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Prime Minister launches National Youth Policy 2016

The National Youth Policy 2016, an essential planning tool guiding the country in its approach to youth development, was launched on 7 October 2016 by the Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, at the Rivière du Rempart Youth Centre. The Paper defines the vision of Government, and in particular, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, as a timely response to emerging youth needs.

The policy document, which acts as a guideline that will give direction to the programmes and services provided by Government in youth matters, highlights the commitment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and other stakeholders on interventions and services that would ensure the rise of a smart youth for 2020.

The key areas of interventions identified so as to enable youth development are: Informal Education, Employment and Employability, Entrepreneurship, Recreational Activities and Wellness and Attitude; this in view of promoting voluntarism, building leadership and eradicating all forms of violence and negative behaviours which endanger our youth. The broader focus is on empowerment of youth so as to build their resilience and sense of belonging to society.

In his address, the Prime Minister stated that young people are a source of talents and represent the future of our nation. ‘As a caring Government, we are conscious of our responsibility to help our youth attain their maximum potential and
satisfy their aspirations in the best possible ways’, he added.

According to Sir Anerood, young Mauritians need guidance to pursue their journey on the right track since they are confronted with multiple challenges and are prone to temptations and societal issues. The youth policy has all its relevance and importance with the document covering all three dimensions of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental, he said.

‘There are, however, challenges hindering youth development. One of the major blocks lies in the image young people hold of themselves. Many young people do not believe that they can make a difference as they are plagued by feelings of helplessness and feel vulnerable. In this respect, education, training and health are pillars of youth development as well as the need for hard work, discipline and perseverance to achieve success’, he pointed out.

The Policy Paper

Key Areas of Intervention

1. Informal Education
   The Policy Objective is to set up an integrated programme of informal education geared towards the promotion of youth responsibility for their own learning and development, and for an inclusive community life.

2. Employment and Employability
   Policy Objective
   • To enhance youth employability and young people’s active participation in the labour market, by equipping them with the ability and skills to gain initial employment, maintain current employment and develop new career paths.

3. Entrepreneurship
   Policy objective
   • To provide young people with training to develop their entrepreneurial skills, mind-set and culture and to promote sustainable youth enterprise as a significant strategy for fostering economic development and growth.

4. Recreational Activities
   Policy Objective
   • To mandate the provision of quality leisure for the self-development of youth and to set up non-competitive/youth friendly recreational activities to reduce negative behaviour, improve educational performance and promote higher productivity.

5. Wellness and Attitude
   Policy Objectives
   • To create awareness on wellness and attitude as a prerequisite for making smart choices towards a healthy and fulfilling life.

The Policy Principles

The Policy upholds the following principles:

• Non-discriminatory approach where no distinction is made in youth programmes against youth, on the basis of age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, or any other form, in accessing resources and services necessary for their development.

• Holistic perspective which embraces all aspects of physical, emotional, social, economic and spiritual development of young people.

• Transparency and accountability incorporated in all actions undertaken by all organisations working towards the policy objectives.

• Social cohesion and national unity promoting youth as an integral part of society involving them in nation building.

• Civic engagement and participation integrating leadership, youth empowerment and creating space for youth voice and democratic ideals.
A full-fledged e-Registry System is now operational at the Registrar General’s Department (RGD) in line with the set of reforms initiated by the Government in view of transforming the Department from a registry service organisation to an e-registry service.

The Department, which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, has since 2014 embarked on the Mauritius e-Registry Project (MeRP) funded jointly by the Government of Mauritius and the Investment Climate Facility for Africa.

The MeRP has been implemented in two stages. The first stage, which went live in 2014, pertains to the modernisation of the Department with the implementing of a software called the Mauritius e-Registry System. In this stage, all services within the Department have been automated and RGD officers are providing services using sophisticated software tools.

The second stage which pertains to online services, was implemented in 2015. Customers have been provided with a dashboard to submit their documents for registration, for payment of fees and for the retrieval of registered documents online. The Search Online Module will also be made available to Ministries/Departments, Professionals and Public Sector Bodies in the first instance.

A Call Centre and a Help Desk have been set up to assist customers in using the online services. Furthermore, an Application Programme Interface is available for professionals to interact with the Department through their System.

With the implementation of the MeRP, the time for the registration of documents was been reduced from 210 days to 15 days and with the implementation of LAVIMS in 2011, it has been further reduced to 2 days.

To date 58,575 documents have been registered through the Online Services.

Moving Mauritius towards a digital platform

In his address at the launching of the e-Registry System on 14 October 2016, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Pravind Jugnauth, commended the RGD for this initiative which he said in line with Government’s vision of moving Mauritius towards a digital platform and called for other Government entities to follow same and adopt the digital strategy.

The Finance Minister also expressed his determination into transforming Mauritius into a fully-fledged Digital Society with emphasis on investing further in digital technologies, infrastructure and facilities so as to develop a Digital Citizenship. On this score, he called for a concerted effort of one and all in attaining this endeavor while at the same emphasising the role of educational institutions and parents which he said have a great share of responsibility in promoting the concept of digital citizenship.
The EU is more than a key strategic, political and economic partner of Mauritius. It remains a safe anchor and vital link for a modern and forward-looking and prosperous Mauritius in a fast changing world with important geo-political shifts, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, said about his visit from 24 to 26 October 2016 to Brussels.

The Minister led an important delegation to Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU), one of the most important and reliable development partners of Mauritius.

The main objective of the visit was to initiate dialogue with the EU to ensure that Mauritius is not placed on the blacklist of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions which EU is currently compiling to be released in 2017.

Another component of the visit was to have exchanges on the state of play of the Mauritius-EU partnership which goes beyond traditional development cooperation and spans over key areas like Trade, Climate Change, Sustainable Development Goals, Maritime Security and Fisheries, among others.

During the visit, the Finance Minister raised with key EU decision-makers issues with regards to the EU tax initiatives especially in the light of global developments in the financial services sector, particularly in the areas of transparency and exchange of information.

In this respect, Mr Jugnauth had discussions with high officials of European Commission dealing with tax matters whereby he highlighted that Government is in a process of consultation with all stakeholders of the financial sector while recalling that Mauritius is neither a non-cooperative tax jurisdiction nor has a harmful tax regime. He reiterated Mauritius’ commitment as an international financial centre and responsible member of the international community to combat cross-border tax evasion and other malpractices.

The Minister reaffirmed the willingness of Mauritius to continue its high level dialogue with the EU and its Member States so that they are kept abreast of our commitments to tax cooperation and developments regarding the Mauritian tax legislation well ahead of the proposed establishment, through a screening process, by the EU of a Common of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions which is to become effective by the end of 2017.

He also had discussions with the Directorate General for Research and Innovation where further areas of cooperation with EU were explored in research and innovation so as to sharpen our competitive edge and transform Mauritius into a knowledge industry.

Were also on the agenda issues with regards the support to the National Innovation Framework, established in April 2016, under the aegis of the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation, in line with the calls in Budget 2016-2017. To this end, a seminar will be held on Horizon 2020 in Mauritius to create awareness about the programme.

The current challenges in the agro-industry sector, including the foot and mouth disease, and the need to ensure the protection of our export market on the high quality Special Sugars produced by Mauritius ahead of the end of EU production sugar quotas on 30 September 2017, were also discussed.

A meeting with the European Commission on Trade focused the upgrade of the current Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (IEPA), signed by Mauritius with the EU, into a full and comprehensive EPA and the uncertainties surrounding BREXIT and the need for solid assurances from the EU to maintain our acquis post BREXIT were also discussed.

Working sessions with prominent investors were also held and a delegation led by AWEX (BOI equivalent in Belgium) will have a prospective investment mission in the first quarter of 2017.
Mauritius participated for the first time in the 2016 Guangdong 21st Century Maritime Silk Road International Expo, in view of pursuing marketing efforts in China and Hong Kong following the recent Buyers Sellers Meeting and Contact Promotion Programme in June 2016.

The Expo, hosted by the Guangdong Branch of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade and supported by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, Hong Kong Tourism Board and the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute, was held from 27 to 30 October 2016 at Guangdong Modern International Exhibition Centre, Dongguan City in China.

This was an opportunity to maximise visibility of ‘Mauritius Made with Care’ products in China and nearby countries as well as to establish fruitful business contacts and networks in Guangdong, wider China and with other participating countries.

Mauritius was represented by a delegation led by the Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection, Mr Ashit Kumar Gungah and comprising 38 local participants and key stakeholders such as the Board of Investment, the Financial Services Promotion Agency, Air Mauritius, the Bank of China (Mauritius), the Mauritius Film Development Corporation, and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (Mauritius).

According to Statistics Mauritius, Mauritius has attained remarkable export growth to China, from Rs 86 million in 2011 to Rs 271 million in 2015. The main export products are from the agro and apparel sectors.

Following the participation of Mauritius at the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road International Expo, the Bank of China (Mauritius), which has recently launched its operations in Mauritius, has received 3 potential clients worth USD 1.3M; in the Textiles Sector, Soge International has received a trial order for a full container load of denim wastes; La Chartreuse has secured an official representative for its products (tea) in Guangdong; and Tour Operators have established their presence as they had been targeting the Chinese markets.

Sir Anerood Jugnauth spoke about the origin of Hindi in Mauritius and called for respect for our ancestors who came from India as Indentured labourers bringing along their religious, cultural and linguistic heritage which they preserved and handed over to us as legacy.

The Prime Minister underlined the several developments with regards Hindi in Mauritius with the setting up of the Hindi Speaking Union in 1994 to promote the Hindi language in its spoken and written forms. He further stressed that various facilities have been provided to promote friendship and understanding between the Hindi speaking peoples of the world and to engage in educational work designed to further this initiative.

He recalled the decision of the setting up of the World Hindi Secretariat in Mauritius which was raised at the First World Hindi Conference in Nagpur. He added that the foundation stone of the building was laid in 2015 during the visit of the Prime Minister of India, Mr Narendra Modi, and is expected to be ready for the Eleventh World Hindi Conference to be held in Mauritius in 2018.
National campaign on MauriGAP Standard 1:
A giant leap for the agriculture industry

A national campaign on MauriGAP Standard 1 – the basic standard for biofarming – was launched on 8 October 2016. This framework for good agricultural practices on horticultural local farms is adapted from international standards of good agricultural practices. Its main objective is to pave the way for the setting of the right and appropriate standard with respect to various agricultural practices.

In the first instance, MauriGAP has been introduced with its Level 1 (Basic) and Level 2 (Advanced) which will serve as steps towards Level 3 which corresponds to GLOBALGAP certification. Levels 2 and 3 will soon be introduced.

The introduction of MauriGap aims to curb the heavy reliance on pesticides and fertilizers which characterises agricultural practices in the Mauritian context. The target set is the production of no less than 50% of our total local food production according to bio-norms by 2020.

This initiative aims to develop suitable agricultural practices as well as promote sustainable agriculture which is an alternative approach that maximises the reliance on natural, renewable on-farm inputs while ensuring long-term environment protection, health benefits and economic viability.

The promotion of food safety and efficient and sustainable production practices/system is a priority for Government. To meet this vision of a green economy and ensuring safe food within a sustainable context, the following actions have been taken: motivating farmers to shift towards sustainable production systems; providing renewable biological alternatives to agro chemicals; improving efficiency in natural resource use; and implementing certification scheme for Green Agriculture/Bio-Farming.

MauriGAP: Role and significance

The Mauritius Standards Bureau has published in October 2015 a Mauritian Standard on ‘Specification for Good Agricultural Practices for Crop Production – MauriGAP – Part 1 – Basic requirements’. It establishes basic requirements for sustainable crop production, focusing on GAP for food safety, environmental stewardship and farmer/worker welfare. It applies to open and protected field cultivation as well as to hydroponics. It is used for inspection and certification purposes of the crop production process.

MauriGAP Standards cover efficient use of resources; adoption of environmentally sound practices for natural resources; biodiversity preservation; pre and postharvest best practices; workers’ health and safety; and agricultural waste recycling.
SSRN Hospital equipped with new Gastroenterology Department

A new Gastroenterology Department was inaugurated on 6 October 2016 at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam National (SSRN) Hospital in Pamplemousses. This development is in line with the vision of the Government to make of Mauritius a centre of excellence for medical services and medical tourism.

The new department represents a further step in ensuring that the public is offered quality care and the public health system is adequately resourced. The government is investing massively in state-of-the-art technology and equipment.

The new Gastroenterology Department is yet another important milestone in the health sector. It is equipped to make an early diagnosis of colorectal cancers, which can lead to improvement in treatment outcome. The new Department goes along the route that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages has mapped out.

The Endoscopy Unit

It was in 2007 that gastroenterology, the specialty that covers disorders of the digestive system, stomach, bowels, liver and pancreas, was introduced in Mauritius. The first Endoscopy Unit, which started at the SSRN Hospital, treated some 200 patients then.

Endoscopy is the examination of a body cavity using an endoscope, which is a flexible or rigid tube with a small camera and light, enabling gastroenterologists to view problems within the body without making large incisions. At present, the number of endoscopic procedures carried out every year at SSRN Hospital is about 2,500.

India Allocates Rs 12.7 Billion for Infrastructure Projects

Mauritius and India will open a new chapter of development following the allocation of Rs 12.7 billion by the Government of India for the implementation of infrastructure projects in Mauritius, scheduled in the 2016-2017 budget.

The Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Pravind Jugnauth, has expressed his appreciation with regard to the prompt response of India in disbursing funds for several development projects, following his recent visit to India from 13 to 18 September 2016.

Among the various projects:

- The Metro Express project as part of the traffic decongestion programme to the tune of some Rs 7.2 billion. A delegation from the Delhi Metro was in Mauritius on 24 and 25 October 2016 for further discussion on the project.
- Distribution of tablets in schools for Std I and II students for which an amount of Rs 500 million has been allocated. The project which also consists of a training component for teachers and other such facilities will cost some Rs 800 million.
- Construction of the new building for the Supreme Court of Mauritius for which an amount of Rs 1.1 billion has been earmarked. India is also providing assistance for the design of the building.
- Setting up of low-cost housing units in 2017 to the tune of some Rs 1.2 billion, of which Rs 700 million has been provided under the financial envelope from India.
- Construction of a new ENT hospital amounting to some Rs 586 million.
- New Headquarters of the National Coast Guard to be set up at Fort William.

As regards the Overseas Citizens of India card, discussions are ongoing with India to facilitate the procedures in view of enabling more people of Indian origin in Mauritius to be eligible for the OCI.
Three Deeds of Concession for fish farming off the lagoon of Old Grand Port have been allocated to Ferme Marine de Mahebourg. The company is a frontline local operator in the fish farming business.

The agreement was signed on 18 October 2016 at the Treasury Building in Port Louis during a meeting involving the Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the Minister of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Outer Islands, Mr Premdut Konjoo, and representatives of Ferme Marine de Mahebourg.

With the three new farm sites, located around Pointe Bambous and Jonchée Bar in the lagoon of Vieux Grand Port, the company is expecting its annual production to increase from 500 tonnes to 1,500 tonnes in the first phase and thereafter to 3,000 tonnes. The expansion project value is estimated at Rs 300 million. Some 110 employees are currently working in the company and an additional 20 to 25 employees will be recruited in the long run.

The Prime Minister claimed that the signing of the deed of concession represents a major step in promoting the development of the ocean economy by leveraging on the Exclusive Economic Zone. With the strong focus on activities which will fuel the development of the ocean economy, marine fish farming is expected to take centre stage in the near future, he said.

Sir Anerood said that the fish farming landscape is expected to considerably change in the near future with more operators coming into play. A number of operators, he explained, have already been granted letter of Intent by the Ministry of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Outer Islands for implementing marine aquaculture projects. The estimated project value of these aquaculture projects is around Rs 1.7 billion.

For his part, Minister Koonjoo said that the signing of the first deed of concession for aquaculture project would trigger structural reforms of the sector by encouraging both local and foreign operators to invest. He highlighted that industrial fish farming activities at the prescribed sites (20 in total) will contribute to the expansion of the sector while adding that the fishermen community would be allocated 11 additional sites for the development of small scale aquaculture.
Parliamentary Gender Caucus: Mainstreaming gender in policies and legislations

The setting up of a Parliamentary Gender Caucus at the National Assembly has reached an advanced stage with the formal framework expected to be in place by the end of the year, when the Caucus would be operational.

A two-day awareness programme on 11 and 12 October 2016 allowed members of the National Assembly and representatives of non-governmental organisations and the civil society to be updated on the issue.

The project was still at set-up phase in January 2016, whereby a model of the Caucus apt for the Mauritian context was being defined. The last step in the establishment of the Caucus will be the presentation of a motion by the Prime Minister for an amendment to the Standing Orders making provision for the Caucus. It is expected that the motion will be presented, and adopted by the House, by the end of 2016.

The objective of the Caucus is to bridge gender gaps and gender-based constraints by ensuring that equality issues are addressed and mainstreamed into policies, legislations and parliamentary processes. The project is benefiting from the support of the European Union and the US embassy.

As the initiator of the project, Ms Santi Bai Hanoomanjee, Speaker of the National Assembly, posits that the inclusion of the Gender Caucus in the Mauritian political architecture will mark the reinforcement of parliamentary democracy in its oversight role. It is also a strong statement of intent as to Government’s commitment as regards the gender issue, she says.

Gender equality has a catalytic effect on the achievement of inclusive and progressive human development and good governance. With that objective in mind, the establishment of the Caucus as a permanent structure in the National Assembly is deemed to be an innovative measure by the Government, in advancing parliamentary democracy and at the same time harnessing gender equality and sustainable development in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

The Gender Caucus

The 17-member Caucus, which will be established as a permanent structure in the National Assembly, will provide a platform for members of all political persuasion to deliberate on and advocate gender equality.

The Caucus will have an agenda to identify priorities that need to be addressed from a gender perspective and ensure that those issues become part of the discussions and debates in Parliament. To do so, regular meetings among its own members will be held along with roundtables, hearings and public events and training workshops.

It is to be noted that the Caucus will not have executive power, which rests with the Minister who is responsible to spearhead Government policy on gender matters. The Caucus will solely have strategic role in terms of supporting the development of legislation promoting gender and advocating policies and programmes for gender equality.
A training programme for graduates in engineering aimed to provide better matching skills for the unemployed youth to integrate the labour market has been launched by the government.

The Programme was officially launched on 27 October 2016 when a first batch of 30 received their placement letter. Graduates in Engineering, from the following fields: Civil, Mechanical, Electrical and Mechatronics, will undergo a pre-registration practical training that will run over a period of two years. The training will be carried out under the supervision of a Registered Engineer.

The Trainee Engineers will be paid a monthly stipend of Rs 23,975, plus travelling allowance. The trainees are expected to be in post by November 2016.

Initially open to 200 graduates, the training scheme is being extended to another batch of 200, given the demand, so as to extend the opportunities of internship to other applicants. By developing their necessary technical skills, the training will expand employment opportunities of the trainees in their corresponding field of expertise and ensure their employability.

Similarly, several training programmes such as Youth Employment Programme, the Back to Work Programme, and the Dual Training Programme have been deployed to address the unemployment among young graduates.

As a result of the various activities under Government’s training programmes, there is now a visible decrease in the rate of unemployment, which stands at 7.4% in the second quarter of 2016. (Source Statistics Mauritius)

Offshore wind energy was the focus of a half-day workshop organised on 26 October 2016 at Cyber Tower 1, Ebène Cybercity, at the initiative of the Mauritius Research Council (MRC) and the US Embassy in Mauritius.

The workshop was organised following the encouraging results yielded by the preliminary research on offshore wind in the waters of Mauritius. The objective was to add to the ongoing research for the effective development of the country’s marine renewable energy sector and help Mauritius assess offshore wind power based on the real-world experience of international companies.

The discussions are expected to help the country meet or exceed its target of 35% of electricity production from renewable energy sources by 2025.

From a presentation by a General Electric Renewable Energy industry expert, it came out that the country’s wind regime which stands at 100 metres is equal to about 350 watt of square metres, and that most regions around the island are above the average of the required 350 square metres. This would be enough to deliver a good quantity of offshore wind electricity to make it competitive. Three potential locations for exploitation of offshore wind have been identified, namely Flic en Flac, Mahebourg, and Rodrigues.

Offshore wind, apart from being a source for green electricity, has several advantages, namely: reduction of CO₂ emission, growth driver for the local economy with job, value and power creation, reinforcement of energy independence and less dependence on fossil fuel and imports, and, health improvement.

Offshore wind turbines are being used by a number of countries to harness the energy of strong, consistent winds that are found over the oceans. Offshore winds tend to blow harder and more uniformly than on land. The potential energy produced from wind is directly proportional to the cube of the wind speed. As a result, increased wind speeds of only a few miles per hour can produce a significantly larger amount of green electricity.
World Food Day

A national Agricultural Show spread over two week-ends marked World Food Day, observed annually on 16 October.

The first act was held at Domaine Les Pailles on 15 and 16 October 2016. This initiative of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security, was replicated at regional level on 22-23 October 2016 at Mahebourg Waterfront.

The theme of World Food Day 2016 was Climate is changing. Food and agriculture must too.

World Mental Health Day 2016: Advocating for change

A cultural programme at the Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre (BSMHCC) and a sales-exhibition to display the creativity of the patients of the Centre marked World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2016.

The objective was to raise awareness on mental health so as to better fight against stigma and taboo.

The programme comprised a sensitisation campaign on the issue of psychological and social first aid, and support to mental patients. The sensitisation efforts were capped by a Solidarity Walk from Rose Hill to the BSMHCC on 15 October 2016.

The theme chosen by the World Health Organization this year is “Dignity in Mental Health: Psychological and Mental Health First Aid for All”.

Housing

195 families benefit from Roof Slab Grant Scheme

Cheques were remitted on 14 October 2016 to 195 families under the Roof Slab Grant Scheme at a ceremony organised at Rabita Hall in Port Louis.

The Roof Slab Grant Scheme is managed by the National Housing Development Company Ltd and payment is effected upon approval from the Ministry of Housing and Lands. Grants of Rs 75 000 are offered to families earning a monthly income of up to Rs 10 000. As for families earning between Rs 10 000 and Rs 15 000 monthly, the grant is Rs 40 000. More than 60 000 families have benefited from the scheme since its inception in 1997, to the tune of Rs 3 billion.

It is recalled that the 2016-2017 Budget has earmarked some Rs 110 m for the Roof Slab Grant Scheme to enable families to complete the construction of their houses. Since July 2015, an amount of Rs 167 m has been disbursed under the scheme.

Furthermore, the National Housing Development Company will construct some 5 000 social housing units, based on the new integrated approach being implemented, for beneficiary families. The size of the new housing units will now be 50 m² instead of 39 m², with individual yard and equipped with the required amenities. Also, the housing estates will comprise a children's playground and a petanque court.

All these measures are in line with Government’s commitment to cater for the vulnerable groups by ensuring that they have access to adequate decent housing so that they live with dignity.