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Views expressed by contributors are their own



*Wishing you
and
your family
a
Happy Sankranti*

Fleurs Banané Madras P.C.



The Golden Flower which some people in Mauritius call "Fleurs Banané Madras" because it blossoms when the Tamils celebrate their new year on 14 February, known as Pongol

The Chagos Saga *Rann nou Chagos*

The International Court of Justice and the United Nations General Assembly have over the years announced that Britain should transfer the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius to complete the decolonisation of its former British colony. Unfortunately, these international organisations have no power to enforce what they preach. The British Government under the Conservatives from the days of Margaret Thatcher has consistently said that Mauritius can go to hell, there is no question of passing the sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago to the former British colony. Margaret Thatcher's ruling was that the Chagos would be given to Mauritius when the main islet, Diego Garcia, would no longer be required for defence purposes. Another recalcitrant among the lot is former PM Boris Johnson.

A change of government in Britain last year (2024) saw a Labourite taking over as Prime Minister. Since then, there has been a change of heart (though not a total change) for the Chagos to be given back to Mauritius. Through negotiations, a deal was reached between the British Government under new Labour Prime Minister Sir Keith Starmer and the then Mauritian administration under Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth.

What the deal was, was never revealed by any party, except that Mauritian PM Pravind Jugnauth told the Mauritian people, during the prevailing election campaign, that the country would be receiving billions of rupees from Britain. Jugnauth even went to the extent of expressing fear that the money could be squandered by Ramgoolam, the contender for the prime ministership if in power.

To Jugnauth's great distress, Navin Ramgoolam (and his allies) won the November General Election by a forceful majority scooping all the 60 seats of the National Assembly, leaving none to Jugnauth (and his allies). Pravind Jugnauth who was riding on the crest of the wave was shell-shocked by such a crushing defeat and disappeared from the scene for several days.

Ramgoolam himself was baffled by such a victory which gave him immense power and self-confidence. No sooner was he in office that he told the nation that the outgoing government under Jugnauth had bankrupted the country and that he would not be able to honour the goodies promised during the electoral campaign.

Chagos Deal Revisited

Everything done by the previous government will have to be undone or improved upon, according to veteran (three-time) Prime Minister Ramgoolam. He reckons that the Chagos

Attorney
General
Gavin
Glover



Foreign
Secretary
David
Lammy



deal between the British Government and his predecessor is inadequate and should be renegotiated. He sent a delegation to Britain on 9 January headed by Attorney General, Gavin Glover, to renegotiate the deal. The PM was subsequently reported to have said to the press that Britain had agreed to give Mauritius some 4 billion rupees per year for the duration of the 99-year lease of Diego Garcia to the Americans. This figure quoted by the Mauritian press seemed to vary from day to day, according to the whims of the papers.

Returning from mission on 12 January, Attorney-General Glover looked rather nonplussed about his assignment and did not look like a victorious messenger. He told the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation on his arrival at the airport that he was not in a position to talk about his mission as he had to report to Prime Minister Ramgoolam first. He said that he could not confirm nor deny the compensation figures quoted by the British press nor about the figures quoted the Mauritian press.

Since the Mauritian people have not been told of the details of the original deal between Jugnauth and the British Government, no one is in a position to know if there has been any improvement on that deal. British Foreign Secretary David Lammy declared at the time of the Jugnauth deal in October last that it was the best arrangement for both Britain and Mauritius.

Take it or Leave it

During the Glover mission to London Foreign Secretary Lammy repeated the same litany to the world: It is the best arrangement for both Mauritius and Britain. So, as far as the British Foreign Secretary David Lammy is concerned it's the same deal being offered to Mauritius now and that there has not been any change on the British stance. *You want your Chagos, take it (with the American tenant on Diego Garcia) or leave it.* Did the international jurisdiction make any mention of compensation to the Chagossians? Our job is done, say the British. Now, you deal with President Trump from next week (20 Jan 2025). For once, Pravind Jugnauth may be happy that his successor will carry the can.

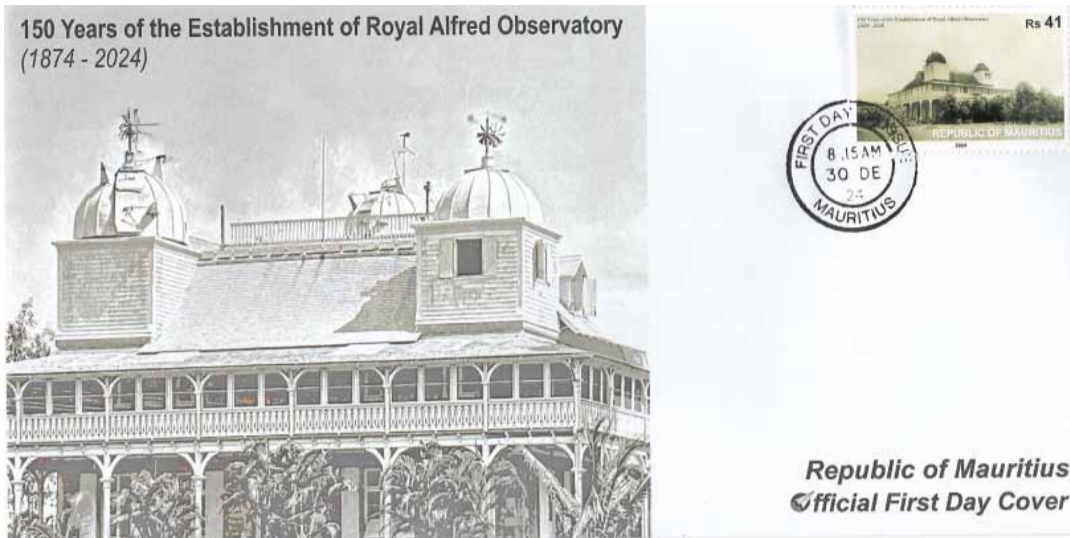
It has been said that India's intervention to President Trump in favour of Mauritius will be of the highest importance. Trump is a character who is determined to turn Planet Earth on its head. To assuage his fury when he is at the White House (He may paint it black), Indian PM, Narendra Modi, may try to convince Trumpy that as long as he (Modi) can keep the Mauritian leaders under India's wings, there is no fear that they (the Mauritians) will accommodate the Chinese in the Chagos. China *est la bete noire* of the US and India. First question to ask: Is it true? Second question is: Can Modi influence Trump? Attorney General Gavin Glover will now go back to England for further talks.

Suresh Coonjee Beeharry

Stamps of Mauritius

Theme: Anniversaries & Events

On 30 December 2024, the Mauritius Posts Ltd issued a Rs 41 commemorative stamp and special First Day Cover (envelope) to commemorate the 150 Years of the Establishment of Royal Alfred Observatory (1874 – 2024)



Historical Background

The foundation stone of the Royal Alfred Observatory was laid on the 30th of May 1870 by the second son of Queen Victoria, His Royal Highness Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh. In his concluding remarks, His Excellency the Governor proposed to name the institution as the Royal Alfred Observatory in honour of Prince Alfred.

The name of an eminent scientist, Dr Charles Meldrum, is always associated with the Royal Alfred Observatory. His numerous works on the science of Meteorology was renowned all around the world. Acknowledging his research work on wind distribution in tropical cyclones that was of immense importance in shipping in those days, the then Local Government approved the proposal of the Mauritius Meteorological Society (created by Dr Charles Meldrum in 1851) to establish an Observatory at Pamplemousses, in 11 acres of Crown Land.

From 1880, photographs of sunspots were taken and sent to the Solar Physics Committee of Great Britain. Major events at the observatory included Dr Meldrum's observation of the Transit of Venus on 9 December 1874 and the Total Eclipse of the sun of 18th May 1901 observed in cooperation with the Royal Society's expedition from the UK. Astronomy works were gradually discontinued but owing to its achievements in the fields of meteorology (particularly in the provision of storm warnings) and magnetism, the Royal Alfred Observatory acquired international recognition and repute.

In 1898 a Milne seismograph was installed at the Royal Alfred Observatory, Pamplemousses. At that time, Mauritius was a member of the seismic survey committee set up in 1897 by the British Association for the advances of science. The instrument was able to record both short & long waves periods.

Vertical movement North-South and horizontal West-East of unfelt earth tremors were recorded on a photographic film travelling 240mm/h on a revolving drum driven by a weight motor clock. The seismograph was installed in the magnetic basement on a concrete pillar which was not in contact with earth on any side so that the instrument records the movement of the concrete only.

The Royal Alfred Observatory became operational as a first order meteorological and magnetic station equipped with the best instrument. The main building was a handsome stone structure surrounded by verandahs and balconies. Astronomical and seismographic observations started in the following years.

Another important activity of the Royal Alfred Observatory was the determination of the local time and the dropping of the time-ball at 1 p.m. on Signal Mountain (subsequently on the Port Tower) actioned electrically by the standard clock of the observatory. The time service which included flashing signals along telegraph wires and on the electricity network was further developed with the transmission of time signals to vessels sailing within a radius of 600 miles of Mauritius.

The passage of intense cyclones in January 1945 and Carol (1960) caused significant damage to the building.

In 1961, the Royal Alfred Observatory was pulled down to make space for the construction of the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam National Hospital.

Courtesy: - Mauritius Meteorological Services, Mauritius Meteorological Society, Musée de la Photographie, Mauritius Posts Ltd

Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam wants the return of the 220 million rupees+ seized by police from his personal coffers ten years ago

According to today's Telegraph (16/1), the Mauritius PM demands the £3.2 million cash seized from his safe by police two decades ago after losing power. According to the online publication, "Navin Ramgoolam was arrested in 2015 on suspicion of conspiracy and money laundering after his surprise general election loss."

The Telegraph makes the serious allegation that he was accused of "receiving funds from foreigners seeking citizenship in Mauritius. The paper says that he was later released on bail and the charges were dropped."

The Telegraph, under the pen of Samaan Lateein, Mumbai, writes that Ramgoolam denied any wrongdoing and declared that the money was donated by his supporters and was set aside for campaigning. The money seized consisted of Rs220 million in Mauritian currency, plus some 4 million in American dollars, reportedly.

Other serious allegations by the Telegraph is that Navin Ramgoolam while in office had financially benefited from the purchase of six Airbus aircraft, but the accusations were subsequently dropped.

The Telegraph says that Ramgoolam's bid for the return of his cash seized under the previous government was scheduled to be heard by the Supreme Court today (16/1) but has been postponed to mid-February. His contention is that the search at his place in Port Louis and at Vacoas was illegal and politically motivated to harm his political career.

Previous similar attempts by Ramgoolam to recover his money did not succeed, but now the situation has changed.

Pierre Louis

