

## MAURITIUS



### 1. Country Brief with reference to its people

Discovered by the Portuguese in 1505, Mauritius was subsequently held by the Dutch, French, and British before independence was attained in 1968. A stable democracy with regular free elections and a positive human rights record, the country has attracted considerable foreign investment and has earned one of Africa's highest per capita incomes. Recent poor weather and declining sugar prices have slowed economic growth, leading to some protests over standards of living in the Creole community.

Mauritius totally has 2,040 sq km space with it out of which 2,030 sq km is land and 10 sq km of water. It has a total population of 1,240,827 out of which around 70 percent are in the working age group and 30 percent are dependent population. The median age is 30.8 years. The population growth is estimated to be 0.82 percent in 2006. The net migration rate is estimated to be (-) 0.4 migrants per thousand populations in the year 2006, which proves that the in-migration is slightly higher than the out-migration.

The ethnic composition of Mauritius is constituted of 68 percent of Indo-Mauritian, 27 percent of Creole, 3 percent of Sino-Mauritian and 2 percent of

Franco-Mauritian. The main languages spoken are Creole (80.5 percent), Bhojpuri (12.1 percent), French (3.4 percent), English (though official language, it is spoken by less than 1 percent of the population), other 3.7 percent, unspecified 0.3 percent (2000 census). Almost half of the population in Mauritius (48 percent) are Hindus; 23.6 percent are Roman Catholic, 8.6 percent are from other Christian groups; and 16.6 percent are Muslims (2000 census)

## **2. Nature and Demographic Profile of Indian Diaspora**

In few decades the island had been transformed into a major sugar producer and experienced an unprecedented demographic revolution as existing Creole and European populations were dwarfed by an immigrant Indian community which rapidly gained majority status.

The Indianization of Mauritius was a deliberate policy of the British who selected the island to be the site of "the great experiment" in the use of "free" rather than slave labour. Mauritius was chosen because it was perceived to be a new and expanding plantation economy unlike the "exhausted" West Indian sugar producers, and because of her proximity to India. Thus, Mauritius became the first British colony to be allowed to export labour under a government regulated indenture system from 1834.

The indentured workers were so called because they were obliged to sign contracts of varying duration which bound them to serve for a fixed wage. Because the migration was designed to prove a viable alternative to slave labour, indenture was a system under scrutiny. As a result the entire proceedings, from recruitment, through shipping, allocation to estates and employment, history were recorded.

*(To be continued)*

## **3. Known distinguished Diaspora**

(To be explored and information to be collected from the Indian Embassy at Mauritius)

## **4. Concerns and problems of Indian Diaspora**

(To be explored and information to be collected from the Indian Embassy at Mauritius)

## **5. Major Diaspora Associations**

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(To be explored and information to be collected from the Indian Embassy at Mauritius)

## **6. Bilateral Relation/Agreements**

Contacts between India and Mauritius date back to at least the early 15th Century. Thereafter, Mauritius continued to have contacts with India through successive Dutch, French and British occupation. During the French occupation (1715-1810), Mauritius occupied a strategic position for French colonies in India, and contributed to France's war efforts in the Indian sub-continent against the British. Indian leaders like Tipu Sultan of Mysore also sent feelers to the French authorities in Mauritius, attempting to seek their assistance against the British forces in India. The French colony of Pondicherry played an important role in the development of Mauritius during this period, by providing skilled workforce. The nature of Indian immigration underwent a complete change during the British occupation of Mauritius, when, with the abolition of slavery, large numbers of Indian workers began to be brought into Mauritius as indentured labourers to work on the sugar plantations.

On November 2, 1834, the ship 'Atlas' docked in Mauritius carrying the first batch of Indian indentured labourers. This day is now observed in Mauritius as 'Aparavasi Day', a national holiday. Over the following two decades, the number of Indian immigrants grew to such a level that they came to constitute a majority of the population. In all, about half a million Indian indentured labourers are estimated to have been brought into Mauritius between 1834 and the early decades of the 20th Century, out of whom about two-thirds settled permanently in Mauritius. The Indian immigrant population, comprising about 68% of the present Mauritian population, has maintained its cultural and religious heritage with India.

Gandhiji's Visit in 1901: Developments in pre-independence India were closely followed by the early Indian-origin leaders of Mauritius, and inspired them to better their lot through education and active participation in politics. A brief stopover of Gandhiji en route from South Africa to India (from 29 October to 15 November 1901), while awaiting departure of his ship SS Nowshera, is still etched in the consciousness of Mauritius. Barrister Manillal Doctor, who came to Mauritius in 1907 at the suggestion of Gandhiji, helped the Mauritian Indian

community to organise themselves better and laid the foundation for their struggle for political and social rights. This eventually led to the struggle for Mauritian sovereignty. As a tribute to Gandhiji and the Indian freedom struggle, the National Day of Mauritius is celebrated on 12 March, marking the beginning of the Dandi Salt March. In 2001, Mauritius celebrated the centenary of Gandhiji's visit to Mauritius in a big way. Two Indian Naval Ships – INS Tir and Krishna – visited Mauritius on the occasion. Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, the then Minister of Human Resource Development, Science and Technology and Ocean Development, visited Mauritius from 31 October to 4 November 2001, as the envoy of the Indian PM, to be the Chief Guest at the concluding ceremonies of the celebrations.

Mauritius has a special significance to India for historical, cultural and political reasons. Mauritius enjoys a strategic location in the South-Western Indian Ocean. 68% of its population is of Indian origin. India and Mauritius have very close and unique relations which encompass virtually all aspects of bilateral and multilateral relations characterised by common kinship, culture, religion and interests. Since Independence in 1968, Mauritius has enjoyed close political links with India.

The Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture was inaugurated during the visit of Prime Minister Vajpayee in March 2000. There is an active cultural exchange programme both under officially sponsored channels and through a wide non-official network. There is a regular and intensive contact with numerous socio-cultural organisations of Indo-Mauritians engaged in the task of keeping Indian culture and languages alive and vibrant in Mauritius. This has helped and supplemented the efforts of the Indo-Mauritian community in preserving their cultural identities in the composite multi-cultural framework of Mauritian society. Within and outside Cultural Exchange Programme, intensive exchange of artists and cultural troupes are carried out. Promotion of Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Urdu is also taken up.

Promotion of Hindi and other Indian languages is another area of priority attention. MoUs on establishment of the World Hindi Secretariat in Mauritius

were signed in August 1999 and recently in November 2003. Follow up action was pursued by both sides to make the Secretariat become functional at the earliest possible. Support is also extended to Mahatma Gandhi Institute (under Mauritian control) in its various activities relating to preservation of Indian culture and languages.

***Bilateral Agreements with Mauritius:***

India and Mauritius have signed a large number of bilateral agreements covering the entire gamut of our relations. Some of the important agreements have been:

- Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement 1982
- Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement 1998.
- Air Services Agreement of 1972, amended in 1995
- Trade Agreement 2000 establishing a Joint Trade Committee
- MoU for Cooperation in the field of Agriculture and allied field, 1993
- Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology, 1990
- MoU for Cooperation in the Field of Ocean Science and Technology 2000
- Agreement for Cooperation in Information Technology, 2000
- MoU for establishment of Rajiv Gandhi Science Center, 1998
- MoUs for the establishment of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, as also for the Prof. Upadhyaya Training Center and Subramania Eye Hospital
- MoU for the establishment of the Remote Sensing Center and Telemetry Tracking Station, Bigara, 1986
- Protocol on Cooperation in the field of Meteorology, 1998
- MOU on Cooperation in Biotechnology, March 2002
- MOU on Cooperation between Ministry of Small Scale Industries of India and the Ministry of Women's Rights of Mauritius, 2002
- Bilateral Extradition Treaty, November 2003
- Memorandum of Understanding for Setting up a Joint Working Group for Combating International Terrorism, March 2005
- Agreement for Cooperation in the field of Environmental Protection, March 2005
- Memorandum of Understanding on the existing Air Services Agreement between the two countries, for enhancing air access and formalizing grant of Fifth Freedom Rights to designated airlines, March 2005
- Agreement for grant of US\$10 million line of credit from Export-Import Bank of India for construction of Sewerage Project at Baiedu-Tombaeu, March 2005

In addition, bilateral Cultural Exchange Programmes have been regularly concluded since 1971. There is a bilateral Joint Commission on Economic, Technical and Cultural Cooperation, which has held nine meetings so far. The ninth session was held on 8th January 2004 in New Delhi, and was co-chaired by the Foreign Ministers of both countries. During the discussions, it was reiterated that Indian assistance to Mauritius would continue to focus on capacity building, HRD, and in high-technology sectors like IT, Bioinformatics, and Non-

Conventional Energy. The Joint Commission launched a 'Joint Study Group' aimed at the eventual institution of a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) between India and Mauritius. As mentioned above, this Joint Study Group has since finished its work, and finalised a report for consideration by the two Governments, which was formally presented to the two Prime Ministers during the recent visit to Mauritius by the Indian Prime Minister, and it was decided to set up an empowered committee to concretise the recommendations for setting up the CECPA within a 12 month time frame.