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INTERVIEW
**Professor
 CHRIS PIERCE** p.38

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Editorial]
 by Touria PRAYAG

Holier than thou

This week saw the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) which is celebrated every May 17 in more than 50 countries around the world. The event is to be distinguished from the LGBT Pride Day, a more controversial event perhaps. On IDAHO, all that gays are asking for is respect, a word difficult for many to understand, it would seem.

Radio one contributed by opening its channel to people to express their views about the subject. As I tuned in, I heard a female voice say the following, *'I am against homosexuality'*. No further ado! What she probably means is that she is opposed to societal acceptance of homosexuality.

I thought that if the fine lady is not homosexual herself, other people's sexual lives have nothing to do with her, surely? For how long will this society promote discrimination against its citizens? For how long will people who have made different choices to ours feel ashamed of their sexual orientation to the point that they have to hide? If there is anything shameful, it is homophobia, not homosexuality.

Apart from our condescending attitude towards all those who are different, our laws, of course, remain archaic. Though the Empowerment Rights Act and the Equal Opportunity Bill have gone a long way towards attenuating discrimination, the *'Sexual Offences Bill'* which was to constitute a major revolution in this country is, as we had predicted at the time the select-committee was constituted, dead and buried. We did not share Rama Valayden's optimism that it would go through as we knew the debate had already been skewed. In our eagerness to deny gays the rights they should be entitled to, we also missed a golden opportunity to introduce harsher sentences for sexual offenders, who are still getting away with murder. The recommendations of the Select Committee on the Sexual Offences Bill will, in my opinion, never see the light of day.

A big misconception may come from the association of homosexuality with child abuse and pedophilia. The recent scandals associated with the church have heightened these concerns. In such debates, one should not lose sight of the difference between being a homosexual as the identity of a gay man or woman and those who engage in abusive homosexual acts. There is a huge difference. There is no evidence in any of the studies carried out that homosexuals are more likely to molest children than heterosexuals. Child sex offenders are attracted to children, not necessarily to one sex. They are usually people who may have trouble in adult relationships. They are not homosexuals necessarily.

Once we have internalised these differences, we should be able to relax about people who are no different to us, except in their sexual orientation. The following extract from Desmond Tutu's historic speech at a conference in Nairobi might help. He states that he is *"deeply disturbed that in the face of some of the most horrendous problems facing Africa, we concentrate on 'what do I do in bed with whom'"*. In a BBC Radio 4 interview, he goes one step further and declares, *"If God, as they say, is homophobic, I wouldn't worship that God...we struggled against apartheid in South Africa, supported by people the world over; because black people were being blamed and made to suffer for something we could do nothing about; our very skins...It is the same with sexual orientation. It is a given."*

Food for thought for some of my 'holier than thou' compatriots.

The MES report : the lessons to be learnt



The Week at a Glance]

Let's bury the hatchet, Mr Speaker Sir!



Library Photo

Kailash Purryag, the Speaker of the National Assembly.

The consensus around the election of Kailash Purryag as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly displays a great deal of maturity on behalf of our representatives.

The role of the Speaker is very important as he has to maintain order in the Legislative Assembly, control the flow of business and act as 'referee' during debates to ensure the proper working of the House. He has to see to it that the rules for conducting the business of parliament are followed and that Members of Parliament have an opportunity to take part in the debates. His major challenges are to be able to balance the right of members of the Majority to conduct business with the right of members of the Opposition to be heard. To be able to successfully fulfill all the duties of the position, a Speaker requires a broad range of skills and personal qualities not least of all impartiality and neutrality. Kailash Purryag has demonstrated both. His reelection is, in that respect, good news for parliamentary debate in this country.

The Speaker has also to decide on the language used by parliamentarians and take sanctions when they use what he considers to be 'unparliamentary' language. In political debate the world over, there is a lot of cut and thrust and exactly what constitutes unparliamentary language is generally left to the discretion of the Speaker of the House, whose job it is to enforce the Assembly's debating rules. In New Zealand, for example, the following expressions were deemed unparliamentary over time: "*Financial Frankenstein, Fungus Farmer, Retardate worm, Clown of the House, Hypnotised rabbits, trained seals, Frustrated warlord, evil genius, Snotty-nosed little boy, His brains could revolve inside a peanut shell for a*

thousand years without touching the sides, Has the energy of a tired snail returning home from a funeral, Could go down the Mount Eden sewer and come up cleaner than he went in." In Britain, the following, less picturesque, words have been considered unparliamentary: "*blackguard, coward, git, guttersnipe, hooligan, ignoramus, liar, rat, swine, stoolpigeon.*" In the Northern Ireland Assembly, the speaker has ruled the phrases "*papish bigot, Orange bigot*", and "*Protestant bigot*" to be unparliamentary. In Wales, the Welsh Assembly even expelled an MP for referring to Queen Elizabeth II as "*Mrs. Windsor!*"

It is nice to realize that we are not, as a country, left out of the fun. Paul Bérenger's fertile imagination when it comes to coining insults for his colleagues and his ability to effortlessly draw from such a wide register, ranging from rare objects to animals and insects, without sparing vegetables, is legendary. And it has kept Kailash Purryag on his toes. Expressions like '*To seve kouma la ke sat*' and '*figir potsam*' are only a few examples of the vast pool of customized expressions which constitute Paul Bérenger's repertoire, a repertoire which has been further enlarged during the electoral campaign.

Though most of his '*victims*' take it on the chin, Kailash Purryag, we will recall, had expelled Paul Bérenger from Parliament for using one of the above expressions. The fact that the leader of the Opposition seconded Kailash Purryag's reelection and that both sides of the House applauded augurs well for fairness and good team spirit. Burying the hatchet and getting on with the business one has been elected to do is a sign of great maturity.

Touria PRAYAG

Events]

The Australian Film Festival



Celebrate Australian culture with the film festival organised by the Australian High Commission and the Ministry of Arts and Culture, in collaboration with Four Points by Sheraton, Air Mauritius, L'express Samedi, the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Screen Australia. The festival kicked off on Tuesday 18th May and will run until Sunday 23rd May. All films will be played at the Serge Constantin Theatre in Vacoas. You can still catch the screenings on Friday 21st to Sunday 23rd at 19.30. Entrance is free. Check www.mauritius.embassy.gov.au/ for more information about the programme.

'Humour Mauricien 2010'

Laughter is the best medicine! Catch the 'Humour Mauricien 2010' show on Friday 28th and Saturday 29th May at the Octave Wiehe auditorium in Réduit. The show regroups 17 comedians including Gerard Ratinon, Yousouf Elahee and Magali d'Avrincourt. Tickets are available at Immedia at Rs. 225 for reserved seats and Rs. 150 for non-reserved seats. Call 2081030 for reservations.



'Libres Caractères'



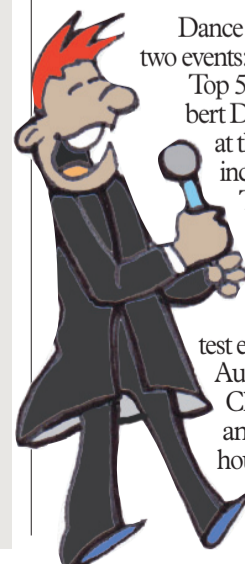
The Institut Français de Maurice has organized a photography exhibition as part of its series of activities entitled 'Passions'. The exhibition by photographer Gérard Rondeau is being held at the institute until 14th July. Entitled '*Libre Caractères - Portraits des deux rives et autres terres de l'Homme*', the exhibition comprises 30 portraits of Mauritians and 30 portraits of French personalities. Having the portraits side by side is a way of highlighting the link between the Mauritian and French culture.

Hiking

Spend Sunday 23rd May in the great outdoors with an outing organised by Pat Loisirs. The two-part outing covers 8 kilometres in the northeast of the island. In the first part, you will discover forests in the north, and in the second part, which is optional, you'll get to visit the caves of Roches-Noires. The outing costs Rs. 200 for adults and Rs. 150 for teenagers. Call 7647192 by latest 21st May for reservations.



Music and Clubbing



Dance the night away on Saturday 22nd May at one of these two events:

Top 50, a song and dance show, based on a concept by Robert Duvergé, will be organised by the *Comité de Soutien JF* at the Racing Club of Mauritius. The two-part show will include artists like Robert Duvergé himself, Christopher Théodorine and Valérie Bancilhon amongst others. DJs Pat and François will lead the second part of the evening, from 23.30 onwards. Tickets cost Rs. 400. Call 4946608 and 7571447 for reservations.

Technokratz Entertainment is organising the latest edition of the Rip Curl Music Festival, which began in Australia at the start of 2010 and will kick off at Queen's Club, Quatre Bornes. DJs Big Papa, Ruben, Cutz, Jayan and Gothika will have you partying away till the early hours of the morning. Tickets will be sold at the door at Rs. 200. Call 7510332 or 7522305 for reservations.

PHOTO OF THE WEEK



A large gathering at the Caudan Waterfront for the 5th edition of the AIDS Candle Light memorial.



Well said]

Rashid Beebeejaun, 'show me one country in the world where the price of electricity has gone down and I will visit it, get their recipe and apply it here.'



Silence is golden]

Pravind Jugnauth, 'we will not talk about the euro here. I have to attend a function. Let the MEXA continue to say what they are saying.' Referring to the Mauritius Export Association's call for an urgent meeting to discuss the issue.

Jean-Luc EMILE



By Nad **SIVARAMEN**

The International Scene]

India's secret war made public!

India's gravest security threat is not Pakistan. The threat is a domestic one and the deadly war is unfolding in the jungles of Central India. It is actually a never-ending and decades-long war that the Indian government seems to be rather shy of. So far thousands, mostly policemen, have died in the fight between the Maoists (also called the Naxalites) and the State.

However, this Monday, following a landmine attack in Chhattisgarh, which killed at least 30 people (15 civilians and 15 Special Police Officers traveling on a bus), the Indian government decided to review its strategy against the rebels. Home Minister P. Chidambaram stated this week, "I was given a limited mandate... we will go back to the cabinet to revisit that mandate."

More and more, things seem to be out of control. Last month, in Dantewada, 75 paramilitary troops were killed while trying to tighten security. For many observers, the insurgency has spread to the rural areas of 20 of India's 28 states.

The Indian government has three possible ways to engage with the Maoists. First option, the military is ordered to take over the operations and to train the police without getting directly involved. "This strategy will save the Indian government the embarrassment of conceding the failure of the police force (...) the ruling Congress party is aware that failure to tackle the Maoist insurgency could hurt its prospects in eight

state elections lined up over the next two years," commented journalists Krittivas Mukherjee and Bappa Majumbar in Reuters. Second, the military takes over the ill-equipped police and engages a frontal war (with the use of air power) against the 20 000 Maoist combatants. This is highly unlikely because the rebels live in perfect harmony with the poor in the region of Central India. And this will amount to a publicized vast bloodshed. Third, the government continues with the police action like it has always been the case.

Meanwhile, the Indian government is trying to win the public relations war. After having said that the government will review its counter-insurgency policy to eradicate the Maoist menace, Mr. Chidambaram criticized "unhelpful elements of civil society because there is a lot for what they have to answer." Without naming her, it was clear that he was referring to famous writer Arundhati Roy whose lengthy human story with the Maoists ran recently in several magazines and on the Internet.

In February 2010, quietly and unannounced, Arundhati Roy visited some of Central India's forests, home to a melange of tribespeople (many of whom have taken up arms to protect their people against state-backed development projects and referred to as Maoists or Naxalites). Her unique journalistic "encounter" with armed guerrillas and their families, for which she combed the forests for



The threat of Maoist rebels in India is little known but nonetheless worrying.

weeks at personal risk, puts faces and names on the nameless Maoist rebels. Her essay, "Walking with the Comrades" was published on March 19, 2010 and sheds a completely different light on the conflict.

"The Indian Constitution, the moral underpinning of Indian democracy, was adopted by Parliament in 1950. It was a tragic day for tribal people. The Constitution ratified colonial policy and made the State custodian of tribal homelands. Overnight, it turned the entire tribal population into squatters on their own land. It denied them their traditional rights to forest produce, it criminalized a whole way of life. In exchange for the right to vote, it snatched away their right to livelihood and dignity(...). Over the

past five years or so, the Governments of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal have signed hundreds of MOUs with corporate houses, worth several billion dollars, all of them secret, for steel plants, sponge-iron factories, power plants, aluminum refineries, dams and mines. In order for the MOUs to translate into real money, tribal people must be moved. Therefore, this war," writes Arundhati Roy.

It is no surprise today that the Director General of Police of Chhattisgarh is reported to be seriously examining whether Arundhati Roy should be prosecuted under the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act (CSPSA) / Unlawful Activities Prevention Act for her writings...

Left Field]

By Nicholas RAINER



Scrap book

It's not often that we agree with Showkutally Soodhun. But his decision to scrap the State Trading Corporation's laughably inept little side-business, the STCCL, has been rightly feted as a step in the right direction. Yet the STCCL is not the only millstone around our collective neck. Taxpayers are being asked to foot the bill for scores of commissions and agencies that simply aren't up to the tasks they've been set. Here are a few that have long outstayed their welcome or, more aptly, our largesse.

The Beach Authority (BA) and the Tourism Authority (TA): what is it exactly that these two "entities" do? Let's start with what we know. The former doles out highly dubious permits for deckchairs (thereby privatizing public beaches), while the latter's employees zip around in tiny green lorries trying their best to look active. So basically, they cost the taxpayers money without actually doing much to justify the expenditure. If anything, the two "authorities" and, in particular, the BA use our hard-earned cash to make our lives a little less pleasant. That's why you probably won't see too many tears being spilt over their much deserved demise. Go on Nando, make our day!

Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA): it's no secret that organizations with names beginning in "independent" are about as independent as countries with "democratic" in their names are democratic. Yet even factoring in its fawning subservience to the government of the day does not explain how staggeringly ineffective the IBA is. It purports to be "at the centre of the now emerging landscape wherein private, commercial and community broadcasters will operate side by side." It seems to have formulated this description using the same logic that led Ptolemy to conclude that the Earth was at the centre of the universe. At least Ptolemy's place in History is secure. The same probably can't be said of the IBA.

Financial Services Commission (FSC): if anything, the recent subprime crisis and the subsequent convulsions it sent across the world showed us how dangerous a mix inadequate regulation and increasingly complex financial products can be. This lesson seems to have been completely lost on the FSC, which has been either unable or unwilling to stamp its authority on the rough and tumble world of financial markets. Its unfortunate habit of always sweeping its investigations under the carpet is additional proof of its raging obsolescence. This is not to say that we don't need a financial watchdog. We just don't need one that is toothless, blind and crippled.

Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC): not so much a white elephant as a stampeding herd of albino pachyderms, the ICAC has absorbed hundreds of millions of rupees since its creation in 2002 without once succeeding in getting the sort of high-profile conviction needed to send a strong message to those who have turned corruption into an art form. Admittedly, it has obtained 11 convictions since June 2006 but nabbing cops for accepting Rs200 baksheeshes doesn't exactly represent a convincing return on such a massive investment. In its defence though, the ICAC seems to have come to terms with its relative impotence. Click on "Career opportunities" on the commission's website and you get "file not found".

Exporters pushing



Library Photos

Cashier at an exchange counter

Mookesh Gopal, president of the Mauritius Export Association (MEXA) does not like to use the term "depreciation". "We are not asking for a depreciation of the rupee vis-à-vis the euro," he said to l'Express Weekly. In fact, the 343 export companies regrouped in the MEXA are pushing for a depreciation of the ru-

pee to prevent a dwindling in their export revenues. But no one wishes to use the term depreciation or devaluation.

"You cannot call it depreciation. A few months ago, you were getting Rs 44.25 for one euro. Today, you are getting only Rs 41. We are asking government to look at the depreciation of the euro and take necessary steps to bring its value to the rupee to the level it was some time back. I would not call such an adjustment a depreciation of the rupee," explains Mookesh Gopal.

Danielle Wong, director of MEXA, underlines the straight jacket in which the textile sector finds itself today, "Textile factories are paid some six months after having shipped their goods. Just try to imagine this: you export today when the euro is Rs 45 and your price is one euro per shirt for example. Six months later, you are paid and the euro is



for a depreciation of the rupee

Export payment in dollar

Economist Eric Ng says that it is high time for the Mauritian authorities and exporters to start thinking about payment in dollar for our exports.

"We pay most of our imports in dollar, yet we receive payment for most of our imports in euro. This is a situation which requires some attention," says Eric Ng.

According to this economist, most Asian countries exporting to Europe are paid in dollar. On the list of countries claiming payment in dollar from France or Great-Britain are Hong-Kong, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China etc. He adds that it would pose no problems for our hotels either. "All our hotels can claim payment in dollar, for most of them receive clients on packages made by important European tour operators who will have no problem paying in dollar.

Eric Ng underlines that using the dollar as a single currency for our imports and exports would be very practical. "But this policy would not eliminate the risks of currency fluctuation, for the dollar is also prone to high level of depreciation."

The economist also adds that in the present situation, the Bank of Mauritius can easily depreciate the rupee vis-à-vis the euro by buying euros at a higher price than they are being sold at the moment.

"Such a move will immediately bring down the rupee. But would the Bank of Mauritius accept such a deal when it has in fact to look for the best investment available?" explains Eric Ng.

at only Rs 40. Your margin of profit might be Rs 5 or less."

She is asking for monetary policies which would give the country a very stable rupee; *'The EPZ sector brings Rs 40 billion to the country each year. There should be a political will to stabilize the rupee and allow this sector to make profit and reinvest,'* says Danielle Wong.

According to the president of the Mexa, the euro is bound to depreciate further in the coming months. This view is shared by economist Eric Ng, director of Pluri-conseil.

"I do not want to panic the 55 000 employees of the textile manufacturing sector. But I am worried by that some factories are selling their garments to French importers at production cost. They are doing it to keep factories open," says Mookesh Gopal.

According to him, those

factories which are selling their products at production cost may soon start to sell under production cost, which would mean huge losses. *"It is bound to happen if the euro continues to depreciate,"* he says.

The tourist industry may also get caught in the same nightmare.

According to analysts, this situation has cropped up because both the textile and tourist industry accept orders some six months in advance and the price quoted is based on the currency rate prevailing at the time the order is placed. *"Three or six months later, the rate is not at all the same,"* explains Eric Ng.

"When quoting prices, we take into account the fact that currencies fluctuate. But we cannot make provisions for huge fluctuations to avoid being priced out of the market. So when these big fluctuations



come in the form of an important depreciation of the euro, we find ourselves in big trouble," says the president of the Mexa.

At the Mexa, many solutions are being contemplated to avert damages to the exporting sector. A currency equalization fund is amongst the solutions proposed as well as the beefing up of the stimulus package. It is not the first time that members of the Mexa have protested against a strong rupee vis-à-vis the euro. Ex-president of the Mexa, Georges Chung was a staunch supporter of government intervention against a strong rupee. Ex-Finance minister Rama Sithanen has always revisited the push to depreciate the

rupee to allow higher revenue for Mauritian exporters.

The proposals made this week by the Mexa will be studied by a committee set up by the minister of Finance, Pravind Jugnauth. The minister says that he will follow the recommendations of this committee which comprises the Joint Economic Council, the Bank of Mauritius and currency experts from his ministry.

Raj JUGERNAUTH



Workers in textile factory.

Asking European tourists to pay in dollars

Mauritius pays most of its imports in dollars; yet, most of its exports (mainly sugar and textile) are paid in euros. The same situation applies to its invisibles exports. Most of the nearly 1 million tourists visiting the country come from France and they pay in euros. What would have been the situation if Mauritius were being paid in dollars by its European tourists and European textile importers?

Catastrophic and highly dangerous for the textile and export industry if one took a look at countries being paid in dollars by European countries.

Cambodia is one example of a country paid in dollars for its exports on the European market.

"Chan Sophal, president of the Cambodian Economic Community explained on 17 May 2010 that even though Cambodia uses dollars in its transaction, the depreciation of the Euro will affect Cambodia's export market. He pointed out that "most of our goods are settled in dollar; when the Euro depreciates, our goods would cost more."

The MEXA says that even if we were to be paid in dollars by European exporters (something which is quite feasible), the latter would adjust payment when the euro depreciates vis-à-vis the dollar.

The euro depreciation expected to last

Before the present depreciation, the euro rose in the wake of the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bail out plan of Greece. This country, with a very high budget deficit, would have defaulted on its loan repayment without the bail-out package. But the euphoria surrounding the euro was short-lived. The euro started to plummet again when Portugal began to lash out at public expenses to avoid falling in the same

situation as Greece. Spain may soon follow suit. Investors see in this scenario a "high risk of contagion" within the euro zone. In view of this, they are selling euros and taking refuge in investment vehicles that are considered safe, such as the dollar and the yen. In mid January, the euro had settled below 1.44 dollar, in mid May, it was 1.21 below the dollar and economists think that it will fall to 1.10 below the dollar before the end of this year.

INTERVIEW

WITH

Professor Chris Pierce
Corporate Governance Expert

■ **Corporate governance: buzzword or agent of transformation?**

Corporate governance is a relatively new term. It's seen as a way of creating an engine of growth in terms of employment, efficiency and productivity within businesses. It only really integrated popular parlance as recently as ten years ago. Basically, it's about the way in which a company is managed and controlled. It applies to listed and unlisted companies in the private sector, to NGOs, parastatals, state-owned enterprises; in fact it applies to any organization interested in improving the way it is governed, with regards namely

to its constitution, articles of association, memorandum of association, policies, by-laws, strategies and code of ethics. About eight years ago, the Mauritian government invited the World Bank to explore the level of corporate governance here. One of the recommendations of the report developed by the World Bank was the setting up of a Mauritius Institute of Directors (MIoD), which would be responsible for encouraging and promoting corporate governance.

■ **What's the most basic prerequisite for sound corporate governance?**

The most important area is probably leadership from the top. That's why most new developments in the field of corporate governance focus on the chairmen, CEOs, finance directors, the executive and non-executive directors, company secretaries, etc. because they have the discretion to decide how the company is managed and directed.

■ **On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate Mauritius's performance in terms of corporate governance?**

In terms of general ease of doing business, Mauritius is in the top twenty countries in the world according to the World Bank. You have legislation which states how companies should be managed, as well as a code of corporate governance that is

comparable with that of any other country in the region and which has just been reviewed by the national committee in order to gauge just how well it's operating and where it can be improved. This is evidence that Mauritius is not resting on its laurels and is concerned about implementing the best international practices. For that to happen, directors must both be aware of what's happening and have the desire to incorporate corporate governance into their operations.

■ **And that's the tricky part, isn't it? Desire isn't really something that can be imposed.**

That's partly what the MIoD's programmes are about: not just telling people what they need to do but also about the practical skills they need to implement corporate governance through team rather than individual leadership.

■ **The days when companies were just money-making machines seem to be over. Governments and communities also expect them to behave responsibly with regard to society and the environment. Can corporate governance really help them achieve is?**

At the very least, when a decision is being made at board level, the directors should ask not only how it's going to affect the company but also how it's going to impact upon the community, the environment and other areas of public interest and concern. In the same way the individuals comprising the company should behave like responsible citizens; so too should the corporation behave responsibly as a corporate citizen. That's where Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) comes in.

“Boards should be composed of professionals who ask difficult questions”

■ **It also brings us smack bang to the next question. Government recently imposed a 2% levy on profits for CSR. Companies denounced this, saying that CSR is by definition voluntary. A storm in a teacup?**

Obviously, it's up to government to make decisions for the good of the public interest. If left to their own devices, certain companies might decide during years of hardship not to engage in so-

cially-responsible activities. The levy is a mechanism to ensure that companies do behave responsibly by making these funds available.

■ **Another one of your specializations is government regulation. The financial crisis showed what can happen when there's inadequate regulation. But we also know that too much regulation can stifle creativity. Any chance of a middle way?**

That's what everybody wants to know. I believe in free enterprise and in the power of the market. But when certain situations exist, such as monopolies, oligopolies and cartels, they might not act in the interests of all the stakeholders. Some of the behaviour of the investment banks in recent years has been highly questionable and they're currently being investigated by the relevant authorities. In the UK, there are all sorts of investigations. As a result, we're trying to learn from what's happened and stop it from happening again in the future.

■ **And what, for instance, are we meant to have learnt?**

We've learnt that boards should be more active, they should be composed of more professionals who ask difficult questions and are much more demanding of evidence. Risk management should also be considered far more cautiously.

■ **In essence then, the change has to come from within. Is that realistic given the massive amounts of money involved?**

Yes, but it involves a complex change in the values of the organization, its work culture, practices and so on. But the big change has to come from the top: the chairman has to behave responsibly, as do the directors.

■ **The problem is they often have different interpretations about what "being responsible" consists of. How does one avoid conflicts between the chairman and the CEO, for instance?**

The chairman manages the conduct of the board meetings whereas the CEO manages the business. Both are appointed by the board of directors so the latter should ensure that there is the appropriate chemistry between the two, that their respective roles and responsibilities are absolutely clear. The common situation is to have the two roles separated and, in the majority of cases, it works.

Interview by
 Nicholas RAINER



“The price war will persist in the tourism industry”

Axys, one of the leading stockbrokers in Mauritius states, in a research paper posted on their website on Monday, that two tough years lie ahead of the tourism industry. In their forecasts for 2010, the analysts, namely Vikash Tulsidas and Bhavik Desai, states that receipts would be down by 2%, reaching Rs 35 billion whilst arrival would be up by 4% to attain 907 000.



LIBRARY PHOTO

Visitors have been less spendthrift and last minute bookings kept the hotels in the dark.

“We believe the 2010 climate will be similar to one in 2009. Specifically, the price war will persist, and visibility will remain low due to continued last minute bookings. In addition, it is expected that the clientele shift towards the mid-market will continue, and a weakening euro will add additional pressure. Finally, acts of god have become a norm in the last five years: the chikungunya epidemic in 2006, the AH1N1 pandemic in 2009, and most recently the ash spewing Eyjafjallajökull (volcano). Hence, the risk of an unforeseen catastrophe will an adverse impact on the industry cannot be discarded”, the research paper says.

Furthermore, Axys believe that the industry will suffer for the “next couple of years” attributable to the fact that

the supply is exceeding the demand on the market. On a 2007 to 2009 comparison, the analysts say that the arrivals are down by 4%. On the other hand, the bed places are up by 7%.

In addition, receipts are plummeting lower than tourist arrivals. “Explanations for this observation reside in the heavy discounting, and the clientele shift away from the luxury five star hotels towards the mid-market during the crisis. Visitors have been less spendthrift, and last minute bookings kept the hotels in the blind”, Axys further state.

In 2010, the fundamental imbalance will worsen as new hotels open, including the awaited *Le Trou aux Biches* of New Mauritius Hotels and Long Beach of Sun Resorts.

Arrivals would stand at 2007 levels. “Therefore, we anticipate cheaper rates to become the industry norm in the short to medium term”, the paper adds, taking into account that our main market, Europe, is set for a lengthier recovery than expected. Hence, the growth in arrivals, in normal situations, is “highly improbable”. Quoting experts views, the stockbrokers further says that 2011 will not be better than 2010.

The faltering euro rubs salt in the wound. Devaluation of the rupee would bring short-term relief. Such a measure, however, will not resolve the industry’s “true problem as exposed by the global recession”.

Kamlesh BHUCKORY

CSO: receipts to rise by 12,5%

Whilst Axys stockbrokers forecasts a decrease in receipts, the Central Statistics Office is backing a 12,5% hike in revenues, relying on Bank of Mauritius figures. In a bulletin posted on their website on Wednesday, the CSO stated that the receipts for the current year will be around Rs 40,15 billion (against the Rs 35 billion estimates by Axys). As regard to tourists arrivals, the CSO predict that they will grow by 5% reaching 915 000 (Axys estimates: 907 000, relying on events such as world Cup, Commonwealth Games and Winter Olympic Games)

Figures

2009 indicators	NMH	Naiade	Sun Resorts
N° of local hotels	8	6	4
Star range	4-5+	3-5+	4-5+
N° of rooms	1 744	1 489	809
N° of guests (in thousand)	113.0	61.5	53.7
Average occupancy (% , year)	70.0	63.0	69.0
Turnover (in billion rupees)	7,4	2,39	3,55

(Source: Axys Stockbrokers)

Naiade Resorts downgraded to “reduce”

The second hotel group in the island (in terms of hotels and rooms) is negatively rated by the Axys analysts. They downgraded Naiade Resorts from “speculate” to “reduce”. In their rationale, the stockbrokers state that the 2010 revenues for the group will reach Rs 2,2 billion, down almost 9% compared to 2009, affected by its heavy discounting policy and a weakening euro (losing 1,81% vis-à-vis the rupee from end of April to the 18th of May. Their losses will improve to -Rs 258 millions compared to -Rs 367 millions for year 2009. Closing the losses’ gap is attributed to the capital restructuring plan the group announced end of march, which consists in raising one billion rupees by June 2011.

The Mauritius Examinations Syndicate Report

The lessons to

The Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) report is out. Does it call for alarm? Not according to all pedagogues. The pass rate is slightly higher than last year's but remains low at 61.1%. The percentage is spread more or less equally across the compulsory subjects. As far as gender differentiation is concerned, girls are, predictably, outperforming boys in all subjects, especially in languages.

About languages, the focus of our paper today, the report highlights the good news: that *'the majority of candidates have acquired the elementary reading and writing skills.'* However, according to the same report, *'in writing, weaker candidates often lacked the imagination to develop a given scenario to be able to produce longer pieces of writing. The positioning of adverbs and adjectives in shorter sentences was also found to be challenging by some. As far as vocabulary is concerned, basic, common English words have, in general, been mastered by the majority of candidates but many candidates had difficulty understanding and producing more sophisticated lexical items.'*

Nothing surprising here, according to Suren Bissoondoyal, former director of the Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES). The pupils are taught in such a way that they can regurgitate what they have learnt by heart but cannot use their reasoning. The questions set in the exams tend to be of one particular type: the ones which are closely linked to the syllabus and to the prescribed books and which require no reasoning ability.

Bissoondoyal recalls his days at the MES when parents and teachers were up in arms each time the exam paper contained one question outside the prescribed books. Because the teaching and learning is done mechanically, little importance is given to teaching pupils how to reason. The bright ones can do it without any difficulty while the weaker ones are unable to do so.

Satish Kumar Mahadeo, Associate Professor at the University of Mauritius, on the other hand, feels that there is no reason for alarm or for any change. He thinks that complaining about the *'declining'* standards of English has become a tradition in Mau-



The problems with English that were highlighted by the MES report may be the result of a lack of exposure to the

ritius which is not substantiated by the MES statistics or the report itself. He attributes *'the alarmist tone adopted by the media'* to *'their obsession with pushing Kreol as a medium of instruction for all children.'* He prefers to focus on the part of the report overlooked by other analysts which says that there is a *"slight and gradual progress noted over the previous examination sessions."*

Whether there are any ulterior motives behind the dramatization of results or not is difficult to say but it is fair to admit that when analyzing the performance of students who do not live up to the desirable learning competencies, we must take into account the fact that, with the democratization of education over the past few decades, more and more Mauritian children are learning English, hence, if there exists any *'decline'* in standards of English, it is qualitative, not quantitative.

According to Sattyhudeo Tengur, President of the Government Hindi Teachers Union, the average results in English are low and are due to a lack of exposure to the language in spite of the various media available. *"You have a BBC news channel all day and there are now newspapers in English, like 'L'Express Weekly' itself.*

Our education system must find ways to initiate children to English,' he says. He also adds that it is obvious from the answers to the exam questions that children do not read English either because they cannot express themselves properly.'

Exposure, and particularly reading as a means to improve one's English, is a view shared by Mahadeo, who concedes that reading is a declining tradition the world over. He also advocates Teacher Training as absolutely vital in identifying the motivational factors which can affect students' reading and their general use of reading strategies. *'Teachers must be taught how to give explicit instructions to students about reading a text and the different types of reading for different situations and competencies.'*

Is anything being done to give the students more skills and exposure? The Enhancement Programme was put in place by the Ministry of Education. The idea was to abolish private tuition for children in Standard 4 and replace it with special classes after school hours to help the weaker children perform better. According to Sattyhudeo Tengur, however, *"right now, the Enhancement Programme is a white elephant. It is a misuse of the chil-*

The issue is not the medium of instruction but rather the quality of instruction given in English.

be learnt



e language.

children's time and must be reviewed. It is important to initiate the child to language skills. English is everywhere today. It is the window to success. If children don't understand it they can't learn other subjects."

Suren Bissoondoyal, on the other hand, puts the blame, at least partially, on the CPE exam. Its selective nature puts pressure on the teachers to get the maximum number of pupils through the exam to the National Colleges. However, one cannot deny

that it is easier for the teachers to carry on with the methods they are using now: training the pupils to successfully tackle exams rather than helping them develop their ability to read properly, reason, deal with new situations and seek exposure to languages.

If Suren Bissoondoyal is in favour of introducing a dose of continuous assessment on a gradual basis, he is not advocating the total abolition of the end of the primary cycle exam. He feels that it serves the purpose of assessing the level of the candidates as well as their potential in a more objective way than continuous assessment would do. Removing its selective nature would ease the pressure on teachers and pupils alike and would allow other types of learning to slowly creep in. Reducing the weightage of exams would also allow children to engage in the activities they like.

By and large, it seems that there is general agreement on the nine-year schooling with a dose of continuous assessment at the end of the primary school cycle. The schools the children would go to after their primary schooling up to form 3 would be on an entirely regional basis. A selection exam would be held on the national level at the end of form 3 to determine the school the child goes to and the orientation s/he takes.

It also seems that this is in line with the educational reforms advocated by Vasant Bunwaree. We luckily have enough regional schools to absorb all the students leaving primary school. After

form 3, the IVTB, renamed Mauritius Institute of Training and Development would cater for the pupils who are not academically oriented while the others would have a choice between the form 5 colleges on offer. A bit like going back to the pre-Gokhool era, isn't it? More or less, except that we are much better prepared today than we have ever been.

As far as the medium of instruction is concerned, there seems to be more and more consensus among linguists that Creole is not the panacea it is portrayed to be. Mahadeo is adamant that the issue is not the medium of instruction but rather the quality of instruction given in English. Using Creole as the medium of instruction is definitely not the solution, according to him and to Bissoondoyal.

As Creole makes its way to our primary schools as an optional language on a tentative basis, the reaction of the parents will be an indicator as to where to go from there. Few, for the time being, have expressed any enthusiasm at the idea of having their children spend time learning a language which is unlikely to open the doors of the global village for them. By the end of the day, they are the ones who decide the type of teaching and learning they want for their children and the school they want to send them to. No reform should ever lose sight of that!

Touria Prayag
Melissa Louis



Some pedagogues feel that the issues surrounding the CPE results are being over dramatised.

High-Heeled]

By Deepa BHOOKHUN



Sticks and stones

There's something I don't get. Maybe you could help. Do people actually enjoy being taken hostage every morning by the traffic? You know, some kind of sadistic pleasure? Sorry if the question offends you but I get offended every morning when I see poker-faced people unwearingly and meekly waiting hours on end seemingly resigned, like cattle going to the slaughterhouse.

I'm not talking about the usual rush hour traffic jams; it follows that if everybody is converging towards the capital at the same time, well the roads are bound to get clogged up.

It takes me a little less than 45 minutes to reach Port Louis every morning if I leave home at 07 30 and it's fine by me. See? I can be pretty reasonable on a good day. The problem is precisely that- it takes 45 minutes on a "good" day. And unless it is raining, it is impossible to tell what kind of a day it's going to be.

Last Friday, it took me two and a half hours to do the journey. When I realized that an hour had gone by and I had made little progress, I started hyperventilating. And then I thought I should make better use of my time by finding out what the problem was. The policemen on the radio were of absolutely no help; they just kept going on about the "slowing down of traffic" without explaining why.

I then learnt that the "artificial" jams- that's what the police called it- were caused by a road accident that happened... the night before! And it was only in the morning- early morning apparently- that they had removed the vehicle. The consequence of this single event ended up taking half the country hostage- why even the poor Mr Beebeejaun with his riders, couldn't find a way to overtake the rest of us commoners and fly to Port Louis!

Two days later, the same thing happened. Except that this time it wasn't a day-before accident that held everybody up but some building works on the motorway that had come undone by the heavy rains. This meant once again that the trip to Port Louis took two and a half hours.

Twice in a matter of days. And yet not one soul protested. All the drivers happily took it in their stride and waited and waited and waited. And waited some more. I wonder if their knees didn't hurt...

This makes me so unbelievably angry. And yet we have just been through an electoral campaign where we were supposed to discuss "important issues". And still, we let politicians get away with it.

When you bring up the subject, they tell you those things take time, there's "procedures". Well I don't know about you but I don't care. We've been suffering from traffic jams for the past twenty years but it's now been taken to another level.

Nowadays, there is no "rush hour traffic". The roads are clogged at all times except late at night and early mornings. And yet nobody feels insulted? Nobody reacts? Nobody gets angry?

I guess that's why they say a country gets the government it deserves!

Traditional fishing: an

Traditional fishing is an old and unique craft that is now encountering hard times. Some of the fishermen behind this trade share their troubles and experience with us.



Traditional fishermen continue to use basic equipment like handmade basket traps, nets, hooks and lines.

There are around 2400 fishermen in Mauritius today, who are mostly engaged in traditional fishing. Their own fathers have initiated them to this trade, which is generally handed down over many generations. While these people have been in the business for many years, they are now facing a lot of difficulties, mostly due to ongoing environmental and infrastructural changes that have inevitably affected the sea.

Meeting some of the fishermen around the north west coast is a revelation as to the state of our seas today. A group of fishermen at the Baie du Tombeau fisheries post explain that the sea is not what it used to be. Anthony Eliza has been a fisherman for around 48 years. Like many others, he learned this craft from his father. *"All the fishermen who are working now come from families of fishermen. Otherwise, you would hardly see any young people who choose to do this job. My father had seven sons and I was the eldest so I started to help him, but none of the others followed in this trade. Had I not been the eldest son I would not be a fisherman today."*

He believes that when he stops doing this job, no one will carry on after him.

The life of a traditional fisherman is very hard and many fishermen believe that this is now a dying trade. As Anthony Eliza and his friends explain the difficulties that they face, they await the re-

turn of another fisherman, Mamed Hasenally, who is out at sea. He has not been able to go fishing for three days because of the bad weather and hopes to get a decent catch. He will return to shore disappointed, having caught less fish than he initially anticipated.

Mr. Hasenally explains that the lives of fishermen have become very difficult. *"I have placed several traps in the water; yet I have barely caught 7 kilos of fish. I have a family to look after; a wife and children. Traditional fishing is really coming to an end."*

As traditional fishermen, Mamed Hasenally, Anthony Eliza and the others usually fish inside the lagoon and around the outer reef. These fishermen use small boats of around 4 to 5 metres in length. They mainly use large nets, hooks and lines, and in this case, basket traps, known as 'casier'. The handmade basket traps are placed in the shallower waters of the lagoon. Bait is placed in the traps to attract the fish that are then unable to get out.

Anthony Eliza tells us about his work doing 'la peche casier' (fishing with basket traps). *"When you practice 'la peche casier', you have to start working as from 4 a.m. We can't buy these traps because they are so expensive, so we have to make our own. We need to cut bamboo plants and braid them together to make the traps. It's a very difficult task. We also use wire and mesh it together. It's hard work. Sometimes the*

traps are damaged and we have to start all over again."

The majority of these fishermen have trouble going outside the lagoon because of the lack of equipment and the high cost of fuel. One of the fishermen explains that fishing outside the lagoon can be dangerous when they are trying to keep such a tiny boat upright. *"The water is unstable out there,"* he says. *"There is a very strong current and your boat can lose its balance, unless the motor is running all day. But that would cost too much money."*

A depleted lagoon

As a measure to reduce fishing in the already overexploited lagoon, fishermen have been encouraged to catch what is known as pelagic fish around Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), which have been set up around the island. These devices are man-made objects, usually buoys or floats which are tethered to the ocean floor with rocks. They are positioned 5 to 10 nautical miles outside the reef where the traditional fishermen have learned their craft. These devices attract the curiosity of fish and make it easier for fishermen to catch them.

But with the dwindling amounts of fish and the advent of industrial fishing, their average daily catch is very low. The fishermen explain that nowadays, industrial fishing is very com-

mon. The sophisticated boats and equipment leave the traditional fishermen at a disadvantage because they take away the majority of the fish. *"How can we compete with them?"* asks Anthony Eliza. *"At most, we can catch one or two tuna fish, but the industrial fishing boats will catch a whole shoal of fish."*

All the fish caught by traditional fishermen is domestically consumed. The varieties of fish include those typically known as 'cordonnier', 'cateaux', 'poisson li-corne', 'capitaine', 'beri' and 'congo' or carp fish. Traditional fishermen are proud of being able to provide fresh fish, as it has a unique taste that frozen fish does not have. While these fishermen usually work at Baie du Tombeau, they also move to other parts of the coastline to see if things are any easier there, but there is usually little difference. The fishermen explain that pollution has become a major problem. Anthony Eliza says that they used to be able to look for crabs in the lagoon, in water that was barely knee-deep. Today, the same waters are murky, filled with the effects of chemical and industrial waste.

Development also has its role to play. One of the fishermen explains that they are dominated by the harbour and its constant flow of ships, which disrupt the natural habitat of fish and scare them away.

Judex Ramphul, president of the trade union regrouping fisher-

endangered trade

men says that dredging and land-fill works around the harbour have caused the destruction of corals all around the north west coast. *"The idea is for the country to become a hub for the transshipping of containers, but the constant digging causes sediment to cover the coral. Sewage and industrial waste has damaged the sea. Although measures are now taken for dirty water to be recycled before it is returned to the sea, it is already too late. The coral has suffered badly and 'no coral' means 'no fish'. The government now needs to consider that."*

He believes that the fisheries sector is now suffering from the effects of ongoing development that began many decades ago with little consideration for the natural ocean environment. *"If the sea dies, we all die,"* warns Judex Ramphul.

Much needed improvements

He also explains the issues of security faced by the traditional fishermen. The sea is unpredictable and the very nature of their work means that they are exposed to all kinds of dangers. However, their lack of equipment can often put them in even more danger. *"We need newer equipment,"* he says. *"We need lif jackets and radios so that we can call for help if ever any problem arises. Climate change has become a major problem, not just in Mauritius, but also across the world. You never know when huge waves can suddenly appear out of nowhere. The level of the sea is rising everywhere now, putting small islands in danger. With the increase in natural disasters, we need to be equipped in a professional manner."* He explains that very few fishermen can afford such equipment. The majority of fishermen and

their families are very poor and struggle to make ends meet. With the creation of a new Ministry of Fisheries and Rodrigues, the fishermen are now hopeful that something will be done to help them meet their demands.

The fishermen consider that they need help to ensure that there are people to replace them when they retire. Judex Ramphul explains that there are young people who engage in fishing, but are not trained for professional fishing. He feels that training is very important, as it will give these young people a chance to develop their skills and can contribute to saving the fisheries sector. *"Fishing is a noble job,"* he says, *"but it's dying out. We'd like to see developments such as training, better equipment, a retirement scheme for older fishermen and development that would allow fishermen to move to the high seas. Fishermen themselves need to be involved in the decision-making process because they understand their problems best."*

Nevertheless, the fishermen at Baie du Tombeau are a jovial group and manage to keep a smile on their face. Anthony Eliza says, *"Ah, you can't allow yourself to be stressed when you face such hard times. Otherwise, how would you carry on? God gives me strength because I have to put food on the table. (Laughter) We have to keep smiling and have discipline within our own minds."*

The traditional fishermen of Baie du Tombeau, like many others, will continue to take to the seas as often as the weather allows them to, with the hope that better times will come their way. Fishing is their life and they are proud of what they do.

Melissa LOUIS

Photos : BEEKASH ROOPUN



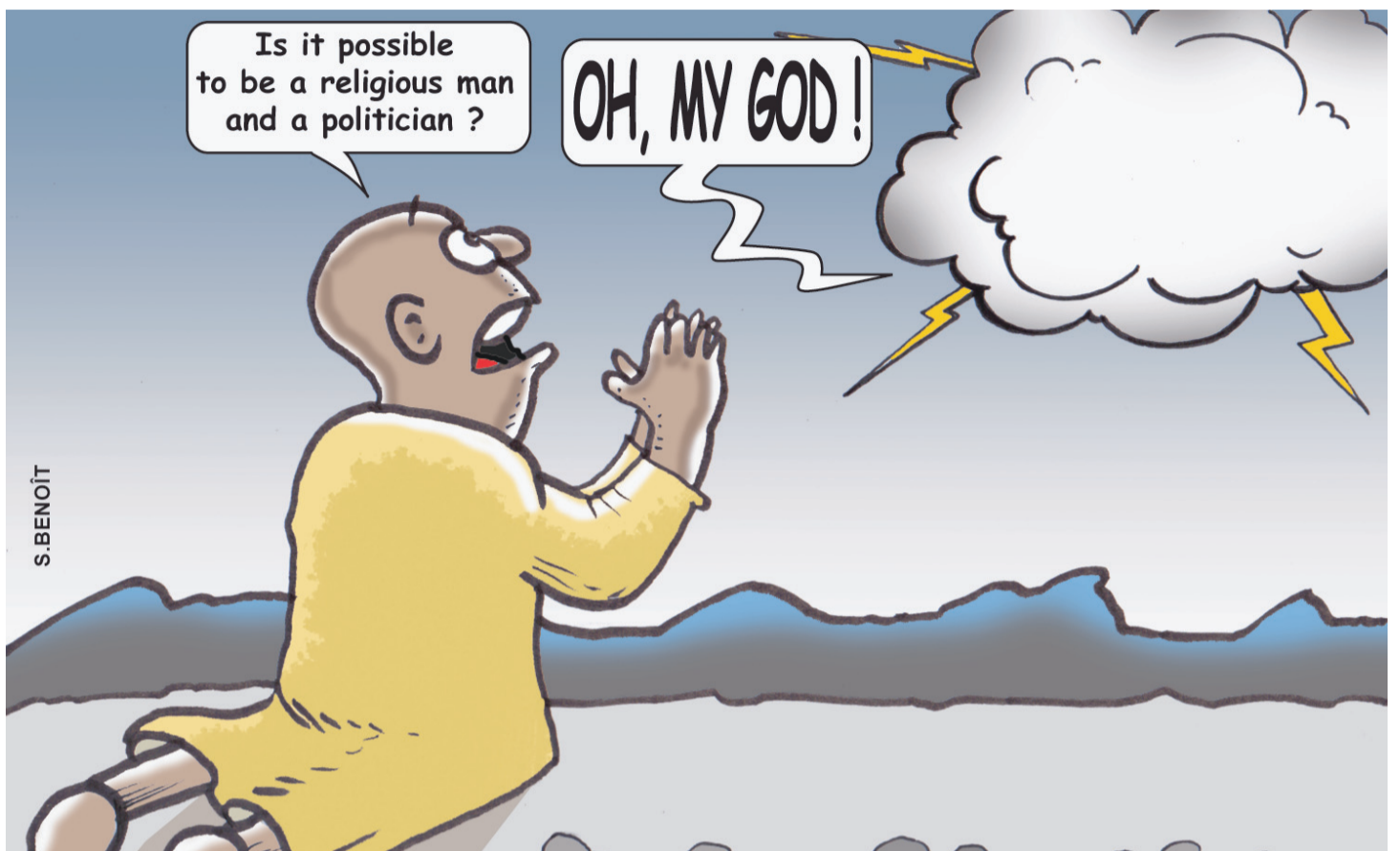
Fresh fish is prized for its unique taste but resources in the lagoon are dwindling.



Mamed Hasenally proudly showing his catch.

The Relationship between

The general elections have been marked by some form of interference or another of religion in politics. Giving the 'consigne de vote' seems to be legitimate to some but much less so to others. Our guests, representatives of three different religions, have been invited to enrich the debate on the relationship between religion and politics.



Nissar RAMTOOLA
President, Jummah Mosque

Islam & politics

In order to understand the relevance and the link between Islam and Politics, we must first understand that Islam is not a religion. It is rather a *Deen*. The Arabic word *Deen* maybe translated into "Religion" in the English dictionaries, but it is quite different from the English connotation "Religion". Religion deals with the spiritual, moral, ethical, ritualistic and theological aspects, along with the acts of faith and with the reckoning of the Day of Judgment. Its primary concern is placed on how the spiritual link and relationship is to be established between a man and his Creator. *Deen*, on the other hand, is quite different. It is concerned with the entire conduct of life.

Hence, *Deen* is a totality whereas religion is a part-and-parcel of *Deen*. In non-Islamic societies, there are different sources for Law, different sources for Morality and different sources for Religion. But as far as Islam is concerned, its morality, its laws, its culture, its politics, its economic affairs, its domestic affairs, its civil affairs, its social matters, its matrimonial matters, all originate from the same source, and this comprehensiveness of the source converts Islam into a *Deen*.

Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had established this link between Islam and Politics during his lifetime

The first step Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) took in linking Islam and Politics was that he gave the constitution of Medina and established the very first Islamic state in the form of a federation.

The basic charter of human rights was systematically provided by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through the charter of Medina, the constitution of Medina and later through his last sermon of his last Hajj, which became the charter of human rights and obligations. After establishing a federation, he established the first Islamic state of Medina through that constitution.

Secondly, he entered into a political alliance with other communities and political entities, which existed in those days in the form of tribes, including them in this political community known as *Ummah*, Society.

The Third step taken by Holy Prophet (pbuh) was the introduction of a welfare state. He created a welfare-based society through establishing an order of social brotherhood. He established a social brotherhood system in the form of *Moakhaat* in order to resolve the economic deadlock of the needy and the poor in society.

The fourth step taken by Holy Prophet (pbuh) was the legislation and the systemization of the political order.

Hence, the divine law protected each and every section of the human society. A full fledged system and a constitution was given by Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). There are specific fundamental, political and constitutional principles, which were provided by Islam. The Islamic political system exists without rigidity. It consists of dynamics, evolution, adjustments and adaptability from time to time,

in order to meet with the changing circumstances of the society. Islam is a dynamic process and an evolutionary system.

Principles of Islamic Teachings:

> 1. There is absolutely no room for dictatorship, no place for monarchy or martial law in Islam.

> 2. Prescribing and promoting the democratic political system and democratic culture.

> 3. Establishment of a parliament. It must be an elected and chosen parliament representing the people. In the days of Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) there existed both a house of commons and a house of experts known as "*Mujlisay Aam*" and "*Mujlisay Khaas*".

> 4. Abolition of prerogatives. The Islamic political system does not find any place for special or privileged classes. Each and every person is equal in the eyes of the law.

> 5. Guarantee of fundamental human rights. The rights for the protection of life, property, business, honour, reputation, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of association. The entire charter of the fundamental human rights has been clearly given by Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as well as in the teachings of the Holy Quran.

6. Guarantee of human dignity and equality with discouragement of slavery and forced labour. There is no difference of race or colour or language in the eyes of Islam. Now, in our modern society we are fi-

ghting against distinctions of race and colour and facing many problems with this issue. Islam provided this progressive revolutionary idea of equality of mankind 1400 years ago. He himself was an Arab but Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) declared:

"*There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, or of a non-Arab over an Arab, of white over a black or black over a white. All are equal*"

> 7. Guarantee of economic justice along with the system ensuring the equitable circulation of wealth and eradicating the exploitative accumulation of wealth.

> 8. Establishment of respectable and peaceful relations with other states for a peaceful global co-existence.

> 9. Eradication of all kinds of oppressions, cruelties, injustices, and evil practices which are detrimental to mankind.

> 10. Helping of the needy & oppressed human societies and for the restoration of their basic rights in order to establish a peaceful global and progressive human society free from all kinds of fears.

Hence those who understand politics as political parties, propaganda, elections and the struggle for power are mistaken. Politics is the art of managing a nation's affairs in the ways that pleases God in the best interest of his creatures.

Politicians should align themselves and their policies with truth and justice and always bear in mind that they will be accountable on the Day of Judgment.

Religion and Politics



Father Jean Maurice Labour

Vicar-general,
Diocese of Port-Louis

Autonomy, Independence and Cooperation

According to the Roman Catholic Church, autonomy, independence and cooperation are (and should be) the three characteristics in command in the relationship between religion and politics. What applies to the church does apply to any religion, even though the ideal relationship hereby described has not always been practiced either by the Roman Catholic Church or by other religions. For instance, during the royal period in France, independence did not exist between the Roman Catholic Church and the kingdoms. Thanks to the French revolution, this dangerous fusion has melted. I believe the church has learnt of her past experience and is now closer to the ideal position. In our days, there are still some examples where the relationship between politics and religions are so dangerously coupled or linked, that it ends in absence of freedom of conscience both for the personal faith and for the personal political option as well as freedom of religion.

Although the Church and the political community both manifest themselves in visible organizational structures, they are by nature different because of their configuration and because of the ends they pursue.

The Second Vatican Council solemnly reaffirmed that, “*in their proper spheres, the political community and the Church are mutually independent and self-governing*”. The Church is organized in ways that are suitable to meet the spiritual needs of the faithful, while the different political communities give rise to relationships and institutions that are at the service of everything that is part of the temporal common good. The autonomy and independence of these two realities is particularly evident with regards to their ends.

The duty to respect religious freedom requires that the political community guarantees the Church the space needed to carry out its mission. For her part, the Church has no particular area of competence concerning the structures of the political community: “*The Church respects the legitimate autonomy of the democratic order and is not entitled to express preferences for this or that institutional or constitutional solution*” nor does it belong to her to enter into questions of the merit of political programmes, except as concerns their religious or

moral implications.

Cooperation

The mutual autonomy of the Church and the political community does not entail a separation that excludes cooperation. Both of them, although by different titles, serve the personal and social vocation of the same human beings. The Church and the political community, in fact, express themselves in organized structures that are not ends in themselves but are intended for the service of man, to help him to exercise his rights fully, those inherent in his reality as a citizen and a Christian and to fulfill his corresponding duties correctly. The Church and the political community can more effectively render this service “*for the good of all if each works better for wholesome mutual cooperation in a way suitable to the circumstances of time and place*”.

The Church has the right to the legal recognition of her proper identity. Precisely because her mission embraces all of human reality, the Church, sensing that she is “*truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history*,” claims the freedom to express her moral judgment on this reality, whenever it may

be required to defend the fundamental rights of the person or for the salvation of souls.

The Church therefore seeks: freedom of expression, teaching and evangelization; freedom of public worship; freedom of organization and of her own internal government; freedom of selecting, educating, naming and transferring her ministers; freedom for constructing religious buildings; freedom to acquire and possess sufficient goods for her activity; and freedom to form associations not only for religious purposes but also for educational, cultural, health care and charitable purposes.

In order to prevent or attenuate possible conflicts between the Church and the political community, the juridical experience of the Church and the State have variously defined stable forms of contact and suitable instruments for guaranteeing harmonious relations. This experience is an essential reference point for all cases in which the State has the presumption to invade the Church's area of action, impairing the freedom of her activity to the point of openly persecuting her or, vice versa, for cases in which church organizations do not act properly with respect to the State.



Somduth Dulthumon

President, Mauritius Sanatan
Dharma Temples Federation

Impartiality Towards All

The co-existence of Religion and Politics has been a continuous long debate in this country. Many people say that Religion should be detached from Politics and that politicians should be kept away from religious functions, which are very often in fact, only cultural programmes on the occasion of a religious event. This is not possible in a pluri-cultural, pluri-ethnic secular country like Mauritius, where the government is firmly pledged to impartiality towards people of all faiths and treats all religions equally. But this impartiality does not mean that people of Mauritius should give up their spiritual and moral doctrines in which they have been brought up, and which form the foundation of their culture. At the same time, each Mauritian has the freedom to participate fully in the election of law-makers of his country and work in close collaboration with the government for the welfare of every citizen and that of his respective community.

The word ‘Religion’, in general, means a system of faith and worship. But the Hindu word ‘Dharma’ appears to have a

much deeper and wider meaning than the word ‘Religion’. *Dharma* means ‘*that which upholds the existence of a thing*’. Man also has an essential nature that upholds his existence as something distinct from the rest of creation.

As far as Hindu *Dharma* is concerned, it teaches that God is omnipresent, He is the Absolute Truth, He is omnipresent and He is also in our hearts. Hence, Religion is both a personal practice as well as that of a group of people or a community of common faith and shared conviction. It comprises moral codes, values, place of worship, institutions, traditions, rituals, and scriptures. There is also a system of cultural activities and large gatherings of the community where religious sermons as well as different types of moral and social messages are disseminated by religious and social leaders of the community.

Politics is a system of administration of a country, estate or nation. It became essential at the time of warfare and groups of people formed a government with the support of the people of that territory for security, justice, deve-

lopment, progress and welfare of the people living within that area of civilization.

Mauritius, which is the outcome of the colonial process during the 17th, 18th, 19th and early 20th century, has witnessed the tribulations of slavery and indentured labour. It suffered a systematic oppression of conversion because of the government in power at that time. There was no dialogue between the rulers or any compassion towards the down trodden. Therefore, there was no respect for their faith, beliefs or religion.

After the abolition of slavery and indentured labour, the inhabitants struggled hard to establish their religion in this country and fight for the freedom for their religious practices. They organised big cultural gatherings during festivals, which were used as a platform for educational, religious, social, cultural, moral and political revival, which led to the independence of the country.

These platforms played an important role in disseminating important messages to the Hindu

folks as there was no radio or television at that time. There were newspapers but the majority of the Hindus were not literate. The only means to disseminate messages was through mass public gatherings during festivals. This has become a tradition in this country, almost a century now, especially, among Hindu organizations. At times, important political decisions are announced in these functions.

People in Mauritius misinterpret the presence of politicians in religious and cultural functions. The politicians, whatever their religious faith today, participate in many festivals to show their religious and cultural respect for, love and understanding of the faith of others. This is the wonderful example of pacific co-existence of religion and politics in Mauritius, where there is peace, harmony and stability. This is a sine-qua-non condition for overall progress of a country.

In certain western countries, they preach ‘*Unity in uniformity*’. We, Hindus, preach ‘*Unity in Diversity*’. I believe in this philosophy.

One word, many worlds...

The world of those who are courageously living with HIV, the world of an HIV+ mother who cannot live with her husband while the latter is working in Mauritius, the world of the families who have lost one of their children due to AIDS, the world of a child who is being denied his right to attend school because of the presumed HIV status of his parents, the world of a person being denied basic health care, dental surgery, the world of a HIV positive woman beaten to death by her husband, the world of those who are hiding their status due to fear of rejection, the world of those 600 prisoners living with HIV, the world of those suffering in silence...

Basic human rights are too often being denied to people living with HIV in Mauritius. If those same persons happen to be vulnerable ones (injecting drug users, sex workers, persons of lower socio-categories, women ...), the stigma is even worse.

The 5th edition of the national AIDS Candle Light memorial was observed on the 16th of May throughout communities in Mauritius to raise awareness regarding HIV.

Many local and international artists have joined the national fight against AIDS. What about our policy makers? Some of them have contributed genuinely and are still trying to do their best to assist communities, NGOs and people living with HIV. Yet, we must recognize that we are far from a strong will to stop the progression of HIV in Mauritius.

● WHY?

Probably because most Mauritians still believe that AIDS is not a of direct concern to them. Why should it be? Most of us, Mauritians, will say that we are not drug addicts, prostitutes, or gay. Most of us live a tranquil life (the usual stuff - a sweet husband or wife, a little extra-conjugal adventure once in a while, nice kids who are by no means engaged in sexual activi-

ties). And YES, AIDS is a curse from GOD. People who have IT deserve IT. Why should we care if they are having proper care or not?

The reality is that AIDS is a natural disease which can be contracted by anyone of us who has not taken essential precautions.

We must start to care, regardless of our race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, education, social position and job because with an average of 50 new cases of HIV+ persons detected each month, Mauritius is already in a red zone.

We already know that the best way to avoid any further progression of HIV lies in preventive action.

So why wait for sexual education in schools? Why wait to train medical staff to properly and counsel people who are doing their HIV test? Why wait to provide a complete decentralized health care and immune ward for HIV+ persons...?

With an estimated 15,000 Mauri-

tians living with HIV, now is the time to act !

Association PILS
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Erratum

In last week's text entitled "SILLY SEASON (post mortem)", we mistakenly printed that the electoral vote for parties lined up against the *Alliance de l'Avenir* was 45% and that the vote difference between the latter and the *Alliance du Coeur* was 5%, when the final, correct figures supplied by PAF were 49% and 8% respectively. We apologise to PAF and to our readers. Editor

How to handle criticism

Dear Gogo,

Very few people in the world of work and in public life seem to be able to handle criticism these days. Business leaders can't, politicians can't, employees can't. How can I handle criticism?

Dear child,

In the workplace, we're told to "catch people doing things right" and compliment them on what they are doing to encourage them to focus on doing more of the same. This theory also says that we should not focus on the negative - on their weaknesses - but let them "die from neglect".

This appears reasonably sensible at first glance, but it would appear that years of applying the "Let's not criticise anybody" approach to the leadership and management of people has resulted in a lot of mediocrity. And mediocrity has a habit of breeding more mediocrity.

Yes, everybody loves to be praised and complimented for something they've done. It makes us feel good about ourselves and, in many cases, helps to soothe our wounded self esteem. And there's a lot of that around.

How you handle criticism says a lot about you. It gives away your level of emotional intelligence. It reveals your emotional maturity. It says volumes about your self esteem. But the most damaging thing it reveals about you is that it shows how genuine you are about improving and growing as person and as a professional.

If all you want and look for is approval and praise, you're not really serious about upping your game. You're more interested in an ego massage.

Criticism is not for sissies. It re-



Learning to handle criticism properly is an important skill in today's workplace.

quires courage to accept an unflattering comment made about you or about something you have done or not done. It takes courage for you to accept the criticism and respond positively - do something about it.

You respond positively to criticism, not by questioning its validity and protesting that it's unfair (bad news,

there's no such thing as fair or unfair criticism - all criticism feels unfair), but by using it as a mirror to determine what you need to change.

If you want to become the best at what you're doing, don't look so much for compliments. Rather welcome criticism.

This doesn't mean you're looking

for punishment. By responding to criticism in the appropriate manner, very soon, you'll be receiving more compliments than criticism.

That's when you'll be in a good space - on the way from good to best!

Regards
GOGO

The democratic deficit

Can an alliance of single-issue pressure groups find solutions to our urgent problems?

The last elections were not fought on the basis of policy issues based on manifesto programmes or an ideology based on socialism. Instead, the major issues were:

- the ethnic choice of the Prime Minister
- dealing with poverty and the malaise Creole
- dissatisfaction of the Muslim electorate with Labour's urban policies.

The first issue was to guarantee the state largesse towards the public and parastatal sectors as well as a continuation of the democratization process towards the small planters and those affected by the V.R.S scheme. The second issue was used for the survival of the PMSD as electoral machinery to attract votes from the general population to curb Père Grégoire's influence on a volatile electorate. The third issue represents the failure of Muslim MLA's to find solutions to the informal

sector of *Plaine-Verte* and the influence of drugs on the youth of that region, as well as the economic impact of transport congestion in the capital.

The first of May meeting was more of a political show than a policy showcase. The recent poll has given us an idea of the role of small parties which will emerge in 2015. These parties will run on single issues and will be organized around one personality, like Cehl Meeah (FSM,ex-Hizbullah). *Parti Malin's* main proposal was to expel all foreign workers from Mauritius. Getting rid of highly productive Chinese workers in the construction or textile factories will cause havoc to these industries. The very fact that *Parti Malin* monopolized media coverage during the recent poll is an indication that voters were fed up with the presentation of the major parties, as none of them really addressed their problems. The party's role as an intermediary between candidates and voters has gone. The

rigid structure of a central committee under the control of autocratic leaders does not give an MLA enough leeway to solve constituency problems.

Party organizations in Mauritius have failed to mobilize people to change policies by their inaction. A few examples from the last government will illustrate this:

- law and order-non implementation of the McKay Report to modernize the archaic justice system;
- traffic congestion -introduction of stop-gap measures;
- private tuition in schools- failure to introduce appropriate policies;
- governance and maladministration-non implementation of the Director of Audit's reports;
- Corruption, in spite of the setting up of ICAC, is still rampant.

The funding of political parties used to come from party membership. As membership decreases, this source of income has disappeared. The result is that our major

parties are increasingly dependent on larger donations from wealthy individuals or corporations. There has been so far no challenge in the Supreme Court that this system of obscure financing is against the principle of the democratic state spelled out in our Constitution. There is no level-playing field for all the candidates to finance their election campaigns. Furthermore, the ethnic classification in our Constitution gives rise to four different types of citizens according to their ethnic origin. The multicultural nature of our nation is changing rapidly and the ethnic size of the general population is increasing due to inter-ethnic marriages.

Interaction between voters and politicians in the last short campaign has been affected by the abusive use of TV. This system of communication has undermined the traditional face to face interaction between politicians and voters. These images have been captured and reproduced in the box and often adjusted before

diffusion. Not only does TV reach more people than any other form of political communication, but it has shaped the messages that people are seeking. Fortunately, in 2015, electronic networks will provide an alternative method of mobilization and accurate targeting. This will also allow on-line discussions and debating forums between politicians and voters thus influencing large-scale political decision making.

The urgent need to form an alliance before the election is an indication of the decline of the major parties. As 2015 has been declared the Year of Poverty, we need to look beyond formal politics for a glimpse of a more positive future. For political leaders, the challenge is to find new sources of political energy in the 21st century.

Waiting for 2015 is very risky and a third political force should be formed now to solve the democratic deficit in Mauritius.

Vijay VENKATASAMY

Open letter to G.i

I refer to your comments concerning the Creole language which was published on Friday 14 May under 'Readers' Reactions'. Right away, I must inform you that, as far as I know, it has never been a question of reading Creole up to A-level, or even to O-level for that matter. The main reason for learning Creole is this: since this "language" (if I may dare use the word) is already being written, why should we not learn to write it in a standardised way?

Surely, it cannot have escaped your attention that more and more public notices and police statements are now being written in that language. And, concerning ads, when it's just a question of selling something and making money, most of us have absolutely no qualms about using Creole! But the problem is that, every one is writing the "language" as s/he pleases. Don't you think that this should be remedied?

Furthermore, not every one may have the opportunity of mastering English and French. Even if most of your friends from the Creole community speak French to their children and send them to English-medium or French schools, for most people, unfortunately, this is not the case. But then, if these less fortunate people want to communicate something to their countrymen, what language can they possibly resort to if they are

unsure of their English or French, through perhaps no fault of their own? By "something", I mean that it might be a story, an opinion or even a love letter to one's beloved!

It must also be stressed that Creole will be an optional language. It will in no way be imposed on anyone who does not want to study it. But surely, if I want to learn it, I think that I have all the right. I cannot see why others should be "pas d'accord" and decide for me that it is not in my interest to do so. It's my mother tongue, after all. Why can't I learn how to write my mother tongue in a standardised way just like English and French? How can this be taxed as "absurd" or "irrational"? And one more thing: there's no need to worry about some people being "confused" when writing in both Creole and French. Believe me; they will be smart enough to make the difference!

Finally, in four of five centuries, it is very likely that only works written in Creole will be considered as part of Mauritian literature. Those written in English, French and "ancestral" languages won't. Just like books written on English soil in the Latin language (before English became an accepted written language) do not form part of English literature!

Jean Lindsay DHOOKIT



A quest for beauty

Enjoying a spa experience in the middle of one of the busiest shopping centres of Quatre Bornes may seem highly unlikely. Yet, there is a place where you can relax, get pampered and ultimately forget about the bustling crowds outside.

Espace Beauté is a beauty salon and spa that was opened by Rita TeckYong in an attempt to take the beauty therapy market in Mauritius a step further. When the business first began 18 years ago, it offered a variety of make up brands that women otherwise had little access to. Today, *Espace Beauté* in Orchard Centre, *Quatre Bornes* has expanded to two floors and new branches have opened in *Port-Louis* and *Grand Baie*.

At *Espace Beauté*, the pampering begins the moment you walk in. You are warmly welcomed and offered coffee or juice as you relax in the waiting area. You then meet one of the friendly beauty therapists who will take care of you throughout your time at the spa. She will lead you to one of the cabins set up for a serene experience. As you lie down for your treatment, all sounds from the outside world fade away. With the dimmed lights and the soft musical sounds of chirping birds and flowing water, you are no longer in a shopping center. You have been transported far far away, to a place where you are safe in the expert hands of your therapist. By the time you emerge from the spa, you are feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. The staff at *Espace Beauté* understand that a good spa treatment is one that caters equally to the mind as well as the body.

Rita TeckYong explains, "Half of this business is psychology. People have to look good but that's not enough. They have small problems around them, work problems, home problems and they come in and sometimes talk about their troubles. We are mini psychologists. We listen. We smile. And people leave feeling good."

Some of the most popular services include the 'Hydradermie' facial and the Balinese massage, which is given by expert massage therapists from Bali. You can also benefit from the hot stone therapy, a Thai massage and an Indian head massage amongst many other services.

Nowadays, beauty treatments are not limited



The hot stone massage is one of the many spa treatments available at 'Espace Beauté'.

to women. Rita TeckYong explains that men are increasingly conscious of the importance of taking care of their looks. Men come to the spa for a variety of treatments, including the 'Hydradermie' facial, manicure, pedicure and massage. This is one of the reasons why the look of the salon and spa changed over the years to adopt a chic but neutral black and white décor that would suit both men and women.

Your quest for beauty begins here. A quote in French, by Alexis Carrel, which can be seen in the waiting area of *Espace Beauté* perfectly summarises the essence of beauty: 'La beauté est une source inépuisable de joie pour celui qui sait la découvrir.' (Beauty is an inexhaustible source of joy for those who know how to discover it.)

Melissa LOUIS

[BOOK REVIEW

SEA OF POPPIES by AMITAV GHOSH

Published in 2008, this novel is the first of an intended trilogy which will be known as the *Ibis Trilogy*, the *Ibis* being the name of a ship. It is a historical novel which should fascinate Mauritian readers as its subject is the arrival of the first indentured labourers from India. Amitav Ghosh, who already has seven novels to his credit, came to Mauritius to research this one. It opens in an Indian village in 1838, just before the British attacked the ports of China in the first opium war. The fields of Eastern Bihar have been turned into poppy plantations to supply opium to the East India Company which smuggles it into China, making a great profit. The villagers have little choice but to switch from traditional crops to opium. We see the picturesque aspect of the "sea of poppies" as their petals fall in a white shower over the fields but also how opium causes what the Observer critic calls a "moral numbness" even in those who are not addicts. It has taken over their lives.

Deeti, one of the main characters, is a poor woman who earns her living by growing opium like all her family and neighbours. As the narrative opens, she has a vision of a ship at sea – something she has never seen. This ship is the *Ibis*, and it has just dropped anchor in the Bay of Bengal. Previously a slave ship, it has been refitted for carrying opium and "coolies."

It is in this ship that Ghosh assembles his large cast of characters as they prepare for the enormous and terrifying adventure of crossing the "black sea". Deeti is widowed and escapes "suttee" by running off with a low-caste cart driver; Raja Halder is a high caste Hindu who is falsely accused of forgery and deported; Zachary, a sailor, is the fair-skinned son of an American slave who passes for a gentleman when suitably dressed... Merchants, middle-men and sailors of all descriptions make up the rest, but the majority are villagers seeking escape from the opium trap. Ghosh thus brings together two great economic themes of the 19th century: the opium trade and the introduction of indentured labour.

However this novel is anything but a dry account of history. Its pace is fast and its characters colourful; the wealth of detail about life in India at the time – seafaring, criminal justice, clothes, food – is fully-researched and nicely integrated into the story. Ghosh has been criticised for the way he uses language, making his characters speak various kinds of creole and pidgin, the meaning of which is not always obvious, but in fact this never impedes our understanding of the story and does much for its exotic "feel".

And how does it end? Well of course I can't tell you that – except to say that it's dramatic, involves a cyclone at sea and leaves us waiting impatiently for volume two!

Beti Peerun

Kreol korner]



Manz pistas gett sinema – eat peanuts watch films

It's our very own version of "panem et circenses" (bread and circus), that nifty old Roman formula on how to keep the masses subjugated, namely by ensuring that they have enough food and entertainment to dampen any revolutionary tendencies. This lesson has certainly not been lost on our political leaders as the general acceptance of anything they do, even their more outrageous excesses, attests.

N.R.

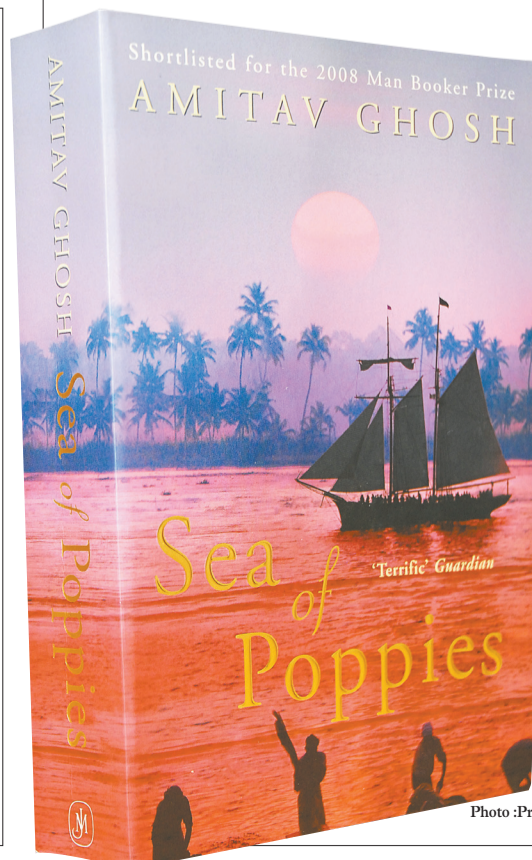


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