

INAUGURATION OF THE SATELLITE GROUND STATION

SPEECH BY HON PRAVIND KUMAR JUGNAUTH

PRIME MINISTER

THURSDAY 07 OCTOBER 2021 AT 1045 HRS
(HON PRIME MINISTER TO ARRIVE AT 1100 HRS)

VENUE: MAURITIUS RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COUNCIL
LEVEL 6, EBENE HEIGHTS, EBENE

**Honourable Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Chairperson of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council,
Executive Director, Mauritius Research and Innovation Council,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good morning.

It is a privilege for me to be here today for the inauguration of the MRIC Satellite Ground Station.

This Ground Station will communicate with the Mauritian Nano Satellite deployed from the International Space Station. It will also receive data from other Low Orbiting Earth Satellites.

In addition, the ground station is equipped with a Mission's Lab, which will enable future research and innovation in the field of satellite design and development.

Access to these facilities will be provided to university students and researchers wishing to explore the avenues that space may offer.

It is a matter of pride that Mauritius has joined the league of space faring countries with the deployment of our Nano Satellite in space on 22 June 2021.

My gratitude goes to the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency and the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs for having provided us with this opportunity.

Such pioneering initiatives are in line with Government's Innovation Strategy. As we embark on a path of knowledge-based growth, we will invest more and more resources in research and Innovation. We need to realise potentials if we want to create the future.

To help us stay on course with our ambitious Strategy, the Innovation portfolio was added to the Ministry of Information Technology and Communication two years ago and the Mauritius Research Council transformed into the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council.

Furthermore, the MRIC Act was amended in July 2021 to expand the mandate of the Council so that it undertakes research in areas likely to strengthen the Mauritian research and innovation ecosystem.

This year, the Space Portfolio has been added to the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation through the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council. Together with the relevant institutional changes to drive innovation, special funds have been earmarked under the National Innovation Program to fund innovative projects.

A National Innovation Framework setting out our Strategy for the period 2018 to 2030 is currently being implemented.

The National Innovation Framework aims to transform the Mauritian economy by setting out a plan for innovation. It is a unique programme that provides funding for collaborative research and innovative projects while consolidating academia-private sector linkages.

Our initiatives paid off when Mauritius climbed from the 82nd place in 2018 to the 52nd place in 2020 in the Global Innovation Index Report. We can improve further the ranking of Mauritius in the Global Innovation Index. This is challenging given the disruption caused by the COVID 19 pandemic but our resilient and flexible National Innovation Ecosystem does open the door to a more promising future for our country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The focus areas to bring about transformation and change are shifting from the traditional sectors to new emerging sectors such as Fintech, Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, Circular Economy, Smart Agriculture and Inclusive Innovation. Our vision is to stay abreast of developments in Science, Technology and Innovation.

The Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Act passed in June 2021 will soon be operational.

Its main aim is to promote the applications of emerging technologies in accordance with national economic and social objectives. It is in this kind of environment that projects at the frontier of Science and Innovation such as MIR-SAT1 are given the opportunity to emerge and develop.

It is crucial that we find such new creative and innovative ways to give a new thrust to the socio-economic development of the Republic of Mauritius.

I know there many challenges to overcome, but progress takes patience. I am convinced that in the medium term, we shall develop a new socio-economic pillar driven by space technology.

The global market for small satellites known as CubeSat is on the rise. Carving ourselves a niche into this market would certainly enable us to create a new socioeconomic pillar for Mauritius.

Satellite technology is one of many tools which can help us to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. Understanding the technology, the potency of the space derived data, and the subsequent opportunities associated with this new space era is of paramount importance for social change, economic development and resource conservation.

Over and above the unique opportunity to acquire technology, knowledge and skills for future space development, the Mauritius Imagery and Radio-Satellite project will foster interest in science careers for more student populations.

With a view to ensuring sustainability of the project, the MRIC is developing a Space Roadmap for the country. The Council is proposing to create a Space Unit which will drive our Space Program. This Space Unit should, within the next 5 years, become a

sustainable and revenue generating institution, transforming itself into a full-fledged Mauritian Space Agency.

The Space Unit will endeavour to explore how space technology, satellite technology and satellite data can be harnessed in the Mauritian context. These initiatives should instill an innovation culture cutting across all spheres of the society. The engagement of all our people, including youths, women, grassroots innovators, entrepreneurs and academics, is crucial in this journey.

I would like to thank our friendly countries, India and Japan, for providing support in these endeavours.

Exploring space technologies for sustainable development is no longer a distant dream for us. As long as we have the vision and the will, we can bridge the gap between your dreams and reality.

Thank you for your attention.
