

While Mauritius offers investment avenues ...

India, The Place To Do Business

Mauritius is like an extension of India, their emotional bonds being more appealing than business tie-ups. But Business is business. While India is the fourth largest trading partner of Mauritius, the latter is a leading channel for the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) into India. **Thailesh Kumar Chamane**, Trade Commissioner of the idyllic African island nation talks endearingly about the bonds the two countries share, which date back mid-19th century, and the dream prospects the present holds for both in terms of economic cooperation and bilateral trade.



Thailesh Kumar Chamane

What is the history of the trade relations and the potential areas of trade and commerce between India and Mauritius?

India-Mauritius relationship is rooted in common friendship, culture and a shared civilisational heritage. In addition, both countries have, over the years, enjoyed close relations which encompass various aspects of bilateral ties, including trade and political links.

The bond between our two countries dates back to the arrival of the first Indian indentured labourers to Mauritius in the mid-nineteenth century. The visit of Mahatma Gandhi, on his way from South Africa, marked a new era of proximity between India and Mauritius which culminated later in a close rapport between the first Prime Minister of Mauritius, Dr Seewoosagur Ramgoolam and former Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and successive Indian and Mauritian leaderships.

Obviously, the excellent political rapport paved the way for enhanced trade between our two countries. Business interaction can be traced back to 1924 when the New Indian Assurance Company Ltd. was registered in Mauritius and it acquired a new dimension as a number of other Indian Public Enterprises like LIC, Bank of Baroda and Air India started operations in our country.

As regards to the potential areas of trade and commerce, there are tremendous opportunities for co-operation in line with our country's strategy to promote itself as a regional hub with preferential access not only to Eastern and Southern Africa but also to the European Union and USA. The Freeport is one such sector.

Mauritius imports a large chunk of its food products as well as most of the raw materials required for the manufacturing sector, which constitute an interesting potential to the Indian business community. It is also worthy to note that frameworks have been set up for the promotion and expansion of bilateral trade through government to government agreements as well as through MoUs between the chambers of commerce and other trade bodies of India and Mauritius. Interestingly, statistics reveal that India is the fourth largest trading partner of Mauritius while Mauritius is the prime FDI provider to India.

What has been your experience in India?

India is considered to be a second home to most Mauritians. I was one of the lucky beneficiaries of a diplomatic training programme at the Akbar Bhawan in 1998 and my Indian experience has been remarkably enriching since then. I have to say that I have witnessed the tremendous takeoff of India particularly with the

development in infrastructure and real estate boom not only in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad but in other towns like Pune as well.

India is furthermore turning out to be the flavour of the moment with business proposals from all round the world which in itself is a clear indication of the vibrancy of the economy and the resourcefulness and wisdom of the Indian people.

Which are the Indian companies present in Mauritius or Mauritian companies in India?

Indian companies are present in numerous sectors in Mauritius. As I have mentioned earlier, New India Assurance, Life Insurance Corporation of India and Bank of Baroda have been in Mauritius for some decades. Recently, the State Bank of India has taken over a major stake in one of the local banks of Mauritius. Air India is in Mauritius since a long time. Indian Oil has penetrated the energy sector and MTNL is also beginning its operations there.

Apart from these companies, some private entities which have ventured into Mauritius include Ajanta Pharma in the pharma sector and Universal Breweries Ltd. which has entered into the beer business in Mauritius. In the hospitality sector, Taj and Oberoi are there and one new entrant has recently started operations. IT is one of the emerging industries with companies like Infosys and PentaFour, NIIT among several others having a firm footing in Mauritius.

I have probably missed a few names but we are certainly highly appreciative of their contribution and welcome others to establish a presence in Mauritius.

Mauritian institutions having a sustained presence in India include public sector companies like the State Bank of Mauritius Ltd. and Air Mauritius in the banking and aviation sectors respectively. Some private companies, mostly in the textiles and offshore sector, have set up shop in India. Also, one major hotel group from Mauritius has opened an office in Mumbai to tap the Indian market.

What are the potential areas of investment?

There used to be a preconceived impression about Mauritius being a small and remote market

devoid of resources.

However, Indian business people have come to realise that Mauritius is a land of opportunities with prospects for investment in a number of sectors like manufacturing, jewellery, offshore, hotel, freeport, medicare and pharma to name only a few.

The fact that Mauritius is gradually becoming a regional hub in sectors like manufacturing, fishing, finance and education is also an indication of the wide array of activities where investment is possible. A number of incentives have also been earmarked to encourage Indian investments which comprise tax holidays, duty free import of equipment and a permanent residence scheme among others.

Could you shed light on some of trading success stories India and Mauritius have seen?

The ongoing buzz in the business community in Mauritius and elsewhere is that India is the place to do business. One of the core areas of business of interest to Mauritian businessmen is textiles.

In addition to that, finance is an area where Mauritian and Indian business communities are working hand in hand.

Could you tell us how TCF would help benefit you?

The Trade Commissioners generally have to adjust to a new location upon each posting. The Trade Commissioner's Forum turns out to be a platform where the new members are able to meet those based in Mumbai and learn about the business and the place and also get acquainted with the officials at various levels in Maharashtra setup and the opportunities in business in the land.

Through this forum, we are also able to arrange meetings with people from the business fraternity and media and obtain information and data in a professional way.

To conclude

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to you for taking up this initiative in helping the forum to bring out this magazine OPEN TRADE.

Mauritius has a lot to offer to India and more business exchanges will help Indo-Mauritius relations reach further horizons. ■

