



“The economy is suffocating under a lot of waste in the public sector. To make it breathe, a good start would be to follow and implement the recommendations of the National Audit Office.”

Eric Ng Ping Cheun, economist and director of PluriConseil.



control works. I would be more worried if we did not see any such criminals in the news. If Mauritius really did have a reputation as a money-laundering jurisdiction, the country would have been blacklisted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other international organisations as well.

■ **The perception of being a round-tripping jurisdiction is something we cannot deny, can we? You just have to read the Indian press.**

No, we can't but our authorities because they are leaving no stone unturned to dispel that perception. The Financial Services Commission, the Mauritius Revenue Authority and the Bank of Mauritius constantly share information with their counterparts in other countries like India. Unfortunately, the Indian press continues to report on us for reasons that are best known only to them.

Mauritius has indeed got a deeprooted banking system in that it is well entrenched in the domestic economy and constitutes at the same time a platform for regional and international transactions. Thanks to a single banking licence allowing them to carry out both onshore and global business, our banks are able to leverage their reputation and strengths in order to generate foreign-sourced income. Our largest domestic commercial bank derives 40% of its profits from overseas...

■ **Exactly how dependent are we on the offshore financial sector?**

Well, Mauritius aims at becoming a financial platform that services the region but we are not an island economy that is totally dependent on the offshore financial sector; we have a well-diversified economy. Sure, our offshore operators have to provide more activities of substance so as to move up in the value chain. We need to offer innovative professional services to be able to compete with jurisdictions like Singapore. We should not only rely on our tax advantages to attract investors. There

are many factors that can make our jurisdiction more competitive, such as lower banking charges and less bureaucracy in the public sector.

■ **You have just published a book – ‘Robinson sur l’île durable’ – which is about the environment. What are your views about the campaign for a better environment organised by the ‘Collectif Citoyen Maurice Environnement’?**

My book is not only about the environment, but it is true that a major part of it deals with environmental issues in the context of the *Maurice Ile Durable* project. The campaign is a good initiative and I totally agree with its philosophy that the problem of the environment begins with the way individuals behave. One cannot commit acts of pollution and then put all the blame on the authorities. Each one of us must take his or her responsibility. Don't ask the state what it can do for you, but ask what you can do for a better environment. That would have been my advertising slogan...

■ **Some people claim they were shocked by the adverts. Were you?**

I must confess that I was taken aback by the slogan. I would not have chosen it. Although it is in Creole, tourists can ask people what it means. It reflects badly on our relentless efforts to promote our destination. Every country in the world has its own problems. We need not shout them out from the rooftop though.

■ **Don't you think the effects this campaign is likely to have on our tourism industry have been exaggerated?**

Well, this campaign has come at an inopportune moment when the country is beset by several political and judicial affairs that are being splashed over the headlines week in and week out. In the context of an economic crisis, we should encourage people to think positively. It is important that they



“We should not rely only on our tax advantages to attract investors.”



feel that there is hope for the future. We all know that there are economic problems ahead, but it is not appropriate to create a climate of despondency. We should rather bring our energies together in order to overcome the challenges. Surely there must be more creative ways of making people aware of the need for a cleaner environment. A lot of physical activities could have been done to get citizens involved in the awareness process. The money could have been used to engage voluntary associations in carrying out small environmental projects. People learn better by doing things than by just reading a slogan...

■ **For someone like you who has travelled extensively, is the country really that sick?**

Compared to other countries, Mauritius is not really sick. When you listen to people talking on the radio, you could be led into thinking that the country is ill.

■ **People all over the world criticise their governments, don't they?**

Yes, they do. The only difference is that they speak in English or French whereas Mauritians lash out at the authorities in Creole...

■ **They speak their mother tongue, we speak ours. Where is the problem?**

No, there is no problem with that. What I am saying is that the problems are the same every-

where and so is the criticism. In fact, I have an idea: We have some 300,000 heads of family. Instead of subsidising wheat, rice, domestic gas and public transport with billions of rupees, the government could give a free return air ticket to London or Paris to each head of family to stay for two days there. Every one could then see how difficult life is in London or Paris compared to living in Mauritius.

■ **You seem to think that our economy is doing well. Is it, really?**

The Mauritian economy is not doing badly. This year, according to the latest estimates from Statistics Mauritius, only the construction industry will contract while all the other sectors will enjoy positive growth. However, we can expect overall growth to be lower than the 3.3% registered in 2012.

■ **But we keep reviewing that growth down.**

Our economic growth is somewhat related to the situation in Europe. The continent is likely to get mired in recession in the second half of 2013, which would impact negatively on Mauritian exports. Happily, we are diversifying our export markets to non-euro countries, like South Africa and the US for our textile products, and the Asian and Russian markets for tourism.

■ **On the other hand, the climate for investment is morose and unemployment is on the rise. Does that not worry you?**

The government should urgently tackle structural weaknesses that are hampering private investment. And it should accelerate the implementation of development programmes to support domestic demand and job creation.

■ **Would lowering the value of the rupee not help investment and job creation?**

In Mauritius, firms need to import most of their equipment and raw materials to produce goods. The import content of their production is high. So the