Mauritius Commemorates the 179th Anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery

‘Le Morne is a symbol which shows that time and again there will be people who will not accept injustice, but stand and fight it. It is also an icon of sacrifice, freedom and resistance,’ said the Prime Minister, Dr Navin Ramgoolam, on 1 February 2014 at the International Slave Route Monument, Le Morne, at the ceremony marking the 179th Anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery in Mauritius.

The Prime Minister stated that we cannot remain insensitive to the history of our country. Whether we like it or not, it is ours and it is important that we know about it, he said, adding that it is high time the wounds left by past experiences are closed.

For Dr Ramgoolam, the first runaway slaves were the first freedom fighters of Mauritius. He recalled that slavery was a crime against humanity, and that a slave was not considered as human being but as his master’s property, like an animal.
Government has implemented several measures to give equal opportunities to one and all, and to fight poverty, said the Prime Minister. We cannot say that poverty exists in only one community, he pointed out.

Government, said Dr Ramgoolam, is here for each citizen of the Republic of Mauritius, and one of its main objectives is to empower the population by creating an inclusive society. He also announced that the setting up of a slavery museum was in the pipeline.

He also proceeded to the unveiling of the eighth sculpture at the Slave Route Monument and the donation of tablets to 12 students of Le Morne Government School who have passed the CPE examinations 2013.

Moreover, the Prime Minister visited an exhibition on the theme Le Morne – enn simbol which was organised at Macaque village to showcase a replica of the village through several exhibits.

Other activities during that day, comprised the National anthem sung by children and youth of Le Morne village, a wreath laying ceremony at the Slave Route Monument and a cultural programme depicting the Code Noir, and the first freedom fighters and the accomplishment of their descendants.
The Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, attended the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2014 in Davos from 22 to 25 January. The theme of the Meeting was “The Reshaping of the World: Consequences for Society, Politics and Business”.

The main objective of the Meeting was to challenge long-held assumptions about society, politics and business so as to generate powerful ideas and collaborative spirit needed to manage the future course of world affairs.

The Prime Minister intervened on the subject of Rethinking Ocean Economies, and explained the vision of Mauritius on the ocean economy. He underlined that the vast resources found within a maritime area of approximately 2.3 million km², were still untapped and expressed his firm belief that the Ocean Economy Roadmap adopted by Government would propel Mauritius from a Middle Income country to a High Income Economy.

The Prime Minister condemned the creation, in 2010, of the Chagos Archipelago marine protected area by the Government of the United Kingdom. He informed that the creation of the marine reserve by the United Kingdom was being challenged by Mauritius at an Arbitral Tribunal set up under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. He stressed that the dismemberment of the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia, from the Mauritius territory prior to Independence went against the 1960 United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2066 (XX) of 16 December 1965. He also mentioned of the plight of the Chagossians, emphasising the violation of their basic human rights by the United Kingdom.

Dr Ramgoolam also attended the session on The India Outlook in which the Panelists examined the challenges posed to Indian leaders to accelerate growth and restore investors’ confidence. After the session, he had a meeting with Mr P. Chidambaram, Minister of Finance of India, on the Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty between Mauritius and India.

In the margins of the Meeting, the Prime Minister met several Heads of State and Government, as well as Mr Al Gore, former Vice-President of the USA, Mr Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Mr Sunil Bharti Mittal whom he encouraged to look for investment opportunities in Mauritius.
Royal College Curepipe Celebrates its Centenary

‘The Royal College Curepipe (RCC) has indeed passed the test of time and is the jewel in the crown. It is not simply a college but an institution that has trained most of the country’s elite’, said the Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, on 13 January 2014 on the occasion of the centenary celebration of the college.

Classified as national heritage in the Schedule of National Heritage Fund Act 2003, the RCC is one of the oldest institutions which opened its door to students on 13 January 1914.

In his address, the Prime Minister, who is also an alumna of the college, stated the RCC embodies what education is all about. It is here that students’ character is formed he said, adding that empowering young people to think for themselves is the best gift to be bestowed on them.

He underlined that education is not just about passing exams and learning by rote. The purpose of education, he stated, is to replace an empty mind with an open mind.

The Prime Minister expressed his belief in liberal education of the best quality. Quality education, he said, has the power to transform life and bring people new opportunities, adding that only then we will not fall behind in facing the challenges of the world.

RCC has given a lot to all of us here and it’s time for us to give something back to the country, said Dr Ramgoolam. Moreover, he pointed out that RCC has produced two Prime Ministers, himself and his father, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, along with one Deputy Prime Minister and three Governor Generals.

Furthermore, Dr Ramgoolam and the Minister of Education and Human Resources, Dr Vasant Bunwaree proceeded to the planting of endemic plants in the yard of the college.

A Time Capsule containing contemporary objects, which will be reopened in 2064, that is after 50 years, was sealed and buried.
Mauritius-Union of Comoros
A Framework Agreement to further boost Cooperation

A framework agreement on cooperation aiming at giving a new impetus to the relations between Mauritius and the Union of Comoros was signed on 14 January 2014 in Port Louis. The agreement also lays the basis for the development of sectoral cooperation in numerous fields between both countries.

The signatories were the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr Arvin Boolell, for the Mauritian side, and the Ministre des Relations Extérieures et de la Coopération, chargé de la Diaspora, de la Francophonie et du Monde Arabe, Mr El-Anrif Saïd Hassane, for Comoros.

This agreement establishes the required regulatory framework to take forward cooperation ties as is the case at the level of international relations. Cooperation, through this agreement, will be enlarged in numerous fields beyond the political, educational and socio-cultural spheres. As such, the enhancement of cooperation pertains to the economic domain as well as to transport, communication and connectivity fields.

A technical committee will be set up to oversee the implementation of projects identified and to further cooperation between Mauritius and the Union of Comoros.

It is recalled that Mauritius established diplomatic ties with the Union of Comoros in 1984.

The Union of Comoros, a former French Colony, is an archipelago of three islands (Anjouan, Moheli, and the largest island, Grande Comore). A fourth island, Mayotte, is claimed by Comoros but administered by France. Mayotte officially became an overseas Department of France in March 2011. Comoros is predominantly a Muslim country at 98% of the population and Roman Catholics constitute 2% of the population.

Decentralised Cooperation Programme II
Twenty NGOs Benefit from Grants for Social Projects

Grants ranging from Rs 400 000 to Rs 4 million have been allocated to twenty NGOs for the implementation of social projects in Mauritius, Rodrigues and the Outer islands, under the European Union funded Decentralised Cooperation Programme (DCP) II, 2nd call for proposals launched in May 2013. The theme of the programme was: Direct Support to Micro-projects for Poverty Alleviation.

A total budget of approximately Rs 56 million has been earmarked for this Call which has been divided into two lots namely Lot 1 and Lot 2 for the implementation of 20 projects. An amount of about Rs 42 million has been allocated under Lot 1 which consists of 14 projects in Mauritius and Rs 14 million under Lot 2 for 4 projects in Rodrigues and Agalega. The funding covers 75% of the total project costs.

The 2nd call for proposals focuses on five specific areas namely: Education of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised; Health of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised; Social welfare of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised; Creation of opportunities for social inclusion of the disabled and the stigmatised; and women’s empowerment and gender issues.
Improving Airport Operational Efficiency through Excellence in Safety Programme

In view of boosting operational efficiency and enhancing the safety standards of airports, Airports of Mauritius Limited (AML) has embarked on the APEX (Airport Excellence in Safety) programme. Consequently, the Chief Executive Officer of AML, Mr Serge Petit, signed on 20 January 2014, a Declaration of commitment and collaboration with representatives of the APEX Review Team at the Holiday Inn Hotel, Plaine Magnien.

The APEX Team, comprising representatives from Airports Council International (ACI) World, ACI Africa, Airports Company South Africa, Aéroports de Montréal and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), were in Mauritius to carry out a safety review. The Team provided assistance in specific areas of interest such as runway safety, aerodrome certification, wildlife hazard management, emergency response, and contractual issues.

A Safety Management System (SMS) workshop was also held from 27 to 29 January for around 30 major airport stakeholders involved in the safety and efficiency of operations, particularly on the airside. The aim was to bring synergy among stakeholders in the implementation of SMS initiatives while enhancing their knowledge and allowing them to pick up real change agents in view of enhancing security and safety systems.

APEX In Safety

The APEX In Safety Programme is based on ICAO standards as well as ACI best practices. It provides several elements tailored to the individual needs of airports and proposes effective solutions geared towards upgrading the safety standing of the airports engaged in the Programme through hazards and risks reduction.

APEX in Safety provides many advantages: it offers ICAO, airlines and other stakeholders the assurance that adequate safety measures are in place. The Programme is a means to acknowledge that the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam (SSR) International Airport, through AML, is proactively taking measures towards improving its safety standing and becoming fully compliant with the applicable safety regulations.

Massive Investment

It is recalled that since the past five years, more than 40 billion rupees have been injected in the setting up of the airport infrastructure, namely the new terminal and new taxiway, amongst others. Several infrastructural projects such as the construction of a new control tower, two new larger parking for bigger aircrafts and a new receptorium as well as the refurbishment of the old passenger terminal are in the pipeline.
HSC 2013 Results: Pass Rate of 77.93%

The pass rate for the 2013 Cambridge Higher School Certificate (HSC) results, proclaimed on 3 February 2014 is 77.93% compared to 79.14% in 2012. The names of 45 laureates were also announced.

A total of 10,287 candidates sat for the examinations that is, 10,011 for Mauritius and 276 for Rodrigues. This year the pass rate for girls stands at 80.80%, whereas for boys, the pass rate is 73.93%.

Out of the 145 secondary schools which fielded candidates for HSC examinations, 22 have scored a pass rate of more than 90%. The colleges scoring a pass rate of over 95% are: Queen Elizabeth College, Sir A. R. Mohamed SSS, Droopnath Ramphul SSS, Aleemiah Girls College, Dr Maurice Curé State College, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Royal College Curepipe, Hindu Girls College, Royal College Port Louis, and Collège du Saint Esprit.

Under the Additional Scholarship Schemes, twenty-four (16+8) scholarships will be awarded on the basis of both academic merit and approved social criteria. As regards the 16 Additional scholarships, the eligibility criteria are as follows: students should be ranked among the first 500 of the Cambridge International Examination Scholarship Rank Orders; and their total household (family) income should not exceed Rs 12,000 per month.

For the other eight Additional Scholarships, students should have passed the Higher School Certificate and secured a seat for a first degree in a recognised tertiary education institution; and their total monthly household (family) income should not exceed Rs 6,200.

Over 4000 Youths Provided Placement under the Youth Employment Programme

The Youth Employment Programme (YEP) has placed over 4000 youths in various sectors of the economy since its operation in January 2013. Among them 54.20% are males and 45.80% females and Information and Communication (including BPO) being the sector with the highest number of youth recruited.

These figures were announced on 04 February 2014 by the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Xavier-Luc Duval, at the launching of the YEP Report in Port Louis.

One of the main factors leading to youth unemployment in the country, said VPM Duval, is skills mismatch that is many youth are over-educated, over-skilled, under-educated or lack experience. On this score, he appealed to the youth to make the appropriate choice in respect of their fields of study to facilitate their integration into the labour market.

Mr Duval stated that government has introduced a series of measures in the 2014 budget to tackle youth unemployment and unemployment in general. Among them: amendments in the education laws; introduction of a training employability skills programme; women back to work programme; careers guidance/job fairs; framework for Africa that is encouraging youth to work in the African continent; apprenticeship scheme/dual training programme and encouraging youth to tap the film industry.

The Youth Employment Programme

The Youth Employment Programme was launched last year with a provision of Rs 330 million to assist Mauritian unemployed youth in the age group of 16 to 30 years to obtain training/placement. For this year a provision of Rs 300 million has been made. Through YEP, government aims to facilitate the transition of youth from education to employment and to provide them with the core skills required by different sectors of the economy.

The programme has a three-pronged objective namely: to enable unemployed youth to obtain training/placement for an initial period of one year, with the possibility of permanent employment thereafter on condition of satisfactory performance; to ensure that appropriate training is provided to youth to promote the development of necessary skills in the labour force; and to assist employers in obtaining appropriate skilled manpower.
**Civil Service Workshop to Ease the Implementation of HRMIS project**

The Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms has embarked on a Resource Management Information System (HRMIS) project since November last year for the modernisation of the human resource management and financial operations across the civil service so as to make it more efficient and effective.

In this context, a two-day workshop meant for coordinators of the project from different Ministries/Departments opened on 05 February 2014 at La Canelle Domaine Les Pailles. The objective was to build their capacity and better acquaint them with the HRMIS to ease the implementation of the system in their respective organisation. On the same occasion, a brochure on the HRMIS project was also launched by the Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms, Mr Sutyadeo Moutia.

In his address, Minister Moutia emphasised that this year his Ministry will focus on three main areas namely: the HRMIS, the operationalisation of the Civil Service College and E-Government, targeting service to the public.

The Minister also announced that Mauritius will be hosting in July the forum of Commonwealth Heads of African Public Service on the theme “e-Government for Inclusive and Sustainable Development” given the high importance of e-Government practices in the country, he added.

The HRMIS project constitutes a major reform initiative in the Human Resource practices with respect to some 55 000 public officers across the Civil Service and will be fully operational by 2016. It will comprise of five modules namely: core human resources; payroll; performance management; learning management; and employee self-service.

The project will be implemented on a phased basis as from September 2014 starting with two modules mainly the core human resources and payroll. The remaining three modules will be put in place as from 2015 and will last till 2016.

**Launching of Training Programme to Empower Persons with Disabilities**

A training programme designed for persons with disabilities and focusing on interview skills, advice and guidance about getting a job and confidence building was launched on 10 February 2014 at the Renganaden Seeneevassen Building, Port Louis, in the presence of the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions, Mrs Sheilabai Bappoo.

The programme is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions and the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board (TEDPB). It is the first of many that would be organised during the year to empower people with disabilities.

In her address, Mrs Bappoo recalled that the mission of her ministry is to transform the lives of disabled people by increasing understanding and ensuring that they get the opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations. Through the TEDPB, the Ministry works extensively with disabled persons to help them to identify, develop and make the most of their abilities, she said.

The Minister announced that the National Policy Paper and Action Plan on Disability which outlines Government’s commitment to serve vulnerable people of society, will be updated with the help of Leonard Cheshire Disability, United Kingdom. A mission from this leading UK-based charity supporting disabled people will be in Mauritius in July this year.

According to Mrs Bappoo, since the implementation of the Action Plan in December 2007, much progress has been achieved, in terms of new social benefits and allowances, review of legislation on training and employment of persons with disabilities, new policy measures relating to duty-free facilities for the purchase of adapted cars, refund of taxi fares for university students with severe disabilities, and provision of facilities for the promotion of recreation, sports, culture and leisure.

Our aim is to build a society in which each and every citizen enjoys his/her rights fully and where persons with disabilities will feel valued and fully integrated', she said.

**Better access to employment**

A important step in that direction was taken with the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons (Amendment) Bill, passed by the National Assembly in July 2012, and which makes better provision for the promotion of the access of persons with disabilities to employment.

Following the amendment, employers with more than 35 employees who are not employing disabled persons as per the prescribed 3 per cent, have to make a monthly contribution of Rs 4 000 for each disabled employee not recruited. The proceeds will be used by the TEDPB solely for the purpose of enhancing training and employment opportunities for disabled persons. Employers not abiding to the law will have to pay a fine of Rs 75 000.
The Mauritian economy is among the most favourable in Sub-Saharan Africa, said the Executive Director representing Mauritius on the Board of the World Bank, Mr Agapito Mendes Dias.

He was speaking at a press conference on 21 January 2014 in Port Louis where he highlighted the resilience of the Mauritian economy in the face of the global financial crisis. He further stated that the economy is on the right track and that the country should continue on that path to face the daunting challenges and the fierce competition on the global front.

According to him, the Mauritian economy is also a top performer in the list of the 22 Franco-African countries which he represents. They are namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Cote d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Republic of Congo, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal and Togo.

Mr Mendes Dias was on an official visit in Mauritius from 20 to 24 January 2014 to better examine the Mauritian economy in the wake of upcoming challenges. The outcome will eventually serve as purpose for the latter to understand further the Mauritian economy thus allowing the World Bank to provide more support to help the country maintain its economic performance.

During his visit, he also met the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Xavier-Luc Duval, with whom he discussed about strengthening relations between the World Bank and Mauritius.

Other issues raised were how to gain a better understanding of the nature and type of support Mauritius needs from the World Bank and how Mauritius can help or be used as a model for other African countries. Both parties expressed interest to collaborate in various sectors among which Hydrocarbon and Deep Sea Mineral Mining sector; Social Protection; Inclusive growth, Labour and Inequality Assessment.

Mauritius is the only African country among the top 40 economies worldwide for doing business, according to the Forbes eighth annual survey of the Best Countries for Business 2013 released in December 2013.

The country which stands at the 29th position worldwide is followed by South Africa, Rwanda, Botswana and Zambia which figure at the top 5 African nations at the 41st, 49th, 60th and 68th place respectively.

Forbes rates 145 countries on 11 metrics, including property rights, innovation, taxes, technology, corruption, freedom (personal, trade and monetary), red tape, investor protection and stock market performance.

According to Forbes, several factors have contributed into ranking the country as the top African country for business. They are namely, a more equitable income distribution, increased life expectancy, lowered infant mortality and a much improved infrastructure, since the country has gained independence in 1968.

The survey also shows that Mauritius, which has developed from a low-income agricultural based economy to a middle-income diversified economy, has registered a growth in the range of 5% to 6% from independence.

Forbes further points out that Mauritius has attracted more than 32,000 offshore entities from across India, South Africa and China and investment in the banking sector has reached over one billion US dollar in 2013. Mauritius, according to the report, with its strong textile sector has also been well poised to take advantage of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the country sound economic policies and prudent banking practices have helped mitigate negative effects of the global financial crisis in 2008-2009.

It concludes that Gross Domestic Product has grown in the range of 3%-4% per year for the period 2010-2012 and the country continues to expand its trade and investment outreach across the globe.

The survey was based on values calculated till December 2013 from market performance based on each country’s major stock index returns for 12 months sourced from Heritage Foundation, World Economic Forum, Transparency International and Freedom House among others.
A Symposium to Encourage Secondary Schools to Set Up Their Own MID Clubs

A symposium, an initiative of the Maurice Ile Durable (MID) Commission, to take cognizance of the progress of the existing MID Clubs and to initiate other schools to set up their own MID Clubs in turn, was held on 20 January 2014 at the Auditorium Octave Wiehe, Réduit.

The main objectives of MID Clubs are to raise awareness on the impact of school community’s activities on environment, facilitate conversion of our schools into eco-friendly schools through projects like recycling, waste segregation, tree-planting and setting up of endemic gardens, composting, rain water harvesting and use of solar panels for green electricity production.

In his address at the symposium, the Minister of Education and Human Resources, Dr Vasant Bunwaree, expressed his appreciation that the symposium brought all the future ambassadors of Green Mauritius on a common platform and pointed out that the prime aim of the MID Club is to harmonise all existing environment clubs in schools and to align together towards MID.

Government has a vision for Mauritius, he stated, that of changing the economic, social and environmental landscape of the country. The focus is on a sustainable future for Mauritius along with the MID concept and aligned to this policy, schools should continually aim at sensitising and empowering students so that they can develop community projects and activities to further foster as sustainable lifestyle, he said.

It is recalled that education is one of the five main pillars of the MID Policy, Strategy and Action Plan. To date, some sixty MID clubs have been set up to instill sustainable development initiatives and it is being envisaged to replicate the setting up of MID Clubs in all secondary schools.

The ultimate aim of Government is to acquaint students with the principles of MID, to develop in them, an ownership of the MID project and rope in the community at large towards the MID concept.