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e-gov

The e-Government magazine for Asia and the Middle East

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RTI & e-Government

Shall the twain meet?

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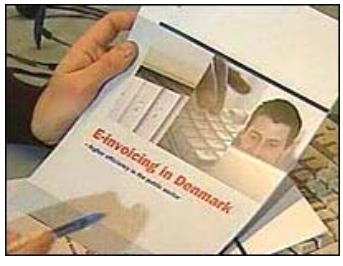

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Editorial Guidelines

***egov* is a monthly magazine providing a much needed platform to the voices of various stakeholders in the arena of e-Government, apart from being a repository of valuable information and meaningful discussion on issues of e-governance in general, and e-Government in particular – both to the specialist and the generalist.**

Contributions to egov magazine should be in the form of articles, case studies, book reviews, event report and news related to e-Government project and initiatives, which are of immense value for practitioners, professionals, corporate and academicians.

We would like the contributors to follow these guidelines, while submitting their material for publication.

- Articles/ Case studies should not exceed 2500 words. For book reviews and event report, the word limit is 800.
- An abstract of the article/case study not exceeding 200 words should be submitted along with the article/case study.
- All articles/ case studies should provide proper references. Authors should give in writing stating that the work is new and has not been published in any form so far.
- Book reviews should include details of the book like the title, name of the author(s), publisher, year of publication, price and number of pages and also send the cover photograph of the book in JPEG/ TIFF (resolution 300 dpi).
- Book reviews of books on e-Governance related themes, published from year 2002 onwards, are preferable. In case of website, provide the URL.
- The manuscripts should be typed in a standard printable font (Times New Roman 12 font size, titles in bold) and submitted either through mail or post.
- Relevant figures of adequate quality (300 dpi) should be submitted in JPEG/ TIFF format.
- A brief bio-data and passport size photograph(s) of the author(s) must be enclosed.
- All contributions are subject to approval by the publisher.

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	Solution Focus	Application Focus
October	Interoperability (Open Standards, Open Source Software)	Transport
November	eForms	Police
December	Information and Network Security	Passport Visa
January	Metadata and Data Standards	Income Tax
February	e-Governance Architecture	Courts
March	WiMAX	Posts

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EDITORIAL

RTI Act vis-à-vis e-Governance

Information *per se* is an inalienable part of any civilised human being. It is through the availability of appropriate and adequate information that the very life process of human beings becomes liveable and easy. It is in this context that the Government of India (GoI) enacted the Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005, through a parliamentary legislation mandating Indian citizens the right to "demand information" whenever so desired, and which every public authority is liable to share as and when asked for, thus recognising the importance of informed citizenry and maintenance of transparency of information. *Ipso facto*, the pre-requisites for good governance too lie in accountability, authenticity and transparency.

Believed to be one of the most advanced RTI legislations in the world, the Act is based on the principle that all government information is the property of people. The chapter II - 4 (1-a) of RTI Act specifically states: "Every public authority shall maintain all its records duly catalogued and indexed in a manner and the form which facilitates the right to information under this Act and ensure that all records that are appropriate to be computerised are, within a reasonable time and subject to availability of resources, computerised and connected through a network all over the country on different systems so that access to such records is facilitated… It shall be a constant endeavour of every public authority to take steps in accordance with the requirements of clause (b) of sub-section (1) to provide as much information *suo motu* to the public at regular intervals through various means of communications, including Internet, so that the public have minimum resort to the use of this Act to obtain information."

Indeed, the RTI Act is an important accelerator to take the e-Governance movement forward in India. Digitisation of all government documents, which is vital to strengthen e-Governance, is quite important to address the information needs of citizens. Effective online services as such gives an average citizen instant access to Government services at a faster and convenient pace, which the RTI Act strongly and truly advocates. This would not only make the citizen e-nabled but also stamp out the scourge of middlemen and rampant corruption. Undoubtedly so, the RTI Act could surely prove to be a boon for various e-Government initiatives in the country when implemented fully. It is equally important that citizens be made aware of their inalienable 'Right to Information', such that they demand access to the existing provisions in the RTI Act while acknowledging the fact that information cannot be monopolised now. Hats off to prominent civil rights activists Ms. Aruna Roy, Arvind Kejriwal and Anna Hazare, who valiantly carried forward the RTI campaign and made people aware of their intrinsic right to information and to be informed.

Ravi Gupta
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Now, technological ATMs to benefit Chinese farmers

China's Jinglingqiao village of Songjiang District in Shanghai began trial operations of an information service kiosk specifically designed for farmers. The kiosks, which are termed as 'agricultural, scientific and technological ATMs', would offer agricultural knowledge, weather reports and market information to farmers. The kiosks would be easily accessible to farmers, from where they would also be able to purchase pesticides and receive them on a specific day. By the end of 2006, Shanghai has decided to establish 40 comprehensive service centres for farmers where such ATMs would be installed. Besides, installation of ATMs on a trial basis would also be done in 40 villages in Songjiang District.

Bangladesh's GrameenPhone sets up CICs

'Community Information Centre (CIC)' has been launched by GrameenPhone (GP) in Bangladesh as a pilot project through its nationwide EDGE (Enhanced Data rates for Global Evolution) connectivity. The project aims to provide Internet access and other communication services such as using emails, fax and instant messaging to the rural people. Besides, the centres would also provide passport forms, birth and death certificates forms, market prices of agricultural products through government website to the customers. According to Stein Naevdal, Director of IT Division of GP, the CICs would ensure self-employment for at least one or two youths in each village thereby contribute to building advanced knowledge of wireless communications and information technology in areas being served by these centres.

Presently, GP has till date established 26 CICs across Bangladesh ever since it launched the project in February 2006. CICs have been established in districts such as Sylhet, Rajshahi, Khulna, Dhaka and Chittagong.

K-AGRINET launches Connect Now campaign in rural Philippine

A 2-month K-AGRINET (Knowledge Networking for Enterprising Agricultural Communities) Information and Communications Technology Roadshow has been launched by the Open Academy for Philippine Agriculture that has brought Internet connectivity in the rural areas across Philippine. K-AGRINET is a campaign that urges local chief executives to allow their agricultural extensionists to go online. During the roadshow, 5 big buses equipped with notebook computers with wireless Internet access travelled down from La Union to Cagayan de Oro during the summer in a bid to promote KONEK NA! (Connect Now).

K-AGRINET, which is funded through the e-Government fund under the administration of the Commission on Information and Communications Technology, has 4 components. This includes e-Learning and Knowledge Bank through Open Academy for Philippine Agriculture, managed by PhilRice; the e-Consortia and e-Farm managed by PCAARD; and the e-Agrikultura, managed by the Department of Agrarian Reform.

The Office of the Provincial Agriculturist and the Philippine Rice Research Institute launched the Internet connectivity for agriculture extension workers in Negros Occidental in November 2005. Currently, OPAPA, also known as the Pinoy Farmers Internet, is advocating modernisation through access of information in the Internet. A network of national, local and international institutions providing e-extension advisory services and distance education to extension workers and farmers, OPAPA aims to empower farmers' groups through interactive network services giving them direct access to extension agents and agricultural experts.

Pakistan launches PIMS e-Government project

Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari, Pakistan's Minister for Information Technology, inaugurated the PKR39mn (US$647,088) PIMS (Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences) automation project recently at Islamabad. The ambitious e-Government project was launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, amidst the presence of Muhammad Nasir Khan, Health Minister; Farrakh Qayyum, IT Secretary; Fazal-e-Hadi, PIMS Executive Director; and other senior officials.

The PIMS has been equipped with computers, printers, and an MIS (Medical Information System) application that includes all functions of the hospital including patient care, inventory and stores. A further 100 additional computers and accessories to PMIS would be provided to extend the project at all its allied departments.

Thai software developers invited for e-Government projects

In Thailand, local software developers would now be able to participate in e-Government development projects. The Office of Computer Cluster Promotion (CCP) is already working with Thailand Science Park, the Software Industry Promotion Agency (Sipa) and Software Park Thailand for establishing 'Open Development of e-Government Collaboration' project. According to CCP's Director Smith Suksmith, the software developers would complete the project in three stages. The first stage would be to develop requirement analysis, design the flow of information between government agencies and establish the system architecture and program specifications for information exchange. The second stage requires the developing of graphic design and programming related to the designs. Finally, programs would be test-run for quality control and evaluation.

Some 10-15 software vendors would initially participate in the project that would run from August to December 2006. However, the number of participants is likely to increase in next year's projects. The selected vendors would be provided with software tools, facilities and training. CCP would function as super-project manager, and is responsible to allocate e-Government projects for development to selected vendors.

Brunei e-Health project to take off soon

In order to give a further push to e-Government, Brunei government's Ministry of Health recently signed a contract with Pricewaterhouse Coopers as part of a continued effort to push forward the implementation of the e-Government project, e-Health. Pricewaterhouse Coopers would undertake the study of requirements for Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the Health Services Department and identify potential areas in the Medical Services Department and Health Services Department that can utilise TeleHealth technologies to improve the current service delivery as well as to conduct a study on the requirements and propose a model for TeleHealth in Brunei. The study is likely to be completed within 3 months.

Dr Hj Sablee bin Hj Aspar, Director of Healthcare Technology Department, and Mr Lee Kin Chee, Managing Partner of Pricewaterhouse Coopers, signed the agreement. The services to be covered under the project include Outpatient Services Department, Health Promotion and Education, School Health, Community Nutrition, Psychology, Maternal, Child Health Care, Immunisation, and District Health.

e-Government Leadership Centre at Singapore soon

Dr. Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, announced that Singapore would soon establish an

e-Government Leadership Centre for training of industry and government personnel.

To be launched by the end of 2006, the e-Government Leadership Centre would be jointly set up by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, the National University of Singapore's Institute of Systems Science and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. Aiming to be a world-class leader in e-Government education, research and consulting, the e-Government Leadership Centre would offer executive management programmes covering topics relating to public policy, ICT policy and management and case studies in innovative e-Government.

IBM

Implementing Linux on IBM @server zSeries

Hungarian National Railways reduces workload, cut costs

MÁV Informatika (*www.mavinformatika.hu*), the Hungarian National Railways (Magyar Államvasutak or MÁV) information services division, is responsible for designing and supporting the entire information infrastructure, which includes online ticketing systems, business inventories, carriage tracking, and freight wagon allocation services. Based in the Hungarian capital of Budapest, MÁV Informatika currently employs about 500 people.

Over a period of time it was witnessed that MÁV Informatika's workload began to subsequently increase with the rapid expansion of the Hungarian economy. Slowing in response times was being considerably experienced by both internal and external users. This ultimately made the urgency felt for the requirement of a more powerful server platform, which would have put the users at ease while bringing speed in response times. Moreover, even MÁV Informatika had also decided to cut operational costs, and possibly to reduce the number of physical servers and operating systems it needed to support.

> **"We had a diverse range of systems, including IBM S/390 [the predecessor to IBM @server zSeries] and Intel®-based servers running Linux® and UNIX®. We wanted to preserve the core operational systems running on the S/390, including Lotus Domino applications, while cutting costs and developing our Web capabilities"**

"We had a diverse range of systems, including IBM S/390 [the predecessor to IBM @server zSeries] and Intel®-based servers running Linux® and UNIX®. We wanted to preserve the core operational systems running on the S/390, including Lotus Domino applications, while cutting costs and developing our Web capabilities. This needed to be done securely and reliably – it is not acceptable

to MÁV for systems to be unavailable," explained János Németh, Systems Programmer.

Single platform for reduced costs

MÁV Informatika standardised on Linux as its strategic operating system, and chose IBM @server zSeries as its main consolidated server platform as part of its drive to cut costs. As such, MÁV Informatika placed the primary zSeries server in Budapest, while a second system has been placed at a remote location as a stand-by ready to resume operations in the event of a disaster. Existing legacy applications run in a z/OS partition, while Linux partitions support both Linux and ported UNIX workload.

According to János Németh, MÁV Informatika has reduced both operating and maintenance costs by implementing IBM's Linux on zSeries. Németh said, "We already had the Linux skills, which we could transfer directly to the zSeries, making it easy for us to implement new workload. Since implementation, Linux on zSeries has proved to be highly secure and extremely available."

The zSeries supports 1,400 users, authenticated using the highly secure Remote Access Control Facility (RACF), enabling access to a wide range of legacy programs, Lotus Domino applications, and the MÁV online ticketing system. Data is stored on an IBM TotalStorage Enterprise Storage Server, with a capacity of 1.6TB.

High security for data

Concluding that the security and reliability of zSeries made for an unbeatable business case, MÁV Informatika said that it considered implementing Linux on Intel-based servers rather than on zSeries. Considering that both the legacy and Linux solutions use IBM DB2 data management software, MÁV Informatika implemented DB2 data sharing across the partitions to ensure that all corporate information is consistent.

MÁV Informatika, which is currently developing the online ticketing system, has also decided to run it on a Linux zSeries partition, with IBM WebSphere Application Server providing access to the travel planning, booking and payments systems.

János Németh said, "MÁV Informatika has been using IBM technologies since 1992. We have considered other platforms for our Linux-based systems, but the security and availability advantages made zSeries the only choice for MÁV Informatika."

MÁV Informatika has expressed immense satisfaction with the new Linux and zSeries solution. The company is now able to reduce its IT maintenance costs and simplify the management of its IT infrastructure by consolidating to a single platform.

According to János Németh, the next step now would be to implement Tivoli Storage Manager on z/OS, which would give the ability to back up and archive data from every system within MÁV Informatika, including Linux on zSeries. This would provide much better system resilience and disaster recovery options.

Linux on German Federal Railways

Besides the Hungarian National Railways, even the German Federal Railways has decided to rely more heavily on IBM's Linux as a server operating system in an effort to achieve sustainable cost savings. According to DB Systems, the German Federal Railway's Intra-group IT Services Provider, Linux offered greater flexibility. Detlef Exner, head of IT Operations at DB Systems, said, "It is our job to develop and run the most efficient and cost-effective IT for the Federal Railways. For us there is no getting way from Linux. The changeover projects are all being erected upon a uniform Linux architecture. One of the main projects has been the Lotus-Notes/Domino switchover from z/OS to zLinux for IBM mainframes. The backbone of the Federal Railways' IT system is made up of 32 redundant servers and has a data volume of about 6.5 terabyte. Because of the high volume in particular savings on license costs of about 50% can be expected."

Italy's Alpitour migrates to Linux on zSeries

Leading player in the Italian tourist industry Alpitour SpA (Alpitour), which has a presence in 7,000 travel agencies across Italy, has also selected IBM mainframe technology to run its core business systems since the mid-1980s. When IBM opened up its mainframe to the possibilities of Linux, Alpitour was delighted and jumped at the possibility of running new Linux-based systems on existing zSeries servers. Working with Gruppo Formula and IBM Italy, Alpitour has been able to implement and take advantage of Linux without losing the availability and performance offered by zSeries.

Initially, Diapason – a modular ERP system that holds second place in the Italian market, was implemented under z/OS on Alpitour's IBM zSeries 900 server. However, the development under z/OS was too slow to meet the growing demand even though Diapason fitted Alpitour's functional requirements well. Finally, Alpitour decided to port it to Linux to improve flexibility and reduce costs. Alpitour's z900 is now divided into two partitions – one running z/OS for legacy workload; the other one is running Linux, for Diapason, with 120 local and remote users, and boasting a WebSphere application connecting over 1,500 travel agencies. Alpitour is now expanding its use of Linux, creating new Web-based booking applications running under IBM WebSphere.

The Challenge

- Provide faster system response
- Reduce infrastructure complexity
- Lay plans for business resilience
- Cut operational costs

The Solution

- Implement IBM @server zSeries
- Running z/OS and Linux®
- Port UNIX® workload to Linux
- Migrate existing Linux workload to zSeries
- Plan for Tivoli Storage Manager

The Benefit

- Reduced administration and maintenance costs
- Support for Web-based ticketing system
- Legacy COBOL applications on a single physical server

SAP emerges leader in all ERP software segments

A Gartner Dataquest report published recently declared that SAP AG has emerged as a leader worldwide and now ranks first in all four of the ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) software segments that include financial management systems, human capital management, enterprise asset management and manufacturing operations. SAP achieved a 21.4% y-o-y (year-on-year) growth in the enterprise asset management market. SAP enhanced its leadership position as the number one CRM worldwide market shareholder with a y-o-y growth rate of 19.6% based on total software revenue. Presently, the company is envisaging a strong customer adoption of mySAP ERP, the company's flagship ERP application, at a fast pace.

Gartner Dataquest, a division of Gartner, Inc., for the first time calculated the market share for the worldwide enterprise software market segments based on the total software revenue metric to reflect the changes in the industry, such as open-source software (OSS), on-demand business models and new regulations.

Slovak Republic to get IBM help in e-Procurement

Aiming to leverage its procurement services, the Slovakian government would acquire an integrated system for electronic public tendering from IBM. The e-Procurement

system is to be supplied to the Ministry of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications for realising its e-Government vision. The IBM solution, which is aimed to make the process completely paperless, would reduce the time needed for the preparation and execution of public procurement, and decrease the costs related with repeated tenders. Bids would also be accepted online once the solution is implemented.

Called EVO, the e-Procurement system would support the tendering cycle, from notifications to national and European agencies, to publication of tender documentation, enquiries, submission of binding offers and the evaluation of bids. IBM's e-Procurement system has already been successfully implemented in several European countries, including Portugal.

Cisco to undertake ME e-Government study 'Net Impact'

Samer Alkharrat, General Manager, Cisco Systems, Gulf region, announced that Cisco is to undertake a study named 'Net Impact' in the Middle East to measure the effectiveness of e-Government, including investments on productivity. Alkharrat, who made the announcement recently at the Cisco Expo 2006 in Bahrain, said that the entirely Cisco-funded study would be conducted country by country in the Middle East.

The New Impact system would be able to ascertain results about moving from transactions into interactions that aims at improving the relationship between the governments, companies and the people. Cisco executives claim that the technology is the catalyst for government transformation and organisations that coordinate process reengineering, Internet business applications and advanced network infrastructure for achieving success with e-Government.

'e-Payments to boost growth in Asia-Pacific'

Michael Cannon, Visa International Asia-Pacific's General Manager, Commercial Solutions, said that e-Payments would lead to significant cost saving benefits in the Asia-Pacific this year given the expected size of business and government spending of more than MYR57.6trn (US$16trn). Cannon, while addressing Visa's Government Services Conference in Perth, Australia, suggested that governments in the Asia-Pacific should abandon outdated procurement processes and adopt modern e-Payments system to boost their economies.

Cannon remarked, "This figure underpins the phenomenal speed at which the Asia-Pacific economies are growing and with it, the greater opportunities to improve governance through maximising resources, reducing costs, simplifying processes, disbursing funds and making it easier for people to pay their taxes and government services."

"Bottom Up" Perspectives on ICTs and the Right to Information

Michael Gurstein and **Parminder Jeet Singh**

As natural resources and readily available, easily transformable energy were the raw materials out of which the Industrial Revolution was forged, so Information and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are the raw materials out of which the Information Revolution is being forged. And just as the Industrial Revolution was transformative of all aspects of daily life including all aspects of economic and social production (and reproduction) so the Information Revolution is similarly transformative.

It is in this context that we must understand the concept and the principles underlying a "Right to Information" (RTI) and both the likely impact of the broad-based introduction of such a right and the manner and type of outcomes which will be its result, particularly as these affect those at the local and grassroots levels.

Why "Bottom Up" and the Right to Information

The challenge of the "Right to Information" is that while such rights may have been translated into laws, the practice of enforcing such rights is one, which in many contexts is out of the reach of those without considerable access to legal or financial resources. And it is those with the least resources who may have the most need to have access to such "information".

It is pertinent to understand the concept and the principles underlying a "Right to Information" and both the likely impact of the broad-based introduction of such a right and the manner and type of outcomes which will be its result, particularly as these affect those at the local and grassroots levels

Having a "right to information" makes little sense if "access" to that information is too costly for ordinary citizens to operationalise, or if such "access" is limited only to those who for example, have a high level of literacy skills or advantageous access to computer facilities and the Internet. The exercise of this right may be denied in practice whatever the law if information access is unnecessarily restrictive, too costly or discriminatory.

In this context, the 'Right to Information' can be understood as having two facets from the perspective of the grassroots: (a.) Access to general information such as the information that governments (and others) make available for example, concerning entitlements and benefits, medical information or information that might be of interest from a working conditions or occupational health and safety perspective among others; and (b.) Access to specific information such as might those concerning individual files, services or entitlements related to individuals, specific decisions made and decision making by government officials and so on.

In both of these instances information technology can play a significant role. In the first instance, by lowering the cost of information access and by facilitating its broadest possible distribution (and potential accessibility) through email or the World Wide Web. In the second instance, by enabling the development and enhanced 'transparency' of information records, tabulations, databases and so on to which ordinary citizens can have ready and low cost access through electronic means.

Also, it should be noted that the issue of "digitisation of records" is still subject to attitudes critical of computerisation among many of those involved in public policy issues – inside governments and outside. In fact, a position critical of new technologies is often seen as being necessary if one is to be understood as being supportive of disadvantaged people.

In fact, the (Right to Information) RTI Act is India's first law that obligates governments to take up e-Governance. Quoting the Act: "Every public authority shall… ensure that all records that are appropriate to be computerised are, within a reasonable time and subject to availability of resources, computerised and connected through a network all over the country on different systems so that access to such records is facilitated. Public and judicial activism can progressively increase the interpretation of all records that are appropriate to be computerised." In a recent workshop on RTI in Delhi many participants were concerned that too heavy focus on the Internet was not appropriate considering the conditions of rural India today, where connectivity is low.

Effective use and the Right to Information

It should also be noted that a "Right to Information" is meaningless and particularly for those with little means without a consequent means for enabling the "effective use" of this information.

In another context, the notion of "effective use" has been developed as an approach to ensuring that access that is made available in attempts for example, to "bridge the Digital Divide" are in fact of value and benefit to the population towards which these applications are addressed. An "effective use" approach would be concerned to ensure that RTI was supported not simply by the means to access the information element but also that it was usable by those making access thus that it is accessible to those with various types of disabilities; designed to be usable given various types of Internet access; available in local languages and supports use by those with little or no literacy skills; downloadable with local means to print in a usable and affordable manner; and perhaps of most importance that there are institutional and organisational structures and supports that enables the translation of "accessed information" into real and valuable use by citizens as for example, in linking the information in public records to the making of formal complaints.

RTI and e-Governance

In India, in particular, there is the additional issue that if the RTI were to be fully executed it is likely that the current governance system would be unable to cope. The scope of this issue is in India enormous and its potential impacts very substantial given the very high cost of servicing even a single request for information. The argument that is frequently made that one successful RTI request obviates the need for many others, as the system perks up and begins to deliver better, may be underestimating the inertia of the system and not recognising the impact of the petty corruption which surrounds information access in India (and in many other developing countries as well).

Digital technologies which provide the means for very low cost publishing and information distribution are quite evidently the necessary supports for the RTI, and without them the promise of any RTI law or similar ascribed right cannot be optimised.

An additional issue with RTI processes where ICTs may have a significant influence is that in many cases when information is requested this request has to be addressed to the very office or official where the information in question may potentially have the most damaging effect. In this instance, the officials in question have the least incentive to disclose and the most incentive (and means) to undertake "damage control" (information access restrictive) measures – a situation where the citizen is necessarily at a significant disadvantage.

The electronic publication of government information could ensure remote access to information without giving a 'warning' to the potentially affected officials. Such processes also allow senior officials up to the highest levels to monitor RTI access to government information remotely, once again without any particular office/official to having knowledge that such a monitoring is being done.

The costs of e-Governance, i.e. broadly, digitising records and processes, though expensive, has to be seen in the context of the overall cost of government and particularly for the Indian governments which runs a quite expensive establishment. This establish-ment however is one with low levels of efficiency and high levels of wastage and one, which would almost certainly be very positively impacted through the widespread introduction of ICTs.

Today, even a small office of, say, a grassroots NGO has begun to realise that

computer-based office work is more cost effective than manual process – whether it be for accounting, documentation or communication. Governments in developing as in developed countries are simply small offices multiplied into the tens of thousands or even millions where each in turn could benefit from computer applications. When linked together by means of the Internet, these could achieve very significant additional improvements in effectiveness and potentially massive cost and overall efficiency benefits as well; but of course while also taking steps to limit the opportunities for the potentially very significant wastage and corruption leakages that changeovers of this scale can themselves engender and particularly in countries such as India where there are entrenched patterns of corruption.

There is of course the need to build the institutional systems and processes that give body to the provisions of the Act. These processes and systems include institutionalisation of practices of seeking and obtaining information from government bodies and also being able to use this meaningfully. Great vigilance and high level of activism by citizen groups is needed in the initial and potentially protracted period of RTI implementation as practices are established and institutionalised, and where they can be expected to have significant resistance from the bureaucracy. Often this will require working with some supportive bureaucrats to build good working systems of obtaining information through RTI, and using it to enforce accountability and improve public service delivery.

As against getting one-off access to useful information, building working systems over the new legal provisions is more important. Many in the establishment have the good intention to improve governance but are impeded by poor existing systems, and working with them to build new citizen-empowering systems is an important work for citizen groups.

Perhaps what is needed as a start is to take a simpler, more home-grown, approach to e-Governance – one where 2-3 years are taken to digitise all processes and documents in one district in a manner that all systems work ideally as per plan (for which will be needed local political and employee level "buy in" including an understanding of what this will mean from personal employment and income perspectives). This being done, the cost saving and output improvements will be easily proven. And since in most cases, governance processes are the same across all the districts within each national grouping, the system can be exported everywhere within the country. Additionally, of course in support of this it is important that civil society activists and the media gives as much attention to this kind of system piloting and mainstreaming as it has to the one-off examples of ICT implementations and the effective application of incidences of RTI.

RTI and Community Informatics

The above was about the institutionalisation of the RTI at the government end, and the imperatives involved in this process. An equally important issue is that of institutionalising processes at the community level. At present, in most jurisdictions it is the urban educated population, often activists, who have used the RTI. It is relatively easy for a city-based educated pensioner, for instance, who is used to official processes, to undertake an RTI action. But the vast majority of the population in developing countries, mainly rural, poor and otherwise disadvantaged, i.e. those who are most excluded by the existing processes of governance, are mostly absent from the RTI picture. It is important for these elements of the population and these communities that RTI processes are embed and institutionalised into appropriate local community informatics systems.

ICT-enabled processes are also needed in communities for RTI to be operationalised to its real potential and this goes beyond the obvious observation that if most public information is put on the Internet, people will need to have the Internet available in order to access it. Community informatics implies making use of ICTs to develop new empowering systems of information and communication processes at the community level. RTI is emerging at a time when access to information has taken on a new meaning and set of possibilities due to the spread of ICTs. Village tele- (or information or knowledge) centres are being promoted as a new institutional form in many Developing Country contexts including rural India, to become local nodes supporting a variety of existing and new institutional processes including in the area of small business development, social organization, governance, and education and health services.

An ideal community informatics implementation will however, not simply be a one-way flow of information into the village community. Equally it will provide opportunities for peer-to-peer as well as bottom-up information flows as for example, community built databases

which could complement and authenticate official records or provide alternatives to existing records which may be faulty or otherwise misleading.

The development of such community-generated data has been one of the most important ways in which truly "effective uses" of the RTI provisions have been implemented by disadvantaged communities. Two RTI activist groups in India, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan and Parivartan, have collected their own data – MKSS about daily wage payments in public works activities, and Parivartan about the Public (Food) Distribution System (PDS) – and have challenged official records in these important areas. These activities have led to significant community empowering outcomes. These examples demonstrate the value of further systematizing such processes and of placing RTI in the context of the development of community informatics applications specific to each community.

In a mature community informatics context, the information collection activity need not only be oppositional and confrontational. Community processes in telecentres can also support the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery. One instance of this is in the IT for Change Mahiti Manthana project in villages in Mysore where women self help groups 'own' such telecentres. It is anticipated that the telecentre or Village Information Centre (VIC) operators will collect information monthly on the health intervention needs of pregnant women and young children in the village. This information will be passed on to public health service providers, so that they can plan their visits accordingly. This information will also be copied to all higher officials. This will save the visiting health staff the need to visit every house to find out which households require their services during a particular visit. The VIC operator, at a later time, will collect data on actual interventions made by the health system, and this information will be available to be compared with the earlier set, which identified the needs.

Ultimately all of this information will be routinely sent to all levels of the health service machinery. However, it may not be sufficient to trust that there will be an automatic intervention from the higher levels even when information concerning gaps in service provision is routinely and systematically made available. The same VIC which will build the community information base will also act as a RTI facilitation centre helping community members to obtain access to official information concerning health interventions that may be mentioned in the official records but may not have actually been performed or which have been made but which have not been entered into the official record. In this way providing access and the means for effective use of health information at the community level will enable a people's audit of the health system and its overall accountability and transparency as well as ensuring that the field workers will be kept on their toes because they will know that information is flowing to the higher levels.

Such an integrated community informatics approach to village level information gathering and management can also be seen as a viable alternative to the currently cumbersome and often inaccurate manual public health data filing system which of course, is a major contributor to the system's overall inefficiency.

Similar information access and communication processes can be established in other areas such as the management and delivery of public works (including workforce enrolment and wage payments), government revenues and expenditures, taxation, education services, agriculture extension among others. However, as pointed out earlier, it is essential that these processes are systematized and institutionalised, so that they both contribute to the continuing upgrading of the machinery of government at the same time as they are increasing the transparency and accountability of governmental operations. It is only when robust information and communication systems are set up, and are sufficiently institutionalised at the community end, that real and sustained benefits from RTI will begin to flow.

RTI, ICTs and Good Governance

The formalisation of a Right to Information carries with it the potential of far-reaching transformation of Indian governance, but for this purpose the RTI law needs to be exploited systematically.

> It should be noted that a "Right to Information" is meaningless and particularly for those with little means without a consequent means for enabling the "effective use" of this information

It is important also to recognize that the opportunities presented by a formalized RTI, as for example, the Indian RTI Act, can only be fully operationalised and routinised through the development and implementation of appropriate information systems and the automation of government operations. Incorporating new processes built around the appropriate and effective use of the new ICTs, both at the government end and at the community end, is absolutely essential for this purpose and overall for achieving "good governance" at both the local and the national levels.

The fears that the bureaucracy has expressed, and attempts to dilute the law, and stall its implementation in various ways, only serves to show the potential of the RTI law. The Indian RTI law is widely accepted to be very progressive, and carries the means to build a popular movement for re-claiming and re-enabling the institutions of citizen based governance and real democracy.

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REALISING INDIA'S POTENTIAL

Building a digitally inclusive society.

The power of computing enables people to pursue their passions and achieve their ambitions, no matter who they are. At Microsoft we recognise that for millions of people, the promise of technology is still unrealised. In India, we have attempted to make this vision real through initiatives that seek to drive the percolation of IT across different strata's of society.

Project Bhasha

One would expect that a nationally acclaimed Hindi poet's creative juices flowed only when pen met paper. On the contrary Professor Ashok Chakradhar felt hampered at not being able to use his laptop to write poetry in his mother tongue. On the advice of a friend, he went to Bhashaindia.com and tried Microsoft Office in Hindi; it was love at first sight. Over the years he has travelled far and wide, using technology to share his creativity and has been an avowed supporter of Microsoft's language programme.

In India, while computing has changed the way we function, yet it is only 2% of the population that has been able to embrace this technology and reap its benefits. One of the key reasons has been the lack of a comfortable local language interface.

Project Bhasha, Microsoft India's National Language programme, brings technology to the most basic level of comfort, one's own language. The aim of the project is to foster an environment of collaboration in order to promote local language computing. Conceived in 2003, it is a cohesive programme that rests on four pillars - localised product development, government engagement, local Independent Software Vendors and student involvement with community activities.

Under the aegis of Project Bhasha, almost all of Microsoft's products support 13 languages, like:

- **Microsoft Windows XP:** To enable local language computing, Microsoft has developed language versions of the Operating Software. In fact, the Windows XP Starter Edition Operating Software is especially developed for India, and is aimed at the first time PC user as it enables computing in two languages - Hindi and Tamil apart from the regular English interface. Also planned are 8 other Indian languages by June 2006.

- **Microsoft Office Suite:** This powerful productivity tool is widely used by businesses in 13 local languages, thereby facilitating easy data handling, impressive presentations and local language correspondence.

Apart from products, the portal - bhashaindia.com attracts an average of 300,000 page views per month out which atleast 10,000 are unique visitors. It supports an ever growing independent software vendor community (currently 15,000 member strong), students and academia to share knowledge and develop local language enabled products and services. This talent pool can also download Language Interface Packs (LIP) in 13 languages and use them as the framework to localise existing products or develop software and applications anew.

With the increased availability of local language computing more and more citizens will be able to access information, communicate, share ideas and transact business in their own language. Therefore, language will no longer be a deterrent to IT adoption but an active enabler in the effort. Through these initiatives, Microsoft will continue to invest in driving technology as a key enabler to build a digitally inclusive society.

Learn more at www.microsoft.com/india/potential

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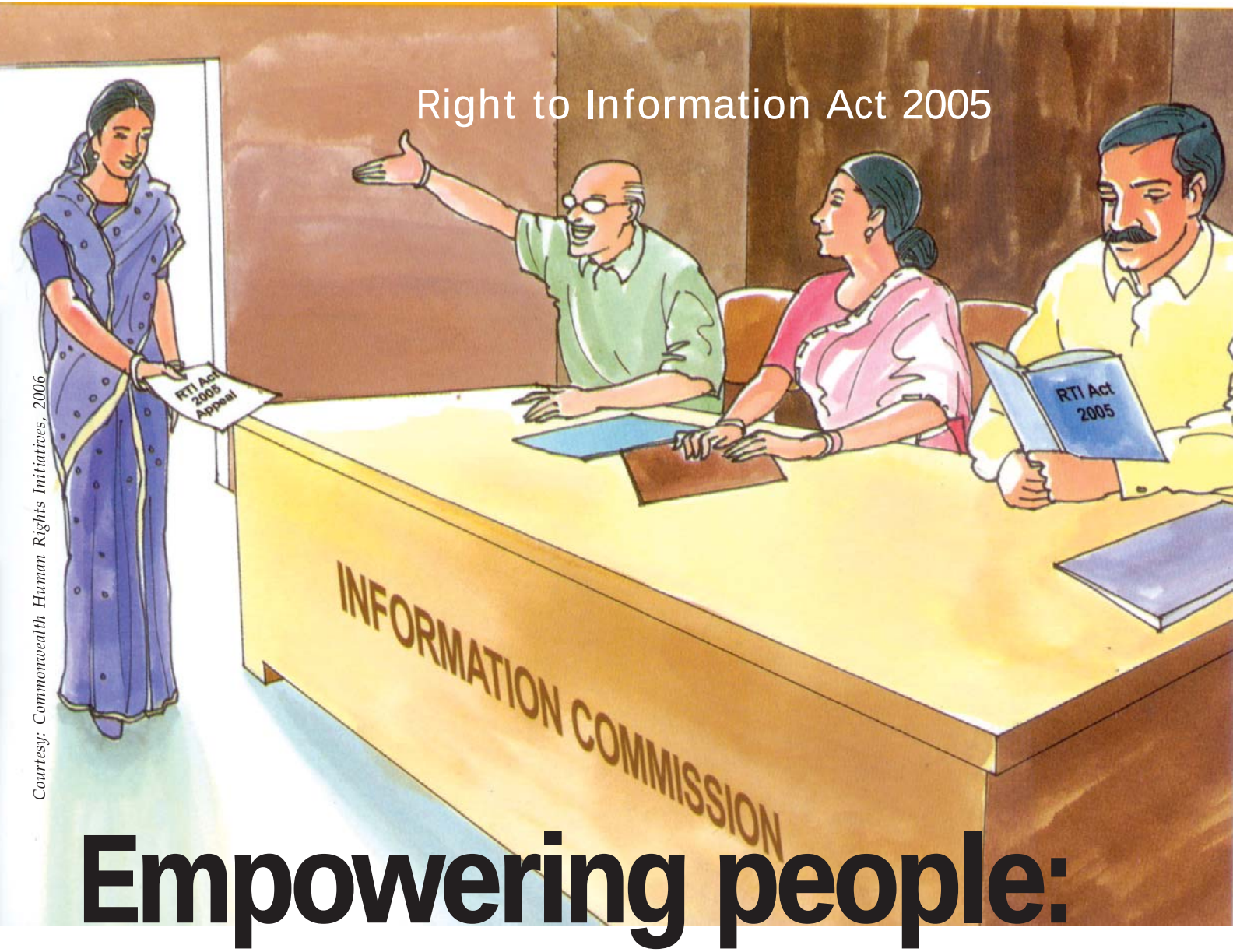


Courtesy: Commonwealth Human Rights Initiatives, 2006

Empowering people: But how?

Prachi Shirur

The Right to Information Act, 2005 (No. 22 of 2005) enacted on 15th June 2005 is an Act to provide for setting out the practical regime of right to information for citizens to secure access to information under the control of public authorities, in order to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority. The Act is enacted to primarily contain corruption and to hold Governments and their instrumentalities accountable to the governed

The Right to Information Act (RTI Act) in India (*http://persmin.nic.in/RTI/WelcomeRTI.htm*) became fully operational from 12th October 2005 (120th day of its enactment on 15th June 2005). Some provisions have come into force with immediate effect viz. obligations of public authorities [S.4(1)], designation of Public Information Officers and Assistant Public Information Officers[S.5(1) and 5(2)], constitution of Central Information Commission (S.12 and 13), constitution of State Information Commission (S.15 and 16), non-applicability of the Act to Intelligence and Security Organizations (S.24), and power to make rules to carry out the provisions of the Act (S.27 and

28). The Act extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir [S.(12)].

The right to information includes an access to the information which is held by or under the control of any public authority and includes the right to inspect the work, document, records, taking notes, extracts or certified copies of documents/records and certified samples of the materials and obtaining information which is also stored in electronic form.

Right to Information Act, 2005

Lack of information denies people the opportunity to develop their potential to the fullest and realise the full range of their human rights. Individual personality, political and social identity and economic capability are all shaped by the information that is available to each person and to society at large. The practice of routinely holding information away from the public creates 'subjects' rather than 'citizens', and is a violation of their rights. This was recognised by the United Nations at its very inception in 1946, when the General Assembly resolved: "Freedom of Information is a fundamental human right and the touchstone for all freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated".

As per the Constitution of India, information means any material in any form including records, documents, memos, emails, opinions, advices, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form, and information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a public authority under any other law for the time being in force but does not include "file notings" [S.2(f) of the Constitution of India].

The Right to Information includes the right to inspect works, documents, records; take notes, extracts or certified copies of documents or records; take certified samples of material; and obtain information in form of printouts, diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts.[S.2(j)]

Information exempted from disclosure

The Right to Information Act, 2005, under Sections 8 and 9 exempt certain categories of information from disclosures. These include:

- Information, disclosure of which would prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State, relation with foreign State or lead to incitement of an offence
- Information, which has been expressly forbidden to be published by any court of law or tribunal or the disclosure of which may constitute contempt of court
- Information, the disclosure of which would cause a breach of privilege of Parliament or the State Legislature
- Information including commercial confidence, trade secrets or intellectual property, the disclosure of which would harm the competitive position of a third party, unless the competent authority is satisfied that larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information
- Information available to a person in his fiduciary relationship, unless the competent authority is satisfied that the larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information
- Information received in confidence from foreign Government; information, the disclosure of which would endanger the life or physical safety of any person or identify the source of information or assistance given in confidence for law enforcement or security purposes
- Information which would impede the process of investigation or apprehension or prosecution of offenders
- Cabinet papers including records of deliberations of the Council of Ministers, Secretaries and other officers
- Information, which relates to personal information the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest, or which, would cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual

Request for Information

Any citizen can request for information by making an application in writing or through electronic means in English/Hindi/official language of the areas, in which the application is being made together with the prescribed fees.

Delivery of Information

A request for obtaining information under Section 6(1) of the Act needs to be accompanied by an application fee of Rs.10 by way of cash against proper receipt or by DD or bankers' cheque.

> **The awareness about the provisions of the RTI Act amongst officers is poor at the lower rungs of the administrative ladder, at the block and *panchayat* levels. Fee structure notified by various governments has no uniformity across the country**

As per the Right to Information (Regulation of Fee and Cost) Rules, 2005, the public authority shall charge:

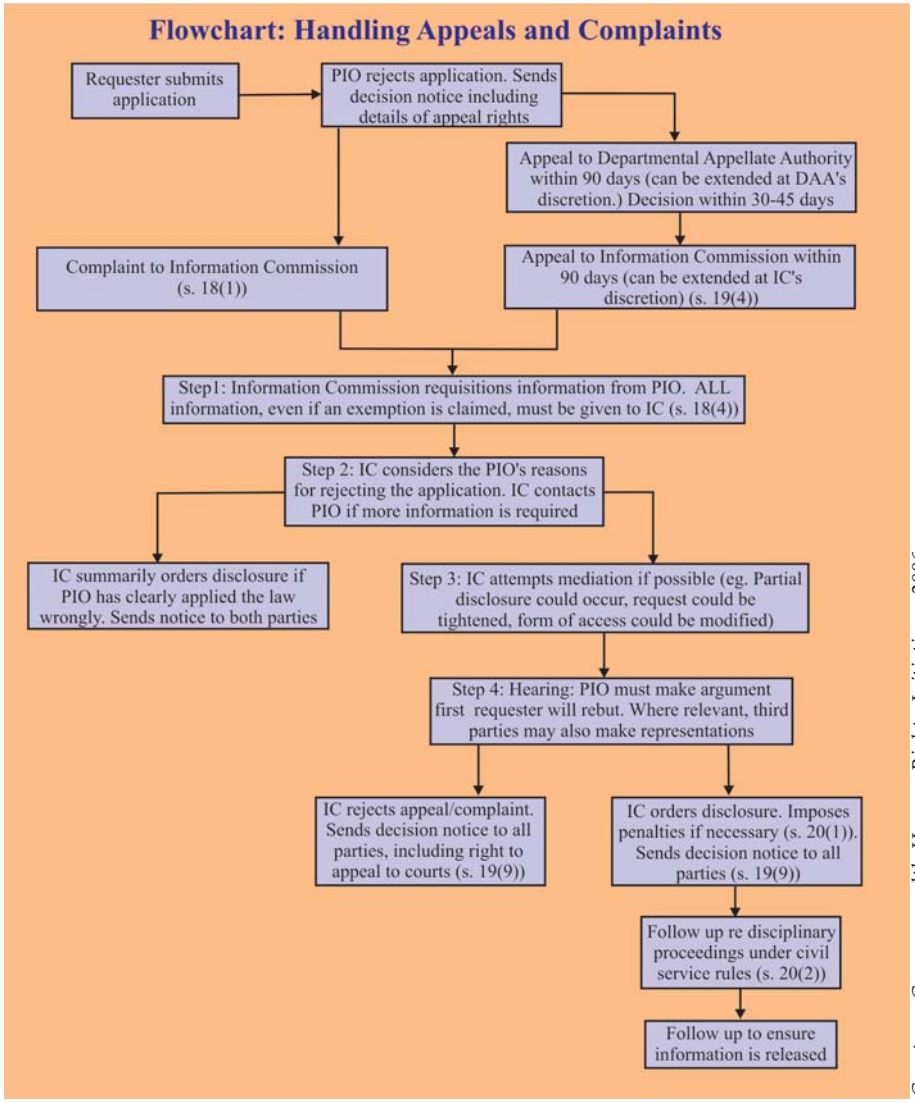
- Rs.2/- for each page (in A-4 or A-3 size paper) created or copied
- Actual charge or cost price of a copy in larger size paper
- Actual cost or price for samples or models
- For inspection of records, no fee for the first hour; and a fee of rupees five for each subsequent hour (or fraction thereof)

Further, to provide information under Section 7(5) of the Right to Information Act, 2005, the public authority shall charge:

- Rs. 50/- per diskette or floppy
- For information provided in printed form at the price fixed for such publication or Rs. 2/- per page of photocopy for extracts from the publication

Authority delivering Information

Any public authority would designate Central Asst. Public Information Officer (CAPIO) at various levels, who will receive the requests for information from the public and necessary number of Central Public Information Officers (CPIO) in all administrative units/ office who will arrange for providing necessary information to the public as permitted under the law. The public authorities are also required to designate authority senior in rank to CPIO, as Appellate Authorities, who will entertain and dispose off appeals against the decision of the CPIO as required under the Act. Any person who does not receive the decision from CPIO either by way of information or rejection within the time frame, may within 30 days from the expiry of period prescribed for furnishing the information or 30 days from the date of receipt of the decisions, may appeal to the Appellate Authority.



Courtesy: Commonwealth Human Rights Initiatives, 2006

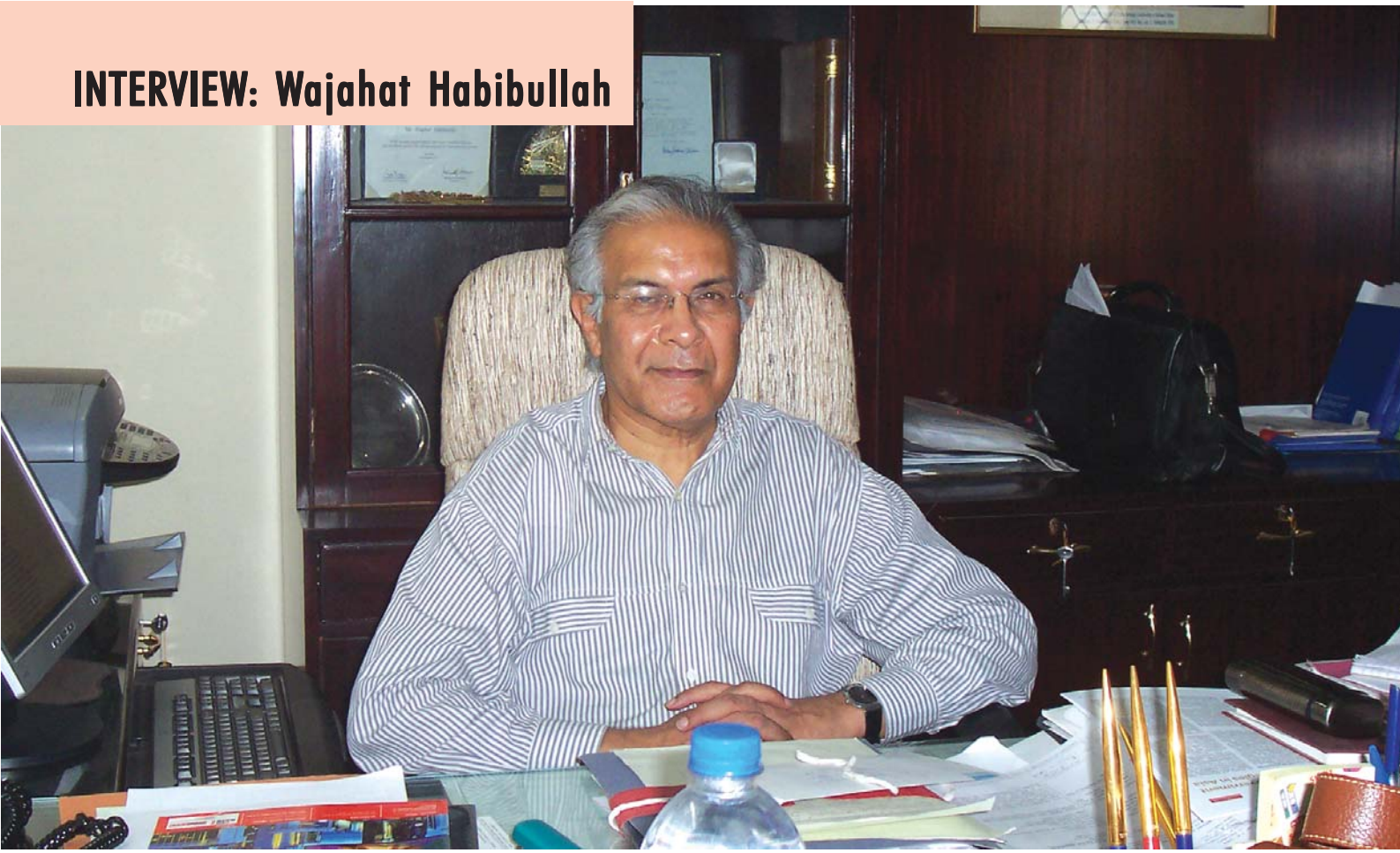
Role of Central Public Information Officers (CPIO)

The CPIO will receive the application/ request for information under the Act and process the request for providing the information and dispose of the same, either by providing the information or rejecting the request, within a period of 30 days from the date of receipt of request.

Gaps in the Right to Information Act

The Right to Information has its fundamental limitation with respect to the fact that there are areas of information that should remain protected in public and national interest. There are also certain gaps in implementation of the RTI Act. Till date, Information Commissions (mandated by the Act) have been set up in 22 of the 28 States only. Requesters are thereby deprived of the statutory complaints and second appellate mechanism in these states to deal with unreasonable action of Public Information Officers and public authorities. The awareness about the provisions of the RTI Act amongst officers is poor at the lower rungs of the administrative ladder, at the block and *panchayat* levels. Fee structure notified by various governments has no uniformity across the country. The Act does not empower any public authority or Information Commission to collect fees for considering appeals from citizens. The Act and the subsequent Rules do not specify a time limit for Information Commissions to dispose of appeals and complaints (Source: Report of the National Conference on the Working of the Right to Information Act, CHRI and ISI, 2005).

The Right to Information Act is often seen as the magic pill that will be the panacea for all our ills. But unless it is preceded by technology enabled knowledge systems, mandated disclosure and structured citizen participation, it will be a damp squib. The gap between what the state knows and what the people are told is the root of repression, corruption and inequity. It is this complete opacity that allows those who have subverted the state to use it for their own ends. Eliminating this asymmetry and setting the foundation for an open democracy is what will truly empower India.



'Using Right to Information to its fullest capacity is challenging'

Being an intrinsic part of democracy, the Right to Information should have come soon after we became a democracy. It has come a little after than it should have come, admits* Wajahat Habibullah, *Chief Information Commissioner, Government of India, in an interview to* Anuradha Dhar & Prachi Shirur *of egov

▶ What has been the purpose and objective behind the passing of the Right to Information (RTI) Act? Has it come at the right time, or it has come early or it should have come long time ago?

The Right to Information (RTI) is an intrinsic part of democracy. From that point of view, to answer your question whether it has come early or late, I would say it has come a little after than it should have come. It should have come soon after we became a democracy. But there are reasons why it could not be there because we were a new democracy; we did not have a long tradition of democratic governance. This tradition had to be established which took time. Now I think that we can claim to be among the more advanced democracies like anywhere in the world. We have our weaknesses; every democracy has its own weaknesses. But this is something that adds strength to the democracy, which leads towards public participation in governance. The public can participate in governance if it knows what the government is doing, and why it is doing what. Once they know what and why, public can either give its recommendations, vote for somebody whom they feel can do what they want, change the government if it feels it needs to be changed, it can raise questions in the parliament, it can raise questions in the street. There are so many means to participate. But first the public needs to have the information and only then it can participate. Therefore, this Act is considered more important than the Constitution itself because it makes the democracy real, makes it for the people of this country. It extends to every citizen of India, gives the right to every citizen of India.

It is not that the government did not give this right before. Article 19 of the

Constitution of India also gives the right to freedom of speech; and freedom of speech and right to information go together. But there was no mechanism earlier through which citizens could access the information. Now that mechanism is there. The other point is when I am talking about why is it important for democracy. In a democracy, as per the classic definition of democracy, Government is of the people, by the people and for the people; and if this is so, that means that the money which is collected by the government is public money. It is literally public money because they pay the taxes, and therefore own this money. The government is only holding it on behalf of the public. It is not an imperial system where the emperor has taken money for his own *durbar*. So, when the money is given to the government in trust, the people have the right to know what the government has done with this money. And therefore, this Act extends to all the public authorities. Public authorities are all those organizations, which have accepted public money – they are not only government organizations but also those private organizations and NGOs that have accepted public money. So they are answerable to the public. However, this is subject to few exceptions since there is the question of security – national and economic, there is the question of privacy. So it is not unfettered access to information. I, as an individual, would have given something in trust to the government; the government may be holding my bio-data in trust. In that case if somebody comes and asks for it, it is denied. With these few exceptions, largely all the information, which is the property of the government, is the property of the public. And therefore, this Act is the recognition of that, and is a mechanism for accessing information by the public, which is their right.

▶ How do you rate the success of the implementation of the RTI Act?

The Act was introduced in the Indian Parliament in May 2005 and passed in June 2005. So, it is one year since it was passed. But it came into operation only in the end of October 2005. It was supposed to be in operation by 12th October, but the infrastructure was not ready by then. I was sworn in as Commissioner only on the 26th October 2005. And the whole Commission became fully operational by the end of November last year. So, the Commission has been there for only 6-7 months, and therefore still in its early days. I give you an example of the United Kingdom, where the RTI Act was passed in January 2000, and it came into operation in January 2005. The whole infrastructure was put in place before the Act was implemented. In India, the Act came into operation without infrastructure being in place. And therefore, there have been avoidable delays and things like that. For example, the states of Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh (UP), they have appointed their Information Commissioners only a couple of months back. And the UP Chief Commissioner says he is having to operate from his home due to lack of infrastructure.

These things would not have happened if we had taken the advantage of using the time from June till October to set up the infrastructure. Even in the Commission, staff was not there, the facilities were not there. Initially it was a bit tough; and now we are an ongoing Commission. But still there are delays; delays in the receipt and dispatch, the routine kind of official working that we take for granted. It is only now that it is coming into position now. Even the space is limited; the staff sanctioned by the Ministry could not be accommodated due to shortage of space. Now we have got little more space.

In certain states such as Delhi and Maharashtra, infrastructure is there because they had the law for a long time. Delhi, in fact, surpassed the Government of India in passing of the RTI Act. The Chief Information Commissioner for Delhi is myself. But they do not have a separate Information Commission and so on. They have the awareness because they have practiced this law for the past five years. In other parts of the country, this is not so. Awareness is supposed to be promoted by the government.

▶ What is the role of this Commission?

The role of the Commission is the final appellate authority. The whole mechanism, which is to be set up, is that every public authority has to set up a Public Information Office, one window. So if you need any information from any public authority, it may or may not be a government department, you go to that public authority and get the information. If you do not get the information, or the information is delayed beyond the time limit, or the information given to you is malafide/misleading, then you can go and appeal. The appeal will lie with the appellate authority, which is inside the ministry or the department of the public authority, a nominated person, and is usually an officer (PIO), senior to the Public Information Commissioner. So here you see that it is already a step forward.

Earlier, if you sought the information, you had to go to the senior officer. Now you have to go to the Central PIO, who is the officer, it has to be a Secretary or Deputy Secretary level officer. It is the Central PIO who is responsible for giving the information, the other PIOs will hold the information for you, if you go to them they will give the information to you otherwise they will give it to any other PIO who asks for the information. So far as you are concerned, you have to go to only one PIO. He/she cannot say "Please go to that officer, or that officer", which used to happen earlier. You cannot be given the run-around here. You get the information from whom you ask. If you do not get the information, then you go in for the second appeal and that is before this Information Commission. And this Commission is outside of the government. It does not have to uphold any directions of the government. It has to uphold the law. Or if you are not satisfied with the work that has been done at the level of PIO itself, he/she is not giving you the information, has been rude to you, or thrown you out of the office, you can go straight to complain to the Information Commission. So there are these two roles of the Commission – appeal and complaint. Then the third role of the Commission is monitoring. At the end of the year, every ministry of the Government of India and every department of State Governments have to submit an annual report to the Central Information Commission and State

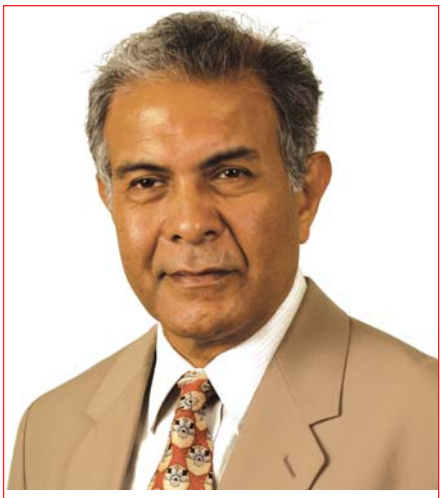
Information Commission respectively, which will give its comments on the work that is being done. If the work is not being done to the satisfaction of the Commission, then it has its way of monitoring the work being done in the ministry.

▶ Is there any apprehension that you have regarding the implementation of the RTI Act in the coming years?

The apprehension that I fear is that the number of appeals is going to multiply hugely. And we may not keep pace. Our pace has increased considerably. Like for example, we have about little over 900 applications so far. But we have got over 300 cases settled, which is one-third. Our average time of settling cases is little over 3 months; we plan to reduce it to 2 months. I feel that if the settlement is not speedy, it defeats the purpose. But whether we would be able to achieve, that is the apprehension. At present the appeals, which are coming to us, are people from the government since they are aware of the Act and its provisions, and from the people of Delhi as well since they have been practicing it. But what happens if the Delhi case starts spreading to all parts of India, then how are we going to cope with the huge numbers of appeals, that is the apprehension.

▶ What steps is the Commission taking with regard to spreading awareness about the provisions of the RTI Act?

The spreading of the awareness is the responsibility of the government – the State government and the Central government, and not the Commission. It is not the responsibility of the Commission. Even if it takes the responsibility, we need funding for that. With these funds, we could sponsor NGOs and others to go to areas where I think that the information or the awareness is less. For this, the Department of Personnel is considering setting up of a regular centre, which would be mandated to develop programmes and other things to spread awareness, and they will be properly funded by the DAVP (Directorate of Audio Visual Publicity), and also by business and other stakeholders. So it would be an autonomous and independent agency, working with the government to spread awareness. This is an idea that has come from in fact one of our members, former Secretary DAVP Mr. Tiwari, and the proposal is now under active consideration of the DAVP.



This is the only Act, which lays down Internet as the mandatory provision for the implementation of the Act. It is the only law in this world, which has this kind of provision

▶ RTI Act has been very successful in many of the developed countries. So what do you think how India can learn from their experiences?

Our laws, of course, are very strong – one of the strongest in the whole world. But it is not the question of the law itself; it is a question of how it is used. A large section of the UK population is using this law. In Ireland, the public awareness is 90%; in Scotland it is 80%. Therefore, the law is being used in these countries to its fullest capacity. My problem is that though the Act is very good, but will it be used to its fullest capacity; that is the challenge I have to face.

▶ Do you have the apprehension that the public might misuse this Act?

Yes it could be, it has been also. But that is for us to see how to keep it to the right track. That is the role of the Information Commission.

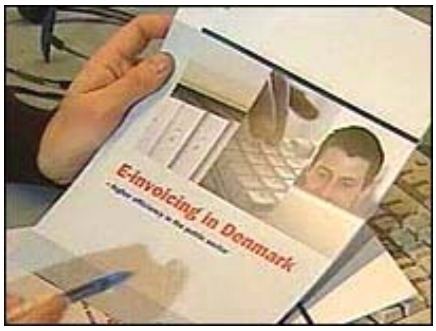
▶ How can ICT or e-Government initiatives play a role in the implementation of RTI Act?

This is the only Act, which lays down Internet as the mandatory provision for the implementation of the Act (see Section 4 of this Act). It mandates that all offices, within reasonable time, have to produce all records in an easily accessible form. The ideal form is digitization, CDs or any other form with all information, so that it could be accessed by anybody through the Internet. So you see it is the only law in this world, which has this kind of provision. In Section 4 of this Act, you will find a load of where e-Government will feature.

▶ How do you see the whole e-Governance initiatives coming up in India, especially in the *Panchayati Raj* department, of which you were the former Secretary? What are your observations?

The Information Technology and *Panchayati Raj* should go together. If the two do not go together, neither will succeed. In *Panchayati Raj* we had made so much stress on making information public, putting it up in the walls so that the people could see. And what better way than to putting it on the Internet. I may be living in any part of the world, and may be able to access information about my village in Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh. I click and I know the information – about roads and lakes there, how much money spent on the lake, about school there, how much money was spent on the school, what development activities are there, what are the decisions taken by the *Panchayati Raj* Department, how the houses under Indira Awas Yojana are being built there and other such information. If I get all this information, I could write to the *Sarpanch* (village head) if things are not being done as per the plans, could give suggestions for improvement – this all comes under public participation. So RTI plays a major role in *Panchayats*, and the instrument through which RTI can work is through the *Panchayats*.

Europe gets model in Denmark e-Invoicing



Denmark is now able to save EUR120-150mn (US$152.90-191.14mn) annually through the mandatory e-Invoicing and a good public private partnership (PPP) effort. As part of its national e-Government strategy, Denmark made e-Invoicing mandatory on 1 February 2005. Now, all paper-based invoices sent earlier to the government on all levels are now being managed electronically. The new set-up has resulted in significantly eliminating keyboarding and postal handling. e-Invoicing has been set up after successful implementation of proven market solutions, including the infrastructure and the systems that are able to receive and process e-Invoices. The success of e-Invoicing in Denmark has presented the rest of Europe a good model to be replicated. Currently, the Agency of Governmental Management, under the Ministry of Finance, is handling the implementation and ongoing administration of e-Invoicing in the country.

Kazakhstan e-Gov portal by December

The Kazakhstan e-Government portal would be up and running by this December. This was informed by Askar Zhumagaliyev, chairman of the Agency for Computerisation and Communication of Republika Kazachstán (RK) at a round table 'Development of the e-Government of RK and Kaznet'. This is in line with the strategy of the e-Government development in Kazakhstan, which is to be implemented in four phases: an informational phase (currently), an interactive phase (planned for late 2006-2008) a transaction phase (2008-2009) and 'information society' phase (2009). The launch of this e-Government portal marks a shift from the informational phase to the interactive phase of e-Government development.

"The transition from the informational to the interactive phase suggests an opportunity of receiving certain permitting documents, references, and licenses via the Internet and the 'e-Government' portal," Zhumagaliyev stated. It is expected that by the year 2009, the number of services provided by the e-Government portal would increase to 900 services. At present, the Kazakh government portal is providing more than 500 services that are of informational nature only.

Bulgaria allocates EUR5mn for e-Government projects

The Government of Bulgaria has allocated a record EUR5mn (US$) for the implementation of e-Government projects. According to the State Administration Minister Nikolay Vassilev, the EU-initiated information technology (IT) project is intended to aid the work of state bodies, and simplify communication for people and the business with institutions. Meanwhile, intensive capacity building initiative in IT is taking place throughout Bulgaria. Some 20,000 state employees across the country are being trained in information technologies. Besides, the Bulgarian government has actively adopted the usage of the digital signature.

Senate Committee questions US e-Government drive

The Senate Appropriations Committee in its report decided not to recommend any funding for the e-Government activities for the fiscal 2007 terming the US President George Bush's e-Government initiatives vague and realistic earnings uncertain. In its report on the 2007 Science, State, Justice, Commerce and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, the Committee said that the Bush administration was unable to quantify the benefits of cross-agency initiatives because cost-benefit analysis was conducted on a governmentwide basis only. The Committee said that it had no confidence whatsoever that the assessed amounts in any way related to the benefits anticipated to be returned.

The Senate Committee expressed concern that the transfer of funds might go beyond what the e-Government Act and other statutes regarding revolving funds allow. According to it, such transactions conceal the total costs of developing and maintaining e-Government information technology systems, and also hides government and contractor performance in meeting budget, schedule and program requirements. The report recommends that in view of the difficulties the federal government face in managing large and complex IT procurements, e-Government should be administered in a manner that does not impede congressional oversight. The appropriations bill is yet to be passed by the Senate.

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Key Speakers

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Hon'ble Minister of Science & Technology and Ocean Development
Government of India

Aruna Sunderarajan
CEO, Common Service Centre Initiatives
Government of India

Aminata Maiga
Afrilinks
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Justice Gopi Chand Bharuka
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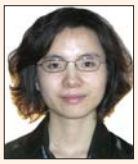
Computerisation of Courts



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Chief Information Commissioner, Central Information Commission
Government of India

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'egov India 2006' aims to focus mainly on how IT in public sector could be an instrument to increase India's competitiveness for fostering a leadership economy. It will address other important e-Governance issues reflecting present situation and future aspirations. It would also provide a platform to hear case studies and debate on the realities and strategies of e-Governance in India.

SESSIONS

Panel Discussion

- India's e-Government Journey: Where will India be in 2010?
- e-Government in India: How not to re-invent the wheel?
- Harnessing Public-Private Partnerships for e-Government

Technical sessions

- Capacity Building: Roadmaps & Roadblocks
- Standards and Interoperability
- Central Mission Mode Projects: Current Status and Way Forward
- State Wide Area Network: Implementation Issues

Indian Telecentre Forum 2006

Indian Telecentre Forum 2006 aims to discuss, and deliberate multi variate issues concerning policy, technology, best practices and business models relating to implementation and sustainability of rural ICT centres and their returns in terms of socio-economic development. The event is expected to follow a consultative mode, with due consideration for making it highly participatory and interactive in nature, bringing together the best of minds, thought leaders, practitioners and stakeholders from government, business and civil society.

SESSIONS

- Indian government initiatives in telecentres
- International perspectives on telecentres
- Mission 2007 - The way forward
- Indian telecentre networks
- Rural connectivity model for telecentres
- Telecentre models - Global experiences
- Telecentre - where can India be in 2010

Panel Discussion

- "Investing, Engaging, and Impacting the telecentre movement in India for poverty reduction and achieving the MDGs"

digital LEARNING India 2006

The Digital Learning India 2006 conference aims to take stock of the progress made by India in using technologies as an enabler of education. The conference will deliberate on the enabling policies and infrastructure, challenges of resources, identify the critical success factors that build and sustain initiatives in ICT in education, and the role of the school principals/teachers and strategies/ programmes to strengthen their capacities to achieve the goals of education.

SESSIONS

Panel Discussion

- Framework for ICT in education policy
- Successful Technology integration in classroom
- Public Private Partnerships for ICT in Education
- Technology in schools - Building partnership for success

Special Sessions

- International perspectives in ICT in Education
- Government initiatives in ICT in 'Education for All'
- Government perspectives in ICT in Education

Workshop

- ICT for Children

Exhibition

The ICT triple conference will host an exhibition of latest e-solutions, services, initiatives and case studies from across Asia and beyond. Professional service providers, IT vendors, consulting firms, government agencies and national/international development organisations involved in the ICT in Education domain are participating in the exhibition.

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Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies (CSDMS) is a leading Asian non-governmental institution engaged in advocacy, research and community building in ICT for Development through capacity building and media initiatives. *www.csdms.in*

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Balancing the inequalities of information access

Andy Williamson

Knowledge is power and information is the vehicle that conveys knowledge. Yet many citizens experience digital exclusion in addition to traditional forms of control. Where access to ICTs is available, individuals enjoy new opportunities to learn and communicate. They gain access to a wider range of information. However, others have a vested interest in mediating this flow of information and restricting access

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are becoming as important as roads and access to new technology must be viewed as a basic right, like electricity and water. Where people are in contact with the Internet, it can transform lives and communities. However, the same powers that have traditionally restricted access to information and controlled information flows, are at work online. Access to ICTs is not ubiquitous and many people lack the skills to use them effectively. Knowledge is power and information is the vehicle that conveys knowledge. Control the flow of information and you limit what people are able to know and, therefore, do. Digital exclusion, in terms of both access and information, is an extension of traditional forms of exclusion and control. Those who are already marginalised, risk becoming even more so when they lack access to technologies.

Barriers and overcoming obstacles

The barriers to technology access are primarily socio-economic, educational, geographical and disability related. Poverty is a barrier to adopting ICTs, hence the importance of public access facilities. Adoption is often related to educational achievement, hence the importance of just-in-time skill acquisition and life-long learning strategies. These are real barriers that must be overcome if we are to create a ubiquity of information access.

Where access is available individuals experience new opportunities for life long learning, communication and alternatives to traditional work. Where individuals are online, they are better connected, better informed and better able to participate in economic, social and democratic life. For remote communities in Latin America the arrival of the Internet has meant connection to distant family, better farming knowledge and access to new markets. It has also connected them to international environmental networks where, for the first time, they are able to see the big picture of the damage caused by exploitative mining practices.

Role of Governments

Governments have a strategic role to play in ensuring that citizens are connected and confident users of ICTs. Governments spend increasingly vast amounts on IT but internal systems or even online service delivery is not what matters here. Building skills and awareness is of primary importance at this relatively early stage of digital maturity. Citizens need to know what ICTs can do for them. They must learn to recognise the value in technology for themselves if they are to avail benefits. Information literacy ensures that people are able to find the information that they need and formal processes, including legislation, are needed to ensure that information access is managed fairly and equitably.

Rights go both ways. I have the right to discover information that is in the public sphere on a topic I am interested in. I have a right to know what information you hold about me. You have an obligation as the custodian of that information to protect it. It is private information but not simply private to me. Information access is not necessarily clear-cut. Ethical issues largely guide the examples above but limitations on access are also economic and political. Information access is a continuum from the entirely private to fully public. In between lie grey areas where ownership, access and even the existence of information are contested.

Role of media

The media has a significant role to play in managing the flow of information. The traditional concept of newspaper as 'reporter' has been eroded by the corporatisation and globalisation of media. As the Australian government moves to liberalise media ownership the editorial in 'The Australian' is less the independent view of a concerned journalist and more a media statement from a self-interested publisher. The Internet counters some of this media bias as alternative sources provide the reader with another perspective. If you know where to look, both sides of the debate are available. No longer is it necessary to accept one side of the story, rather individuals are able to filter information from many sources in order to build a more informed view.

For civil society the Internet is a powerful and relatively low cost way of publishing. Community groups in a disadvantaged community in New Zealand decided they needed a website. They reasoned that reporting of their community in the mainstream media was overwhelmingly negative. Here is a community proud of what it is doing but not recognising the representation of itself in the media. Harnessing digital technologies allows them to convey their own message.

The other side of publishing is readership. Information can be hard to find online and content is not created equal. Ensuring equitable access to technology must include equitable access to content. Models for dissemination of topical or geographical information, such as regional portals, can facilitate this by providing links to a range of publishers. One answer to the advancement of ICTs comes in the form of New Zealand's 'Digital Strategy'(New Zealand Government, 2005), which marks a significant change in government policy and the first time that a government has adopted a whole of government approach to ICTs. The strategy focuses on three core areas – connection, confidence and content. The content component of the Digital Strategy focuses on a vision of knowledge as a currency of exchange. In this vision, ideas and content are shared, traded and used to make new knowledge. This encompasses formal, informal and commercial knowledge instantiated as digital content, building a framework for the management, exchange and preservation of information.

Demand for open information

Demand for open information sources can be facilitated by ensuring that there are networks of free public-access computers; that basic computer literacy courses and more advanced training is available, and that broadband is available to all who want it. Civil society can lead and promote such campaigns but often lacks the skills and resources, relying instead on unsustainable voluntary contributions. Local and central government support is essential to sustainability and, where this is not available, the role of the NGO sector is likely to be critical.

Civil society groups often play a mediating and bridging role between state, media and citizens. New Zealand research shows that there are barriers to the effective use of ICTs within civil society. The sector tends to be relatively poorly funded and cannot afford the technology it would like to use. Second, volunteers do not have the time to learn about new technology or implement it and, third, a lack of strategic planning skills make it difficult to effectively integrate ICTs into the operational structures and processes of the organisation.

Despite these very real barriers ICTs are becoming an invaluable tool for information retrieval, communication and publishing in civil society (Williamson & Dekkers, 2005). The Internet dramatically increases the quantity and distribution of information and governments must recognise that they have a role to play in ensuring free flow. The rights and responsibilities of the digital age will increasingly challenge the margins of privacy and public sphere. Many of these challenges will require a whole of society approach to resolve.

Magsaysay award for RTI activist Kejriwal

Arvind Kejriwal, an Indian Revenue Service officer who is currently on leave from the Government for two years, has been awarded the Asian version of Nobel Prize – Ramon Magsaysay Award for 2006 – for emergent leadership. A Mechanical Engineer from IIT Kharagpur, Kejriwal heads a Delhi-based NGO 'Parivartan', which is spearheading a movement to create awareness and empower poor Indian citizens to fight corruption, besides making the government more accountable. A special Right to Information (RTI) campaign was organised and led by Kejriwal from July 1-15, involving 700 civil society organisations. Some 1500 volunteers were trained to handle RTI centres in 55 cities. Over 20,000 applications under the RTI Act 2005 were filed in the 15-day campaign, which was more than those filed in the eight months since the RTI Act came in force.

About the author

Andy Williamson is Managing Director of New Zealand-based Wairua Consulting (*www.wairua.com*) and an advisor to the New Zealand government's 'Digital Ministers'

Information revolution

Giving birth to an emergent Global Citizenry

Marcus Leaning

The role of the media is considered to be an intrinsic component of the democratic system. Considering the freedom of the press vital for the functioning of democratic societies, its role has become extremely important for the development of the global citizenry. As such, the progress towards information societies depends on the ability to access, produce and disseminate information in the right perspective

Democracy is an ideal that is accepted in theory but is, more often than not, mitigated in practice. Moreover, the very people who cry out for democracy when out of power are the ones, when in office, who find the challenges and difficulties of governing with democracy more difficult than they thought or that power is just a little too good to give up. Bending the rules, hiding the truth and even changing the law are all tools in the arsenal of those jealous of power. None of these problems are new of course; the emergent democracies of the 18th and 19th centuries were beset by corruption and many of the same problems that countries in the developing and developed world face today.

Similarly, the instruments to deal with such problems were also present in early democracies – the most important being, of course, the press. So important was the press that it was even considered to be an intrinsic component of a democratic system. The 19th century British author, Thomas Carlyle termed the press the "Fourth Estate" of democratic government after the executive, legislature and judiciary.

According to such classical democratic political theory, the media fills two central functions in a democracy – it functions as a watchdog chastening those in power, and it keeps the citizenry informed of the actions of those in power and provides enough information so that informed choices can be made.

Since the late 18th century, a number of radical transformations have taken place in the political systems of various Western societies. In Western Europe, the gradual decline of the absolute rule of the monarchy along with the emergence of new merchant classes led to the change from 'subjects of a monarchy' to 'citizens of a country'. Moreover, in the later half of the 20th century the disintegration of the British Empire and the French Overseas Empire (La France d'outre mer) saw the emergence of numerous new republics with citizens, not subjects, populating them. Indeed, the ideals of freedom of speech are written into many constitutions particularly those that had a strong US influence.

In recent years, the pace and breadth of political, technical, economic and cultural transformation, the very processes of globalisation, and particularly those referred to as the 'information revolution' have necessitated and indeed brought about a number of changes in the role (and even the nature) of the media. Three of globalisation's much noted tendencies: its deepening of links between – while at the same time fracturing links within – societies; the increased awareness and actuality of threats and collective risks, e.g. terrorism and environmental catastrophe; and the maturation of truly global systems of financial, institutional and cultural activity have brought about a new way of thinking about our relationship with politics and power.

The Global Citizen

Increasingly, we are witnessing the emergence both semantically and in reality of what may be termed 'global citizenship'. By this we are not only talking about the realisation that we are all part of the same world and actions in one area affect people in other areas but also that because we all get affected we should all have a say. This is the much-touted ability to 'speak back' or answer the historically one-directional flow of information and is often viewed as stemming directly from the qualities of new communications technology. The global citizen is a way of conceptualising our role in the world where global citizens are not just passive recipients of the policy of other nations, organisations and pan-national conglomerates but are internationally active (electronically at least) agents, engaging in discussions and seeking to further their own interests.

Of course, this is an idealistic view and quite clearly we do not normally have a say in how those in power behave and many do not have the ability to 'speak' at all, being on the wrong side of the feared digital divide. Even those who live in the particular political constituencies that select the powerful elites and have the technical and social capital to be able to use the new technologies, may not have much say in the actual selection of the leaders due to a number of factors.

George W. Bush's win in 2000 eventually depended on a majority of 537 votes in the state of Florida (and some even dispute this). Moreover, with the gradual transformation of societies that occurred with industrialisation and more recently the emergence of the 'information society' and globalisation, the media has also become subject to overt corporate and commercial pressures that are deeply tied to the political elites. Many would argue that the watchdog role of the press is now extended to both the corporate world as well as that of the political one. Indeed, the lack of a significant division between the corporate and political spheres of activity means that the press must pay attention to the actions of large corporations if it is to function properly as a watchdog.

However, if the state and commercial interests are becoming more overtly integrated (and perhaps they always have been deeply linked, the British state has never been shy of initiating military conflict for the benefit of a few well placed commercial actors) changes have also taken place in the organisation of the citizenry. Indeed, one of the most important social phenomena in recent years has been the startling rise of NGOs and social movements. This can be understood as the emergence of a form of 'global civil society', a way of thinking about the collected actions of individual citizens outside of the traditional model of states and nations. The sheer number of NGOs and other components of civil society and the volume of comment made by these groups have had a dramatic effect on international politics. Whereas previously we have seen political leaders meeting in private to discuss issues and communicating the decisions to a largely passive audience, we now have 'global summits' attended not just by political leaders but representatives from grassroots organisations the worldover.

Advocating and Defending RTI

It is for this reason that those engaged in civil society work must advocate activities that promote the right to fair information at all levels and across international boundaries. Challenging as it may be, there is ground to be won and advances to be made in the furtherance of global

Becoming a Global Community citizen

citizenry and it is towards this end we, along with many others, argue for the following four-pronged approach:

Promotion of open and transparent decision-making in government: To promote citizen empowerment and accountability, the governmental decision-making process must be open and verifiable, stakeholders must be clearly identified and their interests declared. State and quasi-state administrative processes must be open, and this includes making documents such as the minutes of meetings available. More importantly, the criteria used to make judgements should be available online. To encourage the freedom of information, records held by state agencies and private organisations should be available to individuals to check for their accuracy.

Continued and critical evaluation of state restrictions on media and communication: Whilst it is accepted that a state may seek to restrict the passing of military secrets these should be the exception. The freedom to share, duplicate, and publish information should be the norm and attempts to restrict the flow of information should be continually challenged and examined by legally empowered independent arbitrators. The state and legal machinery should be used absolutely minimally and with great reservations to restrict the flow of information.

Stringent policing of anti-monopoly media ownership controls: Ownership of the media, editorial control and restrictions upon the ability to publish and disseminate information should be carefully monitored. Media ownership (state as well as private interests) has traditionally played a large part in editorial control of the press and accordingly freedom to publish controversial information is often curtailed. The right to disseminate information in spite of media ownership needs to be rigorously advocated and defended.

Advocacy of pluralistic media and communications ownership and production: 'Small' media such as community radio and television, independent presses, and the various forms of Internet journalism should be encouraged. Support should be given to activities that encourage community and citizen participation in media production and dissemination and forms of civic communication between citizens.

These activities are of course very idealistic but the pursuit of them does provide direction. They represent a goal towards which we may aim and a benchmark against which we may chart progress. At the very least, they offer general orientation for those concerned about what the information society offers to those traditionally without a voice.

About the author

Marcus Leaning is Senior Lecturer at School of Creative Arts and Humanities, Trinity College, University of Wales, UK

The Right alone is not enough!

Klaus Stoll

Right to Information (RTI) in the context of ICTs is not just about the "right to" and the "availability of" information, as it is often misunderstood. RTI is a much broader concept and has several important components that are crucial for establishing and implementing the Right to Information. Affordable access to an adequate technical infrastructure and the availability of the information in a form and language that are accessible to the recipient of the information are just two of them.

One crucial component is often overlooked and even more often ignored in the conceptualization of RTI and the implementation of RTI initiatives – Training in the Strategic Uses of Information. The RTI and the information itself in the context of ICTs are without value if they are not implemented with training and support in the strategic uses of the available information. What is meant by this is that it is not sufficient to have information available and accessible, but the important next step is that those who access the information have the abilities and the skills to translate this information into a tool for their individual and their respective community development. Any information available and accessible that cannot be translated by those who receive it into positive action and impact is as useless as if this information was not available in the first place. What impact has the availability of a land register when those who are affected by irregularities and corruption have no skills to interpret the available data and then don't know what to do in order to denounce and rectify the situation? What impact has the availability of uptodate market prices when farmers don't have access to these markets and are forced to deal with unfair middlemen? What good is it to the same farmers to know which will be the next high price gropes to plant when they don't have the skills to grow it?

Right to Information in the context of ICTs is not just about the "right to" and the "availability of" information. One crucial component often overlooked in the RTI initiatives is the training in the strategic uses of information. The problem is that they offer only a one-size-fits-all training component, which is not adjusted to the needs of the respective communities

Overcoming Sensibilisation

But before we can come to the strategic uses of Information we have to overcome one more basic obstacle – Sensibilisation. Information has only value if there are recipients of this information that are open to receive and put to use this information. In order to demonstrate the value of the information, the recipient has to be convinced that this information has some value for him and his community and this value can only be demonstrated by demonstrating a practical use of the information. Not only is it important to demonstrate where certain information can be accessed but also even more important is to demonstrate how this information can be put to good use. Not only what are the current environmental laws in my country but also how can I use the ICT tools available to enforce them and to stop those who break the law. Not only what are the current market prices but also how do I get my goods to the market and how can I use the available ICT tools in such a way that I avoid the middleman.

Having demonstrated the value of

Information and strategic use and having opened up the potential users to receive the information is just the first step in the dynamic that must be followed by a second step of training the potential recipients and users of information in the strategic uses of this information. But what kind of training? Making basic training available in the use of Computers and the Internet is just a small part of the process. Every community is different; every community is living different realities and has different strength and needs. That's why beyond a basic skills training which is common to all communities, those who want to support the strategic uses of information need to work together with the communities to identify the communities needs and strength and to identify and implement together with the community the training content that is needed.

A community that is situated in an area which is under environmental pressure needs skills to make their blight known and skills to arrange for outside support in order to rectify the situation and it will not be a priority in the community to receive training in how to use accounting software. On the other hand, a community that has a strong product but limited access to the markets needs administration, business and marketing skills and might not be very interested in the skills needed to alert at the same time a very specific audience to a problem. Although the skills needed for both might be very similar, they must be made relevant, taught and implemented according to the specific circumstances.

The use of an Excel sheet can be demonstrated either by showing how it helps to keep accounts uptodate or by demonstrating how it can help to organize and compare vital environmental data. The chances that the environmentalist adopts the use of this tool are much greater when he is taught to use it by organizing environmental data and not how to keep accounts.

The problem with many RTI initiatives is that even if they have a strong strategic use component they offer only a one-size-fits-all training component, which is not adjusted to the needs of the respective communities. On the other hand, it is quite understandable why working with the communities is often not implemented because it is simply a time consuming and expensive process that requires a lot of resources and working hours. If done properly this process will at the end represent the biggest item of the overall budget.

> *It is not sufficient to have information available and accessible, but the important next step is that those who access the information have the abilities and the skills to translate this information into a tool for their individual and their respective community development*

Relevance and Sustainability

By just looking at the questions of relevance and sustainability in the context of RTI it can be demonstrated that this in the medium turn might be a rather costly mistake.

Sustainability: By demonstrating the value of the information to the recipient, the recipient is also becoming the caretaker of this information and the information becomes sustainable in the holistic sense of cultural, social, political, technological and financial sustainability. The information is adapted and interpreted by the recipient and user according to his cultural needs and serves the social development. The recipient and user of the information are prepared to defend the information against political manipulations and influences because this affects the value of the information to him. The recipient and user of the information will maintain the physical infrastructure needed to access the information and will pay for the running costs of access to the information as long as the investment into the information is smaller than the perceived benefits of the information.

It might be therefore shortsighted to avoid working with the communities directly in identifying and implementing their training needs because even though those who implement a RTI initiative might have the best intentions by doing so but their efforts will simply not be valued, used and sustained by the community and when the promoters of the initiative move on the initiative dies a quick death because it was not sustainable.

Relevance: The Right to Information and the Right Information. Sensibilisation and training transforms information into the right information to the recipient and user because it results in positive impact. As a key effect, the Right to Information which was for the user of information before just an abstract concept is now for him a vital and important concept, worthy to protect and defend.

RTI initiatives will fail if they don't take training in the strategic uses of information into account. Training in the strategic uses of information is often neglected in RTI initiatives because either it is conceptual not seen as an integral part of RTI or because the necessary investment in time and resources but as we have seen training in the strategic uses of information does not only make information relevant for its users but also strengthens the Right to Information itself because it has become treasured and valued.

About the author

Klaus Stoll is President of Chasquinet in Quito, Ecuador, to promote the strategic use of the Internet for development and involved in the policy discussions regarding information technologies in LAC and worldwide

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Believing in Connected Government

e-Government is an area that is constantly changing. One can find many innovative ways in the deployment of e-Government applications across Asia. There is rarely any "one-size-fits-all" theory being implemented, argues ***James Shoon Loi Yong****, Director, Public Sector Programs – ASEAN, Cisco, in an interview to* **Anuradha Dhar** *of* ***egov***

▶ What is your perspective on the emerging trends of e-Government in the ASEAN region?

e-Government is an area that's constantly changing. Although strictly, e-Government has been around since the early days when IT was first introduced in government functions, I think the turning point was really when the popular web arrived and when government bodies began to leverage on the power of the Internet. Across Asia, you will find many innovative ways in which e-Government applications have been deployed. I am very clear that there is rarely any "one-size-fits-all". I often highlight this fact, when I am advising my clients in governments, that when they look westwards – say towards the US, Europe – at the many promising applications there, that seem to be very successful, they should also remember that Asia has unique challenges which may need to be tackled in unique ways. Asia is a very heterogeneous region with a diversity of languages, religions, cultures, government systems and so forth. In that respect, it is happening to find when you go to different countries how they have evolved their own unique and innovative systems and models to cater for their own challenges. Cities, say like Singapore, where you have very urbanized population, there you have a wired society and literate society, where computer and Internet penetration is high, they have a certain way of doing things. But if you try to transplant the complete Singapore model into another country, you will find more often than not, it faces problems and fails. Each country needs to realise its own challenges and find solutions to these challenges.

A second perspective that I want to propose is that the developing countries and the developed countries tend to be very different. In Asia, when you talk about the developed countries, you're probably referring to Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea. In China and India, the cities are very advanced, but when you go to the countryside the scenario is radically different. So developing countries need to basically find their own models that work and to tackle the issues of their rural population. I think India is a fascinating example with some unique projects, like Bhoomi, e-Seva and so forth. The western world would never think of as it is not relevant to their circumstances.

The third perspective is that we have reached a point whereby more governments have gone through a first cycle. That first cycle was a cycle of websites and was in a way a bit cosmetic. I think we are in the stage, maybe a second or third cycle, where the original projects have either passed the test of time or failed miserably, and people are re-looking at the lessons learnt. I think this is the time in some countries, where government leaders and administrators are putting a lot more critical assessments to find applications that can meet the real need of their constituents.

I think ASEAN countries are moving at different rates, each at its own pace. There are many e-Government rankings, e.g. by the UN, Brown University, Accenture etc., which offer plenty of interesting content. Government leaders often peruse such ranking tables, and ask "Are we ahead of our neighbours?" This I feel is not the right question to ask. The right question should be, "Is there anything I can learn by a country which has a similar environment as mine, and from where I can borrow some good practices to adopt?" Within Asia, one tends to look towards Korea or Singapore as leaders in e-Government. But if you observe what they are doing, their basic focus is on servicing a largely urbanized population. If you ask me, there are many good success stories in various states of India, as well as even in the major cities in China where they customize the applications to cater to their own requirement.

▶ What are the key factors that public sector should bear in mind while implementing e-Government solutions?

In our conversations with e-Government leaders and practitioners in different countries who have spearheaded e-Government initiatives, we have basically presented them with a stark statistic that a huge majority (60-70 percent) of e-Government projects globally, actually fail, or

do not meet the objectives they set out for themselves. We took that fact and went around talking to various e-Government leaders asking them of their experience of deploying all these projects, what have they found some of the things that if more focus is placed on them, the probability of success rises.

We got a range of responses that can be categorized into four main areas. I think, in implementing e-Government, obviously the first one to consider is the SERVICES. e-Government leaders should ask: Are the services provided the ones most relevant to my constituents? Not simply the services that my neighbouring country provides, or the leading e-Government countries provide, but services, which I know my constituents (i.e. citizens and businesses) really need. Because I am close to them, know them and therefore understand their real issues. So, when I provide services I can customize them according to the needs of my constituents. The second area for e-Government is about EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS and use of technology to improve processes, to streamline, and to do more with less. The third area would be TRUST BUILDING – are the e-Government projects being implemented helping in the trust building prospect for the government. In this regard what we hear from the people we interviewed is that trust is a short form for saying that at the end of the day the systems of e-Governance that we do ought to strengthen trust between the constituents and the government.

The fourth area is what we call POLICYLINK. An e-Government project should have a goal and some how that goal should be linked back to the national agenda. Whether that is in areas of environment, national competitiveness, improved healthcare, public education, and so forth. Very often when you drill down into an e-Government project and ask what is it for, it should not be just for the sake of technology, but for, say for example, processing the documents faster. Why? You just keep asking why. And with the better projects, you find you are striving for a higher-level goal – at a department, ministry or national level. The projects that are not so good will show disjointment. Even if the project achieves its goals, it probably does not meet any higher-level goal. Linking the e-Government goals to the national policy/ agenda, is therefore an important criteria.

> Across Asia, you will find many innovative ways in which e-Government applications have been deployed. I am very clear that there is rarely any "one-size-fits-all". I often highlight this fact, when I am advising my clients in governments. Asia has unique challenges, which may need to be tackled in unique ways

Service, efficiency, trust building and policy link are therefore, some of the key factors that are important to pay attention to while implementing any e-Government project.

▶ What is your opinion regarding importance of publicity and awareness generation among the public about e-Government services?

Publicity and awareness generation ought to be part and parcel of any e-Government initiative. It is critical when deploying a system to communicate to the public – to inform them that the system exists, what the benefits are and how they can make use of it. At the same time, it may be timely to deliver some kind of training programme for the community on this. Some countries skip this step or do not put enough emphasis on it, and as a result the response to their e-Government services is lackluster. On the other hand, when Singapore embarked on its e-Government program, there were a lot of such training courses being conducted. But Singapore is a small country. When you are talking about a country as large as India, you need to have a totally different way of doing this.

▶ What do you think of the m-Government (mobile government)? Is it going to happen?

I think this will gradually but most certainly happen. Our lifestyles are definitely more mobile these days. Just look at how many mobile devices some of us carry everyday, Governments need to cater to a mobile workforce so mobile government will certainly come about. I do not think it is here yet. I certainly think that people are quite used to sending SMS and all that, but they do not think interacting with the government very much in most Asian countries.

Though, Philippines is one exception. Philippines often refer to itself as the 'SMS capital of the world'. The number of SMS' sent per capita in the Philippines exceeds anywhere else in the world. Indeed Filipinos use their mobile phones more for SMS' than for making voice calls. If sit in a taxi in Manila, at the back of the seat, the taxi company's SMS number is often provided, which you could send a complaint SMS to if the driver is driving erratically or not providing good service. That is one example of how widely the SMS is used there.

You would think that places like Japan would have wholly adopted this. I interviewed some of the Japanese officials who are spearheading this, and found that they have started considering m-Government seriously, on the back of private sector successes like NTT DoCoMo. Today, however, mobile phone usage in Japan is more for communication and entertainment, than government interactions.

▶ How keen do you think are the governments of the Asian region towards public-private partnerships (PPP)?

I think most Asian governments have taken a keen interest in what public-private partnerships can offer in terms of government. Government over time, I think, has realised, in the words of Osborne and Gaebler, that its primary role is to steer the boat, and not to row it. But if you look back in history, government has done both steering and rowing. The policy or the steering function of the government is something, which it can never outsource, but the rowing function may be outsourced. Also, for reasons of national security, there are certain functions that a

government can never outsource. But there are many functions that are mundane, that can and probably should be outsourced to private companies, if they can do it more efficiently and can give government greater value for money.

Countries like Singapore, Hong Kong, Brunei have already begun outsourcing to private companies. Thailand is considering PPP as a possible model for future projects. So countries in Asia are really at different stages, but I think most of them have an interest in considering e-Government outsourcing.

▶ What are the Cisco's initiatives in public sector in all these countries of Asia and what is its future plans?

Cisco Systems is a premier networking company. Our public sector initiatives come under the umbrella name of Connected Government. We emphasize a lot on connectivity – connecting people, communities and organisations inside and outside government to put people at the centre of responsive networks of knowledge, service, trust and accountability. This is not just branding. If you read a lot of writers, they have basically recognised that one of the key success factors of government efficiency and effectiveness is when you get good connections within the government agency. Traditionally, government agencies have worked very much in silos. If you can achieve even a modest level of integration across different agencies, it can lead to tremendous productivity improvement. If one were to ask what is the "killer application" of e-Government, my answer would be information sharing. Think about it, how many government today have agencies A, B and C are collecting the same information in their own database, information about you for instance, it can help in the registration department, help in the taxation department, health department who knows how many integrity issues are across these departments. But I think you have tremendous efficiency improvement already. Cisco is very much into connecting organisations – both in the private and public sector. So, that is one aspect of connectivity. Any market survey would reveal that Cisco is the market leader in connectivity and collaboration.

Cisco is strong not only in wired but wireless solutions as well. We cater to wireless solutions for both enterprises and consumers. We recognise that world is moving towards mobile workforce. People want to work/study/play wherever they are, and not be tied to fixed locations. So, wireless technology is going to be a very key part of a lot of public sector initiatives, whether in education, healthcare, public safety and so on. We play a major role in the public safety domain. The way we look at it is from the standpoint of emergency response to disasters – either man-made or natural. In case of such emergencies, what you need to do is to evacuate people, care for the injured, quickly set up a command center whereby the police, firemen and other civil defense units can coordinate and communicate with each other. So, we play a major role in public safety and having equipments that withstand sand, high temperature, dust or smoke, whereby in case of any emergency the system can be operationalised instantly.

▶ Would you like to mention briefly your success stories in Asia-Pacific region?

In Singapore, the biggest IP telephony (also referred to as Voice-Over-IP) installation is in a local university, the National University of Singapore. We have implemented 5,000 IP phones across the whole campus. The users are very happy to get the flexibility and added services. In the past the concept was 'a phone is a phone, is a phone'. But now a phone is not just a phone because you can integrate it with your voice mail and other applications. There are many other countries, which are using our IP phones. Most of the institutes of higher learning in Singapore are using wireless.

▶ Is there any particular strategy that you are going to adopt to increase Cisco's market share in the public sector?

Ours is an ongoing set of strategies. For some years, Cisco Systems has taken very deliberate steps to hire people who are not so 'technology focused' as they are "industry domain focused". Cisco realised quite long ago that it needed to evolve from a company that was equally good at conceptualising solutions for different domains as it was on technology innovation. The public sector was one such area where Cisco engaged consultants, ex-consultants or government people, brought them to Cisco to share with others so that they better understand how things are done in government, what the key challenges are, what are the national priorities and so forth. Through that we can better serve the needs of the public sector. This is the first strategy. The second is, Cisco has sponsored a number of research studies focused on things like e-Governance, collaborations and connectivity in either education or health care, to understand and add to the existing body of knowledge in these areas. This is very significant. For instance, we have sponsored a 'chair' in Oxford University for several years focused on e-Governance. The third strategic activity that Cisco conducts is a constant stream of conferences and seminars around the world. We have supported an APAC Public Sector Summit in China for the past 3 years, where we bring together not just people from China but from the whole region as well as experts from Europe, North America and Australia. Practitioners come and simply share their knowledge. All this provides an opportunity for Cisco to listen to what are the key concerns and challenges of different countries and hopefully we can take it back and built it into our new products and services.

▶ What is your opinion about different governments' spending on IT in this region?

I think the governments' spending on IT has so far continued in a robust, upward trend. The organisational mindset is gradually changing from thinking of IT as expenditure, to IT as investment, helping to enhance the value of the organisation. This is the shift that should happen in every economy.

▶ Please tell us briefly about the future plans of Cisco.

Cisco Systems will continue to focus on these strategies that I cited, evolving them, sharpening them, at the same time broadening and deepening the base of knowledge and industry familiarity. What Cisco believes in is Connected Government, in which is built the notion of productivity, effectiveness and greater public value through connectivity, collaboration and a variety of innovative solutions.

Capacity building of government staff for e-Governance

The government is planning a massive capacity building drive to train government staff in the various ministries and departments who do not have the skill-sets required to implement the e-Governance projects. This will speed up the e-Governance projects of the Government of India under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), which is due to be implemented aggressively.

The national e-Governance Plan (NeGP) covers 26 Mission Mode Projects (MMP) and eight support components, to be implemented at the Central, State and local government levels. The fundamental requirement towards fulfilling this goal is to build capacity of the implementing staff. Towards this, the government plans to use the expertise of not only the existing government officials but also 500 professionals with project management and process re-engineering skills from external agencies who will be hired on a contract basis for a three-year duration. Besides, the Government of India is also to launch a new project called 'e-district' soon.

Rethink on the need to conserve e-Libraries

During a workshop recently conducted on 'Care and Maintenance of Library Materials', Prof. NR Satyanarayana, Head of Library Science, Lucknow University, suggested that the National Research Laboratory for Conservation of Cultural Property (NRLC) needs to work in the direction of preservation and conservation of e-Libraries and digital libraries. Tracing the history of library materials from clay plates to bhojpatras to paper and now e-libraries, Satyanarayana said that NRLC should work on computer storage devices such as disks, CDs etc.

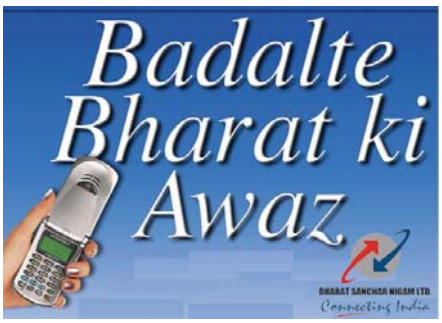
Trainees from over 10 libraries across the country attended the 5-day workshop. The trainees are being trained on how light, heat, biological agents lead to different kinds of deterioration in library material and about de-acidification, stain removal and also the storage, transportation and packaging of library materials.

Emigration goes IT way!

In a significant step aimed at boosting business reengineering process and e-Governance, the Ministry of Overseas Indian affairs (MOIA) has decided to computerise 20-year records, and also standardise the format for applications and the processes. Besides, steps would be taken for computerisation of database, system integration and streamlining of processes. According to MOIA minister Vyalar Ravi, the automation of the emigration offices would simplify the immigration process, lead to speedy clearance and make the emigration offices transparent. With computerisation, the ministry would be able to access data of its eight centres from Delhi and get weekly updates on the number of applications.

National Institute of Smart Governance, a non-government organisation formed under the aegis of the Andhra Pradesh government, NASSCOM and the Ministry of Information Technology are assisting the MOIA in implementing this project.

e-Payment for BSNL customers



Leading state-owned Indian Telecom company Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) has decided to introduce e-Payment system for its customers. With the completion of the project, all bills for both cellular and landline phones would be made through electronic payment. Previously, phone bill payment was made through cheque, which was cumbersome and time consuming. Announcing the switch over plan to e-Payment mode, BSNL has issued directives to all circle heads to gradually migrate to the e-Payment mode.

Bihar ministers to go tech savvy soon


Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister

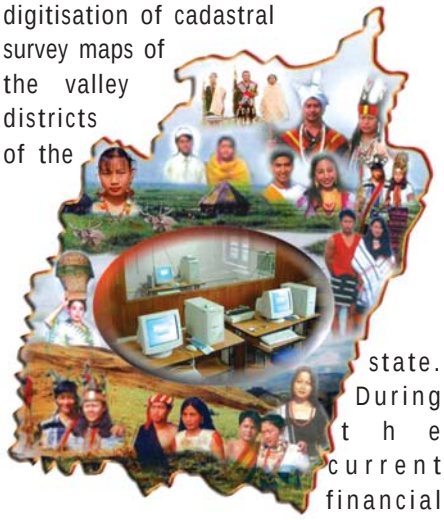
As part of its effort to implement the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), the Bihar government, taking cue from other developed states, has decided to equip all its 26 ministers with sophisticated laptop computers.

According to Bihar's Science and Technology Minister Dr. Anil Kumar, the Science and Technology department has approved the purchase of several laptops, over 250 servers, hundreds of desktop computers and 40 projectors to strengthen the non-existent IT infrastructure in the state. Earlier, the government allocated a laptop, a printer, a facsimile machine and other peripherals attached with the computer for each NDA minister. After the completion of the process, the state would provide computers and necessary software to each district and block offices.

Computerised land administration in Manipur

The revenue department in Manipur has decided to launch various administrative reform measures aimed at modernisation, skill upgradation and application of new technology in the land administration system. The state government has announced that the modernisation plan would cover all the sub-divisional offices (SDOs) where a computer would be installed with Internet connectivity. The work would be completed during this current financial year 2006-07. The National information Centre (NIC) would provide complete assistance in the automation of the SDOs.

The state has implemented a pilot project for computerization of land records in Porompat circle and has introduced issue/distribution of computerized record of rights to the people. The state revenue department has also begun digitisation of cadastral survey maps of the valley districts of the state. During the current financial year, computerised land information centres would be set up at the directorate of settlement and land records and in two valley districts. Earlier, computerisation of the directorate of settlement and land records and the offices of all the deputy commissioners was taken up as a fully assisted centrally sponsored scheme during the period from 2000 to 2005.



Online registration for Gujarat voters

The Gujarat government has launched an online registration system on its portal www.ceogujarat.nic.in. The website provides a link to the enrolment forms, which are to be filled and submitted online. Upon submission of the filled-up form, a registration number is given to the applicants to check application status. The applicant would receive an email, and would also be given the option of withdrawing applications whenever required. The online registration is significantly expected to ease the process of enrolling in the voter list.

Home delivery of railway tickets just an SMS away

Major Indian telecom industry players such as Reliance Infocomm and TATA BPO service are into talks with the Indian Railways to make tickets available through mobile phones. The plan is to develop a system that would make home delivery of railway tickets possible via SMS. When implemented, this will be a step ahead of e-Ticketing.

As per this project, a 24/7 call centre would be set up for booking tickets and answering customer queries. A customer calling at the call centre would get a customer identification number, which be stored on the computer and the berth and seat number will be SMSed to the buyer. The payment would be automatically credited to the phone bill in case of a post-paid connection or deducted from the pre-paid card, as may be the case.

Currently, the penetration of Internet is still not as wide as is the penetration of cellular phones in India. There are over 10 crore mobile phone users.

Uttaranchal is at fairly an advantageous position as compared to the rest of the country. All treasuries are computerised. The payroll is entirely computerised. It is the first state in the country to do that. e-Governance would be internalized in the functioning of the government, says Sanjeev Chopra, Uttaranchal IT Secretary, in conversation to Prachi Shirur of egov

'In Uttaranchal, we are at an advantageous position regarding e-Governance'

▶ What are your plans in taking ahead e-Governance initiatives in Uttaranchal?

In Uttaranchal, as compared to the rest of the country, we are already at fairly an advantageous position. What the e-Governance projects are able to do for the rest of the country, we already have this programme with the World Bank by which we have taken up Bank's projects which includes development of portals for instance, the social welfare portal, the health monitoring and information system, and a whole set of other services which are going to be integrated with the 'Uttara' portal (*www.uttara.in*), which is being developed. So, in a way, our rollout should be at the end of this year, we are at fairly advanced stage as compared to the rest of the country. Besides, in Uttaranchal, all treasuries are computerized. The pay roll is entirely computerized. We are the first state in the country to do that. So, we hope to internalize e-Governance in the functioning of the government. The other programme that we have is the project '*Saksham*', each of the 55,000 government employees are going to be trained in basic skills and computer literacy.

▶ What are the key challenges that you are facing in implementing e-Governance projects in your state?

We do not really envisage any problems as such. Our key challenge basically would be to reach out to the remotest region. It is again not an insurmountable challenge. It is a challenge because of the typical terrain that we have; it is an area of vast distances, reaching out to the remoter areas would be more difficult through the existing PPP models. I mean to say, PPP models would not work in the remoter areas, it will work very well in Dehradun, Haridwar and Nainital but not in Chamoli and other places situated high on the hills in Uttaranchal. So, we have to balance, and make sure to link some of the remote districts with the mainstream districts. We need to build the backbone of connectivity to reach out to the remote areas. This is the issue we are trying to address.

▶ What are the initiatives in the area of capacity building and training of the government employees?

Under the project '*Saksham*', we are taking up the basic capacity building of all our employees. All employees under government of Uttaranchal are going to be computer literate. The process is already started. As far as the computer penetration in our offices is concerned, almost all

sections of the various departments are computerised. Regarding the change management, the reluctance to using computers is not there, as it exists in several other states. This is because Uttaranchal is a new state; the average age of government officers is 29-30 years as compared to 39-40 in other states. That makes the acceptance of technology quite easy. Also there is no legacy of earlier system.

▶ Can you please elaborate on what are the other advantages of Uttaranchal as compared to other states in implementing e-Governance?

One of the biggest advantages of Uttaranchal in the government side is that there is no constraint of resources, there is no constraint of political commitment, if the Chief Minister or Chief Secretary is driving e-Governance in the state.

▶ When do you expect Uttaranchal e-Governance roadmap to be ready?

The work is already going on in this regard. Our IT policy has been put up for wider consultation with the stakeholder groups. But the fact that IT policy is still under preparation does not mean that we are not working on the IT side. Our strategy is to make Uttaranchal not just e-Governed; we are looking at IT as one of the main drivers of employment. Under our project '*Aarohi*' every child in the school, in all the government schools of Uttaranchal, including *Madrasas* and *Ashram padhatis* (traditional educational systems of Muslims and Hindus respectively), will be taught computers. Uttaranchal is the only state in the country where all *Madrasas* and *Ashrams* have computers. So the next generation of children is going to come out of school are going to be totally computer literate.

Then, we are implementing the project '*Shikhar*' for students in the degree college levels. The objective of this project is to impart world class and job oriented IT education to the students of the degree colleges – both governmental and aided – at an affordable cost. Under this project, interested students can do MCA equivalent degrees at a very reasonable cost. So, we hope to roll out a large number of MCA professionals.

Uttaranchal government has entered into collaboration with CII (Confederation of Indian Industries) to set up training for BPO centers, there are about 10-15 BPO training centers here, and 26 BPO call centers which are here for the past 3 years.

We are looking at IT as one of the main drivers for e-Governance, BPO, back office support, trainings- CAT, accounting, legal services and so on.

Uttaranchal is going to be the knowledge center; we already have 9 industries in the state. IT and knowledge go together, that's how we are looking at a really developing state. So, IT is going to be a very important component in the state's development plan.

Regarding the e-Governance roadmap being in place, we are very clear about what we want to do. Also, the Government of India's plans, whether it is SWAN (State Wide Area Network) or CSCs (Common Service Centres), it is very clearly laid out. We already had our meetings as far as the CSCs are concerned. In fact, we already have about 100 CSCs running through the *Kisan Soochana Kendras* (Information Centres). We have the additional 66 such centres being run at the primary agricultural societies through the IFFCO (Indian Farmers Fertilizers Cooperative Limited. We have about 21 *Janadhar Soochana Kutirs* (Information Centres) that are running under the UNDP programme. So we have already 200 CSCs already operational in Uttaranchal. In many ways we are more advanced than the roll out plan of the government of India. The latter's target is to have CSCs by 2007, but we would be able to do it by the end of 2006.

▶ You mentioned introduction of IT in schools of the various religious groups such as *Madrasas* and *Ashrams*. Please tell us about what has been their acceptance level?

Their acceptance has been pretty good. The training of the *Madrasas*' teachers started by reciting from *Quran* and went on to computer education. It has been very positive and ambitious experience for all of us because the acceptance of computers and computer learning has to be there. We made the Muslim Education Board the stakeholders in this mission; the Board has been very very proactive. The results have been very very successful.

As far as the acceptance by the *Ashram* based schools is concerned, the very fact that there is a Haridwar (religious place of Hindus) portal shows that acceptance for IT is definitely there.

▶ What is the allocated budget to the State of Uttaranchal for e-Governance?

This year we spent INR500mn (US$10.75mn) on IT. Next year we plan to double up the expenditures on IT and IT related services and infrastructure. But the important thing is not how much you spend, but how well you spend. Another point that needs to be kept in mind while talking about the IT budget of the state is that the budget comes from various departments and not just from IT department. For instance, the budget for the computer literacy programme comes from the schools; transport department has a lot of computerisation, and the budget comes from transport department. If we calculate the amount spent on IT by different departments other than IT, the amount would be much higher. But let me say this that funds are not a constraint so far as the implementation and development of IT is concerned.

▶ What is your opinion regarding public-private partnership, can it add value to e-Governance?

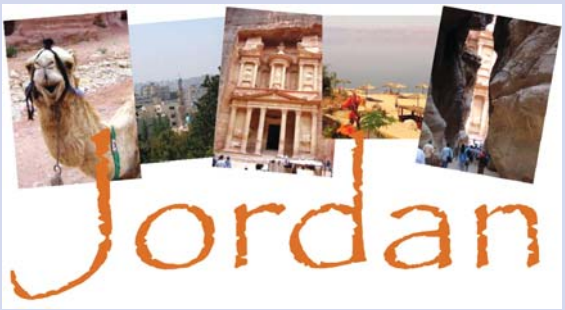
Definitely yes. I am very clear on this. We need this collaboration; we need this partnership to leverage the strength of both. There are certain very strong advantages, which the government has, and certain advantages of the private sector; if these two work in tandem it is a win-win situation for both. The kind of investments we are talking about, those investments cannot be generated by the private sector, and those have to come from government budgets. And yet resource efficiency, competitive models, planning, customer care, designing systems, that is definitely areas that private sectors have their strengths. Leveraging the strengths of both – public and private sectors – is something, which is very relevant for our country. Ultimately, it is India that must win. And if India is to win, the private, public and the citizens have to go together.

MoU on portal for aviation e-Licensing

In an initiative of the first of its kind, the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Emirates Airline to enhance cooperation through electronic links (e-Licensing). Electronic transactions would be possible between the two sides enabling employees in the aviation industry to obtain licenses through a special portal. A move towards e-Governance by the aviation industry in the Middle East, e-Licensing would facilitate transactions and help save the time and effort of pilots, engineers and all employees in the aviation industry who need to obtain necessary licenses, who will be able to get the licenses electronically.

The MoU was signed by Waleed Al Ghanim, Head of the Licensing Department at the GCAA, and Raed Al Rahma, Director, System Applications at Aviation Operations, Emirates Airline.

e-Village launched in Jordan



An e-Village was launched in Lib and Mleih areas of Jordan. According to Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women)'s Regional Programme Director, the two areas were chosen because there were 1,860 households here living below the absolute poverty line, while illiteracy rate is 14% and the unemployment 47%. The e-Village, which aims to bridge the digital divide between rural and urban areas thereby improving the standards of living for its residents, is a collaboration of UNIFEM's Arab States Regional Office and the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology.

The initiative would help benefit some 10,000 residents in accessing entrepreneurial services, technology, and communication tools. Apart from a computer lab, the e-Village would have the first local community radio station, a mosaic workshop, a lego robotics lab, a printing and packaging centre and a café. The e-Village programme is intended towards empowering women, students, business owners, people with special needs, the unemployed and volunteers. More e-Villages would be created in other parts of Jordan in future.

Technical hitch stalls online renewal of health cards

A technical glitch is warding off some subscribers of Qatar e-Government from renewing the health cards of their dependants online. While speaking to the *Gulf Times*, an aggrieved user complained that instead of renewing the health cards of his family members in just 24 hours he had to wait for one month this year as the e-Government portal refused to accept the applications on the premise that their residence permit has expired. However, expressing shock, the aggrieved user said that only this February he had got the residence permit renewed for two-years. Though, the user's health card was renewed, but his family members were not lucky enough.

The benefit of online renewal of health cards is that the new card could be collected immediately after 24 hours from the Health Card Office, provided the application was made on a working day and the next day is also a working day. Further, if the subscriber opts for delivery through the postal channel, at extra charge, the health card would be received within three or four days. However, if the renewal is done through the Primary Health Centre concerned or the specific counters at Hamad General Hospital, it would take at least one month to get the new card.

e-Government survey in Bahrain

In Bahrain, authorities plan to undertake an online survey for businessmen to measure the private sector's expectations of the new e-Government initiative. Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) has prepared the survey. The survey is being posted on the BCCI (Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry)'s website, www.eztrade.bh. Central Informatics Organisation (CIO) is leading the project, and it would receive the results.

Mahel Al Khan, CIO programme management office head, said that some services such as CR renewals, paying off traffic violations and unemployment registration, already exist online at a very advanced level, while others are yet to be developed. The aim would be to eventually turn it into a one-stop-shop for all government services to be inter-related, so

that one online application covers the requirements of other ministries as well. Other services listed on the survey include customs, ports and related services, registration of contracts, public procurement, submission of legal information, registration of leases/rental agreements, multi-storey owners permits, obtaining medical certificates, making General Organisation for Social Insurance contributions, obtaining, renewing and cancelling residence permits and others. The e-Government in Bahrain is expected to be fully operational within three years.

Oman's fifth 'Sanad' service centre inaugurated

Oman's Commerce and Industry Under-secretary Ahmed bin Hassan Al Dheeb inaugurated the fifth 'Sanad' service centre in Al Khuwair (Muscat). The Sanad centres are a part of the national campaign to introduce full-fledged e-Governance by assisting young Omanis with the clearance of their businesses with various government offices and reducing pressure on government establishments and private sector companies.

Perceived as key drivers of e-Government in Oman, the Sanad services specifically aim to provide gainful employment and business opportunity to Omanis by delivering government and corporate services electronically. The centres would provide all necessary services under one roof, such as payment of electricity, water and telephones bills and translation and Internet services.

Drive to eliminate computer illiteracy in Doha

With the aim to raise IT awareness and increase the usage of computer and Internet

across the various sectors of society, particularly among educators and government employees, the Supreme Council of Information and Communications Technology (ictQATAR) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ICDL GCC Foundation. This is part of ictQATAR's e-Citizens initiative. The e-Citizen is aimed to bring about transformation to a digital knowledge-based society.

Dr Mohamed al-Ansari, ictQATAR's e-Education Manager, and Jamil Ezzo, ICDL GCC Foundation General Manager, signed the MoU. The initiative aims to equip citizens with the essential IT skills to be able to utilise e-Government services such as paying bills, enrolling in courses, making holiday reservations, shopping, banking, trading, searching for jobs, or taking part in online discussion forums. ictQATAR is making efforts to end computer illiteracy among Qataris.

ictQatar has decided to work in association with other government sectors wherein all qualifying government employees would be asked to undergo the mandatory official ICDL testing, leading to ICDL certification, regardless of their computer background or job level. ICDL certification is considered as the global benchmark for computer literacy for all qualifying government employees, and is endorsed by governments worldwide.

First automated machine for self-info service in Kuwait

Kuwaiti Interior Ministry announced the launching of its first automated machine for self-information service that enables citizens and expatriates to know procedures and documents needed to carry out transactions related to the ministry. The machine displays information on its screen in both Arabic and English, and provides services related to traffic violations, bails, driving licenses, Kuwaiti passports, and vehicle cards. The machine also provides

information on how to carry out transactions, locations of service centers, and Interior Ministry vehicles.

Lieutenant-General Adel Al-Munayes, General Manager of the General Department for information systems at the Ministry, informed that the launch of this new service is aimed at easing services through geographic expansion and concluding the e-Government project by providing information of citizens and residents in a joint database.

ISRO to guide cities on waste disposal

Waste disposal, which is the biggest challenge being faced by several cities in India, is now going to be ably guided by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) through its expertise in Remote Sensing. P. G. Diwakar, Head, Regional Remote Sensing Service Centre (RRSSC), said that Remote Sensing and communication satellites like Cartosat-1, Resourcesat-1 and the IRS series of satellites were already being used to obtain a wide variety of high resolution images and data in spatial resolutions. "The 2.5m high resolution data obtained from Cartosat-1 can be used in locating the drainage map and the exact area for the disposal of waste. The data is also useful to locate for urbanisation, soil texture, infrastructure, ground water prospects, road network and land use," Diwakar said. Currently, the Ranchi Municipality in the state of Jharkhand is using customised solutions of ISRO in tracing suitable landfill sites.

Digital cameras to classify properties in Hyderabad

As a precursor for implementation of the new area-based property tax system from the next financial year beginning April 1, the Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad (MCH), India, plans to use digital cameras for classifying of residential and commercial properties in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. During the survey, digital data would be recorded, which then would be combined with spatial data obtained through the Geographical information System (GIS) for getting a complete picture of properties.

B. Ramesh Babu, Additional Commissioner (Finance and IT), said that the new system would only rationalise collection of property tax as the exercise would enable correct estimates to be made regarding the plinth area and the rental value of properties.

Satellite to track Malaysia's leatherback turtles

A million-dollar satellite study of turtle migration, focusing on the leatherback that is nearing extinction, is to be conducted by the coastal Malaysian state of Terengganu famed for its exotic beaches. A sum of MYR5mn (US$1.35mn) has already been allocated for the purpose. According to Mohamad Jidin Shafee, Terengganu state executive councillor, the transmitter installation exercise to study turtle migration is likely to be held this September.

Earlier, only one leatherback turtle considered the most endangered of Malaysia's turtles was sighted last year. Also, for the first time in history, neither of the other important species - Olive Ridley and hawksbill turtle, landed at the traditional nesting sites. Turtles are hunted for their meat and shell, and often get killed by entangling in the fishing nets.

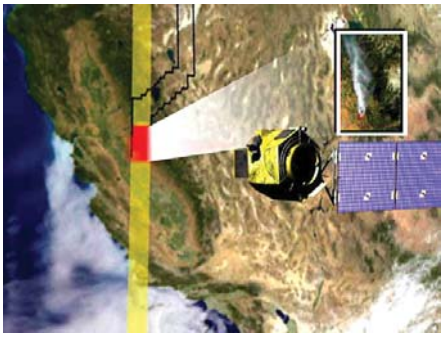
China launches biggest oceanic environment survey

In order to probe the conditions of its maritime space, China launched its biggest oceanic environment survey recently. Sponsored by the National Bureau of Oceanography, the program would last two years and cover 1.02 million square kilometres of sea area off China's coasts. Data on water depths, waves, water levels, ocean currents, water temperatures and colours, mineral contents and plankton in four seasons would be recorded during the survey by scientists. The program is part of a comprehensive survey and evaluation project on China's inshore ocean launched in 2003.

Upon completion, the research findings are likely to guide development of the maritime economy, tapping of oceanic resources, maritime disaster relief and prevention, and oceanic environmental protection.

NASA satellites to track wildfires' progress in US

Now, it would become possible to track the progress of wildfires in the United States owing to joint efforts by NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Agency), the U.S. Forest Service, the University of Maryland and the National Interagency Fire Center. MODIS (Moderate



Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer) imaging devices mounted on 2 NASA satellites would monitor the earth and will be able to locate a fire within a 500m distance. The data sent by the instruments is turned into maps.

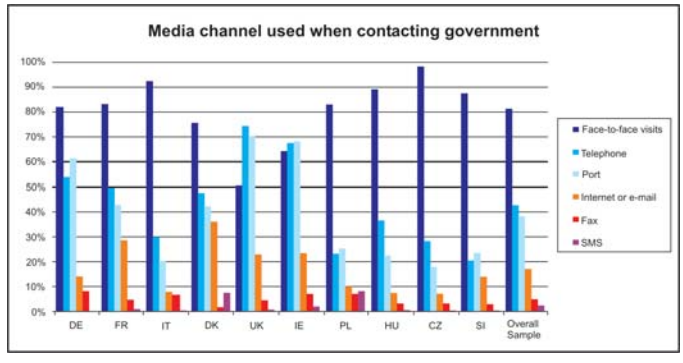
MODIS Rapid Response System is used by NASA as part of its SensorWeb project, wherein sensors circling the earth act in a network detecting fires or other events.

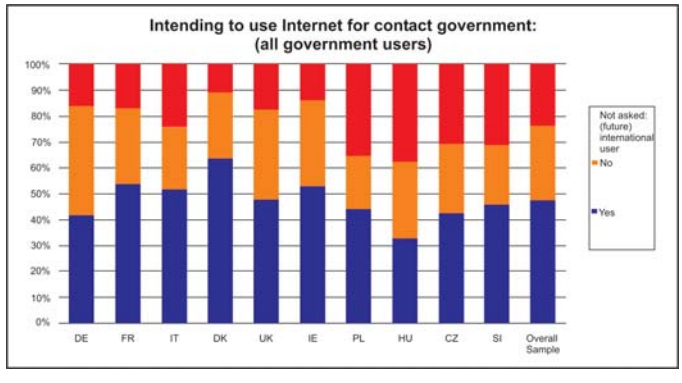
eUser survey on public administration and e-Government

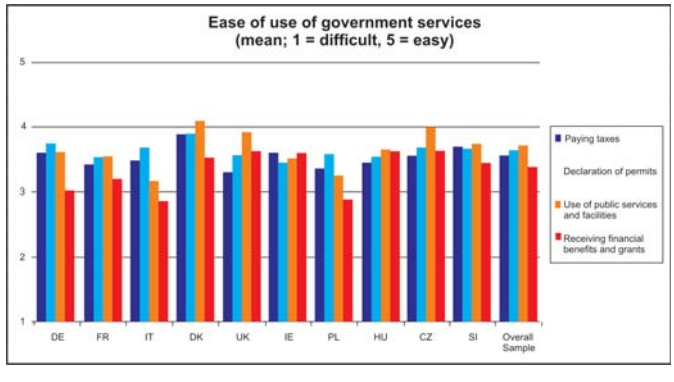
Potential demand for eGovernment services is about 50 percent and will continue to rise. This, among other findings, came out of the eUser study held in 2005, funded by the European Commission's IST (Information Society Technology) programme. The survey conducted in Europe, focused on a number of themes – the public's use of government services, the different channels (or media) employed, the nature of potential future demand for eGovernment, the barriers and experiences in using eGovernment, and the socio-economic attributes of eGovernment users compared with non-users. Some of the highlights of the survey as follows:

- While in some countries like UK telephone and post have overtaken face-to-face contact with the government (74% telephone and only 51% face-to-face), the latter is still the most important channel for contacting government. 81% of all citizens who contacted government in the last year did so in person, although not necessarily exclusively by this channel. (see table 1)
- The potential demand for eGovernment services is about 50 per cent of all government users, and could be higher. This is mainly for information services, followed by communication services, and lowest for transaction services. (see table 2)
- The survey result showed that one of the barriers which users anticipate they will meet when using eGovernment relate to difficulty in actually starting, with a feeling that face-to-face is better and the fear about data privacy important.
- In terms of government services generally, citizens rate their overall satisfaction at about 3.5 out of 5.0.(see table 3)

Users of eGovernment services tend to be younger, male and better educated, and have higher socio-economic status and be in employment.







Source: http://www.euser-eu.org

numbers

15th

is the ranking of Ireland in the league table of online public service availability, according to the new survey carried out by CapGemini on behalf of the European Commission. Ireland has slipped from 12th place last year to 15th place this year.

18

per 1,000 is the PC penetration in India in 2005-06, according to data provided by the Manufacturers' Association for Information Technology. It has increased three times from 6.3 per 1,000 people in 2000-01 to 18 per 1,000.

34

million EUR will be spent by the Government of Serbia in electronic governance by the end of 2007. The investment has been included in the first sector plan under the support of the National Investment Plan in the area of science and e-Governance, adopted recently by the Government.

60

percent of the populated areas in the state of Perak in Malaysia will go wireless in September this year, according to the Perak government. With Perak's own MSC in place and businesses coming in, the state is expected to become the next regional hub for telecommunication services.

123

million Internet users are there in China, which is an increase of nearly 20% over the past year, reveal the official China Internet Network Information Center annual survey. The number of Internet users in China with broadband service jumped by 45% over the past year to 77 million, or about two-thirds of the total online population

120-150

million Euros are saved per year in Denmark with the use of e-Invoicing and a good public private partnership (PPP) efforts. This saving is due to the elimination of keyboarding and postal handling. Electronic invoicing became mandatory in Denmark on 1 February, 2005.

23,000

crore INR (USD 49.21) is what the Indian government will spend on the various e-Governance initiatives. A part of the funds invested would be recovered through an innovative e-Service tax to be paid by the users of the electronic governance.

Source

15th	*http://www.electricnews.net/news.html?code=9726899*
18	*http://www.business-standard.com/common/storypage.php?autono=98398&leftnm=8&subLeft=0&chkFlg*
34	*http://see.oneworld.net/article/view/136327/1/*
60	*http://biz.thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2006/7/14/business/14837322&sec=business*
123	*http://edition.cnn.com/2006/TECH/internet/07/19/china.internet.ap/index.html*
120 - 150	*http://www.egovmonitor.com/node/6669*
23,000	*http://www.greaterkashmir.com/full_story.asp?Date=17_7_2006&ItemID=28&cat=5*

WHAT'S ON

This section lists upcoming e-Government conferences, exhibitions, and other public events for the benefit of our readers.

23 – 25 August 2006
Hotel Taj Palace
New Delhi
India

3 – 5 September 2006

The EURO mGOV 2006
Sussex University, Brighton, UK
www.icmg.mgovernment.org

4 – 8 September 2006

International EGOV conference 2006
Krakow (Poland)
http://www.uni-koblenz.de/FB4/Institutes/IWVI/AGVInf/Conferences/egov2006

6 – 8 September 2006

I-KNOW '06 - 6th International Conference on Knowledge Management
Graz, Austria
http://www.egovonline.net/events/events-details.asp?EventID=79

7 – 8 September 2006

2nd Conference on eServices in European Civil Registration
Tallinn, Estonia
http://www.riser.eu.com/Conf/conf_intro_new.htm

11 – 13 September 2006

The 6th Enterprise Architecture Conference & Exhibition
Practical Approaches for Federal Programs
Ronald Reagan Building
Washington, DC
http://www.e-gov.com/EventOverview.aspx?Event=EA06&NoCache=632870559470560595

11 – 14 September 2006

International Conference on eGovernance Enhancement via Knowledge Management
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia
http://www.eg2km.org/main.html

12 – 13 September 2006

GCC Government Organizations Quality Website Development Conference
Rebuilding Quality & Service Excellence in GCC Government Organization Websites
Burj Al Arab Hotel
Dubai UAE
http://www.datamatixgroup.com/conferences/agenda.asp?id=339

13 September 2006

Conference on 'The impact of eGovernment in Europe' – Tracking the Progress of the eGov Action Plan (2006-2010)
Helsinki, Finland
http://www.egov-goodpractice.org/event_details.php?&eventid=125

20 – 22 September 2006

Smart Event '06 – World e-ID 2006
Sophia Antipolis
France
http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/5642/5744

22 September 2006

2nd International Workshop on eGovernment and Data Protection (EG&DP-2006)
Varna
Bulgaria
www.tu-sofia.bg/saer/

27 – 29 September 2006

4th Quality Conference for Public Administrations in EU
Tampere
Finland
http://www.egovonline.net/events/events-details.asp?EventID=77

2 – 3 October 2006

First Iberoamerican Congress on e-Government
Santiago, Chile
http://www.sumaq.org/egov/

5 – 6 October 2006

European e-Skills 2006 Conference
Thessaloniki
Greece
http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/5640/5744

9 – 11 October 2006

t-Government World Europe 2006
Amsterdam
The Netherlands
http://www.terrapinn.com/2006/tgov/

25 – 27 October 2006

eChallenges e-2006 Conference
Barcelona, Spain
http://www.echallenges.org/e2006/

9 – 10 November 2006

Global Forum 2006
Paris, France
http://www.items.fr/globalforum.php3?id_rubrique=75

20 – 22 November 2006

Arab eGovernment Summit
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
http://www.datamatixgroup.com/

6 December 2006

2nd Annual Event
Information Management in the public sector
London
http://www.kablenet.com

7 December 2006

eGovernment Conference 2006
Copenhagen, Denmark
http://www.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=IDC_P11911

15-17 December

International Conference of E-governance ICEG 2006
IIT Delhi, India
http://www.iceg.net/2006

Tell us about your event at info@egovonline.net

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