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Commonwealth

Mauritius to host CHOGM 2015

Mauritius will host the Commonwealth Summit in 2015. The decision was taken by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held from 27 to 29 November 2009 in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

The Prime Minister, Dr Navin Ramgoolam, who participated in CHOGM 2009, has expressed satisfaction at the crucial role played by Mauritius at the Port of Spain meeting, especially as regards the choice of venues for forthcoming summits and the allocation of 10% of the Copenhagen Launch Fund to Small Island Developing States contained in the Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration adopted at the Summit.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr Arvin Boolell, also participated in CHOGM 2009.

Quiet diplomacy

As the Prime Minister explained, Sri Lanka was to host the next CHOGM, in two years, but in view of the uncertain situation prevailing there, several heads of government would not be willing to attend, mainly...
for security reasons. Sri Lanka maintained it would hold the next CHOGM in spite of reservations expressed by other participants and refusal to attend by some of them. The Mauritian Prime Minister was then solicited to find a solution to the deadlock. Using what he calls ‘quiet diplomacy’, Dr Navin Ramgoolam succeeded in bringing Sri Lanka to change its stand and a solution was found: Australia would host CHOGM 2011, Sri Lanka, CHOGM 2013, and upon a firm request of the Prime Minister, Mauritius would host CHOGM in 2015. However, Mauritius would be ready to host CHOGM 2013, should Sri Lanka not be in a position to do so.

The Prime Minister underlined that this is the first time in the 60-year history of CHOGM that the venues of three forthcoming summits are chosen at the same meeting, and that too with all three venues situated in the same region.

Climate Change was the main issue discussed at CHOGM 2009, in line with the spirit of the theme of the meeting, ‘Partnering for a more equitable and sustainable future’.

Viewing climate change as a predominant global challenge, participants expressed their deep concern about the threat climate change poses to the security and prosperity as well as the economic and social development of their people. The meeting also aimed at bringing Commonwealth member countries to adopt a common stand at the Copenhagen Meeting on Climate Change, to be held from 7 to 18 December 2009.

Commonwealth Heads of Government discussed a proposal of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown in favour of the setting up of a Copenhagen Launch Fund in December 2009 to help poorer countries tackle climate change, as part of a global agreement to be reached at the Copenhagen meeting in December. The Fund would carry 10 billion USD provided by richer countries annually for three years.

The Prime Minister formed part of the Drafting Committee set up to draft and finalise the Port of Spain Declaration on Climate Change to be submitted at Copenhagen. In the final drafting of the declaration, Dr Navin Ramgoolam insisted that some action should be taken in favour of SIDS. Hence, it was proposed that 5% of the launch fund be granted to SIDS, but upon the Prime Minister’s insistence that the 5% be doubled, it was agreed that 10% of the funds would go to SIDS. This decision, which is part of the final declaration, was widely acclaimed by SIDS and other participants as well.

Dr Navin Ramgoolam also insisted that there should be a fast track for the disbursement of the funds, avoiding undue delay for vulnerable countries.
CHOGM 2009

Bilateral Meetings

In the margins of CHOGM 2009, the Prime Minister had bilateral meetings with other leaders.

With British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Dr. Ramgoolam raised the issue of the proposed Marine Protection Area to set up in the Chagos waters and explained that the advisory document circulated on the subject did not properly reflect the position of Mauritius, which has sovereign rights over the Chagos Archipelago. The Prime Minister insisted that the marine park issue could not be raised before that of the resettlement of the Chagossian people.

Mr. Brown gave his assurance to the Prime Minister that nothing would be done that would affect the sovereign rights of Mauritius over the Chagos.

Dr. Ramgoolam also met his Indian counterpart, Dr. Manmohan Singh. Among the issues raised was the non-double taxation agreement between the two countries, on which Dr. Singh assured the Prime Minister that India would do nothing against the interest of Mauritius. Dr. Ramgoolam also thanked India for its assistance for the implementation of infrastructure projects in Agalega.

With South African President Jacob Zuma, the Prime Minister proposed the setting up of a joint South Africa-Mauritius Commission to monitor the implementation of all the agreements signed between the two countries.

Dr. Ramgoolam also met French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Mr. Kevin Rudd has invited Dr. Navin Ramgoolam on an official visit to Australia. The Prime Minister announced he would go next year.

Prevocational education

Knowledge Based Training Centre launched in Port Louis

The Knowledge Based Training Centre (KBTC) of the Industrial and Vocational Training Board (IVTB) was launched on 05 November 2009 in Port Louis in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities, Dr. Ahmed Rashid Beebeejaun, and the Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources, Dr. Vasant K. Bunwaree.

The Centre is a modern training institution which presently provides courses in various fields such as Engineering, Hotel trades and Business Administration, amongst others. Other innovative courses such as Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy are also offered at Certificate and Diploma levels. The objective is to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to the students, set suitable learning challenges, respond to students’ diverse learning needs and overcome potential barriers to learning and assessment.

In Engineering, courses are offered at Diploma level to satisfy the local demand for professionals in engineering fields related to buildings.

Business administration courses are run in collaboration with Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, a Canadian technical institute, and train young persons so that they may take employment or run their own businesses.

As for hairdressing and beauty therapy, City and Guilds accredited courses allow successful trainees to seize new opportunities offered in the hotel and tourism industry.

The KBTC has been operational since September 2008 and so far around 600 persons have successfully completed their training in various fields.
The 2010 budget, presented in the National Assembly on 18 November 2009 by the Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment, Dr Ramakrishna Sithanen, revolves around three main priorities, namely ‘shaping recovery to accelerate job creation’, ‘consolidating social progress to embed inclusive growth’ and ‘sustaining Green Mauritius to mitigate the impact of climate change’. The budget will henceforth coincide with the calendar year.

According to Dr Sithanen, the 2010 budget is a continuity budget, building up on the positive results yielded by economic and financial measures adopted by the Government since 2005 to put the economy on a higher growth path, create employment and bring about social equity.

Through the past budget, the economy was stimulated through expansionary macroeconomic policies public infrastructure projects were frontloaded to save and create jobs, micro to large enterprises were supported and protection was extended to the vulnerable, the unemployed and the retrenched workers. The Additional Stimulus Package helped to save companies in difficulty as a result of the global recession and prevent loss of jobs.

For Dr Sithanen, the success achieved so far should be sustained and nurtured, hence the philosophy of the 2010 budget.

The budget also provides for a full salary compensation of 3.5% to be paid, as from January 2010, to workers earning up to Rs 12 000 monthly and a compensation of Rs 420 for those earning more than Rs 12 000. Old age and other non-contributory pensions and social aid benefits will also be increased by 3.5%.

**Outlook**

The budget outlook is based on the positive performance registered in nearly all sectors of the economy along with the upward trend noted in the ICT/BPO sector, the construction industry, the real estate sector, the seafood industry, the knowledge centre, along with an annual growth of 7.6% recorded in the financial industry.

Together with positive output growth in most countries, this is the setting for action to be initiated to shape recovery, consolidate social progress and sustain Green Mauritius.

Such action will consist in:

- opening more business opportunities and stimulating job creation, especially for women, while consolidating the traditional
and emerging economic pillars;
- continuing to improve the doing business environment to increase investment;
- boosting infrastructure development;
- firming up policies to eradicate absolute poverty, providing decent dwellings to all, improving health care and providing more social protection to women and children;
- improving access to education at all levels for all;
- accelerating initiatives in favour of Maurice Ile Durable.

Figures

For 2010, total expenditure and investment in financial assets will amount to Rs 80.5 billion. Total revenue is expected reach Rs 66.8 billion. Budget deficit would be around 4.5% of GDP.

Public sector investment, especially eco-friendly infrastructure will amount to Rs 24 billion, of which 11 billion will be government investment. Rs 15 billion will be devoted to upgrade the road network.

An amount of Rs 10 billion is being provided for social security. The same amount is being provided for education, which is the largest budget ever allocated to this sector. Provision of Rs 7.5 billion is being made for health, and Rs 5 billion for police.

Also, in the prospect of global recovery in 2010, funds will be restructured and resources in the special funds reoriented to meet changing priorities. An amount of Rs 2.3 billion will be transferred from the Rs 11.3 billion previously allocated to special funds to the budget. Budget 2010 will allocate Rs 1.2 billion to the Food Security and Social Housing Funds.

Budget 2010

Infrastructure

Budget allocation for infrastructure projects are mainly:

- Rs 15 billion for upgrading and expanding the road network to decongest traffic;
- Rs 2 billion for new runway at airport;
- Rs 900 million for new taxiway at airport;
- Rs 3.5 billion for upgrading port container terminal;
- Rs 2 billion to raise power generation capacity at Fort Victoria plant by 30 MW
- Rs 10 million to be invested in the water sector over the next five years, of which Rs 3 billion for constructing Bagatelle Dam
- Rs 640 million for improving reliability of water distribution network

Education/Arts/Culture

- Rs 50 million provided for a new grant formula for private-aided primary schools to improve service delivery
- Rs 1.3 billion to be invested to improve primary and secondary school infrastructure
- Rs 1 billion provided for upgrading primary schools built 50 years ago
- Rs 95 million allocated to centralization of open and distance learning under the Open University of Mauritius
- Setting up of a Cultural and Artistic Boulevard at the Granary Building in Port Louis
Budget 2010

Traditional and emerging pillars

Agro-Industry

- AREU to set up agricultural production and marketing information system to give planters and breeders real-time market intelligence on crops and other products through mobile phone and on a central website

- Provision of 90% of investment costs and technical assistance for development of high-tech sheltered farming

- Provision of financial assistance to sugar cooperatives towards obtaining Fair Trade accreditation from the EU, hence enabling them to obtain USD 60 per tonne of sugar

- Allocation of 200 arpents, secured as part of the cane industry reform programme, for setting up five well-defined food security clusters across the country.

- Setting up of Cane Democratisation Fund to hold the 35% stake obtained from the sugar industry, and shares in the above fund to be offered to planters, labourers and artisans

Tourism

- Provision of Rs 340 million to MTPA to continue marketing Mauritius as high-end destination

- Additional provision of Rs 20 million to MTPA to attract more tourists in the context of World Cup 2010 and the bicentenary of the battle of Vieux Grand Port

- Investment of Rs 520 million to develop a cruise terminal, to be operational in 2010

Export Oriented Industries/Entrepreneurship

- Rs 500 million to expand the Leasing Equipment Modernisation Scheme to include large enterprises

- Rs 40 million to make Competition Commission fully operational in 2010

- Launching of ‘Work from Home’ BPO Scheme to create opportunities, especially for women and the disabled, to work full time or part time from home

GreenMauritius/MID/Energy

- MID Fund to be provided with funds from Agence Française de Développement, the EU and UNDP for about 133 m euros in the form of grants and loans

- Rs 140 m levied on petroleum products and coal allocated to MID Fund

- Land Based Oceanic industry to use deep sea water for air conditioning

- Launch of PPP project for composting 90 000 tonnes of municipal waste every year

- Energy saving lamps to be sold to households by CEB at subsidised price of Rs 30 each

- Guidelines for green procurement being developed

- Subsidy of Rs 250 m provided for grant of Rs 5 000 to 50 000 households on purchase of solar water heaters

- Rs 250 million earmarked to develop Ecovillage concept

- Endemic gardens to be set up in all public schools

- Rs 240 million provided for uplifting and embellishing river banks
SME Sector

The SME sector, which has been the main source of employment creation during the crisis, will be shored up.

Among the main measures to be taken:

- World Bank support to be secured to launch Mauritius Business Growth Scheme (MBGS)
- Government to pay 75% of registration fee as micro-credits taken by women with income of up to Rs 10 000
- Setting up of industrial areas to be leased to SMEs to construct industrial buildings on 100 arpents of land obtained from the sugar industry. Each of the ten sites provided for will cover 5 arpents. One third of the 100 arpents will be set aside for SMEs run by women
- Rs 20 million from the Saving Jobs Recovery (SJR) Fund to be provided for a permanent exhibition space for SMEs
- Provision of Rs 10 million to support trained ICT professionals to become ‘technopreneurs’ capable of creating technology products for the global market
- Raising ceiling of booster loans from DBM from Rs 100 000 to Rs 150 000

Health

- Reconstruction of Jeetoo hospital for Rs 2 billion
- Rs 200 million to be invested in new equipment
- Rs 556 million to be devoted for hospital and health care centre renovation and extension.
- Funds to be provided to reduce waiting list for ophthalmological non-emergency surgeries at Moka eye hospital

Social justice and progress

The National Empowerment Foundation will develop national programme in collaboration with stakeholders to tackle socio-economic issues, the main ones being:

- An integrated social housing programme for some 5 000 poor families;
- Support to women to improve their skills, to poor children through vocational education and to senior citizens for social integration.
- CSR Funds of Rs 140m for social housing, mental health problems in children and leisure and sports.
- Rs 400 million from national lottery proceeds for promoting arts and culture, upgrading the Plaza into an Opera House, upgrading health centres and improvement of quality of life of senior citizens.
- Provision of motorized wheelchairs for use at the University of Mauritius and University of Technology, Mauritius.
- Refund of taxi fares for disabled university students.
- Raising monthly income ceiling for eligibility for full payment of SC/HSC examination fees from Rs 7 500 to Rs 8 500.
- Extension of social aid to beneficiaries of Basic Invalid and Basic Widow’s Pension who live alone, pay rent and have no other income
Budget 2010

Taxation

- Payment of royalties to non-residents will be subject to tax deduction at source at the rate of 15% instead of 10%
- Betting tax on foreign football matches increased from 2% to 8%
- Gaming Regulatory Authority Act to be amended to provide for regulation of “amusement with prizes’ machines and ‘video lottery games terminals’ in game parlours
- Raise in threshold for payment of NRPT to Rs 400 000
- Raise in taxable income threshold, for individual tax payers

Other Measures

- Introduction of e-judiciary project comprising of electronic filing and case management to the tune of Rs 300 million
- Introduction of Smart Identity Card
- Provision of Rs 640 million, including a grant of Rs 300 million, to CWA for a Water Distribution Improvement Programme.
- Rs 20 million provision for the setting up of National Performing Arts groups capable of world class performance.
- Reducing duty from 30% to 15% on tv sets above 32 inches. Abolition of duty on tv sets up to 32 inches.
- Rs 600 million provided for recruitment of more public officers, including doctors, nurses, police officers and teachers
- Equipment and training facilities to be provided to 300 primary athletes
- A new programme to be introduced for reintegration of retired athletes as coaches to train and prepare budding athletes.
- Allocation of Rs 50 million to set up a National Sports Academy at Anjalay stadium

Housing

- 1,000 arpents of land distributed over 20 sites to be dedicated for social housing
- 12,500 housing units for families with monthly income of Rs 5,000 to Rs 16,000.
- Allocation of plots of 60 toises with other grants, subsides and loans to make core houses affordable
- Income threshold for government sponsored MHC loans raised from Rs 8,500 to Rs 10,000

Law and Order

- Rs 525 million provided for more foot and mobile patrols, the extension of CCTV surveillance to Port Louis and Grand Bay and a new digital radio communication system
- Improvement of search and rescue capability through purchase of new equipment for Rs 578 million.
- Recruitment of 900 Police Constables
Indo-Mauritian Cooperation

India to supply coastal radar surveillance system

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 3 November 2009 between India and Mauritius, providing for the supply by India of a coastal radar surveillance system to Mauritius followed by an agreement between Mauritius and the Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for the supply, installation and commissioning of the equipment. Both agreements were signed at Clarisse House in the presence of the Prime Minister, Dr Navin Ramgoolam, and the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Dr Shashi Tharoor, who was on official visit to Mauritius on 2 and 3 November.

The MoU provides for the setting up of eight Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems, five of which to be installed in Mauritius and one each in Rodrigues, Agalega and St. Brandon.

Dhruv helicopter commissioned

Later the same day, at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport, Dr Tharoor handed over a Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopter to the Prime Minister who in turn handed it over to the Commissioner of Police.

On that occasion the Prime Minister reiterated his commitment to continue the reorganization and the modernization of the police force. ‘We need a police force that is fully equipped to cope with new and emerging security challenges and to be more accountable,’ Dr Ramgoolam underlined. Speaking of the new technologies recently introduced, such as DNA technology and the CCTV system, the PM added: ‘We cannot use nineteenth century means to solve twenty-first century problems’.

The decision to acquire a new helicopter for the police had been taken in 2005. The same year, Dr Ramgoolam had discussions with his Indian counterpart, Dr Manmohan Singh, on Indian assistance for the acquisition of an Advanced Light Helicopter and an Offshore patrol vessel, as well as for the installation of a Coastal Surveillance Radar System. India agreed to provide to Mauritius a line of credit of US $100 million including a grant of US $25 million. The Dhruv helicopter and the Coastal Surveillance Radar System costing around US $10m and 3m respectively, are financed by the grant.

The Dhruv helicopter can carry 14 passengers, two pilots and a load of 1.5 tonnes. It will be able to go to the outer islands without refueling. It will be assigned to patrolling, search and rescue operations, medical evacuation mission, anti-drug and anti-piracy operations and surveillance of our EEZ.
175th anniversary of arrival of indentured labourers
Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Dr S.Tharoor,
Chief Guest

The Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Dr Shashi Tharoor, was the chief guest at the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the arrival of indentured labourers to Mauritius. The commemorative ceremony was held at Aapravasi Ghat, on 2 November 2009, in the presence of the President of the Republic, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, and the Prime Minister, Dr Navin Ramgoolam, and the chairperson of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, Dr Vijayalakshmi Teelock.

The commemorative ceremony consisted in the laying of wreaths on the steps indentured labourers first climbed, after they landed, to be brought later to several depots on the island. A folk song in bhojpuri was performed on that occasion by Manoj Tiwari, well known bhojpuri singer from Bihar, India. A drama depicting the arrival of the first Indian intentured labourers was staged by deaf mute inmates of the HEAR Institute.

A cartoon on the arrival of Indian immigrants and a first day commemorative cover were also launched on that occasion.

The first indentured labourers

The first indentured labourers arrived in Mauritius, from India, in 1834 on board the Atlas. They had been brought by the British Government which wanted to use free labour, following the abolition of slavery, for work on sugar plantations. Between 1834 and 1920, nearly half a million of immigrants arrived in Mauritius from India. Some of them were transferred to Reunion Island, Australia, Southern and Eastern Africa and the Caribbean.

The majority of indentured labourers came mainly from Bihar, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Bombay.

After disembarking from the ship, immigrants underwent a medical inspection and were vaccinated. The personal details of each immigrant were registered and his photograph taken. After two or three days spent at Aapravasi Ghat for administrative procedures, the indentured labourers were allocated to sugar estates.

Indian indentured labourers came mainly from Bihar, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Bombay.

The Aapravasi Ghat was inscribed by UNESCO in 2006 as a World Heritage Site.
Labour
Government determined to protect migrant workers

The Occupational Safety & Health (Employees Lodging Accommodation) Regulations are being finalized to provide for better accommodation for migrant workers, the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, Mr J.F. Chaumière, announced on 5 November 2009. He further stated that the Decent Work Country Programme Document for Mauritius is also at the stage of finalization and its implementation will have a positive impact on the quality of life of all workers, including migrant workers.

Minister Chaumière was speaking at the launch in Mauritius of the UNDP Human Development Report 2009: ‘Overcoming Barriers – Human Mobility and Development’.

Decent Work is a goal connecting people with their hopes to obtain productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The project was launched in Mauritius in November 2008 and a draft report was submitted in April 2009, highlighting three priorities, namely employment creation and quality of employment, strengthening social dialogue and elimination of all forms of discrimination.

According to minister Chaumière, the 2009 Human Development Report has come at an opportune time when human mobility has become one of the most complex issues facing the world today. He reiterated government’s endeavor in the field of circular migration, particularly in countries like France, China and Canada.

Mauritius has about 36 000 expatriates living and working in its territory, particularly in the construction and manufacturing sectors and they are contributing to the economic development of the country.

The country has an emigration rate of 12.5% and the major continent of destination for migrants from Mauritius is Europe with 49.7% of emigrants living there. In Mauritius, there are 40.8 thousand migrants which represent 3.3% of the total population.

Mauritius became a member of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in 2006. In collaboration with the IOM, the government is presently implementing a Circular Migration Project which aims at identifying employment opportunities abroad, and training Mauritians in the skills required to facilitate their placement in these jobs.
Development Funding
Mauritius Benefits Loan to the Tune of 105 Million Euros from AFD

Two loan agreements amounting to 105 million Euros (around Rs. 4.5 billion), one for the funding of the Grand Baie sewerage Project Phase 2 and the other to finance the construction of a new road linking the village of Terre Rouge to Verdun, were signed on 12 November 2009 with the Agence Française de Développement (AFD).

The loan agreement for the waste water sector to the tune of 65 million Euros, was signed by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities, Dr. R. Beebeejaun, and the President of the AFD, Mr. P.A. Wiltzer, in the presence of Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment, Dr. R. Sithanen.

The Grand Baie Sewerage Project Phase 2 consists in connecting around 10 000 houses in villages in the vicinity of Grand Baie. Around 110 kilometres of pipes will be laid in the context of this project.

The second loan agreement of 40 million Euros, which will be used to finance the construction of a new road extending over 16 kilometres linking the village of Terre Rouge and Verdun, was signed by the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping, Mr. A. Bachoo. Works will start by the end of this year so that the road is opened before the end of 2012.

International Conference on Diabetes
Mauritius Call for Action Adopted

The International Conference on Diabetes and Associated Diseases organised from 12 to 14 November 2009 at La Plantation Hotel, Balaclava, ended with the adoption of the Mauritius call for Action which identifies key strategies and commitments required for planning and implementing diabetes, cardiovascular and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) prevention and control programmes so as to reduce the burden they represent in the African region.

More than 300 delegates from 50 countries acknowledged that many countries in Africa are on the brink of the epidemic of diabetes and other NCDs and that the cost of diabetes and its complications is huge and will continue to grow. The need for collaboration between Member States and key stakeholders was highlighted as well as the need to develop a comprehensive action plan related to diabetes and NCDs.

The Call for Action stresses, amongst others, the need to promote primary, secondary and tertiary prevention interventions as regards diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and other NCDs; to adopt healthy lifestyle behaviours; to integrate diabetes and NCDs into primary health care; to improve human and financial capacities; to initiate and strengthen research on diabetes and NCDs and to ensure the availability of diagnostic tools and medicines for diabetic patients.

In his address at the closing ceremony, the Minister of Health and Quality of Life, Dr Rajeshwar Jeetah, pointed out that diabetes has emerged as a major public health threat in the region and that the fight against the epidemic can only be successful through the commitment and participation of the Government, policy makers, civil society, private sector, researchers and scientists.

Dr Jeetah expressed his hope that the adoption of the Call for Action triggers concrete actions, in all Member States, that will lead to a gradual decrease in the burden of diabetes and other NCDs in the years to come. He further added that the Conference has provided a forum which will give all Member States the opportunity to follow up actions, monitor and evaluate programmes and take appropriate and timely remedial measures.

The International Conference on “Preventing Diabetes and its Complications: A Challenge for the 21st Century” was organised by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life in collaboration with the WHO and the International Diabetes Federation.