Mauritius hosts 11th World Hindi Conference

The 11th World Hindi Conference (WHC) “Vishwa Hindi Sammelan 2018” was held in Mauritius from 18 to 20 August 2018, at the Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre, in Pailles.

The Prime Minister, Mr Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, the Minister of External Affairs of the Republic of India, Mrs Sushma Swaraj, and other eminent personalities were present for the opening ceremony.

The conference was attended by an important official delegation from India comprising Ministers, Governors and Ministers of State as well as eminent academics and Hindi scholars and lovers from across all countries of the Indian Diaspora. This year’s theme was ‘Hindi Vishva Aur Bhaaratiya Sanskriti’.
In his address at the opening ceremony, Mr Jugnauth underpinned the WHC as a unique platform to reaffirm the commitment to further develop Hindi and expand its global reach. According to him, the main theme of the conference must be subject for reflections that will chart the way forward for an effective use of Hindi in preserving and transmitting the great Indian culture.

The Prime Minister emphasised that Indian languages, especially Hindi, have been a strong and powerful connector with Indian culture, literature and values for Mauritian of Indian descent to connect with their cultural heritage. He underlined that endeavours such as the teaching of Hindi in the baithka system to ultimately the setting up of the World Hindi Secretariat all serve to preserve the Hindi language and culture as well as to promote it as an International Language.

As for Minister Swaraj, she underlined that the 11th WHC is in line with the aim of integrating Hindi into the multicultural dimension and for it to be recognised on the international scene and accepted as an official language at the United Nations. She also recalled that India is willing to provide support to underprivileged countries of the Indian Diaspora for which the country is ready to disburse some Rs 40 billion.

During the conference, several exhibitions focusing on the developments of Hindi language and evening cultural programmes were held. A Kavi Sammelan was organised by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, New Delhi. Moreover, the Mauritius Post Ltd issued a special First Day cover to mark the event and in keeping with the past practice, Hindi scholars from India and other countries were honoured with “Vishwa Hindi Samman” for their distinguished services in the field of Hindi.

**Homage to late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee**

During the ceremony, homage was paid to the former Indian Prime Minister, late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who passed away on 16 August 2018. It was recalled that the latter helped to forge the Indo-Mauritian relations and considerably shaped the economic and cultural landscape of Mauritius.

Key projects that were undertaken in collaboration by the two countries’ under late Shri Vajpayee’s then Prime Ministership, include the setting up of the first Cybercity; initiating negotiations of a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement; and construction of the Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre, the Rabindranath Tagore Institute and the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture. Hence, it was announced that as a tribute to the latter’s name and legacy, the Cyber Tower 1, in Ebène Cybercity, will be henceforth named as the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Tower.
A Record of Discussion pertaining to talks on improving the Meteorological Radar System in Mauritius was signed on 21 August 2018, at Le Labourdonnais Hotel in Port Louis, between the Mauritius Meteorological Services (MMS) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

This Record of Discussion reiterates the Japanese Government's commitment, through JICA, to support the MMS. The project for the improvement of the Meteorological Radar System will enhance the MMS's autonomy, contribute to better general weather forecasting, enhance people's life and also address the specific challenges posed by extreme weather events, given that Mauritius is prone to changing climatic conditions.

It is recalled that an agreement was signed in June 2013 between the JICA and the Mauritian Government for a non-refundable grant of 1.34 billion Japanese Yen, equivalent to Rs 387 million for the S-Band Doppler Solid State Radar Project which consists of two phases, namely, the acquisition and installation of the “S-Band Doppler Solid State Radar”, and the construction of a new tower at Trou aux Cerfs which will house the new Radar and its communication systems.

The construction of the Radar Tower is expected to be fully completed by the end of August 2018. As at 31 July 2018, 50% of the equipment has been installed and is expected to be completed in September 2018. Calibration of the radar will begin in November 2018 and may continue until February 2019.

This assistance is extended via a technical-related cooperation project which aims at providing technical training as well as technology transfer for the operation and maintenance of the Doppler radar.

Furthermore, the project for enhancing Meteorological Observation, Weather Forecasting and Warning Capabilities is expected to start in April 2019. It has as objective to enhance the dissemination of weather information and actionable warnings so as to reach disaster-related organisations and the population in a timely manner.
Prime Minister inaugurates bypass at Saint Julien D’Hotman

The Saint Julien Bypass, which aims to improving road geometry and enhance safety for both pedestrians and vehicles, and decrease travel time and vehicle operating costs, was inaugurated on 21 August 2018 at Saint Julien D’Hotman by the Prime Minister, Mr Pravind Kumar Jugnauth.

The St Julien Bypass starts with a roundabout along Higginson (B24) Road before the village of St Julien d’Hotman, bypasses the village over a total stretch of 3.5km and ends with a T-Junction along B24 Road. The contract for the construction of the St Julien Bypass was awarded to Transinvest Construction Ltd to the tune of around Rs 228 million. Construction works started in April 2017 and were completed in August 2018.

In his address, Prime Minister Jugnauth expressed his vision of transforming Mauritius into a modern country with state-of-the-art infrastructure and road network system which will also include the coming into operation of the Metro Express project by September 2019 to ease traffic congestion. He highlighted the requisite of improving road infrastructures in line with international standards and norms which he added will eventually help position Mauritius on the next level of development.

Moreover, the Prime Minister dwelt on the various projects that are underway across the island under the Road Decongestion Programme. These comprise the two major road infrastructure ventures necessitating an investment of around Rs 5 billion, namely: the grade separated junction at Jumbo/Phoenix/Dowlut Roundabouts which will include three flyovers; and, the construction of the A1-M1 Link Road and Bridge of a length of 350 m and height of 90 m as well as the longest bridge in Mauritius to alleviate traffic congestion from Coromandel, Beau Bassin and Rose Hill to Port Louis and which is scheduled to be completed by 2020.

Prime Minister Jugnauth further recalled that in 2015 Government implemented the Integrated National Transport Network which comprised several projects, that is, the construction of the following road infrastructure: Grade Separated Junctions at Pont Fer, Jumbo and Valentina Roundabouts; A1-M1 Link Road and Bridge; A1-A3 Link Road; fly-over at Deschartres; flyover at Quay D; and, Ring Road Phases 2 and 3.

Government is implementing the Metro Express Project along the corridor Curepipe-Port Louis and reviewing the transportation network at Ebène to modernise the transport sector and reduce traffic congestion, he added.
Mauritius marks Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Day 2018

Mauritius celebrated the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Day for the first time as recommended by the Conference of African Ministers on 10 August 2018. The event was marked by the unveiling of a Commemorative Shield during a ceremony organised by the Civil Status Division under the Prime Minister’s Office.

The theme for this year’s commemoration was ‘Promoting Innovative Universal Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System for Good Governance and Better Lives’. The African CRVS day seeks to increase public awareness of the importance of making everyone visible in Africa through a well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics system covering the entire population and all vital events occurring in a country.

It sheds lights on the importance of having in place appropriate national legal framework, IT infrastructure and innovative business process improvement to make the CRVS system responsive to public demands by improving accessibility and quality of civil registration and related services.

Indeed, the civil registration and vital statistics are essential for modern administrative systems, creating an inclusive society, protecting human rights, ensuring proper delivery of public services and tackling discriminations and inequalities among other related issues.

Civil Status Division of Mauritius

It is recalled that the Civil Status Division dates back to the 18th century, making Mauritius the country having the oldest civil registration in the world. Over the years, Government has endeavoured to transform the Division into a modern and leading organisation through various initiatives.

They include: the implementation of Info-Highway project which aims to provide a robust service platform to facilitate the consumption of published data among Government agencies and private entities to improve operation efficiency in public administration and business operations; issuing of Overseas Citizen of India Cards; ISO certification of all the offices under the Civil Status Division; construction of a Marriage Hall at the Emmanuel Anquetil building to the tune of Rs 7.3 million; revamping of IT system of the Division to the tune of Rs 17 million; and birth and death capture exercise to restore its archives.

The Civil Status Division comprises 33 Civil Status Offices including two in Rodrigues and one in Agalega.
The two-day Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Ministerial Conference aiming to discuss the underlying causes and consequences of unsustainable policies for women of the IORA region and promoting a common agenda on women’s economic empowerment, opened on 28 August 2018 at the Ravenala Attitude Hotel in Balaclava.

Delegates from 19 IORA Member States attended the event which focused on the theme ‘Women’s Economic Empowerment: A Prerequisite for Sustainable Development’.

Organised by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, the conference included the Working Group on Women’s Economic Empowerment as set out in the IORA Action Plan for 2017-2021; and brought together IORA Ministers in-charge of the portfolio of Gender/Women’s Affairs on a common platform to discuss the pertinence of mainstreaming gender in priority areas identified by IORA.

The objective of the event was also to identify and formulate gender-responsive initiatives and strategies to be implemented by the Working Group on Women’s Economic Empowerment. The Working Group on Women’s Economic Empowerment had its first inaugural meeting with Mauritius as Chair and Australia as Co-chair and Lead Coordinator.

The Working Group addressed gender gaps in the IORA priority intervention areas and the Blue Economy; and fostered information and knowledge sharing on policies, programmes, initiatives and best practices that promote economic empowerment of women.

About Indian Ocean Rim Association

The IORA is a dynamic inter-governmental organisation aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean region through its 21 Member States and 7 Dialogue Partners. Its priority areas include: Maritime Safety and Security; Trade and Investment Facilitation; Fisheries Management; Disaster Risk Management; Tourism and Cultural Exchange; Academic, Science and Technology; Blue Economy and Women’s Economic Empowerment.
Six new loan schemes launched by DBM for MSMEs

The Development Bank of Mauritius (DBM) has launched six new loan schemes for providing Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) with funding facilities at an interest rate of 3% and a more conducive framework to support the development of their businesses.

The schemes will help increase the number of competitive and innovative SMEs as well as contribute to the socio-economic development of Mauritius and Rodrigues. The Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI) and the National Women Entrepreneur Council will both ensure proper implementation of the schemes. They are as follows:

- Micro credit up to a ceiling of Rs 250 000 for MSMEs with turnover of less than Rs 2 million (limited to individuals);
- Startups and women entrepreneurs with loan facilities up to Rs 1 million for youth and women entrepreneurs;
- MSME financing with loan facilities up to Rs 3 million for individual, cooperatives or companies in the manufacturing, service, tourism, agri-business and ICT sectors;
- Sheltered farming with loan up to Rs 3 million for individual, cooperatives or companies involved in the cultivation of vegetables, fruits and flowers;
- Organic farming with a loan facility to a ceiling of Rs 1 million for individuals, cooperatives or companies for entrepreneurs engaged in the cultivation of vegetables, fruits and flowers upon the recommendation of FAREI;
- Import Substitution Scheme which comprises a specific assistance plan to be introduced in collaboration with FAREI to revitalise the agricultural sector and encourage farmers to take over abandoned farmland.

All beneficiaries falling under the above schemes should be registered with the SME Mauritius Ltd and Small Planters Welfare Fund where applicable.

A total of 82 youth participate in first edition of National Youth Parliament

The first edition of the National Youth Parliament (NYP) was launched on 01 August 2018 in the Chamber of the National Assembly. Some 379 applications were received from participants aged between 14 to 23 for the first edition of the NYP and 82 of them have been selected to role play as different members of the House.

The NYP, a platform for young citizens to discuss issues of national and international importance in a parliamentary set up which spanned over two days, was intended to develop an interest and understanding of parliamentary history, etiquette and procedure among the youth. It also aimed at developing the participants’ public speaking, presentation, leadership and decision-making skills so as to enhance their ability to network with fellow citizens for the achievement of common goals.

Participants have benefitted from a three-day induction course to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them determine the business to be transacted and to carry on with the proceedings of the two-day session of the NYP.

The Office of the Speaker, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports have been working together on this long awaited project for the past two years.

This first edition of the NYP is a testimony of the importance the National Assembly attaches to reaching out to the young people in view to better informing them about the positive ideals of parliamentary democracy. The NYP is thus a unique holistic learning platform where participants will learn to adhere to the Constitutional duties and discuss important national issues as members of the National Assembly.
The project I-Council, to the tune of about Rs 7 million, was launched at the District Council of Moka in Quartier Militaire on 27 August 2018, in the presence of the Prime Minister, Mr Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, and other personalities.

On the same occasion, the Mauritius Post Ltd and the Moka District Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the provision of postal codes for the different roads in the region of Moka for which a pilot project is already underway at l’Espérance, Quartier Militaire.

The I-Council is an integrated system which consists of a business intelligence, an integrated reporting system, a project management system, the Citizen Support Portal, an asset Identification Solution, e-library, a Geographical Information System (GIS) for Urban Planning and Fleet management as well as a GIS Refuse Collection Management.

The initiative is in line with the vision of transforming Mauritius into a digital country and will serve as a model to be replicated in other District and Municipal Councils.

In his address, Prime Minister Jugnauth underlined that in an era where the world is being driven by technology, it is essential that Mauritius, as a small island State, embrace the use of latest technology and innovation to pave the way forward towards a modern economy. According to him, the country has to adapt to the digital world and move towards innovation, blockchain technology and artificial intelligence which are the backbone for sustained economic growth.

Another key governmental measure in making Mauritius a cyber-country and helping to position the country as a high income economy is the setting up of the Citizen Support Portal, an innovative online platform, which ensures proximity with citizens by providing technological facilities to meet the aspiration of the population and transforming Mauritius into a fully-fledged digital country, he said.
The Grand River North West Rehabilitation Urban social forest project, which will cater for the social, environmental and economic benefits of the country, to the tune of Rs 15 million, is expected to be completed by the end of 2018.

The project will span over an area of 30 hectares from Sables Noir to Martello Tower and an upstream touching up State land Jasmin covering land ecologically categorised as beaches, estuaries, riparian lands, deltas, and ranges from alluvial soils, to marshy and muddy lands.

The project will comprise the following: walking track along the waterline along a length of around 2km; ‘petanque’ court; Wharf; outdoor gym; endemic forest; network of tracks connecting all the historical sites around the area; an existing fruit grove; trekking network of some 5 km; and a central area of recreation to act as the focal point of the whole project area.

The objectives are to provide recreation sites for visitors and sightseeing, protect the fragile ecosystems of the estuary and riparian zone from pollution, abandonment and invasive species, and promote native biodiversity that are unique to Mauritius through the planting of native plants.

It will also help boost the economic activities in the region and promote the livelihoods of people in the surrounding areas in terms of ecotourism and cultural tourism.

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The 6th edition of the campaign La Tournée Rodriguaise 2018 aimed at promoting the tourism and entrepreneurial sector in Rodrigues was launched on 29 August 2018 at Le Labourdonnais Hotel in Port-Louis in the presence of the Chief Commissioner of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, Mr Serge Clair.

The campaign which is a joint collaboration of the Chief Commissioner’s Office, Commission for Tourism, the Rodrigues Tourism Office, the Commission for Industrial Development and Air Mauritius Ltd, was held from 29 August to 02 September 2018. Over the five days, Mauritian tourists were given an insight of the fascinating culture and unique assets of the Rodrigues Island.

The Tournée Rodriguaise contributed mainly to increasing the visibility of Rodrigues as a tourist destination. Other objectives were to tap a potential niche market in Mauritius, target the senior group and promote the special holiday package from Mauritius to Rodrigues. It also showcased the island’s unique characteristics including its authenticity, rich culture, gastronomy and welcoming population.

A series of activities comprising road shows, cultural shows, distribution of promotional materials, authentic creole cuisine and sales exhibition of crafts and entrepreneurial products and a ‘Soiree Rodriguaise’ with traditional creole music and dance, were organised. The Road shows were held at the municipality of Quatre Bornes, Plaisance Mall in Rose Belle, and Flacq Coeur de Ville.
Inauguration of the National Cooperative College

The National Cooperative College (NCC), constructed to the tune of some Rs 20 million, was inaugurated on 09 August 2018 at Bois Marchand, Terre-Rouge, in the presence of the Prime Minister, Mr Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, and other personalities.

The NCC, a first-of-its-kind in Mauritius, represents a milestone for the cooperative sector which in turn will help develop skills in the fields of green energy, aquaculture, fisheries and livestock, amongst others. It will provide training and educational programmes with a view to give a professional edge to the cooperative sector; offer structured courses to cooperative societies; and promote an entrepreneurial attitude for the successful evolution for the sector.

The college will also collaborate with international institutions to enable training as well as the exchange of other knowledge-based activities. In this regard, discussions between the NCC and the Cooperative College of Malaysia have already been initiated for further collaboration.

In his address, the Prime Minister highlighted that the college will better respond to the expectations of cooperatives and will contribute to further strengthen the sector in the future. Government, he reiterated, is committed to reinforce cooperatives and encourage them to further harness their enormous potentials while ensuring the protection of the environment. Massive investments are also being made by Government so as to ensure that local existing and aspiring entrepreneurs benefit from necessary tools and resources for the development of competencies in the field of cooperatives, he underscored.

In this respect, underlined Prime Minister Jugnauth, around Rs 1 billion has been earmarked for the training of some 12,000 unemployed people under various training programmes that will enable them to acquire necessary expertise as well as experience, and facilitate the task of Micro and Small and Medium Enterprises in retaining the services of a trained graduate.

He further encouraged enterprises to adopt the Work@Home Scheme for which Government is allowing a double deduction from tax of the wage and salary costs of employees for the first two years and an annual 5% tax credit grant for 3 years on investment in the required IT system. On this score, he encouraged women and youth to benefit from the facilities and services that will be provided by the NCC.