France favours early solution to the question of sovereignty of Tromelin Island

It is the wish of France to find an early solution to the question of sovereignty of Tromelin Island, claimed by Mauritius, French President Hollande said to Prime Minister Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, who was in France in the context of a three-leg visit from 20 to 28 January 2013 which also took him to Davos and the United Kingdom.

Discussions between the two leaders in Paris also focused on the fight against piracy, the situation in Madagascar, bilateral relations between Mauritius and France, and the possibility of a strategic partnership between Air Mauritius and Air France. As regards the Chagos Archipelago, Dr Ramgoolam informed the French President of the latest developments regarding the conflict opposing Mauritius and Great Britain on this issue.

President Hollande informed Dr Ramgoolam of the reasons behind the involvement of France in Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Madagascar. He thanked Mauritius for its contribution to the positive development
occurred in Madagascar recently. Mauritius is making a contribution of $500,000 for the forthcoming elections that will take place in Madagascar.

At the request of Dr Ramgoolam, the French President has accepted the invitation to attend the Indian Ocean Commission summit to be held for the first time in Mauritius this year.

In UK

In the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister had a meeting with Mr Philippe Sands, the main external lawyer for Mauritius on the Chagos Archipelago. Discussions centred on the strategy of Mauritius in the light of the decision of the Arbitral Tribunal.

After having heard the arguments of both Mauritius and the UK, the Tribunal has rejected the UK’s request for a separate hearing on its preliminary objections to the jurisdiction of the Tribunal and agreed that UK’s preliminary objections and the merits of the case be heard together, as requested by Mauritius.

Hence, for the first time since the events of 1965, the UK would have to explain and justify the excision of the Chagos Archipelago and other measures that it had unlawfully taken with regard to the Chagos Archipelago, in total disregard of the UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 of 1960 on the granting of Independence to colonial countries and peoples.

In Davos

In Davos, the Prime Minister attended the World Economic Forum, which brings together its members and constituents to shape the global, regional and industrial agenda. The Focus of the Forum this year was on “Resilient Dynamism”.

During the Forum, the Prime Minister exchanged views with Mrs Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the IMF on the Euro crisis and challenges faced by Small Islands Developing States in the context of the current economic landscape. He met Mr Kamal Nath, Minister of Urban Development of India with whom he had discussion on the issue of transport, including improvement in road safety and traffic flow. He also shared ideas with Dr Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, on the world situation and on issues of relevance to Mauritius.

The Prime Minister also had the opportunity to discuss issues of mutual interest with eminent personalities, amongst others, Prince Al Faisal al Saud of Saudi Arabia; Princess Mary of Denmark; the President of Nigeria; the President of South Africa; the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe; Professor Klaus Schwab, founder and Executive Chairperson of World Economic Forum, as well as Mr John Chipman, CEO of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London.
Piracy at Sea
First batch of Somali pirates in Mauritius for trial

A first batch of 12 Somali pirates has been transferred from Djibouti to Mauritius on 25 January 2013 for trial. The suspected pirates, who are temporarily charged with piracy attacks at high seas under the Piracy and Maritime Violence Act, appeared before the Mauritian Intermediary Court on 26 January.

Mauritius is part of the Counter Piracy Programme of the United Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) which is committed to international institutions and with islands in the Indian Ocean to track down shipping vessels to combat piracy through the vessel monitoring system as well support those States in the Indian Ocean that are prosecuting piracy cases. The Programme has been in place since May 2011.

Taking its commitment further, Mauritius signed in July 2011, an agreement with the European Union defining the conditions and the modalities for the transfer of suspected pirates for investigation, prosecution, trial and detention in Mauritius, transfer of associated property seized and the treatment of such persons. Subsequently, the Piracy and Maritime Violence Act was voted by the National Assembly in December 2011.

Training on handling Somali pirates

A three-day workshop organised by Interpol and sponsored by the European Union (EU) was organised from 7 to 9 January 2013 at the Prison Training School in Beau Bassin. The aim was to better equip the local authorities in terms of daily handling techniques in line with the human rights of Somali pirates. Some 20 Prison staff and six Police Officers participated.

The workshop, which was part of the implementation of EU Funded Capacity Programme for East Africa, comprised several themes, namely general introduction to maritime piracy, Somalia’s historical background, piracy in Somalia, customs and norms in Somalia, and day to day requirements of the Somali Inmates and satisfactory measures, amongst others.

It is recalled that UNODC organised in mid-2011 its first training programme at the Prison Training School for 23 Prison staff. Thereafter, exposure through the Prison Exchange Learning Programme was held in Kenya from 11 to 15 April 2011 for four Prison staff; in Seychelles from 19 to 21 March 2012 for 6 Prison staff; and at the Plantation Hotel from 12 to 14 December 2012 for a batch of 14 Prison staff and 20 foreign delegates.

Science Adventure kicks off

The Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre (RGSC) is organising the 2013 edition of Science Adventure for primary and secondary schools students.

Science Adventure is a project based competition that provides students with the opportunity to investigate issues related to Science and Technology using the Scientific Method as well as enhance their written and verbal communication skills. It is in line with RGSC’s mission to popularise science and inculcate creativity among students.

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The areas of interest covered by the project include astronomy, biology, chemistry, climate change, energy, environment, health, inventions and discoveries in science, marine science, mathematics, the Maurice Ile Durable concept, natural resources and physics.

The competition is sponsored by the Mauritius Commercial Bank Ltd (MCB) with cash prize awards ranging from Rs 20 000 to Rs 10 000 for winners in each category.
PM’s New Year Address to the Nation
Focus on innovation, employment, growth and construction of a modern nation

“We have to adapt, innovate and put in more efforts to succeed. We have to work together to ensure economic growth, employment of youths and meet all challenges lying ahead.”

This was the gist of the message of the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, in his New Year Address to the Nation on 1st January 2013. He exhorted the population to work towards unity, equality and modernity.

The Prime Minister said that he is full of hope for the year 2013 while recalling that, despite the global economic crisis, Mauritius has achieved progress on the democratic, economic and social fronts last year. He referred to the organisation of village and municipal elections after amendments were brought to the Local Government Act, paving the way for the participation of more women in politics; the construction of roads, hospitals, medical centres, reservoirs, airport and the implementation of the light rail transit system.

Speaking about reforms, the Prime Minister reiterated Government’s determination to create more conducive conditions so that the country can further progress and develop into a modern society. He also expressed his commitment to reinforce respect of institutions and national values, while highlighting that a relentless battle will be waged against drug trafficking.

With regard to Information Technology, Dr Ramgoolam recalled that much emphasis is being laid on new technological advances for the welfare of the population. He made mention of the distribution of electronic tablets to Form IV students, the development of the new identity card for increased efficiency, training to graduates in IT and the introduction of new technology for the education of very young children.

The Prime Minister further spoke of the modernisation of the Police force, decreasing crime rate, enhanced security for the population, and road safety. As regards water situation, he said that a programme for the replacement of water pipes has been put in place. Works for the construction of new reservoirs have started and that all new hotels will henceforth have their own desalination plants, he said.

The Prime Minister further reassured islanders who form part of the national territory, namely Rodrigues, Agalega and St Brandon, that they will be treated equally and get the same technological facilities so that all Mauritians are at the same pace of development.

The setting up of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the launch of the National Institute for Civic Education Pilot Project have created a new dynamism for nation building, said Dr Ramgoolam.
Indian Ocean Commission
28th Meeting of Council of Ministers Approves Strategic Development Plan

The Strategic Development Plan for the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and priorities set for the coming years were approved by the 28th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the IOC held on 17 January 2013 in Mahé, Seychelles.

The Council meeting was chaired by the Seychelles Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr Jean Paul Adam. Mauritius was represented at the Meeting by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr. Arvin Boolell.

The approved priorities include: improving sea, air and digital connectivity between the IOC islands, enhancing food security by making Madagascar the granary of the Indian ocean region, and future launching of a regional television channel. The annual operating budget and the activity report of the Secretary General of the IOC were approved. The Council of the IOC gave the green light for the roadmap for the years to come with the adoption of around twenty key decisions.

The situation in Madagascar was also at the forefront of discussions and the decision of the President of Transition in Madagascar not to run in the May 2013 Presidential election was unanimously saluted by the Council.

Moreover, the Council meeting provided a platform for the signature of new agreements namely: 15 millions Euros with the European Union for an important programme targeting at preserving the biodiversity; 500 000 Australian dollars with Australia to support the electoral process leading to the exit of the crisis in Madagascar as well as support concrete actions towards land-use planning in the Comoros and Madagascar in the context of the IOC’s project focusing on natural hazards; and 100 000 US dollars from China for the institutional development of the IOC and cooperation between its member states.

The chairmanship of the IOC Council of Ministers has been handed over to the Union of Comoros.

About the IOC and the Council

The IOC is an intergovernmental organisation set up in 1984 by the Accord Général de Victoria (Seychelles). Its members are Madagascar, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Comoros and France which acts on behalf of Reunion Island.

At the time of its creation the IOC had set as objective to reinforce friendly ties between the population of the region and favour economic development. After numerous years, its missions have progressively evolved to also taking into consideration the ascent in power of other organisations involved in regional cooperation such as the COMESA and SADC.

The Council of Ministers is the supreme and decision-taking body of the IOC and meets every year to discuss political subjects of regional interest, take stock of the actions carried out during the past year and make propositions for the following year.
**Penalty Points System**

**Distribution of Driving Licence Counterpart till March 2013**

The Driving Licence Counterpart (DLC), a document to be annexed with the driving licence in the wake of the implementation of the Penalty Points System (PPS), is being distributed through 21 police stations in Mauritius and two police stations in Rodrigues since 21 January till 21 March 2013.

As soon as the law will be proclaimed around April 2013, it will be an offence if a driving licence holder does not have both the driving licence and its counterpart in possession. Both documents will henceforth constitute the driving licence.

The existing driving licence will continue to be in service and will work alongside the DLC. The latter, which will be annexed to the licence, is in the form of a paper where information such as penalty points, date of offence, fine amount, disqualification period, date of expiry of penalty points, offence code, etc., are inscribed.

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**How the Penalty Point System works**

With the Penalty Points System (PPS), the aim of drivers is to have a minimum number of points on their DLC. The driver initially starts with zero number of points on the DLC. Upon conviction for an offence, the court will, in addition to regular sanction (e.g. payment of fixed penalty), sanction the offender with penalty points within the range of points attributed to the offence. The range of points provided varies from 2 to 10 in relation to the severity of the offence. Penalty points allocated for each offence will be effective for 36 months as from the date of conviction. The penalty points will be entered on the DLC.

For a provisional driving licence holder, the maximum number of points is 10, exceeding which the driver will be disqualified from driving any motor vehicle in Mauritius. For a competent driving licence holder, the maximum number of points is 15, exceeding which the driver will be disqualified. The disqualification period is not less than 6 months.

After the disqualification period, all penalty points accumulated for the disqualification will be ineffective. However, on a second disqualification, the driving licence will be cancelled for good. Fixed Penalty Notice and the Photographic Enforcement Device Notice are also included in the PPS. Upon settlement of the fine, the lower point of the range of points attributed to the offence will be allocated.

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**Prevocational education**

**3rd Year Programme for Prevoc Students Launched**

The 3rd Year Programme for Prevoc students, a new strategy for prevocational education, was launched on 22 January 2013 by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources in collaboration with the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD).

The strategy aims to provide flexibility of access between programmes and institutions, and facilitate transition for a larger number of students to vocational education and/or the labour market.

The project now makes provision for a four-year prevocational education and the phasing out of the National Trade Certificate (NTC) Foundation project, with a gradual integration of trade skills and entrepreneurial skills right from Year 1. Students will therefore be eligible to move directly to the National Certificate Level 3 - the first year of vocational education of the MITD. Subsequently, the four-year span will cover the whole of the compulsory education period, that is, till age 16.

In 2014, the NTC Foundation will phase out and will be replaced by the fourth year Pre Vocational Education and the first exams leading towards the prevocational Certificate will be held jointly by the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate and the MITD.
Youth Employment Programme
Rs 330 million to assist unemployed youth to obtain training/placement

Facilitating the transition of youth from education to employment and providing them with the core skills required by different sectors of the economy is the main objective of the Youth Employment Programme (YEP) which was launched on 29 January 2013 by Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Xavier-Luc Duval.

The YEP to the tune of Rs 330 million aims to assist Mauritian unemployed youth in the age group of 16 to 30 years to obtain training/placement. Designed as part of the Government’s strategy to fulfill its commitment towards youth employability, the YEP is serving as a platform whereby both job seekers and employers have a first hand opportunity of knowing each other’s expectations in the field of employment.

The programme is part of a four point Action Plan to address youth unemployment. The Action Plan comprises: Youth Employment Programme; Skills Working Group; Service to Mauritius Programme; and Industry placements.

About YEP

YEP which was running on a pilot basis since December 2012 can be accessed on www.yep.mu and is an online database where both job seekers and employers can register. It is a joint public-private partnership operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development in partnership with the Joint Economic Council (JEC).

The objectives are: to enable unemployed youth to obtain training/placement for an initial period of one year, with the possibility of permanent employment thereafter on condition of satisfactory performance; to ensure that appropriate training is provided to youth to promote the development of necessary skills in the labour force; and to assist employers in obtaining appropriate skilled manpower.

YEP will offer placement/training in a wide range of fields, with the exception of financial services and commerce. They are namely, agriculture; manufacturing; construction; transportation and storage; accommodation and food services; Information and Communication; real estate activities; professional, scientific and technical services; administrative and support services; education, human health and social work; arts, entertainment and leisure and others.

According to Statistics Mauritius, currently about 30 000 youth in the age group of 16 to 30 years are unemployed in Mauritius.
GIS Newsletter January 2013

PMO/IOM
Towards the Formulation of a Migration Profile for Mauritius

Mauritius will soon have its own migration profile which will be in the form of a report on key tendencies linked to national and international migration and socio-economic development and will contain potential strategies to improve migration policy planning.

In that context, a regional project entitled ‘Mainstreaming Migration into Development Planning through Migration Profiles in the South West Indian Ocean Region’ whose objective is to prepare national migration profiles for Comoros, Mauritius and Seychelles was launched on 21 January 2013 at Le Labourdonnais Hotel in Caudan.

This initiative, which is funded by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to the tune of US $ 200 000 US dollars, aims at government capacity building in developing reliable and comparable migration data for more evidence-based policy development in the South West Indian Ocean region.

As part of the migration profile project, a research will be conducted with the help of Mr Alain Poulain, International consultant. In a bid to ensure its proper implementation, a Technical Working Group comprising key stakeholders will be set up. The IOM will work in coordination with the Prime Minister’s Office which is the focal point for Mauritius.

IOM has 149 Member States and offices in more than 100 countries and around 7 800 staff working on 2 700 projects. IOM works in Southern African countries on several issues, namely: migration health, regulating migration, facilitating migration movement, humanitarian and post-crisis migratory management, and migration and development. The project will, according to Mrs Tegmo-Reddy, make the migration picture of Mauritius clearer and hence bring greater policy coherence.

Migration Profiles

IOM has produced a series of migration profiles bringing together existing information from different sources in a structured manner and provide comprehensive overview of key international migration and socio-economic development trends in selected countries in different regions.

The reports cover several themes ranging from statistics and other data relevant to immigration, emigration, return migration, remittances, labour migration to irregular migration, trafficking and smuggling. Drawing on the information and data presented, these country profiles indicate existing data gaps and possible strategies to improve migration statistics and present key recommendations for policymakers to improve current migration management.

SMEs
Launching of incubator to empower physically handicapped persons

A new incubator, aiming at supporting the entrepreneurial skills development of physically handicapped persons; and enhance their creative talents for the production of quality handicraft products, was launched on 17 January 2013 by the Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives, Mr Jangbahadoorsing Seetaram, at the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) in Coromandel.

Trainees will, as from February 2013, benefit from free courses in the following areas: fancy jewellery, fibre craft, ceramic, pyrogravure and fashion garment making. With this Incubator, physically handicapped persons will also benefit from training in craft production, entrepreneurship and digital literacy skills.

The technical training will enable participants to sell their products more easily. In addition, SMEDA will act as a ‘One stop shop’ for people with disabilities and will provide courses on management and digital literacy which will enable to enable them to manage their business more efficiently.
Mauritian President on State Visit to India

The President of the Republic of Mauritius, Mr Rajkeswur Purryag, was on a state visit to India from 3 to 10 January 2013. Mr Purryag was the Chief Guest at the 11th edition of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention to be held from 7 to 9 January 2013 in Kochi, Kerala, in India, where he was conferred the prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award.

During his State Visit to India, the President of the Republic of Mauritius visited his ancestral place, Wajidpur Village, in Patna. A civic reception was given in his honour in the village. Mr Rajkeswur Purryag also laid a wreath at the statue of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam at Ramgoolam Chowk.

PBD Convention

The PBD Convention is a unique platform for the overseas Indian community spread across the globe to discuss key issues concerning the Indian Diaspora, interact among themselves and share their experiences in various fields as well as engage with the Government of India and its people for mutually beneficial activities. It is also a forum where the Government of India showcases investment opportunities in India and its potential in various sectors.

The Indian Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, inaugurated the event on 8 January while the President, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, delivered the valedictory address on 9 January. Some 2,500 delegates from 60 countries including Mauritius participated in the three-day convention. The theme chosen was Engaging Diaspora: The Indian Growth Story. Several seminars on Tourism, Pure Sciences and Skill Development were organised. As for plenary sessions, they focused on India’s Growth: Greater Opportunities, Heritage and Diaspora, Engaging Young Overseas Indians and Investment Opportunities in States.

Indian Minister of Commerce in Mauritius from 8 to 10 January

The need for making the Mauritius India Business Council (MIBC) a strong institutional mechanism to boost up trade and investment ties by identifying priority sectors was one of the major outcomes of the visit of the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Textiles of India, Mr Anand Sharma, who was on a three-day visit to Mauritius since 8 January 2013.

In this regard, it was decided that a Joint Working Group on trade and investment will meet before April 2013 to work out the modalities for broadening and deepening the economic engagement between the two countries.

Other Outcomes

In the industry sector, both governments agreed to a form of skill enhancement collaboration with the Northern India Textiles Research Association (NITRA). The development of creative industries collaboration with Clothing Manufacturers Association of India (CMAI) as well as collaboration on Compliance Standards and productivity enhancement requirements with Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC), and with Cotton Corporation of India on Cotton exports and Texprocil on yarn exports, were also sought.

The Government of India will pursue discussions with AEPC and NITRA to enable Mauritius collaboration in compliance standards, skill enhancement and productivity enhancement measures. In the next 12 months, AEPC will enable Enterprise Mauritius develop a program on compliance on lines of Driving Industry for Sustainable Human Advancement. NITRA will enable setting up of a major Skill Development and Productivity Enhancement program on the lines of India’s Integrated Skill Development Scheme.

India has also committed to develop collaboration between CMAI, Cotton Corporation of India and Texprocil with the Mauritius counterparts so that Mauritius Textiles Industry can benefit from an assured supply of cotton, cotton yarn and develop creative industries.

Furthermore, a Memorandum of Understanding will soon be signed between the Mauritius Standards Bureau and the Export Inspection Council of India with regard to the export of Basmati rice to Mauritius.
Mauritius/Maldives

Joint Economic Commission to be set up

A Joint Economic Commission co-chaired by Vice-Prime Minister, Mr Xavier-Luc Duval, and the Minister of Finance of the Maldives would be set up to discuss, amongst others, Double Taxation Agreement; Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement; Environmental Protection; Fish Farming/Aquaculture; Financial Services; and Medical Services.

This was one of the major outcomes of the official visit of Mr Duval from 14 to 21 January 2013 to the Republic of Maldives to share the Mauritian development experience with the Maldives Government.

This visit follows an invitation made by the Maldives to further strengthen the relations especially through increased investments in the areas of fisheries, tourism and aviation industries.

2013 Index of Economic Freedom

Mauritius Ranked Among the Top Ten

Mauritius is the only Sub-Saharan country to rank among the top ten economies out of the 177 countries rated by The Heritage Foundation and The Wall Street Journal in its 19th annual Index of Economic Freedom, released on January 10.

With a total economic freedom score of 76.9, Mauritius’ economy is placed at the 8th position, ahead of Denmark (9th), the United States (10th), and is also the first out of 46 countries in the Sub-Saharan African region, which is well above the world average score which stands at 59.6.

Prison Service

Twenty-three new Prison Officers participate in passing out parade

The Prison Service has welcomed twenty-three new Prison Officers on 16 January 2013. To that end, a Passing out Parade was held at the Prison Training School in Beau Bassin in the presence of the Senior Chief Executive at the Prime Minister’s Office, Mrs K.O Fong Weng-Poorun. Medals were awarded to the best officers for their performance in shooting, physical training and self-defence.

The 23 Prison Officers have followed an eight-month intensive training in various fields such as prison procedures, human rights, first aid, suicide prevention, weapon training, techniques of arrest, rescue of hostages, escort of high risk detainees, unarmed combat, physical training and self defense, amongst others. They have also undergone a three-week intense training so that they can form part and perform efficiently in the Emergency Response Team. After the Passing out Parade, the new recruits have been posted in the different units of the Prison Service and will undergo continuous evaluation and follow-up.

In her address on that occasion, Mrs Fong Weng-Poorun exhorted the recruits to perform their duty with sincerity and pride and cautioned them to keep the department’s standards high. This career, she said, requires a high standard of honesty, moral integrity and sense of devotion as well as constant vigilance and discipline. The reform of the Prison Service is high on the Government agenda, she said, adding that focus is on efficient management, dynamic rehabilitation and reintegration programme and reduction of the rate of recidivism.