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NOTE OF A CALL BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF MAURITIUS ON THE
PRIME MINISTER AT 10 DOWNING STREET AT 1600 HOURS ON
MONDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 1980

Present:

Prime Minister

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam,
Prime Minister of Mauritius

Mr. Richard Luce, M.P.,
Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State, FCO

Sir Leckraz Teelock,
High Commissioner for Mauritius

Mr. M. A. Pattison

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The Prime Minister of Mauritius spent 50 minutes with the Prime Minister over tea. Much of the conversation was inconsequential.

Mauritian Economy

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam said that three recent cyclones had resulted in heavy damage. The economy had been depressed recently, as a result of the oil price rise and the general international economic situation. The rise in the world sugar price would be of some assistance. Mauritius had about 150,000 tonnes for sale over and above its E.E.C. deliveries, where the price was above the world market. The cyclone would affect the next crop, whose growth would be stunted, although replanting would not be necessary. There were 3,000 more houses to be replaced as a result of cyclone damage, at a time when restoration after the last serious cyclone was still incomplete.

Mr. Luce said that the United Kingdom had provided about £15 million worth of aid over recent years. Some of this money was still to be spent, and he would be meeting Sir Seewoosagur to discuss this further tomorrow. There was also much that voluntary organisations could do to help in the aftermath of disasters like the cyclone, and he would discuss

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this further too. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary had suggested that he (Mr. Luce) might make a visit in April/May, a proposal which the Prime Minister would need to consider.

The Prime Minister commented that the U.K. recognised the problems caused by the 100 per cent increase in oil prices, and the inevitable depression of world trade. Only the oil producers could really provide the means to offset the economic effects. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam commented that the oil producers were all buying gold. The Prime Minister stressed that Britain tried to hold down its oil price, and was always last to come into line with price rises. It was necessary to do so because Britain also imported.

Mr. Luce commented that Britain had supported an irrigation scheme in the north of Mauritius. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam said that this had been the result of a successful pilot project, which was now being expanded. It would assist both sugar and other crops.

Mauritian Politics

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam said that Mauritius had a growing sense of isolation. Seychelles and the Malagasy Republic had departed from democracy, and the Russians were in the Indian Ocean. Following the 1976 Election, he had had to go into coalition. The Left-Wing Opposition took 32 of the 70 seats. There had been divisions in his Party, created by an over-ambitious young man. He might perhaps have been in power too long for the taste of the electorate. Now the Opposition were making noises about the need for a coalition including them, in the interests of stability. But stability was not possible with Communists as partners. Sir Leckraz Teelock commented that they were not formally labelled Communists in Mauritius. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam said that current political issues in Mauritius included corruption - a Commission of Inquiry having found two Ministers to be in the wrong - inflation, unemployment, and claims of economic mismanagement linked to the devaluation of October 1979.

CONFIDENTIAL / The Opposition

The Opposition were pressing for nationalisation of the big companies, especially the sugar factories. The measures taken by his Government would need two years to produce results, and would not work through in time to help him in the next Election.

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam said that there were also differences on foreign policy, in respect of attitudes to Russia, and the Opposition's criticisms of links with the West and the United States. The Opposition were opposed to the United Kingdom's role in respect of Diego Garcia. He had recently had to say something on the subject for local consumption. He had spoken of a need to examine whether the position of Diego Garcia should not now be reconsidered, as the United States had a base nearer the Indian Ocean.

Mr. Luce said that the United States would only have replenishment facilities at Berbera. Diego Garcia was vital to them. The Prime Minister commented that the United States presence at Diego Garcia was an insurance policy for the whole area in the light of recent developments.

The Prime Minister asked whether the Mauritian Opposition was a genuine home-grown Socialist movement, or whether foreign influences were at work. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam commented that there was significant Soviet and Libyan assistance to MMM. The Party treasurer had been caught leaving the Libyan Embassy with a large sum of money. There was not much evidence of interference from Cuba or China, but Russia disliked his government. They would also like to see Mauritius aligned with them on foreign policy issues elsewhere, such as the Algerian support for Polisario. Domestically, he felt that the West continued to look on until it was too late. In October, he had tried to persuade Mr. Vance to take a more forward approach, and to support projects to help the Mauritian economy.

Afghanistan

The Prime Minister welcomed the vigorous line taken by Mauritius at the United Nations, in voting with the rest of the non-aligned group. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam said that

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Mauritius had wanted to make her position clear. The Prime Minister hoped that the events in Afghanistan had demonstrated to non-aligned countries the risks in the present international situation. Britain was concerned now about the position in Pakistan and Turkey. Nations must be free to determine their own destiny. Britain took a robust view. This was demonstrated by our position on the Olympics. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam commented that he agreed with the Prime Minister's position on the Olympics.

Rhodesia

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam commented on the wonderful job that Lord Soames was doing. He had known him in Paris. The Prime Minister said that the level of violence and intimidation in Rhodesia was very worrying. This was primarily not the responsibility of Mr. Nkomo. Mr. Luce said that about 75 per cent of complaints appeared to relate to Mr. Mugabe's supporters. There were some complaints about the auxiliaries, which were being investigated. Violence and intimidation posed a real threat to free and fair elections in the areas in question. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam commented that Mr. Nkomo was unable to make himself heard in those areas. The Prime Minister said that intimidation was preventing the supporters of Mr. Nkomo and Bishop Muzorewa even turning up for election rallies. Mr. Luce said that Lord Soames was receiving complaints from all sides in respect of the activities of ZANLA supporters. This implied that the complaints were genuine.

Mr. Luce said that Britain was disturbed by the U.N. Security Council Resolution on Rhodesia, especially with East Germany and the Soviet Union giving a lead in criticising our conduct of "free and fair elections". He asked whether the matter was likely to be taken to the General Assembly. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam regarded this as impossible. There would not be sufficient support for the move.

/ British Council

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British Council

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam spoke of the high standing and reputation of the British Council library in Mauritius. He personally made use of it from time to time. Mr. Luce explained that the library would now remain at least until the Spring of 1981. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam commented that the long serving locally engaged employees thought that they should be treated like H.M.C.S. staff in Mauritius in the past, and be given British passports. He could not say whether they would use them. Mr. Luce said that he would discuss this further at his meeting the next day. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam said that the Mauritians had hoped that Britain would find ways and means of keeping the library open. He had told his Education Minister to keep in close touch with the situation, and if necessary to be prepared to take over the library as a going concern. He was pleased to hear that the library would be retained for the present.



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Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam spent 50 minutes with the Prime Minister this afternoon. There was little substance to their discussion, but I enclose a note of the main points which arose.

I am sending a copy of this letter to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. A. PATTISON

R. M. J. Lyne, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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