International Women’s Day 2011
PM for quota system to enlist more women in politics

“A quota system should be put in place to boost the number of women in politics”, stated the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, on 8 March 2011 at the Grand Bay International Conference Centre. The Prime Minister was the Chief Guest at the ceremony marking International Women’s Day. The celebrations were this year placed under the theme ‘Women as Agents of Transformation’.

Dr Ramgoolam saluted the courage of those women who are already active in politics. According to him, it is important to set up a specific mechanism to encourage more women to engage in that field. “There is a big debate on whether this should be based on a quota system or on merit and it is clear that we should go for a quota system. We will have time to discuss all this when we talk about electoral reform”, the Prime Minister explained.

Referring to the ‘glass ceiling’, the Prime Minister was of opinion that the private sector had a long way to go, compared to the public sector. He noted that the judiciary and the public sector with 35% of
women Permanent Secretaries are the two sectors that are emerging towards parity. He made an appeal for more efforts from the private sector on that front and called for a change of mindset.

For her part, the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, Mrs Sheilabai Bappoo, stressed that Government wants to empower women even more as they remain the pillars of social, economic and political development of Mauritius.

Citing latest official figures showing that 64% women are unemployed, she deplored that women resources are being underutilised and women are not fully integrated in the development process. “It is crucial to create opportunities so as to enable women assume new responsibilities for the progress of the country and for that to happen, gender equality must be respected. Today there is a real political will for that change”, the Minister stressed.

Mrs Bappoo also announced that, after 25 years of existence of the National Women’s Council, a new National Women’s Council Bill is being drafted to better reflect the present context.

The official ceremony at Grand Bay was preceded by a forum on ‘Women as Agents of Transformation’. Discussions revolved around three themes: social and legal empowerment; economic empowerment; and political empowerment.

The agenda also comprised the launching of a National Platform ‘Women in Politics’, with the website: http://women.gov.mu/fpoi-maurice, as well as that of three booklets relating to elimination of discrimination against women, women’s participation in decision-making and economic empowerment.

BRIC

New Platform to Support Innovative Entrepreneurs

The first Business and Research Incubation Centre (BRIC) - a connecting and collaborative platform - was launched by the Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, Dr R. Jeetah, on 3 March 2011 at the Mauritius Research Council in Ebène. The platform is designed to provide the necessary environment that will translate innovative ideas into fruitful businesses.

The BRIC is to act as a facilitating vehicle to investigate the commercial potential of innovative ideas from the academia and other sources. It will also harness existing resources from relevant organisations to uphold exchanges between incubatees and interdisciplinary professionals namely business advisory firms, legal and technical advisors and marketing experts. Moreover, tertiary level students will be encouraged to undergo training at the incubator centre to stimulate them so that they can generate innovative ideas and grow their own businesses.

A hand-holding approach is being adopted by the BRIC platform whereby incubatees are provided with free access to office spaces and business services as well as business support such as access for prototyping and testing facilities, Intellectual Property development and sales and marketing.

Presently, five incubatees are being housed and it is expected that these facilities will be extended to a greater number of innovators soon. The duration of the incubation ranges from a minimum of six months, with the possibility of renewal based on performance, to a maximum of two years.

The setting up of the BRIC is the result of the Business Angels Forum held last year in a bid to bridge the gap between the academia and the business world, and boost collaboration between academic/research institutions and business and innovation promoting organisations.
The official ceremony marking the 43rd Independence anniversary and 19th anniversary of Republic Day was held on 12 March 2011 in the evening at the Champ de Mars in the presence of the President of the Republic, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and Chief Guest Mohamed Nasheed, President of the Republic of Maldives, as well as other eminent personalities.

The programme comprised the flag raising ceremony, a march past by disciplined forces and uniformed organisations, a helicopter fly-past, music/dance fusion items, a display of floats followed by a popular show and fireworks.

Various activities were scheduled during the whole month of March in the context of National Day. These included a Festival Mauricien to showcase the rich creative Mauritian skills in the artistic and cultural fields, cultural shows by local and foreign artists, artistic fairs around the country and distribution of bookmarks to students of primary and secondary schools, as well as a Marche de l’Unité and a culinary exhibition at Goodlands.

President’s Message

Progress result of democracy

“We also know about the difficult situations through which countries producing basic commodities have had to undergo as a result of the great economic crisis two years back. There has been flood and drought and prices of basic commodities and petrol have gone up on the international market”, he said.

“These factors”, stressed the President, “are beyond Government’s control”.

According to the President, people should be able to bring the necessary changes in their lifestyles and live according to their means. “Statistics”, observed the President, “show that the country is developing a highly consumptive society and it is important to become wary so as not to become a country with debts”.

“Mauritius has a promising future and to continue on the path of progress, we have to have faith and stay positive. National unity, human development and education remain sine qua non conditions for the nation”, the President emphasised.
In his National Day message, the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, reminded the symbolical meaning of 12 March as that of an occasion to commemorate those who fought for the country’s liberty. “We are right to be proud of our achievements but the progress of a country and of a people is an unending process. We have succeeded in achieving the Mauritian miracle because we have made efforts in terms of leadership and vision”, he stated.

Events unfolding on the international front and their impact on the Mauritian economy as well as on other countries were evoked by the Prime Minister. These include the world economic crisis, climate change and its effect on the market of commodities and on agricultural exporting countries, the escalating price of petrol, the food crisis and the increase in price of goods in general around the globe.

“The Government will do all it can to protect citizens against increase in prices”, stated the Prime Minister. He enumerated measures taken to help Mauritians, including the setting up of a Price Observatory to limit the impact of price increases on the population’s wallet, the need to review the country’s strategy to reduce imports and increase food autonomy and the importance of continuing the policy of land cultivation in partnership with countries of the region. The Prime Minister evoked other several issues of national interest which include free education, free transport, health and development-related and infrastructural projects and the investments in those sectors.

The Prime Minister said that his determination to fight fraud and corruption remains unaltered. He also expressed his resolve to protect the social stability and national unity of the country. “Nobody is above the law”, he recalled. “If we have rights then we also have responsibilities”, he emphasised. “We have come a long way since Mauritius has gained freedom. Today’s world is difficult and pitiless as money plays a more important role than it should be. It is therefore the role of politics to reestablish a balance in favour of the needy. It is necessary that all our actions are guided by national unity as it is in this manner that we will build the future for the new generation. The year ahead demands from each and every one a sense of discipline and patriotism so as to face the reality of the world. Together we will build a modern country in unity and in justice” said the Prime Minister.
National Day 2011
Mauritius and Maldives propose to pool their efforts to enhance security, economic, cultural, maritime, air and tourism cooperation between the two countries. A joint Commission will be set up to work out the modalities of cooperation.

Areas of cooperation and collaboration were identified during a working session held between the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and the President of Maldives, Mr Mohamed Nasheed on 12 March 2011 at Clarisse House. These include defence, economy, monitoring of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), tourism, the port area and sustainable development.

The Prime Minister and the Maldivian President agreed to work towards the recognition of Small Island States as a distinct category within the United Nations system so that such countries benefit from special and differential treatment in view of their vulnerabilities.

The need to work together in the international arena was underlined. This is due to the fact that such a union would increase both countries’ leverage on the international front, more so since the islands enjoy high credibility in terms of democracy, governance and respect for human rights.

Both leaders agreed that they should study the possibility of setting up a union of Indian Ocean Island States, which would promote trade and business cooperation in various sectors and consolidate air and maritime links. They agreed that further consultations including consultations with the members of the Indian Ocean Commission will be undertaken in this regard.

During the working session, both countries’ respective facilities in maritime surveillance were reviewed and the two leaders agreed to study the possibility of collaborating with other Indian Ocean Island States to enhance the capacity to fight illegal and unregulated fishing in the EEZs and piracy.

Both leaders voiced out their strong opposition to the establishment of a Marine Protected Area around the Chagos Archipelago and agreed to take a common stand vis-à-vis the UK government. It was also agreed that the two governments would make bilateral arrangements on the overlapping area of extended continental shelf of the two States around Chagos.

Mr Nasheed was on State visit to Mauritius from 11 to 13 March 2011 as chief guest to the celebration on 12 March of the 43rd independence anniversary and 19th Republic Day of Mauritius. During his visit, he and his delegation had extensive meetings with several dignitaries.
Tackling traffic congestion in the North

Goodlands bypass and second carriageway from Pamplemousses to Forbach operational

The construction of the Goodlands bypass, to the tune of some Rs 294 m, was deemed necessary owing to the increasing volume of vehicles and serious congestion occurring on the main access to Goodlands and its surrounding areas. The road project consisted in constructing a new single carriageway to bypass the village of Goodlands.

Works included some 5 km of carriageway of 7.4 metres wide, a hard shoulder of 2 metres wide, 1.1 km of access roads, the construction of four roundabouts and the rehabilitation and upgrading of part of Beau Plateau Road over an approximate length of 200 metres. Provision has also been made for drainage structures and miscellaneous road equipment such as carriageway markings, traffic signs, handrails, safety fences, road lighting at junctions.

As for the second carriageway to A13 from Pamplemousses to Sottise - Phase I – from Pamplemousses to Forbach, its construction fits in the Government’s objective to tackle congestion in major agglomerations. The previous motorway from Pamplemousses to Forbach and the link road from Forbach to Sottise had been constructed in 1992. With the economic development in the North mainly due to the thriving tourist industry, the volume of vehicles from Port Louis and the south to the Grand Baie area in the north has increased dramatically, hence the need for the construction of the west carriageway of the motorway from Pamplemousses to Forbach and further extension of the motorway to Sottise. The project is being implemented in two phases:

• Phase I – From Pamplemousses to Forbach over an approximate length of 7 km,
• Phase II – From Forbach to Sottise over an approximate length of 5 km.

The first phase has been completed at the cost of some Rs 227 m. Works consisted amongst others of the construction of two lanes 7.6 m wide over a total approximate length of 7 km and of drain structures. Provision has also been made for shoulders, footpaths, bus lay-bys, bus shelters, street lighting markings, traffic signs and landscaping.

Works for the construction of Phase II from Forbach to Sottise are ongoing.
Ensuring safety and security in EEZ

The National Coast Guard will be equipped, as from 2014, with a state-of-the-art offshore patrol vessel (OPV) capable of ensuring safety and security in Mauritius’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The new OPV will be built to the tune of USD 58.5 million. The contract agreement between the Government of Mauritius and the Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd (GRSE) from Kolkata, India, for the design, construction and supply of the OPV was signed on 4 March 2011 at the Prime Minister’s Office, in Port Louis.

The construction of the vessel will be financed under the line of credit USD 100 million offered in 2005 by India during the State visit of the Prime Minister to India. For the acquisition of the OPV, India will provide a one-time grant of USD 10 million and the remaining USD 48.5 million will be extended under the line of credit through EXIM Bank, India.

Besides providing effective sea patrols in all parts of the maritime zones and EEZ, the new OPV will also participate in anti-piracy, anti-smuggling, anti-narcotics and illegal fishing operations as well as in the control of illegal movement of persons.

In addition to ensuring Search and Rescue cover, the OPV will provide comprehensive logistic support to the outer islands of Mauritius. The 75 metre-long vessel propelled by two diesel engines of 4 300 KW each will have an endurance of above 5 000 nautical miles to carry out sustained operations for about four weeks at sea and will be capable of operating both in daylight and at night.

The OPV will be fitted with a Close Range Naval gun with a state-of-the-art optical Fire Control System and the most advanced Global Maritime Distress and Safety System. It will carry one light helicopter, one rigid hull inflatable board, one landing craft vehicle and one rubber inflatable boat. So as to enhance logistic support to the outer islands, the ship will be able to accommodate around 60 crew members as well as 30 passengers. With state-of-the-art reverse osmosis plants, the vessel will also be able to produce ten tonnes of fresh water daily.

The Permanent Secretary of the Prime Minister’s Office, Mrs. K.O Fong Weng-Poorun, the Commissioner of Police, Mr. D. Y. Rampersad; the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. M. Ganapathi; as well as members of the Indian delegation, namely the Joint Secretary (Naval systems), Ministry of Defence, M. G. Kumar, and the Chairman and Managing Director of the GRSE, Admiral K. C. Sekhar, were present at the signature ceremony.
Les Assises de la Pêche
Towards the Elaboration of a Fisheries Master Plan

Les Assises de la Pêche, a consultation process regrouping stakeholders from the public and private sectors involved in seafood, were held on 11 March 2011 at the Grand Bay International Conference Centre on the initiative of the Ministry of Fisheries and Rodrigues in the context of the elaboration of a Fisheries Master Plan under the ACP Fish II Programme.

The event enabled the 400 participants to analyse the current status of the fisheries sector so as to chart out the future course of action for the development of the sector. Discussions focused on the following themes: Seafood Hub in Support of Fisheries Development, Fishers in the Process, Policy Orientation, Coastal and Banks Fisheries, Aquaculture, Monitoring, Control and Enforcement and Marine Protection and Conservation.

Once finalised, the findings of Les Assises de la Pêche will assist in addressing issues pertaining to the sustainable management of fisheries and the marine resources of Mauritius. The recommendations will be transmitted to the ACP Fish II experts for the development of the Fisheries Master Plan.

Master Plan

The Fisheries Master Plan aims at analysing and proposing options for a comprehensive sustainable fisheries development and management approach for Mauritius with a view to ensuring the ecological, economic, financial and social sustainability of the fisheries sector. It is funded by the 9th European Development Fund to the tune of 174 000 euros.

The Master Plan will be elaborated under the supervision of a team of experts from PESCARES, Italy. The first mission - inception phase - of the group of experts during which consultations were carried out with all stakeholders in Mauritius and Rodrigues, took place from 16 to 29 January this year.
Seafood hub to remain a key sector of the economy

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the Minister of Fisheries and Rodrigues, Mr. L. Joseph Von-Mally, pointed out that the seafood hub sector will remain one of the key sectors of the Mauritian economy since it involves more than 12,000 persons in direct employment and more than 24,000 persons indirectly. This sector has been identified as one of the pillars of the economy by the Government, he emphasised.

Consumer Protection
Price Observatory operational since March

The Price Observatory, aiming to favour transparency in the evolution of prices of commodities and protect consumers, is operational since March 2011. It is also expected to foster competition amongst players by providing information on the region practising the lowest or the highest pricing policy. The Observatory, modelled on a similar body which exists in Réunion Island, is however adapted to the specificities of Mauritius.

Three aspects will be covered by the Observatory, namely a basket comprising 10 to 15 products, a ‘caddy’ with 40 items and local products.

Information regarding the comparative prices of the different commodities will be available to consumers by end April this year. Information gathered will be published on the website of the Ministry of Business, Enterprise, Cooperatives and Consumer Protection and will be disseminated in the media, markets and community centres.

A monthly comparative chart of supermarkets across Mauritius indicating where to find a particular consumer product at the cheapest price will also be produced. The Observatory will act as an informative tool to help create an environment of competition in the market.

A Price Observatory Committee has been constituted and is chaired by Mr. Harish Bundhoo, former Director of the Central Statistics Office. The Committee comprises representatives of the Ministry of Business, Enterprise, Cooperatives and Consumer Protection, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the Mauritius Revenue Authority, the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Shop Owners’ Association and the Consumer Protection Unit.
An update of the work achieved on the five priority areas under the 14-point Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Work Plan was presented during a session of digital video conference (DVC) pertaining to Mauritius-United States TIFA held 14 March 2011 in Port Louis.

Data and other information provided covered the identification of competitive sectors for trade and investment, promotion of private sector linkages, AGOA implementation, exploring potential for greater cooperation on trade and investment agreement and enhancing agricultural trade and agri-business linkages.

On trade in services, discussions were initiated with a view to pave the way for collaboration in some specific sectors namely, ICT, Tourism, Education services, and Health services.

Two DVCs would be held prior to the next TIFA Council scheduled in Mauritius by September/October 2011. The DVCs would be dedicated to trade in services and Intellectual Property Rights.

The Mauritian delegation for the above activity was led by Mr. A. Bhuglah, Director, Trade Policy, while Ms Laurie-Ann Agama, Director for African Affairs at the office of the United States Trade Representative, led the US delegation.

On TIFA

The TIFA was signed on 18 September 2006 in Washington DC. It aims at strengthening and expanding trade ties between Mauritius and the US. It also provides an opportunity for both countries to work more closely on a broad range of trade-related issues, including moving forward the WTO Doha Development Round, and on implementing the AGOA.

The TIFA provides a formal mechanism to address bilateral trade issues and helps to enhance trade and investment relations between Mauritius and the US. Accordingly, a TIFA Council has been established to review the status of the Mauritius-US TIFA and monitor progress of joint efforts to implement the Agreement.

It will be recalled that the first TIFA Council meeting was held on 5-6 February 2007, in Mauritius. The meeting adopted a Work Plan which comprises 14 areas of cooperation. Given the TIFA Work Plan was ambitious, there was need to follow a realistic and pragmatic approach to achieve the short term and long term goals. Accordingly, benchmarks were set on five priority items with a view to achieving immediate results within the first year of implementation of the TIFA.
Food Safety
National Workshop focuses on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards

A National Workshop on the Participation of African Nations in Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (PAN-SPSO) - a project initiated by COMESA – was organised by the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security from 8 to 11 March 2011 at Domaine Les Pailles.

Among the main themes on the agenda were: Modalities for creating and/or strengthening National sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) committees; Promotion of links between private sector stakeholders having a stake in SPS issues with the public sector; and Participation of the private sector in the assessment of standards and to obtain their proposals of standards.

Mr. Brian Nsofu, Assistant Secretary General (Programmes) of COMESA, participated in the workshop.

The PAN-SPSO project

The PAN-SPSO has been established as a joint collaboration between the European Commission and the Africa Union Commission on behalf of seven African Regional Economic Communities. The initiative was taken as SPS issues, in particular food safety and biosecurity, have over the years assumed greater importance in regional and international trade.

The project aims at enhancing the SPS capacity of member countries. It also has as specific objective to improve the efficiency of the participation of African countries in the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC).

The ultimate outcome would be the proper formulation of international standards on food safety and animal and plant health. The services of the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU/IBAR) and the Inter-African Phytosanitary Council (AU-IAPSC) have been enlisted and will be imparted through the seven Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

SPS to boost crop, livestock and food sector in Mauritius

The SPS component of the project will complement the efforts being put in to enhance the competitiveness of the crop, livestock and food sector in Mauritius.

Through the regional cross border initiative, there exists a huge potential to develop these three sectors by promoting the intra- and inter-regional trade. Accordingly, there is need for developing coordinated policies and harmonised systems for effective regional trade in agricultural commodities. Thus SPS issues have to be harmonised to facilitate movement and trade of such commodities.
Mauritius hosted the 6th Joint Expert Group Meeting of the Africa-European Union Energy Partnership (AEEP) from 16 to 18 March with a view to finalising the Action Plan for the provision of electricity to some 250 million Africans over the period 2010-2020.

The meeting, organised at the initiative of the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, the European Union (EU) and the African Union Commission, regrouped around 80 participants from some 15 countries namely Algeria, Burundi, Cameroun, Egypt, Ghana, Togo, Uganda, South Africa, Mali and Mauritius.

Discussions focused on the implementation of the political objectives of the AEEP, its monitoring and the implementation of cooperation programme on renewable energy.

Mobilising resources for energy provision

The Action Plan, in line with the partnership between Africa and Europe, aims at mobilising financial, technical and human resources in support of the African energy development programme. Another objective is to scale up European and African investments in energy infrastructure and interconnections and further promote renewable energy and energy efficiency.

In his address at the opening ceremony on 17 March 2011, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities, Dr Rashid Beebeejaun, said that Mauritius is fully committed to attaining the objectives of the Action Plan which deals with general concerns about energy security, price fluctuations, increasing demand energy access and climate change. He emphasised the need for a spirit of cooperation among the stakeholders, adding that a concerted approach will lead to the successful implementation of projects which have been outlined by the two partners.

As regards the development of renewable sources of energy, Dr Beebeejaun recalled that it is crucial to tackle barriers and obstacles with a view to ensuring a greater penetration of renewable energy in the energy mix. To that effect, it is necessary that reliable and sustainable financing options be identified so as to enhance the use of renewable sources of energy on the continent by sharing technology and experience as well as capacity building, he said.

AEEP

AEEP is a long-term framework for structured political dialogue and cooperation between Africa and the EU on energy issues of strategic importance. It was launched in Lisbon during the 2nd Africa-EU Summit in December 2007.

AEEP aims at creating a forum for energy dialogue between the EU and Africa; promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency; improving the management of energy resources; enhancing institutional and technical capacities; increasing investment in energy infrastructure in both supply and demand side and promoting development of networks and cross-border interconnections and other energy exchange infrastructure in Africa and between Africa and Europe.
The investment portfolio of the National Pensions Fund (NPF) and that of the National Savings Fund (NSF) amounted to over Rs 70 billion and Rs 13 billion respectively at the end of 2010. Both Funds have registered combined assets of an equivalent of Rs 83.6 billion. These figures were released on 11 March 2011 in Port Louis by the NPF-NSF Investment Committee.

At the same period last year, the market value of the NPF portfolio totalled around Rs 63 billion while that of the NSF amounted to approximately Rs 11 billion. From December 2009 to December 2010, the Funds in the NPF and NSF schemes increased by Rs 7.3 billion and Rs 1.8 billion respectively.

Presently, the portfolio of the NPF is well diversified with international exposure, including foreign currencies at 20.5% and Equity exposure at around 19.5%. The Fund also added 1.1% exposure to direct property. According to the NPF-NSF Investment Committee, given the current financial situation and future projections, the exposures should increase over the coming months. This Committee is actively working on finding opportunities to increase the Funds’ equity exposure at attractive prices.

For the year 2010, the NPF and the NSF funds made several investments among which Government Bonds and Bills and Treasury Notes. These investments constitute the core holdings for both Funds.

As regards investment in property, during the second half of 2010, the NPF purchased two buildings in Ebène, namely Altimax Building and Ebène Heights. These acquisitions form part of the diversification strategy of the investment Fund, in order to optimise the return while being conscious of the need to protect the capital of the Funds. Concerning private equity, the NPF has added more private equity exposure during the year 2010. Private equity is an area which, the Investment Committee believes, can be used owing to its size and long-term investment horizon to gain meaningful exposure to sectors or regions which can provide good long-term yields for the Fund.

About NPF and NSF

It is recalled that the NPF was set up in 1978. It is based on a two-tier system in which Government finances payment of the universal basic pensions whilst earnings-related contributory benefits are paid to insured persons or their dependents, on the basis of contributions paid to the scheme by the insured persons and their employers.

The NSF was set up in 1995. Whereas the NPF is a benefits scheme, the NSF is a contribution scheme. At retirement age, the beneficiaries of the NPF receive a monthly pension based on a fixed formula, whereas the NSF beneficiaries receive a lump sum not fixed by any formula and depending largely on contributions made by employers and the investment performance.