

Speech by The Right Honourable Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Prime Minister on the occasion of the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony of the Ebène CyberCity and the CyberVillage at Ebène on Saturday 28 September 2002 at 11:00 Hours

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance,

Honourable Shri Pramod Mahajan, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Communications and Information Technology, Government of India,

Colleague Ministers,

Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps,

The Chairman of the Business Parks of Mauritius Limited,

Members of the National Assembly,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am indeed very pleased to be in your midst this morning on such a happy occasion. At the very outset, may I extend a hearty welcome to Shri Pramod Mahajan, representing the Government of India in this ceremony. Today's function is the realisation of a dream to make Mauritius a technologically advanced country.

In 1982, along with the nation, we embarked on a heroic journey to transform Mauritius from a developing state to a middle income country. It was in fact an act of faith in the ability of our nation to face the numerous challenges confronting us. We had the courage to withstand the strong storms that beset us. In this task, we resolved not to be daunted by the small size of our country nor by our limited resources. On the contrary, we were all deeply motivated by the exciting opportunities, which came our way. We took our destiny in our hands and today the figures speak for themselves. Our foreign exchange reserve is over 40 billion rupees, we have a GDP of 3900 US dollars, making it the third highest in Africa. We enjoy a literacy rate of over 85% making our citizens more educated and literate than at least 111 countries around the world. We have presently a strong export-based manufacturing industry competing in the global market, a vibrant tourism sector as well as a dynamic financial services centre.

The journey is not yet over. We have to forge ahead relentlessly. Twenty years later we are still guided by the same bold spirit to bring our country to a higher threshold in its development process. We have now to win the battle for joining the league of high-income advanced nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are living in a new century driven by knowledge and technology. We have to exploit fully the tremendous opportunities, which the ICT sector is offering us.

There is a general consensus among all stakeholders that the ICT sector will have to become the fifth pillar of our economy. We, for our part, have taken several policy measures in the field of infrastructure development, telecommunications, IT - Education and e-Government. The most important decision has clearly been the setting up of the first CyberCity at Ebène.

The laying of the foundation stone of Ebène CyberCity today marks indeed a new beginning in the history of modern Mauritius. First and foremost, the CyberCity will open up vast avenues of job opportunities for the younger generation. It will provide a platform for sharing scientific and technological knowledge. It will also serve as a breeding ground for incubators and start-ups. The amenities within the CyberCity will constitute an ideal meeting place for leisure and recreational activities, thereby promoting cultural and artistic enrichment among our population.

Furthermore, with the construction of the Administrative Block and the Postal Tower, the Ebène CyberCity will offer a new work environment to thousands of public officers, thus enhancing productivity in the public sector. It will also help in reducing traffic congestion in our capital city.

Apart from infrastructure development, which is well underway, we need to focus on three other critical factors for transforming Mauritius into a CyberIsland. These are human resource development, telecom connectivity and access to computers at home. As regards the human resource development, the Task Force on e-education and e-training has already set clear targets to train IT professionals and other employees for an ICT based economy. In fact, in the medium term, we will have to train some 10,000 IT Professionals, including diploma holders and graduates.

To achieve this ambitious objective, we are investing substantially in upgrading the education and training infrastructure. We have already started the process of IT learning from primary to tertiary levels already. The School IT project is taking shape. Higher-end IT education is being provided by major local and overseas IT training institutions.

International partnerships are being forged. A successful example of this initiative is the tie-up of the University of Mauritius and the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing – C-DAC of India. I am grateful to Shri. Mahajan who, as Chairman of C-DAC, is helping us immensely through this partnership. Furthermore, we have plans to set up linkages with the IIIT Bangalore for post-graduate education in IT.

Regarding the shortage of skilled manpower, we will definitely have recourse to Indian IT professionals and at the same time, we will encourage People of Mauritian Origin specialising in the field of IT to contribute in the implementation of this national IT programme by returning to their home land.

On the Communications side, indeed we have taken a very wise step forward in bringing the SAFE optic fibre cable to Mauritius. But we have yet to find ways to maximize the use of this resource. Without being able to offer communication

services, whether it is voice, data or video, in a globally competitive manner, we will be running a one-legged race where others are speeding fast on powered skates. We will have to fight against our competitors from all corners of the world, whether in Ireland or Morocco, Malaysia or Singapore, Dubai or Tunisia. The cost of doing business and the competitive ability to provide the full menu will influence the mind of the corporate decision makers the world over whether to invest in Mauritius. We have to find ways to actually introduce, in real terms, complete telecom liberalisation as from 31st December 2003.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Concerning the home computer ownership issue, the 2000 IT Household Survey reveals that the home computer ownership was 21% whereas the home Internet connection was only 12%. Let us agree that no IT revolution is possible with such a low IT penetration. If we want to succeed in our objective of making Mauritius a CyberIsland, we need to double these figures in the short term and ultimately treble this level in five years' time.

Let me, therefore, announce that we will launch very soon a national campaign entitled "A Computer In Every Home". The private sector, trade unions, the NGOs, welfare funds, corporate bodies, cooperative societies, commercial banks, insurance companies should all set up within their respective organisations, special funds to assist their employees and members in acquiring a home personal computer. The Government on its part is working out the modalities to facilitate the implementation of this vast national campaign.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The laying of the foundation stone of Ebène CyberCity gives me an ideal opportunity to thank heartily the Government of India for its active support in terms of technical and financial assistance in the realisation of this mega project. May I request Shri. Pramod Mahajan to convey to His Excellency Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee the gratitude of the Mauritian nation for his personal efforts and commitment in helping Mauritius at a very critical period of its history to drive safely and successfully on the information superhighway.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before ending, allow me on this historic occasion to go down memory lane. Some thirty years ago, I shared the political ideals and philosophy espoused by a group of young intellectuals eager to build a new and just Mauritian society. All through my Primeministership, I ensured that the younger generation does not lose hope in our country and instead participates fully in the building of this new Mauritius, which we dreamt of in the early 70s. Some thirty year later, I stand before you with a deep sense of emotion at a moment when our country is undertaking yet another exciting journey. And again I am fully convinced that the youth of our country would find their hopes and aspirations duly fulfilled by our intelligent City.

Let me end by referring to George Bernard Shaw, the Irish writer who said, I quote: "You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say, 'Why not?' ".

I thank you for your attention.

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