

SSR Remembered

Happy 125th Birthday, Chacha

On the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the birth of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, KCMG, the Mauritius Post issued on 18 September, 2025, a Rs60 commemorative postage stamp together with a First Day Cover (FDC) (reproduced below) to mark the occasion. Sir Seewoosagur was born in Mauritius on the 18th day of September and so was Blessed Jacques Désiré Laval in France, a century apart. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam is called The Father of the Nation (of Mauritius) and Blessed Jacques Désiré Laval is called the Apostle of Mauritius.

Mauritius Post First Day Cover



125th Birth Anniversary of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam
(1900 - 2025)

On 18 September 2025, Mauritius commemorates 125 years since the birth of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam (SSR), affectionately remembered as the Father of the Nation. This commemorative stamp and First Day Cover are not merely philatelic releases - they are a heartfelt tribute to a man whose vision and leadership changed the course of our history.

Born in 1900 in Belle Rive, SSR rose from humble beginnings to become one of the most respected statesmen of the 20th century. His early life was marked by resilience and determination, qualities that would later define his political journey. After completing his medical studies in London, he returned to his beloved island to shape a new future of Mauritius.

Guiding Mauritius through the peaceful attainment of independence in 1968, SSR laid the foundation of a modern nation built on unity, justice, liberty and opportunity. His leadership brought free education, improved healthcare and vital infrastructure to every corner of the country. Above all, he nurtured a vision of Mauritius where people of different cultures, religions and backgrounds could live together in harmony - a principle that remains a cornerstone of our national identity. On the world stage, he represented Mauritius with dignity, earning the respects of leaders and nations alike.

SSR and I



Staff of the Mauritius Commission in London in 1966

I became well acquainted with Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam when as a Mauritius Civil Servant, I was posted to the Mauritius Commission (not a High Commission yet) in 1964 as can be seen in the picture above. I am on the far right in the picture above (I still had a head full of hair, then, and a personality not yet ravaged by the years). Pre-independence period, we still had English people among the personnel.

Prior to the creation of the Mauritius Commission, there was a Mauritius House in London located at 16 Upper Montagu Street, off Baker Street (of Sherlock Holmes fame). The Mauritius House accommodated the Mauritius Students Unit {MSU}, a branch in London of the Mauritius Ministry of Edu-

cation catering for Mauritian Students in the UK.

Pending the merger of the MSU with the newly-created Mauritius Commission at Trafalgar Square, as the only Mauritian Civil Servant on secondment from Mauritius servicing both set-ups, I had to do 'La navette' between Baker Street and Trafalgar Square.

It is worth noting that though Mauritius was not independent yet, the British Government allowed the island to open a mission in London to pave the way for the country to have a worldwide fully-fledged diplomatic service by the time that Mauritius would be independent. Therefore, in 1964, Britain knew that Mauritius would be independent in a few years' time. This actually happened four years later, on 12 March 1968. The argument that Mauritius had to sell the Chagos to the British to obtain independence does not hold water. Britain, in 1964, knew that Mauritius was on the way to independence.

I was at the High Commission when on 12 June 1965, Dr Seewoosagur Ramgoolam was knighted by HM Queen Elizabeth II, and when that very same year, the ministerial delegation from Mauritius came to London for constitutional talks for independence. The Wind of Change was blowing over Africa and Britain was ridding itself of the shackles of colonialism. Independence was being rammed down the throat of countries within the British Empire, except India and Kenya which had to fight for independence. Knowing that Mauritius was to be granted its independence, before that event, Britain had leased Diego Garcia, Chagos' main island, to the US for a military base. The lease was given before talks began with Mauritian delegation about independence.

So by the time Constitutional talks began, Britain had already decided that the Chagos Archipelago would be not handed over to Mauritius on a plate. That was in 1965 and to this date (2025), the Chagos Archipelago remains a bone of contention between Mauritius and Britain. Yet, Mauritius has been an independent country since 1968 and has moved into

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the 21st Century with immense optimism and progress, thanks to SSR.

Much ink has been spilled to blame SSR for the retrocession of the Chagos to Britain, as if one can give to Caesar what is already Caesar's or that the servant can dictate to the master. *No servant is greater than the master (John 13:16)*. "We were put before a *fait accompli*, Sir Satcam Boolell, as Mauritius High Commissioner to the UK, later told me in an interview in the 1990s. Sir Satcam was a member of the ministerial delegation to London in 1965.

Duties

At the Mauritius Commission, I was responsible for the correspondence section of the mission, and for welfare of Mauritian migrants in distress in the UK. It was also part of my activities to attend to SSR personally whenever he was on mission in the UK. He used to stay at the Strand Palace Hotel, which was a short distance from the Mauritius Commission located in Grand Building in Trafalgar Square.

I would arrive at the lounge of SSR's suite at the hotel at 9am. His British police bodyguard would already be there. We would converse on this and that. SSR could be short of razor blades etc, which I would get for him from the shop nearby. I bought him the local newspapers, which included The Times, The Guardian and The Daily Mirror. He had a special liking for The Mirror (considered then the workers' paper), a liking which probably dated back to his student days in London). While waiting in his suite, he sometimes would suggest that I had a small whisky from his personal bar. And that was daytime! Sometimes, Gian Nath would do the attendant duties. I would eclipsed myself.

Modern intercom system at the hotel was yet to come. SSR would ask me to knock on the door of certain room where another Mauritian parliamentarian, accompanying him, was staying and to tell him he was wanted. SSR would get into a tantrum if that chap happened to have gone out, probably for a bit of shopping, without letting him know. He could say quite a few things in his anger. I never repeated to anybody what I heard from SSR. The companions could include Harold Walter, Nadess Ringadoo, Razack Mohamed, Satcam Boolell etc. All yet to be knighted by Her Majesty. I believed that I earned the trust of SSR for my discretion. Later, when I was involved in an incident in London which could involve disciplinary action, the matter was reported by the High Commissioner to SSR in Mauritius. I am grateful that SSR told the

High Commissioner to leave me alone. No action was taken.



Picture taken at Buckingham Place on 12 June 1965 on the occasion of SSR's Knighthood investiture.

From left to right: Gian Nath (Second Secretary, Mauritius High Commission), Lady Sushill Ramgoolam, Gurudev Wochit, behind, (Driver), Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam KCMG, Caroon Rengasamy, behind (Driver), Navin and Sunita Ramgoolam.

At times in the evening, I would accompany SSR to visit a friend of his in London while the Mauritian driver, Caroon, would wait in the car. One evening, I went with him to call on an official of the London office of the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce, at his private flat in Bayswater. SSR did not mind, nor did I, to be served whisky in a teacup. I remember there was some excuse about glasses.

In those days there was no talk of 'boute', so I did not expect any. On the contrary, when a job of Welfare Officer was created at the High Commission because Mauritians were coming to the UK by the thousands and having all sorts of problems, the job went to someone else who was not working at the High Commission. No advertising, no interview. He had the proper backing, all right. I had canvassed for the creation of the job as I was really responsible for the welfare activities at the High Commission. The new chap was a good fellow, and we got on fine. When he left, the post was scrapped.

However, I'll be forever grateful to the SSR because I was not sanctioned for my misdeemeanour. And years later, in 1984, when I had left the High Commission I visited him at the University College Hospital when he was very ill. His former faithful office messenger, Aya, was sitting outside. He allowed me to go into SSR's private room. I talked to bedridden Chacha, he only nodded. I never saw him again. He went home for his final journey, which we all have to undertake one day. I was by then editing Mauritius News in London, and I announced his death in the paper with great sadness.

Peter Chellen

High-Level Steering Committee discusses Constitutional Reform at Working Session led by Professor Tarun Khaita



Professor Tarun Khaita (left) and Junior Minister of Finance, Mr Dhaneshwar Damry (centre) and PMO advisers

The High-Level Steering Committee, set up to monitor the implementation of measures enunciated in the Government Programme 2025-2029, had a working session on 'Constitutional Review and Challenges' by the Professor (Chair) of Public Law at the London School of Economics, Professor Tarun Khaitan.

The Chair of the High-Level Committee and Junior Minister of Finance, Mr Dhaneshwar Damry, senior officers and advisers of the Prime Minister's Office, Supervising Officers of relevant Ministries, and professionals with expertise in governance were in attendance.

The working session is in line with one of the five pillars of Government Programme namely Democracy, Governance, Integrity and Constitutional Reform for which a sub-committee has been established. The objective is to review and update the Constitution to further consolidate democracy. The aim of the session is to guide the ongoing efforts in shaping a more resilient and transparent constitutional framework for the future.

During the session, Professor Khaitan shared a comparative analysis of constitutional systems from across the globe, offering insights into the strengths and challenges associated with various frameworks. He elaborated on the complexity of constitutional reform, stressing that leadership will play a pivotal role in ensuring the success of such a process. According to him, constitutional reform is not just about institutional change but also presents a valuable opportunity to educate the population on constitutionalism.

The Professor also highlighted a key challenge in any constitutional design: while reforms aim to strengthen governance, no system is foolproof. He cautioned against hasty changes, adding that the costs and consequences of constitutional replacement must be carefully weighed.

Moreover, Professor Khaitan underscored the need for a clear distinction between the Government and the State, as well as the importance of establishing independent institutions to serve as guarantors of accountability and autonomy. Such measures are essential for ensuring the long-term health and credibility of democratic institutions.

GIS

Editor's note: Suggestions for electoral reform are made by various parties in the press and on radio. In our previous issue, we made a few suggestions ourselves. Does that High-Level Steering Committee receive suggestions from members of the public? Can that committee be contacted by the public?

There are 20 constituencies in Mauritius and each constituency returns three MPs. These MPs are never seen in their constituencies once they are elected. They cannot be contacted by their electors. Should not each elected member have a constituency office for the public to meet them. Thus, there should be three constituency offices in each constituency, located in three separate localities.



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Location: 1st Floor, Lavannya Complex, Saint Denis Street
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Champ de Mars Maintenance

Who is responsible for the removal of rubbish dumped on the ground of the hippodrome by the public? How can this practice be prevented ?

Hereunder are two recent pictures showing the 'C de M' used as public dustbin. Pictures taken near La Corderie Street.

