

L'Union
fait
La Force



Mauritian Overseas Gazette

Truth
&
Trust

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At the service of the Mauritian Diaspora

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A totally independent platform

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Truth
&
Justice

Mauritius News, the first Mauritian overseas newspaper

If as record shows that the first newspaper in Mauritius was created in January 1773, it is not inappropriate to place on record that the first Mauritian newspaper outside Mauritius, Mauritius News, was created in London in November 1983



Issue No 01 November 1983

Mauritius News was in fact created in London as a monthly publication of A4 format printed in Black and White on white paper in November 1983 by Peter Chellen who was the editor as well.

From the A4 format, the publication was made into a tabloid printed on newsprint in March 1992 with full colour.

At the time of its creation in 1983, Mauritius News had no competition be it in the UK or anywhere outside Mauritius, generally. The paper was totally independent with no political inclination, we were at home with everybody. However, the paper did not always sit on the fence. In its very first editorial, the editor specified that "we will criticise when we have to and praise when praise is deserved."

As a matter of fact the Scorpio's Report that appeared on the front page in

November 1983 entitled "Diego Garcia Base To Stay?" was a critical analysis of the three main parties' (Labour, PMSD & MSM) approach to the issue that is still being debated in 2024. Mention was made in that article of 51 years ago of reference to the International Court of Justice and rent payment by the USA.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of Mauritius News was to provide the Mauritian community in the UK with a mouthpiece in the same way that other ethnic minority groups had their own organs to highlight their identity in the country.

Mauritius News was issued with a serial ISSN number from the British Library. It was registered with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the Central Office of Information (COI), the Commonwealth Secretariat, and was on the mailing of the Mauritius High



Achievements:
Ralph Toofany
Sheriff of Lincolnshire

Commission in London. When we came on the scene, Gian Nath, a career diplomat then, had just been promoted to the position of High Commissioner for the UK with jurisdiction to the Holy See in Rome. The High Commissioner and wife featured on Page One of the first issue of Mauritius News (See column One). In Mauritius, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, leader of the MSM, had earlier that year received a fresh mandate from the nation to run the country.

But above all, Mauritius News wanted to create a sense of unity within the UK Mauritian community, especially through the creation of the Mauritius Association of Great Britain with branches in various localities, including Scotland.

Apart from UK news, Mauritius News published news about the motherland, Mauritius, which in the days of poor and limited communications, was highly welcomed and appreciated. The paper included news about members of the community in the UK and their achievements.

The publication also carried topics on compatriots in France, Belgium, Australia and Canada where significant number of Mauritians had settled. Usually of 24 pages, the paper contained articles on entertainment/amusements, news in brief and feature articles. Our editorials generally covered issues of interest to our readers. Many compatriots learned of the demise of relatives at home in Mauritius through our obituary columns. Our penfriends column listing the names of Mauritians at home seeking friendship in the UK was appreciated by both Mauritians and non-Mauritians. One chap told us, at an openair function, how he found marital bliss through the penfriend column of Mauritius News, while pointing to the woman standing by his side then.

The paper also carried interviews with personalities from home, including Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Prime Minister of Mauritius. Mauritius News once received a communication from the University of Nottingham about one their former students who had made his mark on the political scene in Mauritius. That student was Pravind K. Jugnauth, now Prime Minister of Mauritius. It is to be wondered whether the University is now aware of the former student's distinction on the international scene.



KPHS advert in Issue No 1

Following Navin Ramgoolam appointment as PM in 1995 Mauritius News attended his press conference in London organised by the then Mauritius High Commissioner, Sir



Former undergraduate
of Nottingham University

Satcam Boolell. Mauritius News did ask the new PM whether he would grant the Mauritian expatriates the right to vote at General Elections in Mauritius. His reply was an emphatic NO. Mauritius News subsequently set up a committee with Solicitor Raj Boodhoo and Satty Mootien as members to campaign for

From Page One

this right. It will not be surprising that some other new Mauritian Diaspora movement may take up the issue, if only to give a bit of headache to the Mauritius Government under whatever leadership.

At a World Travel Market exhibition in London, local Mauritius Government Tourist Office (MGTO) Manager **Sohun (Toto) Ghoorah** had arranged an interview for Mauritius News with the then Minister of Tourism, Xavier Duval, on the Mauritius Stand.

When I arrived there I was stopped by a self-styled PMSD UK agent, styling himself also as the bodyguard to the minister. He did not allow me to go to the MGTO cubicle on the Stand to talk to the Minister in spite of the fact that I told him that I had an appointment. I gave up and later Toto Ghoorah told me that he made an appointment for Mauritius News with his minister and I did not turn up. I related the fact to him and he said to me the chap had no right to do so. He was not an official of the MGTO on the Mauritius Stand. This was a missed opportunity for the paper to talk to another personality from home.

From Mauritius we were gratified with news pictures from the renowned press photographer **Vel Kadressen MBE**, and in the UK we had the collaboration of photographers **Garson Paratian** and **Michael Marain**.

TOP POPULARITY

MN was the first Mauritian newspaper overseas because it was actually the first Mauritian newspapers to be published overseas, and because it actually stayed on top in popularity among the UK Mauritians.

Mauritius News's popularity was never surpassed. After Mauritius News had come on the scene in November 1983, some other titles appeared in the UK in various formats: as periodical of A5 size, monthly tabloid like the MauriAsia Post of Harry Sookun, even as a quarterly publication like the Mauritian International of Jacques Lee and Mauritians Abroad of Kris Veeramootoo. They lasted for a while. But Mauritius News appeared continuously as a monthly publication for 32 years from November 1983 to June 2015, with an occasional Special Commemorative edition thrown in in between.

Years and years later after MN had been on the scene in the UK, there appeared in 2009,



Miss Mauritius GB organised by Mauritius News

for a few months, a new monthly paper, **Mauritius Now**. The publication, according to certain source, received family support from a megarich relation in Mauritius having connection with the publishing business. When the relation went out of business in Mauritius so did Mauritius Now in the UK. The publication just folded up.

Mauritius News survived for 32 solid years in the UK until it was sold in June 2015. It was incorporated in the UK during its very early years under the name of Mauritius Publications Company Limited (MCPL). The business's name is still on the Companies House register in the UK as an ongoing concern.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

So much water had passed under the bridge from the inception of Mauritius News in November 1983 to its sale in June 2015. How do we condense so much into an article or one chapter? Mauritius News was, first and foremost, a community paper having the welfare of the UK Mauritian community on its dashboard. **Community activities undertaken by the paper formed the backbone of this publishing business itself. So, apart from keeping the UK Mauritians informed, the paper was engaged in various community activities in the country.**

Mauritius News as a hard copy was obtainable mainly through subscription, and to increase and maintain the subscription base, as mentioned earlier, Peter Chellen created the Mauritius Association of Great Britain and encouraged the setting up of local branches in the various boroughs of London and counties of the UK. Soon there was a Mauritius Association of Southwark, Lambeth, Croydon, East London, Manchester, Scotland etc.

In its circulation's drive, Mauritius News received the support of various Mauritian voluntary organisations in the UK like the Mauritius Hindu Association, the Mauritius Islamic Welfare Association, the Sino-Mauritian Association, The Association Chrétienne des Mauriciens à Londres, the Père Laval Benevolent Society, The Mauritius Tamil Maha Sangham, the Anglo-Mauritian Association., etc.

There were on the book of Mauritius News some 22 voluntary Mauritian organisations in the UK whom the paper had befriended and on whose support the paper could depend for its existence in the UK.

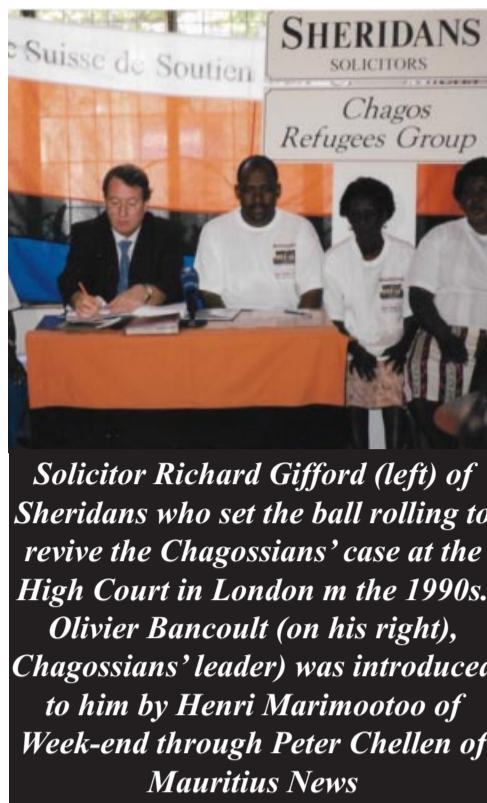
Through an initiative of Peter Chellen the various local Mauritian associations were brought together to create "The Federation of Mauritian Associations in the UK" which lasted as long as Mauritius News was able to provide its direct support. One of the great annual events organised by the Federation was **the Mauritian annual fair at Walthamstow**, West London, which was attended by members of the community from various parts of Britain.

Thus, thanks to its popularity, Mauritius News was able to bring the community together again for other Mauritian Festivals in South London on Clapham Common. Under the aegis of Mauritius News, we put up the first ever **Miss Mauritius Competition in the UK** at Wandsworth Town Hall, the first ever Mauritius Sega Competition at the same venue. And to top it all, Mauritius News, with sponsorship from UK Mauritian businesses like Air Mauritius, Sunset Travel, Imbel Travel and through an organising football committee, set up by the paper, under the chairmanship of Monaf Fakira and later under Vishnu Sooboodoo, was able to bring together 14 UK Mauritian football teams and organised on several pitches on Clapham Common a **one-day Football tournament with prizes galore**. As an annual event, the tournament went on for a number of years. It is not surprising that without the organising ability of Mauritius News the tournament gradually became a thing of the past.

WORK EXPERIENCE AND JOB CREATION

Mauritius News also provided help in a very direct manner to the Mauritian community. With an ISSN from the British Library and a monthly legal deposit to this institution, being also registered with the Commission for Racial Equality as a bona fide ethnic paper, and being on the register of Central Office of Information (COI), plus listing in the Directory of Ethnic Minority Newspapers, the publication had official recognition in the UK.

Thus, many Mauritian university students in journalism appealed to us for placement for work experience which was a requirement of



Solicitor Richard Gifford (left) of Sheridans who set the ball rolling to revive the Chagossians' case at the High Court in London in the 1990s. Olivier Bancoult (on his right), Chagossians' leader) was introduced to him by Henri Marimootoo of Week-end through Peter Chellen of Mauritius News

their course of studies. Such students had to prove that they had spent a period of three months with a newspaper establishment for on-the-job training. We had to keep record of their attendance and performance which we submitted to their educational institutions.

Mauritius News on Wandsworth Road was located in the Borough of Lambeth, adjacent to the Borough of the City of Westminster. We had requests from a local secondary school in Westminster to take students for experience in office practice. So, we were of service not only to Mauritians but to non-Mauritians as well. Numerous young Mauritian school leavers in London came to us for initial work experience. We were also able to arrange with Mauritian solicitors and non-Mauritian solicitors placement of Mauritian young law graduates for their pupillage. Very recently before the sale of the business, we managed to arrange pupillage placement for the daughter of an eminent Mauritian personality. Even as a small set-up we were able to provide full-time employment to a number of Mauritians over the past 32 years. Mauritius News became to them a springboard for more lucrative jobs and fruitful career. We even provided their prospective employers with testimonials and certificates of character.

Mauritius News owned the long-term lease of a three-storey building on Wandsworth Road, South London. There were spare rooms which we frequently used to accommodate, free of charge (but subject to some voluntary clerical help to MN during spare time), students from Mauritius who found themselves in distress. In some instances we even gave them an allowance for their fares and meals. Mauritian solicitor Raj Boodhoo of Raj Law practice in London, told Peter Chellen following the sale of Mauritius News: "**We are now like orphans without Mauritius News.**"

Mauritius News certainly did quite a bit for the community, and more certainly. When Solicitor Richard Gifford of Sheridans of Holborn, London, wanted to revive the case of the Chagossians at the High Court in the 1990s he rang Peter Chellen at the Mauritius News Office to obtain the name of a Chagossian in Mauritius whom he (Richard) could contact to set the ball rolling once more..

Through the assistance of Henri Marimootoo, journalist at Week-End, the name of Olivier Bancoult was given to Richard Gifford. The rest is history. Even the British Government needed the services of Mauritius News. The local Labour Exchange used to send us unemployed people for work opportunity. The salary was paid by the Exchange.

HOME OFFICE

APPEALS

At the very early stage of the publication, a young Mauritian graduate in Art helped us with the design of the paper, and layout on

pasteboard for submission to the printers in the days before the desktop publishing era. For overstaying in the UK following completion of his studies, the young Mauritian graduate was served with a deportation notice by the Home Office.

We wrote to the Home Office and appealed to them to waive the deportation notice on the grounds that the Mauritian artist was helping the paper as a graphic designer. If he were to leave the country, our ethnic publication would collapse. We highlighted the fact Mauritius News was providing a bond to our community in its efforts to adapt in the new country.

Yes, the Home Office extended the artist's stay in the UK until he qualified for British citizenship. Today, the chap is a respectable family man in GB. Thanks to an introduction from him we came across a **young qualified accountant, Chris Seeromben**, who helped the paper considerably.



Mauritius News was only a few months old when the paper was invited by a voluntary organisation in Croydon, South London, to support a campaign appealing to the Home Office to cancel a deportation order and to allow a **young Mauritian girl, Saida** ... with her newly-born baby to stay in the UK. The campaign was successful, and we can now wonder how they are faring today, over some forty years later.

There were many illegal Mauritian migrants in the UK who gave Mauritius News' address as their own. We frequently had a knock on the door from the Home Office or the police looking for them.

AT THE SERVICE OF MAURITIUS

Mauritius News was thus of service to the Mauritian community in the UK but the publication was also of service to Mauritius itself in some respects. The paper helped to popularise the name of the national airline among the expatriates.

In every single edition of Mauritius News, from its **first issue in November 1983** to the final edition, the paper carried an advertisement of Air Mauritius. By such continuous publicity, Air Mauritius became a household name among the community. Before Mauritius News came on the scene, UK Mauritians preferred to travel to Mauritius on British Airways, Air France, Alitalia, Lufthansa, and even East African Airways.

By bringing Air Mauritius to the attention of the community throughout the UK every month, Mauritius News was able to modify this culture. Mauritius News also organised frequent free competitions among its readers, offering, as a prize, a complimentary Air Mauritius ticket to Mauritius.

Mauritius News was available on the reading table of many libraries in the UK, and the MK advert was brought to the notice of non-Mauritians as well. At our open-air festivals and social gatherings Air Mauritius was always present. On the other hand, the numerous travel agents advertising in Mauritius News were all marketing Air Mauritius.

Before Mauritius News appeared, the Mauritius Tourist office did not exist in the UK. Mauritius tourism was promoted by an agent, **Fred Simoes**, who ran

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the KPHS consultancy service off Regent Street in the West End of London near Mayfair. KPHS worked closely with Air Mauritius, under **Indian national Ravi Misra as Manager**, which was located in Mayfair at Conduit Street. A former Air India Manager in Mauritius, Ravi Misra was brought to Air Mauritius office in London. He was the most outstanding Air Mauritius Manager in London that we came across during the 32 years of Mauritius News existence in the UK.

Mauritius News was of great assistance for the promotion of Mauritius tourism in London at the time. In our very first issue in November 1983, Mauritius News carried a full page advert from KPHS appealing to UK Mauritians to spend their holidays in Mauritius. **"There Is No Place Like Home,"** said the advert. The Mauritius Government Tourist Office (MGTO) subsequently opened an office in London, sharing accommodation with Air Mauritius in Conduit Street, when Cyril Vadamootoo was appointed Manager of the office in Mauritius. Mauritius News continued to cover the MGTO promotional roadshows in the UK.

All that is highlighted to indicate the potential of Mauritius News as an advertising channel in the UK for the Mauritian businesses themselves. As a matter of fact, Mauritius News was of immense importance to Mauritian businesses operating in the UK. One has only to cast a glance at an old copy of the paper to see the considerable advertising the paper generated during its existence.

Mauritius News had its own website during the very early 1990s and every edition was placed on the site. It is unfortunate that the site was not properly maintained in the end but a few issues can still be viewed online at <www.mauritiusnews.com>. Please have a look at the site for an idea of what the paper did.

CIRCULATION

Mauritius News with a monthly circulation of 5,000 copies was also available on sale in Mauritius and distributed through Librairie Allot of Curepipe. Copies were also sent to some public libraries in Mauritius. This was how the well-known Mauritian newspaper contributor and author Breejan Burrin in 1990 came across a copy of Mauritius News at the Carnegie Library at Curepipe. He made contact with us and became a valuable contributor to our publication for the rest of the publication's existence.

Mr Burrin contributed under the penname of DODO. His regular contributions "Reminiscences" dealing with topics relating mainly to the historical background of Mauritius were highly appreciated by readers. Mauritius News can also pride itself to have had at one time as contributor from Mauritius, Shan Ip, later Communications Manager of the Mauritius Turf Club (MTC). Other contributors also sent articles from Mauritius like **Jean Descelles**, Manager at Mauritous, who had his own Columns in the paper **"Jean Descelles reporting from Mauritius."** **Nasseem Ackbarally** and **Ahmad Macky** contributed on news topics from the home island, **Gilles Berger** regularly sent articles from France, **Devinia Sookia** from the US, **Mylene Lamy** from Japan, **Eddy Abraham** from Australia. Closer home, **Paul Draper** was sending us news from Rodrigues. **All that on top of our local contributor in UK Yvonne Goder, plus numerous stringers.**

It is not inappropriate to state that according to media statistics, it is reckoned that every copy of a newspaper is read by four persons. On the strength of this figure, it may be inferred that Mauritius News, with a monthly print run of 5,000 copies, had a readership of some 20,000 fans. And perhaps more! I once



Mauritius Football team sponsored by Mauritius News

visited some Mauritian student nurses at a hospital in Surrey. I met a few of the 12 students on training there. On enquiry, I was given to understand that they had among them only one subscription to Mauritius News.

The MN copy was placed in the reading room where the Mauritian nurses (and perhaps non-Mauritian staff as well) read it in turn during their break. The media experts must revise their stats of 1 copy shared by 4 readers. At one time, we did send monthly copies to the National Library at home and to the University of Mauritius. A back copy of MN can still be accessed at the National Library in Port Louis.

In London the company, Mauritius Publications Company Limited (MCPL), was actively trying to promote the sale of its shares and the Management Committee endeavoured to enlist support of the community as far as possible. The Committee used to meet at the London College of Law on the Westminster Bridge Road whose Principal, Kesso Ramsamy, newswas a shareholder himself, and a member of the MPCL Board of Management.

Among the other Board members were late tutor Georges Leong, Rashid and Lillette Ebrahimkhan, Nursing Home proprietors, Chris Seeromben, Accountant, Jimmy Narrainsamy and Bryan Chellen of Mauritius News personnel, Raymond Bénier, President of Association Chrétienne des Mauriciens à Londres (ACML), but above all, Monaf Fakira, former MP and PMSD Secrétaire Général. The help and support from Monaf Fakira was immense and yet Mauritius News maintained its political independence.

COURTING MAURITIUS NEWS

Through a mutual friend in the UK we were introduced to the Director of a newspaper in Mauritius in the hope that we could receive his organisation's help to expand our business. We received an email from the Director of that paper inviting us to meet and discuss this prospect. Quoting from memory, the email said **"Je pense que nous pouvons faire quelque chose ensemble."**

I travelled from London to Mauritius for the meeting. Unfortunately, the meeting *"tourna en eau de boudin"* as there was no "suite" to what we talked. I perhaps did not impress the director and his two colleagues at the meeting to obtain the cooperation of their media enterprise. The Director's email had read "I believe we can do something together." At the meeting I was hoping that he would spell out what could be done "together" but he did not. From my own perspective, I was hopeful that they could take Mauritius News on board as part of their own setup to be an overseas title of theirs. I very likely failed to put that option across to the Director adequately.

On the other hand, the team certainly had their own perception of what they expected of us, which did not come across at all. We never received a reply from the Director following the meeting. We wrote to enquire and there was no response. So much for the *courtoisie* of "the cream of the cream". After all, it is common practice in Mauritius for well-educated people to ignore correspondence they

received.

In our Mauritian jargon, we say it's like *"passing water in a broken violin."* Wonderful expression!

Another company with connection in the media industry in Mauritius, headed by a Britisher, wanted to buy the Mauritius News business. Again, I came to Mauritius for a meeting



Anne Advertising M N

at the Company's office in Port Louis. We talked of what the paper was doing for the Mauritian community in the UK. A rep of their marketing team came to London for further discussions. In the end, a relative of theirs residing in London introduced their own title in the UK, **"Mauritius Now"** mentioned above.

In London itself, through another contact we learned that the owner of a nursing home would have liked to purchase our business. We met the owner and talked. He told us



Devinia Sookia from the USA

that it was a risky business and that he would lose his investment if the venture should fail. He created his own newspaper, The Mauritius Asia Post, which did not last long. The Mauritius News business did not fail but changed ownership eventually.

Yet, another nursing home owner did approach us for a possible takeover. We eventually learned that he went home to Mauritius to get involved in the media business.

AFTER MAURITIUS NEWS

After the sale of Mauritius News and its disappearance from the UK scene, Peter Chellen has been experimenting with other online titles, e.g. the Mauritius Gazette, and of late the Mauritian Overseas Gazette (MOG) which can be accessed via the website <www.mauritianoverseasgazette.com>

The MOG is published under the banner of



Yvonne Goder wrote from the UK

"Mauritius Enterprises Online Co Ltd.com" which is incorporated at Companies House in London. This publication is still at the experimenting stage to assess its viability as an online publication with the possibility of hard copies for circulation among the diaspora in the UK, France and Australia.

All in all, Mauritius News was helpful to UK Mauritians, and to Mauritius itself. The paper did help, in a humble way, to bring the island to the knowledge of non-Mauritians as well. It was gratify-



Mylene writing from Japan

ing and surprising to receive a letter from a secondary school teacher in Northern Ireland requesting us to waive copyright restriction in order that her students could use material from the paper in their studies (Breejan Burrin's articles, as stated above, sprang to mind.) At an Anglo-Mauritian Association's reception in London, at the turn of the century, a local non-Mauritian teacher told me that he gave our editorial on the New Millennium to his students for discussion!!! Yes, Mauritius News was a job well done!



Eddy Abraham contributed from Australia