

Minister's Statements and Speeches

PUBLIC BILL

FINANCE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL 2022

(NO. XIV OF 2022)

(29.07.2022)

C. INVESTING IN OUR PEOPLE.

Education Act

Clause 17 amends the Education Act to empower the Minister of Education to make regulations to award 2 scholarships, to be known as the Sir Anerood Jugnauth National Scholarships on Economics side.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to intervene on the Finance Bill. As we are all aware, it is part of the principle of natural consequences that now that the Budget 2022-2023 presented by my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, has been warmly welcomed by the population at large, the measures announced have now to be implemented.

Cela doit impérativement passer par les amendements à certaines législations existantes afin d'activer la mise en œuvre. Aujourd'hui, M. le président, je me contenterai d'être brève, et donc, je ne vais qu'aborder les trois aspects du Finance Bill qui ont traités à l'éducation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first take the amendment proposed at the Education Act. Indeed, the Finance Bill makes provision for an amendment to this Act with regard to the introduction of a new Scholarship Scheme on the Economics side. You will recall, Mr Speaker, Sir, that at paragraph 245 and 246 of the Budget Speech, it was stated that Government would introduce the Sir Anerood Jugnauth National Scholarship Scheme. A scholarship would be awarded to the most meritorious boy and girl on the Economics side.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government's Scholarship Scheme, also known as the Laureate Scheme, provides for 69 scholarships, including one MCB Foundation Scholarship

annually. Under the Sir Anerood Jugnauth National Scholarship Scheme, two additional scholarships will now be offered for the two laureates on the Economics side to study for an undergraduate degree either overseas or locally and for a maximum duration of four years. The scheme, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a means to pay tribute to the late Sir Anerood Jugnauth. Indeed, the Mauritian population as one recognises Sir Anerood Jugnauth as the father of the Mauritian economic miracle. Certainly, he had been the driving force behind the economic transformation of Mauritius. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, Sir Anerood Jugnauth had always considered education as the bedrock for social equity and inclusiveness as well as the leverage *par excellence* for economic progress.

It thus befits his memory that we should attribute to the lead boy and girl on the Economics side a full scholarship to enable them to engage in further studies. I am fully confident that the scheme will further encourage students to excel in their studies at HSC and beyond. After all, they will forever be motivated to honour the person after whom the scholarship is named, and the awardees would be able to come back and put their acquired knowledge and experience to the service of the country. Nothing would honour the spirit of the late Sir Anerood Jugnauth more. Accordingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Education Act is being amended in the first instance to include a new Section 33(c) with the existing Section 33(c) being renumbered as Section 33(d).

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now justify the second important amendment. The House will recall again that at paragraph 257 of the Budget Speech, reference was made to the construction of a new AYUSH Hospital at Côte d'Or. This was in line with honouring the announcement made by the hon. Prime Minister at a ground breaking ceremony of the World Health Organisation Global Centre for Traditional Medicines in India.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this requires some upstream work and *un travail méticuleux en amont* has to be undertaken. Illustratively, a hospital, especially AYUSH Hospital needs practitioners and specialists in the six Indian systems of medicine namely –

- (i) Ayurveda;
- (ii) Yoga;
- (iii) Unani;
- (iv) Siddha, and
- (v) Homeopathy.

All of which are commonly called AYUSH.

Hence, the Finance Bill proposes major amendments to the Ayurvedic and Other Traditional Medicine Act, particularly with regard to the terminology. Thus, the reason amendment in the definition of the traditional medicine and the words 'homeopathy' and 'ayurvedic' are being replaced by the words 'ayurvedic AYUSH'. The other amendment pertains to the deletion of the term practitioner and practitioners and replacing them by the words 'general practitioners' and 'specialists.'

Mr Speaker, Sir, one good thing about Mauritius is its openness to new ideas, new ways of doing things, taking to and adapting to them seamlessly. The natural empathy that has led to the acceptance of several traditional techniques and remedies transmitted from generation to generation. One such sector which is very popular in Mauritius is the field of Ayurveda, and the other five Indian system of medicine prevalent and practiced in India and some other neighbouring Asian countries. As the House is no doubt aware, the concept of AYUSH was introduced in the mainstream medical field to strengthen the public health services through the revitalising of local health traditions. This concept helped in utilising the untapped AYUSH therapeutics, the principles for the management of community health problems at different levels including the workforce.

It is interesting to note that the recent global pandemic brought to the fore the need to find solutions without harming the environment. While the medical sector was battling the disease and faced the pressure of finding a cure or a vaccine, attention also partly focused on natural cures provided by AYUSH practices as a means of self-protection. We will recall the YouTube channels that were rampant with AYUSH techniques to maintain a balanced life, including mental well-being when faced with the distress of lockdown.

To this end and to promote the local sectors of operation, Government is promoting the use of AYUSH by setting up a centre of excellence for AYUSH in Côte d'Or. We want to ensure our population has access to as many techniques and loads of treatment as provided to ensure its healthy existence, and this goes through a formal recognition to AYUSH studies.

To this end, my Ministry gave its blessing to a bilateral agreement between the University of Mauritius and the Central Council for Research in Ayurveda from India in

2019. As a consequence of this fruitful collaboration, the University of Mauritius has been hosting an academic chair in Ayurveda medicine since November 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we want to ensure that our population fully benefits from AYUSH. It is noteworthy that the Mahatma Gandhi Institute is already delivering a certificate course in Ayurveda and yoga. Similarly, along with the Centre of Excellence in AYUSH, the University of Mauritius will be offering undergraduate and post-graduate courses in the field of AYUSH. One such programme is a post-graduate certificate in Ayurveda Panchakarma for Ayurveda graduates in collaboration with the University Centre for Innovative and Lifelong Learning.

As you may be aware, the Panchakarma is a unique method of cleansing the body and it includes preventive, curative and promotive actions against various diseases. The University of Mauritius will follow all the required procedures and the course will be offered with approval of the Ministry of Health and Wellness as well as the High Education Commission.

Mr Speaker, Sir, because the conceptual realm of AYUSH is relatively new for us in Mauritius, allow me to delve a bit deeper into some of the benefits it will bring.

Mr Speaker, Sir, many aspects of Ayush must be seen as opportunities for local higher education sector but also for the research sector. Mauritius has a number of endemic flora and fauna which have high medicinal properties. Our researchers have done so much already to showcase our rich surroundings, research in Moringa, on the black tea and their beneficial impact on human body are just two such areas. We must not underestimate the rich marine biodiversity that we have. These research areas and such others, Mr Speaker, Sir, would allow for the creation of new opportunities, new opportunities for the business sector as well.

Finally, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me conclude by saying that the amendment proposed by the Finance Bill to the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act aims to include all secondary schools that receive grants under the Private Secondary Education Authority, that is, all Private grantaided Secondary Schools.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the guiding principles that Government has adopted with regard to Private grant-aided Secondary Schools sector has been ensuring the prevalence of equity

and parity with the State sector, be it in terms of facilities provided to students or benefits accruing to the staff.

On the other hand, the Finance Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is firstly amending the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act to clarify the first point, namely that the term 'secondary school' here implies to those, as I have said, Private grant-aided Secondary Schools. Secondly, staff who joined the Private Secondary Schools prior to 01 January 2013, contribute to the Private Secondary Schools Staff Pension Scheme, which is a defined benefit pension scheme governed by the Private Pension Schemes Act 2012. This Scheme falls within the purview of the Financial Services Commission and is managed by SICOM.

On the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, staff of the Private Secondary Schools who joined service as from 01 January 2013 adheres to the Public Pension Defined Contribution Scheme which is governed by the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act. The legislative amendment proposed is primarily serving to align employees who joined the sector prior to 01 January 2013 with those who joined the sector post 01 January 2013 such that they will all be governed under the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me explain the rationale behind this. The private Defined Benefit Pension Scheme, by its very nature of being a closed fund, will over time have a reduced number of active members, while the number of pensioners will increase. As matters stand now, the PSS Pension Scheme is able to meet its pensions' obligations over some ten years but has an actuarial deficit. For recall, the actuarial deficit takes into consideration the future benefits payable to existing and future beneficiaries. So, it is not a cash deficit but an actuarial deficit.

Accordingly, by proposing that the Private Secondary Schools be listed under the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act, we are ensuring that all members of the profession are treated equally. In fact, members will be better off with additional benefits, including new provisions recommended in PRB reports and this, while the acquired rights of members under the existing PSS Pension Scheme are being preserved. With this change, the actuarial deficit in the Defined Benefit Pension Scheme will be addressed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, you will have noted that I have centred my intervention around three amendments proposed in the Finance Bill related to my Ministry, as I stated earlier. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, with this, I thank you for your attention.

Minister's Statements and Speeches

PUBLIC BILLS

THE ACADEMY OF DESIGN AND INNOVATION BILL

(NO. XI OF 2022)

(19.07.2022)

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to intervene on the Bill presented by my colleague, hon. Bholah, Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives. I congratulate him for coming up with this Bill at a time when there are significant transformations taking place in the design field, that is, the field of fashion and textile coupled with graphic and multimedia, building and architecture, jewellery, arts and crafts.

The Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, provides for a new legal and institutional setup for the Academy of Design and Innovation in lieu of the Fashion and Design Institute. If we are looking for the reasons why, this is amply explained by the on thrust of technology that has transformed today the world of design and the design field. It is also accounted for by the need to be highly competitive in niche markets and retain the position achieved by Mauritius on the competitive indexes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us be clear about the terminology used here. Design is not just about designing objects or a field of study. Design is a way of thinking. We should not be constrained by the traditional and especially parochial view of design. The modern dimension of design starts with looking beyond the world of fashion and design. It now encompasses domains like architecture, as I have said earlier, jewellery, the arts and crafts programmes as the Bill has informed, but it also to be borne in mind that design here, is associated with innovation, and rightly so. Can we really dissociate one from the other? The recent pandemic has generated the realisation that one essential skill lies in recognising and creating the exploiting opportunities it arises. Today, the opportunity is presenting itself through the notion of design to transcend contempt and include disruptive innovation in both process and approach.

All to affirm, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the how is more important than the what. I am thus very pleased to see this Bill actually making a case for the Academy of Design and Innovation to have a much broader mandate. The Academy will promote excellence and will also take on-board the creative industries. What justifies this broadened mandate, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? The reasons are both varied and valid. Let me firstly highlight that the world today is what we call the VUCA world: Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. Broadening the mandate of the Academy is much called for to respond to the tectonic shifts brought about by this VUCA world, and this calls for a new era of skills development.

More and more, we speak of the Fourth Industrial Revolution as defining the modern day context. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is fundamentally reshaping the way we live, the way we work. The age of digital transformation and technological progress has been instrumental for many Mauritian businesses including fashion to achieve global visibility, to connect with a broader and more diverse audience and also customer based. This explains why our textile industry has remained resilient despite the many challenges it has faced. No doubt, the label 'Made in Moris' has had its forceful contribution to the symptoms of both quality and design.

Yet, we cannot stop here. It is in this global context that Mauritius has to continue evolving so as to successfully respond to the resulting shifts. In such a context, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what are the implications for Mauritius? For one thing, we have to recognise the necessity to build up and reinforce the value adding dimension of our creative industries. Indeed, it is known that the more sophisticated the taste of people grows, the more likely they are to spend any additional income on outputs of the creative economy.

So, we are here in the presence of a niche market, one that also creates valuable employment opportunities. This is why, the very first object of the Bill and of the Academy is purported to promote excellence in the design field. The Academy will thus spearhead quality and innovative courses and programmes to propel the field to new heights. May I here open a parenthesis by stressing that on the international scene as well, countries that have reinforced their institutions and invested in these domains have succeeded in their exports lead take-off.

A June 2021 report by Deloitte titled 'The Future of the Creative Economy' reveals that the creative economy employment represented around 7% of total employment, nearly 20 million people in nine developed countries –

- (i) Germany;

- (ii) the UK;
- (iii) France;
- (iv) Italy;
- (v) Spain;
- (vi) Turkey;
- (vii) Japan;
- (viii) South Korea, and (ix) Australia.

The report goes on to suggest that creative economy could grow 40% by 2030, adding more than 8 million additional jobs in the above named economies. The report goes on to add, and I quote—

“(...) Middle income countries are likely to show even stronger growth to the extent their overall national income grows faster.”

Mauritius, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, stands to gain as we shape up into a growingly sophisticated nation and reclaim our rightful place among the high income status countries.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us allow ourselves to be ambitious. This Academy will be called upon to play a regional role as well. It may not be in the next few months, it will certainly not be overnight, but that role, it is destined to play. The Academy will not simply be building skills for the present, but it will also be building skills for the future. Already, we have cleared the ground for positioning Mauritius as a new regional knowledge hub. Here, we should draw optimism and comfort from the report of Business of Education in Africa that was launched in 2020 at the World Economic Forum in South Africa. It estimates that by 2035, the number of Africans joining the workforce between the age 15 to 64 will exceed that of the rest of the world combined. This starts a tremendous opportunity for Mauritius to play its full role as a knowledge hub in the region and also for the Academy of Design and Innovation to have a special role.

Indeed, the credibility of the Academy is very likely to be regionally enhanced when it demonstrates its ability to offer programmes and courses that are quality assured that show fitness for purpose through the fulfilment of the objective set, and fitness of purpose through

relevance to societal needs. Therein will lie the attractiveness for the captive market that the Academy is called upon to task.

Let me reiterate that through the Academy as much as through our universities, we can successfully have an optic both in the intake and in the development of skills and competencies of learners both local and continental. Skills to be acquired will go beyond the mere know-how, beyond technical aptitudes, technologies and practices. These will be the soft skills or the transversal skills that will primarily focus on how to interact and connect, how to be innovative and creative. In short, skills that are more directed to learners' insertion in and adjustment to the world of work.

These, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will be the persons who will enter into jobs but also be job creators, entrepreneurs in short. And that in itself is a magic bullet to counter any rise in unemployment rates. I believe that it will be a win-win situation for all, for the students, obviously, but also for the Academy of Design and Innovation. Certainly, the Academy will have a tremendous role to play as an important contributor to a regional innovation ecosystem while also ensuring that Mauritius emerges as a powerhouse of innovation, as rightly put by hon. Balgobin.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, speaking of innovation brings to mind here, the strong link that will be in the offing between the Academy that will be set up and the world of education. This Bill brings to the fore the notion of design thinking as a framework for critical thinking, problem-solving and strategy formulation. Now, to develop the workforce that is adept at design thinking, we must start young. That is why our students are exposed to creative thinking, as well as design principles and processes. We believe that this will help them think of novel solutions to address complex problems.

Such world of thinking, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when my Ministry spearheaded the most comprehensive systemic reform in education till date, including the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education Reform. What lies at the core? At the core lie inclusiveness, equity and sustainability. Thus, a development of knowledge is inextricably linked to the development of the 21st century thinking skills and values. It has been a common complaint that our society, our scales have traditionally tilted in favour of academic qualifications. We tend to overweigh academic degrees to the exclusion of skills. We are in for a change here, a change that has already been sweepingly acted upon.

Our reform targets children as from pre-primary education and seeks to instil a different mindset. It also envisages the creation of multiple pathways for young people to develop those skills, fulfil their aspirations. We have to catch them young. As Frederick Douglass, the African-American abolitionist of the 19th century, said –

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

Our reform targets the holistic development of the self and willingness and commitment to embrace lifelong learning at all echelons because of the short shelf-life of skills in a world that is constantly in flux. This is also why our education system strives for more creativity, more practice-based immersion among the youth. The need to be creative to not only be self-sustaining but also remain relevant in today’s competitive world.

It is precisely with this in mind that technical education is being rebranded today. The House will recall the passing of the ITET Act in 2021. This legislative framework provides the means to promote unified, sustainable and technologically advanced public network of technical education centres that provide work-based, on-campus and online technical education across the country and beyond. The objective is straightforward, makes skill development responsive to the development priorities of both Government and the industry and thereby addressing the sectoral skill gaps in the country. Just as ITET, I believe that this proposed Academy of Design and Innovation will also have its role to play in adopting a demand-centric lens to assess and satisfy the interest of all stakeholders.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this brings to the fore the need for collaboration, specially institutional collaboration and we recall that one of the functions of the Academy will be to operate in partnership with and establish and exchange programmes and courses with any other institution or enterprise having objects wholly or partly similar to its objects. This is the way institutional growth lies. It is given that with the mandate of the Academy, it will be called upon to work together with MITD, ITET as well as the Higher Education Institutions. It is in this context, pleasing to note that the Academic Council that will also be set up will have a good representation from the education sector, as well as experienced persons in the field of design.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this legislation makes a reference under sub-section 6 of the powers of the Academy, to the Academy conducting a wide variety and range of courses and programmes that scale up to diplomas and degrees. The Academy will also be an awarding

body. Obviously, this will not be happening overnight and the Academy will go through a growth process, much attention will be paid to ensure that quality standards are met and that internal and external audits are undertaken to verify baseline compliance with these standards. As we know, quality assurance for Higher Education Institutions has a primary function of establishing the legitimacy of both the institution and its programmes and offer. It also establishes in-house dialogues that focuses on continuous quality, self-improvement.

This entire process, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is obviously one of the best ways in which to inculcate public trust and to see to it that students are informed about the quality, purposes and outcomes of the courses being run by the institution. My Ministry, through the Higher Education Commission, will support the Design and Innovation Academy and ensure that its foundations are solidly grounded in the existing regulatory framework governing the higher education in Mauritius.

Allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to also highlight that one of the requirements of the Higher Education Act is the accreditation of programmes run by public and private HEIs. My colleague Minister and I have already discussed this issue and I wish to reassure the House that all programmes will be duly accredited before being offered. This will obviously be helpful where international students are concerned. Indeed, what better way to attract international students by offering them programmes which bear a label of quality. The Republic of Mauritius intends to play its full role as a regional knowledge hub. The Mauritius-Africa Scholarship Scheme is already channelling many African students who have opted for local awarding bodies and programmes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, substantial change is needed to achieve this Government's aim that all Mauritians are equipped to be successful in the 21st century with the transferable knowledge and skills to take on different types of work throughout their careers that make them gainful, productive and drivers of the high income status economy.

I am glad to note the emphasis laid on adopting the multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary mindset along with research and consultancy focus in the second and fourth objects of the Academy.

The Deputy Speaker: Take your time, hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Thank you. Thinking from a multi-disciplinary approach, requires more than cross-disciplined actions and initiatives. It stems from a firm belief that one should put in question one's worldview. This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, requires a real paradigm shift.

Today, divisions between learning and work are breaking down, bringing before a need to develop an alternate mode of Education Industry Corporation that transform the teaching content and instructional methods, be it adopting technology in teaching, revamping the physical infrastructure and reforming curricular while promoting competency based education that instills life-long skills and competencies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, perhaps before I conclude, it would be proper for me to set the record straight in the light of some arguments that have been ventilated on this Bill. First, all apprehensions relating to losses of or threat to employment of the staff of the FDI should be laid to rest. The transitional provisions do provide the comfort and guarantee the safeguard and retention of the employment and rights of all persons in the new body. I also heard a hon. Member of the Opposition question the credibility of the Mauritius Examination Syndicate whose representative will be a potential Board Member of the Academy. One would genuinely wish that we do not mix issues, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. What happened recently at the MES has been an issue that had immediately been remedied with no major consequence arising therefrom. I do not view this as proper or even sound in principle to put an entire organization in jeopardy through a wild claim or a blanket statement. On another count, we need to view education today from a multi-disciplinary perspective. We cannot practice contempt exclusivity. I am of the opinion that design thinking should not be restrained and confined only to students of design. Rather, all programmes, be they of engineering, business, health, sciences, tourism, all should include a design module. All vocational, technical and university students need to learn to couple the design led creative thinking process with their domain expertise and come with something innovative. Only then, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they will make the shift from being job seekers to becoming entrepreneurs, innovators and job creators.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we all agree that the skill levels of the Mauritian population must be raised and this in order to improve competitiveness, growth rates, job prospects and promote social inclusion in line with Government's vision 2030. We must not forget and it is often taken for granted but design and innovation have been at the cornerstone of the Mauritius miracle and Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, nothing happened by chance or by itself, not our economic growth, not our resilience in the face of adversity. More recently, our handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, not our infrastructure, not even our multi-cultural diversity and unity and I believe that this has been so because of the foresight and of our forefathers and our leaders and I think it is our duty as a new generation of leaders, of politicians to make sure that this unity is not at any point jeopardized or threatened, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. So, I believe that it is only by

being visionary and by being proactive that we will manage to create the right environment for us to achieve our vision and our goals. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, today, we all know too well that exogenous shocks to our economy and our very fabric of life can come in any form and at any time. Building the skills to be resilient in the face of uninvited changes cannot be relegated to future generations; the time to act is now.

As I conclude, I am reminded of the famous words of Charles Darwin –

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent but the ones most responsive to change.”

Any new institution will have to be nimble and agile to succeed because change is the only constant.

I thank you for your kind attention.