

**Speech of Hon. Minister Deepak Balgobin  
Minister of Information Technology,  
Communication and Innovation**

**Launching of the  
National Innovation Campaign**

**Venue: Ebony 1, Hennessy Park, Ebène**

**Date: Monday, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

**Time: as from 16h30**

- **Dr Kaviraj Sukon, Chairperson, MRIC**
- **Professor Theesan Bahorun, Executive Director, MRIC**
- **Heads of Institutions,**
- **Champions of Innovation,**
- **Members of the Press,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good afternoon to you all.**

## **Intro**

1. It is my privilege to extend a heartfelt welcome to everyone present today for the launch of the first-ever **National Innovation Campaign**.
2. Nearly two years ago, before the COVID-19 pandemic, none of us imagined the proportions at which our lives will be disrupted and changed, with such loss and suffering. Every continent across the world has been touched by the coronavirus, with more than 266 million people being infected since the first case was reported and 5,6 million deaths.
3. The rapid spread of the virus has reminded us of our inter-connectedness and interdependency.

4. Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic is a watershed moment that will shape our lives for the foreseeable future. Not only has the pandemic affected lives and the healthcare systems, it has also had a drastic impact on businesses and industries around the world.
5. Along with the rest of the world, Mauritius has and is still confronted with exceptional challenges. Our economy, our livelihoods, our society, have all been profoundly affected by the pandemic.
6. Amidst all of these changes, there may be no better time to look for creative ways to solve problems for our country with the launch of the **National Innovation Campaign** and drive the transformations required for this country, our people, our enterprises to emerge stronger from this ordeal.
7. And while planning our way forward, as we face the pandemic, the idea bloomed in my mind 6 months ago, to organise “**Les assises de la Recherche et de l’Innovation**” which would be the culmination of this nationwide campaign on Innovation – **Innové Moris**.
8. With this campaign, we are inviting everyone to imagine with us, a new, faster, higher trajectory of Mauritian innovation.
9. This is a journey of optimism, of spirit, of determination, and of unleashing the power of innovation.

10. The potential impact of innovation in supporting social and economic development is very dependent on the engagement and maturity of the innovation ecosystems. Innovation challenges have the aim of promoting inclusive development and leveraging local knowledge, solutions and resources.
11. And we all have a role to play in facilitating an enabling environment for innovators to thrive.
12. This is why, my Ministry has the firm belief that in the global context in which we evolve these days, **Innovation** is central to responding to the multitude of challenges that our country faces.

## **Promoting Innovation**

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

13. To recover and to indeed build back better, we are laying emphasis on Innovation.
14. This Government, with the vision of our Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, strongly believes in the potential of **Research and Innovation** and the foundations of innovation have already been laid down. Alongside the creation of my Ministry to oversee the Innovation Portfolio, the MRC was strengthened into the MRIC in 2019 and the MRIC Act (2019) was further amended in July 2021.

15. Together with the relevant institutional changes to drive innovation, this Government has earmarked special funds under the **National Innovation Program** to fund innovative projects. The funds ranging from 125 million rupees to 150 million rupees have been earmarked in the annual Budget since 2016 and have been used to a great extent to fund the measures outlined in the **National Innovation Framework** (NIF) (2018-2030).
  
16. The NIF was launched by my Ministry on the 15th October 2018 and is a unique programme for creating innovation ecosystems to transform the landscape of the Mauritian economy by setting out a plan for Innovation based on integrated growth.
  
17. The initiatives embedded in the NIF allowed the notable rank change for Mauritius from 82nd to 52nd in the **Global Innovation Index** report (2020). My Ministry and the MRIC have conducted a number of initiatives to sustain and improve the performance of Mauritius in the **GII**. This has been particularly challenging with the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic but the ranking of Mauritius in the 2021 report was still 52nd out of 132 countries, maintaining its first position in sub-Saharan Africa. This can be partly attributed to our resilient and flexible National Innovation Ecosystem.

18. The focus areas are shifting from the traditional sectors to new or emerging sectors such as Fintech, Blockchain, AI, Circular Economy, Smart Agriculture and Inclusive Innovation. In this same vein and to re-align with the fast pace development of these emerging sectors, the **Fast Tract Innovation Scheme** (FIT) was launched in March 2021. This scheme had as aim to support short term innovative projects in above thematic areas.

## Way Forward

### Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. Our vision is to stay abreast of developments in Science Technology and Innovation. It is in this kind of environment that projects at the frontier of Science and Innovation, like the first Mauritian nano-satellite **MIR-SAT1**, are given the opportunity to emerge and develop and our country can now proudly claim the status of a space-faring nation.

20. Perhaps more than ever, in the face of the New Normal imposed by the Pandemic, it is crucial that we find such new creative and innovative ways to give a new thrust to the Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Mauritius.

21. This top-down approach which we have been advocating thus far and which is certainly bringing results, needs to be complemented with a **bottom-up approach to innovation.**

22. How can we crowdsource innovative ideas:

- from the community?
- from the grassroots?
- from the informed citizen?

who, closer to their local realities would have first-hand insights in terms of how to address their own local challenges.

23. We want to give voice to the community. We want to empower them to innovate. **We want to introduce challenge-driven innovation from the grassroots.**

24. Above all we want to instill **a culture of innovation not only within academia and industry but also within the community.**

## **The National Innovation Campaign**

25. It is in this context, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, that I fully support the Council in driving a **National Innovation Campaign.** The aim is to rekindle the innovation spirit amongst the Mauritian population and make the public aware of the opportunities made available by the MRIC and other partner organisations.

26. This campaign will target all citizens of the Republic of Mauritius evolving in both formal and informal sectors. We wish to reach out to all economic segments including the non-traditional and emerging ones by this campaign.
27. The objectives of the National Innovation Campaign as enunciated earlier are multifold. Moreover, **I want here to stress on the importance of catalyzing this innovation culture particularly in the younger generation.**
28. Culture is defined by sociologists as **‘a way of life’ which is ‘larger than the sum of all parts of society’**. If innovation becomes central to our way of life, there will be no limit to what we can achieve. It is therefore commendable that the MRIC is striving to entrench innovation within our way of life.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

29. As I said earlier, the National Innovation Campaign will culminate in the organisation of the very first **“*Les Assises de la Recherche et de L’innovation*”** in Mauritius and Rodrigues.



30. It will be a platform that initiates a national dialogue and provides the conducive framework for policy revamping while concurrently providing insights on emerging and frontier innovations.
31. We will also welcome various stakeholders and foreign expert-observers during this summit. And this event will eventually lead to the publication of a roadmap which will pave the way to sectoral innovation and will be the guiding document for transformation in this sector.
- 32. We take the agenda of innovation very seriously and we have large dreams for this country.**
- 33. With these words, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have the pleasure to launch the National Innovation Campaign – Innové Moris !**