

**INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF
THE CHARLES TELFAIR INSTITUTE**

**TELFAIR
MOKA**

WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2011

16 30 HRS

SPEECH

BY

**DR THE HON NAVINCHANDRA RAMGOOLAM, GCSK, FRCP
PRIME MINISTER**

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's inauguration is proof of the significant progress we are making to realize our ambition of transforming Mauritius into a regional knowledge hub and a centre of excellence for tertiary education.

The idea of a private university was first mooted in 1997. I recall a meeting with my friend Jean Marc Harel of DCDM, when he spoke so passionately about his desire to set up a private university in Mauritius.

DCDM in those days enjoyed the reputation of being THE nursery of professional accountants.

The initiative of establishing a private university was pursued by Robin Harel together with Kadress Pillay, the former Minister of Education. It was subsequently decided to create the DCDM Business School using the existing training centre as its nucleus.

You have come a long way since.

This fine piece of infrastructure which is an exclusively private sector venture, is quite impressive. Since you started in 1999, you have not leveraged on infrastructure alone but have endeavoured to be a beacon of teaching and research.

Perhaps many of you don't realize it – the idea of setting up of a university in Mauritius was first proposed by Adrien d'Epinau in the 1830's.

Remy Ollier was bitterly opposed to it – he saw it as a ploy to close the Royal College to non-whites Mauritians.

This debate went on and on for decades and decades.

In 1949 – the Mauritius Legislature rejected the idea of a university as being unrealistic, utopian and unworkable.

Ten years later, in 1959 – the Labour Party evoked the idea of a university in Mauritius.

And again there was a lot of opposition.

In fact I remember one anecdote about what was going on then.

I had a wonderful chemistry teacher called, Serge Fanchette.

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam had asked a Committee to look into the feasibility of a University in Mauritius. Serge Fanchette was one of the members of that Committee.

One day, he told me what had happened in Sir Seewoosagur's office.

He said they produced a report which they handed over to him.

He looked at the report and then angrily tore it up in front of them.

The Committee had concluded that there were not enough students and teachers. There was no critical mass to start such an institution of higher learning and therefore it would cost too much – it would not be value for money and it would be more economical to continue to allow our students to go to university abroad.

Sir Seewoosagur did not agree.

He said experts only look at everything in terms of money and had no vision.

He said not only he wanted the project to go ahead, but he wanted a larger plot of land for future expansion.

They were saying there was not enough students, Sir Seewoosagur was thinking of future expansion.

Events proved him right once again.
And the University was set up in 1965.

There is a lesson to be drawn here.

Leadership means long term vision and not see everything in terms of rupees and cents.

Leaders must not only have vision but they must doggedly pursue that vision in spite of vociferous opposition, so that the vision becomes reality.

It is very similar to the debate, about a geriatric hospital.
Experts, well-intentioned as they are, are not necessarily right.

And if you think – the idea of a University was first mooted in 1830 by Adrien D'Epinay but it finally became reality in 1965 – 135 years later !

And yet, in 2011, we still have people who think that Rome was built in a day !

During my first mandate, we created the University of Technology in 1999.

Today, the University of Mauritius and the University of Technology have a total enrolment of 15,665 students, providing excellent training opportunities for our youth.

Compared to the 70s, when there was only one university, we have at present two public universities, 11 other public tertiary institutions, in addition to the 53 private ones.

The shareholders of the Charles Telfair Institute, include some prominent captains of industry. This endorsement of my Government's policy represents an opportune contribution to government's objective of ensuring the sustainability of economic progress and development in our country.

This involvement of the business sector in major educational projects is important to match people with the right skills to jobs available. Job creation, on one hand, and improvement of skills levels, on the other, are only part of the equation: skills mismatch lead to unemployment and reduce competitiveness.

The job market is changing rapidly and in unpredictable ways. This is a real challenge both to employers and to Government.

Strategic partnerships forged by the Charles Telfair Institute with institutions of repute, like Curtin from Australia, and professional bodies from UK and South Africa will be instrumental in identifying and imparting versatile skills so important for employability.

There is irrefutable proof that investment in human capital and in tertiary education yields high level and specialised human resources, essential for economic growth and social cohesion and also for responding to global challenges.

In today's world, it is those countries which have a highly qualified workforce which will succeed.

We are living in the knowledge economy.

Education remains the key not only for personal development and social mobility but also for the economy.

We had the good fortune of having Professor Stiglitz here some time back. He was invited by the private sector and they need to be applauded for having invited him here.

I should add – Professor Stiglitz is a Nobel Prize Winner in Economics and was the chief economic adviser to President Clinton as well as the chief economist at the World Bank, amongst others.

It was his first visit to Mauritius and he was amazed how we have managed to make so much progress in so short a time and without natural resources.

On his return he wrote an article in New York and he spoke of the Mauritian miracle and he said the US ought to learn a thing or two from Mauritius where all citizens enjoy high standards of healthcare and education.

And he said our leaders had the vision to recognize that without natural resources, our people were our only asset and that we rightly focused on education for all.

That is the key to our success.

And you know how when Sir Seewoosagur took the momentous decision to make education free in 1977, what bitter opposition there was.

The same arguments by the same class of people – Those who always oppose any new and unconventional idea.

Again we heard of how the country was going to be bankrupt and so on.

And yet that decision was the vital key to our success story.

I remember how Sir Seewoosagur used to quote Malcolm Forbes and say “Education’s purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.”

But our success does not mean we should sleep on our laurels.

We must continue to endeavour to improve further.

And we have some issues which we need to address and which we are addressing.

Our gross tertiary enrolment rate is still too low.

It was only 15% in 2000.

Thanks to our efforts it went up to 47% in 2010.

Our ambition is to reach 70% by 2015.

That is why I have created a new separate Ministry for Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology.

In 2000, Government expenditure for tertiary education was Rs 504.5 Million. For this year, the budgetary commitment of Government to tertiary education is Rs 870 Million.

The Charles Telfair Institute will further enhance this landscape and increase our capacity to provide quality tertiary education, and also to attract more students from neighbouring countries.

Whilst we welcome the setting up of institutions of higher learning, it is imperative that we maintain quality.

Institutions cannot operate in a vacuum. They have to undergo a continuous process of reform and renewal to avoid the road to obsolescence.

University-Industry linkages are critical for the competitiveness of our country. The example of Singapore is valuable since they have made tangible efforts to co-relate their development policy and research programmes. In Singapore, University grants are dependent upon quality performance.

During my official visit to Singapore, I invited the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) to carry out a thorough quality audit of our tertiary institutions.

A team from the NTU visited us a few months ago.

I am glad to note that the University of Mauritius is currently undertaking a major reengineering exercise to ensure that it can respond more effectively to the human capital needs of our country.

We are planning to set up four new university campuses across the island to further facilitate access to tertiary education – in Pamplemousses, Piton, Rose Belle and Montagne Blanche. I understand that the first campus at Pamplemousses will start next year.

Government has, in this regard, secured some 200 arpents of land for the setting-up of the relevant infrastructure. To diversify the sector, we are in the process of coming up with our first public medical school and a veterinary school.

However, Government cannot do it all on its own. Private sector initiatives and commitment are required to meet the targets of the development trajectory Mauritius is taking.

It is estimated that, in 2020, 31.5% of jobs in Europe, will need tertiary-level qualifications. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has forecast that, by that same year, there will be some eight million students travelling overseas to seek tertiary education.

I hope to see the Charles Telfair Institute progressively grow into a full-fledged university, focusing on the provision of quality tertiary education programmes including postgraduates and PhDs in key areas, to serve the needs of Mauritians and of students from the region and elsewhere.

Higher education in Mauritius is confronted with exciting challenges. With the dynamism and determination displayed by stakeholders, I am confident that the educational sector will continue to fulfil its mission of preparing the next generation of leaders.

You the youth of this country are the next generation of leaders of our country. What is important is not just get higher education. It is easy to sit in an arm chair and criticise everything under the sun. What is important is to be committed, to think positively and participate in the building of an even more prosperous nation.

Let me quote what the American President Theodore Roosevelt had to say about critics and participation:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

*The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood
who strives valiantly
who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotions;
who spends himself in a worthy cause,*

*who at the best knows in the end the triumphs of high achievement and
who at the worst, if he fails,
at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those
cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat"*

Unquote.

It now gives me great pleasure to declare the Charles Telfair Institute open and I wish all the staff and students God speed.

I thank you for your attention.
