Mauritius is taking giant leaps as far as infrastructural projects are concerned, said the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, on 2 December 2013 at the inauguration of the Terre Rouge-Verdun and Verdun-Trianon Link Road, which serves as an outer bypass to the Capital for those travelling between the south and the north.
Dr Ramgoolam underlined that the Government is transforming the country in terms of infrastructure at a time when the world is going through a tough time economically, adding that for modernisation to take place, there needs to be a well planned strategy. He stressed that it is only due to the economic growth registered by the country that the Terre Rouge – Verdun – Trianon Link Road project has turned into reality.

The Prime Minister encouraged citizens to make use of this new road as it will not only lessen the time spent on the road, but will also decrease the consumption of fuel. He listed out the different Government policies being implemented to promote safety on the roads, that is, the introduction of penalty points and the installation of speed cameras in different parts of the island, amongst others. Moreover, he recalled that a Driving Education and Training Centre would be set up soon.

For his part, the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping, Mr. Anil Bachoo hailed the vision of the Prime Minister which, he said, has made possible all the massive infrastructural projects in the island, be it the new airport, building of roads, schools and hospitals.

It is recalled that the 2014 Budget has earmarked Rs 18.4 billion for investment in infrastructure, while an amount of Rs 55 billion has been allocated over the next three years.

The Terre Rouge – Verdun – Trianon Link Road

The total length of the Terre Rouge - Verdun - Trianon road from is 24.2 km and the project has been implemented in two lots, that is, Terre Rouge - Verdun Link Road and Verdun - Trianon Link Road, to a total cost of Rs 4 162 832 345. The project consists of 7.6 km of dual carriageway from Calebasses to Valton followed by 3 km of single carriageway from Valton to Ripailles, consisting of two lanes Southbound and one lane Northbound with shoulder allowing two-way traffic, and a 13.6 km of dual carriageway from Ripailles to Trianon.

The Terre Rouge - Verdun Link Road was financed by the Agence Française de Développement via a € 40 million concessional loan granted to Mauritius. This road, bypassing the town of Port-Louis, will help reduce traffic burden in the city.

As regards, the project Verdun – Trianon Link Road and the Bagatelle – Valentina Link Road, it was financed by the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa. The Bagatelle – Valentina Link Road which is 2.6 km long, will be completed by the end of the January 2014.

Works on a number of road projects have just been completed: namely Belle Rive-Quartier Militaire Road, La Sourdine Bridge, Schoenfield Bypass, B33 Riche Terre Road and Nouvelle France-La Flora Bypass. The total cost of the projects is Rs 1,377m.
In his end of year address to the Nation on 25 December 2013, the President of the Republic, Mr Rajkeswur Purryag, called on parents to focus more on the education of their children since education remains the pillar in the fight against poverty as well as an important tool for social and economic development.

‘In the light of the difficult economic situation and ferocious competition prevailing, it is important that we continue to develop our human resources through a good education which has to be our most important priority’, he said.

Mr Purryag recalled that the success of education depends on three main factors, namely parents, teachers and discipline in schools. According to him, the future of a child depends on good parenting and the role and responsibility of parents in the education of their children and not merely the amount of money one has. Hence, parents have to bring up their children in a good family environment, monitor the education of their children and inculcate good values in them since their young age. He cited Nelson Mandela who referred to education as the most powerful tool which Man can use to transform the world.

The President appealed to parents to devote more time to their children as regards their education. He stressed on the need for more discipline, adding that education is a partnership between teachers, parents and children themselves.

He pointed out that Government is investing Rs 15 billion in education since education is the future of the country. ‘It is through education that we can build a better future for our children and our country and enhance the quality of our lives’, he added.

As regards discipline in schools, Mr Purryag expressed concern that it is regressing in all educational institutions while aggression cases between school children and students and against teachers and educators are on the increase. He appealed to all stakeholders to work together to find solutions to this problem before it gets too late.

The President also expressed his solidarity with the inhabitants of Rodrigues who were affected by cyclone Amara. The cyclone struck the island on 21 December 2013.
New Year Address to the Nation
2013: Year of Achievements, Prime Minister Says

The Prime Minister recalled that the biggest infrastructure project ever completed in Mauritius was the new terminal building of the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport which was inaugurated in August 2013. A modern and efficient airport is very important for the development of the country and my ambition is to make Mauritius a hub in the region for passengers, tourists and businessmen, he said. As a result of the construction of this state-of-the-art infrastructure, the biggest commercial aircraft A380 is now servicing Mauritius on a daily basis.

Speaking on achievements in the port sector, the Prime Minister stated that a total of Rs 3.2 billion is being invested to modernise the port infrastructure. After the completion of works Port Louis will become an important transshipment port in the region, he added.

Massive investments have also been made to upgrade road infrastructure in view of enhancing quality of life and boost economic activities. The recently inaugurated Terre Rouge/Verdun Road is also a major achievement, Dr Ramgoolam said. He announced that works regarding the Flic-en-Flac-Tamarin Link road will start this year while the second phase of the Ring Road Pailles/Port Louis and the first phase of Light Rail Transit System between Port Louis and Curepipe will also start this year.

The Ocean economy will be a new important pillar for the development of the country and will help to exploit various marine resources such as fishing, minerals and renewable energy, Dr Ramgoolam added. With regard to the ICT sector, he pointed out that spectacular progress has been achieved in the sector and that everything will be done to enhance quality and connection speed.

While referring to the water sector, the Prime Minister recalled that major actions have been initiated for the proper management of water resources. Old pipes are being replaced and the construction of the Bagatelle Dam has already started. The objective is that each household gets a round-the-clock water supply.

The Prime Minister further made mention of measures taken to boost the SME sector and increase the purchasing power of the population. He spoke on the need to provide quality education to children and the introduction of nine-year schooling is in line with the vision of the government to achieve excellence in this field. He emphasised the need for education to be accessible to all and in particular to vulnerable children.

As far as the electoral reform is concerned, Dr Ramgoolam said that this is an issue which involves the whole population and not only politicians adding that a white paper on the subject will be made public.

In the wake of the developments taking place in various sectors, Mauritius is in the process of recovering its reputation as the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean, said the Prime Minister.

2013 has been a year of several achievements which have impacted positively on the quality of life of the population and on the economic growth of Mauritius. The government is modernising the country and preparing the youth to face the challenges lying ahead. This is the gist of the New Year’s message of the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam to the Nation on 1st January 2014.
New Sports Act for the management and organisation of sports

A new Sports Act providing for a modern and appropriate legislative framework to promote better management and organisation of sports in Mauritius in line with the Olympic Charter has been passed by the National Assembly. The Sports Act 2001 has been repealed.

The Sports Bill has been designed in such a way as to safeguard the interests of the sports community on one hand and, on the other hand, to safeguard the benefits that sports both professionals and amateurs deliver to society as a whole, pointed out the Minister of Youth and Sports, Mr Satyaprakash Ritoo, during his summing up on the Sports Bill in the National Assembly on 11 December 2013.

‘We have taken up the challenge to give a new impetus to the Sports sector and put it on the track of sound practices so as to enable our athletes to reach higher summits. We will ensure that the principle of good governance, transparency and democracy which are the building blocks of success are adopted at all levels in our determination to reap better sporting results’, he stated.

Minister Ritoo also expressed conviction that the new Sports Act will create a new mindset among stakeholders for better management and organisation of sports in Mauritius.

Main Provisions

The Sports Act 2013, amongst others:

- Abolishes the Regional Sports Coordinating Committee
- Makes provision to prevent the proliferation of fictitious federations and sports clubs
- Provides for the regulatory framework for the setting up of semi-professional clubs and association of semi-professional clubs
- Provides for the autonomy of National Sports Federations
- Replaces the Mauritius Institute for Drug-Free Sports by a National Commission for Drug-Free Sports
- Provides for an enhanced role for the National Women’s Sports Commission to promote the practice of sports by women
- Establishes the National Institute of Sports
- Provides for the setting up of an arbitration mechanism at the level of National Sports National Sports Federations and the Mauritius Olympic Committee, as well as of a Sports Arbitration Tribunal.
A total of 313 Form IV students from state and private secondary schools in Mauritius and Rodrigues participated in the National Institute for Civic Education (NICE) project 2013 whose aim is to nurture citizens who are filled with pride in national identity.

The NICE project was held from 2 to 12 December 2013 in the four educational zones, namely at Droopnath Ramphul State College (zone 1), Queen Elizabeth College (zone 2), France Boyer de Giroday State Secondary School (zone 3) and Sir Abdool Raman State College (zone 4).

The Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, proceeded on 18 December with the closing ceremony which was held at the Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre, Pailles. Dr Ramgoolam said that the NICE project is all about nation building, adding that it is a very important project which will become part of the national landscape in view of the huge success it has garnered. He emphasised that he has a special interest in the project in that it aims to lay the foundation for a better Mauritius and to transform the society.

The Prime Minister stressed that one’s mindset needs to be changed at a very young age, while highlighting that there is a need to educate and instill a sense of responsibility and discipline in people. He also made an appeal to the population, in particular the youth, to reinforce their belongingness to the nation, to develop a greater sense of patriotism and to know about cultural differences while respecting their neighbours. Furthermore, Dr Ramgoolam said that it is important to understand real values of life such as commitment, truth and honesty.

The NICE project 2013 is in line with the Government Programme 2012-2015 which aims to establish a national initiative for the youth of the Republic of Mauritius with a view to inculcating a sense of national belonging and rootedness. It provides a common platform for shared experience as well as to strengthen ruggedness, resolve and discipline; provide useful skills and vocational knowledge; and engage the youths in meaningful activities.

The NICE Pilot project was launched in 2012 and brought together some 200 Form IV students aged 15-16 years from State and private secondary schools in Mauritius and Rodrigues.
The Mauritius African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Report emphasising essential features such as good governance which also incorporates political, economic, corporate and social governance was presented to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr Arvin Boolell, on 12 December 2013 in Port Louis, following the conclusion of the country’s first review exercise.

Dr Mustapha Mekideche, member of the APR Panel of Eminent Persons and Lead Panel Member for the Mauritius Review Process, and Mr Dalmar Jama, Coordinator for Mauritius, APR Secretariat, handed over the Report to the Minister.

The Mauritius APRM Report will be implemented by Government and all key stakeholders including trade unions, civil society and the private sector on the basis of a well-established roadmap.

The APRM

The APRM, launched in 2003 as part of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), is a self-monitoring tool voluntarily acceded to by Member States of the African Union (AU).

Its objective is to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices leading to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated regional and economic integration through sharing of experiences and reinforcement of successful and best practice, including identifying deficiencies, and assessing the needs for capacity building.

As per the requirements of the Country Review Exercise in line with the Memorandum of Understanding signed by Mauritius and APRM, the Mission needs to have wide consultations with government officials, political parties, parliamentarians, representatives of civil society.

The Panel of Eminent Persons (APR Panel) oversees the conduct of the APRM process to ensure its integrity, considers review reports and makes recommendations to the APR Forum.

Mauritius was among the first States, along with Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda, that volunteered to be the first four pilot countries to be peer reviewed.

COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite FTA

Meeting of Technical Working Group on Rules of Origin held in Mauritius

A meeting of the Technical Working Group on Rules of Origin in the context of the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area (FTA) negotiations was held from 16 to 19 December 2013 at Le Méridien Hotel, Pointe-aux-Piments.

The meeting, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, brought together around 100 trade and custom experts from the 26 Member States of Tripartite region encompassing COMESA, EAC and SADC countries.

Participants pursued discussions on criteria that would qualify a product to be considered as originating from the tripartite region. Other topics at the fore of the meeting included the level of processing in various products, type of ownership and operation of vessels and factory ships.

Tripartite initiative

The Tripartite initiative aims at harmonising the trade regimes of the COMESA, EAC and SADC through the establishment of an enlarged FTA. The objective of the Tripartite FTA is to achieve a larger market with a single economic space which will make it more attractive to investment and large scale production.

The second Tripartite Summit held in South Africa, in June 2011, launched the negotiations for the Tripartite FTA. Following discussions on the modalities of the negotiations, Member States are now engaged in negotiating the draft Tripartite FTA text as well as its Annexes on Rules of Origin, Non-Tariff Barriers, Technical Barriers to Trade and Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Measures, Dispute Settlement and Trade Remedies, amongst others. These Annexes will form the integral part of the text constituting the Tripartite FTA.

The Tripartite FTA will cover some 6 000 products. While most of the products will be aligned to the existing rules of COMESA, SADC and EAC some products will be subject to “specific rule to each product” depending on the outcome of the negotiations.
A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at strengthening the collaboration between Mauritius and India in the field of Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) development was signed on 2 December 2013 in Port Louis by the Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives, Mr Jangbahadoorsing Seetaram, and the Indian Minister of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise, Mr K.H. Muniyappa.

The MoU will help Mauritius to benefit from capacity building as well as technical know-how for the setting up of incubators and Information Technology services. It will also assist local SMEs to diversify in other fields and introduce new products.

The SMEs sector in Mauritius has a very significant contribution in the GDP growth (40%) and provides 54% of employment of the total working population.

As such, Small and Medium enterprises play a crucial in the economy by fostering growth, creating employment, and the consolidation of the sector is in line with Government’s policy to democratise the economy and with the vision to make Mauritius a nation of entrepreneurs.

The National Productivity and Competitiveness Council (NPCC) launched the Growth Opportunities for SME, an SME Productivity Improvement Programme, during a one-day workshop on the theme: Productivity for SMEs held on December 05 at the Cyber Tower 1, Ebène.

The objectives of the programme are to improve the productivity of SMEs through in-plant training and training of a productivity champion of the enterprise and empower SMEs to continuously improve their internal systems and processes so as to be more competitive on the market. As announced in the 2014 Budget speech, the NPCC has been entrusted the training of 500 SMEs on productivity.

The programme which will be implemented in three phases, targets companies with an annual turnover below Rs 50 million so as to enhance productivity of SMEs through empowerment of productivity champions on planning and implementation of process improvement projects.

The Productivity Improvement programme

The first phase which is analysis, consists of overall audit of the SME followed by in-plant training. A half-day training will focus on issues related to non-value adding activities, team work, effective time management and quality work within enterprises. It will be customised on the needs of the enterprises and after the training sessions participants will be required to identify at least one key improvement area in their enterprise, which will be implemented with NPCC in Phase 2.

Under the second phase, enterprises benefiting from phase 1 of the project will be required to sign a contract with NPCC to show the commitment of senior management/owner to implement the project. A productivity champion will be identified by each SME and all the productivity champions will be trained in batches of 30 at the NPCC. They will be responsible to lead the project at the level of the SME.

Phase 3 is the implementation aspect, during which the NPCC will assist SMEs to implement a project identified by the Productivity Champion. Results of the implementation will be presented at top management level of SME and NPCC will invite the SMEs from phase 2 to participate in the Productivity Award 2015. They will also be motivated to register to the NPCC Productivity Club as part of Phase 3 of the project.
The third Report on the progress made by Mauritius towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was presented on 16 December 2013 at Le Sirius, Le Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel, Port Louis. It provides the latest update on the progress achieved before the 2015 deadline and looks at emerging challenges to human development for Mauritius in a Post 2015 perspective.

Mauritius has already achieved 11 of the 21 MDG targets and is working towards achieving the remaining ones. According to the Report, Mauritius is well on target to achieve most of the MDGs if no major external factor further impacts negatively on its economic growth.

The Report confirms the continued progress of Mauritius towards the attainment of the MDGs despite the challenges posed by successive global crises. The country has made remarkable progress in achieving the MDGs, owing mainly to the social welfare policies pursued by the Government with particular focus on free education, universal free health care and large social transfers.

The Report was presented to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr Arvin Boolell, by the UNDP Resident Representative for Mauritius, Mr S. Springett. It has been prepared by the Government of Mauritius in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program Office and Mr L. Amédée Darga of StraConsult.

Highlights

Mauritius has already attained MDG Goal 2 (Achieving Universal Primary Education) and there is no extreme poverty as defined by the World Bank in the country. The Net Enrolment Rate in primary education is 99% with 98.7% of pupils respectively reaching Grade 6. The literacy rate of those between 15 and 24 years of age has progressed to 98.1%. There is also no gender disparity both at primary and secondary levels.

Moreover, citizens have access to free medical treatment and essential drugs. The antiretroviral drugs are provided free of charge to known sufferers of HIV/AIDS. Vector borne diseases such as malaria have been eradicated with only a few cases arising from imported infection. All households are provided with safe drinking water and 99.9% have improved sanitary facilities.

Emerging challenges

The Report also draws attention to emerging challenges, namely an increasingly ageing population, high prevalence of non communicable diseases, increase in the number of persons suffering from disabilities, relatively high prevalence of substance abuse, and a widening income gap.

The Report also highlights that being a middle-income SIDS, Mauritius also faces challenges in accessing concessional global financing for addressing development issues. As a net food importing SIDS, food security is another challenge of strategic importance.
The ICT-BPO International Conference, along with the Africa Youth Engagement Summit, was held on 4 December 2013 at the Intercontinental Hotel, in Balaclava.

The two three-day events were organised by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology in collaboration with the Board of Investment and Extensia Ltd. They were inaugurated by the Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Mr Tassarajen Pillay Chedumbrum.

The conference brought together 250 international and local participants. IT Ministers of Namibia, Swaziland and Uganda as well as high-level government officials from Malawi and Angola, were in attendance.

An African ICT Ministers Roundtable focusing on the State of the ICT/BPO Industry – Present & Future Opportunities and Challenges, and Business Collaboration Meetings were also held during the conference. Dedicated meetings between foreign delegates and local entrepreneurs on opportunities and exploring collaborative endeavours in the ICT-BPO sector were on the programme.

Central themes discussed were: ICT in the African region (investment avenues, development, regional cooperation); and, showcasing Mauritius on the international scene.

Plenary panel sessions focused on the following: Outsourcing, Technology Innovations and Impact on Competitiveness of Nations and Corporations; The African Growth Story: Opportunities, Trends and Collaborative Models to Create Sustained Value; Creating, Leveraging and Establishing Interoperable Infrastructures; and, Developing a Sustainable Services Sector by Leveraging ICT “The Maturity and Experience of the Mauritian ICT Industry and its Capability to Export its Services in the Region”.

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