Prime Minister at African Union Summit and African Peer Review Forum

The Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, was, from 24 to 27 July 2010, in Kampala, Uganda, where he participated in the 15th Assembly of the Heads of State and of Government of the African Union and the 13th Summit of the African Peer Review Forum.

The theme of the 15th AU Summit was Maternal, Infant and Child Health and Development in Africa. Peace and security in Africa, the fight against terrorism, UN Security Council reform and climate change were among other priority issues on the agenda.

No Woman shall die while giving birth

In his address at the Summit, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam recalled that as African women constituted the support system, within the African traditional family, for the development and nurturing of the future, represented by the children, women should not die while giving birth. To achieve this, he added, there was a need in Africa for a systemic change from disease specific policies to family-oriented measures. The Prime Minister spoke of steps taken to improve health services in Mauritius, so that the country now has the highest life expectancy and the lowest infant and maternal mortality rate on the African continent. He also spoke
of Government’s project of setting up a state-of-the-art Institute for Women’s Health.

The AU Summit adopted action towards accelerating reduction of maternal mortality on the continent, mobilising adequate resources for integrated health programmes up to 15% of the national budget and sharing best practices within regions.

Sovereignty over the Chagos

The Prime Minister also apprised the AU Assembly of the concern of Mauritius over the unilateral decision of the UK to create a marine park around the Chagos Archipelago, especially as regards the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago. The Assembly approved a resolution affirming that the Chagos Archipelago is an integral part of Mauritius and demanding the UK to put an end to its illegal occupation so that Mauritius can effectively exercise its sovereignty over the archipelago.

Peer review: strong democratic credentials

The Prime Minister previously participated in the African Peer Review Forum, where the agenda covered the peer reviewing of Mauritius. The report of peer review for Mauritius underscored the success of the country in building up very strong democratic credentials in the African continent and globally.

The main objective of the African Peer Review Mechanism is to ensure that participating States conform to the standards of political, economic and corporate governance and socio-economic development contained in the African Union Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance.

Industrial relations

Launching of e-tribunal system at the Employment Relations Tribunal

The e-tribunal system for the Employment Relations Tribunal (ERT) was launched on 21 July 2010 at the new venue of the Tribunal at Newton Tower in Port Louis, amidst senior representatives of the Bar and the Law Society.

With the e-tribunal electronic case management system, ERT will post online its awards and statements of case and of defence or other documents presented before the Tribunal. The e-system will also allow lawyers, disputants, witnesses and the tribunal to gain time between the lodging of a case and its final disposal.

The former Permanent Arbitration Tribunal, set up under the Industrial Relations Act of 1973, made way for the Employment Relations Tribunal established under the Employment Relations Act of 2008, which came into force in February 2009. The ERT which hears industrial disputes and delivers awards is thus a showcase of the principles governing the newly proclaimed Act. The Employment Relations Act of 2008 lays emphasis on the peaceful settlement of labour disputes and the exhaustion of all dispute resolution processes before industrial action is undertaken and makes provision for a new drive towards collective bargaining and the arbitration of industrial disputes.

It will be recalled that about 150 cases are referred to the ERT yearly and the Tribunal is expected to hear and determine an appeal within 90 days of the date of lodging. ERT has as main functions to settle industrial disputes in the civil service, the private sector and parastatal bodies and local government services in addition to hearing appeals related to decisions of the Conciliation and Mediation Commission. ERT also contributes to the promotion of harmonious industrial relations.
Work Placement Programme for students enters 8th edition

The 8th edition of the Work Placement Programme for students of secondary and pre-vocational institutions during school vacations kicked off on 19 July 2010 at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka, with the participation of some 225 students from 50 different schools. Those students will be spending their winter holidays – 19 July to 6 August – in 36 private and public organisations getting access to, and gaining experience on the realities of, the world of work.

The Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) has been implementing the Work Placement Programme since August 2007 in a bid to reduce the mismatch between the output from the school system and the requirements of the world of work. The project has already catered for the placement of 3,152 students in about 230 enterprises and organisations.

About the Programme

The Programme aims at bridging the gap between the schooling system and the world of work by exposing students to the work culture based on work ethics, professional values and practice, by enabling students to relate the knowledge and skills acquired during their traineeship to their educational subjects and activities, and by consolidating academic learning with practical work-on-the-job.

In availing themselves of this traineeship opportunity, students can hone their skills namely decision-making, problem-solving and communication, develop self-confidence and teamwork and obtain clear information as regards potential career opportunities, thus improving their future employability.

A steering committee, comprising representatives of the HRDC, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources as well as employers, manages the programme. The list of potential participants is the result of a survey undertaken by the Ministry in all schools to enlist those students willing to enrol on the programme with the consent of parents and the rector. The names of the students are then compiled in a database where the subjects of study of students are matched with placement opportunities obtained from the HRDC regional database of enterprises and organisations. After the HRDC has carried out the allocation exercise, students enlisted on the programme confirm their participation.

The students are assigned mentors in the enterprise or organisations where they undergo their traineeship. The mentor’s roles include giving an induction course to students, define work attachment programmes for participants and submit a report on the performance of the trainee.
**India-Mauritius**  
Five MoUs signed

Mauritius and India signed on 3 July five Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) during the official visit, from 2 to 4 July 2010, of the Indian Minister of External Affairs of India, Mr S. M. Krishna.

The aim was to further consolidate the already solid cooperation ties that exist between the two countries. The MoUs relate to the supply of an Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV); cooperation for early warning arrangement for coastal hazards; cultural cooperation for the period 2010-2013; cooperation in the area of Information Security and Information Technology (IT) Standards; and, establishing a Visiting Chair of Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy.

During his stay, Mr Krishna paid courtesy calls on the President of the Republic, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and the Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Rashid Beebeejaun.

Minister Krishna also had a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr. Arvin Boolell, to discuss issues of mutual concern.

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**The MoUs - Highlights**

- The supply of an OPV to the Government of Mauritius for carrying out joint surveillance within the Exclusive Economic Zone of Mauritius.

- Cooperation for early warning arrangement for coastal hazards between the Meteorological Services and the Indian Centre for Ocean Information Services.

This agreement aims at establishing cooperative linkages for Tsunami Early Warning arrangements, preparedness and mitigation of tsunami hazards. It will facilitate real-time monitoring of data from all sea-level and earthquake monitoring stations and all other observation systems of the meteorological Services. It will also enable us to issue timely warnings to public in cases where a tsunami is likely to affect the low lying coastal areas.

- Cultural cooperation between India and Mauritius for the period 2010-2013. The Programme for Cultural Cooperation falls under the Agreement of Technical and Cultural Cooperation signed between Mauritius and India in March 1978.

It is geared towards strengthening and reinforcing cultural linkages and enhancing people to people interactions by organising exhibitions, holding film festivals and book fairs, exchange of cultural troupes, encouraging youth exchange programmes and providing scholarships.
• Developing cooperation in the area of Information Security and Information Technology (IT) Standards between the two countries.

The MoU between the National Computer Board (NCB) of Mauritius and the Standardisation, Testing and Quality Certification (STQC), Department of Information Technology of India will help promote close cooperation and exchange of information pertaining to Information Security and IT standards. It will moreover facilitate collaboration on best practices in the field of Information Security Management Systems; disaster recovery planning and IT Service management.

• The MoU between the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) aims at establishing a Visiting Chair of Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy at the School of Indological Studies at the MGI. This would guarantee an increasingly higher degree of professionalism in the field of Sanskrit academia.

Labour
Actions to promote interests and welfare of workers

An overview of the labour and industrial situation as well as future projects and actions of the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment was presented on 8 July 2010 by the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, Mr Shakeel Mohamed. The object is to address constraints faced by both employers and workers on the labour market.

Minister Mohamed expressed satisfaction on the positive impact of the provisions of the new labour laws, namely the Employment Relations Act and the Employment Rights Act, particularly as regards the protection of workers, and mechanisms and institutions for mediation, conciliation and collective bargaining. On this score, he recalled the role and responsibilities of employers with regards to compliance to the laws and the promotion of collective bargaining and made an appeal to them to sign the procedural agreements which are mandatory under the laws.

In addition to the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) for Mauritius to be finalised by October this year, the Minister announced a series of major actions to be undertaken to promote the interests and welfare of workers. They are amongst others:

• the setting up of the National Tripartite Forum with the primary objective of further consolidating social dialogue and tripartism amongst social partners with a view to better understanding and responding to the challenges that face the country

• the phasing out of the National Pay Council, to be replaced by the Tripartite Mechanism on salary compensation after consultations with all stakeholders

• a National Employment policy, to be worked out with a view to creating innovative policies and practices to unlock opportunities for employment creation and address problems related to mismatch in the labour market as well as importation of foreign labour

• the possibility of signing bilateral labour cooperation agreements with other sourcing countries to address the problems of double
contract of employment and recruitment of foreign workers, in addition to the bilateral agreement which presently exists between Mauritius and China

- the setting up of a pool of barristers and attorneys with a view to further expediting proceedings instituted before the Industrial Court

- the harmonisation of the national legislation in relation to the elimination of all forms of discrimination in line with the international conventions of the ILO

- the implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health (Employees Lodging Accommodation) Regulations

**Economic statistics**

**UNECA Seminar Focuses on Increased Capacity of African Countries**

A five-day United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) seminar, on “Implementation Strategy for International Standards on Economic Statistics in Africa”, regrouping some 50 foreign delegates from across the African continent, as well as Mauritian professionals, was held from 5 to 9 July 2010 at Le Meridien Hotel, in Pointe Aux Piments.

Participants comprised mainly officials from national statistics agencies, central banks, ministries of Finance, international partners and statistical training centres grouped together in the context of UNECA’s efforts to increase the capacity of African countries to abide by international standards as regards economic statistics.

The UNECA seminar, organised in collaboration with the Regional Multidisciplinary Centre of Excellence (RMCE), the Mauritian Ministry of Finance and Economic Development and the Central Statistics Office, served as a platform for the delegates to review concepts and changes in international standards on economic statistics that have been recently adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission with the objective of developing country strategies for their implementation. The deliberations of the seminar also culminated in the formulation of an action plan by participants on how to mainstream economic statistics in the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics in their country.

In addition to apprising countries in the region of the main differences between revised standards and previous ones and assess the progress on the implementation of the revised ones, the seminar acted as a forum to discuss impediment factors and address institutional issues and quality of data sources in the African context. A fair assessment of the current status of the implementation of economic statistics and classifications in Africa was also carried out to enable prioritisation of activities for streamlining international resources to support countries align their economic statistics with the revised standards.

It will be recalled that, in January this year, Mauritius was the first country to ratify the African Charter on Statistics prepared by the African Union Commission to serve as an operational framework for statistical development in Africa including the production, management and dissemination of data and statistical information at national, regional and continental levels.
An inception workshop on the Removal of Barriers to Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Generation in Mauritius ended on 8 July 2010 with a series of recommendations focused on four main areas namely awareness and capacity building, institutional and financial measures, pilot projects, and policy and regulatory framework.

Organised by the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global environment Facility (GEF) at La Grande Cannelle, Domaine Les Pailles, the workshop aimed at analyzing the roles and responsibilities of public and private institutions involved in renewable energy in Mauritius and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of these institutions. The workshop was conducted by a team of international consultants who were in Mauritius till 14 July 2010 in connection with the implementation of the project on the removal of barriers to solar photovoltaic power generation in Mauritius in view of an application to be made to the GEF for funding amounting to USD 2.2 million.

During the brainstorming sessions at the workshop, the stakeholders agreed that there should be capacity building in ministries, educational sectors and financial institutions as well as the creation of a certification system to validate expertise of the different stakeholders in the PV business.

Other major recommendations pertained to the setting up of a grid code and feed-in tariff system and the provision of soft loans by financial institutions to promote PV. The group also agreed that the Mauritius Standards Bureau should define minimum standards for equipment such as the PV systems being compatible with humidity levels and resisting cyclonic conditions. It was also recommended that there should be policies for all new buildings to ensure that they are efficient users of energy. Furthermore, the group agreed that more incentives should be provided to investors to come and set up grid connected systems in Mauritius.

These recommendations will be used by the consultants to formulate a Project Document on the removal of barriers which is expected by October 2010. Mauritius has benefitted from USD 80 000 dollars from the GEF and USD 28 000 dollars from the UNDP for this project whose aim is to accelerate the development of on-grid solar PV systems by removing barriers and developing sustainable delivery models. The project is expected to start in January 2011 and be completed in 2014.

Several barriers to PV systems have been identified in Mauritius. They are, amongst others, the lack of policy, legal, institutional and regulatory framework, lack of financial resources, non availability of appreciation of technical feasibility and commercial liability for PV applications and the scarcity of technicians for installation and maintenance facilities for PV systems.

Solar Photovoltaic Energy
Recommendations for the formulation of a Project Document

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Government Information Service, Prime Minister’s Office, Mauritius
The National Empowerment Programme (NEF), which as from May 2010 operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment, has embarked since July 11 on a countrywide survey to identify new pockets of absolute poverty and update the existing data regarding poverty in Mauritius.

The assessment exercise, for which the final report is expected in September this year, will be conducted over a period of one month. The up-to-date figures will contribute towards helping the Government into achieving higher efficiency and effectiveness in the national drive against poverty. The overall objective is to eradicate all cases of absolute poverty in the country within a span of seven to ten years. Hence, the new data will enable the NEF to determine the level of poverty amongst the vulnerable groups and extend assistance under the Eradication of Absolute Poverty (EAP) Programme to those living in absolute poverty across the island.

Under the EAP Programme, various policies, strategies and programmes are being firmed up to tackle the issue of absolute poverty and a series of social measures such as social integrated projects would be instigated to improve the standard of living of the poorer segments of the society and help them integrate mainstream society.

Since the setting up of the EAP in 2008, the Programme has embarked on several projects based on the data available from two surveys conducted by the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups and the Social Register of Mauritius in the years 2006 and 2008.

Third status report

According to a third status report published by the NEF in June this year, 1,204 families in 60 pockets of poverty have benefitted, under the EAP Programme, from several social integrated projects consisting of housing, education, job placement and training, micro-enterprises, infrastructures and sports and leisure activities for the period extending from 2008 to May 2010. Moreover, EAP is targeting, by 2011, some 7,000 families in 229 pockets of poverty across the island.

The NEF has so far reached around 20,000 beneficiaries both in Mauritius and Rodrigues through its different programmes and projects put in place in view of creating more job opportunities, namely through training, reskilling, and placement programmes, circular migration, assistance to unemployed women, financial and technical assistance for micro-enterprises, Integrated Social Development Programme as well as under the agencies involved in empowerment and in the fight against poverty.
Training and placement and specific schemes

As regards the training and placement programme, some 8 503 unemployed persons - 3 723 men and 4 730 women- have been trained and placed in several economic sectors from January 2007 to May 2010. The majority of the beneficiaries, that is around 6 093, have been placed in the Information and Communication Technology and Business Process Outsourcing sector.

Moreover, under the Mix of Work and Training Scheme set up in 2009 to cater for vulnerable employees and enterprises affected by the global financial crisis, some 25 enterprises and 383 employees have received assistance and an additional 489 employees will benefit from this scheme. In parallel, some 44 laid-off workers who registered in the workfare programme have been trained and placed in other jobs.

Some 1 263 beneficiaries have received assistance in the form of Booster Loan Scheme under the special entrepreneurship programme and 123 Small and Medium Enterprises have benefitted from Quasi-Equity Financing scheme. The special programme for unemployed women, on its part, has provided both financial and technical assistance to some 725 women for the setting up of 260 micro-enterprises projects.

As regards the Espace des Métiers, over 3 700 persons have benefitted from its services from October 2009 to May 2010.

Around 269 persons have been placed in the agro-industry sector in Canada under the circular migration project between March 2008 and May 2010.

435 pig breeders have received financial and technical assistance under the Pig Sector Restructuring Committee for the relaunching of the pig breeding business activity and 40 breeders have been trained to start their own business.

Under the Integrated Social Development Programme, from April 2009 to April 2010, some 198 vulnerable families have benefitted from social housing facilities at La Valette in Bambous. Similar facilities will be extended to some 19 families at Cité Lumière in Grand Baie. At May 2010, 1 757 applications for housing facilities were registered at the NEF.

Furthermore, under the CSR programme initiated in 2009, from July 2009 to March 2010, around 80 enterprises have contributed 2% of their profits for socio-economic projects for the civil society and a total amount of Rs 331.5 million has been received.

Rodrigues

As far as Rodrigues is concerned, from 2007 to February 2010, financial assistance has been provided to some 181 micro-projects and within eight months 60 craftsmen have cumulated sales of Rs 650 000. In addition, some 100 entrepreneurs have been trained and placed in the agricultural sector. 437 children from vulnerable families have also benefitted from programmes under the Eradication of Absolute Poverty in Rodrigues.
Bilateral Cooperation
Grand Baie Sewerage Project benefits from Japanese funds

The Government of Mauritius and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) signed on 8 July 2010 a loan agreement amounting to Rs 2.6 billion for the financing of phase 1B of the Grand Baie sewerage project.

The loan agreement, for which the repayment will be made over 15 years inclusive of the moratorium, was signed in Port Louis by the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr. Pravind Jugnauth, and the Ambassador of Japan, Mr Tetsuro Kawaguchi. The loan carries a preferential rate of 0.6% with a moratorium period of five years.

Through Phase 1B of the Grand Baie Sewerage Project, more than 4000 families will be connected to the existing sewerage plant in the northern part of the country, thereby increasing the sewerage coverage ratio across the region and contributing to the enhancement of environmental conservation and public health. The project is also aimed at strengthening the water quality monitoring system and improving the capacity of wastewater treatment facilities across Grand Baie, which is considered as one of the major touristic regions in the country.

The project, which lies in the context of sustainable development, will be implemented in collaboration with the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and is due for completion in 2015.

The signing of this loan agreement brings the total financial support granted by Japan to the Government of Mauritius to an envelope of nearly Rs 5.25 billion.

It will be recalled that over the past two decades, Japan has been providing assistance to Mauritius in various fields namely telecommunications, sewerage projects and anti-landslide infrastructure. Lately the assistance has been extended to cover other spheres such as climate change initiatives and renewable energy projects. In addition to funding assistance, Mauritius has also benefitted from Japanese expertise through technical assistance, feasibility studies and training programmes.
The launching of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) Preprimary 3 – 5 years on 15 July 2010 at the Octave Wiehé Auditorium, Réduit has completed the cycle of elaboration of curriculum frameworks for the pre-primary, primary and secondary sectors.

The curriculum frameworks lie in the context of the overall reform agenda put in place by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources in September 2006 towards achieving quality education for all amidst the numerous challenges and opportunities posed by new economic and social order. The NCF for the primary and secondary sectors were launched in January 2008 and in November 2009 respectively.

The NCF stems from intersectoral consultations with all stakeholders of the pre-primary education sector and the collaborative effort of the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (ECCEA), the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), the Ministries of Education and Human Resources, Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions, and Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, and NGOs.

The document has been designed to ensure that quality pre-primary education is delivered to children aged three to five through the development of their individual intellectual, socio-emotional and psychomotor skills and build their confidence and self-esteem for learning. It is also in line with the objectives of the Education and Human Resource Strategy Plan 2008-2020 for all children to start primary schooling on an equal footing. Pre-primary education plays an essential role in building the foundations upon which all future learning rests.

Approaches resting on six learning areas

The NCF is based on pedagogical approaches that favour the holistic development of the child. Those approaches rest upon six learning areas which children are expected to achieve at the end of their pre-primary schooling. They include personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; expressive, creative and aesthetic development; health and physical development; body and environmental awareness; and mathematical and logical thinking.

Several effective ways of supporting children to attain those achievements are proposed in the document. Together with the basic concepts of colours, shapes, size, time, measures, numbers and space orientation, children are expected to acquire writing, listening and speaking skills. In addition, creative and visual arts, crafts, drama, music, poetry and storytelling, human values education, personal hygiene, healthy practices and habits are scheduled to promote all-round development of the child.

The NCF also calls for parents, family and community participation for the success of early childhood education. Parents’ partnership is deemed essential in ensuring follow-up of activities at home, in supporting children’s efforts and in producing teaching aids. Moreover, the document paves the way for the use of information technology as aid to teaching and its manipulation by the children as an integral component of the curriculum.

In a bid to implement the framework effectively, the MIE has designed and run various training programmes for the supervisory cadres and educators of the pre-primary sector. Hence, a joint MIE/ECCEA 20 hours training programme has been developed. Some 50 trainers and supervisors have attended training while a kit to guide those trainers is also available. In addition, educators in Mauritius and Rodrigues, from both public and private sectors, have participated in a training session from 6 to 16 April 2010.