Order for Second Reading read.  
Madam Speaker: Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun.  
(5.40 p.m.)

The Minister Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Madam Speaker, allow me at the very outset to congratulate and commend the hon. Minister of Health and Quality of Life for coming up with this Mauritius Institute of Health (amendment) Bill which indeed is very timely.

Madam Speaker, the health sector is one where a high level of professionalism is inevitably the order of the day, and where the services provided have to be the top of the grade. We are, indeed, living at a time when public expectation is for institutions to deliver quality services and for the personnel to reflect a high degree of competency in the fulfilment of their responsibilities. I do appreciate this fact, Madam Speaker, as myself, as Minister of Education, I am responsible for the Human Resources Development in the island.

The Mauritius Institute of Health (Amendment) Bill proposes to review the roles and functioning of the Institute, making it the focal point for the training of personnel in the 98 health sector, for ensuring continuous professional development for the health sector professionals as well as for providing and promoting Medical Healthcare Research. Madam Speaker, this is totally in line with the vision that we have at the Ministry of Education; the vision of moving towards excellence in all the programmes of study that we offer.

Hon. Members would have noted that the amendments proposed have a three-pronged approach, and I propose to talk about these three approaches. The first one is obviously the building of capacity of the health personnel through continuous professional development; the second prong relates to the dissemination function, and the third to the building of partnerships.

Allow me, Madam Speaker to briefly elaborate on these three aspects. This Bill seeks to promote what should be central to all government policies, capacity building and facilitation for real professionalism.

Madam Speaker, what is capacity building? I do not intend to elaborate on the definition of the term. Suffice it to say that it helps in strengthening abilities of individuals to perform their core functions in a sustainable manner. Obviously, the payback is
enormous both for individuals and for the medical institutions in which they operate. For the personnel of the health sector, this means an empowerment, their capacity to develop is promoted, and their capacity to implement activities related to their domain also is promoted in accordance with changing and emerging needs. It is clear, Madam Speaker, as someone once put it, we cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails. With the enhanced training and resulting improved service provided, medical institutions will gain in repute and credibility, and this would be enormous.

Madam Speaker, it will be possible by virtue of public recognition of the organisational efficiency and effectiveness. As you can see, the MIH function will, through the amendments proposed, widen the functioning of the institution so that it will now be in a position to carry out assessment of needs of the health workforce as well as to identify the constraints faced by the medical personnel.

Madam Speaker, this is the underlined principle behind some of the enunciations in section 3 of the Mauritius Institute of Health (Amendment) Bill. At the same time, I would like to bring to the attention of the House subsection (1) (b) of the same section 3, which relates to the fact that the MIH will - “organise the training of local health personnel,(…)” To which is added - “as well as overseas participants(…)”

Madam Speaker, this is no blight. It is, in fact, very much in line with our vision of positioning Mauritius as a knowledge hub, attracting learners and practitioners to come to us, to upgrade their skills and their competencies. And this is possible because Mauritius has built a reputation of its own in the field of training in the health sector. I do agree it was initially in the original Act but, today, it gains a new momentum in the present terms. For too long we have been turning to other countries to learn from their practices, mostly good practices. Over the years, we have rather been underestimating our capacity to be a beacon for others and thus share with others what we are good at.

Madam Speaker, nowadays, whenever we go outside the country, we go to conferences to find people from the region expressing their wish to come and learn from us, expressing their wish to come and find out how do we manage here, in Mauritius, to succeed in various fields.

I am glad to say that even the World Bank, today, acknowledges that whatever we are doing here is very worthy and can be used as models for countries of the region. Only this week, the World Bank has asked the Ministry of Education to come and present the reforms that we are implementing in the sector to countries of the region. So, officers from my Ministry will be moving and giving a sort of an exposé on how we are proceeding. So, we do have our competencies. I must say that we have been turning to Singapore a number of times, to other countries, but, today, we, ourselves, can provide our expertise and our help to countries requiring it.
Over the last few years, Madam Speaker, we have been reversing the trend, and just as the latest global rankings have been demonstrating, we are not being here widely congratulatory, but let us recognise that there are plenty of domains, and health and education are two of these where we can definitely share our good practices.

The hon. Minister of Health and Quality of Life provided and rightly pointed out today that the MIH has been receiving a number of requests for capacity building or/and continuous professional development for health with personnel from countries of the region. We cannot deny the fact that nurses trained by the MIH have always been very well welcome 100 in countries like England, Britain and elsewhere as well. Germany has just made a request to Mauritius to get nurses trained over here to be sent to Germany. So, we do have this capacity.

I must say that I totally agree with the hon. Minister of Health and Quality when he says that the next step that we need to take is to move towards partnership. We already have a number of partnerships as just mentioned by the hon. Minister. I will not go over these again.

But the other prong that we were talking about, and which I referred to earlier, was that of partnerships. Sharing our knowhow and how to with countries in the region does not imply adopting a riding the high horse stand. It is not that we are being boastful, quite the contrary. We always have to learn, and international and regional organisations have a lot to offer, including in terms of expertise, both human and technical. Hence, the Bill makes a strong case at subsection (l) for proper alliances to be struck for increased collaboration.

The hon. Minister mentioned the collaboration with Bordeaux. In the field of medical education, we also have collaboration with Imperial College of England, we have collaboration with Genève, we have collaborations with a number of other institutions. I think this is the way forward. Across the world, the trend is such that we move towards internationalisation of the tertiary sector or the professional sector. This is what we are doing.

This is very much in line with the path taken by my Ministry. One does not exclude the other. The MIH is providing services, is providing training for the health personnel, but we are also collaborating with the MIH at the level of the polytechnics, and there will be other institutions also operating. I must state here that the Tertiary Education Commission, the MQA, are all institutions that are ensuring that the courses or the programmes offered in Mauritius are of the top quality. I would like to stress and underline here, Madam Speaker, that the medical education provided in Mauritius is of the top class. Students leaving SSR Medical College or ANNA Medical College have obtained 100% success at the entrance examination in India as well as in other countries in the western world.

Now I must also say that the Minister of Health will be able to acknowledge this, that students having completed their MBBS in Mauritius enter the system with no hassles, no problem at all, and perform extremely well at the level of the hospitals. So, we have nothing
to say about these institutions. True it is that in the past, we have had a very, let’s say, painful experience with DY Patil post graduate courses, but this Government, the moment we set in, we have tried, with the help of the Imperial College of London to get these students back, les récupérer, Madame la présidente, afin de les permettre de poursuivre leur carrière. This is 101 what we have done, we have mopped out the mess left by the former Government, but we have done it and this successfully, with the help of foreign institutions, true it is, but we have managed to do it.

Madam Speaker, when we talk about collaboration, when we talk about partnership, partnership also exists between the MIH and public institutions. I will talk a bit later about the partnership we have made between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education through the MIH and Polytechnics Mauritius.

Madam Speaker, let me now quickly consider the third prong. I am here referring to dissemination. Section 3 subsections (h), (i) and (j) makes a strong case for the dissemination of health related information, whether for qualification of upgrading, capacity building or public awareness purposes, this will be widely welcome by all. Whether the health personnel or the members of the public, especially at a time when our educated population is increasingly health conscious and driven by the need to understand health-related issues.

As for those operating in the sector, lifelong learning is here to stay. The Ministry of Health had come up, I think last year, with a continuous professional development of health practitioners. Now, the coming up of the MIH and other institutions, namely the Open University and other universities, like the UTM, Medical practitioners are capable of going for their training for continuous professional development and this will now be supported by the MIH as well. Beside, such facilities will certainly serve the sector well in not simply improving the type of services being dispensed, but also in attracting and retaining highly qualified personnel.

Madam Speaker, this correlation, the nexus between education and health is enormous, there is a huge state of interdependency between both, knowledge skills and attitude development, care-say in education, and thus, is incomplete without physical, mental and emotional well-being. So, there is a very close correlation between the two sectors, mens sana in corpore sano is replete with significance in demonstrating that mutual dependence and collaboration is important.

I need to place on record, my sincere appreciation to my colleague the Minister of Health and Quality of Life for translating our collaborative ventures into actual facts. Already the strategic partnership of the MIH with Polytechnic Mauritius has resulted in a National Diploma in Nursing Programme being run in the Polytechnic at Pamplemousses. 80 students are presently being trained. Such collaboration is called upon to reach greater
heights, especially in view of the fact that this Government is facing a huge emphasis on the sustenance of a maintenance culture.

The health sector resorts to the services of lab technicians, radiology technicians, biomedical engineers and the like, and all of them work with equipment that have to be maintain spic and span and up to the hilt. Polytechnic will certainly be there to help make that a reality. We are going together with the Ministry of Health to provide programmes for the training of this personal. The needs analysis will be done versus the Ministry of Health which knows the sector but, on the other hand, we, at the level of the Ministry of Education, we provide the courses, obviously in collaboration with the MIH wherever it is required.

Madam Speaker, the MIH is called upon to be the focal point for training in the Health Care Sector and will be the awarding body with regard to the training it will be providing. It goes without saying that this will mean the institute will have overall responsibility for the standard and quality of the qualification. I have absolutely no doubt that it will live up to this responsibility as well.

This is where people who think that we are moving in opposite directions are wrong. We are working in collaboration and different institutions will have their role to play. I will also insist upon the fact that the norms of quality assurance will have to be abided by, and the institute will maintain - and it will - the trust it has earned in the sector by committing itself to the highest standards of quality.

Madam Speaker, it is important for me to mention here, that the institute will obviously link up with different Boards and institutions, as it legitimately should, and the MQA, the Tertiary Education Commission that operates under the aegis of my Ministry will provide all support necessary to ensure compliance with provisions for registration and accreditation.

Madam Speaker, I would like to go back to what hon. Quirin had mentioned earlier, he was worried about how I would take it, that the MIH would be the focal point for the training of the health personnel. I think the MIH is an institution which has been training the health personnel for years now, and I think it quite normal that, like the various other institutions of the country know and be aware of the needs of the sector. So, apart from the role played by the Human Resources Development Council, there will be collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education to further ensure that the courses, the programmes that we are providing meet the demands of the sector, this is how we operate here in this Government. There is collaboration and cooperation between Ministries, there is no competition, we are complementary to each other.

Madam Speaker, as an end note, I commend my colleague Minister of Health and Quality of Life for modernising and revamping the existing MIH Act, such that it can better
meet the challenges and take advantage of new opportunities that are presenting themselves to the health sector here.

Madam Speaker, I thank you and all Members for their attention.
Madam Speaker: Hon. Dr. Husnoo.
(8.00 p.m.)