

Speech by His Excellency Mr. Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK, President of the Republic of Mauritius, on the occasion of the 185th Anniversary of the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences, on Saturday 11 October 2014, at 10:00 am at Bel Ombre

Mr Gerard Bax, President of the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences

Mrs Marie-Josée Martial-Craig, Honorary Secretary of the Association

Dr Julian Pender Hume, Eminent Speaker from the National History Museum, London

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It's an immense privilege and honour to be in your midst this morning in such an exotic environment.

Bel Ombre and its surroundings boast a rich and diverse heritage that is deeply anchored in the cultural history of Mauritius.

It brings us back very sweet memories of rural village life of pre-independent Mauritius.

The village is also a vivid reminder of the contribution of the sugar sector in the socio-economic development of our country.

I must congratulate the owners of the Bel Ombre Sugar Estate for their relentless effort to improve the plight of estate workers.

To-day, Bel Ombre, presents an altogether different facet of rural life, booming with a full range of luxurious hotels and villas to meet the needs of the most discerning tourists.

Indeed, the physical landscape has changed drastically.

The village is no longer known for its sugar factory but most importantly as an attractive tourist destination.

I read that there are over 10 restaurants in the vicinity with their own charm and specialities, a championship golf course, world class spa facilities as well as a whole gamut of land and sea activities.

All these developments augur well for the future of our tourism industry, but also for the inhabitants of Bel Ombre.

Bel Ombre also has close historical links with an exceptional man, Dr Charles Edward Telfair, the Founder and the first elected President of the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in 1829.

Dr Telfair has left an indelible footprint in the history of the village.

He was known to be a humanist who played a key role in the struggle for the cause of slaves.

As we all know, the “Domaine de Bel Ombre”, which previously housed the Sugar Estate was owned by Dr Charles Telfair who understandably introduced many innovations to the Domaine including the creation of orchards and vegetable gardens.

He was a well-known naturalist and botanist.

During his life time, Dr Telfair was very passionate about the environment and the pristine beauty of the village of Bel Ombre.

I would like therefore to congratulate the RSAS for pursuing the well cherished dreams and ideals of Dr Charles Telfair.

Ladies and Gentlemen

When we refer to the RSAS, we cannot afford to be oblivious to the contribution of one of the world’s famous biologists and zoologists, Charles Darwin.

Charles Darwin is remembered for his principal works such as *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*.

For those of you who have read the life and history of Darwin would know that he spent about 10 days in Mauritius around the year 1831 when he was still of the age of 21.

That’s how presumably, he became acquainted with the RSAS.

Since then, I understand many scientists and arts lovers have joined the Society.

It’s a good thing that to-day you are celebrating the 185th Anniversary of the Society.

That’s certainly a long, long time in the history of an organization.

The members of the Society, past and present, must be commended for their effort in keeping alive the legacy of its Founding Father, Dr Charles Telfair.

If the society has stood the test of times, that is also largely due to the eminent scientists and arts professionals that successfully collaborated in the activities of the Society.

But I believe that the collaboration with the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute from 1958 remains a major landmark in the history of RSAS.

Such a collaboration has inevitably given the society a new and added impetus in the fulfillment of its objectives such as the protection and promotion of our natural flora and fauna as well as the appreciation of the arts.

Since its creation in 1953, the MSIRI has remained at the forefront of research in all aspects of sugar cane in order to enhance the cost effectiveness and competitiveness of the cane industry in Mauritius as well as to improve the efficiency of the sugar factories.

The MSIRI has a history of its own.

The MSIRI is considered as a citadel of research and development in the sugar sector, not only in Mauritius, but also at international level.

Therefore, as you celebrate the 185 years of existence of your Society, I think it is fitting that you also pay tribute to the eminent scientists who have been at the helm of the Institute, and who have in their own way fashioned its destiny, and in the same breath, the success of the Royal Society of Sciences and Arts.

With these words, I wish to reiterate my thanks and appreciation for the warm hospitality that you have extended to me this morning.

It's a real pleasure to be in this magnificent village of Bel Ombre.

I wish you a very fruitful Conference and the best of luck in your future endeavor.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK,
President of the Republic of Mauritius,