

Metro Express

UK assistance aims to improve sustainability and efficiency



Minister Osman Mahomed addressing the Crossrail International Ltd delegation at his Office on 19 January.

A work meeting between the Minister of Land Transport, Mr Osman Mahomed, and representatives of Crossrail International Ltd (CIL), a public body of the United Kingdom (UK) Government’s Department for Transport, was held at the seat of the Ministry in Port Louis. The engagement forms part of the UK’s Green Cities, Infrastructure and Energy Programme.

The CIL delegation is in Mauritius from 19 to 23 January 2026 to provide technical assistance to the Government of Mauritius, with a focus on the wider benefits of major infrastructure schemes, particularly the Light Rail System of Metro Express Ltd (MEL), as well as other appropriate infrastructure projects. The technical assistance amounts to Rs 11 million (approximately £180,000).

The delegation comprises Mr Simon Bennett, Associate Director and Expert in Stakeholder Engagement and Learning Legacy; Mr David Anderson, International Expert in Transport

Planning and Operations; and Mr Mike de Silva, Leading Expert in Sustainability. The support, which falls under the UK–Mauritius Strategic Partnership Framework within the Growth, Trade and Investment Agenda, will see CIL assisting the Office of the Public Sector Governance in undertaking an Operations and Maintenance review of MEL.

In a statement, Minister Mahomed recalled that the Government of India assisted Mauritius in the conception and setting up of the Metro Express. He underlined Government’s objective is to reduce the financial burden associated with operating and maintenance costs, while expanding the socio-economic and environmental benefits of the system, in line with the *Maurice Île Durable* concept. He highlighted that between June 2024 and July 2025, operating costs decreased by Rs 76.2 million.

The Minister listed out the several challenges faced by MEL, namely fare evasion; high maintenance costs linked to the rail system; free travel for students and senior citizens; overcrowding during peak hours; the need for additional trams in operation at busy times; and asset depreciation. He further pointed out that the St Louis station records only about 200 passengers per day despite an investment of Rs 300 million, and recalled that tram services between Ebène and Réduit are no longer operational on Sundays, with Government considering a suspension of services on public holidays.

Minister Mahomed added that the UK technical team will hold consultative meetings with representatives from various ministries, de-



partments and transport organisations to identify appropriate indicators, analyse data and further develop their workplan.

For his part, Mr Simon Bennett stated that the delegation was in Mauritius to better understand how MEL is contributing to the country’s development, and to bring UK expertise to enhance its socio-economic benefits, particularly in terms of environmental impact and sustainability.

Source: GIS

Editor’s note: The Metro Express Ltd (MEL) was introduced in Mauritius by the previous administration at a cost that was considerably reduced from its original estimate.

The aim of the previous government was to extend the railway network to various distant localities of the island. But the MEL has been operating at great deficit. Its future was of late very much in doubt with reduction in services here and there.

The question that may be asked is whether any network extension has been discussed with the visitors from Crossrail International Ltd

Mylene from Japan says why
PM TAKAICHI ANNOUNCES SNAP
ELECTION FOR FEBRUARY 8

Prime Minister Takaichi said: "I am putting my position as prime minister on the line. I want the people themselves to decide whether they are willing to entrust Takaichi

Sanae with the task of running our nation.

A Lower House election is thought to determine the government. If the ruling coalition of the Liberal

Democratic and the Japan Innovation Party secure a majority, I will continue to lead the country."

Takaichi became Japan's first female prime minister when she took office in late 2025, and opinion polls show she enjoys strong approval ratings, particularly among younger voters. Her party, however, tells a different story. Support for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) remains modest, hovering in the

20-30% range.

The LDP and its coalition partner, the Japan Innovative Party currently hold a slim majority in the lower house. This means they can't pass laws on their own and must negotiate with the opposition each time.

Snap elections are usually called either for political advantage or out of necessity.

For Ms Takaichi calling an early election is a gamble aimed at

reasserting her authority. Analysts say she is betting that her personal popularity will translate into electoral gains, positioning her as a leader with the potential to remain in power for years. At minimum, the goal is to secure a clear majority in the 465 seat chamber, where the coalition currently holds a simple majority of 233 seats.

Japan is not due for another general election until October 2028.

WAKA: A SMALL POEM WITH A BIG EMOTIONAL FOOTPRINT

The taglines for the month of January can feel a little blue.
* Dry January. * Dreary January. * Damp January, even * Dryuary.



To keep the winter blues at bay, the Imperial Family of Japan turns to poetry. Each year, they compose traditional waka poems often inspired by nature or personal experience. These are recited at the New Year's Poetry Reading known as Utakai Hajime.

Members of the family, including Emperor Naruhito, Empress Masako and Crown Prince Akishino, share their work, offering a graceful blend of private reflection and national sentiment.

A waka poem is a traditional form of Japanese poetry: short, lyrical and with a specific structure.

It consists of 5 lines and 31 syllables arranged in a 5-7-5-7-7 syllable pattern. Rather than telling a long story, a waka captures a single moment or scene. Quiet, fleeting, and precise.

Historically written by members of the imperial court, the form remains culturally significant today.

This year, Emperor Naruhito's poem reflected the beauty of Venus in the winter sky on New Year's Day.

"Watching the morning Star
Shining high in the sky
I pray sincerely for
Peace in the new year."

Empress Masako recalled her experience attending the Deaflympics in Tokyo in 2025.

"With medals around their necks
The athletes are beaming with joy
Using sign language
I convey to them
Congratulations."

Their daughter, Princess Aiko, wrote about her first official visit to Laos in south east Asia.

"The bright lively voices
Of the young Laotian students of Japanese
Fill the classroom cheerfully"

(The waka's syllabic form is lost in translation.)

DRY JANUARY - ONE MONTH, NO BOOZE, NEW YOU

What started in the UK in 2013 with Alcohol Change UK (originally Alcohol Concern) has since spread to many English-speaking countries, including Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, as well as parts of Europe.

The concept behind Dry January was simple. To encourage people to take a break from drinking after the holidays, improve their health, and rethink their drinking habits.

Thanks to social media and health campaigns, it caught on fast. The promise was appealing, better sleep, more energy, an improved mood and extra money in your pocket.

In Japan, however, social drinking has traditionally played a much bigger role, particularly in the work place. Known as nomikai culture, after work drinking was once a key part of professional and social life. Going out for drinks helped people bond, unwind, and build relationships. Even non-drinkers were expected to show up and have at least one drink. Skipping out could mean being quietly excluded, or even ostracised.

In recent years, though, that culture has been shifting. Greater health awareness, younger generations drinking less, or not at all, and the wide availability of non-alcoholic options mean the pressure to drink alcohol has eased. It's now far more acceptable to say, "I don't drink," and leave it at that.

Japan, quietly and without much fuss, is developing its own non-alcohol scene.

While Dry January isn't a major nationwide event here, cutting back or taking a break is becoming increasingly common. I decided to take things one step further than Dry January, I gave up booze for good.

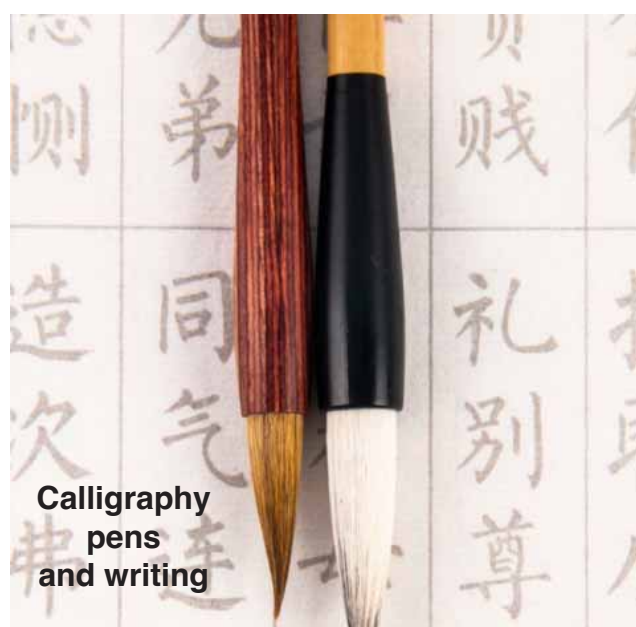
One year on, what's the verdict?

Do I sleep better? Not really, it's more or less the same.
Do I have more energy? Absolutely, and I've saved money too. That alone is a win



Top shelves a mixture of canned non-alcohol drinks: Lemon sour and cocktails at very affordable prices

The downside caught me off guard. I developed a serious sweet tooth. Cravings for snacks, cakes and



Calligraphy pens and writing

chocolates were relentless at first, as though my body was searching for something, anything, to replace the old habit. Thankfully, those cravings have eased with time.

My weight did go up at first, but it eventually settled back to what it was before I abstained. My body fat count has dropped a peg or two, though I wouldn't mind seeing it fall a little further.



Supermarket shelves full of non-alcohol beer. Zero or the symbol of zero indicates no alcohol

The biggest change, though, has been mental. I'm more motivated to stay fit, my focus is sharper, and my memory is better. When I was drinking, I'd read the same chapter of a book night after night because I'd forget it by morning and have to start again. This went on for weeks! Now I actually remember what I've read.

Dry January may be about one month, but for me, stepping away from alcohol became something more lasting. Not a dramatic transformation, just a quieter, clearer way of living that, one year on, still feels worth it.

Miscellany



The Taipoussam Cavadee 2026 will be celebrated on Sunday, 1 February and members of the Tamil Community observe a fast of 10 days preceding the event.

A flag raising ceremony took place in all the kovils of the islands in the night of Friday, 23 February to indicate the start of the fast.

The Cavadee is a tribute to Lord Muruga, featured above, considered as the supreme of the Tamil divinities.

Goodbye Chagos

Chagossians outside the High Court in London



UK Chagossians want the Chagos Archipelago to stay British

Courtesy GB: Britain News Channel

We said it well before, Mauritius will be lucky to see the colour of any money

And, now, Donald The Conqueror does not want any parting. The British Conservatives are against giving Chagos back to Mauritius, and well less any compensation payment.

'IT'S AN ACT OF GREAT STUPIDITY, TOTAL WEAKNESS'

IN 2025, BRITAIN SIGNED DEAL TO RETURN CHAGOS ISLANDS TO MAURITIUS

Me Rooben Mooroongapillay, LLB (Hons), reflects on his *parcours* in the legal profession

(Message picked up from his Facebook post)

16 years ago today, I stood before the judges of the Supreme Court of Mauritius to be sworn in as a barrister.

I embarked on a professional journey without a family legacy in the profession, without sponsors to vouch for me, without well wishers to take my name in a room full of opportunities.

What I did have was an indomitable sense of justice, a desire to protect the Constitutional rights of individuals and the deeply-rooted belief in the fairness of the system as a bulwark against tyranny.

Hence my eminently criminal law practice.

What the past 16 years have taught me is that the system is not perfect. There are delays, there is unfairness. Often, you have to raise your voice and stand firm to vindicate basic rights. But then again, if we, as barristers, don't do it, then who will?

16 years later, I am still here and for this, I am grateful to my pupil masters, my clients, my friends and well wishers in the legal profession and in the criminal justice system. I am blessed and humbled by the support of those who have trusted in me and who saw potential when all I had to give was grit.

This is also an opportunity to renew my resolve. A promise that I will continue to serve without fear or favour, no matter the situation, the personal attacks and the attempts by some to impugn my image, because, in the end, my character will always trump what others seek to misrepresent as my reputation.

As I pass the milestone of sweet 16, I engage on a new adventure. Creating a consolidated structure to service people across all spheres of law. An optimistic endeavour by a lone wolf to lead a pack. RM Chambers is thus officially being launched and I look forward to welcoming my collaborators as we seek to enhance access to justice.

Justitia nemini neganda est
(Justice is to be denied to no one)

Editor's Note:

As editor of Mauritius News, I had the great pleasure of meeting Rouben Mooroongapillay in North London during his student days. Rouben always struck me as a hard-working fellow in pursuit of his objectives. He is today Head of RM Chambers in Mauritius, as featured on the Internet.

P.C.

