

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

Opening of the
Artificial Intelligence Summit 2024

Wednesday, 8th May 2024
Le Meridien Ile Maurice
Pointe aux Cannoniers

- **His Excellency, Prithvirajsing Roopun, President of the Republic of Mauritius,**
- **His Excellency, Omar Al Olama, Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence, Digital Economy and Remote Work Applications of the United Arab Emirates,**
- **His Excellency, Souef Kamalidini, Minister of Post, Telecommunications and Digital Economy of Comoros,**
- **Dr. Cosmas Zavazava, Director of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU),**
- **Mr. John Omo, Secretary General of the African Telecommunication Union (ATU),**
- **Mr Doonunjoy Dassaye, Permanent Secretary of my Ministry,**
- **Dr Suraj Juddoo, Chairman of the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council,**
- **Mr Vrigesh Futta, Executive Director of the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council,**
- **Excellencies and Dignitaries,**
- **Chairpersons and Directors,**
- **Representatives from the Private and Public Sectors,**
- **Captains of the Industry,**
- **Delegates from Mauritius and overseas,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**
- **All Protocols Observed,**

A very Good Morning to you all.

As dawn unfurls its golden threads across the sky, we stand on the cusp of an era not merely of technological change but of profound transformation.

Here, where the future meets the present, we gather to sculpt a world where Artificial Intelligence is not just a tool, but a transformative force, promising to rewrite the very fabric of our existence.

Just as steam power, mechanization, and coal fundamentally reshaped the world during the Industrial Revolution, so too is AI redefining the contours of our workplaces, economies, and societal structures today.

While the precise contours of the future remain unknown, one thing is certain: technologies like AI, Generative AI, Artificial General Intelligence, Deep Learning, Prompt Engineering and Machine Learning will be pivotal in shaping what comes next.

It is worth noting that more than 60 countries have national AI strategies.

According to US multinational, McKinsey and Company, by the year 2300 (*twenty-three thousand*) AI will rival humans – good or bad, I leave to your imagination. This technology can add 4.4 trillion dollars annually to the global economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let's picture this: a future where cars drive themselves, where robots perform surgeries with pinpoint precision, and where virtual assistants seamlessly orchestrate our daily lives.

This isn't the script of a Hollywood blockbuster.

It's the reality we are hurtling towards with the unstoppable force of Artificial Intelligence.

AI is not just another technology. It is special!

Let's consider a few of them in detail.

The Metaverse: A New Frontier

The metaverse, a seamless blend of digital and physical realities, opens new realms of possibility where geographical and physical limitations vanish. This digital universe is becoming a playground for businesses and educators alike.

For example, companies like Meta are pioneering spaces where remote teams can collaborate in virtual offices that mimic real-world interactions.

Artificial General Intelligence and Its Horizon

Artificial General Intelligence, an evolution of AI aiming to match human cognitive abilities, represents the pinnacle of machine intelligence.

While still in developmental stages, Artificial General Intelligence promises profound impacts across all sectors by potentially solving complex problems that require human-like understanding and reasoning.

For instance, Google DeepMind's AlphaZero, which taught itself chess, shogi, and Go beyond human expert levels, showcases the potential of AGI to not only learn but innovate in strategic thinking.

Deep Learning and Real-World Applications

Deep learning, a subset of machine learning, powers many of the most advanced AI applications today.

It's the driving force behind technologies like voice recognition systems used by Amazon Alexa and Google Home, which can understand and process human speech with increasing accuracy.

AI also holds the potential to provide humanity with an evolutionary leap, where AI could augment human beings. We are bordering the point where science fiction becomes reality!!

This is why we need summits such as this one to have productive discussions on the way forward with AI.

There are several questions that I would like the eminent experts to consider.

First, as a politician, how do we take this revolution to the common people?

How do we ensure that everyone is benefitting from such a transformation?

Second, how do we ensure that there is an ethical use of the such tools?

Deep fakes are likely to become more and more popular if we don't discourage such practices!

The beauty of AI lies in its potential to inspire us and to spark new ideas and ways of going about our everyday life, including work process, business and recreation.

We are already using AI substantially, be it in our smartphones, our cars, food we consume and even the houses we live.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of Mauritius has always endeavoured an 'avant-garde' approach to the future, recognizing the pivotal role of technology, especially AI, in shaping our destiny.

Today, as we delve into discussions and insights about AI's impact across sectors, let us not just focus on what AI can do, but let us envision together what it can inspire us to achieve.

I envision Mauritius to be a country where people might benefit from precision medical services, children benefit from tailor made support, job creation, better transportation systems and an optimised energy consumption for the benefit of our environment.

All these can be possible with AI systems.

As the Minister of ICT, it is my responsibility to ensure that Mauritius embraces these emerging technologies whole-heartedly.

We are laying the foundation and infrastructure to ensure that our country does not miss this evolutionary wave.

Our vision is clear: Mauritius may be small in size, but our ambitions are limitless.

We aspire to position Mauritius as a leader in Africa in harnessing emerging technologies, showcasing to the world our capabilities and paving the way together with other nations.

This underscores the commitment of this Government, led by our Honourable Prime minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, to innovation, excellence, and forward-thinking leadership.

Our goal is to create a conducive environment for AI innovation, Research, and Development, fostering collaborations with academia, industry leaders, and international partners.

This AI Summit marks a crucial milestone in initiating a dialogue, both locally and internationally, that will set the foundation for a future where emerging technologies like AI seamlessly integrate into our daily lives.

I wish to welcome delegates who have accepted our invitations to be part of the AI Summit.

You all, come from 11 different countries,

- United Arab Emirates
- Comoros
- Kenya
- Botswana
- South Africa
- Rwanda
- China
- India
- USA
- Hong-Kong
- Switzerland

This gathering of Minds, Experts, and Visionaries is not just about discussing the potential of AI; it's about crafting a roadmap that ensures AI's responsible and ethical adoption, empowering individuals and societies to harness its benefits for collective progress and well-being.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the presence of my dear friend, His Excellency, Souef Kamalidini, Minister of Post, Telecommunications and Digital Economy of Comoros, who is leading the charge of digital transformation in his country.

I also wish to welcome my dear friend, His Excellency, Omar Al Olama, the only Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence, in the world. The United Arab Emirates' pioneering step in establishing a specific Ministry for Artificial Intelligence sets a remarkable example globally.

In line with our commitment to learning and growth, Mauritius has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of AI of the UAE, recognizing the invaluable insights and expertise they offer in this transformative field.

AI presents an unparalleled opportunity for Mauritius to leapfrog in our development journey, and collaborations with esteemed international bodies like International Telecommunication Union (ITU), African Telecommunication Union (ATU), and United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) are key to realizing this vision.

Today's summit exemplifies our dedication to forging meaningful partnerships and leveraging AI's potential for the collective advancement of our nation and beyond.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is imperative to emphasize the importance of ethical and responsible practices in AI development. Today, we are privileged to have speakers who will elaborate on ethics in AI and other pertinent themes, guiding us towards a future where AI serves humanity with integrity and fairness.

The outcomes of this summit hold immense value, particularly for the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council, mandated under my Ministry to spearhead the promotion of emerging technologies in our nation.

The Council will leverage the insights and strategies discussed here to ensure that AI and other emerging technologies are deployed ethically and for the benefit of all Mauritians.

While acknowledging the current dominance of AI development by developed nations, it is crucial for Africa, including Mauritius, to position itself as a key player in AI development by Africa, for Africa.

This summit marks a significant step towards realizing this vision, fostering collaboration, innovation, and responsible AI practices that will drive sustainable development and progress across the continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am proud to announce that we are taking the responsibility to develop comprehensive framework on AI to be developed in collaboration with the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council, based on the valuable insight, ideas and recommendations that would come out of this summit

This crucial step will also be taken in consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders, both locally and internationally, and with the invaluable support of relevant international bodies.

The development of this legislation is not just a formality; it is the cornerstone that will propel us to the next level of AI integration and governance.

We are committed to starting this process now, ensuring that AI in Mauritius evolves in a responsible, ethical, and inclusive manner that benefits all citizens.

So, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let us dare to dream big.

Let us think boldly.

Let us act decisively.

For the future of our nations.

As the day closes and twilight beckons with hues of orange and gold, let us move forward with a resolve to use these profound technologies to forge a future that is not only innovative but also inclusive and humane.

Together, let us build a legacy that will illuminate the paths of generations to come.

Thank you.