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

Launching of ChILD (Children Innovation Learning and Design) Programme

Coding& Robotics for the Young Minds

Thursday, 7th April 2022 at 13.30hrs
Rajcoomar Gujadhur Government School, Central Flacq

- **Honourable Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology**

- **Mr Ravi Jugoo, Chairman of the District Council of Flacq,**

- **Mr Ravi Meettook, Senior Chief Executive of the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology**

- **Ms Sandrine Valere, Permanent Secretary of my Ministry**

- **Mr Anand Soburrun, Chairman of the National Computer Board**

- **Members of the Board of the NCB,**

- **Mr Roshan Bicajee, Headmaster of Rajcoomar Gajudhur Government School,**

- **Distinguished Guests,**

Good afternoon to you all.

I must admit, it feels wonderful to be here. And especially for me, it has always been with loaded emotions, to go through the corridors of my primary school, where wonderful memories of school life and friendships were made, decades ago. Still today, I deeply cherish my time spent in this premise as a former pupil of Rajcoomar Gajudhur Government School. I still vividly remember my teachers, my classmates, my friends, my homework, the fun we were having on the playground. All these have forged me, as to all other children, to what I am today.

If there is anything indelible in life, it is of course our school life. Today, as the Minister of ICT, it means even more for me to be here to launch the **ChILD project** (Children Innovation Learning and Design) - initiated by the National Computer Board, under the aegis of my Ministry - especially in the presence of the Vice-Prime Minister, Hon. Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, the minister of Education herself.

As you know, this project is implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education Tertiary Education, Science and Technology and I seize this opportunity to thank you Honorable Vice-Prime minister for supporting this initiative.

The CHILD project is a new educational initiative in ICT which concerns the introduction of robotics at the primary level.

Technological advances are evolving so fast, and this trend continues to accelerate. In this rapidly changing world, it is essential to adapt and acquire new skills and abilities. The development of **digital** technologies and **digitisation** affects all citizens, regardless of their age.

Smartphones, computers and tablets, which serve our social and entertainment needs, are an integral part of our daily lives. It is imperative for youngsters to develop digital skills, to be able to navigate to a meaningful and interesting future. Having a critical and mastered use of these digital tools become as fundamental as knowing how to read, write or count.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Robotics is one of the keys to the industrial and cultural revolution and will have an ever-growing important economic value in the near future. According to the **Digital Economy and Society Index** (DESI) of the **European Commission**, 90% of jobs today require some level of digital skills. Programming or technical jobs are not the only ones who need it. As Artificial Intelligence and Robotics now take over "simple" tasks, more and more employees need to develop creative and problem-solving skills.

We all know that the only constant in life is to change and this change requires learning and the adoption of new technologies. It is therefore crucial and timely to inculcate the concept of robotics in primary school children so that they adopt STEM subjects thereafter *(Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)*. In this context, my Ministry has developed the CHILD project which is piloted by the **National Computer Board.**

For kids that have never tried robotics, a simple robot offers the stepping stone for creativity that keeps young minds active. Introducing STEM concepts in a hands-on way, activate the "maker" within them, and teach critical coding skills and robotics for kids.

The ChILD program aims to introduce robotic kits to upper primary pupils while equipping them with the required coding skills. This program will allow children to design and build their own robots using the DIY (Do It Yourself) concept.

Before implementing the CHILD program, the **National Computer Board** organized a training program for 24 educators from different schools located in the 4 educational zones.

I had the opportunity to see the demonstration of these robotic kits during the "*Teknolozi dan ou Porté*" event in October last year here in Flacq. I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen that children will be amazed by these learning tools and it will boost their creative talent.

The National Computer Board, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education **Tertiary Education, Science and Technology**, has initiated the ChILD program with the provision of introductory robotics training to Grade 4, 5 and 6 students in primary schools across Mauritius and Rodrigues. We have set a target to train some 2,400 primary school students in the first year.

Robotics projects are a great educational tool to inspire kids to think outside the box. While fun to assemble and bring robots to life, robotics builds cognitive skills like critical thinking and problem solving.

Most importantly, robotics for kids is vital because in today's world it helps them master the skills of tomorrow. The future is in fields of development, iOT technologies, 3D printing, AI, and Augmented / Virtual Reality, etc.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Learning about robotics helps kids coast easier into this next generation. It provides real-world experience that will help them compete in the ever-evolving job market as they get more mature.

My Ministry, through the NCB and the Ministry of Education **Tertiary Education, Science and Technology**, is collaborating further regarding the CHILD program to provide training for young people in Mauritius and Rodrigues. This new partnership will allow them to create and be part of emerging technologies while harnessing collaborative thinking.

Benjamin Franklin, known as one of the founding fathers of the United States and scientist, once said "***an investment in knowledge pays the best interest***". Indeed, all the work we do here today will bear fruit in the future and I thank you all for being a part of it.

On these words, Ladies and Gentlemen, I look forward to seeing the impact of the CHILD program nationwide and I also look forward to continuing to work towards accelerating this Government's ambition of building a **Smart Mauritius.**

I thank you for your attention.