National Assembly adopts DNA Identification Bill

The DNA Identification Bill, tabled in the National Assembly by the Prime Minister on 16 June 2009, was adopted on 21 July after intense debates. Certain amendments were brought to the Bill, and among these, one pertaining to DNA data records. Such records may be kept for a period of five years instead of ten as proposed earlier.

Summing up the debates, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam explained that DNA profiling would not replace good policing and other investigative procedures but was a tool to be used in conjunction with good police intelligence and investigation.

The Prime Minister dispelled doubts regarding the independence and impartiality of the Forensic Science Laboratory, which will be responsible for the DNA identification exercise and the constitution of the DNA database. He explained that the FSL was a government funded institution, and as such, subjected to the authority of the National Assembly. He assured that disclosure of information from the database could be done in very restricted circumstances, as specified in the Bill, namely to the Police or to the Court in the course of criminal proceedings, to the person from whom the sample is taken and to a judge, upon a judge’s order.

Furthermore, any person who unlawfully discloses such information will be prosecuted and can be fined to Rs 50,000 and imprisoned for a period not exceeding two years.

It is to be noted that the FSL facilities have already been upgraded in order to meet standards required for DNA profiling exercises.

The DNA Identification Bill aims to provide a legal framework for the taking and using of DNA samples in specific circumstances in connection with serious offences. The police will be empowered to take and use such samples for the purpose of determining the connection of a person with, or the involvement of a person in, an offence. Unless a person consents, a DNA sample can only be taken from him by the order of a judge in Chambers. However, a person who has already been convicted of a serious offence can be prosecuted if he fails to provide a DNA sample when so requested by the police.

The Bill also provides for the establishment of DNA Data Records to be used for investigating criminal offences for which DNA samples have been collected, a DNA Population Statistical Database as well as a database for unidentified and missing persons.

Provision has also been made for the storage, preservation and destruction of DNA samples.

The establishment of filiation using DNA, pursuant to a Judge’s order, is also provided for in the DNA Identification Bill.
**Bilateral Cooperation**

**Mauritius and India to cooperate for satellite tracking and space research**

Mauritius and India have signed an agreement for the establishment in Mauritius of a Telemetry Tracking and Telecommand station for satellite and launch vehicle at the Remote Sensing Centre situated at Bigara. The agreement also provides for cooperation in the fields of space research, science and applications. Ms K.O. Fong Weng-Poorun, Permanent Secretary at the Prime Minister’s Office, and High Commissioner M. Ganapathi signed the agreement on 29 July 2009 on behalf of the Governments of Mauritius and India respectively.

Collaboration between Mauritius and India in the field of telemetry, tracking and command facilities started in 1986 when an agreement was signed for the setting up of a station in Bigara. Mauritius has benefited from the assistance of experts from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for the operation of the Bigara station. The agreement lapsed a few years ago, hence the need for the new one to continue mutual collaboration.

The new agreement provides for the modernisation and continuation of the telemetry, tracking and command facilities at Bigara through the provision of additional equipment and the replacement of the existing one. The station has already been provided with relevant processing and communication facilities to monitor adequately satellite and launch vehicle performance and accurately determine the special position of satellites and launch vehicles. The data collected by the Bigara station is transmitted to a control centre in India on a real time/near real time basis.

Mauritius will also provide paid direct dedicated telecommunication link to ISRO and facilitate admission of equipment to be used at the Bigara station for ISRO programme. Data on Mauritius collected by remote sensing satellites to be launched by India will be made available for relevant users in Mauritius.

Images received by our National Remote Serving Centre at Bigara have been providing important information such as soil moisture, location of water bodies, density of forests, species of trees and types of soil. This information has helped in the formulation of policies and action plans in the agricultural sector, such as the design of systems of irrigation and for water resource development planning and types of crops to be grown in specific regions. The above information is considered essential for the successful implementation of the Food Security Programme.

The agreement also provides for training of scientists and technicians from Mauritius at facilities of the Department of Space in India.
Several initiatives have already been taken and projects implemented under the Food Security Fund enunciated in the 2008/2009 budget. Action taken is expected to benefit small farmers, breeders and fishers.

It will be recalled that the Food Security Fund, of an amount of Rs 1 billion, aims at achieving self-sufficiency in food through the implementation of a five-pronged strategy consisting in mobilizing land, human resources, technology and financial resources for the purpose of maximum local food production.

Major projects implemented so far include the Seed Potato Purchase Scheme for which half of the Rs 25m earmarked has already been disbursed, the Onion Seed Purchase Scheme – nearly half of the Rs 5m earmarked, disbursed. The Food Crop Insurance Scheme, of a total amount of Rs 15m, has so far benefited nearly 500 planters. Small planters have been allocated 103 acres of land at Rose Belle Sugar Estate and 100 acres at St. Avold.

As regards Rodrigues, it is expected that by the end of the year some Rs 100m would be disbursed for various farming and fishing projects.

Among forthcoming projects: the construction of three model dairy farms at Nouvelle Découverte, Petit Merlo and Mon Trésor, an irrigation network for some 45 planters at L’Espérance Trébuchet, the tagging of livestock animals prior to the launching of the National Livestock Census scheduled for October 2009, a pasture development scheme to encourage breeders to develop high quality pasture lands and a one-off grant of Rs 17000 to be provided to breeders per acre up to a maximum of 25 acres, the acquisition of improved genetic breeds, the setting up of multiplier farms for sheep and goat farming, onion curing facilities at Belle Mare, La Marie and La Chaumière, and the construction of five fibre glass boats for artisanal fishers.

Furthermore, in view of promoting agricultural diversification to meet the objectives set in the Food Security Strategic Plan, an Agricultural Land Bank will be set up to ensure that each plot of land across the country is cultivated. Government will also launch a National Campaign Household Food Security to encourage fruit and food tree cultivation in each household as well as the National Campaign on One Plant to Every Household for which the Ministry of Agro Industry will distribute one plant to every household to raise awareness among the public on the need for tree planting within the context of the “Maurice Ile Durable”.

Other measures to boost that sector are, a National Livestock Census to be conducted with a view to collecting information for the setting up of a database and a livestock information system which will cover all livestock breeders engaged in the rearing of cattle, goat, sheep, deer, pigs and poultry and the construction of a Fish Auction Market at Fort Williams, Les Salines.
A consultative committee comprising owners and registered operators from the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site Buffer Zone has been set up at the initiative of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, the National Heritage Fund, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources and the Municipal Council of Port Louis to facilitate communication and consultation with the local community on measures being proposed for the protection of the buffer zone. The Committee will also help to raise awareness on the economic and social opportunities of a heritage industry in the area.

This coincides with the third anniversary of the inscription of Aapravasi Ghat on the World Heritage list on 16 July 2006.

The Consultative Committee is under the Chairmanship of the Lord Mayor and focuses on the Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) for the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site Buffer Zone, designed for the management and future development of the buffer zone. The protection and preservation of the buffer zone is deemed important in minimising the impact of development on the World Heritage Site so that the latter can retain the relevant historical context in which it has evolved through time. The PPG lists the buildings situated in the buffer zone and categorises them as per their importance as Grade I, II and III as a determination of the degree of control and protection needed for those buildings. For example, Grade I buildings, such as the Granary and the Barkly wharf, are those buildings which require a high level of control with the minimum amount of structural change.

To mark the inscription anniversary a booklet intended for stakeholders, with information on the importance of preserving and protecting the buffer zone for the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site as well as on the PPG, has been released.

In addition, to raise awareness on cultural heritage in the context of the third anniversary of the inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat on the World Heritage List, a booklet on traditional musical instruments used by past inhabitants of the area of Port Louis has been published.

The chairperson of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund Board, Dr Vijayalakshmi Teelock, has announced the setting up of an Interpretation centre on the site, which aims at creating public awareness of the history of indentured labourers providing a better understanding of the experience of the indentured labourers, and the continuous development of the archives section relating to oral history collected from the indentured labourers' descents.
**Training**

**Fashion and Design Institute to conduct degree courses**

The Fashion and Design Institute, to be launched in September 2009, will be conducting degree courses namely BA (Hons) International Fashion Design and BA (Hons) Interior Design. It will also offer courses for top-up degrees in Graphic Design and Digital Media, and in Fashion and Textiles.

The Fashion and Design Institute has been set up through the integration of the Department of Textile Technology of the University of Mauritius, the School of Design of the Industrial Vocational Training Board and the Textile and Apparel Development Centre of Enterprise Mauritius, following the adoption of the Fashion and Design Institute Bill by the National Assembly in 2008. Mr François de Grivel is the chairman.

The main responsibilities of the Institute are to promote excellence in the field of fashion and design technology, to promote fashion and design, to organize academic, professional, vocational and training programmes and courses and to promote the development of entrepreneurship in fashion and design. The institute is also expected to provide research and consultancy services.

Besides the degree courses, the Fashion and Design Institute will offer short term industry-driven programmes to cater for the needs of the textile sector. The different programmes cover Branding for Better Business Results, Industrial Pattern Making and Introduction to Computer Aided Design/ Manufacture, Fashion Merchandising, and Product Development.

The Fashion and Design Institute and the University of Technology, Mauritius will enter into an agreement for the award of certificates, diplomas and degrees by the University.

**ICT Sector**

**Workshop on alternate dispute resolution**

A three-day workshop on the effective use of alternate dispute resolution in the ICT sector was held in Mauritius from July 14 to 16 at Labourdonnais Hotel. The event was organised by the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) and hosted by the ICT Authority of Mauritius.

The alternate dispute resolution service was launched by the CTO in December 2005 and aimed at providing alternate dispute resolution services to member countries and enhanced capacity building in those countries for an effective use of alternate dispute resolution in the ICT sector. It was the Alternate Dispute Resolution Group of the UK, a mediation service provider, who had conducted the workshop in collaboration with CTO.

Participants at the workshop comprised stakeholders from various sub-sectors of ICT field, including fixed line operators, mobile operators, and long distance operators as well as delegates from other service sectors including the financial services and aviation sectors. During the workshop, participants were required to undergo intense training using both course work and practical examples.
The National Environment Laboratory (NEL) has been awarded ISO/IEC 17025: 2005 Certification.

NEL, which is already ISO 9001 certified, has achieved new national and international recognition status with that award. ISO/IEC 17025:2005 accreditation is applicable to all laboratories and specifies the general requirements for the competence to carry out tests and/or calibrations, including sampling. It focuses mainly on organization and management, operational aspects, laboratory facilities and environment, equipment and reagents and technical competency.

Hence, the ISO/IEC 17025: 2005 Certification recognises NEL’s proficiency in operating a quality system. It also highlights NEL’s technical competency as well as its ability to generate technically valid results, providing assurance to customers, be it public or industrial, of good laboratory practice.

In addition, the ISO/IEC 17025: 2005 Certification will allow NEL to present results of analysis or data on environmental samples before a Tribunal or a Court of law in accordance with Section 47 of the Environment Protection Act. NEL is moreover expected to comply with the international standards of ISO/IEC 17025 in the years to come since surveillance visits and re-assessment exercises are scheduled. That exercise will enable NEL to maintain its good laboratory practice and encourage staff professionalism and motivation.

The award ceremony held on July 10 provided the opportunity to present NEL’s projects which include a new organizational development plan which will bring about twinning with other foreign environmental laboratories as well as the setting up of a new unit with core competency in air monitoring. Technicians at the laboratory are presently working on the development of a Lagoonal Water Quality Index, the assessment of surface water and groundwater quality as well as the monitoring of the quality of ambient air. To enhance the technical competencies of NEL’s personnel so that they can face up with new environmental challenges, staff training and development are in the pipeline.

Furthermore, the monitoring exercises carried out by NEL yield data and information which assist policy makers in effective decision making for pollution control and eventually for the protection and enhancement of the environment.

As highlighted by the minister of Environment and National Development Unit, Mr Lormesh Bundhoo, at the award ceremony, the accreditation is in line with Government’s policy towards the development of a Quality Culture in the civil service. In his address, Mr Bundhoo stressed the key responsibilities of NEL in the overall enforcement mechanism, along with the ministry and other authorities, to ensure compliance with environmental policies, standards and guidelines.

New Pharmaceutical Quality Control Laboratory in Réduit

A Pharmaceutical Quality Control Laboratory for the analysis of pharmaceutical products in Mauritius was launched on July 6, as part of the Government Analyst Division, in Réduit. The objective of the laboratory is to ensure that drugs procured are of the required quality, norms and standards.

In addition, the laboratory will provide increased
The Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping has appointed the port and maritime consultancy service, Fisher Associates, to undertake the development of a strategic plan for the shipping sector. The final draft 2009/2015 National Strategic Plan for the Mauritius Shipping sector is expected before the end of August.

The need for the development of a strategic plan is based on the Programme Based Budget requirements of the ministry. As such, the plan is expected to enable prioritization of objectives, effective delivery of services, value for money and improved efficiency.

A validation workshop was organised on July 7 during which the consultants presented to stakeholders of both private and public sectors the core strategic issues and elective strategies which will feature in the plan. The consultants deemed the workshop as an essential step in the development of a sustainable and viable national approach to the shipping sector. Participants were invited to comment and criticize as well as to submit proposals.

The first issue on the agenda of the workshop was the definition and scope of the shipping division of the ministry with the aim of creating a better structure, such as a maritime administration for Mauritius, to deliver the required service levels and to deliver the new strategies which will be formulated in the strategic plan. Other issues involved the establishment of a quality flag for the country, the development and marketing strategies for the Mauritius Register of Shipping, the promotion of maritime cluster development, the Mauritius Maritime Training Academy and the range of training to be offered by that institution.

Feedback from the interactive discussions between consultants and participants would be included in the strategic plan which will shape the future of the shipping sector for Mauritius.

Several types of tests will be carried out by the Pharmaceutical Quality Control Laboratory. They are mainly the identification of active ingredients, the quantity of the ingredients, the degree of purity of a product, friability test, dissolution test and disintegration test. Presently, it costs the Government around Rs 30 000 to test each product when sent overseas to a recognized World Health Organization testing laboratory in South Africa.

The Government Analyst Division is the chemistry laboratory of the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life and is responsible for several activities which are, amongst others, Food Analysis for compliance with the Food Act and Regulations, contamination analysis in foods, drinking water analysis, alcohol level determination in local spirits, cholinesterase test for pesticides sprayer men and toxicological analysis in food.

Currently, the Government Analyst Division is investing in two high-tech equipments namely a liquid chromatograph Mass Spectrometer and a Gas chromatograph Mass Spectrometer, at a total cost of about Rs 38 million.
Youth
National policy to be launched on 12 August 2009

The National Youth Policy is to be launched on 12 August on the occasion on International Youth Day. The policy, to be implemented through an action plan, is expected to meet the ever changing needs and aspirations of young people.

The Policy will set a framework to enable decision-makers to mainstream youth issues and will provide a legal basis for ensuring youth presence and participation in government structures as well as private institutions and forums at national, regional and international levels.

Consultations were held with stakeholders comprising young people themselves, youth and sports cadres, the National Youth Council, different Ministries and Non-Governmental Organisations in a bid to identify areas as regards the elaboration of the policy, which is actually a review of the National Youth Policy 2000.

Strategic areas to be covered by the policy include:

- Education, training and youth participation in decision-making
- Youth health issues, family life education and counselling
- Substance abuse reduction and combating HIV/AIDS
- Youth employment, enterprise initiatives and agriculture
- Information and access to ICT
- Sports, leisure and literacy activities
- Promotion of artistic, cultural and historical values
- Civics, citizenship, spirituality and human values
- Promotion for the protection and preservation of the environment

The National Youth Policy is expected to be reviewed every five years.