Disaster management and weather forecasting:
Minister Dayal reinforces cooperation between Mauritius and Réunion

+ Major changes to initiate more precise and instant weather monitoring and alerts and a post warning class 4 to be introduced

PHOTO below From left to right, General Franck Reignier, Commandant Supérieur des Forces Armées de l’Océan Indien, Mauritian Minister Raj Dayal and the Préfet de la Réunion, Mr. Dominique Sorain.

Honourable Raj Dayal, Minister of Environment, Sustainable Development, Disaster and Beach Management visited the French Department of Réunion Island on January 29 to be acquainted with facilities there with regard to disaster management and identify areas of possible cooperation and assistance.

The minister and his delegation, which included Mr. K. Servansing, PMSM, Director General of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre (NDRRMC) and Acting Commander of the Special Mobile Force (SMF), visited Meteo France Réunion where Mr. David Goutx, Directeur Interrégional made an informative presentation on the management on the island of hydro-meteorological disasters.

Mr. Dayal and his delegation were keenly interested in implementing in Mauritius methods of forecasting of such disasters for timely implementation to protect property and human lives through real time recording and monitoring of levels of rainfall and assessing their impact so as to issue timely and accurate warning that would ensure public safety.

The minister, who chairs the NDRRMC, wants such a system of automatic forecast to be put in place in Mauritius, where it will involve coupling a brand new Doppler Weather Radar from Japan with flood monitoring mechanisms and devices on major rivers, canals and flood prone basins across the country. Mr. Dayal intends to submit the completed project for approval as soon as practicable, with all technical details and financial implications clearly defined. The Doppler radar is being installed at Trou aux Cerfs and will be commissioned as per plan in July 2017.

Mauritius Meteorological Services and Meteo France Reunion already have a protocol for timely communication and exchange of meteorological related information which has helped MMS forecasting’s capabilities. However, for quite some years, this interaction has not been too active. Since the coming in office of Mr R. Mungra as Director of
MMS, this standing protocol has been revived and there is much closer exchange of meteorological information between him and his counterpart in Reunion Island as well as their respective staffs. This will prove to be very beneficial to us more so with the challenges Mauritius is facing in terms of landslide and flood prone areas with aggravating circumstances.

After Meteo France, Minister Dayal and his delegation were received at the Centre Opérationnel de la Préfecture by Col D Paris, Chef d’Etat Major de la Zone et de la Protection Civile pour l’Océan Indien. Following the presentation and discussions, it was seen that there is a vital need for Mauritius to have a legal framework based somewhat on the French laws and regulations for disaster management. A bill to this effect has already been drafted, adapted to Mauritius, and vetted by the State Law Office and will shortly be submitted to Cabinet by way of a memorandum for consideration and approval prior to parliamentary debate.

The Minister had bilateral talks with Mr D. Sorain, Prefet de la Reunion and the visit was concluded by a press conference.

Comparing the decision making process in the two islands, the main decision maker is the Préfet in Réunion, who is the equivalent of a Minister in Mauritius. The 'Prefet' is directly responsible for the inter-ministerial operational responses which is important whilst handling alert phases like class 3 and 4 warnings.

In Mauritius, with the appointment of a Minister for Disaster Management, a clearer decision making process has been established than before. For last two recent weather events which required public warnings to be issued, there were close consultations among the office of the Minister, the MMS, NDRRMC and other important players and with the final decision resting with the Right Honourable Prime Minister. This decision making process helps to avert situations which could hamper economic activities whilst there is not much risks to life and property warranting a higher level of warning like a class 3 cyclone warning. This has to be closely evaluated balancing risks with economic losses.

For cyclone and torrential rains, there are clear protocols for the closing of schools. However, for heavy rainfalls which are not categorised as torrential ones, but which may still pose risk to life and property, there is no clear protocol laid down for decision making at the level of the Ministry of Education. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency as we are likely to encounter such situations at any time during this summer season and future ones.

After a class 4 warning for a cyclone is lifted, there is no effective warning in force though there are still risks to life and properties. In Reunion, a safeguard phase becomes effective once all cyclone warnings are lifted. People are warned of the dangers and advised not to venture outside more so near rivers, beaches, flooded areas and areas exposed to high winds.
At present after a class 4, there is no safeguard in terms of warning the population against unwarranted risks to life and property. A phase needs to be introduced after a class 4 to be known as safeguard phase to ensure public order and safety. To this effect a special warning will have to be issued for at least 6 hours and will be issued by way of a communiqué.

General Franck Reignier, Commandant Supérieur des Forces Armées de l’Océan Indien, Mauritian Minister Raj Dayal and the Préfet de la Réunion, Mr. Dominique Sorain.