

**Address of  
Hon (Mrs.) Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK  
Vice Prime Minister  
Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and  
Technology  
Unveiling Ceremony of the Zhuk Retriever Vessel at  
Polytechnics Mauritius  
(Pamplemousses campus)  
Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

**Mr. Ravi Meettook, Secretary for Home  
Affairs, (Defence and Home Affairs Division,  
Prime Minister's Office;**

**Mrs Marie Sandrine Joelle Valere, Senior  
Chief Executive of my Ministry;**

**Her Excellency Ms Kate Chamley, High  
Commissioner Australian High Commission,  
Mauritius;**

**Mr. Yamal Matabudul, CEO, Polytechnics  
Mauritius;**

**Mr Krishna Jhugroo, PMSM, Deputy  
Commissioner of Police, Mauritius Police  
Force;**

**Captain Binoop, Commandant National  
Coast Guard;**

**Senior Officials of my Ministry;**

**Senior Advisors;**

**Board Directors of Polytechnics Mauritius ;**

**Senior Officers of the Mauritius Police Force;**

**Staff and Students of Polytechnics Mauritius;**

**Members of the Press;**

**Distinguished Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen;**

**Good afternoon to all of you.**

I am very pleased to stand before you today for the Unveiling of this magnificent Zhuk retrieval vessel, a remarkable sight to behold, anchored right here on this campus. This moment is indeed serendipitous. It brings to my mind my visit at the Institute of Technical Education in Singapore in 2016, where I stood witness to a plane on their aerospace campus. One visual impact led to another. Last year I

was glad to unveil the Dornier aircraft at the Montagne Blanche campus of Polytechnics.

And, today, we live another extraordinary moment.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

As an island nation blessed with an exclusive economic zone of over 2.3 million square kilometres of ocean, Mauritius is obligated to empower itself to live up to its potential as a leading maritime nation. Mauritius has been known as the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean, given its strategic location as a key waypoint for vessels traversing the Indian Ocean. This Government has, right from Day One spearheaded the development of the Ocean Economy. We are keen on developing our

outer islands-- whether the Rodrigues, Agaléga, Diego Garcia, Saint Brandon or the Tromelin islands-- and make inroads into new and emerging sectors for the high-income economy. I think everyone present here today would be familiar with our struggle over Diego Garcia that has been unfairly excised, a struggle that late Sir Aneerood Jugnauth had initiated. We remain steadfast in our pursuit that is now being carried forward by our Hon. Prime Minister at the United Nations and through diplomatic channels.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

More recently, on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2024, the Government proudly christened the MV Peros Banhos Cargo Vessel, a tribute to the atoll of the Chagos Archipelago. This vessel

represents a significant milestone in advancing Mauritius' ocean economy and enhancing inter-island connections. To date, I am informed that, the Peros Banhos has completed 18 successful voyages, exemplifying its vital role in supporting our maritime infrastructure and strengthening regional ties.

To capitalise on this potential, Government is committed to developing a skilled maritime workforce and enhancing research in maritime studies at our universities. This focus on research will not only advance global maritime knowledge but also position Mauritius as a leader in maritime innovation. Doubtless, by exploring diverse maritime fields such as shipping, port management, marine

resource exploration and maritime security, Mauritius can drive its economic growth, create job opportunities, attract international investment and strengthen its role as a premier regional and global maritime hub. I am happy to hear that the Participation in Tertiary Education report published by the Higher Education Commission's prioritises Marine Engineering, Naval Architecture and Maritime Engineering at undergraduate and postgraduate levels as key priority fields of study.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Government is resolute in its commitment to education and skills development. We all recognise their critical role in shaping the world of tomorrow. This is what the World

Bank in their 2024 seminal report highlights, and I quote,

***"Investing in education and skills development is essential for building a resilient and adaptable workforce capable of navigating the complexities of the modern economy, including new and emerging sectors of the new economy."***

My Ministry is committed to equipping our youths and mature learners with the skilling, reskilling and upskilling needed for diverse career opportunities, while leveraging modern digital technologies to create a dynamic and enriching learning environment. Through these efforts, we are fertilising the foundational ground for

national development and future prosperity, aligning with global best practices and reinforcing the transformative national educational reform spearheaded by my Ministry.

Allow me to restate what is one cardinal dimension of that reform.

We want every learner to find fulfilment of his or her aspiration of study, and that, irrespective of starting points and entrance criteria. Choice is key. Happiness lies there. This Government is dedicated to creating a multitude of choices through pathways because one path cannot and does not suit everyone. The intent is thus clear: no more blockages or unintended barriers for youth to climb the education or



labour market ladder. Opportunity should not stand in the way of ability.

This instils a more permeable, open and inclusive higher education system with multiple entry, exit and re-entry pathways that give equal chance to one and all and ensures “no learner is left behind”. Clear mandates have been established and clear delineating borders have been carved across complementary institutions whether it is the MITD, the Institute of Technical Education and Technology or Polytechnics Mauritius. Recently, we have also introduced the Technology Education so that learners may opt for a more practice- based curriculum at secondary school right from grade 10 itself.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

A point to be clarified here. Pathways are not just about routes traced for upward mobility and progression in an academic journey. There is more to them than that. Thus, to drive Mauritius' next phase of development towards a high-income status economy, there is a pressing need to establish clear skill sets and resultant career pathways across all occupations in the labour market, including emerging sectors. The ***ILO Skills and Employment Outlook report in 2023*** emphasises that skills mismatch and job market divergence make a strong case for adapting TVET systems to meet the evolving demands of the global economy. Strengthening these systems will ensure that workers are

equipped with relevant and future-oriented skills.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

As we unveil the decommissioned Zhuk retrieval vessel today, I am pleased to hear that Polytechnics Mauritius will soon be launching a number of programmes such as Diploma in Nautical Science or Port and Ship Operations or Bunkering.

Here, I would like to offer a few words of advice for the journey ahead. The path before us is promising, but in a field as niche and regulated as that of the maritime sector, it is essential to remain aligned to international standards, conform to International Maritime Regulations and guidelines set forth by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

The credibility of our qualifications will mould the perception of Mauritius' contribution as a high-quality education and training hub for seafarers. By providing top-tier technicians, technologists and professionals in the field, we will not only enhance our global reputation but also raise the Mauritian flag high, symbolising our commitment to excellence.

Let me conclude by congratulating Polytechnics Mauritius on taking such a bold step in maritime training. The decommissioned Zhuk retrieval vessel, through its presence on this campus, will no doubt inspire current and future youth to take up careers in the maritime sector.

Here I would encourage Polytechnics Mauritius to involve both primary and secondary school learners in field trips and discovery sessions to explore the vessel as a means to expose them early to the world of maritime. Polytechnics Mauritius has indeed successfully turned our vision of the Technical Education Sector into reality. Bravo!

I wish you all well and to sail through safe seas ahead.

**Thank you for your attention.**