



## **SPEECH**

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

**EVENT: 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF UNIVERSITY OF  
TECHNOLOGY MAURITIUS**

**VENUE: UTM CAMPUS, LA TOUR KOENIG,  
POINT ASUX SABLES**

**DATE: 21 JUNE 2025**

**TIME: 10:00 HOURS**

## **Protocol**

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

Mr Navindsing Jugmohunsing, President of the Board of Governors

Dr Dinesh Kumar Hurreeram, Director General of the the University of Technology, Mauritius

Professor (Dr) Kavi Kumar Khedo, Deputy Director General and Chairperson of the Silver Jubilee Organizing Committee

Former Presidents and former Director General of the University of Technology, Mauritius

Distinguished Academics

Esteemed Staff and Dear Students

Members of the Media

ALL PROTOCOL OBSERVED

## **Introduction**

Good morning.

I thank you for inviting me to the 25th Anniversary celebration of the University of Technology, Mauritius.

As a former academic and a former Minister of Education and Minister of Industry, it is a distinct honour for me to be in your midst this morning to grace this occasion with my presence.

I would like to associate myself with the Hon' Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research, the Director General of UTM and all distinguished guests and well-wishers to pay tribute to the prestigious institution's enduring legacy of democratizing access to Quality Education and shaping generations; embodying excellence and resilience, and convey my best wishes for the path ahead.

### **A New Era: Challenges and Opportunities in Higher Education**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Education landscape and ecosystem across the world is undergoing major, fundamental and unprecedented changes.

The **Global Higher Education landscape** in particular is being reshaped by technological disruption, internationalization, rising expectations for quality, relevance and excellence, inclusion, equity and employability, the growing imperative to align academia with sustainable, national development challenges while confronting funding constraints and limitations.

Our Government Programme 2025-2029, which I had the honour to present on 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2025, outlines the forward-looking vision for our tertiary education system through notably:

- A **“Study in Mauritius”** strategy to promote our country as a preferred destination for international students and academic partnerships-a regional and international education hub
- Improving quality, relevance and flexibility in the design and delivery of educational programmes
- Renewed focus on **interdisciplinary and industry-relevant research.**

- **The Digitalization of Higher Education**

- And the design of **learning outcomes** around employability, entrepreneurship, and ethical citizenship.

UTM, with its track record and regional collaborations, will be called upon to play a critical and catalytic role in helping us materialize this vision.

I am sure that the Ministry of Higher Education, with its recent multi-stakeholder consultations, will be deploying its strategies to reposition the Higher Education sector in a fast-changing economic and political ecosystem.

I would not like to repeat what has been said already about the future trajectory of higher education and the role of UTM.

I would rather take advantage of these celebrations to invite you for an exercise in retrospection, introspection and prospection - about the past, the present and the future of Higher Education - in light of the following remarks.

### **Rise of virtual universities**

First, there are today over 4,700 universities worldwide which offer online courses and the virtual schools market, especially post Covid-19, is predicted to grow to \$16.49 billion by 2033, with a compound annual growth rate of 15.4%.

Online education has witnessed an exponential growth over the past decade, with more than one-third of all college students in the United States taking at least one online course, taking advantage of flexibility, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness.

Online education providers are attracting more students.

This poses a formidable challenge to the so-called traditional brick-and-mortar universities, with greater possibilities for students to access on-line libraries, virtual classrooms and labs.

Financial sustainability is a formidable challenge for Universities.

Second, there is an ongoing debate about the full-scale potential of AI: Will AI eventually replace HI-Human Intelligence? Artificial Super Intelligence is already visible in the emerging AI horizon.

Another issue that must retain our attention is: What will be the impact of AI on jobs, including those in the Education sector?

The answer comes to us in three categories: Jobs that AI will replace, Likely to replace, and Jobs that are safe.

I have with me a list of the third categories. These are:

- Human Resource Managers
- Sales Managers
- Marketing Managers
- Public Relations Managers
- Chief Executives
- Event Planners
- Writers
- Software Developers
- Editors
- Graphic Designers

I leave it to you to guess the answers to the two remaining categories and draw your own conclusions.

Even the list I have just presented is likely to be revisited with further developments in AI.

The fact of the matter is that it is important to reflect on the full impact of AI on Academics and their future when Universities will be transformed into Open Knowledge Institutions (OKIs).

But the clear message is that without AI literacy, job security and employability will be at greater risk.

In fact, on 26<sup>th</sup> May, I had launched our country's Digital Transformation Blueprint 2025–2029, which is a road map for a digital Republic.

So, today's academics must not only understand AI but also aim to become **proficient** in deploying it through learning platforms, chatbots, or generative AI.

For both educators and learners, AI-literacy is no longer an option but a necessity, a priority and an AI culture must be fostered through workshops, certifications, study groups, live discussions, hybrid models, AI tutors, immersive virtual labs, and blockchain-enabled credentialing.

### **Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice**

We have often heard about the mismatch syndrome between University qualifications and industry demands.

How long can we go on lamenting on fatality?

Is it not high time and imperative that Universities embed **industry collaboration, hands-on training, and real-world exposure** into the very fabric of tertiary education to **complement** theoretical knowledge and *make students job-ready and life-ready*?

Internships, industry research partnerships, and on-the-ground learning opportunities are essential to not just build technical skills but also confidence, creativity, and adaptability.

It is absolutely crucial that **academics and students**, keep a critical eye on the *latest developments and practical evolutions in your respective fields of study* and change the long held perception that *University programmes are too academic and theoretical and disconnected with the ground realities of industry and society.*

*Interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary principles must also be embedded in the design of University programmes.*

*The evolution of the STEM concept into the STREAM concept (STREAM stands for Science, Technology, Reading and Writing, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) is a significant improvement in recalibrating the relevance of University programmes.*

*On the other hand, as the frontiers of knowledge keep expanding, lifelong learning must go hand in hand with life wide learning.*

*With the shelf life of knowledge becoming shorter and shorter, Universities must heed the warning given by Alvin Toffler, a few decades ago:*

*"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."*

### **An interdisciplinary and Humanist Approach**

The other issue that we need to take on board is: University Community / Society connection.

We are confronted with unprecedented challenges, from climate change to an ageing population, and widening inequity.

What is the degree of ethics and social responsibility that Universities impart to our students to play their role as engaged and responsible citizens?

- Are **our academics and graduates** being **equipped** with the necessary *understanding of ecology, equity and inclusion, health demographics* to be able **to understand and solve real life problems that affect real people**?
- Let me take another example. We have a **rapidly ageing population** and the percentage of people aged 60 years and above is expected to reach **36.5% by 2061**. The “oldest, old people”, i.e. the population aged 80 years and above, would be **65,461** by that time.

(source: *National Integrated Care for Older People (ICOPE) Strategic and Plan 2022-2026*, [https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2023-03/National%20Integrated%20Care%20for%20Older%20People%20%28ICOPE%29%202022-2026\\_Mauritius.pdf](https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2023-03/National%20Integrated%20Care%20for%20Older%20People%20%28ICOPE%29%202022-2026_Mauritius.pdf))

In case of a flash flood, what initiatives need to be taken to save lives?

Should social consciousness, social awareness form an integral part of the mission and vision of Universities?

Should universities act as a "social conscience"?

As societies face complex challenges, Universities must not remain Ivory Towers but be anchors of community and compassion – through the intersection of disciplines, community engagement, social entrepreneurship, and research that uplifts lives.

Universities should not limit the scope of the knowledge and skills prescribed in the curricula; they must also impart the social and human skills- soft skills- like emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, empathy, leadership, communication, resilience and team work so essential to face life in a fast-changing, turbulent, volatile and unpredictable world.

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and gentlemen



Anniversaries are occasions for celebrations. They are also occasions for thoughtful reflections and resolutions to build better futures.

It is in this spirit that I have taken the opportunity to share with you some of my perspectives about the future of Universities and in particular that of UTM.

In closing, allow me to thank and congratulate you all once again for your leadership and dedication in shaping the minds behind the progress and prosperity of our nation.

But always remember the wise words of John Dewey:

**"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."**

Thank you for your attention.