

L'Union
fait
La Force



Mauritian Overseas Gazette



Email : mauritianoverseasgazette@outlook.com
Website : <http://www.mauritianoverseasgazette.com>

Vol 2024 Issue No 47

An organ for the Mauritian Diaspora

A totally independent publication

Editor: Peter Chellen (Former Editor of Mauritius News 1983 - 2015)

Views expressed by contributors are their own

Christmas Greetings



Picture from Victoria
Terminal Mall
in Port Louis

P.C.

MoG wishes you all a Merry Christmas

Paul Draper writes from Rodrigues



As the year draws to a close, we wish to express our heartfelt gratitude for your continued support and engagement.

2024 has been a year of challenges, a huge triple birthday party and new beginnings.

We do not know yet what 2025 will bring but we hope for a peaceful year, full of positive excitement.

Paul, Birgit and the whole Care-Co Team & from Orlando and Susan & Team at the Trevor Huddleston House (GPL Centre-Rodrigues).

Chagos – The Eternal Debate

The Chagos Archipelago issue is very much on the table these days. An agreement was reached between Labour Britain under Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and the former Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth earlier this year for the return of the Archipelago to Mauritius with the US as a sitting tenant on the main island of Diego Garcia. The US would pay rent to Mauritius instead of to Britain for the 99-year lease of Diego Garcia to the US to accommodate its military base in the Indian Ocean.

The new Prime Minister of Mauritius, Dr Navin Ramgoolam, is not happy about the agreement between British PM Starmer and his predecessor Jugnauth. Dr Ramgoolam says that he wants the agreement to be reviewed.

In the House of Commons the Conservatives are clamouring for the Chagos Archipelago not to be returned to Mauritius. Far right MP Nigel Farage wants the Chagos to be given to Chagossians residing in the UK, and for a referendum to be held accordingly.

The greatest fear for the Chagos Archipelago issue is in the installation of reactionary Donald Trump at the White House in January 2025.

He has already declared that the Chagos should not be given back to Mauritius. Once in office as President of the United States, he may turn the whole Chagos saga on its head unless someone tries to appease him.

In this article we analyse this eventuality of an appeasement.

A couple of years ago I wrote an article in *Le Mauricien* entitled “Chagos, the Eternal Debate”. It would seem, so far, that the Chagos Archipelago issue, in fact, offer, material for an eternal debate. The issue goes on and on. Is there no end to it in sight.

The present dilemma concerning the Chagos Archipelago originated in 1965 when a parliamentary delegation from Mauritius headed by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam (SSR) came to London for a conference organised by the British Government (the mother country) to discuss the independence of Mauritius.

The outcome of that constitutional conference was that Mauritius would be granted its independence of Britain but without the Chagos Archipelago. It was rumoured then that the British would allow the Americans to build a communications station on Diego Garcia, the main island of the Archipelago.

There were rejoicings in Mauritius that the country would be independent soon. But there was also concern that Mauritius had been amputated of part of its territory, the Chagos Archipelago constituting of some 64 islets including its main island of Diego Garcia. SSR took the stick from the Opposition leader Gaetan Duval who was against independence but wanted an association with the mother country on the same lines as sister island of La Reunion with its mother country France. SSR was accused of selling the Chagos to the British in return for independence. This stigma has remained to this day. SSR was subsequently accused of selling the Archipelago for £3m, the money given to Mauritius by Britain to compensate the poor ilois (Chagossians) subsequently removed without mercy from the Chagos and dumped on the quays in Mauritius by the British. This action on the part of Britain has been qualified as a crime against humanity.

I happened to meet the Mauritian delegation to London in 1965 as I was one of the three members of staff, plus the Commissioner Leckraz Teeluck, of the newly-created Mauritius Commission a year earlier (in 1964) to pave the way for the creation of a proper diplomatic service to be ready when Mauritius would be independent. The London office became the Mauritius High Commission four years later, in 1968, when Mauritius acceded to independence.

Fait accompli

Three decades later, in the 1990s, when I was editing *Mauritius News* in London and Sir Satcam Boolell who was part of the 1965 delegation to London for constitutional talk told me in an interview that Mauritius was placed before a fait accompli and could not do otherwise but to accept the terms of the British Government for independence without the Chagos. It was question of take it or leave it. The delegation made up of Labour, IFB, Comité d'Action Musulmane, with the exception of the PMSD, opted for the UK offer.

No one could “look into the seeds of time” then and say that, 60 years hence, SSR's son Navin Ramgoolam (now aged 77), would have to deal with the problem that found its roots under his father in 1965 who was then only 65. The son, too, is finding himself in a similar situation of “take it or leave it”. Britain has been widely blamed for dismembering the Mauritius territory before granting the country its independence. The uprooting of the Chagos people from their motherland had been severely condemned by the world. Even the International Court of Justice (ICJ), on an appeal from former Prime Minister Sir Anerood Jugnauth, ruled in May 2019 that Britain should return the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius to complete the decolonisation of the colony.

But Britain did not comply. Conservative British Prime Minister Boris Johnson could not give two hoots about the International Court of Justice's ruling. Nor did any subsequent British Conservative PM. The Conservatives lost power to the Labour Party under the leadership of Keir Starmer in July 2024, and he de-

cidated to comply with the ruling of the ICJ. He started negotiations with the Mauritian Prime Minister of the time, Pravind Jugnauth, negotiations which were to be ratified in January 2025. But Pravind Jugnauth went out of office in November 2024. The new Mauritian Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam, very boldly, told British PM Starmer that he was not going to accept his settlement offer made to his predecessor and that the deal should be renegotiated, especially regarding Diego Garcia leased by Britain to America for 99 years for a military base.

Negotiator Jonathan Powell

But as far as the British are concerned, the Chagos issue has been dealt and done with. The ICJ ruled that the Chagos Archipelago territory should be returned to Mauritius and that's precisely what the British government under PM Starmer is doing. The Labour PM even sent his government his star negotiator, Jonathan Powell, back to Mauritius in December for talk with PM Navin Ramgoolam to impress upon him that the arrangements with his predecessor, Pravind Jugnauth, are in the best interests of both Britain and Mauritius. But Navin Ramgoolam is adamant that the arrangements must be discussed anew. It is stalemate between the two countries.

On the other hand, The Americans, under the outgoing President Joe Biden, are not in the least worried about the British/Mauritian *pourparler* as it is no bother to them as to whom the Diego Garcia rent will have to be paid. However, Joe Biden's Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has tried, over the phone, to bring it home to Mauritian PM Navin Ramgoolam that it would be advisable to sign the deal before President designate Donald Trump takes office in January 2025.

Anthony Blinken's advice is believed to have had no effect on the Mauritian PM as he continues to tell the Mauritian people that fresh negotiations should take place between Britain and Mauritius about the Chagos issue.

For the British, there is no more ground to negotiate, to negotiate on what? To negotiate on the length of the lease of Diego Garcia to the US? To negotiate on the amount of the rent payable by the Americans for the lease? Or is it simply to tell the Americans that they should vacate and remove their military base from the island? Or are these speeches meant for the gallery?

Most reactionary character

Trump, the most reactionary character among the Republicans, has already made it known that the Chagos Archipelago should not be returned to Mauritius on the grounds that Mauritius entertains close links with China and China will have free access to the Archipelago once under the control of Mauritius. In this respect, India will play a very important role to convince his friend Trump that China will have no influence on Mauritius as long as she (India) has a very good bearing on Mauritius.

India, as an opponent of China, entertains good relations with the US. It's diplomacy at the highest level to save the bacon of Mauritius and ensure that Trump pay the rent money to Mauritius for the lease of Diego Garcia. India's President Narendra Modi has immediately made contact with the new Mauritian PM Ramgoolam once he took office in November, and has even extended to him an invitation for an official visit to India. India's Foreign Secretary Sri Vikram Misri came to Mauritius from 20-22 December for talks. Talks most likely about the Chagos Archipelago which is of very importance to India as much as the interests of India in Agalega.

If Trump listens to Modi, the Chagos debate may not be eternal after all – once all the pieces fall into place.

P.C.

Mylene writes from Japan

Taking a Look Back at 2024: The Highlights, the lowlights, Challenges, and Achievements of the Past Year



January

Even though a devastating earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale struck the Noto peninsula, resulting in the tragic loss of 238 lives, there was some uplifting news too. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's SLIM lunar lander aced its soft landing on the moon, joining the elite club of the Soviet Union, the United States, China and India. To add to the excitement, Tokito Oda secured his first victory in the wheelchair men's singles at the Australian Open for the first time.

What a start to the year!

February

Emperor Naruhito turned 64 and sent heartfelt thoughts to the earthquake victims. Meanwhile, a spectacular projection mapping display at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's headquarters made it into the Guinness World Records as the largest building display ever! Plus, The Nikkei index (Japanese Stock market index) closed at a historic high, not seen since 1989.

March

The Sapporo High Court ruled that the ban on same-sex marriage is unconstitutional. Shohei Ohtani, a professional baseball player with the Los Angeles Dodgers and the world's top-earning athlete (a 10-year deal worth \$700 million) denied any involvement in the illegal gambling activities of his interpreter Ipppei Mizuhara.

The government approved a bill for background checks on jobs involving children.

April

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Washington to meet President Joe Biden and talk about defence, while former PM Aso met Trump at his New York office.

The Japan Sumo Association shared the sad news that Akebono (born Chadwick Haheo Rowan in Hawaii), the first non-Japanese wrestler ever to achieve Yokozuna status, died at the age of 54. Additionally, a new ride-sharing service was introduced in parts of Tokyo to tackle the shortage of taxi drivers.

May

The Ministry of Internal Affairs revealed that the child population under 15 years old has declined to 11.3% of the total population, reaching a record low. Northern lights, usually seen in Hokkaido between November and February, could be seen again this month. Princess Kako embarked on an official visit to Greece to celebrate 125 years of diplomatic relations with Japan.

June

At a Tokyo press conference, Charles Oppenheimer, the grandson of Robert who led the Manhattan Project spoke out against nuclear weapons and expressed support for nuclear energy. Biochemist Akira Endo, known for discovering statins, which help lower cholesterol

levels, passed away at the age of 90. Tokyo DisneySea unveiled its latest addition, the Fantasy Springs area featuring attractions inspired by Frozen, Tangled and Peter Pan.

July

The Bank of Japan issued new banknotes for the first time in 20 years. Following Japanese sanctions against Russia, Russia banned 13 Japanese executives from entering the country, including Akira Toyoda, chairman of Toyota. The Sado Island Gold Mines in Niigata prefecture were added to UNESCO's World Heritage site list.

August

The Paris Olympics concluded, with Japan achieving a total of 20 gold, 12 silver, and 13 bronze medals. Nagasaki held a ceremony marking 79 years since the atomic bombing of the city, with Israel not receiving an invitation, resulting in six ambassadors choosing not to attend. Tomiko Itooka, a 116-year old woman, is recognized by Guinness World Records as the world's oldest person.

September

The Nagasaki District Court acknowledged 15 out of 44 plaintiffs as hibakusha, survivors of the atomic bombing of the city. The series "Shogun" received 18 Emmy awards, including the prestigious Outstanding Drama Series. Japan Coast Guard officials arrested the operator of the Kazu 1 tourist boat, which sank off Hokkaido in April 2022. Among the 26 passengers, 20 lost their lives, while 6 remain missing.

October

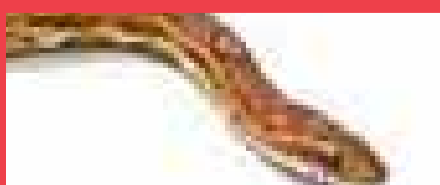
Shigeru Ishiba became Japan's new prime minister after winning the presidential election in September. A US shell from World War II exploded on a runway at Miyazaki Airport causing the cancellation of 78 flights. Nihon Hidankyo, the organization representing A- and H-Bomb sufferers was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to promote a world free of nuclear weapons.

November

An amendment to the Road Traffic Act introduced penalties for cycling while using a mobile phone or under the influence of alcohol. Prime Minister Ishiba joined a meeting of families whose loved ones have been abducted to North Korea. They passionately advocate for their safe return. Princess Yuriko, the great-aunt of Emperor Naruhito, dies at the age of 101.

December

As the calendar year comes to a close, Japan is bursting with seasonal highlights! Christmas decorations adorn public spaces. Winter illuminations light up the streets, and the start of the ski season kicks off. The first snowfall has arrived in some parts of Japan, while others are already under a meter or two. The festive cheer is all around, even though the 25th is a typical working day.



As we welcome in year 2025, may the year of the snake bring you new beginnings, success, happiness and exciting times ahead!
Happy New Year everyone!