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Prime Minister delivers Gandhi Foundation Annual Lecture 2014

The vibrant legal tradition that exists in Mauritius, the fierce protectiveness by our civic institutions of individual rights, and the strongly embedded tradition of faith in legal and constitutional propriety, which is common to all communities and sections of our society, are at the very heart of our national identity.

The second leg of the Prime Minister’s mission led him to France where he met French President François Hollande in Paris on 3 October 2014.

The issue of sovereignty over Tromelin was discussed by the two leaders. The Prime Minister was of opinion that the question of sovereignty should be revisited since there had been considerable delay in the adoption, in France, of the Bill relating to the ratification of the Agreement.
Solar photovoltaic projects - Financial assistance of MID Fund to three secondary schools

Three secondary schools, namely Labourdonnais College, Bhujoharry College and Lycée des Mascareignes are being financially assisted in their solar photovoltaic projects by the Commission on Maurice Ile Durable (MID) in collaboration with the MID Fund to the tune of Rs 2.6 million. In this context, a handing over of cheques ceremony was held on 29 September 2014 in Port Louis.

In his address, the Executive Chairman of the Commission on MID, Mr Osman Mahomed underscored that sustainability begins with education. Investing in school does not only lead to environmental and economic benefits but also teaches students at a young age how to produce electricity and how to use it optimally, he said.

He recalled that Government has approved the MID Policy Strategy Action Plan (MIDPSAP) last year. The MID Fund now functions under the MID Commission and has been entrusted the responsibility of coordinating and monitoring the execution of the Plan. It is in the wake of these policies that the MID Fund has approved for funding Rs 46 million worth of solar photovoltaic systems and installation for 55 schools, NGOs and solar photovoltaic street lighting on Signal Mountain.

The MID Fund

The objects of the MIF Fund are to fund projects, schemes or programmes related to sustainable development. So far, the Fund has funded nearly Rs 800 million worth of projects and schemes. However, other schemes are being funded directly into the budget of Ministries.

Amongst the different projects funded through the MID Fund, there is the installation of wind turbines in Rodrigues which generate about 10% of the electricity needs of the island; and grants to almost 18% of families for the purchase of a solar water heater which has led to energy saving of 786 tonnes of LPG per year and economic saving of Rs 54 million per year as well as emission reduction of 5000 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year.

The MID target for renewable energy is 35% by 2025 and under the MIDPSAP, a gross investment of more than Rs 5 billion for projects by the private sector will be partly offset by a subsidy of Rs 235 million per year by Government over the next 20 years. Projects for renewable energy which are currently in the pipeline include two wind farms and five photovoltaic farms.
An educational system’s first mission is to grow and nurture a collaborative, cultivated, intellectually-agile and responsible citizenry, stated the Prime Minister, Dr Navin Chandra Ramgoolam, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the School of Agriculture at a ceremony held on 13 October 2014 at the Octave Wiehé Auditorium in Réduit.

In his address, he paid tribute to the pioneers of education and training in agricultural sciences in Mauritius and acknowledged the vital role played by the School of Agriculture, later the College of Agriculture and, now, the Faculty of Agriculture to the development of agriculture, the very first pillar of the Mauritian economy for many past decades.

Dr Ramgoolam pointed out that countries which have invested in higher education have made progress and experienced rapid growth, adding that there is a direct link between GDP growth and tertiary enrolment.

‘We are committed to provide equal opportunity to every citizen to have access to higher education, to create an education hub in Mauritius, and to make our economy knowledge-drive’, he said.

Dr Ramgoolam appealed to students to play a more effective role in the development of Mauritius and help take up new and daunting challenges relating to climate change, better land management, sustainable agriculture and food security.

In his message to the youth, he stressed that youngsters should seize every opportunity to serve Mauritius, allow their mind to venture outside the boundaries of conventional thinking and become a strategic part of the country’s progress and success.

Since its creation in 1914, the School of Agriculture has trained more than 2,625 graduates, and mounted nearly 50 different programmes of studies all aimed at improving the relevance of the courses offered, raising skills levels and enhancing capacity in line with the evolving needs of the country. It also plays a vital role in providing trained human resources for the public and private sectors in Mauritius as well as in the region for the development of agriculture and related fields.
Mauritius-India ties, already at a privileged level with shared historical experience and encompassing virtually all aspects of bilateral and multilateral relations, will be further reinforced with the visit from 1st to 3rd November 2014 to Mauritius of the Minister of External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs of the Republic of India, Mrs Sushma Swaraj.

The Minister will be the Chief Guest on the occasion of activities being organised for the commemoration of the 180th Anniversary of the Arrival of Indentured Labourers in Mauritius on 2 November at the Aapravasi Ghat in Port Louis.

Other than the historical and cultural elements of the visit of Minister Swaraj, bilateral and economic aspects will also be of prime importance. The objective is to deepen and broaden the scope of cooperation between both countries as well as explore new perspectives of partnership.

In the margin of the visit, GIS Newsletter presents to its readers an overview of India/Mauritius relations.

India and Mauritius share a very close and unique relationship. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1948, soon after India’s independence.

Mauritius also enjoys close political links with India. In a bid to strengthen friendly and cooperation ties between the two countries, Indian and Mauritian Prime Ministers have paid successive high profile visits.

The most recent visit at highest political level is that of Prime Minister Ramgoolam, where, on a personal invitation of the Indian Prime Minister, Mr Narendra D. Modi, he attended the swearing-in ceremony of the new Government, held on 26 May 2014. Mauritius was the only Non-Member State of SAARC invited to the ceremony. On 27 May 2014, the Prime Minister had a meeting with Prime Minister Modi, in the presence of Minister Swaraj, on bilateral issues.

During the meeting, Dr Ramgoolam raised, amongst others, the issue of the Double Taxation Avoidance Convention. He assured the Indian side of the unwavering commitment of Government to ensure that there is no abuse and misuse of our jurisdiction for illicit purposes. In this context, the Prime Minister proposed to allow the automatic exchange of information and provide adequate safeguard on limitation of benefits. The Prime Minister also proposed the setting up of a Special Cell at the Prime Minister’s Office of both countries to fast track progress on the Double Taxation Avoidance Convention and other projects of strategic importance. This Special Cell is already operational. Prime Minister Modi assured that India would never take any action that would hurt the economic interests of Mauritius.

Over the last 40 years, India has extended 11 Lines of Credits (LOCs) to Mauritius in order to assist the country in the development of its infrastructure, human resource skills development, capacity-building, and joint projects.

The most recent LOC, to the tune of US $ 250 million and a grant of US$ 20 million, dates to the official visit of the Mauritian Prime Minister to India in February 2012.
Mauritius-India Relations at their very best, says Minister Boolell

"Our relations are at the very best. The new favourable orientation of the BJP-led Government towards People of Indian Origin consolidates cultural and ancestral values and this helps in the furtherance of stronger economic ties", says the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Dr Arvin Boolell, in a special statement in relation to the visit.

'The visit of Minister Swaraj shows the special interest that India has for Mauritius. Smt Swaraj chose Mauritius as one of the first countries she would tour. In a telephone conversation I had after her investiture as Minister in May 2014, she promised that she would visit Mauritius officially at the earliest. She has kept her promise", points out the Minister.

According to Dr Boolell, 'India can further help in capacity-building, technology transfer, industrialisation and value-addition. When our economy was on the downside, India has always been our first friend to give a helping hand'. Moreover, as Prime Minister Modi wants to attract more Non Resident Indians to invest in India, Mauritius can be used as the ideal platform for investment towards this objective, he added.

The Minister emphasises that India has helped us a lot in the mapping of our EEZ, in hydrology survey, besides the constant monitoring and surveillance of our waters, with the help of other friendly countries. He also highlights India’s essential collaboration in terms of security, capacity-building, and the fight against piracy and terrorism, amongst others, and the growing presence and visibility of India in Mauritius, especially in the ICT field.

'Mauritius benefits also from India's support in regional and international fora. India, together with like-minded countries, is also much solicited to help make Mauritius a great financial hub and a gateway for investment towards Africa. Mauritius for its part has always supported India to have a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council", states Dr Boolell.

Trade

India is one of the leading economic, trade and investment partners of Mauritius and our major supplier of consumer goods and heavy machinery. Trade in services such as tourism, ICT and education is also on the increase. India’s exports to Mauritius also comprise petroleum products. A three-year Agreement was renewed in August 2013 between the Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd and the State Trading Corporation for supply of our petroleum requirements.

Major Indian flagships operating in Mauritius are LIC, Bank of Baroda, Indian Oil, Ajanta Pharma, Infosys, New India Assurance, Bharat Telecom, MTML and Global Board of Trade.

India has also positioned itself as a very important development partner in Mauritius. As such, India has helped in constructing major landmark development tools for Mauritius: the Ebène Cyber City, the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, the Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre, the Rabindranath Tagore Institute and the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre, amongst others.

Defence and Security Cooperation

The custom-made deployments of Indian Naval Ships for undertaking hydrographic surveys, joint patrol and dedicated EEZ Surveillance in conjunction with the Mauritian Police Force are key highlights of India’s cooperation in the strengthening of the defence and security capacity of Mauritius.

The Inshore Patrol Vessel Pathfinder was handed last year to the Mauritius National Coast Guard (NCG) demonstrating the solid Indo-Mauritian cooperation. The Indian Navy has also recently gifted spare parts and engines of the Defender Aircraft to enhance the NCG’s maritime surveillance capabilities. The Mauritian Offshore Patrol Vessel, the CGS Barracuda, financed by one Indian LOC, was launched recently in Kolkata and is scheduled to be delivered to Mauritius by the end of 2014.
The ten-year plan was developed in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the MPS and other stakeholders. It comprises six pillars namely, setting up of a strategic planning and research unit, improving security of prisons, integrating detainee management, rehabilitation and resettlement, operation of the Eastern High Security Prison, and capacity building.

The MPS has not kept pace with many important improvements and changes that have occurred in contemporary prison jurisdictions across the developed world, hence the need to have a strategic plan.

The major constraints relate to the 85% of released detainees who have re-offended and returned to prison over the past 18 years; half of the prison population are on remand detention awaiting trial and sentencing; over half of those convicted detainees are sentenced for short periods of less than 6 months; over a quarter of those convicted were admitted for non-payment of fines.

The 2013-2023 Strategic Plan outlines new and clear goals for the Prison service, in which the main focus will be to reduce re-offending by detainees and to depart from ‘warehousing’ detainees to a ‘corrections’ model of imprisonment.

Six strategic pillars

With regards to the first pillar, a Strategic Planning Unit has been set up by the MPS. An Inspectorate mechanism has been established and trained to comprehensively inspect prisons and make recommendations for improvements to operations.

Furthermore, the first phase of the e-prison system consisting of core modules has been completed and a new IT infrastructure has been put in place connecting all the sub-prisons to Prison headquarters.

Under the second pillar, a new Emergency Framework has been developed for the MPS to provide a consistent, professional approach in dealing with all emergencies that prisons may face.

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As regards operations of the Eastern High Security Prison, detainees have been transferred to the new prison. The occupancy level of Eastern High Security Prison has already reached 63% and will reach its optimum level very soon in the course of this year.

Under the last pillar, 61 new Prison Officers have been enlisted in August 2014 and 121 Prison Officers of batch 2013 passed out in 2014 after having undergone their initial training period. A total of 357 Prison Officers have attended training, 11 officers have benefitted from international exposure in best correctional practice, and two batches of officers have been attending courses at the Department of Corrective Services, Western Australia.

The Mauritius Prison Service (MPS) Strategic Plan 2013-2023, aiming at bringing down the current recidivism rates by arranging for additional support structures and providing for a more structured form of release, was launched on 25 September 2014 at the Prison Training School in Beau Bassin by the Commissioner of Prisons, Mr Jean Bruneau.
NEW WING AT CENTRAL PRISON OF BEAU BASSIN TO HOUSE SUSPECTED PIRATES

The Central Prison of Beau Bassin is now equipped with a new Wing to house suspected pirates. This new facility is the result of the collaboration between Mauritius and the European Union in the fight against the scourge of piracy. It can accommodate 60 detainees and is endowed with all the necessary facilities geared towards ensuring humane condition for detention.

The new Wing was inaugurated on 8 October 2014 at the Central Prison in Beau Bassin in the presence of the Senior Chief Executive of the Prime Minister’s Office, Mrs K.O Fong Weng-Poorun; the Head of Delegation of the European Union, Mr Aldo Dell’Ariccia; and the Commissioner of Prisons, Mr Jean Bruneau.

The European Union, through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), has financed the construction of the one-storey Pirates Wing to the tune of Rs 43 million. In July 2011, Mauritius entered into an agreement with the European Union for the transfer of suspected Somali pirates to Mauritius for the purpose of their detention prior to trial. The construction of the new Pirates wing forms part of the Transfer Agreement.

By virtue of this agreement, funds worth three million euros were provided under the 10th European Development Fund to assist Mauritius in the implementation of the project. It comprised the construction of a new prison and a courtroom. Assistance was also provided through the UNODC to the tune of 1 080 000 euros to implement short term measures such as legislative review, upgrading works at the Central Prison of Beau Bassin, provision of interpreters and training programmes for Police investigators, prosecutors, Prison Officers and members of the Judiciary.

Before the construction of the new Pirates wing, the suspected pirates were kept in the ex-Segregation and Protection Unit. A total of 12 suspected pirates were admitted there in February 2013. Several measures have been taken by Mauritius to ensure maritime security. These include:

- Adoption of a National Plan to combat maritime piracy since October 2010.
- Setting up of a National Coast Guard Commando Team for anti-piracy operations since 2009.
- Increased surveillance operations by the National Coast Guard vessels and Dornier aircraft in our exclusive economic zone.
- Installation of a Vessel Monitoring System to track the positioning of all Mauritian vessels.
- Acquisition of an Offshore Patrol Vessel to the tune of US$ 58.5 million to enhance naval capability.
- Acquisition of a Waterjet Fast Attack Craft and ten Fast Interceptor boats.
A new batch of forty-six families have benefitted from Concrete cum Corrugated Iron Sheet (CCIS) housing units under the social housing project initiated by the Integrated Social Development Programme of the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF). The objective is to help needy families whose monthly income is less than Rs 6500 to have access to a decent dwelling.

The handing over of keys ceremony was held on 2 October 2014 in the presence of the Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment, Mr Surendra Dayal, and other eminent personalities at the seat of the NEF in Port Louis.

The Concrete cum Corrugated Iron Sheet housing units have been structured in such a way so as to offer the possibility to the residents, if they wish at a later stage, to extend their houses both vertically and laterally.

The approach developed under the Integrated Social Development Programme also provides for support to the families in terms of social, economic and environmental aspects through education, training, employability and entrepreneurship with the assistance of the NGOs. This will eventually help the families to break the vicious circle of poverty.

Initiated in the 2006 budget, the NEF aims at broadening the circle of job opportunities to each Mauritian while reducing unemployment and fighting poverty in the context of the democratisation of the economy. It also comprises a social housing component.

The main axes of intervention of NEF to combat absolute poverty are: the Housing and Community Development programme; the Child and Family Empowerment programme; and the Placement and Training programme. Through its various interventions, NEF is striving to eliminate absolute poverty by putting an end to its intergenerational transmission and attending to the needs deficit of the poorer segment of the society to help them integrate mainstream society.

Over 3000 beneficiaries both in Mauritius and Rodrigues have, since the last four years, benefitted from social housing projects initiated under the Housing and Community Development Programme of the NEF. As far as integrated housing projects are concerned, 199 families have benefitted from the scheme at La Valette Bambous, 19 families at Sottise Grand Baie, 22 families at Dubreuil and 59 families at Gros Cailloux Petite Rivière.

For this year, some 21600 children have been provided with school materials under the Child and Family Empowerment programme. As regards the Placement and Training programme, the number of beneficiaries totaled to 2550 persons.

Moreover, 465 Mauritians have benefitted from job opportunities under the circular migration programme to work in Canada while 30 are working in France, mostly in the hospitality sector.
The Université des Mascareignes, the fourth Public University in Mauritius, and the University of Limoges, France, signed a Memorandum of Association with the aim of strengthening existing collaboration on 10 October 2014 at the seat of the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology in Ebène.

The Université des Mascareignes was created last year. It took over the functions of the Institut Supérieur de Technologie, Camp Levieux, and the Swami Dayanand Institute of Management, Pamplemousses. The University incorporates a dimension of the French system of education and offers programmes in both English and French, based on the 'Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) structure. It benefits from a ‘Protocole de Collaboration et de Partenariat’ with the University of Limoges.

The tertiary institution comprises a Faculty of Sustainable Development and Engineering, a Faculty of Business and Management and a Faculty of Information and Communication Technology. Programmes include Information, Communication and Technology; Accountancy, Banking and Financial Services; Business Information Systems; Civil, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, Concepts of Sustainable Development Technologies and Renewable Resources/Energies.

The Memorandum of Association was deemed by the Minister and both signatories as a significant milestone that will not only further consolidate ties between academic partners, but also set the stage for broader partnerships with other universities and research institutions.

Under the agreement, four focus areas of collaboration have been identified, namely training, research and innovation, international mobility and governance with a view of developing research collaborations as well as faculty and students exchange programmes. The document also provides for joint research with IITRA and IIT, Delhi for the development of a nano-satellite.

The Université des Mascareignes was officially inaugurated on 2 September 2013 on the campus of the Institut Supérieur de Technologie at Camp Levieux, Rose-Hill. The University is in line with Government’s vision to widen access to tertiary education by setting up university campuses in different parts of the island and to provide equal educational opportunities to all Mauritians.
Youth Excellence Award 2014 Ceremony

Outstanding performance of young people in various areas of youth development rewarded

The award ceremony of the 7th Edition of the Youth Excellence Award, which aims at rewarding outstanding performance of young people in various areas of youth development, was held on 11 October 2014 at Le Méridien Hotel, Pointe aux Piments.

Open to young people aged between 14 and 29 years, this year’s edition of the Youth Excellence Award, launched on 8 May 2014, was organised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports jointly with SICOM. Around 130 young people participated by submitting a project in one of the following areas: Literary Promotion; Artistic Pursuit; Technology/Innovation; Art and Design; and Leadership in the field of Socioeconomic Development.

Three prizes were awarded for each of the five categories. Winners were rewarded with a cash prize of Rs 25 000 and a trophy. The first runner up received a cash prize of Rs 10 000 and the second received a cash prize of Rs 5 000 and a shield.

We need a youth with a vision, says Minister Ritto

In his address at the Award ceremony, the Minister of Youth and Sports, Mr Satyaprakash Ritoo, stressed that it is important to engage youth in initiatives that not only bring them knowledge and skills but also enable them nurture good values and humility.

This kind of leadership is not geared towards achieving personal fame and power, but one which aims at empowering one and all to achieve a strong and inclusive Mauritian society. We also need a youth with a vision, he said.

The Award

The broader aim of the Youth Excellence Award is to give young people the opportunity to highlight their involvement in the social, economic, cultural, artistic and other youth-related fields through a project.

It also seeks promote high youth achievers as role models to inspire other youth, reward outstanding projects and showcase original and innovative projects which demonstrate a sense of initiative and a search for excellence by young people. Projects should also address a community need as well as be sustainable, and have scope/potential for development.

Through the Award, young people are encouraged to adopt and advocate a culture of excellence which goes beyond the average and the ordinary.
Government expands its DTAAs and IPPAs networks

Government is expanding its network of Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements and Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements in its effort to make of Mauritius a premier financial hub for Africa and promote greater cross-border investment and trade.

In this context, an Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement with the Government of Kuwait has been ratified and has just come into force. Negotiations on new Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements have also been concluded recently with Cape Verde and Burkina Faso. The procedures for the signing of these two agreements are underway.

Furthermore, the Mauritius-Guernsey Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement and the revised Mauritius-Rwanda Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement have come into force a few weeks back, while negotiations on new Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements have been completed with Malta and Cape Verde. Arrangements are being made for an early signing of these agreements.

Mauritius has to-date signed 45 Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements and 40 Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements. The country is also committed to developing a Tax Information Exchange Agreement with countries where there is no Double Taxation Agreement.

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