

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Mauritius Monthly Briefing September 2023

Mauritius Summary 28 September 2023

Prime minister Pravind Jugnauth (2017-present) attends the G20 Summit in New Delhi (India) between 9 and 10 September, representing one of only three African countries invited to attend the summit. The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) arrests former parliamentary private secretary Rajanah Dhaliah as part of an investigation into bribery allegations on 31 August, exposing further corruption allegations against foreign affairs minister Maneesh Gobin. In another scandal for national carrier Air Mauritius, the board of directors announces on 15 September that it has suspended CEO Krešimir Kučko and CFO Jean-Laval Ah Chip over allegations that the two accepted an all-expenses paid holiday from an Air Mauritius supplier.

Prime minister attends G20

Prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth** (2017-present) attended the **G20 Summit in New Delhi (India)** between 9 and 10 September, representing one of only three **African** countries invited to attend the summit. India extended the invitation to **Mauritius** in a year when the two countries are celebrating 75 years of diplomatic relations. India and Mauritius are key partners, with nearly 70% of Mauritius' population being of Indian origin. Mauritius has often relied on India for assistance, most recently during the **Covid-19** pandemic, when India was the first country to supply vaccines to the island.¹

Jugnauth met with his Indian counterpart, **Narendra Modi**, on 8 September to discuss bolstering cooperation in areas including infrastructure, fintech and culture.² The meeting was Modi's first bilateral meeting of the summit, which Jugnauth highlighted as testament to the positive relations between the two countries.³ During discussions, Jugnauth emphasised that Mauritius was the first African country to sign a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** with India in February 2021. Total trade between the two reached \$554.19m for the 2022/2023 financial year.⁴ Another point of discussion, and in line with the summit's theme, was climate change. Modi confirmed that India would assist Mauritius in acquiring 200 electric buses in a bid to help curb carbon dioxide emissions.

Jugnauth also held a key meeting during the summit with **United Kingdom (UK)** prime minister **Rishi Sunak** (2022-present) on 9 September. The two discussed enhancing cooperation in areas such as trade and climate change and the potential for them to partner under the auspices of the **Commonwealth**.⁵ Jugnauth and Sunak also touched on the progress of negotiations between Mauritius and the UK over the sovereignty of the **Chagos Archipelago** (see *ARC Briefing Mauritius May 2023*). No update was provided to the media but the two agreed to meet again soon.⁶ Chagos remains the subject of ongoing negotiations between Mauritius and the UK, which has maintained control of the archipelago since Mauritian independence in 1968. The UK and Mauritius have

¹ Le Matinal, 7 Sep 2023

² Business Insider Africa, 11 Sep 2023

³ Le Matinal, 9 Sep 2023

⁴ High Commission of India in Mauritius, accessed 29 Sep 2023

⁵ Le Matinal, 10 Sep 2023

⁶ Le Matinal, 10 Sep 2023

concluded three rounds of negotiations and confirmed that a fourth would happen at the end of the month.⁷ At the time of writing, no confirmation of the negotiations have been made.

The Chagos archipelago has again been the subject of controversy in the UK. Former prime minister **Boris Johnson** (2019-2022) noted in his weekly column for UK newspaper **Daily Mail** on 22 September that it is a “*done deal*” that the UK will hand over control of the Chagos to Mauritius. Johnson called the move “*preposterous*” and said it would “*play into China’s hands*”. Negotiations over Chagos have been protracted, likely due to the housing of the **United States (US)** military base on **Diego Garcia**, one of the Chagos islands.⁸ The **UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office** quickly responded to Johnson’s claims, saying it was working with the US during the negotiations and that it had the US’ full support on all elements.⁹ It also said it is not appropriate to speculate on the outcome of the talks while they are ongoing. During Jugnauth’s address to the 78th **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** in **New York** on 22 September he expressed his hope that negotiations will be successful and allow for the full decolonisation of Mauritius. He also emphasised the sovereignty decision is based on international law.¹⁰

Corruption allegations against foreign affairs minister

The **Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC)** arrested former parliamentary private secretary **Rajanah Dhaliah** as part of an investigation into bribery allegations on 31 August, exposing further corruption allegations against foreign affairs minister **Maneesh Gobin**.¹¹ His arrest came after a whistleblower, **Ajay Jeetoo**, told the ICAC that Gobin and Dhaliah, at a party in September 2020, discussed a sum of money that a land leaseholder – **Keegan Etwaroo** – could provide them to obtain a 250-hectare land lease of the **Eco Deer Park Association**. According to Jeetoo, the money was passed through a confidant of Gobin, **Rajesh Ramnarain**.¹² At the time of the alleged meeting, Gobin was attorney general and agro-industry and food security minister; however, in a minor cabinet reshuffle on 30 August, Jugnauth appointed him as foreign affairs minister.

Opposition leader **Rama Valayden** commented at a press conference on 2 September that the statements given at the ICAC directly incriminate Gobin, as Dhaliah in his role was not able to allocate leases, only the attorney general would be able to do so.¹³ Labour minister **Soodesh Calichurn**, responding to the press on the same day and to opposition calls for Gobin to resign as minister in light of the allegations, said the ICAC investigation “*must be allowed to take its course*”.¹⁴ On 9 September, opposition parties **Linion Pep Morisien (LPM)** and the **Rassemblement Mauricien** announced they would hold a demonstration on 11 September to demand Gobin’s resignation.¹⁵ However, Jugnauth, while attending a ceremony on 15 September, said there were no allegations against Gobin and that the ICAC did not see a reason to summon him.¹⁶ The **Parti Travailleiste (PTr)**, **Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM)** and **Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate (PMSD)** alliance at a rally on 22 September said that Jugnauth chose to sacrifice Dhaliah to protect Gobin, “*who knows too many things*”.¹⁷ Notably, Gobin also serves as the secretary general of the ruling **Mouvement Socialiste Militant (MSM)**.

While corruption is considered low in Mauritius compared to other African countries, scoring 50/100 on **Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index** with a rank of 57/180, pan-

⁷ Defi Media, 15 Sep 2023

⁸ Evening Standard, 23 Sep 2023

⁹ Evening Standard, 23 Sep 2023

¹⁰ Le Mauricien, 23 Sep 2023

¹¹ Le Matinal, 1 Sep 2023

¹² Le Matinal, 31 Aug 2023

¹³ Le Matinal 2 Sep 2023

¹⁴ Le Matinal, 4 Sep 2023

¹⁵ Le Mauricien, 11 Sep 2023

¹⁶ Le Matinal, 16 Sep 2023

¹⁷ Le Matinal, 23 Sep 2023

African research network **AfroBarometer** noted in July 2022 that almost three-quarters of Mauritians believe the level of corruption in the country has increased, expressing mistrust of institutions and elected leaders.¹⁸

Air Mauritius suspends CEO and CFO

National carrier **Air Mauritius** announced on 15 September that it had suspended CEO **Krešimir Kučko** and CFO **Jean-Laval Ah Chip** over allegations that the two accepted an all-expenses paid holiday from an Air Mauritius supplier. The Air Mauritius board of directors confirmed it would appoint an independent party to investigate the matter.¹⁹

This latest scandal in the company, in which the government is the majority stakeholder, comes in the wake of the **Yogita Babboo** scandal. Babboo, the former president of the **Air Mauritius Cabin Crew Association (AMCCA)**, was dismissed with immediate effect on 10 July over statements she made on a radio programme on 25 April which the airline said were damaging to Air Mauritius' reputation (see *ARC Briefing Mauritius Aug 2023*).²⁰ Babboo refuted this, saying she was expressing concerns of staff members as a trade union spokesperson and not as an employee. Air Mauritius maintains that it followed procedure and noted that Babboo failed to appear before a disciplinary board following the interview, which contributed to her immediate dismissal. The case drew international condemnation and has sparked an ongoing legal case.

Following the suspension of Kučko and Ah Chip, Air Mauritius appointed replacements, adding to the controversy. **Raj Ramlugun**, representative of the **Listed Companies Minority Shareholders Association (LCMSA)**, told the media on 17 September that "*nothing is working as it should within the company*" and that the replacement officer in charge, **Laurent Recoura**, is a close friend of **Airport Holdings** CEO **Ken Arian**. Airport Holdings is responsible for the running of Air Mauritius.²¹ Concern was also raised over the decision to appoint Captain **Alain Leung Hing Wah** as the acting accountable manager. The captain was suspended from flying for two years in 2014 after a civil aviation investigation found that he and his colleagues were giving each other approval certificates, against regulations.²² His appointment increases doubt about Air Mauritius' credibility. According to Ramlugun, Air Mauritius would not survive if another wave of Covid-19 were to hit.

¹⁸ AfroBarometer, Jul 2022

¹⁹ Defi Media, 15 Sep 2023

²⁰ Le Matinal, 29 Jul 2023

²¹ L'Express, 17 Sep 2023

²² L'Express, 17 Sep 2023

Planner

2024 **(Mauritius)** General election
 2025 **(Mauritius)** Municipal elections

Chronology

29 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Matinal*. **South Korea** and Mauritius sign a bilateral agreement with the aim of attracting more South Korean tourists;

28 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Arab News*. **Saudi Fund for Development** signs two loans totalling \$140m for infrastructure projects in Mauritius and the **Bahamas**;

28 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Tech Central*. **Bank of Mauritius** (central bank) confirms that plans to launch a central bank digital currency are underway and that a pilot project will begin in coming months;

26 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Mauricien*. Education minister **Leela Devi-Dookun** steps in as prime minister in the absence of **Pravind Jugnauth** who is attending the **United Nations General Assembly** and deputy prime minister **Steven Obeegadoo**, who is also overseas;

24 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Mauricien*. Finance minister **Renganaden Padayachy** says during a **Bank of Mauritius** (central bank) meeting that a climate change action plan would cost the government \$6.5 billion given that as an island state, Mauritius is particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels and consequences of extreme weather events;

24 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Matinal*. Prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth** meets with **United Nations** secretary general **Antonio Guterres** on the side lines of the 78th **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** in **New York (United States)**;

22 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Matinal*. Prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth** on the side lines of the **United Nations General Assembly** signs the **Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)** treaty, making Mauritius one of the treaty's first signatories;

22 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Mauricien*. **Bank of Mauritius** (central bank) report indicates that the trade deficit for July reached Rs 14.7 billion (\$330.54m), down 3.1% compared to Rs 15.2 billion (\$341.79m) in July 2022;

17 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Matinal*. Opposition **Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM)** member of parliament (MP) **Joanna Bérenger** alleges that the **Central Electricity Board (CEB)** falsified an appeal regarding land ownership in favour of a company whose shareholders are foreigners;

17 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Mauricien*. **Bank of Mauritius** (central bank) **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** maintains the key rate at 4.5% citing expectations that inflation will maintain its downward trend and reach 7% by December, and anticipates that growth will remain between 6.5% and 7.5% in 2023;

10 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Mauricien*. **Mauritius Ports Authority (MPA)** confirms that the new Port-Louis cruise terminal will be inaugurated in November, which will bolster terminal capacity for tourist cruises;

8 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Matinal*. Prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth**, while attending the **G20 Summit** in **India**, highlights India's support for all sectors in the Mauritian economy, noting that Mauritius was the first **African** country to sign a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement** with India;

6 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Mauricien*. **United Arab Emirates** and Mauritius continue negotiations focused on establishing a comprehensive economic partnership agreement;

6 Sep 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Matinal*. Prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth** arrives in **India** to attend the 18th **G20 Summit** where he will host talks with his Indian counterpart, **Narendra Modi**, and **United Kingdom** prime minister **Rishi Sunak**;

31 Aug 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Mauricien*. The first meeting of the joint commission of the **Mauritius-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** takes place, noting that the two countries have not yet taken full advantage of the FTA;

30 Aug 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Mauricien*. Prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth** carries out a minor cabinet reshuffle, moving **Maneesh Gobin** from the agroindustry portfolio to foreign affairs and swearing in **Dorine Christiane Chuckowry** as commerce minister and **Anjiv Ramdhany** as civil service, administration and institutional reforms minister;

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