

India, Seychelles salvage Assumption Island project

Strategic naval base to help counter China

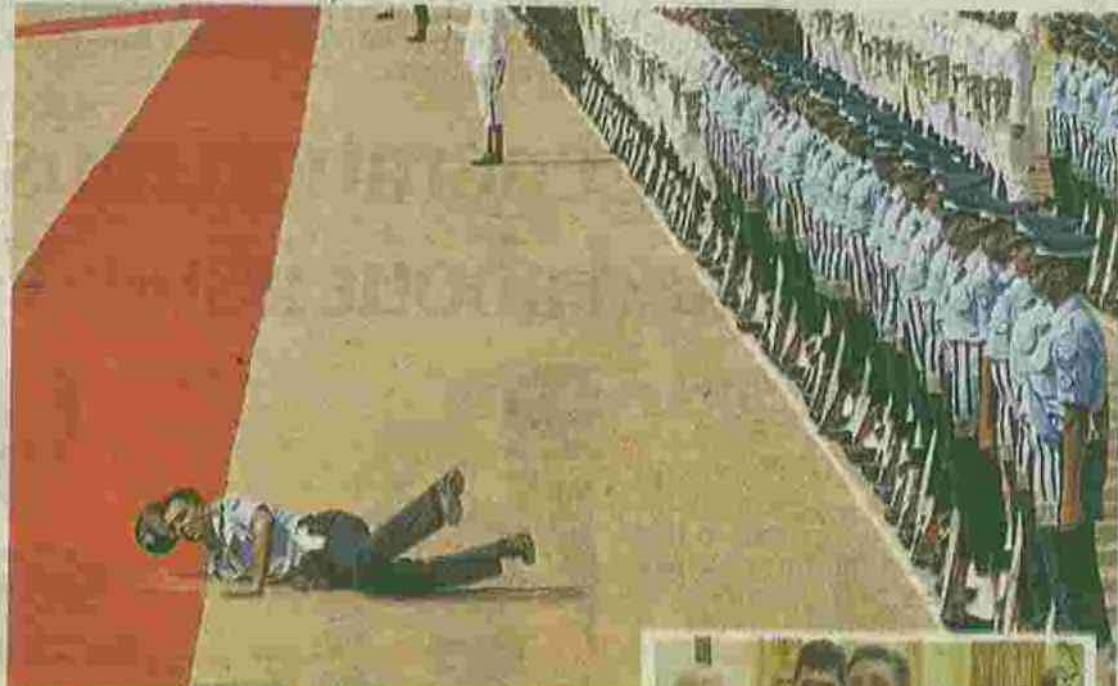
SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, JUNE 25

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Seychelles President Danny Faure on Monday agreed to work together on the Assumption Island joint naval base project in the island nation keeping "each other's interests" in mind, days after the agreement between the two nations on the project was reported to be in jeopardy.

India is keen on developing the Assumption Island in the Indian Ocean as a naval base to expand its footprint in the strategically-key region where China has been trying to enhance its military presence. The project is part of counter-piracy and counter-terrorism cooperation with Seychelles, aimed at preventing "intrusions by potential economic offenders indulging in illegal fishing, poaching, drug and human trafficking".

India had earlier said that the objective of the joint naval base "is to

IAF OFFICER FAINTS IN HEAT



An Indian Air Force officer (above), on Guard of Honour duty, fainted during the ceremonial reception for Seychelles President Danny Antoine Rollen Faure at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Monday. After the ceremony ended, PM Modi walked up to the officer and enquired about his health. — PTI

Seychelles President Danny Faure plays the sitar while singing a patriotic Seychellois song during a lunch hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI



assist Seychelles secure its vast EEZ (exclusive economic zone)" and that "the proposed facility will be owned by Seychelles and jointly managed by both sides". The joint project ran into trouble after

recent reports from the island nation of it cancelling the 2015 pact with India. Opposition parties in Seychelles had reportedly objected to the project fearing that it would affect the sovereignty of

their nation. President Faure had reportedly caved in to Opposition protests due to which the agreement could not be ratified by the Parliament there.

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The talks on Monday to salvage the project assume significance as Mr Faure was quoted as saying by local media ahead of his New Delhi visit that the joint project with India would not move forward. Mr Faure had recently reportedly told his country that Seychelles would build the facilities at Assumption Island itself.

The fresh consensus between India and Seychelles on the project indicates that the revised deal — inked in January by both the countries for “development, management, operation and maintenance of facilities” on the Assumption Island — may be tweaked or renegotiated in the days to come to make it acceptable to both, the government and the Opposition parties in Seychelles.

“We have agreed to work together on the Assumption Island project based on each other’s interests,” Mr Modi said at a joint press event with the visiting leader here.

Echoing similar sentiments, Mr Faure said, “In the context of maritime security, the Assumption Island was discussed. We are equally engaged and will continue to work together bearing each other’s interests in mind.”

India also announced a \$100 million credit for the

Indian Ocean archipelago nation to buy defence equipment from it. The two nations also signed six pacts in areas including culture, cyber security, maritime safety and security cooperation, diplomacy, infrastructure development. New Delhi also promised to finance construction of three civilian infrastructure projects — a government house, new police headquarters, and a building for the attorney general’s office.

The two countries have also agreed to “elevate their bilateral relation-

ship to a more comprehensive partnership of a greater strategic importance”.

India is also handing over a Dornier maritime surveillance aircraft to the archipelago nation. In a goodwill gesture, Seychelles has gifted a pair of giant Aldabra tortoises to India.

Mr Modi said the Dornier aircraft will be handed over to Seychelles on Tuesday. He added that the aircraft would be in Seychelles at its National Day celebrations on June 29.