



## **SPEECH**

**His Excellency Mr Dharambeer Gokhool G.C.S.K., President of the  
Republic of Mauritius**

**EVENT: NATIONAL ESSAY COMPETITION-  
AWARD CEREMONY**

**VENUE: STATE HOUSE, REDUIT**

**DATE: 02 June 2025**

**TIME: 10:00 HOURS**

## **Protocol**

Dr the Honourable Kaviraj Sukon, Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research, and Mrs Sukon

Dr the Honourable Mahend Gungapersad, P.D.S.M., Minister of Education and Human Resource

Mrs Mudaliar, Secretary to the President

Senior Officials and Representatives of the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Ministry of Education and Human Resource

Members of the Jury

Distinguished Guests

Esteemed Parents and dear Awardees

Members of the Media

All Protocol Observed

## **Introduction**

Good morning and a very warm welcome to all of you to State House, for the Award Ceremony of the National Essay Competition 2025 that we launched in the context of our nation's 57th Independence celebrations.

You have just heard both Honourable Ministers share their valuable perspectives on the Essay Competition: its objectives, its organization and implementation, participation, assessment, and its significance.

Let me thank the Honourable Ministers for their thoughtful address and, with your permission, I would like to take this opportunity to add a few reflections, from the State House perspective about today's event.

And I hope it will help to capture the driving spirit and ethos behind this innovative project - an initiative by State House in close collaboration with the two Ministries in the Education sector.

I will also add a few thoughts about the future of this project.

### **Background and context of the initiative**

Let me start by giving some context to the 'why' and 'how' of this event.

As you know, I became the President of the Republic on 7th December, 2024.

You might remember the famous quote by William Shakespeare in his play Twelfth Night:  
"Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them".

I cannot say that I was born great; nor can I say that I achieved greatness. I would not even say that greatness was thrust upon me either.

But I can say that I was entrusted with highest position in the Republic as the President of the Republic of Mauritius.

As per Section 28 of our Constitution, I am the guardian of our Constitution and the main mission of the Presidency is nation building,

and this mission has to be fulfilled with the active support, involvement and inclusion of all sections of the population.

That is why, in my first address to the nation, I stated that I shall endeavour to be the People's President.

A philosophy, a spirit, an ethos that drives all initiatives, activities and events of State House;

In line with the Government Programme 2025-29 which I had the honour to present to the nation on 24th January, 2025.

Our children and youth constitute a strategic partner and a key stakeholder in our dream of a new future for our Republic.

They will be called upon to be the leaders of tomorrow, and the destiny of our country will rest on their shoulders.

It is therefore our duty to create opportunities, encourage them to take initiatives, provide them with guidance, broaden their intellectual horizon, ignite in their hearts and minds love for the country, and inspire and motivate them to aim for excellence.

12 March, Independence Day, is a defining moment for all Mauritians- we all come together around our quadricolour as one people, as one nation.

And renew our commitment to live in peace, justice and liberty.

As part of our Nation Building journey, what better opportunity than to bring together our children and youth around the unifying theme of Independence to read, research, reflect and write.

This is how the idea of a National Essay Competition for our children and youth was born. While preparations were on for the celebration of Independence Day 2025, the State House team decided to create an

event that would provide a platform for students to reflect on the legacy of our independence and to imagine the future they wish to shape.

It would be the right moment to engage our youth to seriously reflect on the lessons to be drawn from our own history, to understand the role played by our forefathers in the quest for freedom, sovereignty and national identity.

The sacrifices they endured, the adversities they faced until they acquired the right to vote in 1947, to those above 21 years old who could pass a literacy test before being extended to anyone above 18 years of age as from December 1975.

It was an epic struggle which needs to be remembered by all generations.

The right to vote was synonymous to independence, liberty which allowed us to take our destiny in our own hands and pave the way for democracy and development to go hand in hand on the road to progress.

This competition was an invitation to participants;

- a) to seriously reflect on the lessons to be drawn from our own history, to understand the role played by our forefathers in the quest for freedom, sovereignty and national identity, and
- b) to better engage in a more informed manner with our contemporary issues.

### **Writing skills**

The Essay competition was not limited to a historical introspection.

The second reason, Ladies and Gentlemen, why I wanted to see our youngsters who are attending formal learning institutions engage in this Essay writing competition, is very simple.

As an academic and a former Minister of Education, I am convinced that we must all engage in a deep reflection on what strong action needs to be taken to bring back and strengthen the culture of writing among our school-going population.

Just like reading, writing is also in the decline.

We are all aware of the inroads made by what is called the digital communication.

Technology is killing the old habit of handwriting, putting pen to paper which shaped the minds, character and personality of learners and could reveal more about you than you might think.

How many of us remember Penmanship; the art of beautiful or graceful handwriting, and its multiple benefits, including its impact on communication, cognitive development, and even professional success?

This may not be the appropriate forum to debate on the merits and demerits of traditional writing and technological writing, and the pervasive influence of AI.

But we must all agree that writing per se is an essential foundational skill and forms part of the 3Rs - Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, crucial for improving numeracy and literacy in students as well as for academic success and progress.

Therefore, the second reason, Ladies and Gentlemen, why I wanted to see our students attending formal learning institutions engage in this Essay writing competition is very simple:

I am deeply convinced that we must all engage in a deep reflection on what strong action needs to be taken to bring back and strengthen the culture of writing and reading among our school-going population.

The Essay competition was therefore also an invitation for our youth to nurture their writing and reading skills.

Our modern-day phenomenon is the dexterity developed by many-- particularly the young, but not only! — in using abbreviations ( LOL) , contractions (msg for message), use of numbers to represent sound (gr8 for ‘great’) when communicating.

We even have a word for that: Textspeak. Worse, words are now being replaced by emoji’s !

Now, while I appreciate that, in a world where the pace of life has shot up, where time is of the essence, and rapid-fire communication has almost become the norm, people just don’t want to spend too much time constructing coherent, grammatically sound and well-crafted sentences.

A pity, though.

The 3Rs - Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic - are foundational skills that are crucial for improving numeracy and literacy in students. They are the core building blocks for academic success and provide students with the necessary tools to learn and thrive. Their influence on the cognitive, psycho-motor skills as well as our ability to remember and recall what we learn is undisputable.

### **Participation and Process**

Once the idea of a National Essay Competition on the theme of Independence was mooted, a dedicated team was set up, composed of volunteers and officers of the two Ministries, to fine-tune and implement the project.

I am happy to note that we received over 1,000 entries from students of primary and secondary schools across our Republic, and 20 essays from our tertiary education sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am encouraged to know that overall, the quality of content, clarity of thought, and language proficiency of our participants was heartening.

However, as anticipated in today's digital age, certain entries from universities showed signs of AI-generated content.

In addition, the engagement from University students is significantly less than that from our younger ones.

I would like now to thank and congratulate all our students, educators, mentors, and schools for their willingness, effort to participate and their achievement.

Among these, I want to offer special congratulations to our two winners from the School for the Blind - Lois Lagesse Trust Fund. Your participation, expression, and perspectives are a true reflection of the spirit of our inclusive Republic.

I also congratulate all parents for encouraging your children to engage in critical reflection that will help shape the future of our nation.

Allow me to extend sincere gratitude and acknowledgement to our jury members, whose commitment, patience, and thoughtful deliberation have been pivotal.

I express special appreciation to Professor Dr. Kiran Bhujun, Director of the Tertiary Education and Scientific Research Division at the Ministry of Tertiary Education, as well as Mr Neerunjun Beegun, Acting Director of the Extra-Curricular Section at the Ministry of Education, and all officials of these two Ministries for their unflinching support in the successful implementation of this project.

I also share the joy of this accomplishment today with everybody at the State House.



## **Way forward**

This National Essay Competition is more than just a pioneering, one-time event in the Presidential calendar of activities. It is part of our broader effort to redefine the Presidency as a catalyst for nation building.

There will be a debrief session for this 2025 edition, which we can consider as Edition Zero. Feedback from assessors will be taken on board.

As an integral part of Nation Building, it is my determination to include this National Essay Competition in the Annual Calendar of Events of State House, with new themes and a wider participation.

I look forward to your continued support and collaboration in this enterprise.

Let's continue to give our youths a platform to contribute towards building a united, strong, inclusive, forward looking, and vibrant nation.

I congratulate you all once again for your effort and success.

Thank you for your attention.