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ISSN 0953 2706

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November 2011 - No 287

Mouthpiece of the Mauritian Diaspora. Every Overseas Mauritian is an ambassador for Mauritius

Monthly - 80p 28th year

November 1983 to 2011

**28 years at the
service of the
community, and
more**

In our very first issue in November 1983, the cover of which is reproduced on the right of this page, we spoke of the Chagos issue. We asked whether Diego Garcia (US Military) base was to stay. Well, 28 years later, the base is still a burning issue brought up yesterday (28/10) by Foreign Affairs Minister Arvin Boolell with his British counterpart, William Hague, at the Commonwealth Conference in Australia.

On the right of this page is also a Mauritius Government Tourist Office (now MTPA) advert inviting the Diaspora to come home for their holidays. 28 years later, the Mauritius Government is inviting the Diaspora to invest in Mauritius! (See mention on Page 11).

As for the national airline, Air Mauritius, we are pleased to have been associated with this international carrier from Day One of our publication (See old advert in next column), a partnership that has lasted for the numbers years we have been in operation in the UK.

Mauritius News was relevant in 1983 and, 28 years later, we are still relevant to the community ... and more.

P.C.



**THE FASTEST WAY
TO THE MOST
EXOTIC ISLAND
IN THE SUN**

AIR MAURITIUS

The above advertisement of Air Mauritius was published in first MN issue in 1983. The office was to move to Conduit Street, off Savile Row



Mauritius News

TRUTH & JUSTICE

New High Commissioner for Mauritius in U.K.

Scorpio's Report
Diego Garcia base to stay?

Vertical text on right: MN's first edition in November 1983

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AIR MAURITIUS

Death in Paradise:

The shattering of an idyllic gem

By Mansha Haurdhan

Mauritius has been labelled as the 'Paradise Island' for holidaymakers, but in January 2010 a horrific murder shattered the idyllic reputation of the serene island.

Almost a year on from the heartbreaking murder of newly-wed Michaela McAreavey, daughter of Mickey Harte (Gaelic football's high profile team manager), how has such a beautiful country that is heavily dependent on the Tourism Industry been affected?

According to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, around 100,000 UK tourists visit Mauritius every year. Several months after the tragic murder, Mauritius saw a slight decrease in the number of Irish tourist visiting the island.

With the safety of tourist visiting the paradise island in question, Mauritians across the world worried about the changing reputation of the popular honeymoon destination.

Mauritius is a small volcanic island and a popular holiday destination with British tourists who visit for the pampering hotel experiences, local cuisine and sunbathing on tropical beaches.

Generally, there is a low crime level, which made the murder of Michaela McAreavey so shocking. Mrs. McAreavey was found dead in the bath by her husband, John, on January 10, 2011, a day of Irish national celebration and almost a fortnight after their marriage. It is alleged that she had been strangled to death by three Mauritian hotel workers at the Legend Hotel in Grand Gaube, north of the island. It is believed the men murdered Mrs. McAreavey after she disturbed a robbery in her hotel room as she went to get a packet of biscuits. A local court ruled that there was sufficient evidence to try the two men accused of the murder.

After the murder, the British Foreign Office did not issue any warning or advice against travelling to Mauritius. However on their website they did state that although crime levels are low in Mauritius, visitors should be aware that incidents of theft, assault and rape do occur. In October 2011, their website reported that most crimes are non-violent, although the use of weapons is evident in some burglaries.

Paul Smowton, a Far East Sales Consultant from Kuoni Travel said that the UK market of travellers to Mauritius had not declined since the murder. "My product manager, Sheena Paton, spoke directly to the hotel and they said they have not seen any decrease in bookings to the resort because of the murder. They also said it is seen as an isolated incident which could have happened anywhere. However, the hotel did advise that the Irish market for tours to Mauritius has declined."

Mauritius has always been a favourite honeymoon hotspot for newlyweds, however the question is has the murder discouraged newly married couples from honeymooning on the island? Natalie Clark, recently engaged to Steven Carrington, is excited as any bride about her future wedding. When it comes to honeymoon destinations the south-west London bride-to-be has a long honeymoon wish-list. "I would love to go somewhere hot and tropical, somewhere like St. Lucia or the Maldives. I have thought about honeymooning in Mauritius as it's such a beautiful island, but after hearing about the murder of the Irish honeymooners it has put me off. I'm not sure if I would feel relaxed enough to trust the hotel staff after such an incident, and who wants that feeling on their honeymoon? I may holiday in Mauritius after I'm married but I wouldn't want to as a newly-wed."

Although some holidaymakers are wary of travelling to Mauritius, the murder has not fazed a number of Brits who want to travel to Mauritius. Claire Edmondson, a student from Canterbury University, has always wanted to travel to Mauritius. "I think I would feel safe travelling to Mauritius as the murder was an isolated incident and don't believe it'll happen again, although I would be wary of which hotels I should stay. I would make sure I read the hotel reviews before making any booking."

Though The death of Mrs. McAreavey is a heartbreaking end to Ireland's fairytale marriage, Kamila Haurdhan, a British-born Mauritian from south-west London, is still proud to say she is Mauritian. "Mauritius is such an exotic and diverse paradise island and it has undergone dramatic developments the past few years and become very touristic."

The tragic end to Mrs. McAreavey's life stands in stark contrast to the happy memories Kamila, who reminisces about her holidays in Mauritius. "My first really vivid memory of the island is when I was about five years old, and my twin sister and I were bridesmaids at our cousin's wedding."

That's why I was shocked about the murder and saddened for the couple and their family as they were only just starting their lives together, soon after their wedding."

The reputation of Mauritius may have momentarily been tarnished by the horrific murder of Mrs. McAreavey but for the majority of the British people, the island is still known as the 'Paradise Island'.

British, Brussels bureaucrat and proud

by Andy Tarrant

Britain's tabloids and right-wing broadsheets have rarely missed an opportunity, and have manufactured many, to attack Europe's civil servants in Brussels. Notoriously, Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, was told "Up Yours Delors" on the front-page of the Sun in November 1990.

The Commission and its staff are routinely painted as an alien and malignant force. According to the latest Eurobarometer opinion polling, only 21% of British people now trust the European Commission (under half of the European average). Given this level of mistrust, Mauritius News has taken an opportunity to have an off-the-record discussion with a senior European Commission official of British nationality.

We wanted to see what an official's perspective was on working in Europe, negotiating with the British government and dealing with the British press. In exchange for a detailed and candid conversation, we were willing to offer anonymity to Mr X.

The role of the European Commission is slightly different to that of a national civil service. In one respect it is weaker, in one stronger. The weakness is that it cannot propose laws on any subject, only on those subjects where every single national government has agreed in principle that a European solution is more efficient than 27 different national laws. This agreement is incorporated in a Treaty. When the European civil servants (known as "fonctionnaires") propose a specific European law in an area included in a Treaty, it then has to be passed by at least a three quarters majority of all the national governments and the European Parliament. Mr X says that "It can be very difficult to find a compromise that works for everyone, but when you do, it is immensely satisfying." He recognises that "... this process of compromise can be culturally difficult for those politicians or national media who expect that legislation should just be a mirror image of the laws and traditions of their own country."

The strength is that the Commission has a unique right to propose draft legislation. Neither the Council (the body in which the countries are represented), nor the Parliament can propose legislation. This gives the Commission an ability to bargain with the Council and the Parliament. For this reason, each of the countries is usually keen to encourage their nationals to join the Commission. They would like to have fonctionnaires in place who are sympathetic to their specific national sensitivities.

Mr X is unimpressed by the idea of the Commission as an alien force which is insensitive to Britain's needs and does not recognise its attributes. "Reading the British press, you might not realise that officials of British origin are over-represented in the highest ranks of the European Commission". Mr X puts this success down to two factors. First, most British governments have been "assiduous" at encouraging bright British civil servants to take the exams to become fonctionnaires and then in backing them when the highest positions are negotiated between countries. Second, "a British university education equips you very well for work in the European Commission. It trains you to focus in on a problem and to come up with a workable solution. Studies elsewhere can be a bit too theoretically focussed."

Mr X is concerned that there is a gap coming in British representation at senior levels. Responding to the eurosceptic mood in the United Kingdom, the Brown government had abandoned the UK's European faststream programme. The consequence was a dramatic fall in the number of British civil servants going to Brussels. Perhaps surprisingly, given his history as an arch Euro-sceptic, William Hague, the current foreign secretary, has been instrumental in reviving the scheme. Mr X expects the situation to improve again, "but for a period after my generation of British fonctionnaires retires, senior Brits will be thin on the ground." It seems that euroscepticism may have had the impact of weakening Britain's

influence in Brussels.

His main concern with the very consensual form of decision-making practised in the EU is that it may not be rapid enough to respond in crises. His view is that when national politicians put in place decision-making processes at EU-level, they should also think about how they might function in the event of emergencies as well as in normal times. "This may have to include more rapid moves to majority voting in crises. In practice this would mean that more compromises would have to be made." Given that the UK is one of those countries where politicians and media do expect that European laws should always look like our own, it suggests that we are likely to oppose effective crisis-management systems.

This might seem a surprising development, as we also hold a national self-image of ourselves as pragmatists. He is very proud of the role the Commission has played. "I joined the Commission [in the 1970s] because I thought it was a force for good, ensuring peace and stability in Europe. It has stayed true to this. It has played a critical role in managing the mostly stable transition of central and eastern Europe from Communism. At the cost of 1% of GDP for the member countries, it is incredibly good value. In the absence of the European Union, imagine the forces that could have been unleashed today in the context of the current deep financial crisis - currency wars and protectionism leading to volatile nation states jostling for temporary advantage and undermining their collective economic position...and the political consequences which could have flowed from this." Here he is referring to the chain of events which occurred in Europe in the 1930s.

In his view, the British government has one of the best ambassadorial operations on the ground in Brussels. "The British representation is extremely well organised for keeping national politicians informed and for putting forward Britain's views to the Commission and to the European Parliament". He says that the Achilles heel of this formidable organization is that inflexibility can be forced upon it when legislation is under negotiation. This, in his view, tends to have little to do with the substance and more to do with the "irresponsibility and ignorance of the British media". This is also partly, in his view, "a failure of political leadership on the part of all British politicians". They have "not only failed to take on the prejudices of the newspapers. They have often actively fuelled it. Agreeing something in Brussels and then returned home to denounce it, saying it was imposed on them."

Mr X says that like the populations of all European countries, the fonctionnaires of all nationalities tend to have shared beliefs in "markets as tools but not masters" and "fairness, and looking after those who cannot look after themselves." It is possible that the hostility of much of the British media to the European process is purely cultural - an aversion to an unfamiliar way of doing politics and based on a feeling that compromise in politics is a "bad thing". It might equally be that much of our media is either overtly or covertly opposed to the general beliefs of the fonctionnaires - and worried that they might influence laws which would apply in the UK. This should be a cause for alarm for us - polling in Britain finds that the general beliefs of the large majority of British people are the same as those of the fonctionnaires. Rather than worrying about "aliens" in Brussels, we should perhaps be more worried about a bad case of Exorcist-style "possession" in our domestic media.

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Truth & Justice

Published in the UK
Founded Nov 1983

The first Mauritian newspaper overseas *

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www.mauritiusnews.co.uk

The editorial team and management of Mauritius News do not necessarily share the views expressed by contributors.

Annual

Subscription Fee:
(12 monthly issues)

UK: £20

Europe: £25

Other countries:
£30

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Political Development

The power game and points to ponder over electoral reform

In previous articles, especially at the time of the last election, MN analysed the possibility of an alliance between the Labour Party of Navin Ramgoolam (PM) and either the MSM of Pravind Jugnauth or the MMM of Paul Bérenger.

It was almost certain that Navin Ramgoolam would go the Bérenger way, but at the 11th hour he allied himself with Pravind leaving Bérenger by the wayside. Navin and Pravind, two strange bedfellows, and like all alliances their union was bound to fail, and it did in September over the MedPoint scandal, a private medical concern partly owned by the relatives of the Jugnauths allegedly sold to Government at an inflated price over an original quote.

The case was brought to the consideration of ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption.) MMM and Opposition leader Paul Bérenger was most vociferous in attacking the Government of which the Jugnauths were part and parcel. "Scandal of the Century", was his condemnation of the purchase of the MedPoint clinic at 144 million rupees when it was first quoted at 75 million rupees.

MSM/MMM alliance

A rumour has widely been circulating in Mauritius that to unseat Navin Ramgoolam (déboulonner Ramgoolam as they did in 2000), Paul Bérenger is now allying himself with the MSM of the Jugnauths with the prospect of Jugnauth, The Elder (80 years' old and now President of the Republic) will come back into active politics to take over the reins of Prime Minister once more for three years in a power-sharing government with the MMM, and Paul Bérenger will be PM for the remaining two years. A similar scenario between the two leaders took place in 2000.

This time, though, Ramgoolam may have a trump card in his hand. How will Paul Bérenger explain to the electorate the fact that only yesterday he was vehemently chastising Jugnauth, The Younger, Finance Minister in the Labour/MSM government for approving the government purchase of the MedPoint clinic in which his close relatives are said to hold the majority shares. Earlier this century, Jugnauth senior as PM and Paul Bérenger as Finance Minister were highly criticised by Navin Ramgoolam, Opposition leader then, for the sale of the former Delphis Bank at a derisory price. Ramgoolam said that he would set up a Commission of Inquiry into the Delphis saga if ever he came to power.

What a campaign it could well be as regards the next election. Many in London see in any MSM/MMM alliance an end to Ramgoolam's reign. Is it so?

Electoral Reform

This is an opportunity, as any other, to talk of the Electoral Reform on which we elaborated in our previous issue under the headline "Mauritian expatriates want the Right to Vote in Mauritius". Incidentally, we wonder what the Mauritius Government will do for the Diaspora now that they (the Diaspora) are being officially solicited to invest in Mauritius.

Anyway, our present point about the prospective

electoral reform is about legislation to forbid alliances between political parties before an election, as advocated in the past by MMM leader Paul Bérenger himself. Any coalition of parties should take place after election results are known. This will be fair to the electorate who will not have to be subjected to the party leaders' policy of *Kiss and Kick* i.e. Kiss today and Kick tomorrow (and vice versa). Such politics is most unfair on the electorate who must put up with the whims of the leaders to suit their own convenience during an election campaign, and even afterwards.

Electoral Reform: Proposals by Guy Ollivry and Rama Sithanen

Now let us talk about electoral reform again. In a paper that he submitted to press a decade ago, Guy Ollivry, leader of the UDM (a party that never made any impact on the political scene), made a plea in favour of Proportional Representation on the ground that it would prevent the 60-0 phenomenon that occurred twice in Mauritius. In 1982, the MMM (with Anerood Jugnauth on board) on its own steam won all the 60 seats of the National Assembly. The ruling Labour Party went into disarray for several years. Even the party's leader and PM, SSR (Father of the Nation), was not re-elected in his cherished constituency of Triolet.

Labour was not to recover from this disaster until some party stalwarts, in the early 1990s, came and fetched a reluctant Navin Ramgoolam, son of SSR, from London to be the new party leader. Well, in 1995, the new Labour leader, in alliance with the MMM of Paul Bérenger, took all the seats in the Assembly leaving none to their political adversaries, the ruling MSM of Sir Anerood Jugnauth who left the MMM in 1983 to create his own party.

Mr Ollivry believes that PR would rid the country of this 60-0 phenomenon. Unfortunately, the fact is that, in spite of some cliché, people vote essentially for the party and not necessarily for the individual MP. It has been said in Mauritius that an out-and-out partisan will vote even for a monkey if such an animal is fielded by his party as a candidate. It must be an enormous pleasure for the electors to witness the total wipe out of a party, with all its members, when it has lost all sense of direction. Mr Ollivry says that this is not good. Under the PR system, the hated party (or coalition) must still have some MPs in the House, in accordance with the votes obtained, he reckons. This could be thwarting the wishes of the electorate.

Communalism

The paper submitted to the press by Rama Sithanen, (a former Labour Finance Minister who failed to obtain a Party ticket at the last election) argued for a modicum of PR to eliminate the Best Loser System, which he said, encouraged communalism. (In our October issue we elaborated on this system).

What is communalism and how does one define it? Communalism has to do with community, purely and simply. In France, they have a new word for this communal spirit that they refer to as 'communautarism'.

Communalism may be used both to mean a state of togetherness, and to demean the same state of togetherness. In the positive sense it can mean service to a community or within a community. In the negative sense, it can mean service to one community at the expense of, or disregarding, all other communities, tantamount to favouritism. One can imagine the state of affairs in multiracial Mauritius under any regime.

We will not shout loud enough to say that communalism is ingrained in the Mauritian psyche, i.e. in the Mauritian way of life, culturally, religiously, politically, etc., etc. Senior posts, be it in Government or the private sector are NORMALLY effected on the basis of communal consideration (Police chief, Service Commissions chairman, Cabinet Secretary, etc and etc). If we have a look at appointments in the Mauritius Diplomatic Service under whatever government we can see that there is yet to be High Commissioner in Australia who is not from the General Population and there is yet to be a High Commissioner in the UK from the same General Population. The same practice may be taking place at the UN and in other embassies. This is the prevailing mentality of our country.

Can Mr Sithanen assure us that any Constitution reform will eliminate the communal spirit in Mauritius? Many members of his own community were convinced that his deselection at the last general election was based on communalism, though we at Mauritius News know it to be otherwise than that.

It may be fair for the Government leaders to have around them people they feel they can rely on unconditionally. Favouritism exists everywhere in the world. JFK employed his brother Robert as Attorney General when he himself became the US President. Many ministers and Permanent Secretaries in Mauritius prefer to have as their PA someone on whom they can rely and whom they can trust implicitly.

Obsession

It is believed that there is too much obsession with the question of communalism in Mauritius. The community spirit is what makes us feel secure and strong in the face of animosity and oppression. Such community confidence starts within our own family in our home and within the relatives around our family, within our religion among similar faithful, then through our friends in our immediate environment, all that blends into the communal group at large, and subsequently into our nationhood that makes our strength and pride.

In the UK we are requested to state our ethnic origin on every official document we fill in. We understand that a Mauritian delegation are appealing to the Privy Council in England with a request to make it unlawful for a parliamentary candidate having to state his communal background on his application form. In the UK such legislation would be defeated, as it is against the Race Equality and Equal Opportunities spirit.

In Mauritius you cannot have a football team with any particular community or religious reference. Such a restriction would be frowned upon as racial discrimination in the UK. Because players of the same community are not allowed to play as a team, football has practically been destroyed in Mauritius. The competition edge has gone out of individual teams.

Mixed Mauritius is a different kettle of fish from Mixed Britannia, (BBC programme presented in October by George Allagiah). In a next issue we may dwell on the difference between the community mix in Mauritius and the community mix in the UK.

Peter Chellen

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21 Sep	11 - 15 - 32 - 33 - 37 - 39	28
14 Sep	23 - 28 - 29 - 37 - 38 - 42	49
10 Sep	5 - 7 - 9 - 10 - 22 - 47	37
07 Sep	4 - 29 - 31 - 36 - 38 - 48	35
03 Sep	4 - 17 - 20 - 26 - 29 - 36	31
31 Aug	5 - 26 - 43 - 46 - 47 - 49	28

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Thought for the month

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BC Forbes

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Entertainment in Tooting

The Classic Club is now owned by Mauritian-born Sandeep and Maya Conhye

A simple doorway and a noticeboard at 28 Upper Tooting Road are the first clues that you have reached the location of south London's best-kept secret. When you pass through the door and up the red-carpeted stairs, you find yourself somewhere really rather special: The Classic.

This Mauritian-owned venue functions on several levels – for some it's primarily a restaurant, for others it's a nightclub where they can dance the night away, some treat it as their 'local' to enjoy a drink and a game of snooker, and for those with a big event to celebrate The Classic is the obvious choice for an elegant party. As a result, the clientele is wonderfully varied, from family groups to smartly dressed youngsters showing off their moves on the dance floor and perhaps an elderly couple enjoying Indian music from a live band.

I knew the place years ago, when it was primarily a snooker hall and bar with a screen showing Indian films. Compared with the fairly basic facilities of those days, the present-day Classic has undergone a spectacular transformation: smart, elegant, clean, well run and serving some of the best Indian food in south London, which attracts many people from north of the Thames. Above all, it surely has one of the friendliest welcomes this side of the Indian Ocean.

That is in great part thanks to the personality of the owners, Sandeep and Maya Conhye, and their staff. Sandeep's professional background combines catering and restaurant management in both Mauritius and the UK, chemistry, legal practice and some years in the Anti Drug Smuggling Unit. Today he is an immigration lawyer, although he also involved in a remarkable project to fortify rice with essential minerals and vitamins (you can see more



at www.jirehfeedtheworld.com). Maya, too, has considerable experience in the hospitality industry, but her association with The Classic is more personal, as she fell in love with the club as an ordinary customer. She said: "The first time I came I felt good, but also felt I could do so much with it."

She finally got her chance in September 2010, when Sandeep handed her the keys and she was able to realise her ambition to "have a small place where I could wear a sari"; above all, a place where people could come and relax and feel at home in a safe atmosphere. As she told me: "You can come here and sit alone and not feel lonely." That is certainly true; it is impossible to spend any time in the place without making friends – a rare and remarkable thing in this big, often impersonal city. And, she takes pains to emphasise, "The staff have supported us – I couldn't have done this without them."

The staff are attentive and soon get to know your preferences.

And when the rush on the bar is over, you are quite likely to find them, and Maya, on the dance floor, which just adds to the sense that this is more like a rather fine family party than a soulless commercial club; it's also an aspect that makes it feel very safe.

That definitely doesn't mean it is bland – the resident DJ, Emron, makes sure of that! The sheer irresistibility of the latest Bollywood hits keeps the dance floor busy until close down. But if the pace looks like slowing down a little, then a blast of séga is guaranteed to get the large Mauritian contingent jumping out of their seats. Occasionally, DJ Emron goes back to his Guyanese roots to expand the music mix to include some soca and chutney. Live music is also a traditional feature of Friday nights at The Classic.

Naturally, it has become a popular venue for people to hold birthday parties, wedding receptions and even modelling shows. A big attraction is its flexibility: the whole hall holds 250 people, but The Classic can work just as well for a small group of 20 people, for example.

Except during special events, such as Diwali, Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve (also highly recommended), there is no door charge and both bar and food prices are very reasonable. Bear in mind, however, that sometimes the whole hall is booked for private parties, so it is wise to telephone beforehand, and on popular days such as Saturdays it makes sense to arrive in good time to be sure of getting a table and avoiding the rush for ordering meals.

The Classic lives up to its name and showcases the best of Mauritian hospitality in London. Just be warned, though: after a couple of visits, you're likely to become a regular!



DJ Emron & guest Sudha

Stephen Spark

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New Opening Times

Mauritius Bar and Restaurant is open Monday Thursday from 4pm - 12pm. The kitchen closes at 9.30pm. On Friday we are open 4pm - late, the kitchen closes at 10.30pm. Saturday and Sunday we are open 12pm - late. Lunch is 12pm - 3pm, dinner 6pm - 10.30pm.

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