

**INTERVENTION OF HONOURABLE N. BODHA,
Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport & Minister of
Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade**

The Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill

Madam Speaker,

At the outset, I would like to commend the introduction of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill. This Bill is a key requirement in this era of unprecedented transformation where change is the only constant. We have to imperatively adapt and evolve to meet the emerging challenges and ever-changing needs of industries and society.

Innovation as well as research and development have to be promoted and safeguarded within a legal framework.

Government is truly sensitive to the key objective as set out in Vision 2030 to transform Mauritius into an innovation-based economy and to create a nation of innovative entrepreneurs and it has been implementing a myriad of measures to encourage innovation and to foster research and development.

However, we must bear in mind that Innovation and Research and Development should not be an end in themselves but rather a means to building a competitive economy and to putting our economic development on a solid foundation. Our aim is to harness the innovation tool as a key lever for our economic development.

We should, in this regard, be guided by best practices in other countries which have transformed their economies by laying emphasis on innovation and research and development. Allow me, Madam Speaker, to cite the examples of China, Singapore and the United States.

China's

In 2015, China launched the “*Made in China 2025*”, a 10-year strategic plan for achieving new levels of innovation in emerging sectors, setting specific performance targets for 10 key industries. The goals of “*Made in China 2025*” include increasing the Chinese-domestic content of core materials to 40% by Year 2020 and 70% by Year 2025.

Zhongguancun is known as China's Silicon Valley, which saw the birth of Lenovo and currently houses companies such as Motorola, IBM, Ericsson and so on. China is already well on its way to becoming a superpower in the key areas of science and innovation. It is the second-largest spender on research and development after the United States, accounting for 21% of the world's total of nearly \$2 trillion in Year 2015.

Singapore

Singapore is increasingly being known as the "*Silicon Valley of Asia*", by positioning itself as the biggest hub for start-ups in the world, with over 2,400 tech start-ups. The Tech start-up industry is estimated to be worth over US\$11 billion, with the newest tech sector presently being e-commerce with the development of a local mobile marketplace application, Carousell.

In April, Singapore hosted the Asian Innovators Summit 2019, which is the premier platform bringing together family conglomerates, the public sector and various industry players to network and gain valuable insights on how the latest technology and solutions help them with their innovation agenda.

United States

In the United States, an Innovation and Improvement Office has been created to invest in innovative educational programs and practices and to administer grant programs to promote innovation.

The role of innovation has been critical to economic development and there is a clear link between innovation and gains in the standard of living.

Scientific and engineering advances have spurred new products and processes. This explains the technology-based economic development approach used by the US to enable an environment where an economy based on innovation and technology can thrive.

Economists have calculated that approximately 50% of US annual GDP growth is attributed to increases in innovation.

Madam Speaker,

The establishment of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council paves the way for Mauritius to achieve similar success in Research and Development and Innovation. The setting up of the National Research and Innovation Fund is designed to foster the proper conditions for innovation to flourish and would therefore support the development of the existing and upcoming economic pillars of the country.

Madam Speaker,

The Bill is aimed at ensuring a coherent, coordinated and rational approach to the whole issue of Research and Development and Innovation.

It is commendable that the Bill provides that the ownership of and responsibility for the application of an Intellectual Property remains with the person who has generated the Intellectual Property. Intellectual Property Rights not only encourage innovation and creative ideas without fear of theft or without another party taking credit for it but allow creators to derive benefit from their work.

It is also laudable that the Bill provides that Intellectual Property developed by employees of the Council would be made available for use in the public interest, subject to appropriate conditions.

Madam Speaker,

The MRIC Bill provides that the ownership of Intellectual Property rights would be in accordance with the Patents, Industrial Designs and TradeMarks Act 2002 (PIDT Act 2002).

There exists an intricate link between Innovation, Research and Development and Intellectual Property rights. As we move to provide a modern framework to promote Research and Development and Innovation through the MRIC Bill, Government will also introduce a modern and comprehensive Industrial Property Bill soon.

So far, the scope of the PIDT Act 2002 is limited to the Patents, Industrial Designs and TradeMarks. The new Industrial Property Bill will cover the whole gamut of elements of Industrial Property, namely Patent, TradeMarks, Industrial Design, Geographical Indication, Layout Design of

Integrated Circuits, Plant Varieties and Utility Models. The Industrial Property Bill will stimulate generation of more Intellectual Property assets which, when commercialized, will generate revenue for the Intellectual Property right holder and the country as a whole, namely with regard to Intellectual Property payments as a percentage of trade.

Together, both the MRIC Bill and the Industrial Property Bill will provide a holistic framework that will promote Innovation and Research and Development on the one hand and protect the creation of Intellectual Property assets through Innovation and Research and Development, on the other hand.

We have developed an Intellectual Property Development Plan (IPDP) for Mauritius with the assistance of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). The IPDP seeks to ensure, amongst others, that the organisations involved in Intellectual Property enforcement, have the technical capacity and know-how to use Intellectual Property as a tool to promote research, innovation, investment and economic growth. As such the objectives of the Intellectual Property Development Plan and those of the MRIC Bill are complementary.

We therefore, **Madam Speaker**, see the synergy being developed at the national level with this MRIC Bill and the upcoming Industrial Property Bill as well as the Intellectual Property Development Plan, all focusing towards promoting innovation and research and development.

Madam Speaker,

My Ministry has already initiated discussions with some of the key players to enhance collaboration on innovation and research and development.

The Free Trade Agreement negotiated with China, which would be signed later this year provides, *inter-alia*, for:

- (a) promoting public and private sector partnerships to support the development of innovative products and services;
- (b) enhancing competitiveness of the industry sector, including SMEs by promoting the use of science, technology and innovation; and

- (c) promoting exchanges of specialists, researchers and professors with the aim of disseminating scientific know-how and providing support in the field of technology and innovation.

The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with India, likewise has a section on research and development and innovation, which amongst others provides that the Parties would collaborate on innovative and research projects for the development of a Research and Development Village.

Similarly, our negotiations with the European Union on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement as well as the ongoing negotiations on the Post Cotonou Agreement would include collaboration on Innovation, Research and Development and Intellectual Property Rights.

In the same vein, Government is collaborating with the United Nations to establish and host a platform, known as the United Nations Technology Lab (UNTIL).

The purpose of the Laboratory is to serve as a platform for practitioners, academia, Government, start-up companies, creative minds and established tech giants to promote the development of new and innovative technologies to deliver on developmental projects.

The UN Technology Innovation Labs (UNTIL) are designed to move humanity forward, faster by focusing on the use of innovative technology to solve some of humanity's most pressing needs such as poverty, climate change and global warming.

This initiative is in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to assist Member States in their national implementation strategy.

The Laboratory in Mauritius will focus on a number of areas to deliver on specific projects such as Empowering Youth and Women, Tackling Youth Unemployment, Ocean Economy and Environment related sector (ecotourism) through technology and innovative approaches.

Madam Speaker,

Innovation remains the bedrock for future Mauritius. The legal protection of new creations elicits the commitment of additional resources to foster

further innovation. The promotion and protection of intellectual property enhance economic growth, promote new job creation and industries and improve the quality of life.

So far, we have been dealing with applied research with little scope for innovation. With the establishment of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council, we are sending a strong signal that we are keenly intent on unlocking the potential of innovation as a driver for economic development within a national entrepreneurial culture and for better enjoyment of life for one and all.

It is my sincere wish that the MRIC would develop partnerships with relevant institutions worldwide to achieve its objectives of promoting Innovation and Research and Development as well as to implement best practices through collaborative projects and programs in an innovation - friendly environment.

Madam Speaker

Allow me once more to congratulate my colleague, Honourable Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation for his visionary leadership in promoting creativity and innovation.

I add my endorsement to the MRIC Bill.

N. B

11 April 2019