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Metro Express Project sets to transform the way we commute

"With the Metro Express, we are indeed bringing about a conspicuous transformation in the way people will commute from one place to another, and we are redefining and modernising significantly our public transport system," stated the Prime Minister, Mr Pravind Jugnauth, at the official launching of the Metro Express Project on Friday 10 March 2017 at the Old Train Station in Caudan, Port Louis. The ceremony was marked by the unveiling of a Commemorative Plaque by the Prime Minister, in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Energy and Public Utilities, Mr Ivan Collendavelloo; the Minister Mentor, Minister of Defence, Minister for Rodrigues, Sir Anerood Jugnauth; the Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport, Mr Nandcoomar Bodha; the High Commissioner of India to Mauritius, Mr. Abhay Thakur, and other personalities.

"The Metro Express is not just another infrastructure investment, but it is a game changer in a wider development perspective," stated the Prime Minister at the launching ceremony. Highlighting the overwhelming pressure on the existing transport system and serious constraint posed by traffic jams on commuters, the environment...
and the Nation’s productivity, Mr Jugnauth said that it is estimated that traffic congestion is costing the country Rs 4 billion every year and, that this annual cost is projected to more than double to reach some Rs 10 billion by 2030. “Our country, as a small island, is far reaching its limits in terms of accommodating new road networks,” stressed the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister also allayed any apprehensions about job losses amongst bus employees. He gave the assurance that there will be full consultations with stakeholders concerned in this sector, particularly with bus employees, bus owners and bus companies with a view to coming up with win-win solutions.

In addition, the Metro Express Project is expected to generate net job creation in the transportation sector itself. It is moreover estimated that in its construction phase, the Metro Express Project will create around 7,000 full time equivalent jobs and contribute to Rs 13 billion to National Output.

“We are expecting even greater economic and social spin-offs as it will be a safer and environmentally cleaner mode of transportation,” emphasised the Prime Minister.

For his part, the Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport highlighted that the introduction of a new mass transit system with its network of Urban Terminals will be the main thrust of the strategy pertaining to building the infrastructure that fits the future.

“As part of Government’s plan for urban and rural regeneration, the Metro Express will totally redesign towns, create new growth poles around the terminals, drastically reduce the commuting time for citizens, raise productivity, eliminate the inconvenience of traffic congestion, save on petroleum import bills and significantly cut down pollution,” he said.

Underscoring the tremendous impact the project will have on the daily lives of all Mauritians, Mr Bodha stated that Government will do the utmost best to mitigate the adverse effect and appealed to the general public for their cooperation and collaboration.

An agreement between M/s RITES, an Indian Public Sector Undertaking, and the Government of Mauritius, appointing M/s RITES as Consultant for the Metro Express Project, was signed on 10 March 2017 in Port Louis to that effect.

The remaining financing will be raised either from local financing institutions and/or line of credit from India and/or from development partners, on the basis of terms and conditions which are most favourable for the Project.

The Singapore Cooperation Enterprise has already completed the Reference Design and the detailed design will be made by the Selected Design and Built Contractor.

The implementation of the Metro Project will comprise several main phases, namely:

1) Civil works;
2) Laying of Rails;
3) Electrical Work and Electronic works;
4) Rolling stock which is the final phase of construction with the purchase of Rolling stock which is all the engines and carriages that are used on a railway; and
5) The full integrated system for the proper running of the metro.

The Government of Mauritius has set up Metro Express Limited, a company to implement the project. The Metro Express Project will be based on an affordable budget to the Government and an affordable fare to the traveller.

The Metro Express Project will have a main line of 26 km in length from Ian Palach in Curepipe to Immigration Square in Port Louis and comprise 19 stations, including five interchanges at Urban Terminals. Each station will be a cluster of economic activity and will have significant spill over on its surroundings and provide cost opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operators.

The Project is financed partly by a grant of US$ 275 million from the Government of India. One of the condition of the grant from the Government of India is that it is mandatory that the Design and Built Contractor be selected from Indian Firms.
The official ceremony marking the 49th anniversary of Independence and 25th anniversary of the Republic of Mauritius was held on 12 March 2017 at the Champ de Mars, in Port Louis.

The Chief Guest for the occasion was the Vice-President of the Republic of Ghana, Dr Mahamudu Bawumia.

The theme chosen for this year’s celebrations was ‘Lame dan lame’. The official programme of activities comprised the flag raising ceremony; parades and défilés by the Police Force and non-governmental organisations and an artistic technological show with state-of-the-art sound and light effects, video projections, and synchronised pyrotechnics.

The Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, External Communications and National Development Unit and Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, in his message to the population on the occasion of the National Day 2017 shared his vision to make of the Republic of Mauritius a rainbow and an inclusive nation.

According to him, this would mean staying in a country where all the different ethnic groups work peacefully, hand in hand, where all people are treated similarly, unhampered by artificial barriers or prejudices or preferences, and live in a healthy manner in a clean environment, and where women are treated with respect and dignity.

The Prime Minister also spoke about the importance for an equilibrium between economic objectives and social objectives. ‘When our economy is progressing, everyone should benefit. This is the condition for social peace. My dream is that everyone should realise that the fight against poverty is not only economical. It warrants a change in our mentality’, he said.

He urged the younger generation to seek leisure activities which will help them grow in a healthy manner. Make full use of the opportunities in education, sports, culture and other sectors which are being made available, he pointed out.

As regards Mauritius’ economy, Mr Jugnauth observed that economic indicators show that the country has been progressing since last year, and he underscored the need for added efforts to sustain this economic growth.
During his three-day State Visit, the Vice-President of the Republic of Ghana, Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, paid a courtesy call on the President of the Republic of Mauritius, Dr Ameenah Gurib-Fakim at the State House, Le Réduit. He was invited for a tête-à-tête and a working session with Prime Minister Jugnauth on 11 March 2017 at the New Treasury Building, Port Louis. These meetings were followed by a joint press conference during which a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) and the agreed minutes of proceedings were signed.

Dr Mahamudu Bawumia then visited the Aapravasi Ghat UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as the African Leadership University in Beau Plan, Pamplemousses, where he met the Ghanaian community in Mauritius.

The programme of visit included courtesy calls on the Vice-President by the Chief Justice of Mauritius, the Speaker of the National Assembly, and the Leader of the Opposition.

Dr Mahamudu Bawumia also attended a State Banquet hosted in his honour by the Prime Minister.

On Sunday 12 March 2017, a breakfast business meeting was scheduled with stakeholders of the public and private sectors. The Vice-President of Ghana then visited the Le Morne Cultural Landscape and UNESCO World Heritage Site after which he attended a lunch hosted by President Gurib-Fakim at the State House. Later in the evening, the Vice-President attended the National Day celebrations at the Champ de Mars in Port Louis.

**The Press Conference**

At the joint press conference on 11 March 2017, Prime Minister Jugnauth underlined the importance of the visit of the Ghanaian delegation to Mauritius. According to him, the visit reflects the vision of the new economic and diplomatic stands of the Government towards the materialisation of various projects for employment creation and of reinforcing economic ties.

The Prime Minister observed that it is in this perspective that the first meeting of the Mauritius-Ghana Permanent Joint Commission was co-chaired on 10 March 2017 by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of both countries. The meeting endorsed accelerating project implementation between Mauritius and Ghana.

The Prime Minister expressed gratitude to the President and the People of Ghana for their unflinching support to Mauritius on the Chagos Archipelago issue. He also lauded the signing of the DTAA which he said is another landmark into cementing the ties between Mauritius and Ghana.

For his part, Vice-President Bawumia expressed appreciation regarding the fruitful discussions with the Prime Minister concerning the agreed instruments under the Mauritius-Ghana Permanent Joint Commission in the various economic sectors and the DTAA.

Dr Bawumia emphasised the need to foster further South-South cooperation and referred to the Mauritian and Ghanaian collaboration as example. He expressed appreciation to Mauritius for supporting the position of Ghana as an International Financial Services Centre in West Africa in addition to the scholarships opportunities offered to Ghanaian students to study in Mauritius.

Moreover, the Vice-President of Ghana reiterated his full support to Mauritius on the Chagos Archipelago issue.
The DTAA will help eliminate double taxation which is a barrier to economic activities as well as remove major impediments to bilateral trade and investment between the two countries. It will also create a conducive business environment for investors willing to engage in larger cross-border activities.

As for the agreed minutes of proceedings of the Mauritius-Ghana Permanent Joint Commission, it represents another milestone into strengthening the relations between Mauritius and Ghana under which several instruments to sustain the economic cooperation between the two countries will be devised.

• amendments being brought to the Framework Agreement for the establishment of the Special Economic Zone in Dawa, Ghana;

• collaboration between the Utility Regulatory Authority of Mauritius and the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission of Ghana;

• collaboration in the development of a Slave Museum and new areas, such as e-Government, handicraft, water, health, arts and culture, financial services and sugar production.

The Inaugural Meeting of the Mauritius-Ghana Permanent Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation was held on 10 March 2017 at the Shandrani Resort and Spa, Blue Bay. Both countries have agreed, among others, to:

President Gurib-Fakim meeting Dr Bawumia
Prime Minister Jugnauth and Dr Bawumia at the joint press conference
Cultural Show on 12 March 2017 at Champs de Mars
Officers of the Mauritius Police Force for the National Day Celebrations at Champs de Mars
The Parliamentary Gender Caucus, a body that will review policies and legislation from a gender perspective at parliamentary level of the National Assembly, was launched on 20 March 2017 by the Speaker of the National Assembly, Mrs Santi Bai Hanoomanjee, at the Receptorium of the National Assembly in Port Louis.

The 17-member Caucus has been established as a permanent structure in the National Assembly, and will provide a platform for Members of all political persuasion to deliberate on, and advocate for gender equality. The Caucus aims at ensuring that gender equality issues are addressed, mainstreamed into polices, legislation and parliamentary processes.

Several personalities graced the launching ceremony. Ministers and Members of Parliament were joined by the chief guest for the occasion, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Mr Akbar Khan.

Elaborating on the cross-party nature of the Caucus, the Speaker stated that it will not only contribute to all Parliamentarians pulling their efforts together for gender parity, but also help in easily detecting constraints and obstacles in different spheres. According to Mrs Hanoomanjee, the incorporation of the Caucus in the Standing Orders as a Permanent Committee will ensure its perenniality.

In her speech, the Speaker of the National Assembly stressed that gender equality will be achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society including economic participation and decision making, and when the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured. “The official launching of the Parliamentary Gender Caucus thus heralds a new chapter in the history of parliamentary democracy in Mauritius,” pointed out Mrs Hanoomanjee.

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The Speaker also commended party leaders and their members for their collaboration and positive response to the initiative.

For his part, the Secretary-General of the CPA said that the establishment of a concrete gender caucus will assist in bringing a change and a fairer society in Mauritius. The pivotal role that gender caucus can play in ensuring that legislation is gender sensitive and that legislation that advocates for gender equality is introduced in Parliament was also highlighted.

Underscoring the importance of Parliament as an independent institution, sitting at the centre of a web of accountability, that reaches into the Executive and the other branches of Government to the public and to political parties, Mr Khan is of the view that Parliament is very well placed to set an example and to lead changes by marrying gender equality and inclusion of all sections of society. “It not only ensures participation but it also ensures, at a time when there is considerable concern about the trust deficit in Parliament, that essential legitimacy and public confidence that are necessary in democratic institutions,” said the Secretary General of the CPA.
A National Energy Saving Awareness Campaign targeting residential customers was launched on 7 March 2017 at New Eton College in Rose Hill.

It aims at promoting the use of energy efficient appliances as well as raising consciousness of energy users to avoid energy wastage so as to contribute in the combat of climate change through the mitigation of greenhouse gas emission.

The campaign is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, the Energy Efficiency Management Office, and the Central Electricity Board (CEB). For this campaign, a new strategy has been developed where school students have been identified as a potential medium for disseminating energy related information to the public. They would act as ambassadors for conveying the useful message to their parents.

The campaign will also provide an opportunity for educating future generations on the need for a behavioral change in order to address the challenges of this dynamic world.

As part of this national campaign, Energy Saving Guidebooks, DVDs and Quiz questionnaires will be distributed to primary and secondary school students of Mauritius and Rodrigues. Residential customers will have to answer the questionnaire and deposit same at the nearest CEB Customer Service or they can fill it online.

If all the questions are answered correctly, residential customers will stand a chance to win a lucky draw of 50% reduction on their electricity bill for a period of six months. The number of winners for Mauritius is 200 and 20 for Rodrigues. The deadline for submitting the questionnaire is 31 May 2017.

The CEB has recently launched a solar energy production programme in a bid to encourage households and other buildings to reduce their electricity bill by producing their own power.

Around 10,000 houses from vulnerable groups will soon benefit from free energy production units. Other measures to encourage energy saving include: energy labelling of electrical appliances, training of 42 energy auditors, and energy audits on Government buildings.

A total of 24 newly recruited Fisheries Protection Officers (FPO) have joined the ranks of the Fisheries Protection Service since July last year.

To that end, a Passing out Parade for these new recruits was held on 4 March 2017 at the Police Training School in Beau Bassin.

The FPOs have been trained over a period of five weeks at the Police Training School in subjects such as officer safety, arrest, ethical and legal conduct, use of force, human rights, team building, Public Officers Protection Act, trafficking in persons, court procedures, awareness of illicit drugs, fisheries and marine resources laws, offences under the Fisheries Act, and drill, among others.

The 24 FPOs have already completed a two-week training programme last year at the Fisheries Training and Extension Center in Pointe aux Sables in order to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their duties effectively.
The 31st edition of the National Sports Awards, which aims at bestowing recognition to those athletes, coaches and teams who have achieved excellence in sports, was held on Friday 3 March 2017 at the Ravenala Attitude Hotel in Balaclava. The Award for Sportsman of the Year and Sportswoman of the Year 2016 was presented respectively to Lambert Leclézio (Equestrian Vaulting) and Kate Foo Kune (Badminton).

Both athletes were awarded a cash prize of Rs 100,000 each during a ceremony which was attended by the Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, External Communications and National Development Unit and Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Pravind Kumar Jugnauth; the Minister of Youth and Sports, Mr Stephan Toussaint, and other personalities.

The National Sports Awards was organised by the Mauritius Sports Council (MSC) in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The Hall of Fame for 2016 Awards

Junior Sportsman – Anthony Madanamoothoo (Weightlifting)
Junior Sportswoman - Amélie Boy (Tennis)
Most Promising Sportsman – Christopher Fok (Tennis)
Most Promising Sportswoman – Ketty Lent (Weightlifting)
Coach of the Year ‘Individual Sports’ – Idriss Suffraz (Swimming)
Coach of the Year ‘Collective Sports’ – Reza Itoola (Beach Volley)
Team of the Year ‘Individual Sports’ – Women’s Team (Badminton)
Team of the Year ‘Collective Sports’ - Women’s Team (Beach Volley)

The First Award

The first National Sports Award was organised by the MSC on 17 December 1986. For the first time in the history of sports in Mauritius, a committee, set up by the Mauritius Sports Council, elected the best athletes under 18 as well as the best sportsman and sportswoman of the year 1986. It also elected the sports leader that has contributed the most in the promotion of sports during the year.

In 1987, the MSC introduced the Sport Journalist Award and the Sport photographer Award.
International Women’s Day, observed annually on 8 March, celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievement of women. It is also an opportune moment to reflect and develop strategies and actions plan to address gender gaps and accelerate gender parity. The theme retained by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare this year is ‘Working towards a Gender Inclusive Society’, highlighting the need for a more gender equal world.

In this context, an official function was held on 08 March 2017 at the Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre in Paillès. In parallel, a series of activities were organised in context of the International Women's Day 2017 that were all geared towards engaging women of all categories in the fight for gender equality.

On this occasion, the Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, External Communications and National Development Unit and Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Pravind Jugnauth underlined the ongoing and relentless fight of women in their struggle for equality and stressed on the importance of rallying the young generation so that they continue to advance the gender cause started by the previous generation. He recalled the acts of courage and struggle for equality that had started with social activist Anjalay Coopen.

According to him, the empowerment of women will occur only in a fair and respectable society while adding that a culture of gender equality should be ingrained in the society. A culture of equality should be inculcated to the youths of today who are the backbone of the society, added the Prime Minister. The revolution of the education sector, through the Nine-Year Schooling will chart the way forward for this change of mindset, underscored the Minister. Forging a way towards fair and just society and raising a generation with the right values remain high on Government's agenda and Government remains responsive to the need of bridging gender gaps at all level in the society, stressed the Prime Minister.

For her part, the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, recalled the need for each woman to be an agent of change and for them to carry on the fight for gender equality beyond that symbolical day. She reiterated that a change in mindset and putting boys and girls on equal footing will drive the fight for equality and root out gender discrimination.

Regarding Government's initiatives, a new series of measures will be undertaken, such as a Regional Centre of Excellence for equality, emergency hotlines for abused women and Extension of training provided in the 15 Women Centres to social and community centres across the island to enable a larger number of women to participate in skills and knowledge development programme.
A grant amounting to Rs 115 million has been allocated to the Government by the European Union (EU) to support climate smart agriculture in the Republic of Mauritius. In this context, an agreement under the Global Climate Change Alliance Plus (GCCA+) Flagship Initiative was signed between Mauritius and the EU on 10 March 2017, in Port Louis.

The GCCA was established by EU in 2007 to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with developing countries, in particular least developed countries and Small Island Developing States.

The Alliance helps to ensure that these countries, in particular the most vulnerable ones to climate change, increase their capacities to adapt to the effects of climate change. The objective of the climate smart agriculture project is in line with Government’s vision to promote bio-farming and reduce the use of pesticides, as well as increase the resilience of the non-sugar agriculture sector to climate change and contribute to sustainable livelihood.

The project is expected to achieve an improved capacity of relevant institutions to promote climate smart agriculture and create awareness on the need to reduce the use of agro-chemicals. Consequently, it will also promote innovative irrigation techniques and farming practices. The funding will be geared towards activities pertaining to the adoption of climate smart agricultural and disaster risk reduction practices by small planters.

The financing also entails interventions to improve water accessibility to small planters and a boost in the production of quality products free from diseases which will have a positive impact on the revenue of small planters.