

# **Workshop on the Mauritius - China Free Trade Agreement**

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

**Le Méridien Hotel, Pointe aux Piments - 02 March 2021 at 09.35hrs**

-----  
**Hon. Alan Ganoo, Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail,  
and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and  
International Trade**

**Hon. Mahen Seeruttun, Minister of Financial Services and  
Good Governance**

**His Excellency, Mr Sun Gongyi. Ambassador of the People's  
Republic of China to Mauritius**

**Mr Harvesh Seegolam, Governor of the Bank of Mauritius,  
Technology, Communication and Innovation**

**Mr Hemraj Ramnial, Chairman of the EDB,**

**Mr Ken Poonoosamy, CEO of the EDB**

**CEOs of private companies of Mauritius and China,**

**Panelists and participants,**

**Members of the press,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good morning.**

I feel greatly honoured to address you on the occasion of this two-days' workshop on the Mauritius–China Free Trade Agreement. I would first like to begin by thanking the Economic Development Board, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade and the Embassy of the People's Republic of China for organising this event.

I am confident that participants are making the most out of this workshop and more opportunities for economic cooperation between Mauritius and China will surely flourish.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the Government of the Republic of Mauritius and the Government of the People's Republic of China entered into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January this year. The FTA comprises four main components pertaining to :

- (1) Trade in Goods, (2) Trade in Services, (3) Investment and
- (4) Economic Cooperation.

During past negotiations, my Ministry was entrusted with the task of providing contributions for Mauritius to offer commitments on Trade in Services, more specifically in the “COMPUTER AND RELATED SERVICES”, the “COURIER SERVICES” and the “TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES” subsectors. This FTA with China removes trade and investment restrictions on more than 100 service sectors, including the ICT sector.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The world has been going through unprecedented challenges due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and this has adversely affected international trade and investment. That being said, let us not forget that the pandemic has given a new boost to the industrial revolution – the industry 4.0.

The world has also witnessed deeper integration of industries as well as a boom in digital technologies, thereby, allowing the service economy to thrive.

Today, more than ever, we are seeing the importance of economic cooperation and the FTA could not have entered into force at a better time. No doubt, the FTA between the two countries would offer the opportunity for Mauritius to be a gateway between China and Africa in terms of cross-border e-Commerce, sharing platforms and collaboration systems.

Furthermore, this agreement would also spur international cooperation in the digital sector, boost macro-policy coordination and facilitate the development of the digital and sharing economy.

Digital trade provides many golden opportunities to build global collaboration. Today, fiber connection has covered the whole island and with deployment of fiber, Mauritius is the Eighth most fibred country in the world in terms of connectivity and the first in Africa.

The ICT infrastructure that we have in Mauritius is conducive to investment and trade facilitation, and integrating Mauritius into global trade. Quality and proven infrastructure is key to support services export capacity which is a major component of the FTA strategy.

The Mauritius-China FTA would definitely help in enhancing trade in services between our two countries as well as anticipating new areas of cooperation.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am pleased to acknowledge that big Chinese multinationals, in the ICT sector, like Huawei, has brought in their contribution in the sector. They have structured their HQ in Mauritius and employing more than 300 employees. Huawei is also contributing to create the talent to support Mauritius shift into a digital and service-based economy for example the Seeds for the Future programme where they provide local students training and exposure to cutting edge technology and know-how from China. Huawei has been a major partner in organizing various events likes the World AI Show, to shape the AI roadmap of Mauritius, the 5G seminar, Innovation for All Summit, amongst others.

Another area that can be contemplated for channeling services to African countries is Software Development. Such endeavours would surely necessitate the setting up of professional help desk services on our island for a long-term sustainable business relationship, the more so that our bilingual characteristic would be of a decisive advantage.

Other big Chinese businesses like Alibaba could leverage Mauritius geographic position as a logistics hub and service the Eastern and Southern African region.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Being a Member State of COMESA and SADC – both Regional Economic Communities (RECs) having FTAs in place – opens up opportunities for Chinese and Mauritian joint ventures to tap from. Trade in services in this big regional market has much to offer.

Mauritius has recently ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement. This englobes all the African RECs and is perceived as the catalytic instrument that will further add to the attractiveness of Africa as a place to do business.

Mauritius having a good business environment, it can be foreseen that more and more Chinese companies could set up their regional Head Quarters here on our soil for **structuring** investments and projects in order to better serve the region. I would wish to point out again, that Mauritius ranks 13th globally in the **World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Report 2020**.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Mauritius can also serve as an ICT service base for the African market. Chinese and Mauritian ventures are most welcome to set up assembly plants in Mauritius for technological products like smart phones, smart TVs and so on. Thereafter, target the African Continent.

ICT firms may set up their service desk here and service both English and French speaking markets. This will benefit both countries and capitalize on our young ICT graduates' skills whilst expanding the local skills base.

One can even think of the setting up of development centres with Software Engineers busy coding ICT solutions for the African market exploiting the island's acumen for ICTs.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Opportunities are huge for trade in ICT services in and from Mauritius. We need opportunity takers!!!

We look forward to a successful collaboration, especially for Trade in Services, to benefit our business associations, businesses, our people and the country as a whole.

To conclude, Mauritius is a fertile ground for cooperation in ICT and other sectors. Businesses of both Mauritius and China should avail of this FTA to seize new business opportunities for the benefit of our two peoples.

On this note, I would like to wish both Mauritius and China a fruitful cooperation programme and wish all the participants a fruitful workshop.

I thank you for your kind attention.

==