Mauritius-Singapore
Moving towards enhanced partnership

Mauritius and Singapore must really move for closer economic ties, the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, told his Singaporean counterpart, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, during a working meeting on 28 September 2010 in Singapore, where he was on an official visit at the invitation of the Singaporean government. The two leaders discussed on ways to enhance partnership, especially on the economic front, between the two countries.

“A Memorandum of Understanding with the Singapore Corporation Enterprise already exists and we can see the benefits of this agreement”, observed Prime Minister Ramgoolam. A tête-à-tête between Dr Navin Ramgoolam and M. Lee Hsien Loong was preceded by the signature of an Air Services Agreement between Mauritius and Singapore. The Agreement makes provision for up to 14 passenger flights per week between Mauritius and Singapore whereas presently there are only two flights weekly.
Dr Ramgoolam also met the Singaporean President, M. Sellapan Ramanathan, with whom he discussed about trade, tourism and bilateral cooperation amongst other issues.

During his visit, Dr Ramgoolam had a working session with M. Clarence Yeo, Commissioner of Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) and its representatives. The discussions focused mainly on the new Mauritian identity card, immigration control and customs.

“If Mauritius wants to send a delegation to Singapore for more details, we are ready to conduct training and host the delegation. We can be of assistance to Mauritius, we have similar challenges and problems,” said Commissioner Yeo after presenting the equipment that the ICA uses for the production of identity cards.

On 27 September the Prime Minister had working sessions with members of the Singapore Mass Rapid Transit Corporation, the President of the Nanyang Technological University and members of the Singapore Public Utilities Board.

This visit was an opportunity for the PM to finalise various strategic partnerships between the two countries on a number of issues such as free trade agreement between Mauritius and Singapore; security measures, particularly in the prisons; waste water management; tertiary education; and investment on infrastructural projects in Mauritius.
For Dr Boolell, the UN General Assembly was meeting against the backdrop of the triple-blow of food, fuel and financial crises which have significantly slowed down the social and economic progress of many countries, particularly the developing ones.

“The statistics are eloquent regarding the negative impact of the multitude of crises on the progress achieved on the MDGs. As the global economic output declined, the ranks of the poor have swelled with the newly poor”, the Minister observed.

The need to have closer cooperation and collaboration between government, civil society and the private sector supplemented by innovative thinking, cutting-edge knowledge and path-breaking initiatives was also highlighted.

Unconditional return of the Chagos Archipelago

The Minister urged the United Kingdom once more to take the necessary steps for the unconditional return of the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia, to Mauritius without further delay.

The Chagos Archipelago was illegally excised by the United Kingdom from the territory of Mauritius prior to the country’s independence. This dismemberment was done in blatant violation of the UN General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960 and 2066 (XX) of 16 December 1965.

The issue of the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago was raised with successive British Governments and the matter was initially pursued as a friendly dispute. However, due to lack of progress, Mauritius suggested that the issue be addressed in bilateral talks which were initiated in January 2009. “The issue of our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago has yet to be addressed”, the Minister deplored.

Marine protected area not recognised

The Government of Mauritius has decided not to recognise the existence of the marine protected area, the Minister reminded.

Mauritius is deeply concerned that the British Government decided on 1 April 2010 to unilaterally declare a marine protected area around the Chagos Archipelago allegedly to protect the marine environment, underlined Minister Boolell.

The unilateral establishment of this marine protected area infringes the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago and constitutes a serious impediment to the eventual resettlement in the Archipelago of its former inhabitants and other Mauritians as any economic
activity in the protected zone would be precluded.

‘Climate-smart’ world

The Minister recalled that the success in achieving the MDGs is inextricably linked to the broader agenda of climate change. “Joining efforts would prevent missing an opportunity to establish a ‘climate-smart’ world,” Dr Boolell said.

In his view, Small Island Developing States should be given simplified access to financing from both the USD 30 billion of Fast Start Funding pledged in the Copenhagen Accord and the longer term funds proposed for the Copenhagen Green Fund.

He expressed hope that the UN Climate Change Conference to be held in Cancun later this year will bring about a legally binding agreement on the limits to greenhouse gas emissions.

Mauritius and the Indian Ocean Region

“Mauritius”, said Dr. Boolell, “will continue, as the new chair of the Indian Ocean Commission, to lay emphasis on the creation of an economic and commercial space, the implementation of a regional strategy on fisheries and aquaculture, the promotion of a regional tourism label in traditional and emerging markets and the development of a comprehensive regional anti-piracy programme”.

With regard to the situation prevailing in Madagascar, Dr. Boolell recalled that Mauritius was actively engaged at the level of the SADC, the African Union and the Indian Ocean Commission in finding a peaceful solution to the political crisis.

Respect of Human Rights

The commitment of Mauritius towards safeguarding and protecting human rights both at the national and international levels was reiterated. “We unreservedly condemn the serious human rights violations committed by warring factions in conflict zones where the vulnerable members of the society particularly children and women are being targeted”, the Minister pointed out.

He called for Security Council reform - one that would meet and respond to the geopolitical realities of the twenty first century and reviewed the situations in Myanmar, the Middle East and Somalia.

Regional Integration
Mauritius participates in COMESA Summit

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International trade, Dr Arvin Boolell, represented Mauritius at the 14th COMESA Summit held from 31 August to 1st September in Mbabane, Swaziland. The theme was Harnessing Science and Technology for Development. The Summit reviewed the implementation of COMESA Programmes on Agriculture and Food Security, Climate Change Initiatives, Infrastructure, as well as the COMESA Free Trade Area.

In the margins of the Summit, Dr. Arvin Boolell had bilateral discussions with the Vice-President of Seychelles, Mr. Danny Faure, on their participation in the subsidiary company of a Regional Development Company which would be opened in Mozambique. The Minister also met Mr. Pascal Lamy, Director of the WTO.
Security
US Government donates defender boats to National Coast Guard

Three Defender Class High Speed Patrol Boats worth Rs 31 million have been donated to the National Coast Guard by the United States Government. The official handing over ceremony took place on 3 September 2010 in Port Louis in the presence of US Ambassador Mary Jo Wills, Police Commissioner Dhun Iswar Rampersad, and high officials from the US Embassy, the Prime Minister’s Office and the National Coast Guard.

The three patrol boats, which were berthed near the Customs Steps for the ceremony, are equipped with integrated radar and navigation and communications equipment. A total of 22 personnel from the NCG were trained by U.S. officials and boat manufacturers in operations and maintenance from July 26 to August 20 this year.

In her address at the donation ceremony, Ms Wills reiterated the US Government’s commitment to strengthening the local security forces. The new Defender Class Patrol Boats, the Ambassador added, would “provide a significant new capability for patrolling the territorial seas around Mauritius and its outer islands. By bringing a new level of range and speed, these boats will allow longer patrols in more challenging sea and weather conditions. These boats are part of the ongoing partnership between Mauritius and the United States to increase regional security and address ongoing transnational threats including piracy on the high seas, trafficking in narcotics, illegal fishing and terrorism.

The US Government has been providing assistance for Mauritius to reinforce its capacities in various fields, including investigation, maritime law, search and rescue, counter-terrorism and piracy.
**South-South cooperation**

**MOU to attain sustainable growth and economic transformation**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed on 2 September 2010 in Port Louis between Mauritius and the African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET) with a view to helping Mauritius achieve the objective of sustainable growth and transformation of the economy in a wider context of greater south-south cooperation.

Several key areas of cooperation are spelt out in the MOU. They relate mainly to policy advisory services, research on economic transformation, developing a pool of African practitioners and undertaking capacity-building in Africa that will help to contribute towards economic transformation.

ACET will work in partnership with the Regional Multidisciplinary Centre for Excellence (RMCE) Mauritius to help the country in terms of mobilising expertise both from Africa and other places and in capacity-building of public officers. Also, ACET will provide assistance towards consolidating the country’s efforts to position itself as a centre for export of services, which is a new pillar to further diversifying the economy.

The setting up an office in Mauritius, a venture that would bring mutual benefit, is being considered by ACET. The office would handle ACET operations in Eastern and Southern Africa in collaboration with the RMCE. ACET has agreed to be represented on the Board of the RMCE. It is to be pointed out that Mauritius forms part of the Advisory Group of ACET since July this year.

ACET was established in 2007 in Ghana to provide high-quality policy analysis and advisory services to African governments with the objective of achieving long-term growth and transformation of African economies. Its Advisory Group comprises eminent academics, policy advocates, internationally renowned leaders as well as corporate and political leaders.

**Fisheries**

**National Action Plan for the Prevention of Unreported and Unregulated Fishing**

The National Plan of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (NPOA-IUU) was launched on 2 September 2010 at the Albion Fisheries Research Centre.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is considered a major obstacle in the achievement of long-term sustainability of fisheries resources. As such, the NPOA-IUU charts out the way forward in fisheries management measures which contribute to combat IUU fishing.

**Norwegian Assistance**

Assistance was provided through the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation to finalise the NPOA-IUU under the bilateral cooperation in Fisheries Management and Development between the Republic of Mauritius and the Kingdom of Norway.

The NPOA-IUU is in line with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) International Plan of Action against IUU fishing (IPOA-IUU) to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing, adopted by the FAO Committee on Fisheries. It has been developed in response to the call of the Committee in urging states to take steps to implement effectively the International Plan of Action.

**Promoting responsible fishing**

Mauritius has taken several measures to promote responsible fishing. These comprise the adherence to the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas and the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources in order to contribute to the struggle against IUU fishing in the southern ocean.
**International Trade**

**World Bank Database on ‘Non Tariff Measures’ handed over to Mauritius**

The World Bank Database on ‘Non Tariff Measures’ (NTMs), containing a catalogue of some 6,000 tariff lines, was handed over on 16 September 2010 to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr. Arvin Boolell, by the Ag Country Director of the World Bank, Mr. Constantine Chikosi, in Port Louis.

The database will help Mauritius to conduct systematic analysis of the effects of NTMs on trade and competitiveness as well as facilitate exports by improving information on NTMs in export markets.

The 6,000 tariff lines that have been catalogued and classified under the existing regulations in Mauritius are in line with the different World Trade Organisation’s agreements dealing with NTMs such as sanitary and phytosanitary agreement, agreement on technical barriers to trade and import licensing.

**About NTMs**

NTMs involve standards and labelling requirements for different products and are put in place to protect public health or the environment. NTMs, if poorly designed or implemented, become Non-tariff barriers and can hinder business productivity and reduce trade competitiveness.

Moreover, Non-tariff barriers such as unnecessary permits and licences, constitute major impediments to the flow of trade and impact on the competitiveness of the national economy.

To assess the situation regarding Non-tariff barriers, the Mauritian Government had set up a jointly chaired Public-Private Sector Committee. This Committee has been working closely with the World Bank and other stakeholders to establish the database of NTMs for Mauritius.

Earlier this year, a team from the World Bank was in Mauritius to assist the country in establishing the permanent data collection mechanism on NTMs, modelled on a new classification method that would make comparison easy and would be convenient for calculating trade restrictiveness.
Rights of persons with disabilities
Guide in Braille launched

A guide in Braille on the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities for both sighted and non-sighted persons was launched as a world premiere on 2 September 2010 in Mauritius, by Dr Poornima Sen, Head of the Human Rights Unit of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The document is the first publication in Braille of the Commonwealth Secretariat. It provides information pertaining to the UN Convention for the disabled. States which accept the Convention must take all appropriate measures to promote the rights of people with disabilities.

These measures are as follows: taking account rights of people with disabilities’ in policies and programmes, eliminating discrimination, stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices, training and awareness-raising through media and education, including training for health and legal professionals, and involving civil society and people with disabilities when implementing the Convention.

Mauritius ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in January 2010. Following the signature of the Convention in 2008, a Policy Paper and a Plan of Action on Disability were produced by the Disability Unit of the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions.

Measures for an inclusive society

The government is taking several measures with a view to building an inclusive society. There is now a greater awareness on the issue of disability. At the level of the Ministry, several committees have been set up to work on issues pertaining to disabilities. These include awareness-raising, training, employment, statistics and data collection, sports and leisure. A guide for the recruitment of persons with disabilities has also been produced in collaboration with the Mauritius Employers’ Federation.

More and more enterprises are interested in including persons with disabilities in their workforce and most new buildings are provided with access facilities to the disabled persons.

Obituary

Vice-President Angidi Chettiar passes away

The Vice-President of the Republic, Mr Angidi Chettiar, passed away at the age of 82 on 15 September 2010. He was given a State funeral on 20 September 2010.

Mr Chettiar was appointed Vice-President of the Republic in August 2007. He had occupied the same post from July 1997 to February 2002.

Mr Chettiar, who had a rich political career, had previously served as Member of the Legislative Assembly from 1967 to 1982. He was Minister of State (Prime Minister’s Office) from 1980 to 1982. From 1976 to 1980, he was Chief Whip for the Labour Parliamentary Group.

Mr Chettiar also served as Mayor of Vacoas-Phoenix in 1970.