Speech by His Excellency Mr. Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK, President of the Republic of Mauritius, on the occasion of the launching of the Biography, “Un Destin d’Educateur”, of Late Mr Harold Chan Lam, Founder of London College, held at the Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel, on Wednesday 1 October 2014, at 13 30 hours

Dr the Hon. Abdool Rashid Beebeejaun, Acting Prime Minister
Mrs Dorine Chukoury, Lord Mayor of Port Louis
Honourable Ministers
Members of the Mauritius National Assembly
Mrs Thérèse Chan Lam, Widow of late Mr Harold Chan Lam
Mr Terry Chan Lam, Manager/Rector of London College
Members of the Chan Lam Family
Mr YU, Chargé d’Affaires of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China
His Grace The Most Reverend Ian Ernest, Archbishop of the Anglican Church of the Indian Ocean and Bishop of Mauritius
Mr Serge Ng Tat Chung, Author of the Biography of late Mr Harold Chan Lam
Mr Yuan Martial, Respected Historian and Journalist
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen
All Protocol Observed

Good afternoon!

I wish to thank the Members of the Chan Lam Family for having associated me with the launching of this Biography, “Un Destin d’Educateur”, of late Mr Harold Chan Lam, the Founder of the London College.

I would also like to congratulate Mr Serge Ng Tat Cheung for authoring such an insightful and comprehensive recollection of the life and achievements of late Harold Chan Lam.

Our greatest sorrow is that Harold departed too early and did not live to see this special day.

But to my mind there is no better way to pay tribute and immortalise the memory of the visionary person that Harold was.

I am sure through this Biography, the name of Harold will be permanently inscribed in the annals of the London College and the educational landscape in Mauritius, for which he dedicated almost five decades of his life.
He will also be remembered, not only for his contribution in the construction of the edifice of the school, but more importantly, for the unwavering role that he played in the educational sector in Mauritius.

For him education was not only a mission but a divine responsibility as well.

This Biography will also serve to remind generations of the great life of Harold Chan Lam, a life full of compassion, humility, patriotism, service and sacrifice.

I have had the privilege to meet Harold Chan Lam on a number of occasions.

I have also read a lot about him, about his engagement in social work and philanthropic activities.

But to my mind, Harold was, above all, a key figure in the field of education, who fought relentlessly to make education accessible to children coming from poor families.

This is what I read at page 155 of the Biography and that was before the introduction of free education at secondary level in Mauritius:

(Quote)

"Many parents come to see me to seek for a reduced fee which I acceded to voluntarily, and some others were admitted free of charge. Furthermore, annual scholarships were awarded to the best student in each form."

(Unquote)

His deep sense of humanism is also illustrated at the same page of his Biography in the following words, and that was in 1996, on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the College:

(Quote)

"In the context of our Pearl Jubilee, we have in mind to create an awareness in our students and the public at large that, to prepare for the future, means, above all, to alleviate the sufferings of poor people, to try to get rid of such things as exclusion and poverty."

(Unquote)

Throughout his life, Harold Chan Lam was imbued and motivated by such noble ideals.

Because for him, compassion for the poor and the underprivileged and fairness for the cause of education were sacrosanct principles of life.

As we all know, prior to Independence, there were very few secondary colleges in Mauritius, especially in the rural areas.

Students had to travel long distances to attend a College, which in those days were located mostly in Port Louis and in the towns.
Harold Chan Lam and many others like him should be commended for their vision and initiative to set up private secondary schools and for opening access to education to many of our children.

I know his reputation as a dedicated and committed educationist and as a disciplinarian.

During his living, Harold Chan Lam was convinced that discipline was the key to success in life.

If the London College has stood the test of times for almost 50 years, that is mainly due to the discipline that Harold Chan Lam instilled not only in the students but also among the teaching and non-teaching staff.

I understand that at its inception, London College was housed in a modest building with wooden structure.

It had about 100 students on its role.

To-day, thanks to the relentless effort of Harold Chan Lam, London College stands majestically over a magnificent three-storey building.

The school population is over 1300 students (boys and girls combined) with a staff of 90 members.

I also read in the brief that was made available to me that the College is running HSC classes including professional and vocational education.

Over the past three years, the College has registered an average pass rate of 69.3% and 89.3% at the Higher School Certificate and School Certificate examinations respectively.

This is indeed a very encouraging and laudable achievement for a school that had a modest beginning at its start.

I am sure that with the management that it has at present as well as the team of motivated staff, the College can aspire to attain a higher pass rate in the years to come.

It is also a matter of pride that London College was the first College in Mauritius to introduce the teaching of Agricultural studies in its school curriculum.

Ladies and Gentlemen

A famous philosopher once said:

“A nation is not built on great ideals but its educational institutions.”

Glad am I to note that since its creation, London College has epitomised excellence and quality education.
If London College is what it is to-day, a highly respected and reputed educational institution, that is because Harold Chan Lam had fought to preserve high standards at the school at all levels.

As Mr Serge Ng Tat Cheung rightly reminds us at page 33 of the Biography and I quote :

“Harold Chan Lam se nourrissait aussi et au tréfonds de lui-même, des vertus de familles laborieuses, appliquées, œuvrant de leurs mains propres, à la seule sueur de leur front, et dans une naturelle prédisposition aux sacrifices nourries du rêve d’un avenir différent. Un avenir à forger, certes, par l’effort au travail, l’ardeur du poignet et le sens du sacrifice.”

(Unquote)

Going through the Biography of Harold Chan Lam, I also came across a beautiful extract of the speech that he made on the occasion of the 35th Anniversary of the College in July 2001, and which I found very inspiring and which I believe should be shared with you.

Let me quote it :

“To-day, when I look back over the past 35 years of London College, I am really very proud that I have been able to place this institution among the best of the island. I have devoted my whole life to London College, and now I want to leave this institution to my beloved country.”

(Unquote)

This perfectly mirrors the vision and the dream that he had of London College.

To-day, London College stands as a citadel of excellent learning in our education sector in Mauritius.

There is no doubt that we will not see the like of Harold Chan Lam again with an indomitable courage and behavior.

We can rightly say of him that whereas some men see things as they are and say why not.

He dreamt of things that never were and said why not.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The only way in which we can honour his memory is for us to adopt these ideals and imbibe the lessons of his life.

As you commemorate the memory of the Founding Father of this prestigious institution, it is my wish that you continue to keep up that level and spirit in the wider interest of your students as well as the interest of our education system.

I would like to commend Mr Terry Chan Lam, the current Manager/Rector of the College for pursuing the ideals and the vision of his illustrious father.
Because the future of education does not belong to those who are content with it to-day, apathetic, timid and fearful in the face of new ideas and bold projects.

According to me, it will inevitably belong to those who can blend vision, reason and courage to the ideals and challenges that our education system demands.

That is the only way that we can take our education sector to the next step in this 21st Century.

I am sure, that is the way that Harold Chan Lam wanted and lived.

While his profound humanism is well known, having been an educationist, he had no doubt a clear vision of what was right and what was wrong in education.

For those of you who have known Harold from close would surely agree that he was much too fond of the right to prefer the wrong or the expedient.

In conclusion, let me quote what the famous English poet, literary critic and philosopher, Samuel T. Coleridge, once said:

(Quote)

“How well he fell asleep!
Like some proud river, widening toward the sea;
Calmly and grandly, silently and deep,
Life joined eternity.” (Unquote)

The truest end of life is to know that life never ends.

Death is no more than a turning of us over from time to eternity.

“Un Destin d’Educateur” will remain a reminder that “some man hath lived long that he has had a short life”.

With these words, I would like to reiterate my thanks and appreciation to you all for the invitation you have extended to me this afternoon.

I wish to convey my special greetings to Mrs Thérèse Chan Lam for having been such a faithful and dedicated companion to late Harold.

To his children, Jerry, Terry and Penny, I say you have every reason to be proud of your father for as Terry himself says, “He was a just man.”

It’s my pleasure now to officially launch this Biography – “Un Destin d’Educateur”, of late Harold Chan Lam, which I commend to all our readers.

I thank you for your attention.