

Bonne Année, Moris

By Rik Kisnah

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While on a family Disney cruise through the US and the British Virgin Islands alongside Estelle and our children -Rekha and Roy; we remarked on how similar those countries are historically, yet how different they are. Mauritius is independent, has consistent leadership, is economically strong, and has made its place in the world. As we sail into 2026, I find myself thinking about the year ahead—and what we wish for our homeland.

Mauritius has survived worse than artificial intelligence.

We survived the abolition of slavery and indentured labour. We survived colonial extraction, cyclones that destroyed entire towns, and the slow death of preferential sugar agreements. We built a nation on a volcanic rock in the Indian Ocean with no oil, no minerals, no natural advantages, except our people and an almost irrational refusal to accept decline.

So when I hear anxious talk on social media about AI “disrupting everything” and leaving small islands behind, I wonder: do you know who you are talking about? Moricien jamais baisse la main

This is not a call for complacency. It serves as a reminder that we have navigated dire transitions before. We did it by being pragmatic, adaptive, and when it mattered: unified. The question now is not whether Mauritius can survive the AI era. The question is whether we will take it seriously enough to shape it.

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### What We Built—And What We Celebrate

As the fireworks light up the sky over Port Louis and Grand Baie this New Year’s Eve, let us pause to acknowledge what this country accomplished in sixty years. I call it Mauritian Exceptionalism.

A stable democracy while neighbouring regions descended into coups. A diversified economy. Universal education. Free healthcare. A middle class constructed on textiles, tourism, and financial services. Courts that mostly work. Institutions that mostly function.

None of this was a god-given gift. It was earned through discipline, stable government, strong private sectors, and the slow accumulation of trust between communities.

But somewhere along the way, we started taking these foundations for granted. We confused the presence of institutions with their effectiveness. We let bureaucracy harden into obstacle courses. We tolerated corruption. We watched talented young Mauritians leaving—and shrugged, as if their departure was weather.

It was not the weather. It was a choice.

The past decade exposed weaknesses: short-term thinking, policies copied from consultants, a political culture that rewarded noise over substance, and zero-sum games—the tired colonial playbook of divide and rule.

We know what held us back. The question is whether we have learned.

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### AI Is Not Magic

I want to say something clearly, as someone who works on AI infrastructure for a living: Artificial intelligence is not magic. It is mathematics, statistics, and a lot of electricity. It is useful. It is powerful. It will change how we work, learn, and make decisions.

But it will not save anyone who refuses to do the hard work.

Mauritius is already flooded with AI hype. Consultants selling “transformation” packages. Politicians promising smart cities. Social media is awash with claims that AI will replace doctors, lawyers, teachers—everything except the people making the claims.



Figure 1: Bonne Année, Moris

We need to be smarter than this.

AI is a tool. Tools require skilled hands, infrastructure, education systems that teach critical thinking, and regulatory systems. None of this is automatic. All of it requires investment, execution, and patience.

A chatbot does not fix a broken process. It digitizes the breakage. If we import systems without building local capacity—our own data, our own expertise, our own judgment—we become digital colonies. Consumers of intelligence rather than producers of it.

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### Signs of Movement

Here is what gives me hope: the private sector is moving.

I see Mauritian tech companies building software for African and European markets. Young entrepreneurs launching startups from Ebène. Banks and insurers are experimenting with automation. Universities are slowly updating curricula.

This is not a fantasy. Something is stirring.

And I will say it plainly: the current government's direction on digital infrastructure and AI policy is broadly correct. The emphasis on connectivity, digital identity, and positioning Mauritius as a technology hub for Africa is sound.

But direction is not enough. Execution is everything. We have seen too many national plans announced with fanfare and buried in filing cabinets. This time must be different.

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### The Generation That Matters

The Mauritians who will shape the next fifty years are in classrooms right now, or entering the workforce, or weighing whether to come home from abroad. The CEO of Mauritius Telecoms captured this well in his end-of-year LinkedIn post concerning shaping his daughters' education in Mauritius via AI. It connected deeply with Estelle as we raise our Mauritian-American children—Rekha and Roy—here in Seattle.

They deserve better. Schools that teach them how to think, not just how to pass exams. Employers who invest in training. A public conversation that takes their ambitions seriously.

The dignity of work matters. Not everyone will become a software engineer. But every worker deserves to see a road ahead. That means vocational training, adult education, portable skills. It means treating adaptation as a national project.

And it means telling the truth: some jobs will disappear. Sugar cane cutting gave way to machines. Textile factories are automated. The future will demand new skills. A decent society builds safety nets and retraining programmes—not just motivational slogans.

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### Multipliers Over Vanity

Every small country faces the same choice: spend limited resources on visible vanity projects, or invest in multipliers that compound over time.

Vanity projects photograph well. Multipliers build capacity.

Education is a multiplier. The rule of law is a multiplier. Clean governance is a multiplier. The environment is a multiplier too. Mauritius depends on tourism, fisheries, and fragile ecosystems. Destroying these for short-term construction is theft from our grandchildren.

We should be ruthless about distinguishing multipliers from distractions. That means prioritizing boring, invisible investments—fibre optic cables, teacher training, court modernization—over ribbon-cutting ceremonies.

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## One People

The politics of division have no place in what comes next. We cannot afford petty bickering or leaders more interested in being right than in getting results.

Mauritius has always been a negotiation between communities, between generations, among aspirations and constraints. That negotiation requires good faith and remembering that the person across the table is also Mauritian, also worried about their children's future.

The divide-and-rule reflex is a colonial inheritance. We do not have to keep it.

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## What We Carry Ahead

As 2025 begins, let us be honest about where we stand. We are not a global power. We are not rich in resources. We are not invulnerable to climate change, market upheavals, or technological disruption.

But we are free. We are educated. We have built things worth protecting. And we have a generation ready to work—if we give them the tools and trust they deserve.

The algorithms are coming. But algorithms do not build nations. People do.

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### English

We are an island of crossings, tested by storms, formed by work. With no riches but our people, we learned to stand and build.

The future brings no miracles. only tools and hard choices. Nations are not saved by machines, but by those who use them well.

Midnight passes. What remains is will.

Bonne Année, Moris. The future is ours. if we earn it.

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## Mauritian Kreol

Nou enn lil ki finn traverse bokou, batir ar travay, tini anba siklonn. Pa lor, pa petrol. zis nou dimounn.

Lavenir pa enn mirak, zis zouti ek bon swa. Se pa masinn ki fer pei, se dimounn.

Minwi pase. Volonte reste.

Bonne Année, Moris. Lavenir pou nou. si nou merite li.

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So at the moment the clock strikes midnight, and we raise our glasses across this island—from Curepipe to Mahébourg, from the diaspora scattered across the world—I wish you all a peaceful, prosperous, and purposeful new year.

Bonne Année, Moris. The future belongs to us—if we earn it.