The official launch of the first phase of the IOX (Indian Ocean Exchange) Submarine Cable system project aiming to make Mauritius a landmark for innovative technology-based businesses and services in the African continent and the global market was held on 9 May 2018 at the Le Labourdonnais Hotel Caudan Waterfront, in Port Louis.

The IOX Submarine Cable System, is the third submarine cable landing in Mauritius, and has been conceived as an open access cable system to offer opportunities for licensed operators to become providers of high bandwidths on cutting-edge technologies. It aims to providing a new open access alternative path for connecting Africa and Asia to Europe and the USA.

The first phase of the project
consists an underwater marine survey for the IOX Cable System. The vessel will embark on its survey from Mauritius, to Rodrigues Island and then complete its route to South Africa. It will assess the seabed conditions, engineer the route, cable design, and cable installation programme.

Once completed, the ultra-high speed IOX Cable System will be the first open access system connecting Mauritius and Rodrigues to East London in South Africa and Pondicherry in India. The IOX cable system will deliver an ultimate design capacity of over 54 terabits per second.

The project will significantly enhance the development of Mauritius broadband infrastructure to support and drive the new digital economy. It will enable operators to use their capacities effortlessly and facilitate business across Indian Ocean islands by putting at their disposal a network that is resilient and diversified. The IOX cable system is scheduled to go live in 2019.

Mauritius Telecom is the anchor tenant of the IOX submarine cable system which spans more than 8,850 km, connecting Mauritius, La Reunion and Rodrigues to South Africa and India, with a design capacity of over 52 Tbps per fibre pair.

The IOX Cable system will be the first open access cable system in the region and offers the opportunity for any licensed operators to benefit from the latest technology and seamless access throughout the life cycle of the cable system.

The ultra-high speed IOX Cable System will connect Mauritius and Rodrigues to the East Coast of South Africa on one side and the East Coast of India on the other. The IOX cable system consists of 4 fiber pairs in its trunk and will deliver an ultimate design capacity of over 54 terabits per second and will also reinforce Mauritius as a hub in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act 2003 will be amended, to be in line with the Budapest Convention and the African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection.

The alignment of the Mauritian legislation with these Conventions would serve as a guideline and framework of reference and would further provide law enforcement agencies and the judiciary with a clear understanding of cybercrime and electronic evidence that would lead to efficient investigation and prosecution.

The Budapest Convention is the first international treaty on crimes committed via the Internet and other computer networks, dealing particularly with infringements of copyright, computer-related fraud, child pornography and violations of network security. Its main objective, set out in the preamble, is to pursue a common criminal policy aimed at the protection of society against cybercrime, especially by adopting appropriate legislation and fostering international co-operation.

Similarly, the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection also covers a very wide range of online activities, including electronic commerce, data protection, and cybercrime, with a special focus on racism, xenophobia, child pornography, and national cybersecurity.
Mauritius signs Country Programming Framework with FAO for sustainable agriculture

The Country Programming Framework (CPF) for the Republic of Mauritius for the next four years was signed on 9 April 2018 in Port Louis. The Framework aims to renew the support of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to Mauritius in terms of technical, financial assistance and expertise for the development of the agri-business, promotion of sustainable agriculture for food security, and sustainable fisheries.

The Framework lays down the priorities for collaboration in the fields of agri-business development in particular the elimination of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition as well as strategies, legal and management frameworks and institutional capacities for selected strategic value chains. It addresses the different approaches to reducing poverty; enabling inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems; increasing the resilience of livelihoods to disasters.

With regard to sustainable fisheries, the CPF aims to facilitate in improving the enabling environment, policies and legal framework and institutional capacities for the promotion of sustainable aquaculture and off-lagoon fisheries.

Besides CPF, a Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) for Rodrigues will be signed to strengthen rural development planning in Rodrigues. The Programme is in line with Government policy to empower Rodrigues to be the driver and trend-setter in agricultural innovations.

The TCP will focus on addressing the priority objectives namely: reviewing the institutional framework of the fisheries sector; development of a national animal identification and recording system in Mauritius; and support for the national legislation and implementing regulations of organic farming in Mauritius.

Back gardens can be a sustainable strategy to improve food security
The agreed minutes of the first round of negotiations on the Mauritius-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that kicked off on 02 April 2018 was signed by the Director of Trade Policy, International Trade Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Mr Narainduth Boodhoo, and the Head of the Chinese delegation, and Deputy Director General, Ministry of Commerce, Mr Hu Yingzhi, on 03 April 2018 at the Maritim Resort & Spa, in Balaclava.

The aim of the FTA is to create the necessary conditions to further expand bilateral trade and investment exchanges between Mauritius and China as well as strengthen economic cooperation in a number of areas of interest to Mauritius.

A delegation of fifteen members from China, officials from the Ministry of Commerce, National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and General Administration of Customs discussed and agreed on the modalities of work on four pillars of the Agreement. These are: trade in goods, trade in services, investment, and economic cooperation.

The work agenda comprises parallel meetings focused on trade in goods, trade in services, investment, general economic cooperation, and dispute settlement and legal provisions.

During the meeting, both parties highlighted the long and enduring friendship that both countries share and expressed confidence that their economic and trade relations will be further reinforced through the implementation of the FTA.

The next meeting will be held in Beijing during which both countries will proceed to the official exchange of requests regarding market access.
The National Productivity and Competitiveness Council (NPCC) launched a portal and a logo on 18 April 2018 in respect to the first edition of the National Productivity and Quality Convention (NPQC) which will be held in August this year.

The NPQC will serve as a premier platform for quality and productivity practitioners of public and private organisations in Mauritius and Rodrigues to showcase their value creation projects in the field of productivity and quality.

The convention encourages the local stakeholders to share their best operational practices, processes, systems and initiatives and learn from the experiences of others. It provides an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of teams that have been responsible for creating and/or managing productivity and quality improvements at their workplace.

As regards the portal, it provides a series of information on the aims and objectives of the convention and guidelines on registration and participation. Different categories of organisations can participate in the convention, namely small and medium private enterprises with an annual turnover of less than Rs50 million, large private enterprises with an annual turnover of more than Rs50 million as well as Government departments and parastatal bodies.

Organisations are invited to register online through the portal by 25 May 2018. Each organisation can send up to two teams and their topics should be related to productivity and quality through Quality Circles, Innovation, Business Excellence, Productivity Improvement and Lean Management.

During the months of June and July, the NPCC will provide coaching and advice to the participating teams in an effort to help them deliver a strong presentation. Videos on the steps to organise the presentations will be displayed on the NPQC 2018 website. The preparations will culminate with the three-day convention during the first week of August where the participants will compete in three different categories namely Gold, Silver and Bronze awards.

The winners of the Gold Award will have the opportunity to present their projects to a panel of international judges in the aftermath of the convention followed by an award ceremony. The six best teams will be offered the opportunity to participate in the International Convention for Quality Control Circles (ICQCC 2018) in Singapore from 22 to 25 October 2018.
Construction of A1-M1 Link Road to improve traffic flow to Port Louis

The construction of the A1-M1 Link Road and Bridge, in line with Vision 2030 to transform the road network landscape in the next five years, kicked off on 11 April 2018 at Belle Etoile in Coromandel.

The project aims at providing an effective and efficient road network to support the socio-economic development of Mauritius by improving the fluidity of traffic to reduce congestion time; decreasing accidents by providing road safety; and enhancing the level of service to road users through the provision of high quality infrastructure.

The A1-M1 Link Road and the 350m long and 90m high bridge represent a new phase in road network modernisation in Mauritius. They will improve the distribution of traffic within the network of A1 Road and M1 Motorway, and reduce traffic congestion to a significant level at Réduit and Ebène by providing an alternative access to the city of Port Louis to traffic originating from Rose Hill, Beau Bassin, Chebel, Chapman Hill, and upper Coromandel.

This project forms part of the Road Decongestion Programme, which also includes the grade separated junctions at Pont Fer/Jumbo/Dowlut Roundabouts and the New Pont Fer flyover, in addition to a tunnel under the Signal Mountain. These three projects, which necessitate an investment of nearly Rs 10 billion along with the Metro Express, constitute the National Integrated Transport Network Project.

It is recalled that several infrastructure projects in line with international norms are also being undertaken across the island so as to provide a modern and state-of-the-art infrastructure to the population while at the same addressing the issue of traffic congestion.
Open Data Portal launched with 100 Datasets

The National Open Data Portal (NODP) comprising one hundred datasets of Government Agencies in an open format and encompassing 20 categories, was launched on 25 April 2018 in the context of the Open Data Initiative for Mauritius during a workshop at the Holiday Inn Resort, in Plaine Magnien.

The NODP, an initiative of the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation, is in line with the e-Government Strategy and the Open Data Policy, to empower citizens and businesses for carrying out data-driven initiatives such as development of mobile apps, data analysis, creation of innovative products and research amongst others.

In 2015, Government embarked on the Open Data Initiative, by developing the National Open Data Policy, and carrying out the Open Data Readiness Assessment with the assistance of the World Bank. Government approved the National Open Data Policy in 2016 and the Open Data Readiness Assessment Report in July 2017. The main objective of the National Open Data Policy is to create economic value out of the releases of Open Government datasets.

The Open Data Readiness Assessment Report identified a list of datasets that could be published on the NODP which can be accessed on https://data.govmu.org/dkan/. The datasets were categorised as Quick Win, Priority or Longer Term.

Datasets that were deemed to be important in order to support citizen engagement in Mauritius as well as to promote Government transparency and accountability are namely Public expenditure and budgeting data; Environmental data; Demographic data and socio-economic indicators; Health care data; Geographical and geo-spatial data; and Transport data.

Open Data Workshop

The Open Data workshop was organised by the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation in collaboration with the National Computer Board from 25 to 27 April 2018. It brought together around 100 participants, mostly members of the Open Data Teams of Ministries and representatives of parastatal bodies dealing with datasets. The resource person was Mr Gavin Chait, Lead Consultant, Whythawk, who conducted presentation on the theme ‘The Open Data Professionals’.

The first two days were targeted for Governmental institutions with the main objective of defining the role and responsibilities of the Open Data Team with regard to the importance of Open Data for innovation and the various practices to abide on the release of Open Government datasets. The last day of the workshop which was meant for journalists and officers involved in Communication and Advisory Matters, focused on Data Journalism.
‘Regional Maritime Security Mechanisms’ was the outcome of the Ministerial meeting of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) on maritime security issues held from 28 to 29 April 2018 at the Intercontinental Resort in Balaclava.

The Conference adopted the Declaration on Maritime Security in Western Indian Ocean, called “Mauritius Declaration on Maritime Security” put forth by the Ministers in charge of security in the Indian Ocean region and representatives of regional and international organisations, and also indicated its appreciation of the joint Plan of Action.

The Ministerial Declaration reaffirms the commitment of the States of Eastern and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (ESA-IO) to fight the crimes and threats as regards maritime security and underlines the importance of a consolidated partnership with the international community in this endeavour. Moreover, it calls for the cooperation of ESA-IO regions and stresses on the need to mobilise necessary resources for ensuring maritime security which is essential for the long-term development of the region.

The Ministerial meeting agreed on the need for strengthening regional cooperation in the fight against maritime crime. Member States pointed out the relevance and necessity to continue and amplify their commitment and that of regional organisations in the activities of the Regional Programme for the Promotion of Maritime Safety in the ESA-IO (MASE Programme), in particular through the regional mechanisms for sharing and exchange of maritime information and the coordination of action at sea through dedicated regional centres with the support of partners, namely the European Union.

The conference also called for the establishment of the legal framework to effectively guarantee the confidentiality of information sharing and the coordination of joint actions through inter-ministerial and intersectoral consultation instruments as well as the appointment of a national focal point to monitor all activities related to maritime security. With regards to enhancing maritime surveillance, the use of new operational technologies and capacity-building for maritime safety and security through the use of remote sensing applications, have been recommended.

In view of the rapid evolution and adaptability of illicit trafficking, it has been agreed to reinforce monitoring capacities and add additional means of action, particularly in transit areas, to break the flow and to prevent these places from becoming new consumption poles. Other relevant issues that were discussed are: combating terrorism threats, unreported and unregulated fishing; Maritime pollution; Search and Rescue at sea; and Biodiversity and impacts of climate change.

The Conference

The Ministerial Conference was co-hosted by the Republic of Mauritius as the current chair of the IOC and the General Secretariat of the IOC, with the support of the European Union (EU) through the Eastern and Southern Africa and Indian Ocean Maritime Security Programme. Some 180 delegates from 22 States as well as Regional and International organisations were present for the ministerial conference.

The objectives of the conference were to identify priority actions in response to maritime transnational risks and crimes; identify regional, tangible and value-added collaborative and comprehensive approaches to each of the threats to maritime safety and security in the ESA-IO region; and, mobilise partners and institutions and generate specific commitments for concrete actions to be implemented according to an agreed roadmap.
Mauritius marks Earth Day 2018

A series of activities were organised by the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, and Environment and Sustainable Development to mark Earth Day 2018, celebrated on 22 April 2018.

The theme for this year is “End Plastic Pollution”. The Ministry launched the National Tree Planting Campaign at the Royal College of Curepipe on 22 April 2018, including the distribution of medicinal/decorative plants to students and the community.

The national campaign was also held in all primary and secondary schools from 22 to 27 April 2018. Moreover, a collection of plastics and PET bottles was carried out from 22 to 29 April 2018 in Curepipe.

The launching of the second edition of the booklet “Une Famille, Une Plante” and a talk on radio to sensitise the public on the importance of Earth Day and environmental protection, were also held.

Students were sensitised on how they can help in protecting the environment.
Education: Mauritius to accede to Addis Convention

Mauritius will accede to the Addis Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States.

The Addis Convention aims at:

• strengthening and promoting international cooperation in the field of recognition of qualifications;
• defining and putting in place effective quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms at the national, regional and continental levels;
• promoting the widest and most effective use of human resources in Africa and limiting brain-drain on the Continent;
• facilitating the exchange and greater mobility of students, academics and researchers of the Continent;
• furthering high level inter-institutional training and research programmes; and
• contributing to the harmonisation of qualifications taking into account current global trends.

Annual vaccination campaign

The annual vaccination campaign of the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life against seasonal influenza kicked off on 11 April 2018 at the level of the Regional and district Hospitals, Mediclinic, Area Health Centres.

The vaccination campaign targets the vulnerable sections of the population recommended by the World Health Organisation namely, people with high risk including, pregnant women, children aged between 6 months to 5 years, patients below 60 years suffering from health complications, healthcare personnel exposed to patients suffering from influenza and also the general public.