

**Speech of Hon. (Mrs.) Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun  
Minister of Education & Human Resources  
Tertiary Education and Scientific Research**

**Launching of “National Science Week 2018”  
Wednesday 9th May 2018**

**Dear Students**

Good Morning to all of you.

It is a great pleasure for me to address you on the occasion of the Launching Ceremony of the National Science Week 2018 and the National Youth Conference on Science, Technology and Innovation 2018.

Way back in 2016, my Ministry took the policy decision to give a new promotional boost to science such that it has a much bigger impact. That’s where the National Science Week was conceptualised. The idea behind the National Science Week is thus eminently simple: science and technology are essential in our everyday life and for our welfare. They are all around us—at work, at home, in the world of entertainment, in the health system, our transportation system — well, just about everywhere.

However, this ubiquity of science demands a fuller understanding of what it seems, along with its technology, can do. Thus, we use our smartphones, watch television and make a systematic utilization of our refrigerators. Now, just take a few minutes to think of the teams of people, researchers and scientists who are currently thinking, and working on our future television sets, our upcoming laptops and smartphones.

One thing therefore stands out: we must understand the basic functioning behind those technological equipment that we now take for granted. And the organization of this year's 'Science Week' seeks to help you to do precisely that.

Incidentally, you are in good company here. The Science Week is a common occurrence in many countries-- in Australia & India, for instance, there is a full week of activities exclusively dedicated to Science and Technology.

The rate at which scientific concepts are evolving and technology is expanding is absolutely stupendous. It sometimes leaves us nonplussed, confused, wondrous.

Let me take Japan as an example.

The Government of Japan has been promoting what is called there the “**Super Smart Society**” or **Society 5.0**. This is a society which

can respond to the various needs of citizens by providing necessary items or high quality services to them, thus enabling them to live a life of high comfort. To make that happen, Japanese companies rely enormously on robotics, the Internet of Things (IOT) and Artificial intelligence.

This is part of what Professor Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, first defined as the **Fourth Industrial Revolution** (or **Industry 4.0**). This is exemplified by mobile supercomputing, intelligent robots, self-driving cars, neuro-technological brain enhancements, etc.

The point is that this is more than ever before *the era of science and technology* ! Both are seen as **the** tools *par excellence* to address global 21<sup>st</sup> century issues such as climate change, energy challenges, and global access to food and clean drinking water, among others.

We shouldn't therefore be surprised that practically every country today talks of the significance to be attached to Science and Technology as the means to bring in innovation.

Thus the African Union has a strategy called “ Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa” (STISA-2024). STISA 2024 places science, technology and innovation at the epicenter of Africa's socio-economic development and growth. STI is viewed as central to poverty reduction; economic growth and social development efforts.

Again, the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025) contains 12 Strategic Objectives. Quite naturally, one of these Strategies is spelt out thus:

*“Strengthen the Science and Maths Curricula in youth training and disseminate scientific knowledge and culture in society “*

The same applies for the **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development** (OECD) whose member states place a heavy premium on Science and Technology as the drivers of change and innovation.

Finally, let’s face it: if we really are serious about transforming our country into a knowledge-based economy, if we want the new economic pillars like the Ocean Economy, Food Security, Renewable Energy, ICT and Sustainable Development to take off, we have to strengthen our STI capabilities.

And that means, Ladies and Gentlemen, we must grab and sustain the interest of our students in “ *la chose scientifique*”.

Unfortunately, at this current stage, I am a bit dismayed. If we take stock of the present intake in science subjects at SC and HSC, the percentage of students embarking on science subjects is quite low. For example, Biology is considered an essential base for food security & sustainable agriculture, the blue economy and health sciences. However, Biology has the lowest output at HSC level with only about 6% of HSC intake. Conversely, in Europe and the US, Biology is one of the most popular subjects. How can we explain this situation?

I think it is more than high time to raise the alarm. We must all work together to reverse this tendency. The Careers Guidance and Officers and Teachers must systematically guide students in the choice of science- and technology-related careers, On the other hand, the

HRDC should probably come up with a long-term plan for such science- related fields in Mauritius.

As for the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre, the implementation of its Strategic Plan should result in the adoption of a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to the cause of promotion of science and technology in Mauritius. Nothing works better than having Ministries and Departments pooling their brain power, optimizing their resources and coordinating their actions. As famed basketball player, Michael Jordan put it,

*“Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships”.*

**Ladies and Gentlemen, dear students,**

The Exhibition on Science and Technology for this edition of National Science Week demonstrates exactly this coordination point.

This Science Week brings together a number of stakeholders from major spheres of our economy under one roof to showcase and explain to you, to let you discover the hidden technology in the gadgets they use. Some stakeholders would be quite willing to let you test these gadgets and to answer all your questions.

I wish to thank all those departments who are supporting this laudable initiative to motivate our youth.

On the other hand, I also welcome the holding of a National Conference on Science, Technology & Innovation for our Grades 12 and 13 secondary school students as well as talks/seminars related to Science and Technology.

The aim is to enable you, young persons, to ponder and debate on where you want Mauritius to be and where you think Mauritius will be in the next 50 years as regards advances made in the field of science, technology and innovation. Such a Conference aims at raising your awareness on how STI can play a strategic role in addressing issues of national importance and finding sustainable solutions to problems

As you know, you will be focusing on matters related to poverty alleviation, healthcare, food and nutrition, digital literacy, clean energy, sustainable tourism, climate change and many others—all of which are central to the progressive evolution of our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

STI is our future and if Mauritius wants to evolve, we must have more scientists and encourage more research in all areas and look for solutions to current and emerging issues.

*Et cela passe par un encouragement tacite, une motivation intrinsèque à nos jeunes afin qu'ils se retrouvent aisément dans un domaine, dans un monde où la science et la technologie priment et prédominent.*

I wish to thank everyone that has collaborated to make this event a success: all the stakeholders, the students and the Educators and

the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre.

National Science Week 2018 is a welcome addition to the Centre's exhibits and programs. I hope it will be a place of fun, exploration and learning for everyone.

I will encourage everyone to pass on the message to their families, friends to come and visit this exhibition and participate actively in the interactive sessions.

With these words, it is my immense pleasure to formally launch the National Science Week 2018.

Thank you for your attention.