the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam. She addressed the National Assembly and met members of the local business community.

Bilateral ties

Discussions between President Patil and Prime Minister Ramgoolam on 25 April at Clarisse House focused on issues covering the vast framework of Indo-Mauritian relations. In a statement that followed the meeting, both sides expressed satisfaction over the current state of ties that exist between the two countries and agreed that there is untapped potential which can be exploited particularly in the areas of trade and economic cooperation, as well as regards business opportunities in both countries. Mauritius and India have also agreed to further enhance exchanges in the fields of higher education, information technology, science and technology, tourism, hospitality and culture.

On the adverse impacts of piracy in the Indian Ocean region, the Indian side expressed its determination to work with the Mauritian Government in enhancing the security of its people through concrete measures. President Patil highlighted the fact that the support of Mauritius on global issues of crucial importance to India is highly valued, especially its consistent support to India's candidature for permanent membership in an expanded United Nations Security Council.

Valued and trusted partner

In her address to the National Assembly, President Patil assured that India will remain a valued and trusted partner of Mauritius in its multifaceted comprehensive development. She reaffirmed the commitment of her country for the welfare, peace, progress and prosperity of Mauritius and its people. ‘Our bilateral relations are rooted in mutual respect and mutual benefit. Our ties are extensive in scope and comprehensive in content,’ said Smt. Patil.

In his vote of thanks, Prime Minister Ramgoolam said that Mauritius has found in President Patil a true friend on whom the country can rely to take friendship and partnership ties to new heights. ‘Our friendship is unshakeable and our partnership is unbreakable,’ he said. Dr Ramgoolam recalled that Mauritius has always shared the vision, values and ideals underpinning the actions of India’s great leaders.

Business opportunities

A business meet, aiming to provide a platform for Indian and Mauritian entrepreneurs to discuss business opportunities, was held in Grand Baie on the last day of Smt. Patil’s visit. The event was intended to provide opportunities to Indian businessmen to network with Mauritius and tap into the potential of Africa.

Business possibilities were discussed on the rationale that both governments are keen to provide an environment which is conducive to business and the framework in this regard exists through many agreements signed over the years. Smt Patil expressed her confidence that an accelerated development of economic and commercial ties as well as increased investment flows will become the principal component of the India-Mauritius strategic partnership in the 21st century.

Economic ties between India and Mauritius date back to the 1800s. India remains the main import, economic and investment market for the country. In 2010, Indian exports to Mauritius stood at approximately USD 1.1 billion, representing about 22.3% of Mauritian total imports. Total investments from India account for nearly MUR 2.9 billion thus positioning India as the second single most important foreign investor in Mauritius. On the other hand, outward investments from Mauritius by Mauritian nationals into India stood at about MUR 1.1 billion and the main sectors attracting Mauritian investment in India include banking and financial services, textile, logistics and travel amongst others.

During her stay, the University of Mauritius conferred upon President Patil the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa. Visits to the World Heritage Sites of Aapravasi Ghat and Le Morne were also on the programme.
My visit to Mauritius highlighted the abiding bonds of friendship and generated a greater momentum towards a deeper, strengthened and more diverse partnership. Our bilateral relations have obtained a broader vision and both sides acknowledge that these are for mutual benefit. Both countries enjoy a unique and special relationship in the backdrop of our cultural, historical and linguistic linkages which has been nurtured and groomed into a modern-day partnership. The strong and enduring relationship between India and Mauritius is based on shared democratic values and the commonality of being pluralistic societies. My address at the National Assembly of Mauritius was to particularly emphasize the importance of the long tradition of democracy upheld by our two countries which also links us together.

There is regular high-level political dialogue between India and Mauritius and my visit was a part of that process. I had a fruitful meeting with Sir Anerood Jugnauth, President of Mauritius. I held detailed discussions with Prime Minister Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam. I also met the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Paul Raymond Berenger, the Chief Justice of Mauritius, and the Speaker of the National Assembly of Mauritius.

I reiterated that there exists a national consensus in India on the further consolidation and expansion of our bilateral cooperation with Mauritius. Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam stated that our ties nurtured by renewed understanding, trust and mutual support, will continue to evolve and flourish. I too am confident that my interactions with the leadership of Mauritius will provide a greater momentum and thrust to our partnership.

Our discussions focused on a diverse range of issues covered under our multi-sectoral and vibrant bilateral partnership. While expressing satisfaction over the current state of our relations, we did feel that the already considerable and growing opportunities could be exploited particularly in the area of trade and economic cooperation. It was agreed to convene the next meeting of the Joint Working Group on the Double Taxation Avoidance Convention.

The Indian business delegation accompanying me was hopeful that a more congenial atmosphere has been generated now that they have had the opportunity to interact with their counterparts and 7 Ministers of the Government of Mauritius who attended their meeting. I also participated in the Business Meet during my stay there to listen to views from the captains of industry from both sides and encourage them to further participate in our bilateral economic exchanges. I am glad that two business MOUs are being signed by private companies.

We have agreed to enhance exchanges in the fields of higher education; information technology; science and technology; tourism; hospitality; culture; rural development and Ayurveda. People to people contacts reflecting our common heritage and traditions will remain prominent in these exchanges.

Mauritius has been unequivocal in its condemnation of international Terrorism. It has consistently supported India’s candidature for permanent membership in an expanded United Nations Security Council. On both these issues, the leadership of Mauritius again reaffirmed its position.

As a country deeply committed to the security of Mauritius and its people, we are determined to work with the Government of Mauritius in enhancing the security of its people through concrete measures including joint action against piracy.

The understandings and exchange of views during my visit have firmly established a solid foundation for the intensification and enhancement of our mutually beneficial strategic partnership and in bringing our two peoples closer together for a better future.

I have invited President Sir Anerood Jugnauth and Prime Minister Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam to visit India. They have accepted the invitations. Mutually convenient dates will be decided through diplomatic channels. I must add that the presence of both of them at the University of Mauritius, where I was conferred a Doctorate Honoris Causa, was a remarkable gesture indicative of the strong bonds of affinity, I was honored and I deeply appreciate their participation.

My visits to the Aapravasi Ghat, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture - where Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam and I jointly unveiled the bust of Mrs. Indira Gandhi - were touching reminders of the links that have been woven over a period of time between the leadership and the peoples of our two countries.

I will conclude by mentioning my visit to Le Morne which was to recall the sacrifices of those who struggled against the inequalities which human beings suffered over the course of many centuries, from the scourge of slavery. It was a homage to those who gave up their lives in the struggle for equality and freedom.
The Visit - Snapshots
The Visit - Snapshots
Reinforcing coastal security
Police equipped with Navigation Radar for Coastal Surveillance

The Mauritius Police Force is now equipped with a Coastal Surveillance Radar System (CSRS) which will strengthen its coastal surveillance capabilities and assist in controlling illegal fishing and piracy in the region. The CSRS was inaugurated by the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, at the National Coast Guard (NCG) Headquarters at Les Salines in Port Louis on 15 April 2011.

Financed by India under a one-time grant of Euros 2 465 726, the CSRS was devised by Bharat Electronics Ltd Bangalore, India. The project comprises the installation of radars and Automatic Identification System Centres at eight sites, namely Albion, Gris Gris, Le Morne, Grand Gaube, Pointe du Diable, Rodrigues, St Brandon and Agalega. The CSRS provides an integrated picture of the sea surrounding the NCG Operations Room at Les Salines.

The radars cover a distance of about 45 nautical miles while the Automatic Identification System can track targets some 200 nautical miles into the sea. All vessels above 300 tonnage with Automatic Identification System and smaller boats equipped with transponders and metallic reflecting plates can also be tracked down. Equipped with radar towers, computers, solar power packs and diesel generators, the CSRS, which is simple to operate and user-friendly, is the most widely used navigation radar in the world. In addition to undertaking surveillance of coastal surroundings, it can also monitor the movement of fishing vessels, pleasure crafts and pirogues. It will help to fight illegal fishing, smuggling, terrorist activities and pollution which pose a threat to the safety and security of the EEZ of Mauritius.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, the Prime Minister said that the commissioning of the CSRS project is yet another manifestation of the close cooperation and enduring relations between Mauritius and India. He recalled that following his State visit to India in October 2005 during which discussions were held on the need for Mauritius to enhance its coastal surveillance for the proper monitoring of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 1.9 million km², the Government of India agreed to provide assistance to Mauritius in this area. Besides the commissioning of a Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopter and the CSRS, works for the construction of an Offshore Patrol Vessel for the NCG have already started, said Dr Ramgoolam. India has been providing technical assistance to Mauritius in different sectors and participating in various development projects. Some recent projects include the conduct of hydrographic surveys in the coastal waters of Mauritius and the design of nautical charts, training of commandos in Indian institutions and patrols undertaken by Indian ships in the EEZ of Mauritius to deter illegal fishing and acts of piracy.
The Energy Efficiency Bill, which provides for the setting up of an Energy Efficiency Management Office for an efficient use of energy in Mauritius, was voted on 29 March 2011 in the National Assembly. The legislation forms part of the National Energy Strategy which targets a 10% reduction of energy consumption by 2015.

The legislation will make it compulsory for designated consumers to carry out energy auditing on the basis of their energy consumption. In line with the provisions of the Bill, standards targeting appliances such as freezers, air conditioners, electric and microwave ovens, dryers, dish washers and electric water heaters will be developed by the Energy Efficiency Management Office. This entity, to be set up with a view to implementing energy efficient programmes, will also regulate imports of equipment on the basis of their efficiency level.

Promoting an energy efficiency culture

Energy efficiency refers to the use of less energy for the same output, that is achieving more with less. Measures initiated by Government to promote energy efficiency were enumerated by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities, Dr Rashid Beebeejaun, who had introduced the Bill. Among these, a review of the Building Control Bill to incorporate energy efficient features in the construction of houses and new guidelines for energy efficient houses for low and middle income groups. Moreover, the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environment Facility are funding the ‘Removal of Barriers to Energy Efficiency’ project with the aim of overcoming barriers to energy efficiency in residential/non-residential, existing and future buildings.

Other initiatives include the funding of low energy bulbs for households and street lighting, solar water heaters and LED traffic lights; energy audits in public buildings; awareness campaigns on the efficient use of energy; a decongestion programme which includes construction of roads and bypasses and the modernisation of vehicle fitness centres.

Over the past decade, electricity demand in Mauritius has grown at an average annual cumulative rate of around 5%. The Central Electricity Board forecasts that electricity generation requirements will increase by approximately 30% over the next 10 years, mainly due to air conditioning and mechanical ventilation from commercial and residential buildings. Electricity consumption in the domestic sector is 33% of the total demand, while the commercial and industrial sectors account for 34% and 31% respectively.
Asset Recovery Bill
Deterring crime and terrorism

The Asset Recovery Bill was voted by the National Assembly on 5 April 2011. The new legislation enables the State to recover assets which are proceeds or instrumentalities of crime or terrorist property.

The procedure applies in cases where a person has been convicted of an offence as well as in cases where there has been no prosecution but it can be proved on a balance of probabilities that property represents proceeds or instrumentalities of an unlawful activity.

Commending the Bill, the Attorney General, Mr Yatin Varma, explained that the rationale was that those who commit unlawful activities should not be allowed to profit from their crimes. “Proceeds of crime should therefore be forfeited and used to compensate victims, whether it is the State or an individual”, he pointed out. Another objective sought would be to deter criminal activity.

The Bill creates a comprehensive asset recovery framework which will apply not only to drug offences but also to all offences against the laws of Mauritius which are punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of not less than 12 months. It will also apply to any offence committed in a foreign State which, if committed in Mauritius, would constitute an offence.

Provision is also made for the establishment of an Enforcement Authority who will be the Director of Public Prosecutions to reinforce the fight against transnational crime and for a legal framework and procedure to enable the government to recover assets which are proceeds or instrumentalities of crime or terrorist property.

The Bill also carries provisions for co-operation between public sector agencies in Mauritius and with Enforcement Authorities in foreign States.

Divorce and Judicial Separation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill - Divorce by mutual consent

The Divorce and Judicial Separation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which provides for divorce or judicial separation by mutual consent or acceptance in principle of the breakdown of a marriage, was voted on 22 March 2011 by the National Assembly.

The salient features of the new legislation are:

- Reducing, from five to three years, the period of separation required for a divorce or judicial separation on the ground of rupture de la vie commune

(However no application for divorce by mutual consent can be made during the first 24 months of marriage)

- Simplifying the process following the lodging of a petition

- Providing for the automatic conversion of a provisional decree into a permanent decree three months after the provisional decree has been granted, unless one of the parties objects to same not later than 15 days before the expiry of the three months.

For the Attorney General, Mr Yatin Varma, who had tabled the Bill, the law on divorce is one area of Mauritian law which Government undertook to review and where the need for reform has been felt for a number of years. “A divorce can be said to be one of the most painful and stressful experiences which a married couple and a family can ever go through”, he underlined.

The new legislation aims to ensure that a marriage is dissolved with dignity and in a manner which is not embarrassing, humiliating and, as far as possible, fair to the spouses and their children.
The United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf approved, in April, the joint submission of Mauritius and Seychelles for the extension of the Continental Shelf, resulting in an area of 396,000 km² of Extended Continental Shelf for both States. This will offer new prospects of cooperation between Mauritius and the Seychelles in the protection, exploration and management of marine resources such as minerals and hydrocarbons of the Mascarene Plateau.

The Joint Management Committee set up to manage the area through a Framework Agreement will, with the assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat, work out in detail ways and means to explore and exploit living and non-living resources in the Continental Shelf, pending delimitation of the Extended Continental Shelf.

Mauritius and Seychelles will therefore have joint access to resources in the 396,000 km² of additional seabed and subsoil of the Mascarene Plateau. Such an extension will substantially increase access to marine resources for Mauritius according to the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Under this Convention, a coastal State shall establish the outer limits of its continental shelf wherever it extends beyond 200 nautical miles from the territorial sea baseline, securing access to additional seabed area. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea was adopted by the Assembly of the United Nations in November 1973. It defines the framework governing ocean space. The Convention was ratified by over 158 countries, including 47 Commonwealth countries. Mauritius ratified the Convention in 1994.

**Preliminary Steps**

The process for the Extended Continental Shelf for Mauritius started in 2000. The Mauritius Oceanography Institute, set up the same year, was asked to prepare a technical paper to support the request from the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. In this context, two geophysical surveys were conducted in 2003 in areas of the Mascarene Plateau and the Chagos Archipelago to collect bathymetric and seismic data.

The Mauritian Government’s decision to make a partial submission in common with the Republic of Seychelles in the region of the Mascarene Plateau required a new approach. After the agreement as regards a median line boundary between the Exclusive Economic Zones of the two coastal States, Mauritius and Seychelles began formal discussions during the second quarter of 2008 for an extension of the continental shelf.

The dossier was submitted to the United Nations for the first time in 2008. Since then, a joint team consisting of technicians, lawyers and scientists from both countries worked closely to prepare a joint submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. An official presentation was held at the United Nations headquarters in March 2009.
Temporary job opportunities abroad
Circular Migration Project right on track

The Circular Migration Project, one of the strategies adopted by the Government in its economic restructuring policy, especially in the wake of threats affecting the world economy, is right on track.

The project aims at offering Mauritian citizens who have a spirit of enterprise to take temporary employment abroad, acquire skills and capital and then set up their own business or invest in other economic activities once they come back, thus actively participating in national economic development.

At a press conference held on 6 April 2011 in Port Louis, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment, Mr Xavier Luc Duval, stressed that the Government’s initiative to develop and boost circular migration has a two-fold objective. Firstly, it will provide the international market with well-trained people and secondly, it will help the Mauritian workforce to acquire professional experience and upgraded skills in a new working environment and to establish trade networks.

According to the Vice-Prime Minister, there will be numerous job opportunities in future for those willing to work on a temporary basis abroad, especially in Canada and in France.

Mr Duval recalled that, following a tripartite agreement signed in March 2008 by the Government of Mauritius, the International Organisation for Migration and employers in Canada, five labour migration projects have been implemented with Canadian private companies, thus providing some 300 Mauritians with temporary employment in the agro-industry sector and in cleaning services in Canada. He also said that Quebec is ready to accommodate some 100 Mauritians to work in the meat industry and that a delegation from the Province of Saskatchewan in Canada which recently visited Mauritius, would announce some 200 job offers every three months in sectors such as agriculture, hotel, construction and hospitality.

As regards France, Mr Duval added that the country will accommodate some 850 Mauritians every year among whom 200 young professionals and 150 artists.

An online database known as the Mauritius Circular Migration Database (MCMD) is operational since 5 February 2010 to register Mauritians interested in temporary employment opportunities abroad. It was developed jointly by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Government of Mauritius. Candidates can also register online by logging on the site www.smsjobs.mu or send an SMS on 8627. The National Empowerment Foundation, which is the implementing agency for Mauritius, will monitor closely the procedures and guide employers throughout the process.
Mauritius and Sierra Leone sign MOU on Trade and Investment

The Board of Investment (BOI) of Mauritius and the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) signed on 14 April in Port Louis a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at developing intra-regional trade and investment between the two countries.

The signing ceremony was held in the presence of the Acting Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Dr Vasant Bunwaree, and the Minister of Trade and Industry for Sierra Leone, Mr Richard Konteh. Both parties agree on the strategic importance of regional cooperation for the promotion of investment in Africa.

The MOU provides the necessary framework for regional cooperation and is in line with the outward investment strategy of the BOI to further increase the economic space for Mauritian investors. It will also support the BOI in assisting Investment Promotion Agencies in the region towards improving the business and investment climate.

The MOU is the 11th one that BOI has signed with its counterparts in the region. In addition to increasing the flow of investment in the region, the collaborative agreement will strengthen mutual cooperation between the two agencies through sharing of information, experiences and best practices on matters relating to investment promotion, investment facilitation, investment aftercare and policy advocacy.

Mauritian authorities have been encouraging local entrepreneurs to tap into opportunities in Africa. Owing to the strategic location of Sierra Leone in the west coast of Africa, it is considered that the country can act as an entry point into the West African markets.

The possibility of concluding bilateral trade and investment agreements with Sierra Leone regarding a Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty (DTA) and an Investment Promotion and protection Agreement (IPPA) is also on the agenda. Such agreements would help the private sector of both countries to engage in deeper cooperation and enable Mauritius to restructure additional investments in Sierra Leone in major projects such as infrastructure, mining, energy, construction, port and airport.

ProIT: First B2B ICT Exhibition and Conference Event in Mauritius

The first edition of ProIT, a business to business (B2B) ICT exhibition and conference event, was held from 20 to 22 April at the Freeport of Mauritius Exhibition Centre, Mer Rouge. Some 3 000 visitors attended the three-day event.

ProIT 2011 was organised jointly by the National Computer Board and the Mauritius IT Industry Association and targeted professionals and decision makers of the ICT sector as well as Finance Managers and the business community including Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from Mauritius and the region.

The ProIT platform aimed at raising awareness and providing information on ICT business solutions and applications for corporate and SMEs and to offer information on products, technologies and services that can be efficient tools in improving productivity.

ProIT 2011 gave the opportunity to participants of the exhibition and visitors to meet and network. Some 30 stands housed ICT solution providers (both software and hardware) who were able to showcase their products and services, and promote their expertise and knowhow in business solutions and emerging technologies.

In parallel with the exhibition, conferences and product demos focusing on latest technologies and their applications in empowering the business sector were also held.
Tripartite FTA
A Consultative Workshop for Mauritian Stakeholders

The COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area (FTA) was the main theme discussed during a Consultative Workshop held on 29 April 2011 at Le Labourdonnais Hotel in Port Louis. The aim was to provide an opportunity to all relevant Mauritian stakeholders from the public and private sectors to brainstorm on the tripartite process, its scope and the negotiations modalities.

The Tripartite initiative is an important step towards institutionalising cooperation between the COMESA, EAC and SADC. These three regional economic communities (RECs) have been implementing their regional integration programmes with a view to expanding trade, alleviating poverty and improving the quality of life of their peoples. They also have a common objective of establishing a FTA, Customs Union and Common Market.

The decision to establish the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite FTA was taken by the first Tripartite Summit held in Kampala, Uganda in October 2008. In preparation for establishing the FTA, the Tripartite Task Force made proposals on the following: a roadmap for establishing the FTA; negotiating modalities; working text for negotiating the FTA Agreement; and a declaration for launching the negotiations.

The Consultative Workshop, organised jointly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade and TradeMark Southern Africa, fits into the context of consultations being held in the region. These consultations aim to better prepare Member States in the run-up to the second Tripartite Summit scheduled in June 2011, in South Africa, during which it is envisaged to launch the negotiations on the Tripartite FTA.

The RECs

The three RECs (COMESA, EAC and SADC) comprise 26 countries with a combined population of 527 million, a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US $ 624 billion and a GDP per capita averaging US $ 1 184.

The 26 countries make up half of the African Union (AU) in terms of membership and just over 58% in terms of contribution to GDP and 57% of the total population of the AU. The enlarged FTA will therefore provide Mauritius with significant market access prospects.

Tripartite FTA Benefits

The COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite FTA would result in various benefits namely: increased access to a larger market, comprising 26 countries resulting in greater opportunities for trading in goods and services; increased domestic, cross-border and foreign investment prospects; greater business openings for production of goods, services and infrastructure; enhanced competitiveness; job and wealth creation; and deeper integration of Tripartite economies.

Some of the main features of the Tripartite FTA would be:

- Removal of import and export duties on all goods originating and traded within the Tripartite region;
- Business friendly rules of origin which are easier to comply with;
- Simple and harmonised customs and transit procedures and regulations;
- Removal of non-tariff barriers and other impediments throughout the Tripartite region.
Mauritius and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) signed on 18 April 2011 in Washington a Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of the Africa Regional Technical Assistance Centre South (AFRITAC South) in Mauritius.

The MoU was signed by the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Pravind Jugnauth, and the Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Ms Nemat Shafik.

The Centre, to be operational in July 2011, will cover 13 countries in Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean, bringing AFRITAC coverage in Sub-Saharan Africa to 37 countries. AFRITAC South is the IMF’s eighth regional technical assistance centre and its fourth centre in Africa, joining the other institutions across the continent, namely AFRITACs Center, East, and West.

AFRITAC South will provide technical assistance to countries for developing and implementing capacity-building programmes in several areas, such as macroeconomic policy, macro-fiscal policy and public financial management. The Centre will also work closely with the Regional Multidisciplinary Centre of Excellence (RMCE) and the African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET) and will act as a vehicle to export Mauritian expertise in public sector management to the rest of Africa. Mauritius will, in addition, benefit from technical assistance free of cost.

The AFRITACs are part of the IMF’s Africa capacity-building initiative launched in May 2002. As a response to calls from African leaders, the initiative promotes the strengthening of the capacity of African countries to design and implement their poverty-reducing strategies as well as to improve the coordination of capacity-building technical assistance. The AFRITACs provide technical assistance in the core areas of expertise of the IMF on a grant basis. They are financed by contributions from the beneficiary countries, bilateral and multilateral donors, and the IMF.

Work is in progress for the setting up of a similar center in Ghana to cover anglophone countries in West Africa (AFRITAC West 2).
A workshop on antimicrobial resistance, which is rapidly becoming a major health issue, was held on 7 April 2011 in Trianon. The aim was to create awareness among stakeholders on the increasing trend of antimicrobial or drug resistance. An initiative of the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) in the context of World Health Day, the workshop was attended by around 100 health professionals from the public and private sectors.

Themes discussed included antimicrobial resistance as an increasing global threat, challenges facing chemotherapy of HIV/AIDS, surveillance of antibiotic use/role of pharmacy in managing drug resistance, universal precautions, respiratory tract infections and use of antibiotics and trends in antibiotic resistance in Mauritius.

Addressing the participants, the Minister of Health and Quality of Life, Mrs Santi Bai Hanoomanjee, said that there is an urgent need for corrective action against antimicrobial resistance. She recalled that antimicrobial resistance can result in prolonged illness and greater risk of death by reducing the effectiveness of treatment. Antimicrobial resistance can not only jeopardise healthcare gains to society and compromise health security but also cause damages to trade and the economy, the Minister cautioned.

‘Antimicrobial resistance and its global spread’ is the theme chosen for the World Health Day 2011. According to the WHO, the emergence and spread of drug-resistant pathogens have accelerated resulting in the failure of an increasing number of essential medicines. Antimicrobial resistance therefore threatens the continued effectiveness of many medicines while at the same time jeopardising important advances being made against major infectious killers.

Remedial measures

In a bid to combat antimicrobial resistance, the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life has reinforced the surveillance of antibiotic sales in private pharmacies and requested all retail pharmacies to abide by the Pharmacy Act 1983 and avoid any misuse of antibiotics. Besides, inspections are carried out in pharmacies to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Pharmacy Act. A pharmaco-vigilance unit which will be responsible for drug monitoring is also expected to come into operation shortly.

Several steps can be taken to contain drug resistance: using drugs prudently; developing a comprehensive financed national plan; strengthening surveillance and laboratory capacity; ensuring uninterrupted access to essential medicines of assured quality; regulating and promoting rational use of medicines; enhancing infection prevention and control and fostering innovation and research of new tools.

On antimicrobial resistance

Antimicrobial resistance is the ability of a microorganism (like bacteria, viruses and some parasites) to stop an antimicrobial (such as antibiotics, antivirals and antimalarials) from working against it. As a result, standard treatments become ineffective, infections persist and may spread to others.

WHO statistics show that at least 440 000 new cases of multidrug resistant-tuberculosis were detected last year and that extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis has been reported in 69 countries to date. Resistance to anti-retroviral drugs for HIV/AIDS has also become a huge concern for low-resource countries for which second-line treatments are prohibitively expensive.
A one-day workshop focusing on the modernisation of the Civil Service through e-services was held on 28 March 2011 at Domaine Les Pailles. A joint initiative of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology and the Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms, the workshop saw the participation of some 50 representatives from different ministries, departments and public organisations.

The objective was to enable participants take stock of the present situation as regards e-services, identify the strengths and weaknesses in implementing e-services and come up with recommendations to improve the overall public e-service delivery.

Presently, there are fifty-three e-services available in the public sector. However, a survey conducted recently indicated that few of those services are judiciously used by the public. During the workshop, participants discussed the findings of the survey and learned from the successful experiences of three departments, namely the Police department, the National Transport Authority and the Mauritius Revenue Authority, in strengthening public confidence in their e-services.

In his address, the Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Mr. Pillay Chedumbrum, stated that no stone should be left unturned in improving the quality of public services. This, he said, can be achieved by providing e-services in a more effective manner and by ascertaining that the public sector is responsive to the needs and expectations of its clientele. The Minister added that the recommendations of the workshop would be submitted to Cabinet in view of developing measures for a fast and successful implementation of all e-services.

The Minister also announced the completion of the first phase of the Government Fibre Network Project (GFN). The first phase comprises the connection of four sites hosting ministries and government departments namely, Air Mauritius Centre, Emmanuel Anquetil Building, Renganaden Seeneevassen Building and the New Government Centre, to a high speed fibre network. The GFN project aims at providing ample bandwidth to ministries and departments for accessing government applications, internet and email services.

For his part, the Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms, Mr. A. K. Gungah, emphasised the need for public service to shift to state-of-the-art technologies and become digitally up-to-date in order to overcome the challenges of globalisation. However, the most challenging aspect is integration of technology in the operation of government institutions to ensure effective service delivery worthy of the 21st century, he added.

According to Minister Gungah, lack of communication has been substantially responsible for the low use of e-services. E-services will succeed only if participants develop communication strategies that can influence customers’ attitudes and behaviours while adopting a customer-oriented approach that increases productivity, reduces routine work and creates added value for customers, he pointed out.
Rodrigues will shortly define a three-year strategy which will include several actions geared towards gender development and consolidation of measures against violence against women as well as child abuse and exploitation. The support of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare in that regard has been sought and acquired.

The basis of this collaboration was established during a visit of the Minister, Mrs. Sheilabai Bappoo, to Rodrigues from 15 to 17 March 2011. She was on the island in the context of the centenary celebration of the International Women’s Day.

The strategy, falling under the responsibility of the Deputy Chief Commissioner of Rodrigues, Mrs. Marie Thérèse Clair-Brault, will be converted in a triennial plan of action and will constitute the framework for the redeployment of the progressive transformation of the Rodriguan society towards more social justice and equity.

The Minister wishes to see the reinforcement of the collaboration between her Ministry and the office of the Deputy Chief Commissioner which would engage and enlist the active participation of a greater number of Rodriguan women at the level of different decision-making institutions. The Minister evoked this during discussions held with the Rodrigues administration, Rodriguan women, women entrepreneurs as well as with those engaged in social work.

Moreover, during the visit several activities were organised to mark International Women’s Day 2011. These included a forum on the theme Femmes Agents de la Transformation: Les Défis de la Femme Rodriguaise during which the role of women as active agents of transformation in the social, economic and political spheres was examined, as well as a workshop on Rajeunissement des Associations Féminines. The aim was to sensitise the youth on the need to sustain the women’s movement. A workshop on The Role of Science and Technology for Women in Sustainable Resource Management: Exploring the Scope of Organic Farming in Rodrigues to assess the scope of organic farming was also organised.