

Message

Dear Students,

Independence Day is always a singular moment for me to address a personal message to you.

It is the strong belief of the founding fathers of our country in education as a fundamental right, that has led us on the path of development and progress.

In the face of adversity and severe financial constraints, the first Prime Minister of Independent Mauritius, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, remained unflinching in his determination to provide free primary and secondary education for all.

Free transport for students, since 2005, has helped to further alleviate the financial burden on families and made schooling for all more accessible.

Such opportunities are not available in many countries. I invite you, dear students, to take some time to reflect on the 60 million children or so, around the world, who are not attending school - through no fault of theirs.

I urge you to take stock of the long and arduous way we have travelled since we achieved independence in 1968 to ensure that our children are not deprived of educational opportunities.

The longer you stay in the formal school set-up, the more versatile you will become. The more you steep yourselves in the critical thinking that education

exposes you to, the greater are you likely to develop new skills and competences that will serve you well in your quest for a brilliant career and a life of fulfilment.

It is this principle that underlines my Government's endeavour to offer a wider range of education and training facilities. At the same time, we have to ascertain that our education and training systems remain attuned to the dynamics of an ever-changing world.

No system should measure success by its statistics. The true meaning of education lies in its ability to unleash the potential of individuals and equip them with the skills, knowledge and personal talents needed for life and work.

One of the main thrusts of my Government is to continue to eliminate cultural, economic and social barriers to education, to serve the most marginalised groups of our society, including those with disabilities. We will also focus on raising the standards for high fliers in the pursuit of further scholastic achievements; and we will continue to nurture the emergence of a knowledge-based economy.

Our aim is to open doors and minds. And this aim is underpinned by consistently high levels of investment. This year's budget for the education sector is more than Rs10 billion. I have maintained that the future of our society will always depend on its intellectual capital. That's why I consider that budgetary allocation to education is not an expense; but an investment that brings in high dividends for a society.

Last month we received the visit of Nobel Laureate, Professor Joseph Stiglitz. He was very impressed by our success and our resilience during the world economic crisis.

He rightly said that development is meant to transform the lives of our people and not just the economy.

Every child deserves to be given the opportunity to earn her/his rightful place in society. We will continue to formulate policies and adopt practices that will significantly reduce the number of youth who are not in school while enhancing the academic rigour of the school curriculum.

At the end of the day, however, the outcome will depend on how you, dear students, personally make the most of the opportunities given to you; how you fulfil your responsibilities and show discernment in every decision you take. Remember: the bridge between goals and accomplishment is resolution, resilience and patience.

Access to internet is becoming cheaper and easier. Facebook and Twitter have both revolutionised the new generation. Make good use of such facilities.

Education is also about helping you to sort out the wheat from the chaff. I urge you to guard yourselves against a new set of threats, including those that the information age may bring in its wake. I recommend that you adopt a well-balanced and healthy lifestyle that will allow you to develop your potential to the fullest.

In this context, I invite parents to actively participate in their children's education; to guide them, to encourage them, so that they can identify the programmes that best fit their needs and aptitudes. Indeed none of us dealing with children should underestimate the importance and value of what we do. It is essential to realise that we are in a position to make a positive difference to the lives of professionals as well as decision makers of tomorrow and that we fully relish this challenge.

Let me share with you this inspiring quotation from Richard Bach:

“A cloud does not know why it moves in just such a direction and at such a speed... It feels an impulsion... this is the place to go now. But the sky knows the reasons and the patterns behind all clouds, and you will know, too, when you lift yourself high enough to see beyond horizons.”

On this momentous occasion, let us all pledge to harness our collective wisdom in uplifting our nation and take it to new heights.

Good luck in your studies.

Long live Mauritius !

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Prime Minister*

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