

HIGHLIGHTS OF CABINET MEETING – FRIDAY 17 DECEMBER 2021

1. Cabinet has agreed to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of the Republic of India regarding an Indian Grant Assistance for the implementation of small projects in Mauritius aimed at contributing to the socio-economic development of Mauritius and improvement of public welfare.

2. Cabinet has agreed to the Mauritius Kestrel (*Falco punctatus*) being declared as the National Bird of the Republic of Mauritius. The Mauritius Kestrel is an endemic species unique to Mauritius. In the early 1980s, the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, in collaboration with the Government and international conservation organisations, took up the challenge to rescue the Kestrels from extinction.

The current wild population of Kestrels stands at 350 individuals. The rescue of the Mauritius Kestrel is one of the greatest conservation success stories not only in Mauritius but also in the world. The Mauritius Kestrel would be declared 'the National Bird of Mauritius' on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the accession of Mauritius to the status of Republic in March 2022.

3. Cabinet has taken note of the status regarding the implementation of the Premium Visa regime as at 30 November 2021. Some 1,010 applications have been approved during the period December 2020 to November 2021. Cabinet has agreed to allow foreigners to stay in the country under the scheme for a period between six to 12 months instead of the actual one-year duration, which is renewable.

4. Cabinet has agreed to the promulgation of the Motorways and Main Roads (Amendment) Regulations 2021. The Regulations aim at amending the Motorways and Main Roads Regulations with a view to –

- (a) classifying the newly constructed Cap Malheureux Bypass as a 'Main Road A', namely A20; and
- (b) updating the descriptions of the Mont-Choisy-Cap Malheureux Road (B13) and the Calebasses Branch Road (B97).

The Regulations would come into operation as from 27 December 2021.

5. Cabinet has taken note of the promulgation by the Mauritius Ports Authority of the Port (Fees) (Amendment No.2) Regulations 2021. The objective of the Port (Fees) (Amendment No.2) Regulations 2021 is to amend Regulation 3 of the Port (Fees) Regulations 2008 in respect of the collection of seamen's welfare dues by the Mauritius Ports Authority and remission of the dues thus collected to the Seafarers' Welfare Fund.

6. Cabinet has taken note that the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development would recommend to the President that amendments be made to the Pensions Act, by way of Regulations, under section 3 of the Act to give effect to the recommendations of the –

- (a) 2016 Pay Research Bureau (PRB) Report – Outstanding issues; and
- (b) 2021 PRB Report.

The Pensions (Amendment No. 3) Regulations shall be deemed to have come into operation on 01 January 2021.

As regards the 2016 PRB Report, the salary scale was increased from Rs34,175 to Rs39,575 following the recommendations of the 2016 PRB Report (Addendum). The amendment has been implemented administratively with effect from 01 January 2016 but needs to have a legislative coverage. Accordingly, the Pensions (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2021 would be deemed to have come into effect as from 01 January 2016.

7. Cabinet has taken note that amendments would be made to the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act, by way of Regulations, pursuant to section 20 of the Act to give effect to the recommendations of the -

- (a) 2016 Pay Research Bureau (PRB) Report – Outstanding issues; and
- (b) 2021 PRB Report.

The Statutory Bodies Pension Funds (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2021 shall be deemed to have come into operation on 01 January 2021.

As regards the 2016 PRB Report, the salary scale was increased from Rs34,175 to Rs39,575 following the recommendations of the 2016 PRB Report (Addendum). The amendment has been implemented administratively with effect from 01 January 2016 but needs to have a legislative coverage. Accordingly, the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds (Amendment) Regulations 2021 shall be deemed to have come into operation on 01 January 2016.

8. Cabinet has taken note of the promulgation of the following Regulations –

- (a) Customs Tariff (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 6) Regulations 2021;
- (b) Customs (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2021;
- (c) Excise (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 7) Regulations 2021; and
- (d) Value Added Tax (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2021.

The Regulations provide mainly for –

- (i) the implementation of the revised World Customs Organisation Harmonised System for the international classification of goods (HS Codes 2022);

- (ii) the implementation of customs tariff liberalisation commitments taken by Mauritius under trade agreements with the European Union, United Kingdom, Turkey and China;
- (iii) the extension of the termination date of the measure allowing an incoming passenger to benefit from an increased duty-free entitlement in respect of alcoholic products from 31 December 2021 to 31 December 2022;
- (iv) the implementation of the budget measure 2021-22 to extend up to 30 June 2022 the authorisation granted to Duty Free Shops and shops under the Deferred Duty and Tax Scheme to sell goods on the local market without any limit on quantity but with payment of duties and taxes;
- (v) amendment to the eligibility criteria relating to the maximum allowed length of stay in Mauritius for a returning citizen to benefit from excise duty concession on a motor vehicle. The new eligibility criteria will take into consideration any overstay in Mauritius due to COVID-19 air travel restrictions; and
- (vi) the implementation of the provisions of the Pay Research Bureau Report 2021 in respect of duty exemption entitlements on a motor vehicle.

9. Cabinet has taken note that the Social Integration and Empowerment (Free Examination Fees Scheme) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 would be promulgated. As announced in the Budget Speech 2021-2022, the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development exam fees would be waived for the current financial year for children of families eligible under the Social Register of Mauritius. The Regulations shall be deemed to have come into operation on 01 July 2021.

A Memorandum of Understanding would be signed between the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity and the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development to define the responsibilities of each Party for the implementation of the new Scheme.

10. Cabinet has taken note that the Consolidated COVID-19 (Amendment No. 5) Regulations 2021 under the Quarantine Act 2020 have been promulgated to provide, inter alia, for new definitions of “booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine” and “fully vaccinated”.

11. Cabinet has taken note that a Notice has been made by the Minister of Health and Wellness under the Quarantine Act 2020 to extend the quarantine period from 31 December 2021 up to 30 June 2022.

12. Cabinet has taken note that the Central Electricity Board has approved a Time-of-Use Tariff 150C to Domestic consumers for charging of electric cars who have imperatively applied for the new CEB Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Scheme. The calculated base rates of the proposed Time-of-Use Tariff 150C are as follows –

Period	Time (hours)	Base Rates (Rs per kWh)
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Day	0400 – 1759	5.40
Evening (Peak)	1800 – 2100	10.00
Night	2101 – 0359 (next day)	4.00

Domestic consumers and owners of an electric vehicle are thus encouraged to charge their vehicles during off-peak period namely between 0400 hours and 1759 hours or preferably between 2101 hours to 0359 hours where the rates are more favourable. The Central Electricity Board has also approved the Scheme for charging of Electric Vehicle by Corporate Sector and the Scheme for Service Providers of Public Charging Infrastructure.

The tariffs should be deemed to be applicable as from 01 November 2021.

13. Cabinet has agreed to the signing of a General Framework Agreement between the Republic of Mauritius and the United Republic of Tanzania. The General Framework Agreement constitutes an important framework for increased overall cooperation between the two countries and its main objective is to promote cooperation between different economic, scientific, technical and cultural institutions and encourage exchange of experience and information in areas of mutual interest. The Agreement also provides for the establishment of a Mauritius-Tanzania Joint Commission at Ministerial level. The purpose of the Joint Commission would be to oversee the fulfilment of the Agreement and make the necessary proposals for the purpose of promoting and developing cooperation.

14. Cabinet has agreed to the ratification of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Industry. Mauritius signed the SADC Protocol on Industry on 18 August 2019. The aim of the Protocol is to promote the development of diversified, innovative and globally competitive regional and national industrial bases to enable the SADC region to achieve sustainable and inclusive industrial development.

The coming into force of the Protocol, would provide various benefits to Mauritius, namely –

- (a) addressing existing obstacles to trade within the region;
- (b) boosting the export of Mauritian products to the SADC region;
- (c) providing a better framework to enhance the participation of the private sector in regional activities; and
- (d) promoting investment, capacity building and research.

15. Cabinet has agreed to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Mauritius and Seychelles Country Office. The proposed areas of collaboration are as follows –

- (a) sharing of data about the innovation ecosystem of Mauritius, Rodrigues and the other islands of the Republic of Mauritius;

- (b) collaboration in exploration and solutions mapping exercises;
- (c) collaboration in multi-stakeholder experiments and programmes;
- (d) facilitating access to technical expertise and knowledge on thematic areas of mutual interest; and
- (e) participation in events organised by the other party.

16. Cabinet has taken note of the setting up of a National Maritime Information Sharing Centre for the sharing of maritime information in line with the requirements of the Maritime Security (MASE) Agreement signed by Member States of the Eastern, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean and with the Jeddah amendments to the Djibouti Code of Conduct.

Cabinet has agreed to assistance of international agencies being sought for the enlistment of a Consultant to guide the Prime Minister's Office on the necessary framework and the legal requirements for the setting up of the Centre. The objectives of the National Maritime Information Sharing Centre would be –

- (a) to enhance maritime situation awareness;
- (b) to collect, classify and analyse maritime security related data and information;
- (c) to share the actionable information for timely warning and response to potential maritime security threats; and
- (d) to sustain the operations of the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre based in Madagascar and the Regional Operational Coordination Centre based in Seychelles.

17. Cabinet has taken note of the outcome of the participation of the Prime Minister in the virtual Summit for Democracy, hosted by US President Joe Biden on 09 and 10 December 2021. The Summit focused on challenges and opportunities facing democracies and provided a platform for leaders to announce both individual and collective commitments, reforms, and initiatives to defend democracy and human rights.

In his statement, the Prime Minister underscored, inter alia, the following –

- (a) Mauritius is built on democratic principles with a parliamentary system based on the Westminster model with elections held every five years and smooth transitions of power;
- (b) an independent judiciary guarantees the fundamental rights and freedom of each individual;
- (c) in order to combat fraud and corruption, an independent anti-corruption agency has been established and the Director of Audit, who holds a constitutional post, scrutinises public spending and a Public Accounts Committee provides parliamentary oversight of public expenditure management;
- (d) a vibrant private sector operates freely and there exists a well-structured public-private dialogue mechanism;

- (e) a National Human Rights Commission enquires into complaints on infringement of human rights filed by individuals and an Equal Opportunities Commission, as well as the Ombudsman, receive and resolve complaints of discrimination; and
- (f) one of these challenges is the evolving role of digital media and the emerging issues around misuse of digital media, including social media platforms, and the related adverse impacts on democratic participation.

18. Cabinet has agreed to the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage submitting the Biennial Report on the status of '*Sega Tambour Chagos*', which has been prepared by the National Heritage Fund in collaboration with the Chagossian community, to UNESCO.

Following the inscription of '*Sega Tambour Chagos*' in 2019, the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage requested Mauritius to submit, for the next four years after inscription, biennial reports on the results of the measures taken to ensure the safeguarding of this element and to highlight participation of the community.

The first Biennial Report is now due for submission to UNESCO for its examination by the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee at its seventeenth session to be held in November/December 2022.

19. Cabinet has taken note of the findings of the National Drug Observatory Report for the year 2020 which has been prepared by the National Drug Secretariat of the Prime Minister's Office. The main objectives of the Report are to –

- (a) collect data from all stakeholders involved in providing drug-related services including the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Police Department and the NGOs, amongst others;
- (b) monitor and assess the drug situation in the country, including Rodrigues; and
- (c) provide reliable data to enable concerned authorities to respond proactively, efficiently and in a timely manner to drug-related problems.

The Report provides drug-related data such as types and trends of drug use, the impact of COVID-19 on drugs, health response in terms of treatment, rehabilitation and prevention programmes, arrests effected by the DSU, drug seizures by the different law enforcement agencies, and drug-related offences, convictions and imprisonment. The National Drug Observatory Report 2020 would be shared with all the stakeholders and uploaded on the website of the Prime Minister's Office.

20. Cabinet has taken note of the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic prevailing across the world. Some 272.5 million cases have been reported globally, of which 244.9 million persons have been successfully treated. According to WHO, the Omicron Variant has been detected in 77 countries and could become the dominant variant early next year.

With regard to Mauritius, as at 16 December 2021, there were 507 active cases of COVID-19, out of which 17 were admitted at the New ENT Hospital. Over the period 09 December to 15 December 2021, 55 deaths were attributed to COVID-19. Twelve imported cases of Omicron Variant have been detected in Mauritius. They are all currently in quarantine and their health is stable.

Cabinet has also taken note of the updated vaccination strategy and progress in the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, including the administration of the booster dose in the Republic of Mauritius. As at 16 December 2021, 935,776 persons had received a first dose of vaccine (representing 73.9 percent of the population). 908,111 persons were fully vaccinated (representing 71.7 percent of the population). 156,852 persons had received a booster dose (representing 12.4 percent of the population). Some 203,580 doses of Pfizer vaccine donated by the US through the COVAX Facility reached Mauritius on 16 December 2021.

Cabinet has further taken note that three repatriation flights have been effected to Rodrigues on 15 and 16 December 2021.

21. Cabinet has taken note of the dates of the Special Lotto Draws for the financing of the restoration of designated historical sites and museums. Two special lotto draws would be effected on 18 and 25 December 2021, respectively. The remaining two lotto draws would be organised in 2022. 47.16 percent of the net proceeds of the special lotto draws would be remitted in full into the Lotto Fund for the restoration of historical sites and museums.

22. Cabinet has taken note of the recent participation of the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives in the opening ceremony of a Virtual International Conference organised by the World Trade Organization in collaboration with the University of Mauritius. The Conference which was launched by the Minister aimed at convening research and discussions with focus on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The main themes covered during the Conference were –

- (a) COVID-19 and Blue Entrepreneurship;
- (b) COVID-19 and MSMEs: Impacts, Challenges, Opportunities and Recovery Measures; and
- (c) COVID-19 and Digitalisation.

During his intervention, the Minister focused on the difficulties that MSMEs have endured since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Mauritius and the effects of the two confinements on their operations, sales turnover, employment and profitability. The new opportunities available to the MSMEs have also been highlighted together with all the recovery measures that Government has put in place to improve their resilience.

The Deputy Director General of the WTO focused his speech on how small businesses and the ocean economy could help the Small Island Developing States recover from COVID-19 and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

23. Cabinet has taken note of the participation of the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance in the Mauritius Finance and Investment Week held recently in Dubai. The Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance, in collaboration with the Economic Development Board, organised the Mauritius Finance and Investment week from 04 to 09 December 2021.

During the mission, four business forums, two roundtable sessions and targeted one-to-one meetings were organised. The forums were attended by High Net Worth Individuals, prospective investors and key professionals, including tax advisors, wealth and asset managers, and law practitioners. The sessions focused on positioning Mauritius as a jurisdiction of choice for investment into Africa. One of the key outcomes of this event has been the substantive visibility of the Mauritius International Financial Centre.

The Minister interacted with various individuals and companies in the field of private wealth and wealth management, family offices, fund management and insurance. Representatives of the Bank of Mauritius and Economic Development Board met with several banks in Dubai to explore the possibility of them moving some of their regional activities to Mauritius.

Meetings were organised with several dignitaries in Dubai and Abu Dhabi to strengthen bilateral ties and discuss areas of collaboration.

24. Cabinet has taken note of the recent visit of Mrs Marie-Celine Zialor, Minister of Youth, Sports and Family of Seychelles in her capacity as President of the "*Commission de la Jeunesse et des Sports de l'Océan Indien*" (CJSOI) regarding the on-going preparations in view of the 2022 CJSOI Games. During her visit, the Minister and her delegation were able to gauge the progress achieved in the on-going preparations for the forthcoming 2022 CJSOI Games. The delegation took note that an Organising Committee comprising a Board, a Secretariat and 14 Commissions had been set up for the successful organisation of the 2022 CJSOI Games.

The delegation visited the sports infrastructure, namely the Côte d'Or National Sports Complex, the Petit Camp Tennis Centre at Phoenix, the National Boxing Centre at Vacoas and the National Table Tennis Centre at Beau Bassin which have been identified to host the different competitions of the 2022 CJSOI Games. The delegation also attended the celebrations organised by the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation to mark the '*Journée de la Jeunesse de l'Océan Indien*' which was held on 11 December 2021 at the Pointe Jérôme Youth Training Centre.

25. Cabinet has taken note of the reconstitution of the Executive Council of the Telugu-Speaking Union with Dr Ramsamy Appadoo as President.
