The importance of the AGOA programme and the third country fabric provision was highlighted during the 5th Mauritius-US Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Council meeting held on 16 January 2012 at the Intercontinental Hotel, Balaclava.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr Arvin Boolell, who was present for the opening, expressed his conviction that successful advancement in TIFA Work Programme and in particular priority areas will help ensure that existing relationships with long-time partners such as the US are strengthened. He gave the example of the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) being negotiated and which will provide Mauritius with the necessary legal framework for increased investment flows from the US. ‘We are confident that progress will be made in ensuing discussions on the BIT so that it can be a stepping stone’ he said.

The US delegation at the Council meeting was led by Ambassador Demetrios Marantis, Deputy United States Trade Representative. Representatives of the US Department of State, USTR Office and USAID East Africa Trade Hub formed part of the US delegation. The Mauritian side was chaired by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Mr A. P Neewoor.
The Discussions

During the meeting, discussions focused on the TIFA Work Programme with particular emphasis on priority areas identified by both Mauritius and US. They include: AGOA implementation, Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT), agricultural trade and agri-business linkages, Intellectual Property Rights, Trade in Services, ICT and Trade Capacity Building.

As regards AGOA, the US administration fully supports the renewal of the third country fabric provision which is vital to the African textile and apparel industry and optimism was expressed with respect to its renewal before its expiration in September 2012. The AGOA programme itself is due to expire in 2015 and both Mauritius and the US will engage in deeper discussions as to the enhancements that could be made so as to improve its utilisation.

Concerning the BIT, Mauritius proposed April 2012 as tentative date for signature and invited the US side to have another dedicated video conference on the issue. The US side highlighted the fact that they were in the process of reviewing their BIT model which would be submitted to Mauritius as soon as possible.

It is to be noted that technical work pertaining to the TIFA has been carried out on the basis of a Work Plan agreed between Mauritius and the US. The Work Plan consists of 14 areas of cooperation namely trade and investment promotion in competitive sectors, enhancing private sector linkages, coordinating on AGOA implementation, promoting Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), enhancing trade in services, trade in fish and seafood sectors, and, strengthening agri-business linkages, amongst others.

About TIFA Council

The TIFA Council is an important process that helps pave the ground for bilateral cooperation. It addresses a wide range of trade and investment issues that include, but are not limited to, trade capacity building, intellectual property, labour, environmental issues and enhancing the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in trade and investment. Mauritius is among the few African countries having signed a TIFA with the US.

Mauritius-US TIFA

The Mauritius-US TIFA was signed on 18 September 2006 in Washington. The TIFA includes provisions for the establishment of a bilateral Trade and Investment Council that will meet annually to monitor trade and investment relations, identify opportunities for expanding trade and investment, and identify important issues and challenges that the two countries need to address. The first official meeting of the TIFA Council took place on 5 and 6 February 2007 in Mauritius.

Two-way trade statistics

According to Statistics Mauritius Office, total two-way trade between Mauritius and the United States amounted $307 million in 2010 that is a 27 % increase from 2009, mainly owing to a rise in Mauritian exports.

Mauritian exports to the US amounted to $198 million in 2010, while imports from the US reached $109 million. Leading Mauritian exports to the US include, textile and apparel, precious stones and jewellery, live animals, prepared fish, medical/surgical instruments, and leather products. In 2010, leading US exports to Mauritius included silicones/articles of plastics, medical equipment, precious stones, aircraft parts, communication equipment, and agricultural machinery.
PM urges population to be more productive in face of economic slowdown

In his New Year Address to the Nation on 1st January 2012, the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, called for a sustainable participation of the population in the construction of a new modern Republic in spite of the global economic slowdown. For the Prime Minister, the key to the prosperity of Mauritius lies in political and social stability.

Dr Ramgoolam said that we should be vigilant in face of the global economic challenges and he urged the population to exert discipline and integrity and work towards more productivity. According to him, 2012 will be a decisive year for the Maurice Ile Durable project, with the MID Commission in the process of finalising its plan which will be presented to the Rio summit on Environment this year.

As regards law and order, the Prime Minister expressed his satisfaction that the reform programme in the Police department has started yielding positive results with statistics that clearly indicate a downward trend in criminality in general.

Dr Ramgoolam reiterated the determination of the government to tackle the problems of fraud and corruption and stressed that legislations will be strengthened to further combat drug trafficking and money laundering. He called for a change in the mindset of people and underlined the need for a culture of integrity in the nation.

He further stated that legislations voted in the National Assembly will set the stage for a modern, fair and equitable society. He also made mention, amongst others, of the Equal Opportunity Act, the creation of an Equal Opportunity Commission, the Truth and Justice Commission, the report on Electoral reforms and stressed that the law now provides for a greater participation of women’s representatives both at the level of municipal and village council elections.
The National Broadband Policy 2012-2020 (NBP2012), which outlines the overall policy objectives and targets for a broadband Intelligent Mauritius branded as Towards i-Mauritius, was validated on 20 January 2012 by Government. The NBP2012, elaborated by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, also spells out the methodology to ensure adherence to a logical sequence - promotion, oversight, and universalisation - for successful broadband development.

Salient features comprise:

- Defining the broadband ecosystem for Mauritius as well as creating a conducive environment to attract new investments and players in the new ecosystem
- Establishing and promoting the National Broadband Infrastructure
- Consolidating the regulatory and legislative frameworks to allow the emergence of Broadband i-Mauritius
- Providing adequate broadband services within accessibility, availability and affordability ranges
- Promoting research, innovation and competition for sustaining the broadband ecosystem

The NBP2012 also identifies six targets to be adopted by Mauritius which will serve as a compass over the next decade. These are:

- At least 60% of homes should have, by 2014, affordable access to actual download speeds of at least 10 Mbps and actual upload speeds of at least 5 Mbps; and by 2020, almost 100% of homes should have affordable access to actual download of 100 Mbps.
- The country should become a leader in the region in mobile innovation, with the fastest and most extensive wireless networks by 2020.
- Every Mauritian should have, by 2020, affordable access to robust broadband service and the means and skills to subscribe if they choose.
- By 2020, every public institution should have affordable access to at least 100 Mbps broadband service to anchor institutions such as schools, hospitals and government buildings.
- To ensure safety of the public at large, every alarm monitoring and security response service provider should, by 2020, have access to a nationwide, wireless, interoperable broadband public safety network.
- To ensure that Mauritius leads in the clean energy economy in line with the Maurice Ile Durable programme, every Mauritian should, by 2020, be able to use broadband to track and manage their real-time energy consumption.

Broadband Internet in Mauritius

Broadband Internet, defined as Internet connectivity at speed of at least 256 Kbps, was introduced in 2002. In September 2011, the number of broadband Internet subscribers was 232,611. These subscribers had access to the service through Digital Subscriber Line connection, mobile cellular telephone, using General Packet Radio Service including the Wireless Application Protocol, and the third Generation of Mobile telephony (3G).

The number of Internet subscribers in September 2011 was 287,339 representing some 23 subscribers per 100 inhabitants. Out of the 287,339 subscribers, 43% were mobile Internet users.
Mauritius and Turkey have concluded talks on a Framework Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation during a two-day meeting held on 11 and 12 January 2012 in Port Louis. The Framework Agreement is expected to be signed at the end of February 2012 in Mauritius during the visit of the Turkish Minister of Economy, Mr. Caglayan.

The Turkish delegation was led by Mr Hakan Karabalik, Head of Department of the Ministry of Economy. The Mauritian side was headed by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Mr Anand Neewoor, and comprised representatives from relevant Ministries and the private sector including the Mauritian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and MEXA.

The Framework Agreement

The objective of the Framework Agreement is to enhance economic cooperation as well as foster trade between Mauritius and Turkey. It covers different areas of cooperation including Agriculture, Education, Science and Technology as well as provisions on trade facilitation and trade promotion. The Agreement will provide a platform to identify areas of investment and create greater economic synergies between both countries.

It is recalled that Mauritius and Turkey signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in September 2011 and once the Framework Agreement concluded, it will provide the necessary platform to tap the benefits of the FTA as it enters into force.

Another milestone in Mauritius-Turkey’s trade relationship, says SFA

In his closing remarks, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs said that the successful outcome of the talks mark another milestone in Mauritius-Turkey’s maturing trade relationship, opening up the possibility of a gradual network of Memorandum of Understandings or agreements that can be envisaged in different sectors. According to Mr Neewoor, the Framework Agreement is designed in a way which will offer both an individual and collective economic boost, and allow businesses to draw on the benefits of the Mauritius-Turkey Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed in September 2011.

For his part, Mr Karabalik, noted that concluding the Framework Agreement is the second step that has been taken after the signature of the FTA and this has been done rapidly. Mauritius is the first country in sub-Saharan Africa with which Turkey has signed an FTA and due to this fact Turkey attaches great importance to this FTA, he said. ‘For sure in our experience, it will help to boost trade and economic relations as well as investments between both countries’, Mr Karabalik stressed.

Volume of trade between Mauritius and Turkey

In the first ten months of 2011, the volume of trade between Mauritius and Turkey reached 43.2 million USD. During this period, Turkey’s exports increased by 117.4% that is from 16.9 million USD to 36.8 million USD. Similarly, Turkish imports rose by 21.7% from 5.2 million USD to 6.4 million USD.
One of the greatest challenges that Mauritius would face in 2012 is the management of the euro zone crisis that will eventually have a direct impact on the economy, stressed the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Xavier-Luc Duval, in a press communiqué issued on 9 January 2012.

The Vice-Prime Minister pointed out that measures will be taken in 2012 especially to curtail the negative impacts of all major changes that are forecasted for this year. At the same time, he added, the Mauritian economy should be well prepared to better respond to new challenges and much emphasis should be laid on investment, increased productivity of businesses, diversifying the markets, protection of the environment while providing better protection to people at the lower rungs of the social ladder.

Among the main priorities that will help the economy to withstand the euro crisis:

- Putting in place of a contingency plan to deal with the partial or total dismantling of the euro
- Implementing the provisions of the National Resilience Fund (NRF) in case of economic threat
- Implementing all budgetary measures in time
- Getting rid of bottlenecks that hinder the implementation of major projects especially public infrastructure projects
- Ensuring the effective promotion of goods and services particularly with regards to new sectors such as the creation of marinas and film production
- Maintaining an appropriate communication strategy between economic partners and the public in general

According to Vice-Prime Minister Duval, Mauritius will be directly affected by various international events that will take place in 2012 such as the presidential elections in France, in the United States, the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and presidential or parliamentary elections scheduled in 20 African countries. The holding of the Summer Olympic Games, from July 27 to August 12 this year in London, could also affect the tourism industry in Mauritius, he said.

Mauritius ranks 8th on the Index of Economic Freedom 2012

Mauritius is placed 8th in global rankings of the Index of Economic Freedom 2012 published by the Wall Street Journal and the Heritage Foundation, which rates the freedoms of 183 economies across the world on a scale from 1 to 100 points.

With a total economic freedom score of 77 points which is well above the world average, Mauritius also ranks 1st out of the 46 countries in the Sub-Saharan African region followed by Botswana and Rwanda at the 2nd and 3rd place respectively. The Index further mentioned that it is the first time that Mauritius figures in the top 10 list and the first time ever that a Sub-Saharan African country has been so highly rated.

According to the report, Government’s continued commitment to structural reforms and policies that promote integration into the global marketplace has placed the island economy as a world leader in economic freedom.
Prisons
Barkly Special Prison for Women operational

The Barkly Special Prison for Women, located in the premises of the Correctional Youth Centre in Beau Bassin, is operational since 5 January 2012. The object of this Rs 5 million project is to provide an environment more suitable for prisoners with special needs and challenging behavior.

Construction works began in March 2010 and ended in November 2010. The Prisons Department has also undertaken works to enhance the safety of the existing wall and built a new road leading to the prison of Barkly. The new prison comprises a twelve-cellular bathroom incorporated residential block with yard and office, a gate lodge housing a visit room cum search and other offices. The first female detainee was admitted on 9 January 2012.

It will be recalled that the setting up of this prison is a result of the decision taken by the Prisons Department to transfer women prisoners with difficult attitudes from the Women Prison in Beau Bassin. These women work less well in terms of interpersonal and life skills and it was deemed necessary to develop a separate facility to house them.

Literacy and Numeracy Course for Detainees - Training of trainers

On the rehabilitation side, the Mauritius Prisons Service, in collaboration with Media Watch Organisation, has put up a basic course on literacy and numeracy for detainees, to be conducted in Mauritian creole.

At the initial implementation stage, a batch of 20 persons, namely six resource persons, five detainees and nine Prison officers, will be trained as trainers. They will follow the course of 20 hours duration in mother tongue literacy, transfer of skills from Mauritian Creole to English and accountancy. After completion of the course, the trainers will be called to set up courses in the different penal institutions which will be evaluated by the facilitators. Detainees will have the opportunity to learn, read and write in creole, develop basic competencies in English and gather basic skills in accountancy.

The aim is to train trainers who will eventually train detainees to read and write in English through the creole medium. The latter will also be taught how to maintain their balance of accounts. Through this programme of education, rehabilitation and empowerment, the detainees will receive training which will help them to integrate the normal social and economic life after completion of their sentences by securing a job or embarking on a business of their own.

This capacity building programme is in line with the mission of the Prisons Service to rehabilitate and integrate detainees into the mainstream society and empower them to lead a normal life after release.
School Year 2012 kicks off

Some 15 230 new pupils entered primary schools and around 13 000 joined secondary schools on 11 January 2012, while the other students resumed school on January 12.

For this academic year in the Republic of Mauritius, pre-primary schools have accommodated some 34 000 children. Five additional pre-primary schools namely at Belle Mare, Palma, Barkly, Duperre, and Bambous, constructed in 2011, are operational since January 2012. Around 116 000 pupils and 115 300 students are attending the 305 primary schools and 180 secondary schools, respectively.

This year, Kreol Morisien has been introduced in Standard I and some 3 487 pupils have opted for this subject. Around 84 teachers have opted for the teaching of Kreol Morisien including 13 from Rodrigues and training was carried out at the level of Mauritius Institute of Examination from the period August to November 2011. With regards to Bhojpuri, it is being taught as an oral component in schools as from the start of this year as well.

In addition, the National Assessment for Form III students has been rolled out to all schools this year and the subjects being examined are English, French, Mathematics, Computer Literacy/Studies and Science. The National Assessment for Form III students which is being implemented in 139 secondary schools, both State and Private as well as in Rodrigues, addresses the five-year span of schooling after CPE to Form V which does not allow the detection of weaknesses of students which would have enabled remediation.

A new strategy has also been charted out whereby a fourth year schooling is being added to the Pre-vocational education programme. The curriculum was reviewed to suit the needs of children attending the prevocational education and place greater emphasis on the work-based experience, social skills, lifelong learning skills and development of trade skills. The 4-year programme will lead to a formal certification pitched on the national qualification framework and would open up pathways to further education and training, and for either vocational educational, or reintegration of the academic stream or again becoming functional and employable.

It will be recalled that the budget for education and training has increased from Rs 9.8 billion in 2011 to Rs 10.7 billion in 2012, representing an increase of some 10 per cent. Rs 500 000 has also been provided per school for infrastructure in the 2012 budget.

Tertiary International Knowledge Investment Forum 2012

Decision makers, investors from the education sectors, C-level executives from leading corporates, representatives from the financial services, business professionals and government officials from different countries around the world participated in a one-day ‘Mauritius International Knowledge Investment Forum 2012’ (MIKIF) held on 30 January 2012 in Balaclava.

An initiative of the Board of Investment in collaboration with the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, the forum focused on latest trends, developments, opportunities and challenges in the spheres of higher education. The MIKIF also showcased the various investment opportunities that Mauritius offers to the global education community by creating the most appropriate environment and encouraging investment in the education sector.

The key themes discussed during the forum were: internationalisation of higher education, case studies on mobility of international students, the growing needs for specialised infrastructure for higher education and meeting the rising industry needs for higher education in Mauritius and regionally.
The Ministry of Health and Quality of Life has strengthened measures to enhance both food control and food safety in the country in the wake of an increase in food poisoning cases. Figures from the Ministry revealed that since 2011, around 46% of food poisoning accidents occurred at home as a result of unhygienic practices and the consumption of toxic foodstuffs such as mushrooms and fish. The number of cases is as follows: 129 in 2008, 831 in 2009, 79 in 2010 and 336 in 2011.

At a press conference on 9 January 2012 in Port Louis, the Minister of Health and Quality of Life, Mr Lormus Bundhoo, underlined the need to sensitize the population, in particular, school children on the need to take necessary precautions when buying and consuming foodstuffs. He recalled that an efficient food control is necessary as a result of the emergence of food borne hazards, climate variations, climatic change, the incessant change of technologies in food production, processing, marketing, and the change in lifestyles, namely consumption of street food and fast food.

Measures taken by the Ministry include a fivefold increase in vigilance and inspection, distribution of leaflets on food safety which will be available in some 5,000 selling points and in schools and ensuring that the quality of water and food sold are within the prescribed norms and regulations. In a bid to carry out quick field testing on food samples, the Ministry has purchased seven microbiological rapid testing equipment.

Each equipment consists of an incubator which can undertake tests for salmonella, coliform/E coli and vibrio parahaemoliticus. These equipment will help to improve the system of surveillance with quicker results and a reduction in delay to release foodstuffs at point of entry and also relieve work pressure on laboratories.

The situation will be assessed again in six months and if no decrease in prohibition orders and contraventions is noted despite the sensitisation campaign and inspections, the law will be amended, said the Minister. He appealed to all stakeholders such as heads of Parent Teachers Associations, head teachers and canteen operators to ensure that food sold is fit for human consumption and hygienic conditions are observed. Minister Bundhoo urged parents to sensitize their children on how much to eat and what to eat.

Overview of the health situation in Mauritius

According to a survey carried out in 2004 by the Ministry, the prevalence of overweight and obese children aged 5 to 11 years was 31.7%. Figures also indicate that 30.7% do not eat any fruit daily and that 90% of children aged 6 years have dental caries. In adolescents aged 12 to 19 years, the prevalence of overweight and obesity was 15.7%.
Climate Change
Workshop to integrate Climate Change in sector policies and investments

‘Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) policy and Carbon Balance Appraisal of Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use projects and policies’, was the focus of a three-day training workshop held from 18 to 20 January 2012 at the R. Burrenchobay Lecture Theatre, University of Mauritius, Réduit.

About 50 agriculture, forestry and land use planners and project field experts from various countries in the Indian Ocean attended the workshop organised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology and the University of Mauritius. The objective was to help the participants to deal with the best way to integrate climate change in sector policies and investments.

The participants were called upon to scrutinise different agriculture and forestry policy and investment strategies which could contribute to mitigate the impact of climate change through a reduction of Green house gas emissions. The workshop also served as a platform to expose the participants to appropriate preventive and curative measures as regards climate change.

The Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, Dr Rajeshwar Jeetah, pointed out that the threats and risks of climate change are serious for the global economy, society and environment and that safeguarding the environment has become a matter of human survival. He pointed out that by 2020, some 75 to 250 million people in Africa will face growing shortages of water due to climate change. The Minister added that Mauritius has the potential to contribute to a decrease in the emergence of carbon markets through projects in sustainable agriculture, forestry and agro-forestry, and land use change.

The United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator for Mauritius and Seychelles, Mrs Leyla Tegmo-Reddy, also present, emphasised that climate change is a high priority issue for the United Nations system globally and that the UN is conducting a series of programmes and projects targeting climate change.

Mauritius has adopted a series of measures to reduce its carbon footprint. The most prominent one is the Maurice Ile Durable project with the major thrust to reduce fossil fuel use, improving energy efficiency, and increasing the share of renewable energy from the present 17% to 35% by 2025.

Various actions have also been taken to ‘green’ the country’s development efforts so that climate resilience, sustainability and low-carbon growth become the foundations of the future prosperity. They are namely, the introduction of a ‘carbon price’, such as levies and additional taxes on fossil fuels, incentives such as subsidised solar water heaters and CFLs, duty rebate on vehicles emitting less CO2, promoting innovation and investment in renewable energies (solar, wind, hydro, landfill gas, etc) and encouraging energy efficiency through the promotion of less carbon emitting technologies and practices.

The Climate Smart Agriculture strategy is a new concept put in place with the collaboration of Governments, international agencies such as the World Bank, the FAO, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The concept which has been recognised a priority by all Ministers of Agriculture in Africa, aims at addressing the challenges of building synergies among climate change mitigation, adaptation and food security. CSA also aims at enhancing the capacity of the agriculture sector to sustainably support food security, incorporating the need for adaptation and the potential for development strategies.
**Implementation of the Hydrochlorofluorocarbon Phase out Management Plan**

A Workshop on the Implementation of the Hydrochlorofluorocarbon Phase out Management Plan (HPMP) that will allow Mauritius to meet the new phase out obligations was held on 19 January 2012 at La Cannelle, Domaines Les Pailles.

With the phasing out of the Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), an increase in the use of Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC), has been observed mainly in the refrigeration and air conditioning servicing sector. However, with the recent adjustment of the Montreal Protocol, Mauritius has now to address the issue of phasing out the HCFCs as the latter also contributes to ozone depletion.

While Mauritius does not produce any refrigerant gas or manufacture appliances using these gases, refrigerant gas, particularly HCFC is imported for local consumption, re-exported to Seychelles for the hotel sector and sold to shipping vessels.

Hence, the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development in collaboration with the German Cooperation Agency, GIZ-PROKLIMA developed the HPMP for the smooth phasing out of these substances by 2030, through a wide consultative process involving all stakeholders. The HPMP was approved by the Government and the Executive Committee of the Multilateral Fund to the Montreal Protocol and the total cost for its implementation is estimated at about US $3 million.

The phasing out schedule for HCFC rests on the phasing out of HFCFs in Mauritius through a freeze of imports in 2013 to the average level of 2009-2010 and then applying a gradual reduction on import until complete phase out in 2030.

Mauritius managed to phase out the use of CFCs five years ahead of the 2010 deadline and intends to accelerate the phasing out of HCFCs to achieve the target well before the 2040 deadline. Consequently, the import of appliances and equipment containing HCFCs will be banned as from January 2013 since alternatives such as hydrocarbons, ammonia and carbon dioxide are already available on the local market.

The HPMP also makes provision for amendments to existing legislations namely the Consumer Protection Act and the Dangerous Chemicals Control Act, to control HCFCs. Moreover, under the HPMP, demonstration projects including awareness campaigns will be implemented to encourage the use of natural refrigerants.

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**MRA Revenue Collection in 2011 amounted to Rs 53 billion**

The Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) has for the fiscal year 2011 collected approximately Rs 53 billion in the form of revenue as compared to Rs 49.64 billion in 2010, which represents an increase of 7%.

The satisfactory performance on the revenue collection front, according to the Director General of the MRA, Mr Sudamo Lal, is mostly attributed to a number of initiatives taken at the MRA and also due to changes in excise duties especially on tobacco and alcohol. Revenue collection under excise duties amounted to Rs 9.3 billion in 2010 whilst in 2011 Rs 10.7 billion were collected.

Other factors which have contributed towards this increase in revenue include: broadening of VAT taxpayer base by 18% and Income Tax base by 11% and an increase in e-filing namely 70% corporate tax returns and 64% of individual IT returns.

Moreover, fiscal investigations spread across various trades and professions have yielded Rs 188 million.

Among the other key achievements of the MRA for the year 2011 were: arrears collection of Rs 867 million, tax audits of Rs 1,875 billion, tax refunds of Rs 152 million and narco and other seizures of Rs 86 million.

The MRA is offering a lottery draw in a bid to encourage more individuals and companies to file returns electronically. It is also stepping up efforts to track tax evaders. The MRA is able to trace unreported income through other sources.
Energy Efficiency Workshop on Energy Audit Management Scheme

Around 75 engineers, contractors and architects followed a three and a half day training workshop on the Energy Audit Management Scheme (EAMS) from 24 to 27 January 2012 at La Cannelle, Domaine Les Pailles. The workshop was organised at the initiative of the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, the Energy Efficiency Management Office and the UNDP.

The training programme was held in the context of the implementation of the UNDP/GEF project ‘Removal of Barriers to Energy Efficiency and Energy Conservation in Buildings’. The objective of the workshop was to create awareness and familiarise the local stakeholders with the scheme, the Energy Audit Manual, the Compliance Mechanism, and the Contingent Support Mechanism (CSM). A British consultancy firm, Building Research Establishment (BRE), has been appointed to prepare the EAMS and the CSM.

The programme comprised presentations on the EAMS, Compliance Mechanism, road map for Accreditation to ISO 17024, requirements for local Certification Body and local Accreditation Body, interim Certification of Building Energy Auditors, Code of Conduct of Building Energy Auditors and Quality Plan and Quality Assurance Guide, amongst others. Dr Andy Lewry, Principal consultant, from the BRE was the resource person.

Energy Auditing is considered a time-tested catalyst which aims at ensuring energy savings and compliance to environmental factors. More prominently, in industries and commercial buildings, energy audits lead to quality and productivity improvements by guaranteeing fewer breakdowns and reduced maintenance. In this line, EAMS will develop the necessary infrastructure for carrying out energy audits in energy-intensive sectors as outlined in the relevant provisions of the Energy Efficiency Bill. The CSM will in addition provide financial incentives to Designated Energy Consumers to enable them to enlist the services of a Certified Energy Auditor for undertaking energy audits of their non-residential buildings.

It will be recalled that in 2011 some 45 building energy auditors were trained in the EAMS and CSM project.

Support to Women and Children in Distress
Four NGOs receive grants totaling Rs 2.3 million

Four NGOs received on 5 January 2012 grants totaling around Rs 2.3 million under the Special Collaborative Programme for Support to Women and Children in Distress to fund approved projects. The cheques were handed over to them by the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, Mrs Mireille Martin.

The Programme, which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, was set up in 2009 with a view to providing financial support to NGOs working for the welfare of women and children in distress.

The four approved projects relate to:

- Empowering women with epilepsy through community education
- Transport Facilities for 66 disabled children coming from poor families
- Empowerment of Rodriguan Women and remedial classes for slow learners children in Rodrigues
- Support, in the form of allowances, transport, equipment and school materials, to some 30 children in the southern region of the island suffering from various disabilities.

Some 29 projects were approved and retained in 2011 under the Programme and a total sum of Rs 18.5 million disbursed for the various projects.
** Fisheries**

Fingerlings released in the Blue Bay Marine Park to rehabilitate the lagoon

*The Ministry of Fisheries and Rodrigues, released some 5,000 fingerlings of ‘cordonnier’ reared in hatcheries at the Albion Fisheries and Research Centre, on 12 January 2012 in the Blue Bay Marine Park. The project is in line with the marine ranching-release of fish fingerlings and coral farming programme with a view to rehabilitating the lagoon of Mauritius.*

Under the programme, the target is to release some 100,000 fingerlings in the lagoon and a sum of Rs 10 million has been provided for the project in the 2012 budget. One of the main objectives of the marine ranching project is also to rebuild fish stocks through the release of fingerlings for the benefit of fishers.

An exposé on coral farming was held prior to the release of the fingerlings. The coral farming project is part of the conservation strategy of the Ministry of Fisheries in line with the millennium development goals.

On the same occasion, a private sector operator presently engaged in the post larval capture of marine aquarium fish also handed over some 200 marine aquarium fish for release in the Marine Park. In addition, another 20,000 fingerlings were released on the same day at La Cambuse.

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**The Fish Auction Market**

The Minister of Fisheries and Rodrigues, Mr. L.J. Von Mally, visited the Fish Auction Market at Les Salines in Port Louis on 12 January 2012. The purpose was to present the different facilities available for the proposed auctioning of fish to stakeholders.

The Fish Auction Market, a project to the tune of Rs 55 million and partly funded by the Greek Government, represents a platform for the development of a modern and efficient fish marketing system for catches from the industrial, the semi-industrial and the small-scale fisheries as well as the fish and by-catch unloaded by calling fishing vessels. It is in compliance with the European and international sanitary norms and standards relating to fish and fish products to allow trading in foreign markets.
Social protection
Drafting of a Disability Bill for greater protection of the disabled

A Disability Bill which will give greater protection to the disabled, in line with the objectives of the United Nation’s (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is being drafted, the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions, Mrs Sheilabai Bappoo, announced at a press conference on 24 January 2012.

Another important measure for the betterment of the disabled will be the amendment of the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act (1996), to include a penalty for employers who fail to abide to the regulations under the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act (1996). Under the Act, all enterprises having a workforce of 35 or more are required to include 3% of persons with disabilities.

As regards senior citizens, Mrs Bappoo referred to the Elderly Day Care Centres set up across the island to cater for them, adding that a third batch of carers will start training as from July this year for a National Certificate for the Care of the Elderly and the Disabled.

By March this year, Mauritius will submit its Country Report to the UN regarding all the measures implemented by the Government in view of helping those who are disabled, the Minister also said.

It will be recalled that a sum of about Rs 230 million has been voted for various projects to be implemented in 2012. The main project is the construction of a residential recreational centre to the tune of Rs 197.5 million at Pointe aux Piments to cater for some 12 000 senior citizens annually. A new wing to the tune of some Rs 5 million to accommodate about 15 additional beds will also be added to Foyer Trocheta which currently welcomes some 35 senior citizens with severe handicaps.

Launching of Website and Database on Disability

A website and a database on disability with the collaboration of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were launched on 30 January 2012. The establishment of the website and database enables Mauritius to meet the requirements under Article 31 of the Convention which calls for State Parties to collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data.

The website and database provide, in a detailed, centralised and coherent manner, invaluable elements of information derived from an otherwise scattered variety of sources, in the areas of education, health, vocational training, employment, human rights, sports, culture and leisure. They are also important tools to define policies and approach donors for assistance for people with disabilities.

While the database is a tool for decision making, the website is a disabled-friendly specific portal where people with disabilities can apply for a number of services.