

**Address of Hon. (Mrs.) Leela Devi Dookhun-Luchoomun
Vice Prime Minister
Minister of Education, Tertiary Education,
Science and Technology**

**Launching Ceremony of “Science Workshops and Rajiv Gandhi
Memorial Lecture”
Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre
03 March 2020**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you all a wonderful morning.

It gives me great pleasure to be here in your midst today on the occasion of the launching Ceremony of **“Science Workshops and the Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Lecture”**.

You are all, I am certain, alive to the fact that one fundamental objective behind this initiative is to popularise science.

But not only.

These workshops are also part of the drive to facilitate the Continuous Professional Development of Educators from both the primary and secondary sub-sectors. The

ultimate goal, obviously, remains to strengthen the pedagogical strengths of Educators such that the notions and concepts of science can be taught and transmitted with more confidence.

Ladies and gentlemen

We often gloss over the fact that Educators are active learners in their own right, and that, in that capacity, they tend to question themselves, assess their own classroom work and delivery and engage in critical reflection in relation to their science teaching practice.

And that is exactly what I hope these workshops will seek to consolidate further: they are likely to position participant teachers as active learners in asking questions about their own work and undertaking.

Experience shows that, as teachers work in this “inquiry –based” way, their understanding about effective science pedagogy changes. More specifically, it enables them to recognize how their thinking not only influences their professional practice, but ultimately also shapes the quality of their students’ learning.

Students, we know, are best engaged when there is a lot of cooperative interaction in the classroom. That is

the hallmark of the effective teacher and not how highly qualified she is.

That is why I have always felt that there is perhaps no better consecration for those engaged in the teaching service than to establish a community of practice, of mutual support and of peer interaction.

It is indeed my fervent wish to come up very soon with the Academy of Teachers, one that will facilitate peer-exchange and sharing of good practices. It will be an Academy of Teachers for Teachers.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

There is an unfortunate situation that has perpetuated itself – and it is not exclusive to Mauritius.

Science has traditionally been perceived as far too difficult as compared to studies in, say, Humanities and Commercial subjects. So much so that it has been observed that the number of students opting for science subjects at Grade 10 has been on the decline.

I can understand that students' choice of subjects is guided by several factors: the differing abilities of the

individuals, liking of the subject, perception of difficulty in the subject, influence of educators and peers, job prospects—these are a few of the reasons that seek to explain the trend.

But we are endeavouring to buck this trend.

Major curricular reforms have been undertaken which lay much stress on science & technology education right from the preprimary level.

The new curriculum also puts heavy emphasis on the need to reconcile the science taught in the classroom with the Science that students experience in their environment so as to make learning more meaningful.

Again, at the level of my Ministry, a Task Force is working on ways and means of increasing the attractiveness of Science—and because of the need for a real hands-on approach, we are envisaging the re-introduction of assessments in Practicals at the end of Grade 11.

You will all agree with me that, living as we do in a technological age, we do need a minimum knowledge of science subjects. In fact, we need to remember that rapid changes in science and technology, and the introduction of new technology in particular, have changed the development prospects of many nations.

Examples abound.

The African Union came up with a Science, Technology and Innovation strategy for Africa 2024, commonly known as STISA 2024. This strategy places STI, i.e., Science, Technology and Innovation, at the very heart of Africa's socio-economic development and growth.

The same African Union has set up the C10, a Committee of Ten (C10) Heads of State and Government championing Education, Science, Technology and Innovation in Africa. Mauritius happens to be one of the 10 countries.

Again, only last week, Rwandan authorities have been insistent upon their Universities coming up with programs that invest people with the right skills sets – especially those linked to STEM.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In our quest to be deeply engaged in the fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) , we can ill afford to lag behind.

We have to reverse the lack of uptake in science among our youth.

Indeed, Mauritius, while moving up the value chain in well-established sectors, is also tapping into new sectors such as biotechnology, blue economy, artificial intelligence, fintech, blockchain, to name but a few. The predominance of science as a lever in these domains cannot be minimized.

If we want Education to play its transformative role, an increased interest in STEM, in '*la chose scientifique*', is a pre-requisite.

This is where I turn to you, Educators. Make it a point to engage in regular exchanges. Get your science departments to be hubs generating dynamism for the

scientific temper. I would wish you to become active *advocates and champions* for the cause of Science and Technology among both your peers and students.

Otherwise there is always a risk of our youth becoming functionally illiterate in one way or another if they cannot keep pace with modern science and new technology.

Dear Educators,

The activities planned during the workshops will definitely improve your scientific and pedagogical skills, encourage a hands-on and minds-on approach to demonstrate science concepts and encourage networking among peers.

We are lucky to have in our midst Prof Michael J. Reiss from the University College London. Prof Reiss is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and Visiting Professor at the University of York and the Royal Veterinary College. He is also a member of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and has written extensively about curricula, pedagogy and assessment in science

education. Alongside, he has, over the past twenty five years, directed a very large number of research, evaluation and consultancy projects funded by UK Research Councils, Government Departments, charities and international agencies.

Prof Reiss, it's an honour to have you here with us and I have no doubt that both the educators and the staff of RGSC will benefit from your vast experience.

As for you, Educators, I am certain these workshops will allow you to teach with more confidence at all levels. And that, in itself, will be a major contributory factor to magnetically increase the intake of science students for the greatest benefit of Mauritius.

I now have the great pleasure and privilege to officially launch the “**Science Workshops and the Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Lecture**”.

I thank you all for your attention.