Mauritius and India: Signature of MoU for grant assistance worth Rs 12.7b for project implementation

The Metro Express project along with four other projects will benefit from a grant assistance to the tune of Rs 12.7 billion allocated by the Government of India for priority development projects in Mauritius. In this context, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Mauritius and India on 14 November 2016 in Port Louis.

The signatories were the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Pravind Jugnauth, and the High Commissioner of India, Mr Abhay Thakur. The Government of India agreed to provide grant funding to Mauritius during the visit of Mr Pravind Jugnauth, to India in September this year.

The Rs 12.7 billion in the form of grants will be used to finance the following five major projects:

• Rs 9.9 billion for the Metro Express project;
• Rs 1.1 billion for a New Supreme Court Building;
• Rs 500 million for the provision of tablets to primary students;
• Rs 700 million for the construction of some 1,000 social housing units; and
• Rs 500 million for a state-of-the-art ENT hospital.

These projects which are considered crucial for the socio-economic development of Mauritius encompass various sectors of the economy such as public transportation, education, health care, social housing and the judiciary.

In his address, Minister Jugnauth, stressed the importance of concluding a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with India, adding that it is a topmost priority in strengthening trade and investment policies as well as cementing economic ties between the two countries.

To this effect, Mauritius made several proposals namely:
The fourth Business Development and Facilitation Centre

(i) the setting up of a Mauritius–India Infrastructure Development Fund for the mutual benefit of both countries and for investment in the region; (ii) a Triangular Cooperation involving India–Mauritius–Africa to enable both India and Mauritius to tap new markets and promote greater cross border investments in Africa and India being a key partner in our New Africa Strategy; (iii) promote a greater participation of Indian businesses and investors in the upgrading of our education and health sectors, public utilities, air and sea connectivity, land transport system and telecommunication services; (iv) support value-addition investment in the ICT sector and in creating a digital economy and society; (v) give a fillip to the emerging Mauritian Film Industry; and (vi) assist in the setting up of the Pharmaceutical village which will cater for local as well as African markets.

For his part, Mr Thakur announced the visit of an Indian business delegation to Mauritius in December to finalise the CEPCA among others and reassured Mauritius that no other countries have received the special consideration with regards the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement between India and Mauritius. India is also providing a grant of USD 4 M and a line of credit of USD 52.3 M to finance the Trident Project to upgrade facilities for maritime operations and surveillance by the National Coast Guard in the fight against drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean.

Mauritius is also seeking the assistance of India for a grant of USD $ 200 million for the implementation of several port-related projects, which may include, an Oil Jetty at Albion; an Aviation Fuel Pipeline from the port to the airport; a joint petroleum storage project at Albion; and a breakwater in the port to house a marina.

 minister meeting Indian Prime Minister Modi

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) opened its fourth regional Business Development and Facilitation Centre in Goodlands on 18 November 2016.

With the objective of decentralising the activities of SMEDA, regional Business Development and Facilitation Centres have been set up in the North, South, East and West/Centre regions of Mauritius.

The Centres are providing assistance to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), in a pre-defined region both at the Centre or in-house on the premises of the business. It offers delivering, coaching, mentoring and handholding services to newly registered businesses.

The setting up of these centres is expected to eventually accelerate the development of Start-ups and strengthen existing businesses through an array of Business Development Services.

The Business Development and Facilitation Centres are also known as regional incubators allowing closer cooperation between mentors and would-be entrepreneurs. They will be able to share knowledge, expertise and experience needed for the successful expansion of SMEs.

These centres do not only focus on the setting up of a support infrastructure of business services aimed at boosting the initiative of young entrepreneurs, but also provide them with the expertise, networks and tools needed to make their ventures successful.

Some 3 329 applications have been approved under the Water Tank Grant Scheme for the Financial Year 2016-2017.

Under this Scheme, low income families are provided a grant for the purchase of a water tank, subject to certain conditions. The Central Water Authority is carrying out a campaign in areas affected by severe water cuts, and distributing application forms to interested households.

Moreover, households, who are in financial hardship and registered in the Social Register of Mauritius, are not required to swear an affidavit to declare their income.
Mauritius will ask for agenda item 87 at the 71st UN General Assembly this year relating to the request for an Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice in respect of the Chagos Archipelago to be considered forthwith, if no progress is made in the talks with the United Kingdom (UK).

The statement was made by the Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth at the National Assembly on 29 November 2016 in reply to a question on matters relating to our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. A letter will be addressed to the President of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, requesting that debates on the agenda item be held at the earliest possible, before June 2017, should the UK continue to insist that the talks between the officials from Mauritius and the UK be held under a sovereignty umbrella, as they did during the meeting on 9 November 2016 in Mauritius, the Prime Minister told the House.

The stand of Mauritius is that since the talks, in line with the understanding reached in New York, were about the completion of the decolonisation of Mauritius and the exercise of full sovereignty by Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago, they could not be held under a sovereignty umbrella as was the case for previous talks between the two countries, including those held on the implementation of the Award delivered in 2015 in the case brought by Mauritius against the UK under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Prime Minister recalled that at its meeting held on 14 September 2016, the General Committee of the UN General Assembly agreed to recommend the inclusion of item 87 in the agenda of the General Assembly on the understanding that there would be no consideration of the item before June 2017 and that thereafter it may be considered upon notification by a Member State.

The UK was initially opposed to the inclusion of this item in the agenda of the General Assembly, the Prime Minister said, adding that however, in view of the wide support which Mauritius had obtained on the matter, the UK asked, as a compromise, that consideration of this item be deferred to June 2017 to give time to Mauritius and the UK to engage in discussions with a view to arriving at a satisfactory resolution of the matter.

However, the Prime Minister said, the UK Government in a statement made to the UK Parliament on 16 November 2016 announced decisions it has purportedly taken to the effect that the Chagossian community will not be allowed to resettle in the Chagos Archipelago, and the US presence in the Chagos Archipelago under current arrangements with the UK will continue until 2036.

Following this statement by the UK, the Government of Mauritius, through the Prime Minister’s Office, issued a Communiqué on 17 November 2016, stating that the UK had acted in blatant breach of the letter and spirit of the Award delivered on 18 March 2015 in the case brought by Mauritius against the UK under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, inasmuch as the UK failed to fully involve Mauritius, as required by the Award, in the renewed use, until 2036, of the Chagos Archipelago for the purposes for which it is currently being used.

“Government believes that the decolonisation process and independence of Mauritius would not be complete until and unless the Chagos Archipelago is returned by the UK to the effective control of Mauritius”.

For Mauritius, the issue of sovereignty and the return of Mauritian citizens of Chagossian origin to the Chagos Archipelago are indissociable.

Mauritius, Sir Anerood said in his reply at the National Assembly, has no objection to the continued use of Diego Garcia as a military base and is even prepared to grant a long term lease to the United States of America for its continued use as a military base. However, we condemn the unilateral decisions purportedly taken by the UK with regard to resettlement in the Chagos Archipelago and the continuation of the UK-US agreement in respect of the Chagos Archipelago until 2036, he added.
Mauritius hosted the 6th Africa Regional Platform and the 5th High Level Meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction from 22-25 November 2016 at the Intercontinental Resort in Balaclava. The platform was organised by the Government in collaboration with the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The Regional Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction is a multi-stakeholder forum which has varying characteristics and offers a dynamic forum for policymakers, partners, experts and practitioners to announce initiatives, promote campaigns and monitor progress about disaster risk reduction.

One of the main objectives of this Regional Platform was to include the African Programme of Action to implement the Sendai Framework in Africa, the Mauritius Declaration on implementation of the Africa Programme of Action and a Draft Africa position for the Global Platform 2017. Some 400 representatives from 40 African countries including 300 government representatives attended the three-day Regional Platform.

The four key areas of the Sendai Framework which is the successor instrument to the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, consist of understanding disaster risk, strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk, investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience and enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Furthermore, seven global targets have been agreed to achieve the outcome of the present Framework. The seven global targets include reducing the number of affected people globally by 2030, reducing direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product by 2030; and reducing disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities, including through developing their resilience by 2030.

It is recalled that the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 was adopted at the Third UN World Conference in Sendai, Japan in March 2015. It is the outcome of stakeholders consultations initiated in March 2012 and inter-governmental negotiations from July 2014 to March 2015, supported by the UNISDR at the request of the UN General Assembly.

The Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation marked the Computer Security Day observed on 30 November 2016 by organising a series of activities, namely:

(a) a Cybersecurity Conference to focus on how to secure Internet of Things systems and gain the necessary skills to create robust Internet of Things security policies; and

(b) a talk and video projection on Internet Security with a view to increasing awareness on the importance of Internet Security, encouraging Internet users to utilise appropriate internet applications and promoting responsible online behaviour and positive use of the Internet.

The Mauritian National Computer Security Incident Response Team (CERT-MU), in collaboration with the Forum of Incident Response Teams (FIRST), also organised a Technical Colloquium, where best practices in cybersecurity were shared.
The youth of Mauritius must take a leading example from those unsung heroes who had an indomitable spirit to overcome all obstacles with their blood, tears and hard works, yet lived a life of dignity, respect and humility.

The above statement was made by the Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, at the 182nd anniversary of the arrival of indentured labourers in Mauritius, commemorated on 2 November 2016 at the Aapravasi Ghat, World Heritage Site, Port-Louis.

Sir Anerood Jugnauth paid tribute to the indentured labourers who through perseverance, resilience and fortitude tried to overcome all obstacles and make of Mauritius where it stands today.

He underlined that the Aapravasi Ghat marked the beginning of the Indentured era with the migration of over two million indentured labourers between the year 1834 and 1920 who brought with them their culture contributing into making Mauritius a multi-cultural society.

He also recalled that the Aapravasi Ghat, formerly known as the Coolie Ghat, represents a cornerstone of the Mauritian National Cultural Heritage which got international recognition through its inscription as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2006.

The commemorative ceremony organised in joint collaboration by the Ministry of Arts and Culture and the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund consisted of a wreath laying ceremony on the steps indentured labourers first climbed after they landed, launching of a coffee table book entitled “Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site” as well as cultural programme by local artists.

Mauritius marked World Diabetes Day 2016 observed worldwide on 14 November. The theme this year was “Eyes on Diabetes.”

According to the Non-Communicable Diseases Survey Report 2015, the prevalence of diabetes in Mauritius has stabilised at 22.8% in 2015, as compared to 23.6% in 2009, while the prevalence of pre-diabetes for the same period has declined from 24.4% to 19.4%.

Activities organised include:

- the launching of a ‘First Day Cover’ on diabetes;
- an exhibition on NCDs and other health related issues, such as retinal and foot care;
- retinal and NCD screening across the country;
- an open day with Type 1 Diabetic patients aged between 17 to 30 years at Victoria Hospital; and
- Continuous Nursing Education on the theme “Healthy Living and Diabetes Care”, including demonstration on insulin injection techniques, proper use of glucose meters at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital.
Increase the penalties for certain serious offences, in particular those relating to dangerous driving, driving without care, and causing death by careless driving when under the influence of intoxicating drink or drugs is the main object of the Road Traffic (Amendment No.2) Bill which was passed at the National Assembly on 22 November 2016.

With regard to causing death by dangerous driving, the term of imprisonment is increased from three to five years with a fine of not less than Rs 25 000 and not more than Rs 50 000. Furthermore, a new sub section has been inserted in case of second or subsequent conviction, where the proposed fine shall not be less than Rs 75 000 and not more than Rs 100 000, while the term of imprisonment shall not be less than 12 months and not more than eight years.

Concerning the section on causing death by careless driving when under the influence of intoxicating drink or drugs, the Bill paves the way for increasing the term of imprisonment from three years to five years for the first conviction. A new subsection, which caters for a second and subsequent conviction, has been inserted, and provides that the fine shall not be less than Rs 75 000 nor more than Rs 100 000, and the term of imprisonment shall not be less than 12 months nor more than eight years.

According to the new Bill, cyclists found to be under the influence of alcohol will be sanctioned. When a cyclist refuses to submit to a preliminary breath test, the latter shall be fined for a sum of not less than Rs 5 000 and not more than Rs 25 000. In the case where a driver of a motor vehicle refuses to submit to a preliminary breath test, the fine to be imposed has been increased from Rs 5 000 to Rs 20 000.

Moreover, under the Bill, police officers will carry out Random Breath Test which has been adopted in many other countries. This provision will cater for those driving under the influence of alcohol to inadvertently escape from being detected by the Police and continue to drive. As for the detention of a person found to be driving a motor vehicle with alcohol concentration exceeding the prescribed limit.

The Bill also empowers a Magistrate to immediately order a person to be disqualified from driving a motor vehicle for a period not exceeding two months, or from holding or obtaining a licence in Mauritius for a period not exceeding six months, where that person is found to be driving a motor vehicle with alcohol concentration exceeding the prescribed limit.

The Bill provides, in addition, that in case of road accident, the driver must report the accident within one hour, instead of four hours, at the nearest police station or to a police officer, after its occurrence. The fine for an offence committed under this section is maintained at Rs 5 000, but the term of imprisonment has been increased from six months to three years.
A validation workshop on a 10-year Master plan for the development of globally competitive Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) was organised on 23 November 2016 at Hennessey Park Hotel in Ebene. On this occasion, a Master plan was presented outlining a series of initiatives and actions which could benefit SMEs.

The objective of this workshop was to initiate discussions on the constraints, challenges, strategies, action plans and methodologies related to the setting up and the implementation of the Master Plan.

The proposed Master Plan will review current strategies, priorities and objectives to be in line with the Government’s vision and mission and propose appropriate action plans for each sector. It will also help to evaluate current support institutions for SMEs and make appropriate recommendations.

Furthermore, the plan will chart a roadmap for the development of SMEs in the short, medium and long term. It will also examine current monitoring and set up a reliable evaluation system to enable funding. The factors and challenges that influence SME performance will also be evaluated in the 10 year Master plan.

More than 100 SMEs participated in the “Salon des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises” (PME) from 3 to 6 November 2016 at Port Louis Waterfront. Organised by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), the objective of this event was to enhance the visibility of locally manufactured products, stimulate access to markets and develop linkages with other enterprises, suppliers, traders, industrial buyers and large enterprises.

Moreover, the Salon des PME allowed SMEs and enterprises not having an annual turnover exceeding Rs. 50 million in the manufacturing as well as the services sector to participate because they usually lack adequate resources to promote, market and sell their products.

One of the commonly identified constraints for the growth of the SME sector is access to markets and space in prime locations to enhance the visibility of products is beyond the reach of the majority of SMEs. It is against this backdrop that the SMEDA regularly organises trade fairs across the island for promotion of local products.

The Land Drainage Authority Bill which will be shortly introduced in the National Assembly, will endorse the setting up of the Land Drainage Authority. This institution will be responsible for the development and implementation of a land drainage master plan for the Republic of Mauritius and will also carry out an inventory and map all existing drainage infrastructure.

Moreover, the Land Drainage Authority will undertake a study based on hydro-meteorological and hydrographic survey and produce a flood risk map and a National Land Drainage Plan. It will review the flood risk map and the National Land Drainage Plan, as and when required as well as conduct and coordinate research and development on land drainage and watershed management.
The National Code of Corporate Governance for Mauritius (2016) has been endorsed by the National Committee on Corporate Governance. The main objectives of the Code are to introduce and encourage organisations to comply with good governance practices, and empower participation of stakeholders in ensuring that these practices are effectively implemented. The purpose of Corporate Governance is to facilitate entrepreneurial and prudent management that can deliver the long-term success of an organisation.

The existing agreement between the Government and the Mauritius International Arbitration Centre Ltd has been extended to include the setting up and operation of an International Arbitration Hearing Centre. The centre will be equipped with the state-of-the-art technology and amenities/facilities to create the ideal physical setting for arbitration and dispute resolution hearings. The opening of the Hearing Centre will ensure that Mauritius maintains its lead in the field of arbitration.

The new National Plan of Action for Nutrition for the period 2016 to 2020 has been issued. The main objectives of the Plan are, amongst others, to promote appropriate diets and healthy lifestyles, including raising the consumption of fruits and vegetables by two fold, decreasing the consumption of oils, saturated fats and trans-fatty acids by 5%.

It also aims at protecting consumers through improved food quality and safety, enforcement of food regulations and consumer education. Under this Plan, dietary recommendations have been established for adults for the prevention of chronic diet-related diseases based on the World Health Organization's population nutrient intake goals.

The 11th Edition of the Festival International Kreol aiming to promote the authenticity of the kreol culture through local music, arts, language and cuisine was held from 17 to 27 November 2016. Among the various activities that were organised, a ‘Konferans’ on the theme ‘Lang kreol: Siman la Nasion’ was held on 17 November 2016.

His Majesty Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, monarch of the Kingdom of Ashanti, Ghana, was the Chief Guest of the Festival.

He led a delegation of businessmen to explore business possibilities with Mauritian counterparts with a view to concluding mutually beneficial business agreements.