

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Mauritius Monthly Briefing October 2023

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#### Mauritius Summary 31 October 2023

*At least 11 armed men raid a charity concert held on 20 October to mark the 15th anniversary of the Attitude Hotel in La Citadelle in Port Louis. United States-headquartered credit rating agency Fitch Solutions confirms on 4 October that it has significantly revised Mauritius' economic growth forecast to 5.7% for 2023, up from 4.5%. The Supreme Court of Mauritius rules on 4 October that Section 250 of the Mauritian criminal code, which criminalises same-sex relations, is unconstitutional, officially legalising same-sex relations in the country.*

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#### Armed men raid charity concert

At least 11 armed men raided a charity concert held on 20 October to mark the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the **Attitude Hotel** in **La Citadelle** in **Port Louis**. Concert attendees reported that around 9.40 pm, a group of men wearing hoods and armed with swords, knives, truncheons and smoke bombs stormed the venue, creating panic.<sup>1</sup> Law enforcement was called onto the premises to control the situation, but the suspects fled. The **Criminal Investigation Division (CID)** launched an investigation on 22 October. Two suspects were brought before the Port Louis court on 23 October and nine other suspects on 24 October. They face charges of unlawful assembly, damaging property, and bearing offensive weapons.<sup>2</sup>

Politicians, including prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth** (2017-present), condemned the unprovoked violence, which is not a common occurrence in Mauritius. Police commissioner **Anil Kumar Dip** gave a statement on 25 October condemning the incidents and confirmed that an additional two people were arrested and that further arrests are planned.<sup>3</sup> Arts and cultural heritage minister **Avinash Teeluck** noted on 28 October:

*"The government will not tolerate those who want to jeopardize national unity."<sup>4</sup>*

Opposition leaders were critical of the police services. **Parti Travailleiste (PTr)** leader **Navin Ramgoolam** said on 28 October that events indicate a total failure on the part of the **National Security Service (NSS)** and police, who should have been expecting the event.<sup>5</sup> Ramgoolam's comments came after confirmation that two police officers were among those arrested, and reportedly provided the arms for the group.<sup>6</sup> He called the event an attack on Mauritian values. Teeluck disputed Ramgoolam's claims, noting that neither the government nor intelligence services could be blamed, but said those involved would face justice.

#### Fitch revises Mauritius growth

**United States (US)**-headquartered credit rating agency **Fitch Solutions** confirmed on 4 October that it had significantly revised Mauritius' economic growth forecast to 5.7% for 2023, up from 4.5%.

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<sup>1</sup> Le Matinal, 24 Oct 2023

<sup>2</sup> Le Matinal, 24 Oct 2023

<sup>3</sup> Le Matinal, 25 Oct 2023

<sup>4</sup> Le Matinal, 28 Oct 2023

<sup>5</sup> Le Matinal, 29 Oct 2023

<sup>6</sup> L'Express, 24 Oct 2023

Despite this upward revision, it is still far below the 7.8% registered in 2022.<sup>7</sup> Fitch warned that growth would decline slightly to 4.5% in 2024.

Fitch noted that the upward revision was based on **Statistics Mauritius** data released on 29 September, which show that real gross domestic product (GDP) growth had increased 5% year-on-year to 6% in quarter two (Q2) of 2023, which was above expectations.<sup>8</sup> This has also contributed to better growth in the first half of the year, leading to the upward revision of 2024 growth, with Fitch stating that the improved growth indicates that the economy is faring better than expected.

Fitch also affirmed its forecast that inflation will average 7.4% in 2023 before declining to 5% in 2024, which will prompt the **Bank of Mauritius (BoM)** (central bank) to begin a cycle of monetary easing. Fitch warned Mauritius' dependence on imports will continue to weigh on net exports, especially its reliance on cereals. **India** has confirmed that it will continue to supply Mauritius with rice, despite an export ban to most other countries, which will help prevent sharp increases in prices but can still impact inflation if supplies are disrupted.<sup>9</sup>

Statistics Mauritius also revised upwards its growth forecasts after releasing its data on 29 September. The agency revised its growth expectations from 5.4% to 6.8% for 2023.<sup>10</sup> According to Statistics Mauritius, this is being driven by growth in key sectors such as construction, trade, transport, and accommodation and catering.

### Mauritius decriminalises same sex relationships

The **Supreme Court of Mauritius** ruled on 4 October that Section 250 of the Mauritian criminal code, which criminalises same-sex relations, is unconstitutional, officially legalising same-sex relations in the country. The ruling was in response to a case filed by four LGBTQ+ rights activists in October 2019 challenging the law. The activists claimed that Section 250 violated their fundamental rights and freedoms, while the defendant, the government, said that while it is sympathetic to arguments put forward, the values of wider society meant that it was not the right time to change the law through parliament.<sup>11</sup>

Section 250 of the criminal code dates back to 1898 when Mauritius was under **British** colonial rule and carried a prison sentence of up to five years.<sup>12</sup> The court ruled that the law does not align with the values of indigenous Mauritians and was rather a remnant of colonial rule:

*"Its enactment was not the expression of domestic democratic will, but was a course imposed on Mauritius and other colonies by British rule."*<sup>13</sup>

The court referred to prior court decisions in other **African** countries such as **Botswana** and **South Africa** where such laws were also struck down, as well as to the 1994 case of **Toonen vs Australia** in which the **United Nations (UN) Rights Commission** found that criminalising same-sex relations violated the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**.<sup>14</sup> Mauritius in 2008 and 2019 enacted legislation that protected against discrimination based on sexual orientation, making the supreme court case a matter of time.

Mauritius becomes the ninth country out of 16 in the **Southern African Development Community (SADC)** to decriminalise same-sex relations.<sup>15</sup> The decision comes as many other African countries have strengthened their anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, including **Uganda**, and has earned Mauritius praise

<sup>7</sup> Fitch Solutions, 4 Oct 2023

<sup>8</sup> Fitch Solutions, 4 Oct 2023

<sup>9</sup> Fitch Solutions, 4 Oct 2023

<sup>10</sup> Le Mauricien, 1 Oct 2023

<sup>11</sup> VOA, 6 Oct 2023; Reuters, 5 Oct 2023

<sup>12</sup> Africanews, 5 Oct 2023

<sup>13</sup> VOA, 6 Oct 2023

<sup>14</sup> HRW, 5 Oct 2023

<sup>15</sup> The Conversation, 12 Oct 2023

from several organisations including the UN, the **UN Development Programme (UNDP)** and US-headquartered **Human Rights Watch (HRW)**. Parliament must still repeal the law to make it legal; however, the ruling bodes well for Mauritius' international standing. Uganda serves as an example of when a country goes in the opposite direction, with the **World Bank** opting to withhold new funding and many US companies ceasing to do business with Uganda over its stance.

## Planner

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

## Chronology

31 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *L'Express*. **Syntheses-Maurice** carries out a survey showing that 67.6% of Mauritians want a new political leader;

28 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Matinal*. Prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth** attends the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the **Chinese Business Chamber (CBC)** alongside several other ministers;

27 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Defimedia*. **Statistics Mauritius** reports that between January and mid-October, Mauritius hosted 949,795 tourists;

27 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Afrik21*. **Envolt**, a subsidiary of the Mauritian conglomerate **ENL**, launches a \$45m green bond programme to finance the construction of 13 photovoltaic solar power plants;

24 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Business Insider Africa*. **Absa Africa Financial Markets Index (AFMI)** ranks Mauritius as the second best **African** country to invest in 2023;

21 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Defimedia*. **Association des Consommateurs de l'Île Maurice (Acim)** (consumers association of Mauritius) organises a protest against fuel prices, calling for a significant reduction in the price of gasoline and diesel;

18 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Matinal*. Prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth** confirms that since 3 November 2022, Mauritius and the **United Kingdom** have held six rounds of negotiations over the **Chagos Archipelago**;

17 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *L'Express*. The **National Assembly** approves a motion presented by speaker **Sooroojdev Phokeer** to suspend **Mouvement Militant Mauricien** leader **Paul Bérenger** for the next six sessions, claiming that Bérenger spoke to him in a derogatory way.;

16 Oct 2023 **London (United Kingdom)** *Reuters*. **Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC)**, which acts as a final court of appeal for 27 countries and territories that were once part of the **British** empire, upholds a 2021 **Supreme Court of Mauritius** ruling upholding the election of prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth** to parliament;

7 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Mauricien*. Energy and public services minister **Joe Lesjongard** says government is working towards having 50 megawatts (MW) of offshore wind energy by 2026;

7 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Le Matinal*. **Petroleum Pricing Committee** reduces the price of petrol to Rs 72.10 (\$1.63) while diesel rises to Rs 63.69 (\$1.44);

6 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Agence Ecofin*. **Mauritius Telecom** says it is evaluating expansion opportunities in several **African** countries;

3 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius)** *Government of Mauritius*. **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** secretary general **Wamkele Mene** pays a courtesy call on prime minister **Pravind Jugnauth** to brief him on the implementation of AfCFTA;

2 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius) ESI-Africa. Central Electricity Board (CEB)** opens bids for the design, supply, installation, testing and commission of ten 66/22 kilovolt (kV) gas-insulated substations (GIS);

2 Oct 2023 **Port Louis (Mauritius) Airspace Africa. Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC)** says it is intensifying its investigation into national carrier **Air Mauritius** following the suspension of CEO **Krešimir Kučko** and CFO **Jean Laval Ah Chip** in September;

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