



*Jehlum Post News Network/Colombo/ March 12, 2015/India and Mauritius announced a new security cooperation agreement on Wednesday, as part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Indian Ocean outreach. In Port Louis, on the second leg of his three-nation tour to the Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka, Mr. Modi and Mauritian Prime Minister Aneerood Jugnauth signed five agreements, one on opening up the "ocean economy", or "blue economy". Another is a key memorandum of understanding that will see India taking over responsibility to build transport*

*infrastructure (sea and air links) for the Agalega Islands. Sources told The Hindu that this agreement would give India a strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean region, working closely with the Mauritius Defence Forces guarding the outer islands. In addition, India has extended a \$500-million Line of Credit for development or security projects that Mauritius will decide on. The highlight of India's push for maritime heft during the visit will be the commissioning of a 1,300-tonne, Indian-built coastal patrol vessel, MCGS Barracuda, on Thursday. The ship will showcase India's commitment on maritime security, particularly along the African coast that faces the threat of piracy. It is also part of the government's "Make in India" programme. Ahead of Mr. Modi's visit, two Indian warships, the destroyer INS Delhi and the hydrographic survey ship INS Sarvekshak, have arrived off the coast of Port Louis as further evidence of Indian presence and assistance in the region.*

*India's security cooperation agreements in the Seychelles on Wednesday have set the course for Mr. Modi's foreign policy initiative for India to become a "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean region, in a bid to counter China's increasing influence there. During Mr. Modi's visit, India is expected to offer expertise and funding to help Mauritius move from its traditional economy of sugarcane crops and tourism. "We have worked very closely in civilian structures, in building infrastructure, in health, in science and technology, in IT India built the first cyber city and in building up Mauritius's capacities as a financial services hub, as well as now a petroleum hub," said Secretary (East) Navtej Sarna at a briefing this week. On Thursday, Mr. Modi will attend the National Day celebrations as chief guest and address the National Assembly. During his address, he is expected to invoke the close connections between India and Mauritius, where more than 68 per cent of the inhabitants are of Indian origin. He will inaugurate a building of the World Hindi Centre. "My visit to Mauritius will aim to strengthen our age-old civilisational ties*

*with 'Chhota Bharat,'" said Mr. Modi before leaving India referring to a term popularised by the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who made the first state visit to the island in 1970, when more than a lakh people had gathered to welcome her in Port Louis. Mauritius celebrates its National Day on March 12 as a mark of respect to Mahatma Gandhi, who began his Dandi march on this day in 1915. In a statement issued in New Delhi, President Pranab Mukherjee said, "This day is not only significant in the history of the political struggle for freedom of both our countries but also symbolises how both India and Mauritius uphold the values of democracy." Hindu*