

**GRADUATION CEREMONY: FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
AND HUMANITIES**

**Address by Mr. R. Basant Roi, Governor, Bank of Mauritius  
September 3, 2002**

Pro-Chancellor, Mr. Surendra Bissoondoyal  
Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Goolam Mohamedbhai  
Pro-Vice Chancellors, Prof. Fagoonee and Prof. Hookoomsing  
Registrar, Mrs. Goordyal  
Deans and Members of Faculties  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

I am privileged to deliver the address at your graduation ceremony this morning. Before addressing my fellow students – I call you fellow students, as I do not believe that I have stopped learning – let me first express my appreciation to your lecturers and professors who expend their lives performing duties that often go without due recognition.

I extend my congratulations and best wishes to my fellow students who have distinguished themselves at the examinations. I wish all those who will be awarded their degrees at today's graduation ceremony a bright future. To those, if any, who have not been as successful at the examinations, I can only recall the case of a great scholar of Greek and Latin, who did not get through in some of the papers on those very subjects at Oxford University. The biographer of that great scholar made the following observation: the nightingale got no prize at the poultry show. On 26 February, 1946 at the University of Miami, Florida, after having been awarded a Honorary degree, Sir Winston Churchill, referring to himself, said that he was surprised that in his later life he should have become so experienced in taking degrees when as a schoolboy he was so bad at passing examinations. In fact, one might almost say that no one ever passed so few examinations and received so many degrees. Three

years later, on 31 March 1949 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he said it bluntly: 'I have no technical and no university education, and have just had to pick a few things as I went along.' Yet he was awarded a Nobel Prize in literature. Whether one has performed poorly or well, there does exist a window of opportunities, more so in the globalized world of today, to invent one's own future.

Some of you, I guess, will pursue higher studies. Some of you will very likely be in the jobs market and still some of you might decide to start your own enterprises. As you leave the portals of the University of Mauritius, you will be stepping out into a very different world the decadence of which is unimaginable to the young and innocent minds. It is a world full of experts – experts in plunging knives in your back and calling the police to say that you are carrying concealed weapons, experts full of steam that blows the whistle but are unable to move the engine, cartoon versions of experts parading inconceivable expertise in every conceivable field to an inconceivable degree and people who lie out of both sides of their mouths at the same time. You will come across despisers, diabolical distorters and deniers of plain truths, rich goons with perverted views, topsy-turvy perverters of all human relationships, irresponsible braggarts, blaring self-trumpeter, idols of opaque intellectuals, flibbertigibbet pope of chaos, portent and epitome of this generation's moral and spiritual disorders. You will also come across people of splendid abilities but utterly corrupt. Like rotten mackerels by moonlight, they shine and stink. You will regularly measure in your mind the baseness, effrontery and mendacity of old dealers, new dealers, foul dealers and dirty dealers.

Unfortunately, intellectuals have been downgraded and devalued in our times. An 'intellectual' has come to assume the meaning of someone who is intelligent enough to know on which side his bread is buttered. One of the former Presidents of the United States of America, Theodore Roosevelt, once observed that a man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car, but if he has a university education, he may steal the whole railroad. This is the dark side of our times. These are some of my silent observations over many years of my own career. They are not meant to harass you but to guard you against the pitfalls into which the victims often perish. At times, it is dangerous to be sincere though not to your sense of good principles and purpose.

However, there is also the brighter side of our times. Move around and studiously observe the thinking man around you. A nervous restlessness, a thirst, a yearning for something unknown – perhaps morality among a good number of us becomes perceptible. We do have intellectuals with the best of intentions in the country. We do have among our young ones men with an elevated sense of purpose in life. There are amongst us people who realise that they have come into the world as part of something bigger, a family or community. One such person – a young person with an unpretentious look – said to me recently that we need to be fully ourselves. We cannot be kind, good or virtuous if there is no one around us on whom we could shower the virtues. An increasing number of individuals believe that the accumulation of wealth by fair or foul means could bring them up to the status of self-sufficient human beings. This is illusory. A totally self-sufficient human being could only be god. I quipped that many of our people are greedy; they chew more than what they can swallow. If god dies, so many of them would queue up and lobby for the vacant post.

Your stay at the University of Mauritius must have made it possible for you to learn to think. The two marks of truly educated men are intellectual curiosity and the capacity to think clearly. If this habit of thinking properly – I mean scientific thinking - has not yet been inculcated in you, you would be well advised to acquire it after leaving the portals of the University of Mauritius. The capacity to think lucidly should enable all of you to sift and reject, wherever necessary, ideas and ideologies that are constantly inflicted on us all by the mass media of communication. Universities across the world help transfer ideas from system-thinking to folk-thinking, not the other way round as is done by mass media of communication these days. Let not your emotions, affinities or affiliation to particular groups overpower your good sense of objectivity. This is a great ideal of a truly liberal education.

May I ask of you a high standard of discipline and decorum, of dignity and decency. Excite your will to be a man of firm determination and strong but good character. It is difficult; it requires the patience of a cat. In this endeavour the true man sails a boundless sea. There are harbours for shelter. There are floors for anchorage. There is a starting place with an appointed destination. The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel. The sea is both a friend and a foe. The seamanship

consists in using the mind for clear thinking in making a friend of every hostile occasion. Only then you will succeed in life. You will be appreciated. You will be liked and loved. This is an approach to life less adopted. The contrary path is a splendid raft with all sails set. It moves majestically and you accumulate wealth, often by foul means, but you win many false friends. As a matter of course it hits the rock and sinks. Some of the time it does not sink out of pure luck. But damn it your feet are always in the water. The choice is yours.

We seem to have lost the golden habit of the past. Once having left the portals of the University, there is a tendency among many of us to feel that nirvana has been attained. Read Aristotle, read William Shakespeare, read Voltaire, read Plato, read Cicero, read Alexandre Dumas, read Jean Paul Sartre, read Charles Dickens, read Andre Malreaux, read Jean Jacques Rousseau, read the Bible, read the Koran and read the Ramayana and the Mahabharatta, read all the classical works. You have the time. You will surely grow up into a thinking person, a learned person, a great father or mother and above all a good citizen.

The opportunities and challenges for you and indeed for all of us are great. Only two options are available: either you decide to rise by the force of your own gravity or to sink by your levity. In your organisation or enterprise where you will be employed work with passion and devotion – the same passion and devotion that a typical French patissier demonstrates. Visit any patisserie in France. The patissier takes so many minutes to wrap a small ‘tarte aux cerises’ with so much of tenderness. He gently puts it in a box, ties it beautifully with a matching ribbon and tenderly hands it over to you as though it were a new born baby – when that blessed thing is going to be devoured the moment it is taken out of the patisserie. That sort of passion pays in the long run.

Whether at your workplace or in public, your speeches and conversations should be limited to the bounds of professional ethics and to the confines of the law of the land. Let me share with you an oft-repeated unpleasant remark made to me by many bankers in Mauritius and abroad. I have been often told that it is very difficult to do banking business in Mauritius. Why? The reason is that many of us in Mauritius have the repulsive habit of divulging confidential financial information to a point

nowhere in the world ever seen. We are said to have big and loud mouths at one end and no sense of responsibility at the other. Irresponsible behaviour does not contribute to our GNP – Gross National Product but it does contribute to another type of GNP – Gross National Problem. Work with passion and shut up as far as possible.

This is rightly an occasion for me to reiterate some reflections I shared with you on March 8, 2002 here at the University of Mauritius. Acquiring a diploma or a University degree is indeed a license to learn. Learning starts after academic achievements. Anyone who refuses to learn is doomed to find himself with an expired certificate. And that certificate would eventually represent nothing but a certificate of worthlessness in the fast changing world we live in today. Life in today's world is indeed a long distance race that we cannot afford to quit. But we cannot win also. There is always someone ahead of us. We have to define our own race. We have to set our own targets and speed. We have to invent our own future.

Since the 1970s we are living in an era totally different from other eras in human history. Earlier skills were put into workers. Today skills are put into machines. We are endangered. We get de-skilled overnight. The skills we acquire today are outdated tomorrow. Constant re-tooling is important. The pace of technological progress makes it imperative for us to keep re-inventing our own future. The world over manufacturers and suppliers of services no longer have to wait for the training of a new skilled workforce for they can and do move advance technologies from country to country within a very short time-span.

Persevere and invent your own future. I wish you the very best of success.

May I thank the University of Mauritius for having given me the opportunity this morning to be with you all and to dream or rather feel that I am still very young.