

**ADDRESS BY HON. D. GOKHOL,
MINISTER OF INDUSTRY SCIENCE
AND RESEARCH**

**PRIZE GIVING CEREMONY
of the
National Science Challenge
2009**

***Monday 9 November 2009
at 13 30 hours***

**Auditorium, RGSC
Old Moka Road, Bell Village**

Associate Prof R. Somanah, Chairman of Jury Panel

Dr A.K. Maulloo, Director, RGSC

**Mr D. Balgobin, Manager/Curator Mechanical Engineering
RGSC**

Supervising Teachers and Rectors

Distinguished Teachers and Rectors

Dear Students

And

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to to-day's Prize Giving Ceremony of the National Science Quiz Competition 2009.

I am very happy that the RGSC has organized this competition again this year and I congratulate all schools, students and teachers for their wonderful enthusiasm and efforts in participating in the competition.

Science

Science is the very foundation of all development and my Ministry is committed to promote Science and Technology education in order to create a Science Literate Citizenry.

As you are aware, the Rajiv Gandhi science Centre has the overarching mission for popularization of science. It organized the first National Science Challenge in 2006 aimed at Form IV and Lower Six students. I was then heading the Ministry of Education and Human Resources.

Following the success of the competition, the project was reiterated in 2007 and 2008 and I am pleased to be present again for this 2009 edition *but this time as Minister of Industry Science and Research.*

I am very happy that RGSC is upholding my philosophy that only projects that can be sustained will receive the support of my Ministry.

It is worth noting that since 2006 to date more than 2000 students have participated in the National Science Challenge involving around 100 supervising teachers from 70 Secondary Schools.

As you are aware, Government has created a new Ministry – the Ministry of Industry, Science and Research and one of its responsibilities is to integrate Science, Technology and Innovation in our developmental strategy.

NSC

The National Science Challenge is a clear demonstration that the teaching of science through extra curricular activities is an excellent strategy to ignite the minds of our youth to develop a new interest in the sciences. The questions you answered ranged from scientific curriculum-based subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Biology to Life Sciences.

I would like, once more, to commend RGSC for initiating this laudable project which aligns itself with the Government's policy to encourage a new dynamic thrust to the teaching of sciences. I also take the opportunity to commend the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre for the research presently being undertaken in the field of Science and Society. The findings of this piece of research will be completed before the end of this year, I have no doubt that this project will make a valuable contribution in mainstreaming science awareness and interest for our society's future development.

Events

You will be pleased to note that Mauritius hosted the 1st SADC Science, Engineering and Technology Week last month. The key objective was to raise public understanding of Science, Engineering and Technology.

There are two important events coming very shortly.

- (i) A Workshop on Biomaterials being hosted by the University of Mauritius; and
- (ii) A Bio-Health Mauritius 2009 Conference hosted by Board of Investment

Both events have the full support of my Ministry.

My Message

Be the champions of this growing momentum in favour of Science and develop a critical and scientific mind and a researcher's approach throughout your life. Remember, you will be the citizens of a knowledge-based society and life-long learning will be a way of life. But you will also need a critical mind and science will be of tremendous help to you.

Also, in the new economic trajectory that Mauritius plans for the next twenty years, Science will play a leading role to take the country to new heights. Let me just take an example in medicine to illustrate how science has profoundly changed society in the past 300 years, and how present biomedical research is changing the life of people as never before. In Shakespeare's day, life expectancy for the average worker in Britain was only 30 years. Even by the 1880s, for the malnourished working class, it was still under 40.

Today, life expectancy at birth in Mauritius is nearly 70 years, and we can expect many of us to live healthily into our eighties and nineties and I hope for you, even hundreds. The availability of this extraordinary progress is largely a direct result of advances in the life sciences and improved medical treatment. But we still have many more challenges in the field of Medicine and other fields. The journey must continue. Curiosity and the quest for new knowledge must be nurtured at all times.

Let me share with you a quote from the famous American philosopher, and poet, **Ralph Waldo Emerson** on Science:

The beauty of science lies in its stimulation for creativity and innovation.

Men love to wonder, and that is the seed of science.

RGSC

The Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre is, I am proud to say, the ideal place in Mauritius for fostering this drive for learning sciences through dreams. All science begins one day with a dream, a romance that something is possible and the sky is the limit. RGSC must become a hub for Science Events and a meeting point for Scientists and Researchers. Through the activities of the centre, the world of science must unveil itself in an insatiable spirit of discovery, curiosity and eagerness to learn. Students who participate in such competitions profit from more than just knowledge and expertise, as they get the unique chance to have face to face communication through the friction of minds with other fervent students, and be implicated in the mesmerizing world of scientific research.

Teachers

The organization of such competitions will undoubtedly pave the way for moulding our youth into prospective Scientists and Engineers. I once again reiterate my request for teachers to fully support co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in their programmes in order to demystify science and to persuade more students to opt for science subjects as we will need more scientific graduates in the forthcoming years to allow the smooth transition of Mauritius from an industrial hub to a scientific hub.

I want to assure you all of my unflinching support for Science, Technology and Innovation. When I was at the Ministry of Education, and Human Resources, a pilot project for 21st century science as a core subject until SC was implemented. It is to be recalled that in the Curriculum Reform document it is recommended that students not opting for the Sciences be given, at level of SC, a general coverage of science to enable them, in the future, to have a strengthened Science background to face the requirements of an increasingly technological environment

Science Portal

You will also be pleased to learn that the RGSC has collaborated with other organizations to host the Mauritius Science Portal that acts as a one stop focal point for online science popularization in Mauritius.

Science and Society

The Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre has recently completed a nation-wide survey on the public understanding and attitude of science and technology – a first in Mauritius. A strategic plan for science and society, with this survey as backbone, is also underway.

1st SADC SET Week

In the aftermath of the SADC SET week, it has been proposed that SADC Member States should organise an Annual Science Week. This is an interesting and exciting proposal and I am sure that RGSC will take up the challenge.

All these initiatives in Sciences are illustrative that we are adopting a harmonized and networked approach in the subject, with strengthened inter-institutional collaboration and reduced duplication of efforts. I once again make a strong plea to the Private Sector to support the initiatives of RGSC.

Dear Students, we want to engage you in a life-long journey of discovery. The NSC is one of most appropriate vehicle for this journey.

Before concluding, let me two announcements:-

- (i) The next scheduled event is the launching of a new exhibition on Astronomy in Mauritius for the first time to mark the international year of Astronomy. This event will coincide with the 5th anniversary of the inauguration of RGSC; and

- (ii) The RGSC and the Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators, under the leadership of Associate Professor Yeshwant Ramma is offering a one year Master's Degree Scholarship Programme at the University of Westminster in UK in any Science related subject. More information available at his Science Portal.

Congratulations to all and especially to the winners of the NSC 2009.

May I thank you for your attention.