

**Address of Hon L.D.Dookun-Luchoomun,
Vice Prime Minister
Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology**

**Urdu Speaking Union
Annual Prize Giving Ceremony**

Protocol

Good Afternoon to you all. *Adaab.*

Thank you for inviting me on the occasion of this Prize-Giving Ceremony organized by the Urdu Speaking Union in collaboration with the National Urdu Institute.

I am glad to note that the Urdu Speaking Union has made it a point to make this celebration an annual event.

I would like at the very outset, then, express my congratulatory words to all of you who have performed in an exemplary manner at the different examinations and competitions that are intimately related to the flourishing of the Urdu Language.

You must see today's ceremony as an official recognition of your efforts to express your love for the language.

And why not? Urdu, after all, is spoken by more than 100 million people globally, predominantly in Pakistan and India. but also in the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Should we forget Mauritius?

Certainly not.

Urdu, distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, has gained a firm standing in Mauritius and is not likely to be ever done away with—not when you have such keen drivers as the National Urdu Institute and the Urdu Speaking Union at the helm!

Indeed, this Union has gone quite some way to encourage the exposure to Urdu language and the literature inherent to it. You have facilitated an appreciation for the culture and values related to the latter.

This is highly praiseworthy. In Mauritius, there has always been a tendency to link languages, especially ancestral languages, to specific ethnic and religious groups. A language like Urdu, however, transcends such narrow confines. And the truth of this is evident in the large scale appreciation that we have for Urdu as a richly poetic and aesthetically transporting language.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, Urdu is taught in our schools with this aim of developing language proficiency, both speaking and writing, and communicative skills.

All Primary and Lower Secondary Urdu textbooks (Grades 1-9) are in line with the National Curriculum Framework, incorporating graphic content, exercises and more elaborate explanations. The contents themselves offer local colour, cultural & historical insights and values related to the country and the world at large. These have definitely made the learning of Urdu more pleasant, taking into consideration modern pedagogical principles as well as the needs of the modern learners.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Every lover of a language hopes for it to firm its roots. This is particularly true for Urdu that is viewed as an aristocratic language given its linguistic and literary sensibilities.

I mean, we are all charmed by the “*shayeri*” that it is reputed for. Its two-liners are often emotionally stirring—and especially applicable to different contexts.

Thus, when we encourage our youth to be enterprising and risk-taking, my mind echoes with

**Manzil milegi bhatakkar hi sahi,
gumrah to wo hain jo ghar se nikle hi nahin.**

Or again, at a time when we speak of Equity in education and some people ascribe low achievement and poverty to fate and destiny, we need to remind ourselves of Ghalib’s words,

**Haathon ke lakiron pe mat jao,
naseb unke bhi hote hain jinke haanth nahin hote**

So, to repeat, one would wish to further firm the roots of Urdu in our schools. However, we at the Ministry, can only do that much. *I expect the support of the Urdu Speaking Union as well to both give a fillip to the teaching of the subject and whip up the interest among new would-be learners.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our Educators of Urdu are doing their very best where sustaining the interest in Urdu is concerned. In addition, the Covid pandemic, for all its accompanying flipside, has given rise to at least one significant benefit for the education sector.

It has unleashed among Educators the potential for a pedagogical innovation.

Thus, it is common knowledge that the audio-visual means, when properly used, enhances learning as a whole, especially language learning.

At this juncture, allow me to heartily congratulate those teachers of Urdu who had braved the Covid-induced impediments and vicissitudes to ensure that their learners did

not face any leaning loss during school closure. Educators, often neglecting their families, worked from home, went to the Open University and the MBC just to fulfil their responsibility vis-à-vis their pupils. Hats off. These front liners, these “essential workers” deserve our collective applause.

Let me share with you that my ministry has now decided to invest more time and resources into blended learning, a mix of in-presence and remote learning.

Already, I am informed that some Urdu Educators at both Primary & Secondary levels are resorting to the flipped classroom instruction, play- based learning, project- based learning as well as discovery learning—and ICT is playing a major role there.

As we encourage more and more of remote learning, I believe that the Urdu Speaking Union can make a profitable use of that as well. While the learners will be studying partly from home on the different devices, parents and siblings could be induced, prompted and encouraged to also gain an exposure to the language—in short, get a foot in the door that opens up a new or renewed interest in Urdu.

Distinguished guests,

Two final points before I end my speech.

Obviously, as we all know, the primary Objective of the Urdu Speaking Union is, and I quote, “*to preserve, promote and propagate Urdu language and culture through different activities*”. Knowing the extent to which the Members have at heart the interests of Urdu language, I have absolutely no doubt as to the viability and receptivity of the educational, cultural and other outreach activities undertaken by the Union.

I also understand that the one-year Adult Beginners’ Course run by the MGI is gaining in popularity.

There is *accordingly* every reason for us all to insist upon new approaches towards popularizing and promoting Urdu that is so rich, so poetic, so liting a language.

What I am also going to add here applies to all Speaking Unions.

We are living at a time when solidarity, sharing and collaboration are seen as the modern hallmarks of our existence. If nothing else, the Covid 19 has shown the importance of alliances and partnerships. These, for instance, help to flag the winds of optimism and success in our anti-pandemic endeavours and militancy.

This, I believe, should be the norm for all Speaking Unions. It doesn't anymore help to live in silos. Collaboration is the name of the game.

We, in Mauritius, have always demonstrated to the world that, as a rainbow nation, we have the ability to live together in harmony, to sustain our peaceful co-existence. Besides, the website of the Urdu Speaking Union as well throws this into relief very succinctly. One can read there that one of the activities specified by the Union is to “promote *inter cultural and inter-linguistic understanding and harmony through exchange and participation*”.

One also reads on the same website that the Union seeks to “provide *facilities for exchange programmes, scholarships and social intercourse between [itself] and other organisations at regional and international level*”.

I am sure this is being done –but it would also help to demonstrate greater visibility. This has to be seen in action and hence guarantee a good press.

And finally, my last point is meant to those learners who are being feted.

To all students present here today as well as their parents, I need to stress the importance for you all to bear in mind those who actually and historically militated for the Urdu language. We owe it to these pioneers to remember them—persons like Dr Athar Parvez, Mr Enayet Hossen Edun, Sir Abdul Razack Mohamed, the late Mr. Abdullah Currimjee, who was the first president of the Urdu Institute and the late Mr. Ahmad Abdulla Ahmed.

These, alongside a host of others, were driven by a *josh*, a *junoon* for the language. We wouldn't have been where we are today without them, without their investment of time, of resources, of their own selves.

So, as you pick your prizes, remember them all.

Unka lihaaz karna chahiye.

Your achievement is in fact an homage to them.

So congratulations to all the prize winners and *Mubarak baad* as well to the National Urdu Institute that celebrated the 50 years of its existence last September.

Thank you for your kind attention.