

Bonne Année, Moris

By Rik Kisnah



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 zamaïs baisse la main.*

This is not a call for complacency. It is a reminder that we have navigated dire transitions before. We did it by being pragmatic, adaptive, and when it mattered: unified and (Manchester or Liverpool :)) united. 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.

What We Built and What We Celebrate

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

A stable democracy while neighboring regions descended into coups. A diversified economy. Universal education. Free healthcare. A middle class built on textiles,

tourism, and financial services. Courts that mostly work. Institutions that mostly function.

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

But somewhere along the way, we began 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 leave and shrugged, as if their departure were weather. It was not weather. It was a choice.

The past decade exposed weaknesses: short-term thinking, policies copied from consultants, a political culture rewarding 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.

AI Is Not Magic

As someone who has spent most of his professional life working on AI, let me be clear: artificial intelligence is not magic. It is mathematics, statistics, and a great deal of electricity. It is powerful and useful. It will change how we work, learn, and decide. But it will not save anyone unwilling to do the hard work.

Mauritius is already flooded with AI hype. Consultants selling “transformation.” Politicians promising smart cities. Social media insisting AI will replace everyone except those making the claims.

We must be smarter than this.

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

A chat bot 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.

Signs of Movement

Here is what gives me hope: the private sector is moving (really fast and extremely agile for instance young Mauritian entrepreneurs as Thierry Lincoln, who amazes with me with Silicon Valley revolutionary AI ideas and innovation in nu-tizil).

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

This is not fantasy. Something is stirring.

And it should be said 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.

The Generation That Matters

The Mauritians who will shape the next fifty years are in classrooms today, entering the workforce, or deciding whether to return from abroad.

They deserve schools that teach them how to think, not merely 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 everyone deserves to see a path forward. That means vocational training, adult education, and portable skills. It means treating adaptation as a national project.

And it means telling the truth: some jobs will disappear. Others will emerge. A decent society builds safety nets and retraining programs; not slogans.

Multipliers Over Vanity

Every small country faces a choice: invest in visible vanity projects, or 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.

We should be ruthless in distinguishing multipliers from distractions—prioritizing fiber, teachers, courts, and systems over ribbon-cutting ceremonies.

One People

The politics of division have no place in what comes next. Mauritius has always been a negotiation between communities, generations, aspirations, and constraints.

Divide-and-rule is a colonial reflex. We do not have to keep it.

What We Carry Ahead

As the new year begins, let us be honest about where we stand. We are not rich in resources. We are not invulnerable. But we are free. We are educated. We have built things worth protecting.

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

Bonne Année, Moris.

We are an island of crossings, tested by storm, shaped by toil,
With no riches but our people, we learned to stand, to build, to soil our hands in work and oil.
No miracle waits on the horizon, no easy gift to claim,
Only tools, and hard decisions, and the cost of getting it right again.

No nation's saved by clever machines or promises that thrill,
But by women and men who choose to use them with judgment, craft, and will.
Midnight passes. What endures is not the noise or cheer—
It is resolve. Bonne Année, Moris.

The future is ours, if we earn it here.

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.