

Speech – Graduation Ceremony

Chancellor, Dr Louis Jean Claude Autrey

Honourable Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, Mrs Leela Devi Dookhun -Luchoomun (IF PRESENT)

Pro-Chancellor, Mr Preaduth Chitamun

Vice-Chancellor Professor Romeela Mohee

Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academia) Professor Hussein Subratty

Pro-Vice Chancellor (Planning and Resources) Associate Professor Thanika Juwaheer

Members of the Congregation

Distinguished academics

Distinguished guests

Graduands

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning to you all.

On the very outset, on behalf of MEXA, I would like to congratulate Dr Louis Jean Claude Autrey upon his installation as Chancellor of the University of Mauritius.

I am indeed deeply honoured to be the Guest Speaker for the University of Mauritius Graduation Ceremony for the students of the Faculty of Social Studies and Humanities, that of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and of the Mauritius Institute of Education.

An honour indeed it is for me.

15 years ago, I was a fresh graduate of the University of Mauritius and I would never have thought that one day I would be the main guest to address a similar audience.

Looking at the smiling faces that are going to graduate today reminds me of my days as a student at the University of Mauritius. Unlike many others, at the end of my secondary schooling, I had opted to pursue my tertiary education at the University of Mauritius because I firmly believe in the education system of Mauritius.

When I look back at those 15 years, I realise that I had taken the right decision to place my trust in this academic temple. Yes, I must say that the University of Mauritius has imparted onto me the desired academic fundamentals but has also empowered me with the right work ethics and values.

Chancellor, you can rely on me to be one of the best ambassadors of the University of Mauritius in all national and international forums that I will be attending throughout my career.

L&G, undeniably, the Export Manufacturing sector still remains one of the main engines of the Mauritian economy. With an export turnover of Rs 47 billion annually, and a share of 6% to the national GDP, the Export Manufacturing sector is the largest employer on the private sector front. Today, it employs 55, 000 people directly including around 22, 000 expatriate workers. It further creates jobs for some 155,000 people indirectly through ancillary sectors such as the entire supply chain sector, the Insurance and Banking sector and so on.

Over the last 44 years, this sector has been surfing over the waves of international crisis, surmounting each challenges and today it is described as the most resilient and innovative sector of the country.

The success behind this performance is the ability of our operators to maximise on those challenges and making the most of the opportunities thereof. The sector is continuously investing in new technology and in the upgrading of its manpower's capabilities.

Continuous improvement through productivity and efficiency enhancement is our motto. Constant market and product diversification is the mantra of our export operators. For a small country like Mauritius today is exporting more than 90 lines of products to more than 100 countries of the world.

It is true to note that the export sector started with 2 main pillars; the Textile & Apparel sector and the Jewellery, Watch and Diamond sector in the 1970s. In the late 90s, the seafood sector took birth and gradually became an essential asset in the ocean economy strategy. Moreover, today we are witnessing the emergence of other high-tech sub-sectors such as Light Engineering, Agro-Based and the bio-medical sector.

Our vision is to have a second industrial miracle, building around an efficient high-tech manufacturing sector which will be in line with the economic agenda of the country which is to make Mauritius a high income earning country.

Similar objectives have been embraced by countries like Singapore, Germany and Ireland. They are today the most developed countries of the world and yet each one of them has a vibrant and high-tech manufacturing sector which according to economists has proven to be important to shield any economy against any crisis. For instance, Germany attributes its positive economic performance to its strong manufacturing sector despite the economic crisis. A salient point to be noted in these economies is the excellent working collaboration between the academia and the industry.

Indeed, the achievement of a second miracle of the country will not happen without the support of our academic institutions. High calibre, efficient and qualified human capital constitutes the backbone of our industrial development. It is also important to point out that presently, there is a deficiency of skills in high expertise areas. A look at the statistics of the occupational permit division of the Board of investment clearly illustrates that the number of foreign consultants employed by the manufacturing sector has significantly increased in 2014 as compared to 2013.

By high calibre staff, we mean a refrigerant for the seafood processing sector, a marine bio technologist for our ocean economy, a dye master for the textile and apparel sector, a treasury management executive to manage foreign exchange risks, micro-mechanic technicians for our Jewellery, Watch, bio-medical sector, researchers to come up with innovate ideas, product and processes and so on. We will also need our people to work in business units at international level.

We do feel that there is a wide potential for our youth in the high-skilled technical jobs in the export sector. The export sector can be a provider of solutions to the current youth unemployment dilemma at the supervisory level and middle management level. Today all our middle management employees are Mauritians. Under the Youth Employment Programme, the export sector is one of the largest employers of youth.

MEXA is also very concerned with the current mismatch between the academia and the industry. We, at MEXA, have gone beyond blame games and we have taken the responsibility to develop our own industry-based curriculum under the Dual Training Programme to cater for the needs of the industry.

In this context, MEXA has already developed the first industrial-based programme in the field of engineering with Universite des Mascareignes. The course is known as Technician Diploma in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering for industries. We would also like to stress on the fact that this diploma course has been over-subscribed by our export companies.

The main beneficiary of this industry-based course will be the youth. It will also be an opportunity to attract employment of the youth to the industry by providing them a decent job and the opportunity to pursue their studies. Based on the concept of “Alternance”, the young trainee will be working as well as following the course on a principle of 3 days work and 3 days at the University weekly. At the end of the 3 years, the youth would not only have obtained a diploma but also industrial experience.

We are now working on similar projects such as micro-mechanics with the University of Mauritius and we will continue to develop such programs with the help of other academic institutions.

Before ending my address, I would like to stress on the importance of having the right attitude to work. The members of MEXA have often reported that our young graduates are often very demanding. What employers are looking for today in their new employees are hard work, dedication, commitment and assertiveness which will help their company to achieve their set objectives.

Your academic institution has empowered you with the right qualification and it is now up to you to maximise on the opportunities in front of you in a very humble way. With the present high level of unemployment rate, it is not easy to find the right job with the right salary.

You are the craftsmanship of your own destiny! Once one of the HR Gurus, Mr Dan Bundhoo who passed away last month, told me that the best university of the world is the University of Life for what you get to learn throughout your career is not captured in a theory or a book.

With all humility, I would like to take my own example. I started with a salary well below the market rate. I strongly believe in a very important principle of life which is hard work always pays.

On these note, L&G, I would like to thank all the institutions, namely the University of Mauritius, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the Mauritius Institute of Education for having given me this opportunity to address you today. On behalf of MEXA, we reiterate our commitment to support the University of Mauritius in its initiatives.

Dear Graduands, I would like to congratulate you all for the good work and achievement. I would also like to salute the courage of the students of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and

the Mauritius Institute of Education, who have gone a step further in their career by pursuing their education.

All the very best for your future and thank you for your attention.

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Director, MEXA

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