



## **SPEECH**

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

**EVENT: EXPERIENCE A BLIND NIGHT**

**VENUE: SUGAR BEACH RESORT, FLIC EN FLAC**

**DATE: 27 MARCH 2026**

**TIME: 19:20 HOURS**

## **Protocol**

Mr. Bernard Leong Son, District Governor of Rotary International for the Indian Ocean Region;

Dr. Shree Satya Bappi Ramchurn, President of the Rotary Club of Beau Bassin–Rose Hill,  
Members of the Rotary Club

Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
All Protocol Observed.

## **Introduction**

Good evening.

I am pleased to join you this evening for what promises to be a deeply meaningful and thoughtfully designed initiative.

At the outset, allow me to extend my sincere appreciation to the Rotary Club of Beau Bassin- Rose Hill, under the leadership of its President, Dr Arvin Ramchurn, for its continued commitment to service and for advancing social causes of national significance.

I am aware that the Club’s past contributions, including the donation of cataract extraction equipment, have made a tangible and lasting impact on the lives of many Mauritians.

I also commend Mr Sham Panjabi, as well as all members, collaborators, and organisers, for bringing together this distinguished gathering of corporate leaders, partners, and civil society stakeholders around an issue of profound societal importance: visual impairment and equitable access to eye care services.

I consider this evening, therefore, more than a mere formal gathering, but as a purposeful and experiential occasion rooted in awareness, reflection, empathy and engagement.

## **The Experience of a Blind Night**

I understand that tonight's programme centres on a unique dining-in-the-dark experience, a distinctive and thought-provoking exercise.

Even within a controlled environment, the temporary absence of sight challenges our perception, orientation, and interaction, offering a glimpse into the lived realities of persons with visual impairments.

I am certain that this experience will serve as a practical point of reference, helping us better understand the daily adjustments required in everyday life for those with visual impairment.

More importantly, it invites us to move beyond awareness towards genuine empathy.

I would like to share with you my own personal experience with a classmate of mine, who had visual impairment, during my university days in India.

He used to climb the stairs in the morning to come to my Hostel Room and then we would walk together to our lectures.

I would often try a trick to test him.

Whenever I would see him on the stairs, I would quietly walk down silently thinking that he would not recognise me.

As I would reach a few steps downstairs, he would call me. I would be caught.

He could not see me, he could sense me.

It is a gift that God bestows upon them and God invites us to show empathy towards people with visual impairments.

Empathy is often described as stepping into another person's shoes; yet tonight reminds us that some may not have shoes, or even the same path to tread.

It compels us not only to understand, but also to respond with deliberate action, compassion, and a shared sense of humanity toward those whose experiences may be very different from our own.

### **Significance and Context**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Globally, over 2.2 billion people live with some form of vision impairment, of which approximately 1 billion cases could have been prevented or remain unaddressed.

These figures highlight both the scale of the challenge and the urgent need for inclusive healthcare and sustained awareness.

Mauritius is not exempt from this reality.

More than 100,000 individuals live with disabilities, including visual impairment, a number that has been steadily rising.

The challenges they face extend far beyond medical needs, encompassing social stigma, limited access to training and education, and significant barriers to employment.

Persons with visual impairments are too often wrongly assumed to be entirely dependent, socially isolated, or unable to contribute meaningfully to society - misconceptions that perpetuate exclusion.

These challenges are further compounded by the rising prevalence of chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and hypertension, which can exacerbate eye health conditions.

The Government has already taken significant steps to address these needs, including the commissioning of the new Eye Hospital in Réduit, and the continued enhancement of services across the country.

Yet, much remains to be done to strengthen awareness, prevention, and equitable access to care.

Against this backdrop, the Rotary Club's Corporate 30 initiative is both timely and commendable.

By focusing on health, mentorship, and social responsibility, it exemplifies the critical role that corporate leaders can play in nation-building and in fostering a more inclusive and empathetic society.

### **Presidency Perspective – Inclusion, Equity, and Human Dignity**

As President of the Republic, I remain committed to serving as a People's President, guided by the principles of inclusion, equity, and human dignity.

Drawing upon my lifelong career in education, I firmly believe that leadership must carry a strong human dimension, ensuring that every citizen is empowered to participate fully in society.

It is in this very spirit that, in July 2025, I convened a Round Table on Disability Inclusion and Empowerment at State House, bringing together the United Nations, the National Human Rights Commission, and civil society organisations.

The recommendations arising from this dialogue have already led to the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee on disabilities, aimed at strengthening coordination and improving service delivery across government.

I have also engaged directly with associations such as the Blind and Visually Impaired Association (BAVIA), both at State House and in the field, reflecting our commitment to active and inclusive engagement.

I even participated in a walk with them on 15 October 2025 to mark White Cane Day, as a sign of solidarity.

Our efforts are further reflected in the participation of students from the Lois Lagesse Trust Fund School for the Blind in national

programmes such as the National Essay Competition, which I pioneered last year.

**Let us be clear: inclusion, equity, and dignity are not mere slogans or policy goals – they are national imperatives that define the character of our nation.**

### **Corporate Social Responsibility and Collective Responsibility**

Distinguished Guests,

Tonight also demonstrates the vital role that Corporate Social Responsibility can play in fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and humane society.

CSR is no longer simply about philanthropy; it must be embedded within the ethos, strategy, and daily operations of organisations. Companies bear a responsibility not only to their shareholders but also to all stakeholders - employees, communities, and society at large.

Disability inclusion represents both a moral duty and a strategic opportunity.

Persons with visual impairments often encounter stigma, assumptions of dependency, social isolation, and barriers to education, training, and employment.

By creating accessible workplaces, inclusive policies, and proactive engagement, organisations can challenge these stereotypes, empower individuals, and cultivate dignity and autonomy.

The responsibility to build a society in which no one is unseen or unheard rests not only with government or corporations but with every individual, institution, and community.

Profit and purpose are not mutually exclusive; they can, and must, advance hand-in-hand.

This is how we can cultivate empathy, justice, and a shared sense of national responsibility.

### **Closing Remarks**

On this thoughtful note, allow me to conclude by thanking and commending the Rotary Club of Beau Bassin–Rose Hill, its members, collaborators, and partners for illuminating this important cause and for exemplifying the principle of service above self.

Let this not remain a singular moment of reflection, but rather become a sustained movement of awareness, engagement, and action.

Mauritius has always drawn its strength from unity, shared values, and a collective commitment to human dignity.

Together, let us strengthen this legacy and continue building a society where every citizen, regardless of ability, is empowered, included, and valued - **As One People, As One Nation.**

Thank you for your attention.