

India, Mauritius sign pact to explore for hydrocarbons

ONGC will work with Mauritius Oceanography Institute to identify areas

Sandeep Dikshit

PORT LOUIS: India and Mauritius on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to explore for hydrocarbons off the coast of the island nation. The two sides signed a country agreement to bring Mauritius under the ambit of the India-proposed Pan African telecommunications network. The MoU and the country agreement were signed in the presence of President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam on the concluding day of his three-day visit here.

The Oil & Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) will work with the Mauritius Oceanography Institute to identify the areas and submit a plan to the Government of Mauritius. Both sides will prepare a detailed plan for carrying out geological studies following which ONGC Videsh will carry out operations in areas to be demarcated by the Mauritius Government. The ONGC will also bear the expense for training geoscientists and engineers of Mauritius in its petroleum research and development institutes.

On-shore drilling

Last week, India signed a MoU with Myanmar for exploring the possibility of on-shore exploration for hydrocarbons during the President's first leg of the two-nation tour.

India already has a joint venture stake in two off-shore blocs off the Arakkan coast. Another joint venture is under way in Russia's Sakhalin area in an attempt to source energy from areas other than the Middle East.

The country agreement was signed on behalf of India by the State-owned Telecommunications Consultants India Limited to involve Mauritius in a proposal to set up a 53-nation telecom grid submitted to the Commission of African Union.

Under this plan proposed by Mr. Kalam in 2004, India will set up and manage for five years a satellite-based network in Africa headquartered in Ivory Coast to provide connectivity to "very very important persons" besides medicine and tele-educ-



RETRACING HISTORY: President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam visits the historic Apravasi ghat (immigration depot) in Port Louis on Monday. - PHOTO: PTI

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India, Mauritius to sign pacts

**RC Rajamani
in Port Louis**

MARCH 12. — India and Mauritius will turn a bold new chapter in bilateral relations with the conclusion of the comprehensive economic cooperation and partnership agreement expected this July.

The agreement, now being worked out, will place the two countries together in a joint initiative to surmount difficulties in trade and commerce in the face of increasing restrictions on several aspects of trade and commerce in a WTO-regulated regime. A broad road-map on the agreement emerged today during talks between Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and the Prime Minister of Mauritius Dr Navin Chandra Ramgoolam on the second day of the President's visit to the strategic Indian Ocean island republic.

Mauritius is facing particular problem in the three pillars of its economy, sugar, textiles and tourism after the WTO restrictions and India has offered to assist it in tackling the same. Briefing newsmen on the talks, India's foreign secretary, Mr Shyam Saran, said as a first step India will buy from Mauritius one million pieces of garments and the number could double in due course. In an

affirmation of its commitment to help Mauritius, India will sign two agreements tomorrow — one on the exploration of hydrocarbon — oil and gas — and the other on expanding the Pan-African communication network, a personal initiative of Dr Kalam, to include Mauritius. The network, using fibre optic and satellite, is expected to revolutionise communication in the entire continent.

India has also agreed to help Mauritius in the health sector, Mr Saran said, adding that Apollo Hospitals will be opening a modern hospital in the Indian Ocean island. It is expected to promote medical tourism in Mauritius, a new trend now gaining ground in India.

Dr Kalam told his host that India would airlift 500,000 does of mosquito repellent to help Mauritius tackle mosquito-related diseases similar to dengue. India and Mauritius will also work together to see the treaty to avoid double taxation between the two countries is not put to misuse by unscrupulous elements.

This is in the context of the two to agree to work together to eliminate sources of funding for terrorism after it was seen that those perpetrating this were misusing the treaty to generate funds.

Two key agreements today

AGENCIES

Port Louis, March 12

INDIA AND Mauritius will sign two important agreements on Monday — on exploration of hydrocarbon resources in the Island Republic and another on the Pan-African e-network project.

The deals will be inked in the presence of President APJ Abdul Kalam on the last day of his three-day visit to Mauritius, foreign secretary Shayam Saran told reporters on Sunday. He said that after attending the National Day Celebrations of Mauritius — a country Kalam described as 'close relative' — as Chief Guest, the President discussed with Prime Minister

Navinchandra Ramgoolam the prevailing economic situation in the country in the backdrop of the changing global trading environment. Kalam witnessed parade, cultural programme and flag raising ceremony on the occasion.

Indo-Mauritius economic cooperation is poised to attain new heights with finalisation of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) coming into force next month, Saran said. The CECPA will help Mauritian products to be competitive in the Indian market. A technologist to the core, Kalam visited the famous cyber tower in the Mauritius capital and interacted with the CEOs of IT companies.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

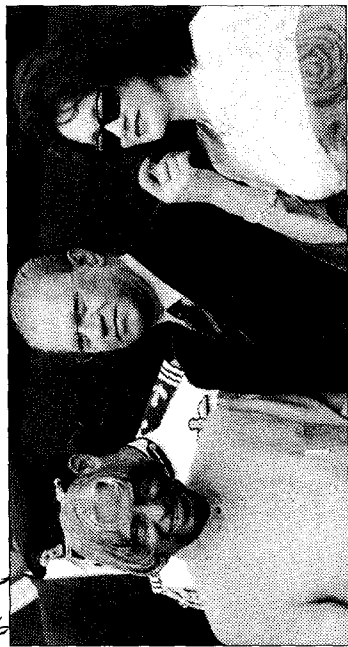
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Mauritius rolls out carpet for 'kinsman' Kalam

MANRAJ GREWAL
PORT LOUIS 1 MARCH 11

HED called it a close relative at the outset of his two-nation visit. Today, Mauritius received President APJ Abdul Kalam with the warmth reserved for a special older relation.

The President, on his part, reiterated the umbilical connection between the two countries. It was in 1834 that Indians arrived at this emerald island as indentured labourers, brought by the British to work on sugarcane farms. Today they are at the helm of the country with a population that is 68 per cent of the total. PM Dr



President Kalam with Mauritius PM Navinchandra Ramgoolam and his wife at Port Louis on Saturday. PTI

Naveenchandra Ramgoolam is also of Indian origin as is President Anirudh Jugunnauth.

Addressing a banquet hosted by PM Ramgoolam here this evening, Kalam congratulated the Indians settled here for maintaining the spiritual and cultural link with their civilisational roots. He stressed the importance of making sure that the younger generation

continues to nurture these ties. India, the President said, will attempt to do this by helping Mauritius tackle the new economic challenges facing it.

The country, which used to rely on sugarcane and textile for its growth, is now trying to reinvent itself as an information and communication hub. Kalam said India, with its wealth of experience in IT development, could lend Mauritius a helping hand.

India views Mauritius as an entry point to the rest of Africa for trade. Tele Communications India Ltd is already working on an optical fibre link to connect Mauritius to other African countries.

Myanmar Dairy

► Punctuality is one virtue that all Myanmarese treasure. Officials at the Indian Consulate say they may reach before time but never late. Fortunately, it's a trait that's rubbed off on the Indians settled here as well. But with President Kalam often running late due to his tight schedule, the Myanmarese had no choice but to wait, and wait. The other virtue they cherish — hospitality.

► They might be punctual but don't imagine a stiff upper lip. Music comes naturally to the Myanmarese. That may explain the rock-bottom price of musical instruments, including the guitar — even the best of the lot won't cost you more than Rs 1,200. It's another matter that Filipinos dominate most of the bands in the local hotels, many of which have at least two if not more groups of crooners in attendance.

► Don't try touching someone's head in Myanmar, it is considered an insult. If you do want to greet someone or show your respect, simply fold your hands, namaste-style. The higher you take your namaste, the more respectful you are.

“Cyprus welcomes nuclear deal between India and the U.S.”

Cyprus President Tassos Papadopoulos believes it is time to rekindle Nicosia's traditionally strong bonds with New Delhi. Mr. Papadopoulos, who arrives in India on Tuesday, believes Cyprus needs to focus more on Asia. Excerpts from an exclusive interview he gave to *The Hindu* in Nicosia on Thursday:

Amit Baruah

You will be following in the path of every Cyprus President by visiting India. What makes this relationship so special?

I cannot say for how many years we have had excellent relations with India. Even before independence, I was involved as a student in the Cyprus problem and remember that Krishna Menon was the first one who spoke about the independence of Cyprus. Later, during the [Archbishop] Makarios Government, we were members of the Non-Aligned Movement [NAM]. Throughout these years, India has always been a friendly country, supporting the principles [behind] a solution of the Cyprus problem, the various resolutions of the United Nations ... territorial integrity, sovereignty of Cyprus.

Everybody knows India is a country with a great culture, history and it plays a major role in world affairs. Now, India is one of the leading countries in the rate of growth, especially in information technology.

Of course, it's partly a trip of homage, respect, admiration. I will be accompanied by a group of businessmen. The important thing is they asked to accompany me. I am looking forward to this visit.

You will be visiting Bangalore during the visit. What specific forms of new cooperation are you seeking with India?

We have already made contacts about cooperation in information technology: establishing a technology park. We already have a sizable trade [\$42 million] by our standards, by yours [laughs], perhaps, it is insignificant. This visit will increase the interest of our businessmen [in India].

I hope we will be able to sign a number of bilateral agreements that are pending between us. For example, one agreement is joint action against terrorism, about immigration and some cultural agreements, cultural exchanges and education. We also have to recast some of the existing agreements with India on account of us joining the European Union, especially treaties that have to do with taxation and trade.

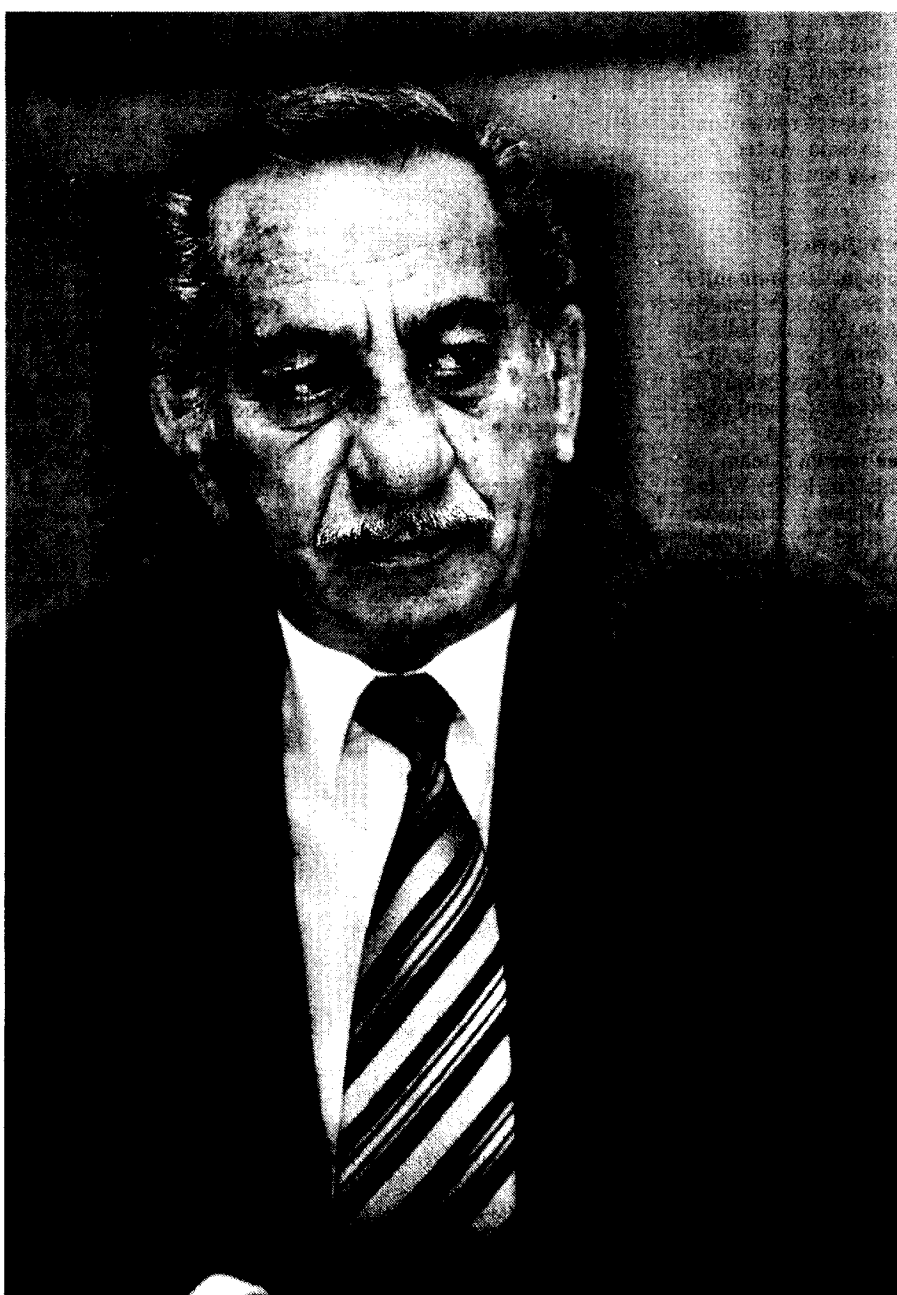
Cyprus withdrew from NAM after joining the EU in April 2003. Is this because of the EU's goal of a common foreign and security policy? But you, however, remain a member of the Commonwealth?

On account of the common foreign and security policy of the European Union, the proper thing to do was to withdraw [from NAM]. That does not mean our ties with NAM countries are removed or our gratitude for the important support from that Movement is diminished in any way. When you belong to an international association of countries, you have to follow their policies. We are grateful to NAM, we appreciate the great role it has played in the past and, perhaps, the time will come when the Movement will regain its influence in the United Nations and other international forums.

In the past few years, Cyprus focussed on Europe, and not so much on Asia. Is your visit to India one way of addressing this focus deficit?

You put it very clearly and I agree with you ... Even so we have not ignored our other international obligations in the United Nations and the Commonwealth. When you are a small country like Cyprus facing a problem, you cannot be looking only in your side.

You have to have an active role in international problems to show that you are concerned about the problems of others if you want others to be interested in your



Tassos Papadopoulos: “You cannot have a peaceful solution without a dialogue.” – PHOTO: REUTERS

problem. [But] you're right, economically and otherwise, maybe, we have not focussed on the east.

As a member of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group, will Cyprus support the lifting of all civilian nuclear restrictions on India at the NSG?

Cyprus welcomes the agreement between India and the U.S. [United States] on full international cooperation in civilian nuclear energy. Both sides [Cyprus and India] agree that such cooperation would help in addressing concerns related to global energy security and environmental protection. Cyprus conveys its support for India's efforts for the promotion of civilian nuclear supply for the benefit of her economic development and prosperity of its people.

When I visited Cyprus in October 2002, there were no crossings of the U.N.-policed Green Line that snakes through the country. Today, people are crossing. Pending a final settlement, can other things be done to build confidence between Greek and Turkish Cypriots?

We had never imposed restrictions on the Turkish Cypriots to cross the Line. It was only three years ago that the Turkish Cypriots partly removed the restrictions they had.

I say partly because for the Greek Cypriots to cross they have to show their passports because the Turkish Cypriots want to perpetuate the myth that they are a separate country.

It is my firm belief that the Cyprus problem is not a question of inter-communal lack of confidence. It is a clear case of invasion and occupation by Turkey. Proof of that is the understanding between the people [Greek and Turkish Cypriots]. In the three years that the Green Line has been open, there have been nine million crossings. It is 10 times the population of Cyprus. And there was not a single incident. Not a single incident of clash or acts of violence between the people. Cyprus has always been a mixed country ...

Will Turkey's possible entry into the European Union lead to a settlement here?

I cannot tell what eventually Turkey will do: whether it will appreciate that there are greener pastures elsewhere – let's say – in Europe.

We support a European Turkey, we support the orientation of Turkey towards Europe because we think that Turkey with that orientation is better for Europe, for us.

But there is one important condition: that Turkey also appreciates and implements its obligations towards the EU. The EU is a

unique club; members have rights, but they have a great number of obligations towards each other.

We have our own issues in the sub-continent. But India and Pakistan have launched a quiet dialogue, away from the gaze of the media. Do you think there is a possibility of a quiet dialogue between Turkey and Cyprus to resolve these issues?

You cannot have a peaceful solution without a dialogue. Sometimes, dialogue is being puzzled [complicated?] by becoming publicly debated in the press and the media. Not that anybody wants to keep secrets. Eventually, people must know what you are discussing. But keeping it away from the limelight, yes, it's better atmosphere.

You might consider a quiet dialogue at some point.

Yes. As far as we are concerned, we have committed ourselves to the [U.N.] Secretary-General. We are not going to get into polemics or statements which make it more difficult for the other side to respond to our moves.

Is Cyprus concerned about the civil war-like situation in Iraq or is Cyprus insulated by the sea?

We are very concerned. Let me say that although Iraq is 800 miles away from Cyprus when you see the area of conflict in Iraq on television, in the corner there, you see Cyprus. People don't realise how distant you are.

And, since we are a country relying to a great extent on tourism, obviously not many people want to visit as tourists an area of concern. So, when the war started [in 2003], we had our worst setback. Our tourism was cut down tremendously, and we haven't yet succeeded in catching up with the loss we have had.

But this is not the main concern we have. I think that peace and stability in our area is in our interest. We think of [a] peaceful, regional arrangement.

Concerning Iraq, we have always been following questions of principle: that any such action must be sanctioned by the U.N. and, if possible, undertaken by the U.N. We hope for that area that eventually they would find a way of peacefully solving their own problem without foreign troops. Last September, I was in New York for a U.N. meeting. And, there, I happened to meet several leading personalities from Iraq. Irrespective of what their attitude was towards their internal problems, all of them have explained that foreign troops must be removed.

On the subject of withdrawal of all foreign troops from Cyprus, do you see a situation where the British wind up their two bases on Cyprus?

Our policy has always been full demilitarisation and removal of all bases from Cyprus. We got our independence from England. However, when we were given independence, it was not given to the island of Cyprus. Independence was given to the area designated on the map, which excluded the two British bases.

That's why they are called by the British, not by us, sovereign base areas. So, theoretically, they are not part of Cyprus. But, I think, the British, as everyone [else], realise that no military bases can function in a hostile environment. If the people do not want bases on their soil, and, I am sure, Greek Cypriots do not want bases on our soil, they [the British] know very well that they cannot function for the purpose they keep them [the bases].

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