Regional and international issues of mutual interest and matters and projects of common concern such as a development model that focuses on sustainable development were high on the agenda during the three-day State visit to Mauritius, from 16 to 18 October 2013, of the President of the Republic of Gabon, Mr Ali Bongo Ondimba.

During his visit, President Bongo had a working session with Prime Minister Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam at Clarisse House which was followed by the signature of four Agreements. These relate to cooperation in a number of fields, namely trade, agriculture and tourism.

In a press statement after the work session, both leaders agreed that the State visit has further intensified existing bilateral relations. Dr Ramgoolam stated that the visit of the Gabonese President on Mauritian soil evidenced the determination of the two countries to elevate bilateral relations to new heights.

For his part, President Bongo highlighted the ‘well-known entrepreneurship’ of the Mauritian people and expressed his admiration for the Mauritian way of doing things. Mr Bongo also spoke of the benefits and the potential areas of establishing trade and investment collaboration in his country. He urged Mauritius to explore possibilities for mutually profitable ventures. He added that
by strengthening ties between our two countries, we are paving the way for a truly African south-south cooperation.

This pledge of enhanced cooperation was reiterated at the State banquet given on 17 October in honour of the visiting President. In his address, Dr Ramgoolam said that Mauritius is opening up to Africa by abolishing visa entry to Africans and opening its universities and training institutions for students from Africa.

Dr Ramgoolam further noted that both Mauritius and Gabon have similar problems and both are working towards the eradication of absolute poverty and a series of measures have been adopted to upgrade health care, manage energy, water, agriculture and to ensure food security. Both governments are investing massively to modernise infrastructure which is crucial for economic and social development, stressed Dr Ramgoolam.

The PM also spoke on the project pertaining to the Ocean Economy in Mauritius and the visionary project ‘Gabon Bleu’ and said that both countries can share experiences and competencies in this field. He pointed out that there exists a complementarity between the project ‘Gabon Vert’ and the project Maurice Ile Durable and that a synergy of action in favour of sustainable development should be encouraged.

President Bongo said that Mauritius is serving as a model in Africa in terms of development as well as a source of inspiration for the Gabonese authorities. He announced that his country will soon appoint an Ambassador in Mauritius and that Mauritians travelling to Gabon will be exempted from a visa. He appealed to the Mauritian business community to invest in Gabon now that the proper framework has been established and reiterated his wish that his country becomes an investment hub for all economic operators.

Also on the programme

- Courtesy call on the President of the Republic of Mauritius, Mr Rajkeswur Purryag, at the State House
- Laying of wreath at the Samadhi of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam at the SSR Botanical Gardens, Pamplemousses
- Courtesy calls by the Acting Chief Justice and the Leader of the Opposition
- Working session with the business community at the Grand Baie Convention Centre, followed by the signature of an agreement
- Visits to Thon des Mascareignes factory at Riche Terre, the Indian Ocean Naval shipyard at Mer Rouge, and Omnicane sugar factory in L’Escalier.

The Agreements

- General Agreement providing for cooperation on a wide range of fields, including trade and investment, Information and Communication Technologies, research, tourism and agriculture
- Memorandum of Understanding outlining the mechanism for having regular diplomatic consultations between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of both countries to further develop and strengthen existing bilateral relations
- Memorandum of Understanding providing for cooperation for agro-industrial development in each country in terms of processing and value-addition of certain agricultural products, such as fruits, vegetables, spices, coffee, cocoa, sugar cane and its by-products, and livestock
- Memorandum of Understanding in the field of tourism to provide for the development of common projects aiming at promoting international tourism, and tourism between both countries through the organisation of promotional campaigns, participation in tourism fairs and forums
The Visit in Pictures
PM Inaugurates Fire Station in Tamarin

A new fire station in Tamarin, which will cater for the western part of the island as well as in the vicinity of Bambous and Bel Ombre, was inaugurated by the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, on 31 October 2013.

The construction, to the tune of some Rs 44 million, of the Tamarin Fire Station started in 2011. It is the tenth station adding to the list of existing fire stations across the country.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Dr Ramgoolam emphasised that ensuring the security of citizens remains a priority for Government and that no efforts are being spared to achieve this objective. He further said that the Tamarin Fire Station is yet another realisation in terms of ensuring better security to the population.

The Prime Minister announced various developments to be undertaken shortly by his Government among which the setting up of a Fire and Rescue Training Academy in Riche Terre. The Academy will cater for the training needs of the fire fighters. Other fire station projects are also in the pipeline, he added, namely at Rose Belle, Montagne Blanche, Goodlands and Riche Terre and will cost Government some Rs 250 million.

Another project geared towards enhancing security which he mentioned, is the setting up of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre that would oversee disaster management activities in Mauritius and the outer islands. It will also act as the main institution for Mauritius for the planning, organising, coordinating and monitoring of disaster risk reduction and management activities at all levels.

The Prime Minister also spoke on the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill, passed in the National Assembly in June 2013, and which makes provision for the Fire Service to participate in national schemes for the mitigation and reduction of disasters and to assist the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre to ensure timely disaster management response.

For his part, the Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands, Mr. Hervé Aimée said that with the enactment of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill, the core duties and functions of the Fire Service have been further consolidated. According to him, the new fire station in Tamarin will help the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service to deliver timely service in case of disasters especially in the western part of the country.

The Government Fire Services has been renamed the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service since June this year.
Education
Towards reforming the system and making Mauritius a centre of knowledge

Stakeholders of the education sector met during two sectoral forums during the month of October to discuss, for the first one (Assises de l’Education) the new orientations that educational policies should take at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels, and for the second one (Assises de l’Enseignement Supérieur) the way forward for transforming Mauritius into a knowledge hub.

Assises de l’Education

The four-day Assises de l’Education, covering issues of strategic importance to education, was held as from 14 October 2013 at the at the Cyber Tower, Ebène. It aimed to enable all stakeholders to come forward, thorough discussions and open-thinking, with views and ideas pertaining to the new orientations that educational policies should take.

The event brought together major stakeholders of the education community as well as representatives of international institutions involved in the education sector. It provided an opportunity for participants to take stock of the innovative strategies adopted in the various sub sectors of the Mauritian education system, ranging from the pre-primary to secondary sub sectors, and contribute to the formulation of new strategies.

After the deliberations, the setting up of a MOE Connect Platform, was announced. The platform will be a permanent mechanism for the exchange of ideas and will enable every stakeholder to submit electronically well-researched proposals for consideration and also to exchange ideas. It is expected that this will enrich the educational reform process and ensure full partnership and ownership in education.

Moreover, the concept of nine-year schooling was unanimously voted. It is recalled that this concept has been especially recommened by international bodies such as UNESCO, the Commonwealth and the Francophonie. The modalities will be worked out soon and with this system of nine-year schooling, the Certificate of Primary Examinations (CPE) will eventually disappear.

As regards the Laureate Scheme, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources is negotiating with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development for the establishment of a special fund that will assist needy students who want to pursue their higher education in a tertiary institution in Mauritius.

Also in the pipeline is the setting up of the Health and Wellness Division, which will be directed by a doctor. The department will ensure the moral health, emotional and physical development of children, teachers and other education stakeholders.
The first Assises de l’Enseignement Supérieur, held on 30 and 31 October 2013 at the Cyber Tower, Ebène, elaborated on a series of recommendations geared at transforming Mauritius into an internationally recognised knowledge hub.

The two-day forum focused on the future of higher education in Mauritius, with emphasis on a culture of continuous improvement and a future orientation that benchmarks the local educational practices against the best in the world. More than 150 participants including students and academics and representatives of the public and private sectors, tertiary and research institutions, non-governmental organisations and international agencies attended the event.

Discussions focused around five main themes: internationalisation of tertiary education, opportunities and threats; labour market and employability; research and innovation; quality standards and assurance; and management of higher education institutions and effective academic leadership.

The main recommendations that came out of the two-day discussions comprise among others: greater cooperation between the stakeholders of the higher education sector; engaging in public private partnership to finance research endeavours and to implement innovative ideas and projects; matching research priorities with country’s needs; striving for excellence and a better monitoring of quality through worldwide recognition of certificates and effective regulations; and establishing training and employability schemes for students.

The Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) organised an initiation workshop at the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture, Phoenix on 31 October 2013 to mark the launch of its work placement programme for Lower VI students.

Some 650 students from 90 schools across Mauritius will be on placement in 40 organisations for two to three weeks during the November/December 2013 school holidays. This time, the HRDC has brought some changes to the structure of the placement programme whereby participating students will be given the opportunity to hear from HR experts on selected topics. The HRDC believes that this incentive will give the students a better perspective on the world of work before actually embarking on their work placement programme.

Since the launch of the project in 2007, some 4,615 students have been able to complete a placement in 250 participating companies.

The contribution of education and training to economic and wider development has been demonstrated in varied national contexts. The work placement project emphasises the importance of out-of-classroom career-related experiences for students. It is one of the easy ways to ensure that there is connectivity between school and the world of work, from an early stage. The project helps to reduce the mismatch between the demand for and supply of labour while strengthening the linkage between the schooling system and the world of work.
Health
New Paediatric Ward Inaugurated at Victoria Hospital

A new Paediatric Ward to the tune of Rs 5 million was inaugurated on 7 October 2013 at Victoria Hospital, Candos by the President of the Republic, Mr Kailash Purryag, in the presence of the Minister of Health and Quality of Life, Mr Lormus Bundhoo. The new infrastructure is a result of the joint collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life and the Tayelamay Construction Group.

On this occasion, the President of the Republic recalled that health and education are the two most important factors which can transform a poor country. There is a need to focus more on prevention and quality of service provided in hospitals, he said, adding that nowadays more people suffer from non-communicable diseases as compared to the 60’s where people were mostly prone to communicable diseases. Mr Purryag urged parents to take good care of the youth, especially with regard to health and education.

Minister Bundhoo announced that specialists will henceforth have to work on a 24-hour basis in hospitals. Eight pediatricians, 14 gynecologists and 15 anesthetists will be recruited this year, and next year, five pediatricians, five gynecologists and five anesthetists will be recruited, he said.

Infrastructural Development in Health Sector

With regard to infrastructural development in the health sector in the last two years, more than Rs 5 billion have been invested. Victoria Hospital has known massive development with Rs 900 million injected in several projects. These include: opening of a new Intensive Care Unit to the tune of Rs 18 million; construction of a new cardiology centre costing Rs 100 million; renovation of two wards to the tune of Rs 11 million; and a children ICU at the cost of Rs 6 million.

Works relating to the refurbishment of drains and lanes within the hospital compound have also been carried out. A new block comprising 150 new beds, four operation rooms and a new ICU is being constructed. Minister Bundhoo announced that a new 120-bed Accident and Emergency Unit will be constructed to the tune of Rs 60 million.

A total of Rs 2,5 billion has been invested in the third phase of Dr Jeetoo Hospital while Rs 140 million have been injected in the new Accident and Emergency Unit at SSRN Hospital. A new block to the tune of Rs 150 million has also been constructed at Flacq Hospital.
World Kickboxing Champions Awarded Cash Prizes

Mauritius won two gold medals and two silver medals and was ranked sixth amidst the 47 participating countries from five continents at the World Kickboxing Championships 2013, the World Associations of Kickboxing Organisations (WAKO) Senior World Championships (Low Kick, K1), held in Guarujá, São Paulo, Brazil, from 28 September to 6 October 2013.

Out of the five athletes who participated in the championships, four won a medal. James Veejay Agathe in the -81 kg category and Fabrice Michel Bauluck in the -54 kg won the World Champion title, while Facson Perrine in the -63.5 kg and Burtlan Clifton Mathieu Simiss in the -51 kg reaped silver medals. Boris Brissonette in the -71 kg category reached the quarter-finals.

The Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, presided over a cash prize presentation ceremony on 11 October 2013 at the Treasury Building in Port Louis to reward the athletes. James Veejay Agathe and Fabrice Michel Bauluck, each received Rs 500 000 while Facson Perrine and Burtlan Clifton Mathieu Simiss were awarded Rs 340 000 each. The national kickboxing coach, Mr Judex Jeannot, was also remitted a cheque of Rs 200 000 for his commitment in accompanying and supporting the athletes.

In his address, the Prime Minister praised the kickboxers for their exceptional performance. He stated that the medallists are the pride of the country and are great role models for the Mauritians, in particular, the youth, through the strong work and efforts, perseverance and discipline displayed to achieve these performances.

Dr Ramgoolam also spoke of Government’s efforts and commitment to ensure that Mauritius athletes perform to the best of their abilities. He said that the cash prizes awarded to best performing athletes at world championship levels have been raised. Gold medallists will now get Rs 500 000 instead of Rs 340 000 while silver medallists will obtain Rs 300 000 instead of Rs 250 000.

Mauritius Ranks 20th Worldwide in Overall Ease of Doing Business 2014


Mauritius remains among the top twenty economies on the overall ease of doing business followed by Rwanda (32nd in the globe ranking), South Africa (41st), Botswana (56th) and Ghana (67th) out of the 189 economies rated by the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank.

According to the Report, Mauritius’ performance can be mostly attributed to the continuous reforms upon which the country has embarked thus transforming and improving the business climate into a more globally competitive one. Reforms have also made the investment procedures significantly easier for people to do business, says the report.

The Report further points out that the country has made three reforms this year in the following areas: improved access to credit information by expanding the scope of credit information and increasing the coverage of the historical data distributed from two years to three, enforcing contracts made easier by liberalising the profession of ushers, providing competitive options for litigants to enforce binding decisions, and resolving insolvency made easier by introducing guidelines for out-of-court restructuring and standardising the process of registration, suspension, and removal of insolvency practitioners.
Oceanography

MOI Hosts Three-Day Workshop on Marine Pearl Production

Marine pearl production was the focus of a three-day workshop, organised by the Mauritius Oceanography Institute (MOI) for the various stakeholders, which opened on 22 October 2013 at La Cannelle, Domaine Les Pailles.

The resource persons comprised a team of four Chinese experts from the Third Institute of Oceanology - State Oceanic Administration. They made presentations on several topics, namely: pearl oyster biology; development, aquaculture and utilisation; how to set up a pearl oyster hatchery; pearl oyster breeding; diet microalgae culture for pearl oyster; and pearl oyster aquaculture technique.

This intensive and comprehensive workshop also dealt with infrastructure facilities needed for a hatchery, controlled maturation and spawning, larval rearing, larval feeding, pearl oyster grafting, farm management and pearl processing. Demonstration and seeding sessions were also held at the MOI farm site at the Albion Fisheries Research Centre. It was the first time that grafting of Mauritian oysters took place so they may produce pearls in the country.

This workshop aimed to create an opportunity for technology transfer, training and support for the local aquaculture industry. It also reviewed the present state of pearl oysters farming as well as the transfer of technology that will help the MOI jumpstart its pearl oyster grafting efforts. The training workshop also helped to extend the technical know-how to the fishing community.

Pearl production in Mauritius

The MOI has been undertaking research on various aspects of marine living resources for the development of our country’s marine fisheries, in line with Government Programme 2012 - 2015 to transform the country into an Ocean State. Under this programme, several investigations were taken up on the culture of pearl oyster, especially during the past couple of years, and considerable progress has been achieved.

Pearl production is a thriving business for coastal communities. Prior to establishing and operating a pearl oyster hatchery, the correct biological conditions must be present to allow pearl oysters to grow well and produce high quality pearls. Through a feasibility study, it is possible to determine if the right conditions for growing pearl oysters are available.

Except for the highly skilled procedure of grafting, pearl culture requires simple farm structures, and more importantly, no artificial feeds. Production of high quality pearls is only possible under certain conditions, including a suitable farm site. Among the varieties of pearl oysters used for pearl culture, (black lip pearl oyster) and present in Mauritian waters species to be used in local farms.

Pearls are formed naturally when the oyster is irritated by the presence of a foreign particle in its body. This is usually a small piece of rock or a grain of sand. To get rid of the irritant, the oyster lays down a layer of the shiny, iridescent nacre around the particle to form the pearl.
Second Phase of Experimental Wheat Cultivation Project

The second phase of an experimental wheat cultivation project spearheaded by the Mauritius Research Council (MRC) is under way at the Petit Merlot Dairy Farm Cooperative Ltd at Midlands.

The Cooperative has provided some three acres of land to the research institution, which undertook the sowing process in July 2013. The crop cycle of the planted wheat lasted four months.

A wheat harvest ceremony was held at Petit Merlot, Midlands on 24 October 2013 in the presence of the Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, Dr Rajeshwar Jeetah, and different stakeholders. The wheat harvested will be processed into flour and the flour quality evaluated. In light of the promising results, the Petit Merlot Dairy Farm Cooperative Ltd has decided to provide some 10 arpents to the MRC to pursue the project.

The experimental wheat cultivation project, a study to evaluate the potential of local wheat cultivation, is an initiative of the MRC. The research project focuses on evaluating wheat cultivation under different agro climatic conditions of Mauritius; assessing the highest yielding wheat variety under study and assessing the quality of the wheat product as flour for consumption.

It is to be recalled that the first phase of the project started in June 2012. Six varieties of wheat were sown on three experimental plots in different agro-climatic regions around the island, namely at Montagne Blanche, Saint Antoine and Savannah. The wheat varieties were evaluated for their adaptability, yield potential, resistance to pests and diseases as well as for the quality of flour. The results were promising with an average yield of four tons per hectare of wheat grains obtained from all six varieties under study.

In the second phase, the project was up-scaled using the three most promising varieties. Those varieties were sown as from June 2013 on a total area of nine acres of land in Saint Aubin, Saint Antoine and Petit Merlot. The second phase will entail a more in-depth laboratory analysis of the wheat harvested in order to validate the results obtained in the first phase.

Wheat is among the three top-most produced cereal worldwide, together with maize and rice. Mauritius is currently importing 70% of its food requirements with rice and wheat being the most important staple foods. The local flourmill processes 165 000 tons of wheat into 100 000 tons of flour each year.