

Speech of Hon Deepak Balgobin Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation

Inauguration of the MRIC Satellite Ground
Station, Launching of MIR-SAT1 Magazine and MIR-SAT1
First Day Cover
The First Mauritian Satellite

Venue: Mauritius Research and Innovation Council, Level
6, Ebène Heights, Ebène
Date: Thursday, 7th October 2021
Time: 11:00 Hrs

Honourable Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth,

**His Excellency, the Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary of Japan,**

Her Excellency, the High Commissioner of the Republic of India,

Mr Om Kumar Dabidin, Secretary for Home Affairs,

Miss Sandrine Valere, Permanent Secretary of my Ministry,

Dr Kaviraj Sharma Sukon, Chairperson, MRIC

Professor Theesan Bahorun, Executive Director, MRIC

Heads of Institutions,

Distinguished Guests,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning to you all.

It is an immense pleasure for me to be here today with the Honourable Prime Minister to inaugurate the MRIC Satellite Ground Station and the Antennas.

It tremendous moment for all of us, when MIR-SAT1 was deployed from the International Space Station into orbit. That was the culmination of a long journey, which the team at the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council had embarked on, 3 years ago, in order to bring the First Mauritian Satellite to realisation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Upon the deployment of MIR-SAT1 into orbit around the earth, my Ministry and myself have been particular keen to be regularly apprised on its status.

It is worth informing you that the satellite switched on, as expected, 45 minutes after its deployment on the 22nd of June and transmitted its first signal over Sydney, in Australia.

The first signal was decoded over Texas in the United States and the team of engineers at the MRIC managed to capture and decode the satellite's signal on the first pass over Mauritius.

It took them 2 months to complete the satellite commissioning in order to ensure that all systems onboard the satellite is functional as expected. The knowledge and experience they have acquired over this period have been momentous.

With the setting up of the Ground Station which will be inaugurated shortly, the team of engineers is able to constantly monitor the satellite's trajectory in real time, its status, collect data and imagery.

We are proud to announce that we have received the FIRST Mauritian images of the FIRST Mauritian nano-satellite, MIRSAT1 which we will all witness in live streaming in some time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Government, under the able leadership of our Prime Minister, realises that for our country to be able to face the world's volatile economy, we need to keep innovating and build a stronger capacity. Space and Satellite Technology is one of the best platforms to boost innovation. African countries are actively engaging into the New Space technologies. Many of our African neighbours, including countries like Kenya, Ghana, South Africa have already sent their first satellites and are collecting data from space. We are now proud to say that Mauritius has also adopted this trend.

This year the mandate of the MRIC has been extended by an amendment of the MRC Act to conduct research on identified National-Priority thrust areas in order to strengthen our research ecosystem. The Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council which is being setup will change the research landscape to include new and emerging technologies.

Space applications, although largely and seamlessly present in our daily lives - and even more so during these difficult times we are going through because of the Covid-19 pandemic - are often overlooked. Space Technology offers a formidable boon to the society as a whole.

Capacity building, disaster risk management, weather and climate monitoring, connectivity to remote areas and sea surveillance are some of the space applications which are key to human and economic development. Nowadays, space sourced data, Space/Satellite

Technology Development and other direct and indirect outcomes of space development, are proving to be key factors for boosting the socio-economic development of many countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

MIRSAT1 has opened a new chapter for the country to explore how to harness the possibilities that this initiative can present for Mauritius in the medium and long run.

And here, I would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his characteristic foresight and long-term vision for the betterment of the country. He has recently added a new responsibility in the port-folio of my Ministry, namely the Space Research and Technology in August this year. This again bears witness of the commitment of this Government to move the economy to even greater heights.

Currently, 13 African countries already have space-related agencies, organisations or research institutions. We have to keep up with countries in the region, especially in the space sector and this highlights the right time and justification for a much-needed space unit at the MRIC.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we all know, Mauritius is an upper middle-income country and the vision of this Government is to transition to the level of a high-income country, where innovation becomes the key driver of socio-economic

development. Innovation requires effective implementation, and this can be achieved in a sustainable manner with the setting up of a structured framework which will allow the 'doers of innovation' to operate and grow.

Ensuring sustainability of this project is of considerable importance to initiate Mauritius into Space Technology and in the long run create a new economic pillar for the country.

Satellites feed the Earth with enormous amount of useful data daily; data which is either impossible or difficult to gain while staying on earth.

The MRIC has already engaged with international space agencies and, of course with friendly countries. Here, I would like to reiterate my heartfelt thanks to the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). The Government of Mauritius is also very thankful to the Government of India for its engagement in our endeavour in this nascent sector for Mauritius. Following the ministerial visit of the Indian Minister of External Affairs in February 2021, India has offered to help Mauritius achieve its goal in its Space agenda and we will be collaborating with the Indian Space Research Organisation of India.

The knowledge and technology gained through this First Mauritian Satellite project will be fundamental for such future endeavours.

My Ministry through the MRIC will ensure that investments are channelled towards the development of solutions that will bring

significant growth prospects and have the potential to enhance the social and economic well-being for everyone, especially the youth.

The MIR-SAT1 initiative envisages inspiring the younger generation to look into the numerous advantages of engaging into space technology. Not only for job creation, but also for Research, Development and Innovation and thus for the betterment of the society.

With this in mind, the MRIC in collaboration with the Mauritius Radio Amateur Society represented by Mr Jean Marc Momplé, who is among us this morning, and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, have already trained more than one hundred students from 14 colleges and 5 universities and we are planning to train some 500 more students.

These students have learned how to build a simplified antenna for satellite communication. With this training, they are able to retrieve images from low orbiting satellites and some of them have even captured the signal from MIRSAT1.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is hoped that in the coming years, the technological landscape and innovation ecosystem of the country will be significantly transformed through the investments we are initiating today, because our Prime Minister has a vision for our country, a strong belief on the youth and with his determination and perseverance, we will make this country a real STAR of the Indian Ocean.

Thank you