



SPEECH

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

**EVENT: 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF
PORT-LOUIS TOASTMASTER'S CLUB**

VENUE: OPIUM RESTAURANT, REDUIT

DATE: 12 JULY 2025

TIME: 18:45 HOURS

Protocol

Mr. Craig Halbmaier, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S Embassy Mauritius

Mr. Aslam Adam Hossenally, Lord Mayor of the city of Port Louis

Mr. Philip Ah-Chuen, Founder Member of the Port Louis Toastmasters Club

Mrs. Chitra Beekoo-Koonja, President of the Port Louis Toastmasters Club

Honourable Members of the Port Louis Toastmasters Club,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All Protocol Observed.

Introduction

A very good evening to you all and thank you for inviting me to the celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Port Louis Toastmasters Club.

I am deeply honoured to be with you tonight to celebrate this remarkable milestone.

Let me begin by extending my warmest congratulations to all members, past and present, in particular Mr Philip Ah-Chuen, Founder-Member, and Mrs. Chitra Beekoo-Koonja, who became the new President of the Port Louis Toastmasters Club this month, for their unwavering commitment to excellence in communication and leadership, vital for expanding human potential and talents.

I thank our previous, eminent speakers who have already shared valuable perspectives and insights into the Club's journey, vision, commitment and activities over the years.

(Personal note)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

An anniversary, the more so, a silver jubilee, is a special occasion for celebration and paying tribute; it is also a time for reflection and new resolutions.

Since my secondary school days, I was fascinated by the Toastmaster initiative.

Unfortunately, I did not connect with it, although now I do realize that it could have been of great benefit to me as I was quite involved in extra-curricular activities.

This celebration has given me the opportunity to reconnect with the movement.

Initiated by Ralph C Smedley, in 1924, it represented a collaborative learning platform to learn and master the art of public speaking and it was grounded in values of **integrity, respect, service, and excellence**, and one that speaks to a universal truth: that the ability to express oneself confidently and clearly is not just a skill, but a cornerstone of leadership and personal empowerment.

This movement reminds us that leadership is not a title but a journey, and that communication is not simply about speaking but rather about connecting.

In a world saturated with noise and overconsumption of information through AI, fake news and an overexposure to conflicts around the world, the need for clarity, empathy, expression, creativity, leadership, humanity and authenticity, particularly through communication, has never been more vital.

Toastmasters: A School of Transformation

So, what this Club has nurtured over the years is not only the Art of public speaking, but also the courage to stand, to speak, and above all, to serve with integrity.

A personal transformational journey for greater confidence, clarity, conviction and competence.

Dear Friends,

As you may be aware, before becoming President, I have been an academic my whole life, teaching at the University of Mauritius, and I have also been the Minister of Education.

So, I have always placed immense value on empowerment through education, inclusive dialogue and civic engagement.

As President of the Republic, I deeply value and support initiatives that strengthen the capacity of our citizens to lead with clarity, compassion, and courage.

In line with this mission, every day, the State House welcomes children, youths, students and senior citizens in a space where we foster constructive dialogue, creative expression, and engage in reflection on key concepts and issues, in order to build a Mauritius that is more just, more equitable, more resilient.

This requires confident voices and authentic leadership from all walks of life.

So, it is imperative that we move forward together– As One people, As One nation, in peace, justice and liberty, true to the ideals of our National Anthem and our Constitution.

And I can say that Toastmasters embody many of these very principles that I so profoundly adhere to.

You are cultivating not just better speakers, but more thoughtful citizens, individuals who listen, reflect, engage with attention and empathy, and act.

From our youth to our elders, from all parts of our Republic, we must empower people to express ideas, challenge the status quo, and inspire change.

And in this regard, the Port Louis Toastmasters Club has played, and I am certain that it will continue to play, a quiet yet powerful transformational role.

Making the platform more gender friendly, inclusive and more equitable is another trademark of your movement.

In 2025, you have emulated what Toastmasters International did when it inducted Helen Blanchard as its first woman President in 1985.

You have a new woman President, Mrs. Chitra Beekoo-Koonja, who is succeeding another woman, the immediate past President of the Port Louis Toastmasters Club, Ms. Brinda Surnam.

A Message to the Next Generation

Friends,

As we gather here this evening, we must not only celebrate achievements but also reflect on the way forward: what we can do more to leave a legacy and a better future for our present and future generations.

So, my message to our younger friends of the Toastmasters Club and indeed to the young people of Mauritius is that: you must never underestimate the power of your voice.

It is your most potent tool- not only to express yourself, but to shape your destiny and uplift others.

Let platforms like Toastmasters be your training ground not just for speeches, but for character development and service to community.

Let your leadership begin here and extend into your communities, your institutions, and your country.

Way Forward

The Government Programme 2025–2029, which I had the honour to present on 24th January 2025, already sets the clear and ambitious course that we are adopting toward a more inclusive, resilient, and forward-thinking Mauritius.

As we embrace digital transformation, regional integration and a more participatory democracy, the role of ethical and visionary leadership becomes ever more critical.

So, your responsibility as Toastmasters is more relevant than ever.

In this connection, I would like to meet you and discuss how we can work together.

I urge you to continue being a catalyst for positive change.

Conclusion

In closing,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to congratulate the Port Louis Toastmasters Club and all its members once again on your silver jubilee.

May you continue to inspire, to challenge, and to lead - not just through words, but through action.

Thank you for inviting me to share in this moment.

It is a privilege to celebrate this achievement with you and I wish you a memorable and happy evening ahead.

I would like to end by this inspirational thought from R. C. Smedley:

Learn by doing

Improve by criticism

Long live the spirit of Toastmasters.

Long live the Republic of Mauritius.

Thank you.