PM calls for renewed commitment and action in the fight against drugs

Government is urging for a collective effort towards a Mauritius that is free of drug abuse and will show no mercy towards drug dealers. Every sector of society must work with Government to fight drug abuse and promote a safer future for our children.

The statement was made by the Prime Minister, Mr Pravind Kumar Jugnauth at the launching of the programme on Prevention Nationale pour Maladies Non-Transmissibles in Upper Dagotière on 7 April 2017 in the context of the World Health Day. He stressed that Government will leave no stone unturned in the fight against the drug scourge and that all means will be deployed to get rid of this social evil.

According to 2015 statistics, the prevalence of diabetes stood at 20.5% among people aged 20 to 70 years old and the prevalence of hypertension was 28.4%. He deplored the fact that while 54.2% of the population was overweight, only 23.7% undertook physical activity.

Speaking about the high rate of alcohol consumption and the prevalence of smoking which were at 52.8% and 20% respectively, Mr Jugnauth stated that it was unacceptable that 83% of the Rs 10.9 b health budget go to hospital services, out of which 75% were for treatment of NCDs. He also highlighted the importance of education and information in promoting healthy lifestyle and preventing NCDs.
National Minimum Wage to be implemented in January 2018

The National Minimum Wage (NMW) will be introduced in January 2018. Proposed by the National Wage Consultative Council (NWCC), the NMW aims to providing a decent salary to workers of both the public and private sector. The final recommendations of the NWCC will be presented by the end of 2017.

The NMW will be calculated on a proportion of domestic median wage, the same method as adopted by all countries having a national minimum wage and will cater for three categories of workers, namely: full-time workers and part-time workers; young persons aged 16 and 17; and apprentices.

According to Statistics Mauritius, there are currently around 400 000 full-time employees among whom 20 000 are earning less than Rs 3 500, 40 000 less than Rs 5 000 and some 100 000 less than Rs 8 000, respectively.

The objective of the NMW is to protect workers at the lower rung of the social ladder so as to improve their standard of living and to enable them lead a decent living. It also aims at protecting low-paid workers against exploitation without causing job losses.

The NWCC was set up in a bid to make recommendations in regard to the introduction of the minimum wage such as, evaluating pay structures and pay differentials which will be reviewed in 2020 and consequently, every 5 years.

It will also take into consideration its impact on wealth and income distribution, wage ratio, employment, inflation, competitiveness and economic growth, for the benefit of one and all.

It comprises seven members of any worker’s organisation representing workers employed in the private sector and seven members of any worker’s organisation representing employers, seven members employed in the public sector, two members representing consumers, two academicians, a representative from the Pay Research Bureau, a member from the National Remuneration Board, a member from Statistics Mauritius and an Executive Director.

Relaunching of livestock sector

Government is envisaging to relaunch the livestock sector. In this context, the recommendations made by the Ministerial Committee set up to propel the livestock sector will be implemented.

The measures recommended include:

(a) consultancy services for the elaboration of a Biosecurity Plan;

(b) upgrading of Richelieu Quarantine Station to accommodate animals imported for slaughtering;

(c) setting up of new Quarantine Stations for cattle, pig, and turkey; a heifer and a sheep farm; and a livestock zone;

(d) relocation of pig breeders to specific regions; and

(e) setting up of an Animal Health Laboratory in Rodrigues for the conduct of tests to detect diseases.
Stakeholders deliberate on Cooperatives Act 2016 during a one-day workshop held on 13 April 2017 at La Cannelle in Domaine Les Pailles.

This initiative of the Ministry of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives aimed to give participants the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the contents of the legislation so as to ensure proper implementation of the Cooperatives Act, before its proclamation and subsequent enforcement.

Government, in its Programme 2015-2019, reckons the importance of the cooperative sector and endeavours to further strengthen the cooperative movement by providing the appropriate legal, fiscal and policy support. The new legislation will replace the Cooperative Act 2005 where various loopholes and practical impediments have been found during its implementation and enforcement.

The new Cooperatives Act encompasses new concepts such as Corporate Governance and Code of Ethics and best practices. Another element in the Act aiming towards modernisation of the sector is the provision for e-registration of cooperative societies and submission of financial statement online.

It is expected that the new Cooperatives Act 2016 will lead the Mauritian Cooperative Movement towards the following: creation of jobs in existing and emerging sectors; empowerment of women and the youth through cooperative entrepreneurship business models; promotion of good governance and ease of doing business; fostering accountability, control and transparency as well as combating suspicious and fraudulent transactions; and professionalising the operations of cooperative societies, amongst others.

The Cooperative Act 2016

The main objective is to promote the development of sustainable cooperatives, equity and participation, as well as good governance and transparency.

The salient features are:
- Setting up of a Cooperative Audit Unit
- Establishment of a National Cooperative College
- Liability of directors
- Joint venture
- Computerisation
- Good governance
- Anti-money laundering and combatting financing of terrorism

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Following the third round of negotiations for the renewal of the fisheries partnership held during the last week of April 2017, the European Union (EU) and Mauritius have reached a provisional agreement on a new Protocol for Sustainable Fisheries that opens a new era in the relations between the EU and Mauritius. The protocol makes provision for a global budget of some Rs 150 million spanning over 4 years.

The EU and Mauritius will ensure regular joint monitoring of catch data using up-to-date technologies. These fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance methods, which are also applied to other domestic and foreign fleets, will eventually deter illicit unreported and unregulated fishing activities.

Moreover, good fisheries governance and the sustainable development of the sector will continue to be supported through sectorial support on behalf of the EU, but specific support will now be given to cooperation for sustainable exploitation of the sector and the development of the blue economy.

As soon as the new protocol is implemented, the European fleet will be authorised to carry out its fishing activities in Mauritian waters.

Moreover, Mauritian authorities will receive in real time the satellite positions of European vessels operating in its waters. The electronic catch reporting system will be automatically transmitted to the Albion Fisheries Monitoring Center in the near future.

The New Protocol

This protocol, which will be effective by the end of 2017, includes a contribution from the EU and ship owners. Part of the Rs 150 million will be allocated to support the Mauritian fisheries sector, in addition of a specific contribution earmarked to promote the development of the blue economy.
First Session of Mauritius-Comoros Joint Permanent Commission

The first session of the Joint Permanent Commission Mauritius-Comoros at Ministerial level was held on 26 April in Réduit. It was co-chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Mr Seetanah Lutchmeenaraidoo, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Union of Comoros, Mr Mohamed Bacar Dossar.

Within the Joint Permanent Commission, Mauritius and Comoros have established a series of joint projects based on South-South cooperation in mutual respect and in a win-win situation.

Projects include extending a proposal for Comoros to join Mauritius within the Economic Partnership Agreement configuration; exchange of information (covering piracy, illegal fishing and drug trafficking as well as disaster management; and blue economy.

Several other fields of cooperation have been examined, within the scope of the joint commission, to advance Mauritius-Comoros ties in terms of trade exchanges; cross-border investment; fisheries; health; tourism; and maritime security.

The Mauritius-Comoros Joint Permanent Commission is in line with the strategy of opening markets to the region and mainland Africa.

The Africa strategy forms part of the three main pillars of the new economic architecture and thus constitutes a major focus for the new economic diplomacy.
A training session in the context of the Regional Programme for the Promotion of Maritime Security (MASE) designed to enhance maritime security in the Eastern and Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region (ESA-IO), was held from 18 to 22 April 2017 at the Prison Training School in Beau Bassin.

This initiative of the East African Community (EAC) saw the participation of around 40 heads from correctional services of the ESA-IO namely Burundi, Kenya, Mauritius, Tanzania, Rwanda, South Sudan, Somalia, Seychelles, and Uganda.

The workshop enabled the participants to exchange views as regards best practices on the management of prisons. Problems and issues facing prisons as well as corrective measures were on the agenda.

The training coincided with the 6th Meeting of the EAC Prisons and Correctional Services Chiefs and the 2nd Meeting of the ESA-IO Prisons and Correctional Services Chiefs. This is in line with the resolution of the 1st ESA-IO Prisons and Correctional Services Chiefs Meeting held in Mombasa on 20 May 2015 where Mauritius offered to host the two meetings.

The MASE Programme aims at promoting maritime security and safety in the Western Indian Ocean. Coordinated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), it comprises five result areas implemented by ESA-IO regional organisations:

Result 1 – Alternative livelihoods through vocational development initiatives and advocacy against piracy are supported; maritime coordination mechanisms are reinforced in Somalia;

Result 2 – National and regional legal, legislative and infrastructural capabilities for arrest, transfer, detention and prosecution of pirates are developed and strengthened;

Result 3 – Regional capacity to disrupt the financial networks of pirate leaders and their financier while also addressing the structural vulnerability factors and minimise the economic impact of piracy is strengthened;

Result 4 – National and regional capacity for maritime tasks and support functions are enhanced; and

Result 5 – A regional mechanism for coordination and exchange of information is developed.
Mauritius and the Kingdom of Swaziland signed a Memorandum of Understanding and initialled a Bilateral Air Services Agreement (BASA) on 19 April 2017 at the Prime Minister’s Office in Port Louis.

The signatories were the Solicitor-General, Mr D. K. Dabee, for the Mauritian side and the Director General of Swaziland Civil Aviation Authority, Mr Solomon Dube, for the Swazi side.

The Agreement provides for multiple designation of airlines by each country and seven weekly frequencies to be operated by the designated airlines of each Party. Air Mauritius will also be able to exercise fifth freedom traffic rights at a number of intermediate and beyond points on routes specified in the Agreement. Both countries may operate all cargo services between and beyond the territory of the Contracting Parties without any capacity and frequency restrictions with full third, fourth and fifth freedom traffic rights.

It is expected that the new air services agreement will give a boost to passenger traffic between the two countries and will be beneficial for cross border collaboration, as well as enhance Swaziland investment opportunities in Mauritius.

The BASA is also important for the air transport sector’s contribution to the economic and social development of both countries.

The signature of the Agreement is a follow-up of a visit in February 2016 of a delegation from Swaziland, led by the Minister of Transport of the Government of the Kingdom Swaziland, to Mauritius. During the visit, it was agreed to review and modernise the existing Air Services Agreement.

Air Services between Mauritius and the Kingdom of Swaziland have so far been governed by the framework of an Agreed Record and a BASA concluded in May 1977. The Agreement provides, amongst others, for single designation of airline and one weekly frequency to be operated by the designated airline of each Contracting Party.

Air Mauritius has also successfully managed to strike a commercial agreement and partnership with Singapore Airlines this year that gives a new impetus to the air corridor and makes travel beyond Singapore to Asian countries more economical. In this context, Swaziland has been invited to join the air corridor to bring new synergies and further strengthen this project.

In the late 70’s and early 80’s Royal Swazi National Airways operated direct air services between Mauritius and Swaziland. However, it ceased its services to Mauritius in 1981. In the absence of direct air links between Mauritius and Swaziland, passengers travel through the Johannesburg gateway. In 2016, tourist arrivals from Swaziland stood at 370.

The Singapore-Mauritius-Africa Air Transport Corridor project

In line with Vision 2030, the Government of Mauritius is implementing a more open and robust air access policy that takes into account both the national interest and economic growth. In this perspective, a collaboration agreement was signed between Air Mauritius and Changi Airport Group in Singapore.

The creation of this air corridor, which became operational in March 2016, serves as a link between Africa and Asia via Mauritius. As part of this initiative, Air Mauritius has expanded its network into Africa with two new destinations, namely, Maputo and Dar-es-Salaam.

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Five Mauritians and eighteen young Zambians received, on 27 April 2017, in Port Louis, certificates following their participation in an International Award Exchange which was organised in the context of the Duke of Edinburgh’s International Award programme.

The Minister of Youth and Sports, Mr Stephan Toussaint, presented certificates to young people aged between 17 and 19 years.

The International Award Exchange was an opportunity for Zambian and Mauritian youth to complete their Adventurous Journey section under the Duke of Edinburgh’s International Award programme. Participants undertook an expedition with a defined purpose in an unfamiliar environment at Pétrin and Alexander Falls from 19 to 22 April 2017.

An international Zambian-Mauritian night was also held at Pointe Jérôme Youth Training Centre on 27 April 2017.

International Award Exchanges are organised on a regular basis to facilitate young people interact and share experience among their peers.

Under this exchange programme, young participants from Rodrigues, Slovenia and Kenya were in Mauritius last year. For 2017, a delegation from Mauritius is expected to undertake a journey to Malaysia.

**Duke of Edinburgh International Award**

The International Award is a challenging self-development programme which is offered by the Ministry of Youth and Sports to young Mauritians aged between 14 to 24 years for more than 50 years now.

It presents to young people a balanced, non-competitive programme of voluntary activities which encourages personal discovery and growth, self-reliance, perseverance, responsibility towards themselves and service to the community.

The Award concept - with three level bronze, silver award and gold - is one of individual challenge.

**Workshop focuses on protective measures for PSSAs**

Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs) was the focus of a three-day sub-regional workshop held on 11 April 2017 in Ebene.

The workshop, a joint initiative of the Ministry of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), aimed at establishing protective measures for PSSAs tailored to prevent, reduce, and eliminate the risk of damage from international shipping activities.

Some 20 participants from Comoros, Seychelles, Reunion Island and Madagascar along with some 20 local participants from different Ministries and the National Coast Guard attended the workshop.

The overall objective was to assist participants in initiating a PSSA assessment process, taking into consideration the IMO’s associated protective measures that could be implemented under proposed PSSAs.
Mauritius is acceding to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

The Protocol covers, inter alia, the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, protection of women from violence, exploitation of women, protection against harmful practices, access to judicial and legal services including legal aid, equal access to education, training and employment, the rights of women to health, food security and adequate housing, rights of widows, and special protection of elderly women and women with disabilities.

**Water Tank Grant Scheme: Procedures have been simplified**

The procedures and criteria of application for the grant to purchase a water tank, under the Water Tank Grant Scheme, have been simplified, so as to encourage more people to take advantage of this Scheme.

As from now, applicants will no longer be required to swear an affidavit to certify their household income, and the Basic Retirement Pension will not be included in the computation of the gross household income.

Moreover, applicants in the Social Register of Mauritius, who will be automatically eligible for the grant, will not have to produce any documentary evidence of their household income.

Application forms will be available at the Customer Service Offices of the Central Water Authority, the Citizens Advice Bureaux, and the Social Security Offices, as well as online.

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**Award Ceremony held for Mauritius Heritage Short Film Competition**

The first Mauritius Heritage Short Film Competition award ceremony was held on 19 April 2017 at the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre in Bell Village. The ceremony was organised by the National Heritage Fund (NHF) and the Mauritius Film Development Corporation (MFDC), in the context of activities marking the International Day for Monuments and Sites 2017, observed on 18 April.

The theme for 2017 ‘Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Tourism’ was chosen both in relation to the United Nations International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The competition offers an opportunity for local communities and individuals to consider the importance of cultural heritages in their lives, as well as promote awareness of its diversity and vulnerability. It also aims to encourage people to double the efforts required to protect and preserve them.

There were 25 entries for this competition and the five winners of the competition are:

First Prize: Mareemootoo Corvilen - Le Pont Mysterieux

Second Prize: Boyroo Ajmal - My Ancestors

Third Prize: Ramjeeawon Ashesh - The Legend of Maheshwarnath Mandir

Fourth Prize: Ramrooch Krishnaduth - Tour Martello

Fifth Prize: Nunkoo Varun - La maison St Aubain

Mauritius is acceding to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.
A regional training workshop on Coastline Mapping using Satellite Imagery was held from 17-21 April 2017 at the Mauritius Oceanography Institute (MOI) in Albion.

The objective of the five-day workshop was to provide technical staff with the theoretical principles and practical exercises for using satellite imagery to perform coastline mapping in the framework of the Monitoring for Environment and Security in Africa (MESA) Project.

Some 20 participants from Comoros, Seychelles, and Madagascar along with local stakeholders attending the workshop which was organised by the MOI in collaboration with the Ministry of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC).

This initiative of the MOI forms part of the capacity building activities of the MESA Project, funded by the European Union. It utilises Earth Observation and satellite technologies to generate products and information services for sustainable environmental management.

Currently, it is offering products and operational services to African users in areas such as: agricultural production; monitoring and assessment of droughts and floods; climate services for disaster risk reduction; coastal and marine resources management; and water resources management, amongst others.

Stamp Issue Programme for the year 2017 has been made public.

Postage stamps would be issued depicting the following:

(a) the Chagos Archipelago and the Islets of the Republic of Mauritius;
(b) the 250 years of the Mauritius Police Force;
(c) the 50th Anniversary of the Bank of Mauritius;
(d) the 100 years of late Serge Constantin (1917-2017);
(e) the Tai Biou Pagoda, also known as Kwan Tee Pagoda, the oldest Pagoda in the Southern Hemisphere;
(f) the Lions International Centennial Anniversary, and Lions 50-Year of Presence in Mauritius; and
(g) sea shells of the Republic of Mauritius.