

**Speech**  
*by*  
**Honourable Soomilduth Bholah**

**Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and  
Cooperatives**

*On the occasion of the*  
**Opening Ceremony**  
**“50<sup>th</sup> Textile Research Symposium”**

**Thursday 07 September 2023**  
**09.00 hours**  
*at*  
**The Ravenala Attitude Hotel,**  
**Balacava**

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

*His Excellency, Shuichiro Kawaguchi, Ambassador of Japan in Mauritius;*

*Professor Sanjeev Kumar Sobhee, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius;*

*Distinguished Guests;*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

A very good morning to you all!

It is an honour for me to be here with you today for the Opening Ceremony of the **50<sup>th</sup>** Textile Research Symposium.

Allow me to extend my thanks to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius for inviting me to be part of this event.

May I also convey a warm welcome to all foreign delegates who are here with us, this morning. I hope that you will enjoy your stay in our island, and make the most out of it.

It goes without saying that the Textile Machinery Society of Japan is the initiator of this Research Symposium Programme. A symposium which brings together academic and industry operators to brainstorm on ways and means to stimulate advancement in the field of Textile and Clothing.

Let me seize this opportunity to heartily thank the Ambassador of Japan and.... through His Excellency... the Japan International Cooperation Agency for their continued support to the National

Productivity and Competitiveness Council. Especially in the setting up of a Centre of Excellence in Mauritius.

***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

One of the responsibilities of my Ministry is to foster the development of the manufacturing sector in Mauritius... of which Textile and Clothing is among the leading activities. This line of business is the backbone of our export-oriented policy.

In the **1970s**, with the constant supply of cheap labour force, Mauritius capitalised on this comparative advantage to attract foreign investors, mainly Hong Kong nationals, to our shores. The appropriate legal framework, coupled with a package of incentives and necessary physical infrastructure facilitated a number of investment projects from the Asian countries.

Over the years, we were able to establish a vertically integrated Textile and Clothing sector... powered by spinning, weaving, knitting, dyeing, embroidery, screen-printing and garment-making processes.

More importantly, our textile operators earned the trust of renowned international brands to source intelligently from our country.

***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

Mauritius, being a small remote island in the Indian Ocean, with no raw materials, has been able to emerge as a world-class player supplying to international buyers across the five continents.

The industry operators have successfully withstood the test of times in the face of multiple challenges such as... dismantling of the

Multi Fibre Agreement... emergence of low-cost producing countries... Brexit... and the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

This is fully evidenced by the excellent export performance achieved by the sector in **2022**. However, for the first semester of **2023**, a slowdown has been noted. But we are confident to overcome this state of affairs as we move forward during this year.

***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

The Textile and Clothing sector provides direct gainful employment to more than **21,700** persons, with multiplier effects creating job opportunities for an even greater number of people.

On the export front, it is among the top generators of foreign exchange earnings contributing to **44%** of domestic exports. In **2022**, Textile and Clothing represented exports worth **Rs 22.9 billion**, out of domestic exports of **Rs 52.3 billion**.

Moreover, over the years, the sector has captured niche markets mainly in export of shirts, T-shirts, trousers and pullovers... supplying to prestigious brands such as... Lacoste, Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Levis, Puma, Guess, ASOS and Woolworths.

It is also worth highlighting that some Mauritian entrepreneurs have bravely ventured offshore by setting up textile factories in Africa, India and Bangladesh, as part of a global business strategy.

***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

It should be noted that, until now, we are still reliant on traditional market destinations such as UK, France, Netherlands, Italy and Spain which account for more than **29%** of exports.

A major breakthrough has been achieved in rebalancing our export destinations with South Africa emerging as an alternative market avenue, contributing to around **38%** of exports. Sustained efforts to strengthen regional linkages in the value chain are also paying dividends with Madagascar representing about **14%** of Textile and Clothing exports. In parallel, much progress has been achieved in our endeavour to make inroads in the USA with some **14%** of exports.

Although we have more or less secured markets, I firmly believe that we should look beyond the horizons. This is because, the volatile international trading environment coupled with geopolitical tensions, are lively threats. And we need to ensure long term survival of the Textile and Clothing sector.

In this perspective, Mauritius has to fully leverage on new business opportunities, opening up in the context of Free Trade Agreement with China, CECPA with India and the Africa Continental Free Trade Area.

I wish to highlight that all efforts are being pursued to deepen our trade relationships with these countries.

There are also ongoing negotiations with United Arab Emirates and Indonesia to conclude similar trade agreements.

### ***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

In our market diversification strategy, Government has laid a lot of emphasis on export to the USA, capitalising on the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act.

However AGOA is due to lapse in September **2025**. At the level of Government, we are very concerned about this situation. And actions have been initiated to push forward for a possible renewal of the Agreement.

I recently led a delegation to the USA whereby I had the opportunity to discuss with several high-level Government and private sector officials on the necessity to maintain AGOA.

I am glad to inform that the US counterparts were very attentive to our concerns and they have expressed their willingness to facilitate the already good trade relations between Mauritius and USA.

***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

A host of support measures has been put in place by the Government to assist local manufacturers in their export growth. For instance the Trade Promotion and Marketing Scheme, has been vital in supporting textile operators to enhance their competitiveness through increased airfreighting of finished goods. In **2022**, more than **25%** of Textile and Clothing were exported via airliners. Similarly, the Freight Rebate Scheme has been fundamental in expanding exports to Africa.

Attractive financing options are also being provided by the Industrial Finance Corporation of Mauritius Ltd to allow manufacturing enterprises invest in advanced technologies.

At the level of my Ministry, we maintain close proximity with all operators to facilitate seamless production activities and delivery of orders. Much attention is being devoted to digitalisation and greening of manufacturing operations to have an edge over low-cost producing countries.

To this end, my Ministry is presently implementing a Manufacturing 4.0 project in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat. A group of enterprises, including textile companies, will soon benefit from foreign expertise to develop their capabilities in identifying and adopting technologies such as... Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Industrial Internet of Things and Cloud Computing.

Additionally, we are launching a project entitled “Accelerating the Transition to a Net-Zero Nature-Positive Economy” with support from the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Environment Programme.

On a general note, I would like to underline that the recommendations of the McKinsey Report on establishing Mauritius as a Regional Sustainable Textile Hub are being given due consideration at the level of Government.

***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

Global trade in the textile industry has exploded over the past **50** years to reach a peak of around **1.5 trillion** US Dollars in **2022**.

It is a matter of pride that Mauritius has carved out a share of this market through relentless efforts and acute resilience in face of all sorts of adversities.

As at now, the Textile and Clothing sector is evolving on a strong base, driven by creativity and design, innovation, technology uptake, product development, niche marketing and sustainable practices.

I am happy to note that during the two-day Symposium, all these thematics which have a major bearing on the future orientation of the Mauritian Textile and Clothing sector.

I firmly believe that this is an excellent opportunity to generate new ideas and innovative solutions for the smart evolution of the Textile and Clothing Industry.

So I wish you all fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.