

# India announces plans to launch Bhutanese satellite, provide internet gateway

## RuPay Phase-II launched

**MB Subba**

**I**ndian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday announced India's preparations to launch a Bhutanese satellite into space and provide a third international internet gateway for Bhutan.

The announcement was made during the e-launch of the second phase of the RuPay card network by the two countries' prime ministers.

Prime Minister Modi said that India would welcome four promising youth space engineers from Bhutan in December this year and that a Bhutanese satellite would be sent into space next year. "I convey to all these young people my best wishes," he said.

He said that the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was preparing for the launch and that progress towards that was being made at a fast pace.

Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering said that a memorandum of understanding was signed recently between the two counterparts for co-operation in the space sector.

## India announces plans to launch Bhutanese satellite, provide internet gateway

From Pg 1

This new area of cooperation between Bhutan and India, he said, was an important step toward realising His Majesty's vision.

"For an astute, 21st century King, who is well informed of all the modern details, it will be His Majesty's delight to see young Bhutanese grow up with relevant knowledge and skills in space science and technology," he said.

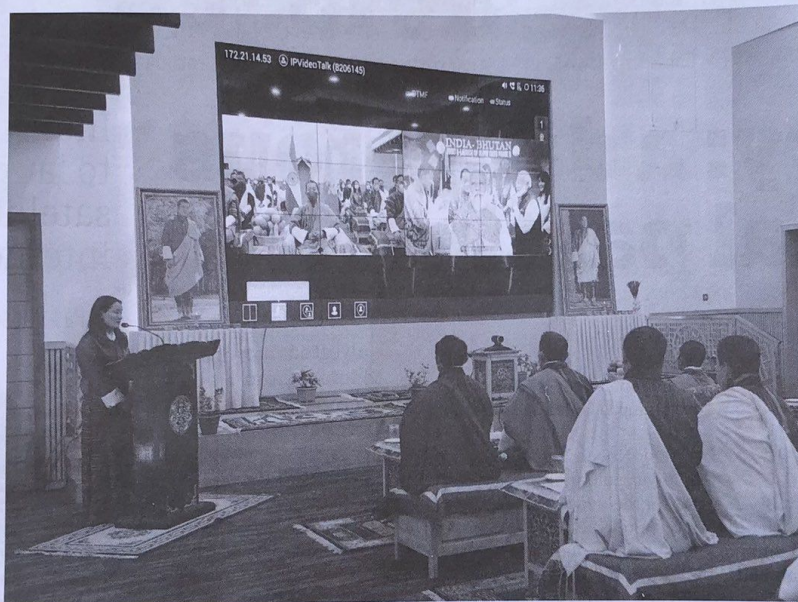
Prime Minister Modi said that India will support His Majesty's efforts to use advanced technology, including ICT and space technology for development. He said that India was willing to share its experience and facilities in order to realise the vision of His Majesty The King.

He said that a ground earth station in Bhutan for using the South Asia satellite was inaugurated during his visit to the country in August last year. Bhutan launched its first nano-satellite Bhutan-1, which was built with Japan's assistance, on a SpaceX rocket in June 2018.

He also assured his support for Bhutan's objective to create an ITC-enabled knowledge-based society.

The prime ministers also spoke about the progress made towards establishment of the much-awaited third international internet gateway for Bhutan.

The Bhutanese prime



► Prime Ministers Dr Lotay Tshering and Narendra Modi jointly launches the RuPay phase II

minister said, "I am also pleased with the progress we have made towards establishment of the third international internet gateway. I am following up very closely on this with your ambassador here."

### Second Phase of RuPay launched

The first phase of the project with the acquiring of RuPay cards in Bhutan was launched on August 2019 with 10,428 successful transactions of INR 36.52M aggregated till yesterday.

The second phase anticipates empowering the banks to issue RuPay cards to Bhutanese citizens, which means that Bhutanese card holders can access the RuPay network in India.

The card, which is issued by the Bhutan National Bank Limited (BNBL), is more affordable than other international card schemes. It is a cross-border payment initiative between the two countries and is aimed at promoting the use of low-cost digital payment solutions and advance

digital financial inclusion.

The launch of RuPay card scheme in Bhutan has been made possible by the interconnectivity of the Bhutan Financial Switch (BFS) with India's National Financial Switch (NFS), operated by the National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI).

The transaction will be routed through the Bhutan National Bank Ltd. (BNBL) financial switch for authentication and authorization.

The BNBL's RuPay debit cards can be accepted at more

than 100,000 ATMs and 2 million (M) PoS (point of sales) terminals deployed by the member banks of the National Payments Corporation of India for cash withdrawal, balance inquiry and purchases.

According to a press release from the Royal Monetary Authority (RMA), the interconnection of the BFS network with the RuPay network would not only usher in safe and convenient banking, but also help realise cost effective and cashless transactions by streamlining the payment flows into mainstream banking systems, and thereby, enhancing cross-border digital payments between the two nations.

The two leaders also exchanged views on the unique friendship between the two countries.

Dr Lotay Tshering highlighted exchange of high level visits. "We are closely following up on the deliverables from their visits and would like to seek Your Excellency's support in realising them."

He also sought India's support in establishing a multi-disciplinary hospital, which he said had reached the final stages.

Prime Minister Modi assured that India stood together with Bhutan during the Covid-19 pandemic. "Your needs will always be the highest priority for us," he said.