The episode of the jailbreak and the manhunt which is going on for those who are still at large has lifted the conditions in our prisons from news pieces which we looked at every now and then with mild interest and turned them into something everyone can chime in on. But, really, did it bring anything new? As far back as 2004, the then commissioner of prisons, Bill Duff, qualified our prisons as “institutions on the verge of collapse” and talked openly about the problems that we all know: drug trafficking in the corridors of prisons and detention centres, “in connivance with officers of these institutions”, mobile phones (don’t these need to be regularly recharged?!), illegal betting, Aids, theft and general racketeering. If you add to these rape and harassment, you have the full picture. Bill Duff acknowledged then that “80% of detainees were locked up for drug-related crimes.”

Six years on and one commissioner of prisons later, the situation is the same. This means that at best, we have been treating the symptoms rather than the disease. Overcrowding added fuel to an already blazing fire and the ease with which the 34 escapees managed to get out is disconcerting. Now with two of the most allegedly dangerous prisoners still on the run (the police being too busy arresting journalists and social workers), a string of guards being accused of collusion and enticing sums of money involved, the finger being pointed at the commissioner of prisons will not flinch. In all posts of responsibility, when something goes badly wrong, the buck goes no further.

The question is not even whether he should take responsibility for the failure of his staff or not. The problem goes beyond that and begs the question of what Mr. Lingamanaicker Vijaynarayanan has contributed to the situation in our prisons since he took over on an expatriate’s salary. As someone at the top of an organization, he is expected to set the vision for his team, manage it properly and take overall responsibility for the ship; it is the value he adds which should make the difference. So, what value did he propose as a long-term plan of action for penal reform and improving the administration of criminal justice?

On another level, it has now transpired that some of the major issues in prison are the lack of segregation of criminals from those who are presumed innocent. Segregation by type of crime and age are also vital in stopping the crime trend. Prisoners need to be classified and housed according to their level of risk. Lower risk groups require less security and can be managed on a lower security basis.

But above all, overcrowded prisons are more difficult to manage and are frequently plagued by increased conflict and violence. This is caused particularly by a slow court system and, as a result, the number of remand or non-sentenced prisoners increases substantially. For justice to be effective, it has to be quick both for those awaiting trial and the victims of crime. Dealing with this problem looks urgent. As for the professionalization of correctional officers, well, the commissioner of prisons has talked his way out of all situations so far. How will he talk his way out of this one?
Congratulations Ghana!

Of all the games played so far in the World Cup, this week saw the most important one for Africa. For it carried all the hopes of Africa... until Friday. Well, the hopes of Africa are gone, its despair is great but its pride is intact. The pride it feels as a continent in the performance of Ghana, the last hope of Africa in this competition. "The story of the Black Stars has redeemed the image of Africa," ANC chairwoman Baleka Mbete remarked on the eve of the game. "On your shoulders rest the footsteps of Africa which shows that no African country has ever made it beyond the last eight of the World Cup."

Indeed, the Ghana team bore not only the hopes of a continent but also the weight of history; a history which shows that no African country has ever made it beyond the last eight of the World Cup. On a Friday which will be remembered for a agonising shoot-out.

When all is said and done, however, this World Cup will be remembered for bringing the greatest show on earth to Africa and Ghana will be remembered for having given hope to a continent which badly needed it. A continent, which can now believe in itself, be believed in and reckoned with. And that is no mean feat. It is what has to be celebrated today.

"It has been a terrible moment for the entire continent, not just for our nation," stated Kwesi Nyantakyi, the president of the Ghana Football Association, in a television interview. Indeed, but if ever there was pride in defeat, it could not have been better felt by the whole continent. The same disappointment was echoed by Ghana's Serbian coach Milovan Rajevac, "The whole of Africa supported us — we didn't deserve to lose this way," he said. Africa's answer to you is: You did not lose! Congratulations from the whole of Africa!"

Touria PRAYAG

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**Events**

**Fiesta Zouk**

Catch “Fiesta Zouk” on Saturday 10th July at 9pm at the Grand Baie Conference Centre. The two-hour event, organised by Dream Events Ltd, will bring together several popular artists, including Slai, Meddy Custos, Fanny J, Thierry Cham and Orlane. Mauritian singer, Tcheky, will perform during the first part of the event. After the concert, burn up the dance floor at a Tropical Party as from 11pm, complete with a DJ. Tickets are available at Rs. 350 through Rezo Otayo. Call 4669999 for reservations.

**World Cup**

The World Cup may be drawing to an end but fans have yet to celebrate the finals in style. “Le Suffren” is organizing a special event on Sunday 11th July, the Final Face-Off Party. It will include a fashion show, with models from Europe, a champagne bar, a VIP boat for jetsetters, live entertainment and a barbecue on the beach. There will also be a Happy Hour, one hour before the kick off of the match everyone is waiting for. Contact “Le Suffren Hotel and Marina” on 2024900 for more information.

**Concert: Alka Yagnik**

Catch Alka Yagnik, the famous Indian singer in concert on 31st July at 7pm at the Swami Vivekananda Centre in Pailles. Alka Yagnik is known for her beautiful voice and a career spanning 30 years as a playback singer for Bollywood films. She has sung in over 550 movies so far and has won a number of awards including best playback singer for the movie "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai" at the Bollywood Movie Awards, and seven prestigious Filmfare awards between 1988 and 2008. Tickets are available at Immedia and through Rezo Otayo.

**Illustration Workshops**

Have you always dreamed of designing your own comic strip? Then join in the workshops organised by the "Institut Français de Maurice" (IFM) in collaboration with the "CroArt" Association. There are two workshops for which participants can still sign up. You must be aged 16 or above and should already know how to draw. Thierry Brezault, a world-famous French screenwriter, in collaboration with Afrilid. The aim is to finally release a comic book. Each workshop costs Rs. 750 and you can sign up at the IFM. Call 4674222 for more information.

**Public Lecture**

The Indus Entrepreneurs (TIE) Mauritius and the Department of Social Studies of the University of Mauritius are organising a public lecture on “The Myriad Faces of Social Entrepreneurship” at the University on 9th July at 4pm. The talk will be led by Indian entrepreneur Satish Jha, who has been noted for his work in the area of using information technologies for development and has been a key contributor to this movement. Satish Jha is also a writer and editor and has long been a social activist and a human rights activist.
After more than half a century of military rule, Guinea recently held the very first presidential election of its troubled history. Since this West African nation – also referred to as Guinea-Conakry (to distinguish it from its neighbor Guinea-Bissau) – declared its independence from France, in October 1958, it has been ruled by dictators who have transformed this resource-rich country into one of the poorest nations of the world.

On Monday, an extraordinary Independent Electoral Commission began counting about 1.5 million votes cast over the weekend. Several international observers followed this “republican discipline” of the armed forces of Guinea who have finally accepted to relinquish power after several months of tough negotiation. “It also breathes life into the hope for substantive change in a corruption-riddled country whose 10 million inhabitants rank among Africa’s poorest despite sitting atop billions of dollars of mineral wealth,” stated an observer from Conakry.

According to Todd Pitman, who covered the election for Associated Press, there was a lot of emotion in the streets of Guinea. “We have voted and we are free!” one man with tears in his eyes screamed at a red-bereted presidential guard outside the villa housing General Sekouba Konate — the junta chief who steered Guinea toward elections after his predecessor, Captain Dadis Camara, was shot in the head and nearly killed in December. What is happening nowadays in Guinea gives Africa a reason to believe that dictatorship can actually be stymied if the people decide so. Over the past two years, there have been four coups in Africa— in Guinea, Niger, Madagascar and Mauritania. While coup leaders often promise a quick transfer of power, restoration of democratic institutions and fast-tracked elections, most are not delivering on those promises.

First free elections in Guinea

People queued for hours but were proud to cast their votes.

Transition to democracy–
In January, Camara succeeded him as president after a coup. In September, more than 150 people at a pro-democracy rally in the capital, Conakry, were killed by army forces. In December, Camara is shot and seriously wounded by an aide. In January, Camara recognizes Sekouba Konate, his Defense minister, as Guinea’s interim president. In March, Konate announces presidential elections to be held on June 27.

The International Scene

By Nad Sivaramen

The scene of a tragedy in Belle Mare: two children, Clovis Asson and Julie Asson aged 11 and 6 years old respectively, died this week when their house caught fire. They were asleep when the fire broke out and could not be saved. The seven other inhabitants of the house were taken to hospital. The causes of the tragedy have not yet been determined.

The main challenge of the future democratic leaders now is to find the large amounts of money which reside in overseas accounts (private accounts of past dictators and their family members) and to work towards sustained economic growth while ensuring that income, finally, is equally distributed among the population...
**Left Field**

**The dirty three**

By Nicholas RAINER

Even if, as one of Murphy’s Laws rightly states, “a proliferation of new laws creates a proliferation of new loopholes,” a person can still tell a lot about a country from its laws. Yes, they’re passed by self-important types in the cosseted bowels of Parliament, far from the reality they’re meant to regulate. But one has to admit that they give an idea of the general philosophy of government, whether it’s of a progressive or repressive bent, etc. More telling still are the laws that don’t exist, the ones that our politicians daren’t pass out of fear that they undermine their authority, an authority that has been reinforced by practices that fall someway short of those usually associated with democratic values. Here are three pieces of legislation that are unlikely to see the light of day anytime soon.

The Equal Opportunities Act: Anyone remembers Billy, the Prime minister’s classmate who became a cobbler simply because he was denied the same opportunities as his illustrious friend? Navin Ramgoolam never tires of boring all and sundry with tales of how this revolutionary law will change the very fabric of Mauritian society by ensuring equal opportunities for all.

Even if his pet law has been voted, it has not been promulgated. And it’s very unlikely that it will be in our lifetimes. For the simple reason that it would throw a monumental spanner in government’s pathetic habit of doling out jobs to people simply on the merit of their political affiliation rather than their competencies. It’s a pity for Billy’s kids really. And ours.

The Freedom of Information Act: How distant 2005 now seems. Back then, the “Alliance Sociale” were vying for power with a wondrously progressive manifesto that would’ve put Barack Obama to shame. One of the Alliance’s main pledges was the promise of a Freedom of Information Act that would usher in a new era of transparency. Indeed, thanks to this law, citizens would have the privilege of requesting access to information that hitherto had been kept under wraps.

Dirty secrets would be exposed, the guilty parties punished and everyone would live…to see the exact opposite happen.

Oh yes, we’ve since discovered the hard way that Navin Ramgoolam and his licksplitters prefer to keep freedom of information on a very tight leash. In a cage. In a dark room. Somewhere in the region of Jin Fei. And anyone seeking to challenge this state of affairs can look forward to being arrested, fired, boycotted, ostracized or all four. Remember this though - information flows, no matter how much you try to suppress it.

The Whistleblower Protection Act: In government’s defence, it never pushed ridicule to the point of promising a piece of legislation that would encourage both civil servants and private sector employees to denounce wrongdoings in their workplaces. That would’ve been a bit of a tough act to follow for an administration that has condoned numerous wrongdoings in the name of maintaining an unchallenged stranglehold on power. The absence of a Whistleblower Protection Act shouldn’t, however, deter people from speaking out on excesses, abuses and other wrongful acts. After all, while we’re being asked to live exemplary, disciplined lives, our leaders are paragons of human weakness. This is for them, “Either practice what you preach or shut up!”

Whistleblowers are few and far between. But how can we ensure that more people come forward to denounce wrongdoings? As we’ve seen time and time again, it’s all well and good for a politician to thump his chest and announce the setting up of this Fact Finding Committee or that Commission of Enquiry. Yet, the findings of such bodies are practically useless if they’re not made public. Indeed, for them to have any sort of impact on policy and attitudes, wrongdoings have to be exposed to the light of day. Keeping them secret, on the other hand, defeats the purpose. It might be time to decide which of the two approaches we prefer.

One way to explain why government gets away with keeping any damning information under wraps is the dearth of whistleblowers, or people willing to denounce wrongful acts. Whistleblowers have helped to expose some of the world’s biggest scandals, as Deep Throat did during the Watergate affair that ultimately led to Richard Nixon’s resignation.

In 2002, Time magazine honored three whistleblowers by naming them Persons of the Year. Yet here in Mauritius, the possibility of developing a whistleblower culture seems more distant than ever. Why? For several reasons. Currently, the only piece of legislation protecting whistleblowers (also known as a sunshine law for obvious reasons), is the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA), which provides for the punishment of those seeking to victimize “a person who has made a disclosure” to the Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC).

Given that the whistleblower almost invariably works for the company or department he or she has chosen to denounce, victimization usually comes in the form of dismissal. In itself, the POCA is not a bad law; it’s just not enough. A whistleblower generally refers to the act of denouncing any wrongdoing, be it in the
Public or private sector, legislation is needed to protect all potential whistleblowers.

Yet in Mauritius you’re only legally considered a whistleblower if you use your tin whistle of truth to report a case of corruption in front the ICAC. Any other sort of denunciation – such as exposing the series of events, both direct and indirect, that led to the recent prison break – leaves the whistleblower completely vulnerable to all forms of victimization, such as unfair dismissal, ostracization and much more. So the POCA alone will do little to stem the tide of dodgy deals and abuses.

“The way things stand, whistleblowing is discouraged,” explains Maneesh Gobin, a lawyer. So what needs to be done is to get us off the slippery slope of mass complicity? “We’re on the right track with the POCA. But protection needs to be given to those who denounce any kind of wrongdoing in the public interest. One way of doing this would be to pass a Whistleblower Protection Act. Without the appropriate legislation, wrongdoings will be perpetuated in silence,” he warns solemnly.

There are two problems with this suggestion. Firstly, even the parochial POCA is selectively implemented, if at all. Just ask Raj Rughoonauth and Jean-Claude Pierre Louis, chairman of the Mauritius Telecom Employees Association and former Island Chief Executive of Rodrigues, respectively. Both men saw their professional fortunes take an abrupt turn for the worse after having gone to the ICAC to denounce alleged cases of corruption. Needless to say, the shabby treatment meted out to Messrs Rughoonauth and Pierre Louis in the wake of their disclosures will do little to inspire other potential whistleblowers to come forward.

Secondly, given how averse the authorities are to any form of openness and transparency, it seems unlikely that they’ll voluntarily opt to bring forward a piece of legislation aimed at promoting those very values. “They don’t want to shoot themselves in the foot,” opines Maneesh Gobin. The only way this could change is if public opinion demands it. But the chances of that happening are, to put it kindly, very slim indeed; all the more so given the opposition’s hugely lackluster performances in Parliament of late.

If it’s any consolation, this culture of opacity is not unique to this fair little island. In their seminal work “Media Law”, the two Queen’s Counsels Geoffrey Robertson and Andrew Nicol, explain how a similar tradition of insidiousness is alive and kicking in Britain: “Secrecy, said Richard Crossman, is the British disease. Government administrators catch it from the Official Secrets Act and supporting legislation. It is aggravated by bureaucratic rules and arrangements that conspire to place the United Kingdom towards the bottom in the league table of openness in Western democratic government.”

Refreshing, the authors suggest that one of the best ways of defeating this silent disease is to break the law: “Against those who would hide their publicly paid behaviour from the public eye, the professional journalist can have only one response: to press on investigating and publishing, irrespective of the law. Most of the secrecy rules described in this chapter [Reporting Whitehall] deserve to be broken, and many are, in fact, broken by the media regularly and without repercussions.”

The delicious irony of this statement won’t be lost on those who remember that the Prime minister availed himself of the services of Geoffrey Robertson in 2008 to assist in drafting a Mauritian media law. Unsurprisingly, his recommendations were confined to a dark and dusty drawer, never to see the light of day again. Ultimately, there’s only so much so-called sunshine laws can accomplish. Deep Throat, for instance, didn’t wait for the appropriate legislation to be passed before clandestinely giving information to Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the Washington Post. This goes to show that a desire for justice and transparency isn’t something that can be imposed.

“At the end of the day, it’s the culture of saying ‘No!’ to wrongdoings,” says Maneesh Gobin. And it behoves journalists and citizens, not government, to utter the battle cry for more accountability. “There is a wave of new journalism and journalists and citizens, not government, to utter the battle cry for more accountability. So how can they go about doing this? To begin with, by using their freedom of expression constructively to denounce wrongful acts. Depending on which way you look at it, this observation can either be cause for despair or for hope.
After five years at the helm of Northfields High School, Clive Barnes shares with us his reflections on the Mauritian educational system, both private and public. His views are refreshing, sound and engagingly candid.

Read on…

INTERVIEW WITH

Clive Barnes

Headmaster of Northfields International High School

Mr Barnes, you have spent about 5 years now immersed in education in this country—what are your impressions of the local educational situation?

In essence I like it because the Mauritian Government is making every effort to educate all of its children but is also taking into account differentiation for those who are more academic.

You mean those who go to the “star schools”?

Yes, I am impressed by the academic hot houses that have been created and are now traditional ‘must haves’ such as Queen Elizabeth College, College du St Esprit, the Royal Colleges etc. but the mainstream State Schools, whilst these are for everyone, seem to lack the true definition of educating with dedication and genuine care. Also, I am distressed by the lip service paid to holistic education, educating the whole child for a global society.

And is educating the “whole individual” done in private schools, for example?

In fact, I am not particularly impressed with what are called in general “private schools”. I do not, as I have experienced in most other countries, see them as necessarily better or more dedicated to delivering a better education than the state schools.

Are you actually saying that private education is no better than the public sort?

Yes, exactly.

If it is not perceptibly better, how does it survive then?

That is a question I might ask. I mean because certainly in most countries in the world, if you’re paying for something, you’re going to get a better response than if you’re getting something that is part of the state’s “hand out”.

The government is putting more into the state sector than the stakeholders who control the private sector are putting into theirs. The private sector does not have the means that the government has at its disposal. You know we operate under the PSSA but to be frank with you, everything is very vague.

So how do private schools survive?

Well, in some cases, there is a church organization behind the school. And they have probably got a group of people with a certain philosophy that take them forward but I don’t think that these organizations are creating the sort of independent schools you and I would know for instance. In the Western world, and even in Asia, the very best independent schools are hugely financed. They have a strong alumni background. Some of the great schools in India are financially very secure because the old boys are looking after them. And in fact, I ran a school such as that in Zimbabwe where the old boys’ factor was massive and without that input, we would not really have been the school that we were.

You mean the alumni were financing the school?

In many respects, yes

And you don’t see that happening here?

I would say it is not happening here.

Why? Could it be because there is no sense of belonging?

Either that or there is a sense of belonging but it does not translate into huge financial interest. But my limited knowledge after five years is that there is a lot of pride in belonging to the great schools like the Royal Colleges, St Esprit and Queen Elizabeth but whether they are putting anything back into them, I would say “no”. Whereas the alumni in the U.K or Africa are still putting back into the schools.

But is school only about financial input?

Sadly yes. What comes with financial input is the option to choose a much more highly qualified and experienced staff. And of course, to build the facilities that attract people; you want children to have something more than just a classroom-based education. My concern about the schools in Mauritius is that they don’t want to do the work involved in creating a holistic school - one where the extra-curricular is not necessarily more important than the academic side but certainly on a par with it. A school where there are sports, cultural and leisure activities, social parental input, fun days, golf tournaments - anything likely to bring the community together and to make people believe in the community,
to believe in the children and develop their education - will be a successful one. So that’s what worries me.

Are you talking about private AND public schools?

I am. Both. All I see, and this is purely a personal response, is a strong push for academic success, sadly, to the detriment of every other aspect of the child’s development.

But isn’t there the same focus on academic success in the U.K. and the obsession with getting into Oxbridge?

Yes, but those children going to Oxford and Cambridge are probably good debaters, can speak in public, have played good soccer or rugby, or excelled at athletics because when they get to Oxbridge, of course, that is all part of their lives. It’s as if they are sort of feathering their caps. Because Oxbridge will only take children like that who come from that holistic background.

There is a general belief here that children who go to private schools are more confident – for example, they can debate with more ease. Does this come from the school or from the parental background?

I think it comes from the parents. It is also part of their culture or, if not, then they believe that it’s actually essential because they didn’t have it themselves. In fact, that is what the wider world wants: a social animal rather than the academic sort of achiever.

I’ve never taught in an environment where private tuition is so incredibly all-consuming.

If you have been in education in this country for a while, you must have heard of a famous affliction called “private tuition”.

Well, I am trying to understand the people of Mauritius from this point of view. I’ve never taught in an environment where it is so incredibly all-consuming. Elsewhere, it has always been necessary for children who have learning difficulties to be given extra help. When I was a child, mathematics was never my forte (my forte was definitely English, history and things like that) so my father, I remember, did send me to a cram school. But in Mauritius it seems they are cramming almost every one from junior school right through secondary school and so there is no time to make them all-round individuals.

Do children from private schools also take private tuition?

Yes, they do.

Why is that?

Because it’s a disease! And we have no control over it. The extra tuition we give in the school is only for the children who need it. We try and keep within our framework. My wife is a truly excellent mathematics teacher for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and that I love.

No, because we are offering a more holistic education. What we do offer is extra-curricular activities after three o’clock.

Do you run the International Baccalaureate (IB) as Le Bocage does?

I.B. is the flavour of the month in terms of the whole world and it is growing exponentially. It is a great programme which includes the important element of CAS (Creativity, Action and Service). But we are also conscious of its limitations. In a school where children are from a background where they are not all brilliant and this is not going to change, it is sometimes difficult. We tend to take expatriate children and to be honest, we are taking children who go to Oxford and Cambridge there - that’s the bottom line. And we give them the very best possible opportunity to become very good practitioners as far as they can with, in some cases, their limited ability. And IB does not suit all of them because I think it was originally designed for international and bright students, whereas we’ve got the international students but they are not all top academically and so we have tried to balance that very delicate act here at the school.

But for those low achievers, there is the I.B. certificate, isn’t there?

The I.B. certificate does not mean very much. We have done our homework on it and we know, for instance, in Britain, 98% of British universities would not even look at these certificates.

In Australia they do...

There are some Australian and South African universities that will look at them but again, a limited number. And honestly, some of our students are not up to it. You know when I go to debates, public speaking and spelling contests at Q.E.C. and St Esprit, I watch these extremely intelligent and confident children operating on the stage and I think to myself – those kids have got it because they are also very bright. Many of our kids do not have the same ability.

What do you think it would take to make private sector education here similar to what you have in the U.K.?

Well, it’s not going to happen because there is not going to be an organization that is going to come forward and pay that sort of money. In order for this to happen, there has to be a very serious financial input initially. We are talking about tens of millions of rupees to start off the school. For a community to do this, like putting up Northfields, it is an extraordinary thing to happen because the school is a limited company. It has shareholders and the parents buy shares in the company in various categories. It is a huge investment and it is only possible because of the involvement of the parents.

How much would it cost me to send my child here?

If you are an expatriate, Rs 28,000 a month; about half of that if you are local.

Do you think that is a deterrent?

No, I actually don’t. Now that you mention it. I don’t think it is. I think a lot of Mauritians would struggle to find a way if they thought the independent sector was offering something better than the state sector. I would like to believe that. I do think most parents believe that if it’s worth paying for, they will find the money. The fact is that they probably find that what is being offered is no better than what the state is offering.

I think the belief here is that there is not enough competition in the private sector. There is no selection. Is that a justifiable viewpoint?

I think that is justifiable: the system is money-based and everyone is allowed in. Queen Elizabeth, the Royal Colleges and St Esprit are elite schools whether we like it or not. And it’s an elitist system formed within a government system. So, there is a wonderful elitist system being sustained at these schools and I ran one of these schools in Africa, so I would be the first to say that I don’t approve of them because you can get a lot out of them. Where I do worry is that what we created at the end of the day was still not a global citizen. But I am not being entirely fair; here when I go to certain competitions, I am electrified by how much these young Mauritians want to express themselves, want to be seen as intelligent, capable people and I love that part. I really enjoy seeing them do this because they are in state schools and very often maybe they come from quite poor backgrounds and that I love.
Hypocrisy does not kill, Mr Bérenger!

I listened to your press conference last Saturday, Mr. Bérenger, and I could not help but recall how you sent the CID knocking on my door when you were Prime minister. You did it just because I published an article saying that the Beau-Bassin prison is a “passoire” where mobile phones, drugs, money and syringes are regularly taken inside cells and yards with the help of prison officers. The article also said that drugs were more easily available inside the prison than outside and that a drug and gambling ring was being operated from the cells.

In fact, you held a press conference and said that the article was entirely false. The MBC broadcast excerpts of this conference in which you said that you, the then Prime minister of Mauritius, will have an “inquiry” conducted on the information published by “l’express” on the Beau-Bassin prison.

I wrote and signed the article after two weeks of inquiry, going to every nook and corner of the island to talk to ex-prisoners, their relatives, prison officers and high-ranking police officers. I checked and counter-checked all the information people fed me with and published it only when I was dead sure about my facts.

Instead of checking to what extent the article was correct, instead of an investigation on the prison services, you chose to have an investigation done on the journalist who wrote the article.

You knew that people who talked to me could not come to testify in court and that as a professional journalist, I would never reveal the names of my informants, which could have led me to being convicted of publication of false information.

I do not know to what extent you were aware of what was happening in our prisons when you were Prime minister. It would be a surprise if you were not at all aware.

Nevertheless and despite the advice of our legal advisor who asked me to tell the police investigators that I had nothing to say on this matter, I made a statement. I told the police investigators that I had nothing to say on this matter. I listened to your press conference last Saturday, Mr. Bérenger, and I could not help but recall how you sent the CID knocking on my door when you were Prime minister.

But very often, these commissions have become a headache, so much so that today, the same opposition who have had time to investigate into alleged police and government corruption and organised crime.

The powers of a commission of inquiry

The president of a commission of inquiry may have powers wider than those of a Supreme Court judge. It will all depend on the terms of reference of the commission. “Judges take their power from the constitution, whereas the president of a commission, usually an ex-judge, takes his power from government. The extent of his power will depend on the terms of reference of the commission of inquiry,” says Anil Gayan, Senior Counsel.

In most of the Commonwealth countries around the world, the commission of inquiry is a major government tool for public inquiry into an issue.

But very often, these commissions may take years to complete their task and the government may change in the meantime. A queer situation when a commission is enquiring on allegedly corrupt practice by the opposition and have to submit the report to members of that same opposition who have had time to snatch power during the interim.

One of the longest times on record taken by a commission of inquiry is being suggested for the MCB-NPF saga.
mission of enquiry

All will depend on the terms of reference of that commission. That’s why Paul Bérenger, who was the first to suggest a select committee of the House, asked about the terms of reference of the commission of inquiry that the Prime minister talked about last Tuesday in parliament,” explains Reza Uteem.

This MMM counsel says that his party and himself are mainly concerned about all those people and companies who have benefited from the almost Rs 1 billion siphoned off the National Pension Fund and the National Savings Fund account.

“The scam was discovered seven years ago and the police have not done their job. No one has been prosecuted. What we have had so far is a 237-page judgment by the Supreme Court, in a civil suit, after the bank sued Lesage asking for the refund of the money siphoned off. So an enquiry is more than necessary,” explains Reza Uteem.

But the Prime minister added a proviso to it all. He will appoint the commission if Lesage does not go on appeal against the judgment against him.

“This appeal cannot prevent the setting up of a commission of inquiry. Such a commission can be set up irrespective of any legal proceedings that may be pending,” says Arail Gayan.

So the public will wait hungrily for the next episode in the MCB-NPF saga which is turning into some sort of a soap opera, particularly after allegations of mishandling of the case by the then MSM-MMM government. Navin Ramgoolam talked about a possible cover-up while Paul Bérenger bluntly accused some government members of having links with Teren Appasamy.

The Prime minister is showing foresight when he talks of amendments to the Commission of Inquiry Act. In fact, enquiries into bank dealings are often thwarted by the protective and powerful systems that banks use to shield themselves from conventional investigation. Bank confidentiality is one of the main arguments used by banks in court when they are summoned to produce documents.

The Mauritian government has often resorted to commissions of inquiry, often under pressure, to investigate allegations of malpractice, corruption and fraud. One of the most famous commissions of inquiry in our history was appointed in December 1978 by the then Prime minister, Sir Seewoosa-gur Ramgoolam after pressure from a group of his MLAs headed by Harish Boodhoo. It was presided over by Sir Victor Glover and had to investigate two ministers, Badry (minister for Social Security) and Dabee(minister for Cooperatives). The report, published in May 1979, was so damning for the two ministers that they had to resign.

Another famous commission of inquiry was the one appointed in July 1986 and presided over by Sir Maurice Rault to enquire into all the aspects of drug trafficking in Mauritius. His report was published in February 1987 and proved to be damning for many members of the Labour and MSM parties.

Another famous commission was the one that was appointed to look into the Kaya riots. Many personalities accused by commissions of inquiry have in the past appealed to the Supreme Court which has ruled that they had been unfairly accused because they had not been given the opportunity to challenge the findings and the accusations made against them by the commission.

The National Pension Fund Building in Port Louis.

The Prime minister said on Wednesday that he sometimes laughed when he read the newspapers. (I don’t think it was a compliment) Well, I’m very happy for him because I on the other hand, want to cry every Tuesday when I go to Parliament.

I feel like crying every single week when I see how much of a mockery Government makes of democracy, how they view every parliamentary question as an opportunity to better themselves in the art of dodging questions.

I want to try when I see how much members of the opposition don’t give a damn about real issues.

Three examples will suffice. Last Tuesday, the leader of the opposition decided to query the Prime minister on whether he will appoint a select committee on the MCB-NPF scandal. Now don’t get me wrong- I’m as keen as you to know the truth (the real one if you know what I mean) about this scandal but now is not the time as Ramgoolam pointed out. Robert Lesage has 21 days to appeal against the judgment and it hasn’t been 21 days yet.

What I wanted to know was what the minister of Industry Showkataly Soodhun had to say about the renewal of the Mangalore contract. I’m sure you did too- it’s only natural to want to know where exactly one’s money is going after all. But Bérenger was clearly not bothered.

Alan Ganoo asked a question about the Board of Visitors of the Prisons (a board that’s supposed to have a vital role in ensuring that the prisons function the way they’re supposed to). Ramgoolam says the Board was last constituted in 2003 and doesn’t give any explanations as to why it hasn’t been constituted since. Ganoo didn’t press for further information because it was Paul Bérenger who failed to constitute the next Board of Visitors.

The question then fizzled out. Nobody in the opposition dared ask too many questions because deep down they know they’re all to blame for the catastrophic situation in the prisons. (Bérenger, Ramgoolam, and SAJ; SAJ was the one who unwittingly started it all by passing a law that denied remission to most of the detainees, although in his defense, he never thought he knew better than the experts).

So MPs tread on safer grounds. And ask a question about defective equipment at the prisons. Because repairing them is obviously going to magically solve all problems.

Adil Ameer Meeah, newly elected opposition MP asked a question about the now famous film “Paradi en dey”. Before going to Parliament, he made a big deal about it on the radios. But in Parliament itself, the MP didn’t have anything to say to the Prime minister.

Any wonder it all makes me want to cry? So the Prime minister can laugh all he wants when he reads the newspapers but he should know he’s about the only one laughing.

What’s happening is not a laughing matter. Government has forgotten the meaning of democracy and is acting like the country belongs to its members’ fathers and the opposition is aiding and abetting Government in this most dismal rape. I’m laughing so much my ribs are hurting.
The modern sugar industry has been shaped by thousands of hands that helped define it and reinvent it so that it still remains an important part of the country’s identity. We bring you on these pages “l’Aventure du Sucre”, a museum that pays tribute to our sugar industry.

**Sugar:**

*an amazing adventure*

Set in the former Beau Plan sugar estate, “l’Aventure du Sucre” is a testimony of the thriving sugar industry that is so closely linked to our land, our economy and our people. The sugar factory was closed down in 1999 and the museum opened shortly after, perfectly preserving the highlights of the estate, from the machinery to the brick chimney that has stood tall and majestic since 1895.

The site has in fact existed since the end of the 18th century, explains Ashveen Khemraz, Communications Manager at “l’Aventure du Sucre”. It was initially an indigo factory, because it was believed that indigo might be a viable crop to grow on a large scale in Mauritius. The idea was soon abandoned, in the face of heavy competition from India, which produced high quality indigo at a low cost. The factory was then converted into a metal foundry and, by the end of the 18th century, became the “Beau Plan Sugar Estate”.

Your journey at the museum begins at the mysterious entrance, where you are welcomed by the sound of the crashing waves of the Indian Ocean and the eruption of the volcano that became Mauritius. A mystical discovery of the creation of the sugar island and, as you come out at the other end of this tunnel, you will realise that you are inside a recreated sugar dome, bright and shiny as if it were made of real sugar crystals.

The history of sugar in Mauritius begins with the Dutch settlers who introduced sugarcane to the island, bringing it from Java in the 1500s. They extracted sugarcane juice to produce “arrack”, an alcoholic drink similar to rum. The various galleries at the museum take you through a timeline of events in Mauritius, complete with pictures and bilingual explanations. The documentation has been gathered with the support of the Unesco programme “La route des esclaves” and through the hard work of a number of Mauritian historians and researchers.

From the aristocracy to the common man

The museum even includes a section on how sugar claimed its rightful place in our world. Ashveen Khemraz says, “It is believed that until the Middle Ages, the Western world was unaware of the existence of sugar and honey and maple syrup were used to sweeten food. It seems that while the East had known sugar in its current form for many millennia, the West discovered it after only coming into contact with the Arabs, who sold sugar loaves. When sugar entered the Western world, it remained for many centuries a rare and precious item, which like spices was
Upcoming events

“Il’Aventure du Sucre” also organises temporary exhibitions on a regular basis, with themes usually related to global food production, agriculture and sustainability. Towards the end of this month, the museum will launch an exhibition entitled “Energie: La fête est finie” (Energy: the game’s over), which as the title indicates, focuses on the world’s limited energy resources. Visitors will be able to understand the fragile global context and reflect on the place of Mauritius within the energy set-up. How do we manage rapidly depleting resources? And, more importantly, where do we find new ones to support a massive global demand? The exhibition has been set up to make sure that even children can enjoy learning about energy issues. Yann Arthur Bertrand’s stunning photography helps illustrate energy-related issues in various parts of the world.

The Sugar Protocol

As a member of the ACP countries (African, Caribbean and Pacific states), Mauritius was a signatory of the Sugar Protocol signed with the European Union from 1975 until 30 September 2009. The protocol meant that Mauritius benefited from a preferential price of sugar offered to ACP countries which was slashed by 36%, leaving the sector at a point where it seriously needed to reevaluate itself, and find a long-term solution for its survival. As a result the sugar industry underwent a major restructuring, having to adapt itself to this decrease in revenue through a cost reduction exercise as well as an increase in output and revenues. Cost reduction entailed the rationalisation of factory operations.

In the South of Mauritius, five factories have closed in recent years. Today Mauritius also has a refinery, called Omnicrane, that since 2009, has been refining and exporting white sugar to Europe, mainly through a contract with the German firm Sudmacker that will last until 2014. Since the 1980s, Mauritius has also produced a variety of special sugars, with high added value, which are also for export purposes. Special sugars represent a fifth of the annual production.

Slavery and indentured labour

The abolition of slavery put some pressure on the sugar industry. When the British took over the island, the settlers were worried about the abolition of slavery. One of the major events of British rule was the arrival of the Indian immigrants to Mauritius to work in the sugar cane fields as a replacement for the now freed slaves. With the arrival of the Indian workers, explains Ashveen Khemraz, the industry went through a boom, until the first crash came at the end of World War I. This is referred to as the year of 90 shillings. One of the galleries of the museum gives ample details on the events of the time, including an interesting quote from Malcolm de Chazal, who explains that it was an era where New York and London were still ruling the global market. There was an epic battle between London and New York and to break New York’s power, London had the brilliant idea of using Mauritius. They asked Mauritius to sell all its sugar to them at the extraordinary price of 90 shillings. All local prices went up and the country got accustomed to luxury. But the other side of the coin is that it left the country in shock, unable to manage the high prices. After all the inevitable law of the economy is that a period of luxury is always followed by a crash.

Of course, the sugar industry would nevertheless survive all the ups and downs, as you will learn through the rich documentation at the museum. Once the historical part is over, you will move into the factory and discover the machinery used for the production of sugar. Everything has been kept intact, to preserve the authenticity of the experience, from the mills that crushed the sugar cane, to the crystalliser in which the sugar crystals are formed according to the various criteria that must be considered in the production of different types of sugar. The museum also has an area dedicated to the progress made in the manufacturing process. Miniature models of a mill run with water or windmills that come to life at the touch of a button will delight children. “Il’Aventure du Sucre” is a beautiful journey for adults and children alike. A walk down memory lane, with the sweet smell of our precious sugar waiting all around you.

Melissa LOUIS

adventure

reserved for royal courts and the aristocracy. With the rapid development of the sugar plantations established within the French and British colonies, the sugar industry grew rapidly and made sugar popular and accessible to the common man. Sugar grew mostly from the West Indies and production started to move from traditional methods to mechanised development.

What made sugarcane the better choice for Mauritius? It showed considerable resistance and resilience to drought and more particularly to cyclones. Ashveen Khemraz explains that the plantations at the time were mostly there for ships to replenish their stocks. When the British captured the island in 1810, after what is known as a gentleman’s agreement with the French, the sugar industry began to spread its roots. This marked the beginning of the major sugar protocols. Sugar in Mauritius was then sold at the same price as sugar from the West Indies and production started to move from traditional methods to mechanised development.
The neglected human factor

The situation in Mauritius, of what is generally considered as a serious impediment to the proper and efficient management of the prison system, namely overcrowding, is not considered exceptional. Available statistics reveal that the world-wide average percentage of prison overcrowding (in relation to some 130 countries) is around 30%.

Mauritius would be within that average and this would be a far cry from countries like Barbados or Bangladesh, for example, where the prisons are populated with a staggering 300% of their actual capacity.

Recent figures given in Parliament (which stand un-contradicted), whilst confirming the state of overcrowding, show that the situation, although not being as it should be, is nevertheless, not desperately alarming. But the problem of overcrowding should not be viewed in isolation, as it is aggravated by several other often quoted factors that need to be recalled here for the sake of completeness.

The first and most obvious of these is inadequate and institutional overcrowding. The central prison at Beau Bassin is harboured by a 19th century building, a fact that speaks for itself. Even the newer constructions have been acknowledged to manifest functional shortcomings.

The question of staffing has also been invoked regularly. Recently officially interpreted statistical figures given in Parliament would suggest a quite comfortable situation of how our prisons are manned. There are however more realistic suggestions that the practical working ratio is that in fact of one police officer to six inmates, and not the officially interpreted ratio of one to two.

Also of relevance to the issue is the alarming percentage of inmates that are stated to be HIV positive. The above can be summarised as being the main explanations that are frequently put forward when the shortcomings of the prison organisation in the country are brought to light, especially when these occur in a manifest way, as happened recently.

But are the explanations finally purely infrastructural ones? The rationale of a prison organisation rests basically on the premise that those guilty of a certain type of deviant behaviour need to be isolated from society. That isolation involves a measure of punishment and retribution. But such isolation has, by our modern standards of human rights, to be for a definite period of time and this implies that, generally speaking (there may be extreme exceptions), the detainee will sooner or later reintegrate society anew.

In managing the conflicting rights of society and those of the deviant, infrastructural issues come into play without doubt, but above all, what is involved is a human issue.

The legislator has, in theory, not been oblivious to the human factor in the “prison equation” and to the absolute relevance of preserving human dignity in prison, to the need for a proper and intelligent rehabilitation process and to the relevance of conditions of rehabilitation in society.

The Reform Institutions Act that came into force in 1988 recognises the human aspect of detention and officially caters for the mechanisms destined to ensure its implementation. The Board of Visitors has wide and important functions under the Act, the most important ones being its jurisdiction to enquire into the conditions of detention of the detainees, to hear complaints made by detainees and to enquire into abuses and matters that it considers expedient.

The other mechanism relates to what is called the Discharged Persons’ Aid Committee which is concerned with ensuring that a discharged prisoner’s re-instatement in society is done in reasonable circumstances. It has the mission, inter alia, of procuring possibilities of employment for the discharged prisoner.

The Parole Board is set up under the Act and its role is to recommend the release on parole of a detainee who has served at least half of his sentence, with a minimum of 16 months served sentence.

These mechanisms are conducive to modern conditions of detention but they either do not function at all or function wrongly. They have not been functioning, as they should, because the human element is not given the importance that it deserves, emphasis being laid more on retribution and punishment than on rehabilitation and reinsertion.

This philosophy is however not restricted to the prison system. The judiciary appears also to be more inclined to lay more emphasis on the retributive or punishment aspect of sentencing with the imposition sometimes of inordinate periods of detention. The legislator, it must be said, has tried to diversify the sentencing process by devising alternative forms of punishment but these are acknowledged to be limited in scope. The general sentencing policies are on the high side by international standards and that significantly affects conduct and behaviour in prison.

There can be further no proper prison management so long as inmates are divided into two categories, those entitled to the automatic one-third reduction of sentence and those (convicted for drug offences) who are not so entitled.

Innocent until proved guilty

True, Preetam was arrested, but he considers himself lucky. It was Police Sergeant Paul who asked him to call at the station. They have known each other since their school years. Sergeant Paul did not believe one minute that Preetam meant it when he threatened to cut off his boss’s hand if the latter would not copy it to himself. The problem was that Preetam has his pride and would not apologise, even if, as the police said, he had committed an arrestable offence.

True, Preetam was remanded to police cell, but he considers himself lucky. The Police did not object to bail which was fixed at RS 5,000- by the Magistrate. She looked so sorry for Anil to know that time spent on remand is taken into consideration for sentencing purposes. He is innocent.

Many are better qualified than I to debate about what is wrong with our prisons; why the provisions of the Reform Institution Act, once acclaimed as a modern piece of legislation, are not enforced. Why taxpayers’ money is spent on reforming foreigners who we do not want to integrate into our society anyway.

Others may think that those in prison deserve what they are getting, that it is more important to rid the society of those criminals who put our lives and those of our loved ones in danger. But the fact is that there are too many in our prisons who are not convicted criminals. And not everybody is as “lucky” as Preetam. Nothing should make bearable the idea of an innocent person being deprived of his liberty and treated as a criminal. Not even our legitimate expectation to be and feel safe or our outrage when confronted with so many unpunished crimes.

The priority of all priorities should be to ensure that only those who actually represent a danger to our society are sent to prison, whether as a preventative measure or after conviction. And there is no need for any new law. There is little point in making new laws if those who are called upon to enforce them are not properly trained: properly trained police officers would know the difference between the right to arrest and the need to arrest. They would know that in the normal course of things, an inquiry should precede an arrest, irrespective of the connections of the victim or of the suspect; properly trained Magistrates would release without condition those who should not have been arrested in the first place; properly trained Probation Officers would give true alternatives to custodial sentences.

Properly trained lawyers would know that the only privilege which comes with the robe is the opportunity to serve the cause of justice by playing a crucial and well defined role within a judicial system which presumes that every man or woman is innocent until proven guilty.
Monitoring every move or turning a blind eye

Devereux DEONARAN
Barrister at Law

The escape of the GRNW prisoners has been grabbing the headlines these last two weeks. Here members of the legal profession give their viewpoints on some very fundamental aspects of the prison system in Mauritius.

To speak of the famous evasion, which is still ongoing as not all prisoners have been captured, in isolation from the problem of the prison would be too simple. The problem is probably inhereent in the system and there is need for a serious policy reform. Let us not forget that the idea behind locking up criminals is above all to protect society, but also to reform and reform them. The main concept is to rehabilitate most, may be not for all of them. It is clear that, in some cases, there is no other way than to lock them in to serve the purpose of justice and/or to protect the society from them.

For long, the prison services were known as the reform institutions in as much as in the colonial days, the Brits came with the concept of reforming the prisoners and making them better individuals. Now, coupled with that, you have another category of prisoners on remand; those who are presumed innocent but because of the case, its seriousness or because of their character and propensity to commit crime, are locked up pending trial. Both categories are different and they should be kept and treated differently. One has been sentenced and the other one is awaiting trial.

The controversy with the commissioner of prisons being Indian should not have been made an issue at all as the debate is erroneous from the very beginning. It is not being Indian that renders the incumbent incapable; it is that he has been put in a sensitive post which needs and requires local data and knowledge. It requires a potential of speaking to the prisoners and understanding their frustration. It also requires the ability to relate to his officers and to respect them. It is known that the incumbent has not even met a counsel who tried to meet him to discuss access to his client; this is gross.

One of the former commissioners of prisons went to another extreme by encouraging prisoners to be actors in an in-house prison theatre group he launched. Some posts in most countries are never given to foreigners for the simple reason that not only there are capable persons locally but also because it requires a full knowledge of the country’s mentality and an interaction with all levels of individuals including the rogues and the proletariat.

Posts such as commissioner of prisons, commissioner of police, chief justice, ministers, judges and magistrates, secret service, police officers, the army and chief of staff, head of ministries require nationals and patriots. In France, they prepare the top nationals for the top jobs through the “École Nationale d’Administration” (ENA), an institution made to prepare the best citizens for top civil service jobs such as jobs in para - governmental corpora- tions and also in high profile private companies, the reason being to pro- bably protect and preserve French nationals’ interests. Many presidents and Prime ministers graduated from there. It also works as a spider’s web as this is where they get to know each other and develop connections and relations, the famous réseau.

As Mauritians and patriots, we are touched when a post that can be occupied by a national is occupied by a non-national. In some sectors, it was necessary to seek foreign competence for reasons that go beyond a knowledge of local data or local mentality. It was necessary to appoint, at a certain time, a customs commissioner that has no links with Mauritians, as it was also important to appoint a tax commissioner for the same reason. The benefits of having foreign competence in financial institutions and banking sectors is a blessing as we lack local talent, at least for another decade, but in the future that may not be the case.

Prison reform? Yes, definitly but it requires a full diagnosis of the problems related to prison services including crimes and family break up, education and poverty. It requires a Marshall plan and it is not the sole responsibility of the Prime minister but of all people of good intent to sort out and to tackle these problems that have been present since SSR and went on also during SAJ and Paul Bérenger’s mandates as Prime ministers. They did not start today.
London and New York are not about to lose their spots as the world’s leading financial centers but they are being challenged by emerging market upstarts in a potentially lucrative area: the management of funds moving between developing economies.

With developed economies struggling and emerging markets thriving, more and more financial deals are being cut well away from the traditional centers.

Rising trade between emerging economies, cross-border mergers, acquisitions by Indian and Chinese companies and moves by developing world businesses to raise capital in each other’s markets will spur growth of financial centers in the fastest growing economies, according to industry experts who addressed the Reuters Emerging Markets Summit in Sao Paulo last week.

For the bankers clustering in cities like Sao Paulo and Mumbai, the intra-emerging markets movement of funds represents an alluring chance to make money.

“We see flows between Africa and India, India and China, India and Korea being much bigger,” said Neeraj Swaroop, CEO of Standard Chartered’s India business. “Not just big companies but also small- and medium-sized companies are making outbound investments. For banks like Standard Chartered, these are immense opportunities to pursue”.

Stephen Jennings, CEO of Renaissance Capital, a Moscow-based investment bank focused on developing economies, said he is already seeing a rapid integration of capital flows in emerging markets.

“In our M&A practice, 80 percent of our deals don’t have a Western face. And the same thing will happen with financial flows”, he told the Reuters summit.

“London cannot possibly retain its role as a primary capital markets center for emerging markets ... I think it will be displaced totally over the next two to three years”, he said, adding that high taxes, intensifying regulation and unfavorable immigration policies all work against the City.

While other industry experts expect New York and London to remain dominant for years to come, examples of the world’s changing investment flows abound.

Chinese investment is surging in Africa, Latin America and South Asia. Russian and central Asian resources companies are lining up to list shares in Hong Kong. Jennings says UC Rusal’s $2.2 billion IPO in Hong Kong in January was “the tip of a massive iceberg”.

Chinese banks are also making big loans across the developing world, such as $1 billion in financing South Africa’s Standard Bank obtained from a consortium of Chinese lenders in 2009. And Brazilian companies will soon tap debt markets in South Africa and Russia, said Edoardo Centola, CEO of Standard Bank’s Latin American operations.

“There is interest in issuing bonds for Brazilian companies in rand, and there’s a huge appetite for rand bonds in Africa”, said Centola. “We also find there is an appetite for Brazilian companies to issue in rubles”.

Both New York and London have a long list of advantages over emerging market rivals, ranging from loose capital controls and the strong rule of law to sound infrastructure and high quality schools and universities.

Jim O’Neill, Goldman Sachs’ head of global economic research and the man who coined the term BRICs, says it will take many years before the traditional financial powerhouses are overtaken by emerging market rivals.

“For any of these emerging markets to truly be an international financial center, they have to do something about the basic ingredients, including the use of English and adopting very credible and acceptable rules of business law”, he said. “Without those two basic things, these countries have no chance”.

Nevertheless, some of the new centers may soon dominate lucrative niches.

Singapore is challenging Switzerland for the world’s wealth management business, Hong Kong -- which led the world in IPOs last year -- is becoming an equity hub for Asia’s growing resources companies and Shanghai, not New York, is coordinating the region’s natural resources driving China’s private sector.
ELI Africa

Based on our belief that lack of a “proper” education should not define someone nor play such a determining role in someone’s life course, ELI Africa was set up and currently works with four different nonprofit schools in Mauritius, implementing innovative and engaging educational programs to inspire children. ELI Africa hopes to create an educational environment where all children are safe, respected, and encouraged to learn and grow. The program is designed to challenge the students’ potential and help them develop into successful and responsible members of society.

Sports and the Power of a Healthy Body

Sports has the power to change the world—Nelson Mandela.

Connecting 19 countries, hundreds of teachers and thousands of students from around the world, DREAMS + TEAMS is all about training, sharing and learning.

The British Council has always taken pride in the various educational projects implemented in Mauritius over the last 50 years of its existence on the island.

One of the projects implemented by the British Council Mauritius is DREAMS + TEAMS, which brought together 19 AFRICAN countries.

The inaugural program is running at full steam in Mauritius to share and exchange knowledge and experience in the world of education, education which is at the very heart of everything we do. Sports is a universal language and can be professionally and personally rewarding for teachers as they are exposed to innovative teaching methods and develop mutual understanding.

Andy Pottuck (head teacher from QESC) and 4 students, James Tighe, Ollie Hand, James Edward and Jack Abraham plus one of the students from QESC are currently visiting Mauritius to share and exchange knowledge with their foreign visitors, games such as cricket and tug rugby. Healthy activities, which keep children on their feet, ensuring that they make positive use of their energy. But as mentioned by Mr Gopaul, “In a place like Mauritius, hundreds of years ago, what games and pleasures existed that made life worth living? It was an age when even the slightest comfort was impossible, not to say electricity was unknown.”

“Working with schools from another country is a great way to motivate and enthuse pupils and can be both professionally and personally rewarding for teachers as they are exposed to innovative teaching methods and develop mutual understanding.”

Andy Pottuck

The rector commented on the changed attitude of students, but also of the teaching staff, PE is not just a game, it is an insight into education, education which is at the very heart of everything we do. Sports is a universal language.

Georgina Ragavan

Media and PR Consultant

A group of young leaders from the UK play traditional games at Beau Bassin SSS.

QESC taught the girls from Beau Bassin SSS the basics of playing cricket and tag rugby. Healthy education, education which is at the very heart of everything we do. Sports is a universal language.

Colds and flu: facts and myths

I am about to open a can of worms: the common winter cold. Every winter, the common cold turns common folk into ad-hoc healers. And whilst modern medicine has provided us with cancer chemotherapy, diabetes medication, and heart transplants, it has yet to cure the cold. As flu season looms, let’s set the record straight.

A cold is an infection of the upper respiratory tract caused by viruses. Over 200 types of viruses have been associated with it, the most common being the rhinovirus and influenza virus. Adults catch a cold about 3 times a year and children about 5-7 times depending on their age and how unhygienic they are.

The virus spreads from person to person via mucous secretions. Sounds revolting, I know but the classic scenario is: Sick person A sneezes, virus contaminates A’s hands and surfaces surrounding A such as door handles, keyboards etc. Unsuspecting person B comes along, touches aforementioned door handle or key-board and picks up the virus. B then touches her own nose and eyes and delivers the virus there. Completely unrelated to the fact that B likes to walk around with a head of wet hair in cold weather.

Which brings us to our first myth: temperature. To reiterate, colds are caused by viruses entering the nose. Wet hair, swimming and exposure to chilly weather and food do not promote viral transmission: it’s a hand-to-nose affair. Colds, incidentally, are more common in winter because people spend more time clustered together indoors thus facilitating viral spread.

The second major myth is supplements. I suspect orange juice companies fostered the 1980’s Vitamin C craze; it is unsupported by research and it is frankly a bit passé. Nowadays, cool and trendy people swear by echinacea. Echinacea is a herbal supplement packaged in clever-looking bottles that cost a small fortune and look like they could endorsed by the Beckhams. Sadly, Echinacea will not prevent colds either, despite the hype behind it.

While we are on the subject of pills, let us mention the curious one: antibiotics. Antibiotics target bacteria and are not effective against viruses. They are only indicated if you develop a complication such as bronchitis or a chest infection.

The third cluster of folklore revolves around food: I like chicken soup and trust me, I have searched high and low for any shred of evidence to support its therapeutic benefits—regrettably I found none.

Milk will also not increase mucus secretions or phlegm— it goes down through your stomach and doesn’t come out through your nose normally—if it does, then perhaps you belong in a circus. There is also no need to eat more or less to ‘feed the fever’ or ‘starve the fever’, whatever the current vibe is.

While some fret over pills, potions and prejudices, others believe that coughing and sneezing are the body’s way of expelling the virus. Actually, it is the vi-rus’s way of spreading itself. Symptoms do not affect the duration of the cold; pain relief and cough syrup will not impair recovery.

Cold symptoms generally last about a week but if they persist or worsen, then you should see a doctor in case you are developing a complication. Otherwise, whilst none of the above practices has been proven to cure a cold, they are mostly harmless and if they soothe you, who am I to argue? I, for one, am not giving up chicken soup...

By Dr Zina VALAYDON

Column

Dreams and Teams

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The virus spreads from person to person via mucous secretions. Sounds revolting, I know but the classic scenario is: Sick person A sneezes, virus contaminates A’s hands and surfaces surrounding A such as door handles, keyboards etc. Unsuspecting person B comes along, touches aforementioned door handle or key-board and picks up the virus. B then touches her own nose and eyes and delivers the virus there. Completely unrelated to the fact that B likes to walk around with a head of wet hair in cold weather.

Which brings us to our first myth: temperature. To reiterate, colds are caused by viruses entering the nose. Wet hair, swimming and exposure to chilly weather and food do not promote viral transmission: it’s a hand-to-nose affair. Colds, incidentally, are more common in winter because people spend more time clustered together indoors thus facilitating viral spread.

The second major myth is supplements. I suspect orange juice companies fostered the 1980’s Vitamin C craze; it is unsupported by research and it is frankly a bit passé. Nowadays, cool and trendy people swear by echinacea. Echinacea is a herbal supplement packaged in clever-looking bottles that cost a small fortune and look like they could endorsed by the Beckhams. Sadly, Echinacea will not prevent colds either, despite the hype behind it.

While we are on the subject of pills, let us mention the curious one: antibiotics. Antibiotics target bacteria and are not effective against viruses. They are only indicated if you develop a complication such as bronchitis or a chest infection.

The third cluster of folklore revolves around food: I like chicken soup and trust me, I have searched high and low for any shred of evidence to support its therapeutic benefits—regrettably I found none.

Milk will also not increase mucus secretions or phlegm— it goes down through your stomach and doesn’t come out through your nose normally—if it does, then perhaps you belong in a circus. There is also no need to eat more or less to ‘feed the fever’ or ‘starve the fever’, whatever the current vibe is.

While some fret over pills, potions and prejudices, others believe that coughing and sneezing are the body’s way of expelling the virus. Actually, it is the vi-rus’s way of spreading itself. Symptoms do not affect the duration of the cold; pain relief and cough syrup will not impair recovery.

Cold symptoms generally last about a week but if they persist or worsen, then you should see a doctor in case you are developing a complication. Otherwise, whilst none of the above practices has been proven to cure a cold, they are mostly harmless and if they soothe you, who am I to argue? I, for one, am not giving up chicken soup...
Beautiful furnishings just for you

It’s not always easy to find ready-made furniture that suits your needs and tastes. Looking for a beautiful and practical piece of furniture? Try the custom-made experience and place your order at “M.C. Samban & Fils”, a furniture workshop situated in Beau Bassin.

The workshop has built a solid reputation over 40 years of existence. First set up and run by Mar-daymootoo Samban, the business was taken over by his son Siven Samban when the former passed away 15 years ago.

Today, the workshop has expanded and has a steady supply of loyal clients and many new ones. “Clients bring clients,” explains Siven Samban. He believes that satisfied customers are the key to the business, which is why everything is done to make things as easy as possible for you. There is also an element of trust, which Siven Samban believes is very important. Some of his workers have been with him for many years, like Jean-Noel, who has spent around 30 years at the workshop. Local customers are familiar with their work and are pleased to spread the word about the great service.

Whether you are looking for a new kitchen cupboard, dining room furniture, bedroom furniture, beautiful wooden stairs or that perfect saloon style wooden door, the craftsmen at the workshop will be able to provide you with the perfect solution. You can even have a custom-made sofa set, complete with tasteful upholstery.

Siven Samban has a catalogue presenting a wide selection of furniture models from which you can choose the one that suits you best. He explains that they are always pleased to work with the customer. Both parties bring their suggestions, and this often means that no two pieces of furniture will ever be exactly alike. To make things easier for the customer, Siven Samban will go to their house, when necessary, for example, to check the space available for stairs or to measure the angles for the handrail.

The workshop offers a variety of wood, including teak, rosewood and sapelé, as well as melamine and MDF, and also different shades of varnish. Samples are presented to the customer so that he or she can make an informed decision. You can choose to keep the wood’s natural colour or you can choose a hazel-nut brown, a deep red brown, or even black. It’s all about meeting your requirements.

Siven also understands that his customers are often busy people who do not always have the time to come to the workshop. He is more than willing to visit you at your convenience, including weekends and evenings. Once you have ordered your new furniture, you can regularly visit the workshop to check the progress being made.

And it can be custom-made to suit your budget. Prices are based on size, the type of wood and the model chosen by the customer. A bed for example, can range from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 30,000.

The workshop is thriving today thanks to a lot of care for detail and quality. Whether you are redecorating or setting up your new home, at “M.C. Samban & Fils”, there is a solution for you. After all, the customer is king and deserves the very best service.

Contact number: 749 4854
Melissa LOUIS

Kreol korner]

Mo dan pins/dife – I’m not doing well
Far be it from us to promote the vocabulary of negativity, but in these trying times it’s necessary to know how to tap into the zeitgeist. So the next time you’re feeling under the weather and someone cheerfully asks you “ke menny”, all you have to do is retort “mo dan pins” or “mo dan dife”. If the person persists in enquiring about your mood, you’re entitled to have recourse to force. Ignorance really is bliss…

[Book review]

A survivor’s story

Most of us have heard about the horrors of Darfur but for many people, the thousands of victims go anonymous and are simply part of another news story. “Tears of the Desert” is Halima Bashir’s autobiography, written with Damien Lewis, former war reporter whose books include the internationally best-selling “Slave”. He has reported for many years from the African continent and is considered by many to be an expert on Sudan, hence the right choice to bring Halima Bashir’s story to life.

When you first pick up this book, you cannot help but open it with caution. After all, it is a true story and you know that it will be shocking and will tell you many things you would rather not know. Yet, you know at the same time that it is a necessary voice to expose the situation in Darfur. Through her harrowing tale, Halima Bashir brings Darfur closer to us and presents it as we would have never imagined it: a place called home, peaceful, happy and bearing the mark of African culture and traditions.

Born in the Zaghawa tribe, Halima Bashir paints a beautiful picture of her home. The first part of the story gives a good deal of insight into African traditions and tribal life, something that many of us know very little about. Her home becomes familiar to us, which makes us even more sympathetic to her cause. Born with a white eyelash, which is considered as lucky in her tribe, Halima will grow up followed by that good fortune. She is surrounded by her family and friends and for a long time lives in happiness. She is academically gifted and pursues her studies, becoming the first doctor in her village. Halima cares for the sick and needy, her main goal in life being to do something good for the tribe she loves so much…until the day war breaks out in Darfur and everything spirals into madness.

Long gone are the happy moments we witness at the start of the book. It is now time to face the destruction of Darfur and its people. War, violence, and fear are all that are left. When the Janjaweed militia attack Halima’s village, they leave behind a trail of unimaginable desolation.

Halima Bashir and Damien Lewis do not hide any details of the horror. The killing of the village men, the horrendous rape of 40 young girls and eventually Halima’s own ordeal are powerful and painful moments of the novel that will have you choking with tears, stunned by the horrors that one human can inflict on another. Halima Bashir is an example of bravery throughout. Of course we know that she survived to tell the tale, but how she survives and begins her life anew are what you need to discover. The book is a voice for Darfur in many ways. “Tears of the Desert” manages to do something that all the war reports in the world cannot do: put a face on the suffering. It makes Darfur real.