The Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, attended the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) held on 20 May 2011 in Windhoek, Namibia, where he supported the Roadmap of the SADC Mediator as part of action towards solving the political situation in Madagascar. He then proceeded to the UK and to France for discussions on issues of national and bilateral interest.

In Windhoek, discussions focused on, amongst others, the SADC Mediation Recommendations on Madagascar, the COMESA-EAC-SADC Free Trade Area (FTA) and the political situation in Zimbabwe.

As regards the SADC Mediation Recommendations on Madagascar, the report of the SADC Mediator, H.E. Joaquim A. Chissano, former President of the Republic of Mozambique, was considered. The Prime Minister supported the roadmap for returning the country to constitutional normalcy and urged the international community to help towards its implementation. He stressed the need for an approach in search of a lasting solution to the crisis and made an appeal for the lifting of sanctions and suspensions which are already affecting the Malagasy people.

The need for an all inclusive political process towards finding a lasting solution to the challenges
facing Madagascar was reiterated. In this regard, the Summit mandated the SADC Chairperson, the Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defense and Security Cooperation and the SADC Mediator on Madagascar to convene as soon as possible a meeting with all Malagasy stakeholders to be held at SADC Headquarters in Gaborone, Botswana.

The Summit endorsed the pillars of the tripartite integration process as market integration, infrastructure development and industrial development.

A report on preparations for the 2nd Tripartite Council and Summit to be held on 12 June 2011 in Sandton, South Africa, was submitted to the Summit which noted the progress made towards the launching of negotiations for the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite FTA.

The Summit also received and considered the Report of the Committee of Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General on the review of the Role, Responsibilities and Terms of Reference of the SADC Tribunal in accordance with Summit Decision 20 of August 2010 taken in Windhoek, Namibia.

**Chagos, Indian Ocean Commission**

In the UK, Dr Ramgoolam met Mr Philippe Sands, Legal Adviser on the Chagos issue. Discussions were devoted to the constitution of the Arbitral Tribunal set up under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to adjudicate on the dispute between Mauritius and the UK regarding the proposed establishment of a Marine Protected Area around the Chagos Archipelago. In the light of the discussions, it was decided that Mauritius would challenge the appointment of Sir Christopher Greenwood, Judge of the International Court of Justice, as member of the Arbitral Tribunal.

In France, the Prime Minister had a working session with the French authorities regarding the hosting of the Summit of the Indian Ocean Commission which Mauritius is currently chairing. He also met former President Jacques Chirac with whom he discussed issues of bilateral interest.

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**NEWS IN BRIEF**

- The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development is developing a National Chemical Spill Contingency Plan, along the same lines as those of the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, to provide for a pre-defined strategy and procedures for activating and implementing a coordinated response to potential emergencies involving chemicals and gas releases. The Plan will also assess risks, assign roles and responsibilities to stakeholders, and outline steps to be followed in emergency situations.

- The Aeronautical Authorities of Mauritius and those of Botswana have agreed upon a Memorandum of Understanding, following bilateral air services talks held on 16 May 2011. The MoU provides for:
  1. the principle of multiple designation of airlines to be applicable for each side;
  2. the Route Schedule;
  3. the designated airline(s) of each State to be entitled to operate three frequencies in each direction per week on the specified routes using any aircraft type; and
  4. no restrictions on cargo services.
Reducing poverty and bringing the necessary support to the needy segments of the population remain high on the development agenda of Mauritius. The European Union (EU), a steady economic and development partner, has been supporting the Government to attain these goals through various financing mechanisms, among which the Decentralisation Cooperation Programme (DCP).

Decentralised Cooperation Programme II: EU Grants Rs 230 m

A Financing Agreement to the tune of approximately Rs 230 million for the second phase of the Decentralised Cooperation Programme (DCP II) was signed between the Government of Mauritius and the EU on 6 May 2011 in Port Louis. The Agreement was signed by the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr. Pravind Jugnauth, and the Head of the Delegation of the EU in Mauritius, Mr. Alessandro Mariani, in the presence of the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment, Mr. Xavier Luc Duval.

DCP II, representing EU funding in the form of grants, will be implemented by the National Empowerment Foundation and will run over a period of four years. It is a follow-up to DCP I which started in 2005 with a total sum of about Rs 697 million and came to an end in March 2010.

Priority areas in DCP II, which will further contribute to poverty reduction in Mauritius and Rodrigues, will include empowerment and solidarity, support to vulnerable groups such as women and children in distress, people facing special challenges and those with special needs. The project also seeks to strengthen the capacity of Non State Actors to design, implement, manage and monitor community-based projects that call for high standards.

At the signing ceremony, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment, Mr. Xavier Luc Duval, made an appeal to all stakeholders involved in the fight against poverty to work together as cooperation and solidarity would help achieve the best results. For his part, the Head of the Delegation of the European
Union in Mauritius, Ambassador Alessandro Mariani, stressed that DCP has offered a platform where every social partner has an active role to play for the benefit of the socially disadvantaged groups. Following the success of DCP I as regards its contribution towards poverty reduction, the EU is looking into possibilities to further increase the financial allocation under DCP II, he added.

DCP is an EU instrument assisting NGOs engaged in activities to fight against poverty at community level helping the needy segments of the population. DCP awards grants through a calls for proposals scheme and is in line with the commitment of the EU to combat poverty and exclusion. It will be recalled that the under the DCP I, some 240 NGOs received funding facilities for the implementation of nearly 340 community-based projects in Mauritius and Rodrigues, focusing on poverty alleviation, good governance, improved business services for small businesses and natural resource management in Rodrigues.

Grant of Rs 18 million to four Non State Actors

Four non-governmental and civil society organisations received on 10 May 2011 in Port Louis their grant award certificates to the tune of Rs 18 million under the EU thematic programme Non State Actors and Local Authorities in Development. This complements the funds available under the DCP for which the Mauritian Government and the EU had signed the Financing Agreement few days earlier.

The beneficiaries of the grant award certificates are the APEIM, the Diabetes Parents Support Group, the SOS Children’s Villages and the Union Park Women Association involved in mushroom production. These Non State Actors’ (NSAs) projects provide concrete assistance to children and adults who need extra help, women and children in distress, victims of child abuse, young adults with moderate to severe intellectual disability and children suffering from diabetes.

Speaking at the grant award ceremony, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr. Arvin Boolell, stressed the special character of the partnership with the European Union which he terms as ‘a very reliable and trustworthy partner’. ‘There are issues where we differ and may agree to disagree but when it comes to issues which are relevant to empowerment and to the politics of inclusiveness, the EU has always responded very positively to the requests and the legitimate demand of the Mauritian Government’, said Dr. Boolell. Ambassador Alessandro Mariani, congratulated the four selected NSAs for their commendable work and the improvements that they bring to people who need extra care. The Ambassador also announced that the EU Delegation has made a request for additional budget under its 2011 Annual Action Programme. He encouraged all non-governmental and civil society organisations to fully seize the opportunities to be offered under the next round of calls for proposals which is expected around mid next year.

Non State Actors Programme

In 2007, the EU introduced a new thematic programme the Non State Actors and Local Authorities in Development to co-finance initiatives proposed and/or carried out by the NSAs and local authorities. This is done through a specific budget line of the EU and in addition to possible bilateral programmes. The aim is to facilitate involvement of the NSAs and local authorities in policy formulation and their capacity to deliver basic services to the poorest sections of the population in developing countries and therefore help reduce poverty in a context of sustainable development.

Mauritius received an allocation of € 500 000 under the NSAs Budget line in early 2010. Accordingly, it was convened that the EU Delegation would launch a call of proposals for local NSAs to apply for funding. The themes for interventions were selected after consultations with the NSAs in February 2010. The call for proposals was launched in August 2010 in a two-staged process – submission of concept note and submission of full project proposal.
African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) Member States should continue to urge the US to extend the AGOA beyond 2015 on a long and sustainable basis and to align the third-country fabric provision with the term of the AGOA.

These are the two main recommendations following the Trade Ministerial AGOA Review meeting held on 14 May 2011 in Lusaka, Zambia. It was for the first time that the African Trade Ministers of AGOA beneficiary countries met in a formal setup to discuss a common strategy ahead of the forthcoming US-AGOA Forum scheduled for 9 and 10 June 2011 in Lusaka. Mauritius was represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr. Arvin Boolell.

Other participating countries were Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Cameroon, Uganda, Swaziland and Zambia.

The Review meeting enabled participants to identify the benefits of AGOA for African countries, particularly in promoting non-traditional exports such as textiles and apparels, leather and agro-processing products. It was also noted that AGOA has contributed to job creation and flow of investments in some African countries.

Participating countries were given a presentation on a joint survey conducted by the African Union Commission and the UN Economic Commission for Africa on African countries’ experiences and expectations on AGOA. The focus of the survey was the impact on employment, international trade, foreign direct investment, requirements and restrictions and future prospects of AGOA.

It was noted at the Review meeting that, despite the positive contribution of AGOA to African economies, there still remain some challenges that need to be addressed. Among these are: sanitary and phytosanitary requirements; restrictive rules of origin; product specific standards; uncertainty about the future of the AGOA; potential expiration of third-country fabric rule in 2012; weak productive capacity of most African countries; lack of regional value chains; and weak competitiveness of African countries due to weak infrastructure development.

The recommendations

Among the recommendations, Member States called upon the US to:

- consider the concept of cumulation as a way of dealing with the stringent rules of origin and this cumulation would allow the sourcing of inputs from more competitive non-African beneficiary countries of US preferences
- relax rules of origin to allow for effective market access of fish and fish products
- provide support for building productive capacities as well as for diversifying and expanding the production base in order for Africa to benefit from the more than 6 000 products list eligible under AGOA
- be more engaged in infrastructure development in Africa

About AGOA

The AGOA was signed into law on 18 May 2000 as Title 1 of the Trade and Development Act of 2000. The Act offers tangible incentives for African countries to continue their efforts to open their economies and build free markets.
Oceanography
Capacity Building Workshop on Indian Ocean Data Buoy Networks

Around 50 ocean data users, researchers and buoy operators participated in the 2nd Data Buoy Cooperation Panel (DBCP) Africa/Western Indian Ocean Capacity Building workshop on the implementation and operations of Indian Ocean data buoy networks and their application for enhancing regional predictive capability from 2 to 6 May 2011 at La Plantation Hotel, Balaclava.

The participants were from countries of the Western Indian Ocean region and the event a joint initiative of the Mauritius Oceanography Institute (MOI) and the Joint Technical Commission for Oceanography and Marine Meteorology (JCOMM).

The workshop focused on capacity building within regional meteorology, ocean and climate institutes relating to the new Indian Ocean Observing System Data and other regional programmes for enhanced predictive capability in the region. It also provided training in deployment and management of in-situ ocean observations for the implementation of buoy programmes. Another objective was to coordinate synergies with African Monitoring of the Environment for Sustainable development for in-situ ocean observations for the Western Indian Ocean.

The development of linkages between offshore/near shore long-term observations for greater involvement by stakeholders and benefits with regard to natural resource management, disaster risk characterisation and reduction such as floods, droughts, cyclones and biodiversity conservation were also on the agenda. The workshop facilitated collaboration between existing and planned studies of the region.

During the five days, discussions centered on the Agulhas system and its role in ocean circulation and climate (The Agulhas Current transports warm and salty waters from the tropical Indian Ocean to the southern tip of Africa); ocean forecasting; developing global citizens and connecting the next generation of international scientists; seasonal forecasting as well as regional data networks and accessibility.

About DBCP and JCOMM

The DBCP is an international programme coordinating the use of autonomous data buoys to observe atmospheric and oceanographic conditions, over ocean areas where few other measurements are taken. The DBCP aims to increase the quantity, quality, global coverage and timeliness of atmospheric and oceanographic data. These observations are then relayed by satellite and used immediately to improve forecasts and therefore increase marine safety.

JCOMM is an intergovernmental body of technical experts that provides a mechanism for international coordination of oceanographic and marine meteorological observing, data management and services, combining the expertise, technologies and capacity building capabilities of the meteorological and oceanographic communities.
The IOC is implementing two environmental components, namely “Capacity building for the prevention of coastal and marine contamination” and “Building capacity for regional oil and chemical spill response” of the GEF-Western Indian Ocean marine highway development project.

The potential risks of oil spills in the Western Indian Ocean Region and particularly in the Mauritian waters are high, as it is estimated that over 30% of the world’s petroleum production is transported through these waters. In this context, the objectives of the oil spill tabletop exercise were to test the national organisation in charge of oil spill response, the updated National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCP), the dedicated personnel and the National Incident Command Post.

The purpose of the NOSCP is to provide for the organisational structure and procedures for preparedness and response to oil spills. It is a live document which the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development updates on a regular basis, adapting it to the realities of the administrative organisation of Mauritius and the development of maritime traffic, amongst others. The NOSCP applies to all oil spills, whether inland, on the adjoining shorelines or within the maritime zone as defined in Section 49 of the Environment Protection Act 2002.

A National Coordination Committee has been set up in the Ministry to be responsible for the development, implementation, review and update of the NOSCP. The Committee, which comprises stakeholders such as the Prime Minister’s Office, the Police Department, the Special Mobile Force, the Civil Aviation Department, the Ministry of Fisheries, Police de L’Environnement, Mauritius Ports Authority and oil companies, is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.

The NOSCP is activated in case of an oil spill in our territorial waters. However, in case of oil spills greater than 10 metric tons, assistance will have to be sought from other countries, in view of the limited amount of oil spill combat equipment available locally. In such cases, the Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan will be activated.

An oil spill simulation exercise is scheduled in December 2011.
Modernising the Legal System
Revised Laws of Mauritius Accessible Online

The Online Database of the Revised Laws of Mauritius was launched on 12 May 2011 at the seat of the Bar Council by the Attorney General, Mr Yatin Varma.

The Online Database has been designed to be as user-friendly as possible. At the click of the mouse, a user can have free access to the following:

- the Constitution of Mauritius and regulations and orders made under the Constitution
- an alphabetical list of all Acts of Parliament
- recent Bills introduced into the National Assembly and Acts of Parliament which have been published in the Gazette, with a short summary of what the Acts and Bills are all about.

The Revised Laws of Mauritius published on the website are a complete set of laws as at September 2009. The next revision to the laws will be carried out soon. The Revised Laws will be published in a Supplement and thereafter incorporated in the Online Database, which can be accessed free of charge from the website of the Attorney General’s Office at http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/webattorney

The free dissemination of the Revised Laws of Mauritius over the internet will, no doubt, reinforce the rule of law and the functioning of democracy in our country, said the Attorney General in his allocution at the launching ceremony. He pointed out that in order to reinforce the rule of law and further modernise Mauritius’ legal system, the National Assembly recently passed the Revision of Laws (Amendment) Act 2011. The Act which came into operation on 30 April 2011 enables the Attorney General to cause to be prepared and published, from time to time, a Supplement to a revised edition of enactments prepared under the Act.

Mr Varma said that legislation must be readily available and understood for increased community awareness and understanding of the law and that better access to legislation is essential in a democracy. “However, I earnestly hope that by making available the laws free of charge to the public, my Office is contributing to achieve the objective of ‘transparency’ of laws”, he added.
Gender equality
A Research and Documentation Centre to be set up

A Research and Documentation Centre on Gender Equality will be set up within two years. The project will be implemented in two phases. A working session in this connection was organised on 5 May 2011 by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare in collaboration with the UNDP at La Cannelle, Domaine Les Pailles.

The Centre will provide a platform to enhance knowledge and debate on specific gender and human rights issues by enabling women to access a wide array of information. These issues would range from the history of women’s movements, best practices, legislations, health and education to women in decision-making and politics, women’s economic empowerment, gender and new Information and Communication technologies, amongst others.

The services of a consultant have been retained by the Ministry with the support of the UNDP to conceptualise the Centre and work out its operational strategies.

Phase One of the project will consist in the establishment of the organisational structure, including the premises and preparatory actions such as the setting up of Regional Advisory Committees, the development of work plan, budget, resource mobilisation strategy and partnerships. The Centre’s documentation and research activities will begin only in the second year (Phase Two).

The Centre will also serve as an Observatory and Information Hub on gender and women’s rights issues in the region, mainly East Africa and the Indian Ocean. It will contribute to building human and institutional capacity to engage in policy oriented research, evidence-based policy formulation and advocacy for advancing gender equality and women’s rights in different thematic areas and sectors.

Moreover, the Centre will include a fully computerised library with at least two distinct sections. Publications and resources (both printed and online) will be made accessible to the public in general and users at the local and community levels. The other section will comprise more technical and scholarly documents and materials for researchers, students and development practitioners.

National campaign on gender to continue, Minister says

Speaking at the opening of the working session, the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, Mrs. Sheilabai Bappoo, stressed the need to carry on with the national campaign informing, from top professionals to the grassroots, the very notion of gender. The time has come for a complete transformation in our way of thinking, mentality and mindset as regards gender equality and development. To achieve this, all citizens have to understand what it is all about. The process has already started at the level of the Ministry and with the assistance given by the UNDP for bringing gender equality at the level of all Government’s machinery, she observed.

For her part, Mrs. L. Tegmo Reddy, UN Resident Representative, noted that together with the Ministry, the UNDP has devised technical assistance to formulate the national gender policy framework and has also supported the establishment of a gender information system which will become an integral part of the research and documentation centre on gender equality.
Coastal and Marine Management
Regional Workshop to Help Implement Pilot Projects

Around 30 scientists and experts participated in a regional workshop on “African Monitoring of the Environment for Sustainable Development (AMESD) Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)-Thematic action (Thema) project” from 9 to 13 May at Gold Crest Hotel, Quatre Bornes. The participants of this five-day workshop, organised by the Mauritius Oceanography Institute (MOI), were from Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles and Tanzania and are involved in the implementation of pilot projects.

The “AMESD IOC-Thema project” is now entering in a new phase, more operational, with the ongoing installation of the AMESD receiving stations for national partners, the launching of the first version of AMESD-MOI products and services and the launching of activities related to the national pilot projects. It is in this context that the regional workshop took place in Mauritius on 9 and 10 May and was followed by a training course on the use of the AMESD e-station from 11 to 13 May at the Mauritius Meteorological Services.

Several themes were on the agenda during those five days, namely, the monitoring of physical oceanography variables, marine currents forecasting, use of imagery for the study of oceanic mesoscale features, tools to visualise oceanic charts for detection of potential fishing zones, ocean colour and Earth observation applications for fisheries and the use of the AMESD e-station, amongst others.

Access to ocean data is critical to understanding and managing the marine environment in a sustainable manner. To that effect, the AMESD project will equip all partners with the technology capable of satellite data acquisition. Given the critical importance of specialised training in satellite oceanography, further training in ocean data manipulation and treatment will be organised.

Moreover, the AMESD will hold the 2nd AMESD Forum at the InterContinental in Balaclava, Mauritius, from 20 to 22 July 2011. “AMESD Services and Products: Achievements and Perspectives in Support of Environmental Management” will be the theme of the forum which will include a technical visit to MOI—one of the five Regional Implementation Centres on 23 July 2011.

AMESD-IOC Thema

The AMESD programme is a continental-wide project financed by the 9th European Development Fund for the Regional Economic Communities in Africa and implemented by the African Union. It aims at developing operational information services to improve decision-making processes in the fields of environmental management. As a Regional Implementation Centre, the MOI has been entrusted the responsibility for implementing and managing on a regional basis the IOC Thema project related to coastal and marine management. The overall objective of the IOC Thema is to help governments and institutions of IOC member countries and countries bordering the Mozambique Canal to make better use of environmental observation data, especially from satellites, with regard to the definition and follow-up of their marine and coastal policies.
A Family Day aiming to sensitise Mauritian families on the importance of strengthening family values was held on 15 May 2011 at the Gymkhana Grounds, Vacoas. It was organised in the context of the celebrations of the International Day of Families 2011, with ‘La Famille – Source du Bonheur’ the theme retained at national level.

The programme of the Family Day comprised a play entitled ‘True happiness within the family’; the launching of an audio CD on family values compiled by the Indian Ocean Centre for Education in Human Values; an award ceremony for winners of a play competition on family values; a cultural programme; and fun activities for the family.

At a press meet held on 12 May 2011 in Port Louis on the activities marking Family Day, the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, Mrs. Sheilabai Bappoo, elaborated on the problems linked to families.

‘In Mauritius, the situation is becoming alarming as regards the cases affecting families. We must not hesitate to state that there is a certain family and social dysfunction. It is a concern for each one of us – Government, Forces Vives, NGOs and civil society’ she said. The Minister also gave examples of recent reported cases of child abandonment and domestic violence in Mauritius which bespeak lack of parental responsibilities and decline of family values, thus demonstrating the erosion of parental roles.

According to Mrs. Bappoo, moral values remain a key criterion and priority to ensure social welfare at the level of the Mauritian society. Mauritian families need to be ready to give once more importance to their roles towards their members and especially towards children. ‘There is a need for counselling and rehabilitation and efforts have to be reinforced as regards prevention campaigns to stop family-related problems. It is for this reason that emphasis is laid on projects such as the Ecoles des Parents, pre-marital counselling as we should empower parents’, the Minister pointed out.

For Mrs Bappoo, the Government, the Ministry and the Child Development Unit cannot replace the family. ‘We are here to develop accompaniment policies and protection measures along with NGOs to secure the family unit and values will remain priority for us’, she stressed.

It is recalled that International Day of Families, observed every year on 15 May, reflects the importance which the international community attaches to families as basic units of society as well as their concern regarding their situation around the world. This special Day provides an opportunity to promote awareness on issues relating to families as well as encourage appropriate action so that problems of families are addressed and better understood. The theme retained this year by the United Nations is Confronting Family Poverty and Social Exclusion.