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The e-Government magazine for Asia and the Middle East

Malaysia Vision 2020
Roadmap for a tech-enabled government
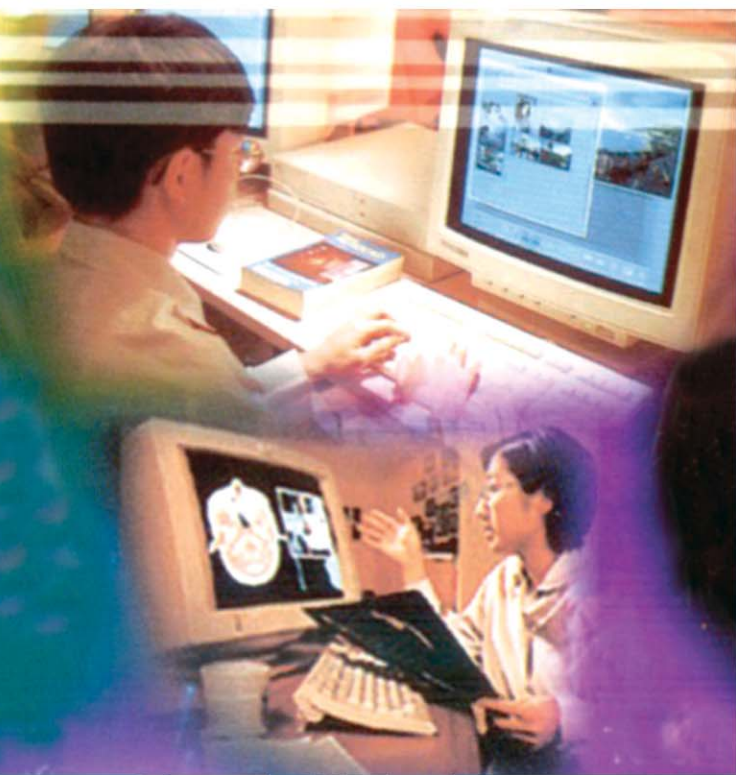
SPECIAL FOCUS
e-Government in evolution

An evaluative survey of government websites in Malaysia

IN PRACTICE
Benchmarking excellence in public service delivery in India

REGIONAL FOCUS: ORISSA
From "Below Average Achievers" to "Average Achievers"

Interview: Surendra Nath Tripathi

PREVIEW

egov **Asia** 2006

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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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Roadmap for a technologically enabled government

Governance is closely linked to development. As more and more governments the world over use online tools to reach out to its citizenry, the world wide web becomes the face of these governments. This builds not only transparency and accountability, but also creates an opportunity for community assessment of their performance and delivery of services and promises. The information society can truly become community driven when countries not only use these online tools and technologies as a global publicity platform, but also use it to review their own performance within the countries.

Government websites can be of different quality and reach. How far are they in turning out to be truly providing e-Governance services? When do countries get their status of e-Governments? Are there benchmarks to measure the evolution of a successful e-Government? These and some other critical questions of monitoring and evaluation have been raised by many academics. In the March issue of egov, we are pleased to present an interesting assessment study focussing on Malaysia – a survey of over 200 websites set up or run by governments has been made. This is an important study. There are useful lessons for other countries in different stages of evolution of e-Government implementation to learn from.

The World Bank Institute's Governance assessment frameworks classify them at three levels, namely, macro, mezzo and micro. The macro assessments are usually inter-country comparative studies done across the world, and are periodic in nature. The mezzo level assessments are cross-country survey of enterprises. The micro level assessments are specialized, in-country, in-depth surveys of governance and institutional capacity diagnostics. The web analysis of Malaysia is emerging as a key addition to this regular framework of tools for governance assessments.

Exciting local and innovative initiatives and projects can be effectively up-scaled to national levels when they get integrated to the policy and help realize the vision of a truly knowledge driven society. egov strives to document them and advocate policy changes and to provide innovative ideas for governments to adopt them at national scale. We look forward to speaking to many of the practitioners around Asia in the coming months.

Ravi Gupta
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The IT industry sources in the country disclosed that the government is seeking HKD170mn (US$21.90mn) in the first phase funding from the Legislative Council. An undisclosed amount of money is to be invested in the project over five years. Although the new website plan is an effort to improve e-Government services in the country, the government is still unclear about its motive to dump the old portal in favour of a new one.

"Under the ESD system, the cost to taxpayers is about HKD1mn (US$128,840) per month, which will increase to over HKD9mn (US$1.15mn) under the new system. The government's rationale for replacing the ESD system is not clear. ESD Life has been given very favourable reviews by the government ever since it started," claimed IT industry sources.

2,000 'illegal' websites closed by China

More than 2,000 websites were closed down China in 2005 after citing that they contained too much sex, violence or politics. Referring to the websites as "unhealthy", the Chinese daily *Beijing Morning Post* said that the crackdown was ostensibly a part of nationwide campaign aimed at effectively banning online content including pornography, excessive violence and sensitive political or religious issues.

Of late, policing on the Internet has been stepped up to ward of unhealthy influence on the young Chinese. Already, the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) had issued warnings to 53 websites providing downloads for pornographic games in November last year. Also, in September the Chinese government announced revised Internet rules requiring Internet operators to re-register their news sites and police them

for content. According to the GAPP, any content that "harms national security, reveals state secrets, subverts political power, (and) undermines national unity" has also been banned. Besides, the regulations prohibit posts that "instigate illegal gatherings, formation of associations, marches, demonstrations or disturb social order."

By 2008, Smart ID Cards in Korea to debut

In an attempt to streamline application procedures, the Korean Home Affairs Ministry has decided to introduce Electronic residential registration cards with integrated circuit chips or Smart ID Cards in 2008.

According to the Home Affairs Ministry officials, the existing cards would be replaced for stronger privacy protection and prevention of counterfeiting. While functioning as an online ID, the new card would provide relief to the people since they would not be required to submit registration certificates issued by local ward offices to banks by allowing them to log onto e-Government websites from any bank for immediate confirmation. Besides, the Smart ID Cards would also make it easier to clear immigration at airports and conduct health insurance and senior-citizen benefit dealings.

e-Government projects in Philippines to be re-evaluated

All the existing and proposed e-Government projects in the Philippines would be re-evaluated by the government. Particularly, the existing government ICT projects that were allocated funding in

2005 are to be reviewed by the technical working group.

Virgilio Pena, Chairman of the Commission on Information and Communications Technology (CICT), said, "A technical working group would assess all government ICT initiatives with a view to re-distributing unused resources. For 2006, PHP1bn (US$19.5mn) has been allocated to e-Government spending by the Department of Budget and Managements (DBM). Among proposed new projects are a PHP200mn (US$3.90mn) e-accounting system for DBM, an integrated government financial system, the modernisation of the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority, and an overhaul of the anti-cybercrime unit of the Philippine National Police and the National Bureau of Investigation."

"Some agencies have yet to start implementing e-government projects that have been given funding under the yearly e-government fund. These projects include an e-Overseas Filipino Workers Link project of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and a DBM project," Pena said.

Online tuition payment for Taiwanese students now

Thanks to an e-Government Payment System set up and promoted by the Research, Development and Evaluation Commission (RDEC), Taiwanese students would now be able to pay their tuition online.

Ho Chuan-teh, Director of the RDEC Information Management Department, said, "More than 400 universities, colleges and schools have joined the system to allow students to pay their tuition and other fees through the RDEC system, which would accept any valid means of payment including credit cards."

Originally developed to allow taxpayers pay their taxes online, the system would be upgraded into a fully developed government treasury through which people can make online payment of any taxes and other government fees.

ASIA

Bhutanese officials visit India for e-Governance lessons

The Indian cities of Hyderabad and Bangalore have now become prime destinations for senior Bhutanese officials to learn the basics of e-Governance for implementation in Bhutan. Bhutanese daily *Kuensel* quoted Tenzin Chhoeda, Director of Department of Information and Technology (DIT), as saying: "The concept of e-Governance has not taken off as expected. In the government sector, ICT had remained confined to email and

net surfing. Some government offices were using its application on a small scale while others were still reading about it. The ICT study visit organised by the Ministry of Information and Communication with assistance from Indian government was therefore, aimed at exciting the key government officials into some action within their own organisations."

The Bhutanese officials visited ICT centres like e-Sewa, Centre for Good Governance, L&T Infocity, National Institute for Smart Governance and Satyam Technology Centre in Hyderabad, while they visited the Bangalore One and various call centres in Bangalore. Besides, a multi-sectoral team at operational level from offices like trade, RCSC, police, agriculture and immigration also visited National Informatics Centre in Delhi and Assam to observe ICT use by government bodies in delivering public services.

e-Syariah courts in Malaysia to be commercialised globally

The electronic management and administration application of Syariah Courts, e-Syariah, would be commercialised globally in future by the Malaysian government. According to Tan Sri Samsudin Osman, Chief Secretary to the Government, said, "The application system developed by the Sarawak Information System Sdn Bhd (SAINS) at the Syariah Judicial Department of Malaysia and the Syariah Judicial Department in the states would strengthen the legal knowledge and Islamic judiciary in other Muslim countries."

A part of the seventh e-Government project, e-Syariah, was launched by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Putrajaya on 7th February 2003 at an estimated cost of MYR39mn (US$). "e-Syariah Courts were able to resolve 84.8% of the cases in six months of its launch while 15.1% were resolved after that period. However, in less than three months 71.6% cases were reolved," said Osman.

According to DIT officials, there is an urgent need to develop ICT infrastructure in Bhutan for implementing new ideas although it was improving with broadband fibre-optic connectivity through Thimpu WAN and Dzongkhag LAN. There was also scarcity of funds. During the current plan period the government had allocated a budget of about BTN40mn (US$898,896) for application development but one software application available in India costs much more.

Nepal to get Korea help for e-Governance

Nepal's master plan to promote e-Governance would be getting support from the Korea IT Industry Promotion Agency (KIPA). Chang-hak Choi, Director General, Presidential Committee on Government Innovation, while addressing a seminar entitled 'Korea-Nepal e-Government Symposium', said, "We are interested to provide all the necessary assistance to promote the ICT sector in Nepal. Korea has emerged as one of the powerful ICT nations of Asia. Korea has reached the peak of progress in the ICT sector within a short span of time because of the effective planning and the strategy implemented by its government." The seminar was organised by the Nepalese Government's High Level Commission for

Information Technology (HLCIT) and Korea IT Industry Promotion Agency (KIPA).

Speaking on the occasion, Atma Ram Ghimire, Member-Secretary, HLCIT, said, "Nepal has implemented few applications of ICT for Budget Control and monitoring and VAT system, which is being implemented by the Finance Ministry. The government is planning to bring a three-year National Action Plan on IT. Nepal has potential opportunities for collaboration with the private sector of Korea."

Rebuke for new Hong Kong e-Government portal plan

The Hong Kong government is facing harsh criticism from IT industry experts for its plan to replace the current e-Government portal, ESD Life, with a new HKD560mn (US$72.15mn) e-Government portal. A unit of Hutchinson Whampoa was running the old portal, whose contract is due to expire in 2008. The ESD Life used to receive HKD5.50 (US$0.70) per transaction from users for the e-Government portal that allowed the users to pay government and private utilities bills online besides also offering booking services for theatre and train tickets.

e-Government in evolution
An evaluative survey of government websites in Malaysia

The Internet has opened new possibilities for the government and the governed, just as it has for the businesses. The emergence of the e-business, e-organisation and k-economy and the corollary, e-Government, is predicted to change social governance dramatically, if not, radically. Over the past decade many governments have conceived and implemented programmes intended to launch the government into the digital realm. While many see the power of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) especially the Internet to improve, extend and diversify public service delivery systems, others view it more broadly to include the governance dimensions. The optimists view ICT and particularly, the Internet as the panacea for the ailing spirit of democracy all over the world. ICT, it is argued, will rekindle the political consciousness of the citizenry and draw the apathetic masses back into the mainstream of political debate and discourse. The years of declining social capital and the politics-citizen disconnection can be mended and in fact, reversed.

Whether ICT and specially Internet, revives waning interests of people in political life of a nation, there is near consensus that the Internet enabled electronic government will dramatically change the way in government serves the public. Many of the age old complaints of government and its services can come to pass if the Internet is exploited systematically and adaptively. The highly complex bureaucracies that grew to regulate the economy and society through the highly differentiated but usually lowly integrated bureaucracies can eventually be reconstructed through the Internet and intranets.

The Malaysian government has envisioned a technologically advanced society and implicitly, a technologically

International surveys have given Malaysia fairly high marks for e-Government development. The study here examines 168 randomly selected government agency websites on information currency, interactivity, communication and online services. The findings, however, suggest that the international assessments have been rather exaggerated. Most websites served little and stale information for the citizens.

enabled government through its Vision 2020. The move towards a digital government is progressing slowly along the government-to-government (G2G) route and also along the government-to-citizen path (G2C). Alongside with the launching of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996, the government has lined up several flagship e-

government projects namely Project Management System, Human Resource Management Information System, e-Procurement and General Office Environment intended to transform the government from the paper-based, unintegrated islands of agencies and departments to an integrated and networked government.

Flagship Applications

Smart Schools

Electronic Government

Multi-Purpose Card

Telehealth

The 8th Malaysian Plan and the recently launched Knowledge-Based Economy Masterplan recognise and strategise for the transformation of the government particularly the public service. Although many of the projects are mainly aimed at intra-governmental transactions, the agency-public interface is still an important goal. Within this e-Government plan, the government agencies are expected to and have launched websites as digital service portals. In keeping with the standard development elsewhere, Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU) has sought to organise these sites into a convenient public service portal. Several agencies have significantly improved their services to the public by allowing inquiries and searches to be made online. Companies Commission of Malaysia, Road Transport Department, The Royal Malaysian Police, the Subang Jaya Municipality and the Election Commission are examples of such agencies. But the vast majority has not used the Internet for interaction but merely as a static broadcasting medium.

Because of its popularity, low cost and tremendous reach, government agencies have over the last eight years entered the Internet domain to make their presence felt. Since then, a plethora of websites have been created and launched with the usual fanfare. While most agencies proudly proclaim their digital initiatives, the usefulness/value of these sites to the citizen-clients has not been systematically examined. Many of the surveys of e-Government by international consultancies like Accenture and Taylor

Flores Nelson involve limited websites, mostly of the federal agencies and target English contents. Although remarkable improvements have been achieved in providing services via the Civil Service Link, these success stories are by far the exceptions than the norm. To provide a better description of the progress of e-Government, it is important that the state and performance a of larger base of websites be examined.

Implementation and Reality

Despite the growth of websites and the profound implications for the

government, there have been few studies of the e-Government revolution. It is not clear how the e-Government revolution has progressed and what kinds of information and services are online. It has been posited that the Internet will encourage greater accessibility to services, greater openness and accountability of the government agencies. In reality, many government websites carry stale information and outdated data. These sites often do not have much interactivity designed into it.

There are very few agencies providing the services entirely via the Internet. Most agencies have advertised their services and make available the forms and the instructions. Few actually permit complete online transactions. This state of affair has raised serious questions about performance of these websites and also the larger question of how information technology is being deployed in the public sector. The websites are undoubtedly agency-centric creations.

This survey highlights the state of use of this potentially useful delivery

channel. Much less is known about the pace and the depth of e-Government implementation in Malaysia. The publicly available information is policy oriented and says little about the progress and, more importantly, about the pilot project outcomes, which will inform the eventual rollout of the e-Government programmes. The recent United Nations e-Government Readiness Report 2004 is quite revealing about e-Government in Malaysia. Most agencies are merely getting on the Internet and have not gone beyond the 'publish

> **The Malaysian government has envisioned a technologically advanced society and implicitly, a technologically enabled government through its Vision 2020. The move towards a digital government is progressing slowly along the government-to-government (G2G) route and also along the government-to-citizen path (G2C).**

stage'. The government agency work is still largely offline with exception of a few progressive record-keeping agencies.

The study is a cross-sectional sample survey of public agency websites. It is intended to examine the state of development of the digital service window of the agencies. A sample size of 200 agency websites was deemed appropriate as it covered about half the listed public agency web sites. However, we were able to obtain data from only 165 websites as the balances were inactive or have been removed pending reconstruction or experienced server problems.

State of e-Government

The sample observed included more state agency websites than federal. But the slight over representation of the state agency websites in the sample does not raise serious concerns of distortion. About half of the websites were in Bahasa Malaysia while a third was bilingual and about 15% in English only.

Sixty-five percent of the websites did not display a privacy policy statement, which is very worrisome as it is a standard practice in e-Government. In fact, MAMPU guidelines require that the privacy statement be displayed. With security and privacy issues being still the main obstacle to e-business and e-government, the poor showing here is not very helpful to ameliorating these perennial security concerns of users.

The government websites are notorious for their failure to keep the information on the websites current. Critics have scoffed at the suggestion of advancing e-Government by constantly referring to the disconnection between data currency and the website. This survey finding does nothing to diminish this criticism. The staleness of information on the web speaks volumes of the lack of integration of the website into the agency activities. It surely indicates that there is no automatic or scheduled updating of information. The use of outside vendors for the creation and maintenance of the websites in part also explains the lag.

The promise of e-Government lies in bringing the agency services to the "anywhere and anytime" concept that the Internet makes possible, cheaply. All e-Government surveys look at the range and extent of agency services, which are available on the net. Although many international surveys have accorded high marks for online services, this survey tells a different story. Less than 10% of the agencies provided complete online services to the public. A minority had some form of online services but they represent only a part of the total service offering. Even forms and guides are still to become a standard feature of website services. The availability of the online payment facility probably is the best indicator of how far full online services can proceed. On this score, there is precious little to report.

An often-mentioned complaint about government agencies including its services on the web is the lack of or slow response to inquiries. To test this, we sent emails to the listed officers asking simple questions about the agency services. We logged their response to our emails and the response was dismal. Even, more recently a test of email response (by ministers) carried out by a national daily *New Straits Times* produced similar results.

The Malaysian e-Government vision does not accord, at least at for now, much weight to extensive public participation in the agency affairs beyond the role as users. The role of the users as citizens in the policy making process is not articulated as a key objective in the e-Government visions.

Discussion

The e-Government development is quiet but dramatic changes are taking place throughout the world. Several countries notably US, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Norway, Canada, UK, Netherlands, Denmark and Germany have progressed to become global leaders in e-Government. As the e-readiness of Malaysians improves, the conditions for the e-Government, e-administration and even, the e-Governance will improve correspondingly. The UNPAN survey placed Malaysia in an exalted position labeled as 'interactive presence' (UNPAN, 2001:14) (but dropped to 42nd place on the UN 2004 survey and a place down in the 2005 survey) while the Accenture study placed Malaysia among the

'platform builders'. But on a national basis, the findings of this study paint a slightly different picture. There are wide variations in the e-Government development as judged from their website. But along this e-Government spectrum some commonalities are readily observed. Information paucity, information staleness, information utility and responsiveness continue to plague e-Government in Malaysia.

Implications

The implications of these findings are discussed in sections such as Information Currency, Agency-Centricity, Online Services and Interactivity in the context of the development of e-government in Malaysia.

Information Currency: Government services are information based. The quality and quantity of information defines the quality of service available to the people. UNPAN list the quality of information as a sine quo non for developing credibility of the e-Government. Even in more progressive e-Government countries, the citizen's demand is greatest for information. It is not merely the creation of the website that marks improvement or greater openness. It is quality and quantity of information about the internal administrative functions that is made available to the users that determines whether e-Government improves services in a democratic society. The access to information, where available, must be convenient and inexpensive. Undue difficulties and costs in obtaining information about the government serves only to frustrate not facilitate citizen-government interaction. The staleness of the information posted on the government websites has become an object of ridicule and a measure of the commitment to the digital service window. The information quality has three dimensions namely the currency of the data, the regularity of updating and the level of aggregation of the data presented. This study examined the time since the last updating.

The difficulties are likely to arise if the backroom activities are not computerised and integrated to enable easy, if not, seamless uplink to the agency

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websites. Even where such links exist, the effectiveness of these links must be continuously examined because many sites offering database search do not yield anything except a note of server problems. Citizens' expectations of online and conventional services are different. Many organisations have developed the websites using outside vendors and the uplinks are managed via these vendors. The transfer of information to intermediaries to be posted on the Net not only prolongs the process but may also introduce new risks as some information cannot be exchanged with outside parties. Other valid, though speculative, reasons can be offered for this state of affairs. The staleness of the information served on the agency website is also perhaps in part due to the tactical question of keeping the citizens away from actively evaluating the agency performance. Much of the information and data, however innocuous they seem, are classified as confidential and as such cannot be made public.

Agency-Centricity: To begin with public agencies are still agency-centric institutions despite the introduction quality initiatives aimed at providing better services to the clients/citizens through increased focus on the customer cum citizen. Despite the improvements in

the public services over the years, the agencies remain very producer-centric. This trait is also reflected in the development of e-Government. To be useful, the agency websites must be designed, operated and improved for the benefit of the public. This general advice is often not heeded in the design of the sites. The websites are replete with corporate information that includes standard vision, mission, objectives and also the client charters. In addition to this, the structure of the organisation and the information of the office bearers, at least the senior ones are a standard feature. It is observed that in high power distance societies such as Malaysia, the all-important civil servants who head the agencies and its various departments are given particular prominence. In fact, sometimes nothing more is available besides the personnel and corporate information. This information is only marginally useful to the public.

Online Services: The primary value of the Net for the government and its agencies is in the extension of the services to the citizens anywhere and anytime through 24/7/365 service delivery. In the case of the Malaysian e-Government, the main objective of e-Government is to extend services to the people via an

alternative medium. For this goal to be achieved, the services must go online. The findings of this study are a terrible indictment of the state of online services. Few services are carried out online. Some are partial in nature. The local authorities especially the urban ones are actively seeking to go online. But online payment is a big stumbling block in the transformation. Recent surveys have shown that Malaysians, just like their counterparts all over the world, are still concerned about the security. The recent announcement of further delays in enacting the Personal Data Protection Act, the Electronic Transactions Act and the Electronic Government Transactions Act does little to help assure the anxious public about online security. The few online services available are focused mainly on the vendors and contractors. The Treasury's e-Perolehan (procurement) system allows all government purchases to be managed online. But these systems have not been fully rolled out and many are prototypes that are being tested and refined and will gradually be extended to other agencies of the federal government and later to agencies of the state and local government as well. The development of online services is not expected to move rapidly or smoothly because the e-Government plans at the agency level is not in place.

Interactivity: e-Government has the potential to transform the relationship between the citizens and the government. The Internet allows for the declining interest in government and in democracy to be reversed. In fact, many observers report evidence, though still isolated, of e-Government reconnecting the public with their rulers. The findings of this study do not reassure that the government agencies are exploiting the interactivity that the Net provides. The emails posted on the Net are not, in many cases, active. The response to emails of agency placed in the website for general inquiry was disappointingly low. Very few actually responded to the email inquiries. A recent survey of responsiveness of Ministers to email inquiries showed that the political masters fared no better than the agencies under their charge. e-Government without plans, processes and standards are likely to evolve into public relations exercises that lose appeal and interest after the grand ceremonies and fanfare.

The limited nature of Malaysian e-Government vision is symptomatic of the usual reticence shown by public servants to the idea of e-democracy via e-Government. Service rather than democracy is the mainstay of e-Government, at least for now, not only in Malaysia but also on a global basis.

Conclusion

The study paints a rather different picture of e-Government from the annual surveys by different agencies including the United Nations. The Malaysian e-Government, as judged by the websites features and facilities, is still very much in the early stages or phases of e-Government development contrary to much higher placing in other surveys. The websites are very much focused on the agency need to broadcast information about the personnel and the agency. A user orientation is not evident as a general feature. This partly explains why the e-Government uptake is still low among Malaysian. There is serious information paucity - not much is available and also the problem of information staleness. Outdated information is a common caricature of government websites. Utility of the information is still a major question. The responsiveness of the agency to, for example, an email inquiry, is dismal and disturbing. The agency websites have not actively sought to interact and involve their respective constituencies. This is not surprising as the national e-Government Plan emphasises service delivery dimensions of e-Government. e-participation and e-democracy are not on the e-Government agenda.

The evolving e-Government requires greater user centricity to propel e-Government to challenge the conventional services delivery as envisaged in the Public Sector ICT Plan. The increasing info-structural facilities will not see a corresponding rise in e-Government uptake unless the agencies aggressively move beyond the broadcasting stage to interaction and even transaction online. To achieve this, the agencies must become more user-centric in the planning and do a lot more on the internal front to develop greater e-Government readiness. The public expectation is rising faster than can the agencies reengineer and transform. The e-Government evolution in Malaysia is uneven with the more public side appearing to move faster but the unseen back office is still to see major changes to allow rapid and seamless integration of services across different platforms and agencies. The dream of fully portalised life event based e-services is still a long way to come.

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Software Park Thailand

Facilitating software entrepreneurs towards growth

Thai software market in 2005 valued at THB41,435mn (US$ 1,059mn) with an overall growth of 27% from 2004. "Software Park Thailand aims to promote the growth of Thai software industry by attracting local and international partners," says **Suwipa Wanasathop**, *Director, Software Park Thailand, in an interview to* **Dipanjan Banerjee** *of egov.*

■ **Software Park Thailand came into existence way back in 2000, at a time when the economy was going through a rough time. What were the principal objectives and vision behind establishment of the Software Park Thailand?**
Software Park Thailand is a semi-government operation established under the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) within the Ministry of Science and Technology. It was approved by the government in 1997 and became fully operational in 2000 with the aim to promote the growth of Thai

software industry by attracting local and international partners to form a cluster of software-related businesses, and providing supported services including world-class infrastructure and facilities, human resource development, business development and marketing enabling, facilitating investment and funding, and even introducing the latest technology.

Our vision is to become a top-rate learning organisation that supports entrepreneurs to create a strong world-class software industry, making software an enabler for competitiveness of the Thai economy.

■ **What are the principal services and facilities provided by Software Park Thailand in terms of developing the domestic and International IT industry?**
To achieve our goals, a number of services and activities are being offered. Software Process Improvement Centre (SPIC) serves the Thai software industry through acting as a resource centre providing assistance to software companies to achieve business excellence.

The centre provides them with consultation in implementing and institutionalising internationally accepted frameworks SW-CMM, CMMI and ISO. Business Development and Market Enabling Department supports operators in the Thai software industry in the fields of marketing, public relations, networking with other software developers as business partners. To date, the department has forged over one thousand business alliances.

Technology Transfer Department is tapping into human resource, which is

> **Our vision is to become a top-rate learning organisation that supports entrepreneurs to create a strong world-class software industry, making software an enabler for competitiveness of the Thai economy.**
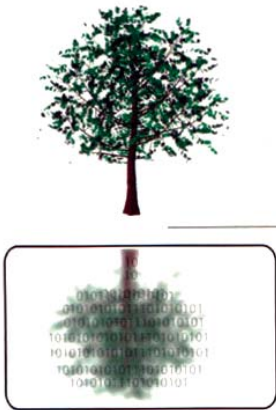
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one of the keys to build up a successful software industry. The department offers training for both individual IT professionals and organisations through our network of partners in academic, governments and private sector organisations. Incubation Centre provides help to nurture technology ideas into commercial successes. Its mission is to provide the most enabling environment for the start-up companies or individuals that have growth potential in software development to create a successful business. The Centre provides workspace, constructive and supportive environment to software entrepreneurs at start-up and during the early stages of their businesses at no charge for a period of one-year in-wall incubation.

IT Consulting Centre for Industry handles industrial/business fusion with IT environment. The Centre was set up to enhance competitiveness of all other manufacturing and service industries through the use of software, and to form special interest clusters for software businesses that support interactions and transfer of practical knowledge and best practices among themselves and across clusters. Primary Business Legal Consulting has its mandate to advise and assist the IT companies and investors for their business establishment in Thailand. The legal advice covers company registration, contracts, work permits and visa approvals. Facilities Services offer office spaces as well as the training facilities, which are rentable at reasonable price. It is part of our efforts to provide necessary infrastructure that supports the

Thai software cluster and community. The Park is now the national focal point for those who want to do software business in Thailand and is housing about 50 software companies and 30 new start-ups.

■ **Mission statement of Software Park Thailand expresses a sincere intent of the organisation in taking forward the e-Government vision of the country and work towards developing and e-society. What are the prominent initiatives of the organisation in this direction?**
In fact, Software Park Thailand is a software industry promoter and we know most of the players in the software field in Thailand as well as possess a strong international network. Our direction is to facilitate software

> **Since the beginning of its operation, Software Park Thailand has served as a facilitator to foreign IT investors/ enterprises aiming to set up their business in Thailand.**

entrepreneurs in penetrating and expanding the market, to create a platform where buyers meet with potential sellers, to support buyers in other industry sectors so that the proper investment in IT and increase in competitiveness of all

the sectors be it in e-Government, e-industry, or e-society projects can be achieved. Our business matchmaking activities have been quite successful and the Park has essentially been a market place for software.

■ **Software Park Thailand has a special focus on IT-enablement of manufacturing and agricultural sector of the country. What special efforts have been put in for this purpose? What is the level of uptake of IT in these core sectors of the economy?**
Some of Software Park Thailand's missions resulted from the studies done in 1996 by the National IT Committee to find ways to create strong viable software industry. The specific mission on promoting the use of IT to all sectors of the economy to help increase productivity and competitiveness was added on after the study the National Economic and Social Development Board in 2000 (by McKinsey – on productivity of Thai industries which showed most industries to be using too little IT) and in 2003 (by Harvard Business School – on 5 strategic industries: food, fashion, automotive, tourism, and software – that showed need to have software as enabler for all economic sectors). Since the studies then, Software Park Thailand has put in several efforts in getting software to become the enabler of other local businesses, industries, and agriculture; not just focus in the export of software itself. Activities of the Business Development and Marketing Enabling Department and the IT Consulting Centre for Industry, in particular, are strategically organised through different industry clusters to serve this purpose. To this end the overall benefit to the country has to be measured not just within the software industry but also to include the extra value-added to the competitiveness of other economic sectors where IT has been utilised.

What is the level of response from overseas enterprises in term of setting up their IT development centres in your Software Park? What is the span of the countries that are already here and/or in the process of coming up?
Since the beginning of its operation, Software Park Thailand has served as a facilitator to foreign IT investors/

enterprises aiming to set up their business in Thailand. The responses from overseas IT-related enterprises are extremely strong, seen from the numbers of investment value each year. So far, more than 35 foreign-participation companies from 16 different nationalities have set up their operation in our Park. The companies expanding their businesses here are from various parts of the world including mostly from the North America (US and Canada), and Asia (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore).

■ **The "Incubation Centre" of Software Park Thailand is known to have churned out a number of successful IT start-ups in Thailand. What is the adopted model of incubation in this centre? What are the selection criteria and facilities provided through these centre?**

Software Park Thailand Incubation Centre provides workspace, constructive and supportive environment to software entrepreneurs at start-up and during the early stages of their businesses at no charge for a period of one-year in-wall incubation. If needed, entrepreneurs can continue to obtain our support for another two years of out-wall incubation. The Centre's strength comes from the tremendous support given by successful business people who act as mentors, consultants, VC/angle investors, instructors, etc. to help the new start-ups.

Individuals and start-up companies that meet the following qualifications can apply for entry into the program. For this, they should have know-how in software development, and had been an entrepreneur for no more than two years; have a viable business plan; have potential growth in revenue and employment; participate in training, business networking and other events; ready to commit to one-year incubation program; and, willing to work in a cooperative environment with other entrepreneurs and incubator personnel.

Incubation Process: The initial training in business plan writing is given free of charge about one month prior to application due date; the applicant submits the business plan to a panel of software business people, experienced business executives, technologists, and representatives from funding resources; selected entrepreneurs began their

incubation period with assigned mentor. These mentors volunteer their time once a month to advise the entrepreneurs. Each month, a progress report is required from each participant to the incubation management; during the incubation, a number of practical courses are offered to the participant in areas such as project management, marketing, negotiation techniques, sales tips, presentation skills, legal and business practices, software process improvement overview, etc; participants are invited to exhibitors, trade shows, site visits to successful companies, special seminars, and all events participated by Software Park Thailand; Media coverage of the products and services and other marketing efforts to help getting their product and services to the market are also supported; and, matchmaking with other businesses and funding sources are also organised for the entrepreneurs.

■ **Software Park Thailand is also taking serious initiative towards promoting Data Standardisation and Interoperability among the local IT industry. What is the present level of acceptance of such standards among Thai enterprises and user groups?**

I must admit that Software Park Thailand

has not done much in these areas except pointing out that these are the areas policy makers have to give the priority. The Ministry of ICT, SIPA, NECTEC have worked on the issues but the tasks are quite complicated; therefore, take time.

■ **Over the past few years, Thailand software industry has witnessed a steady average growth rate of 20%, year-on-year. What is the breakdown of this growth rate in terms of domestic and international business? What level of growth is expected from the industry over the next 5 years?**

According to the study of ATCI (Association of the Thai ICT Industry) released in February 2006, Thai software market in 2005 valued at THB41,435mn (US$ 1,059mn) with an overall growth of 27% from 2004. Within this market value, 52% (THB21,401mn or US$ 546.97mn) are packaged software, and 48% (THB20,034mn or US$ 512.04mn) are outsourced software.

The study shows that the average growth of IT market from 2005-2008 will be about 20%. Specifically, the expected growths for each year of Thai IT Market are 19% for 2006, 18% for 2007, and 22% for 2008.

Thailand Partnership for Development

Beginning of an ambitious initiative of holistic growth

The Thai capital Bangkok recently held 'Thailand Partnership for Development – Conference of Interested Parties' in which diplomats, government administrators, CEOs, media barons, and a host of others participated organised at the Government House.

'Thailand Partnership for Development – Conference of Interested Parties' is an initiative set forth almost a year ago, when the Royal Thai Government set up a 'Special Project Committee' on 2nd February 2005, for the purpose of developing a framework on the Partnership-for-Development programme.

The framework was created with the intention to ask for international cooperation from government and private sector of other countries in implementing Government Special Projects in Thailand. It may be noted that 'Government special projects for development' refers to those projects, which requires specific expertise, latest technology and large volume of investments; whose benefits shall be a

well-prepared infrastructure which raises standard of living, strengthen economy and promote competitiveness of the whole country.

The conference opened with an impeccable speech by the Thai Prime Minister, Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra, who

emphasized on the identified areas of development in Thailand and the crucial role that foreign companies and organisations that can play in this regard. "The scope of our cooperation is virtually boundless. The format is open and flexible," said Dr. Thaksin.

In order to focus specifically on each of the defined sectors of development, the conference had five breakout sessions in the post inaugural session. These areas included infrastructure and construction; natural resources and the environment; information and communication technology; national defense; and others such as, various other sectors namely agriculture, science and technology, culture, and public health services.

While the infrastructure and construction session focused mainly on the mass transit system in Bangkok and an integrated water resource management system for the country, the session on natural resources and the environment envisaged a system for converting waste to energy as well as the creation of a bio-diversity database and a national digital map of natural resources.

The session on information and communication technology (ICT), marked by presentations by Ministry of ICT, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Industry and Ministry of Culture, proposed a number of projects aimed towards development of advanced IT-based systems through an infrastructure backbone for the Government in the form of a government virtual private network termed the 'Government Nervous System (GNS)'. Such a network would connect all areas of the country through the power of broadband transmission, employing cutting edge technology and Triple Play services, on the basis of existing ICT infrastructure. This would also effectively link government agencies together as well as provide integrated, online e-Government services on-demand for the people.

In the session it was also highlighted that software applications for many agencies still need to be developed in order to utilise this new platform. Specifically, in the area of e-Education, the proposed project titled - "Thailand Hub for Integrated National Knowledge" (THINK) presented by Ministry of Education showcased the plan to integrate the process of educational content production and connecting to knowledge providers and distribution units. Such a system would enable students to benefit from "courses-on-demand" and foster a system of lifelong learning enhancing Thailand's human resources.

Other government agencies such as Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Industry also expressed their need to go further online and have a total solution system in order to serve the public better and increase the competitiveness of the country. Of special mention was the proposed initiative of Ministry of Commerce towards creation of IT-driven Cluster Development, implementing Thailand e-Logistics project and establishing a national IPR Centre, with the plan of Ministry of Industry to develop the Thai Standardization System and e-Services for industrial modernisation.

The session on National Defense discussed about new security challenges and the compelling need to modernise defense mechanisms through better technology, knowledge and intelligence.

The session comprising sectors namely - agriculture, science and technology, culture and public health services, discussed projects on food trace ability, modernisation of tuna and dairy industries, development of alternative energy sources, establishment of a world-class Science and Technology University, setting up centres of excellence in various medical services and promoting research, development and production of various vaccines and medical products.

Moving away from the traditional mode of cooperation in which governments are asked to provide assistance for a country's development, Government of Thailand is rather seeking expert third-party views as an impartial outsider looking in at the country's development efforts. The Thai Government is looking forward to innovative and practical business proposals to utilise the expertise and know-how from around the world for advancement of Thailand.

Clearly, the Thailand Partnership for Development – CoIP marked the beginning of an ambitious initiative to lead Thailand towards a path of holistic growth and development through cross-national collaboration and partnerships. ⓔ

Dipanjan Banerjee

Government procurement of software
A major driver for investment in the IT industry

Michael R. K. Mudd

The largest single investor in software assets is often the Governments. To provide a much-needed boost in the IT industry it must be kept in mind that the governments worldwide should appropriately focus on the selection and purchase of software assets so as to get the maximum value for the taxpayer's money.

Competition and innovation drive increases in productivity as witnessed in the software-rich information and communication technology (ICT) industry. The ICT industries have made larger contributions to economies worldwide with the increase in productivity. For example, in Finland and Ireland, ICT industries account for over 13% of total value-added of the business sector.

The innovation in the ICT industry led to precipitous declines in the real price of ICT equipment and software, which accelerated ICT investment rates. From the 1980s to 2000, the percentage share of ICT investment in total non-residential investment tripled in France and the United Kingdom. In Germany and Italy, ICT investment rose from about 10% to just over 15% of total non-residential investment. In Finland, ICT investment accounts for more than 25% of total non-residential investment.

As investment rates rose, ICT capital accumulated and began to contribute significantly to total growth in economic output around the world. From 1995 to 2000, ICT capital accounted for 20% of total output growth in the US economy, 18.7% in Italy, 18.4% in western Germany, 13.5% in the United Kingdom, 12.5% in France, and 11% in Finland.

Faster falling real prices of IT equipment and software have resulted in even higher IT and software investment rates. During the last half of the 1990s, IT and software investment increased at annual rates exceeding 20% in all countries for which data are available.

As IT capital (hardware and software) accumulated, it began to drive real growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) of economies. Between 1990 and 1998, 27.8% of real growth in GDP in Denmark can be attributed to IT; in France, 38.5% of real GDP growth can be attributed to IT; and in Germany 45.5% of real GDP growth can be attributed to IT. More important, the contribution of IT using industries to real GDP growth was greater than the contribution of IT producing industries.

These contributions to our economic well-being are the result of IT innovations driven by a competitive marketplace unimpeded by unnecessary government intervention. Existing government interventions in IT and software markets effectively promote competition, diffusion of information and knowledge, investment in research and development (R&D), and innovation.

Governments often represent the largest single investor in software assets. Unfortunately, a number of governments, at different levels, have adopted measures affecting software procurement that depart from the very environment they have successfully permitted in the private sector. Those measures adopted to date encourage the acquisition of one form of software over the other thus effectively limiting their choice in acquiring an asset that is otherwise fully available in the marketplace.

Protocols for Government software procurement

There are 5 principles or protocols, which focus on technical neutrality to assist governments gets the maximum value for the taxpayer's money in the selection and purchase of software assets.

Protocol 1 outlines that choice is paramount for sound software investment decisions. As such, sound software investment decisions cannot be made on the basis of a priori exclusions of available technologies that can meet government

needs. As stated in the Danish Government's software strategy, "The individual institution must be ensured that it can procure the software solution that has the maximum value for money measured on the basis of merit and local business need irrespective of whether this implies using proprietary software solutions or open source."

Proponents of open source software preferences have failed to provide evidence that such intervention is necessary. Despite forces driving concentration in technology and software markets, the software industry is not concentrated. Despite barriers to entry in technology and software markets, the software industry has a high rate of turnover even among industry leaders. Despite large sums necessary for, the uncertainty of, and the difficulty of financing R&D spending, the software industry has increased R&D spending dramatically and produced results. Simultaneously, the Proponents have also failed to consider the high costs and harsh consequences of such preferences. A government policy of open source software preferences that excludes commercial software assets from consideration will, in effect, exclude 85% of IT channel business activity. In the European software market alone, the initial annual lost business opportunity would be US$49bn. Any decline in government spending would have ripple effects on the economy that might be two to three times greater than the initial direct effect.

Protocol 2 states that choice among competing software assets should be based on firm economic considerations. Governments should invest in software assets that offer highest value irrespective of technology. A well-designed cost-benefit analysis (CBA) that includes a total cost of ownership (TCO) model for assessing the costs of the asset over its life cycle is necessary for an informed investment decision.

The economic basis of systematic and rational investment decisions is CBA. CBA is endorsed and used by international economic development agencies, including the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank. Moreover, CBA is equally relevant to private sector investment decisions. CBA consists of a value or benefit component and a cost component. Benefits are the positive changes or resources produced or freed up as a result of the investment. Costs are the negative changes or resources used up and not available for other uses as a result of the investment. The investment alternative of higher value is

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the asset with a larger benefit-cost ratio.

Protocol 3 mandates the Governments to ensure full transparency in the procurement of their software assets. The third protocol enhances choice in government software procurement by requiring full transparency in the tendering process. Accordingly, Governments must make their requirements very clear and bidders must be fully apprised of the functionality and cost benchmarks that the government will use in deciding on a software asset. This means that bidders must be required to provide detailed data on performance characteristics and cost elements that go well beyond purchase price. Solicitations must relate detailed performance expectations to long-term cost considerations so that bidders can assess these requirements and respond accordingly.

International transparency rules reflect increasing convergence among governments in requiring predictability and accountability in procurement. While international transparency regimes alone cannot ensure that Governments will refrain from restricting software choice, they discourage ex ante restrictions of any kind, as Governments inevitably must consider every possible software technology when they weigh cost and technical capabilities among competing software proposals.

Protocol 4 necessitates that government procurement of software must be consistent with international trade norms. Software procurement must be seen from the perspective of the rules and norms that have evolved since World War II in the area of international trade. Trade agreements are an outgrowth of an increasing desire for predictability and transparency by traders and investors, and as an integral part of the development of all economies. International trade norms address government procurement, through, inter alia, the WTO Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) that affects 38 members of the WTO; several bilateral free trade agreements; as well as best practices provisions of the APEC. These countries account for 77% of world trade.

Governments should view the WTO and other trade norms for procurement as a workable tool toward reaching a uniform and transparent system of issuing tenders, and selecting vendors, regardless of nationality, that offer the very best value-for-money product. In procuring software, they should avoid the use of offsets, which include the requirement to require the transfer of technology as a condition for procuring software. They should refrain from imposing technical standards except those that relate to performance rather than design. The provisions relating to offsets and technical standards have implications for any government requirement that source code must be disclosed as a condition for considering software tenders.

Protocol 5 stipulates that government procurement of software must respect international norms governing intellectual property. Most countries, especially developing and least developed countries are keenly interested in attracting foreign direct investment and promoting technological development through both innovation and technology transfer. Intellectual property regimes exist to promote innovation and creativity, and are recognized as an important, if not essential, factor in investment and technology transfer decisions.

Strong intellectual property protection is as critical to the growth of a local software industry as it is to a foreign competitor. In addition, intellectual property rights are extremely important to the software development industry regardless of the business model an individual company has chosen to pursue. Both proprietary and open source business models are dependant on the effectiveness of intellectual property systems in enforcing their rights. Therefore, any governmental policy that establishes a precedent for undermining intellectual property rights for one business model or industry risks undermining all intellectual property rights, both domestic and international. Such a governmental policy that restricts software choice may also prevent or deter the procurement of critical technology, or inhibit its competitive development.

> **Undermining internationally agreed minimum standards for the acquisition and enforcement of intellectual property rights not only places innovation and investment at risk, it risks economic uncertainty stemming from possible violations of intellectual property obligations. The implementation of TRIPS-consistent IPR regimes is expanding IPR protection, and the resulting benefits, at a remarkable pace.**

Undermining internationally agreed minimum standards for the acquisition and enforcement of intellectual property rights not only places innovation and investment at risk, it risks economic uncertainty stemming from possible violations of intellectual property obligations. The implementation of TRIPS-consistent IPR regimes is expanding IPR protection, and the resulting benefits, at a remarkable pace. This is taking governments in the direction of more sophisticated and predictable IPR protection, all of which difficult to reconcile with measures that limit software choice by requiring the disclosure of source code, a policy which is opposite to the direction taken by international IPR norms.

The cornerstone of these international regimes is that each intellectual property right, such as a patent, a copyright and a trademark, is by its very nature an exclusive and private right. Exclusive rights to use or authorise the use of a patented invention or to reproduce a copyrighted are very broad. Once these exclusive intellectual property rights are established by meeting the conditions for acquiring each right, only narrow exceptions exist to limit the rights. The importance of respecting exclusive IPR's is reiterated, for example, by specific inclusion of the right of the owner "to assign or transfer patents and conclude licensing contracts". The governmental obligation under TRIPS is to protect exclusive IP rights such as the right to prevent copying a work (such as software) without the owner's consent. The governmental obligation to afford protection of IPR's includes private and government use of inventions or reproduction of software, subject to these narrow exceptions. Indeed, government use or authorisation for use of a patent without the permission of the rights holder, also referred to as compulsory licensing, is subject to additional restrictive criteria.

While the WTO agreements on the government procurement of goods and services (GATT 1994 and GATS) are subject to exceptions from applicable national treatment provisions, the international intellectual property regime not only contains no such exception for government procurement, it imposes additional limits on any government availing themselves of potentially applicable exceptions. These obligations were negotiated from governments' recognising the importance of IPR's. As a matter of good policy, governments should encourage the protection of rights holders including proprietary rights in source code. Consistently, a government that imposes an obligation on its procuring entities to condition software purchases on the blanket disclosure of proprietary source code to third parties is almost certain to be in violation of its international trade obligations.

Governments may promote the development of standards, which promote the interoperability of software consistent with the strong protection of intellectual property as envisioned by TRIPS. Interoperability is not a function of IP protection but is largely dependent on standardisation. TRIPS does not prevent the recognition of such important policy objectives by acknowledging that laws and regulations may include measures necessary to promote the public interest in sectors of vital importance to a country's socio-economic and technological development. However, those measures must be consistent with the provisions of the TRIPS Agreement. A further provision requires TRIPS consistency for measures necessary to address unreasonable restraints of trade or that adversely affect the transfer of technology. Governments must respect the intellectual property regime in establishing public policies.

From this, it is clear that the government imposition of licensing terms that require the free disclosure to third parties of subject matter protected by IPR's, whether copyrights or patented processes, raises serious concerns on the consistency of such a measure with the international intellectual property regime.

While measures that limit software choice may not overtly discriminate against foreign software, it is possible that such measures interfere with the expectation of equality in the conditions of competition and, thereby, have the de facto effect of resulting in discrimination. ▣

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MIDDLE EAST

Oman facilitates e-Application for students

For the first time, the Sultanate of Oman has introduced e-Governance that would facilitate students to apply for up to 20 programmes from April 1 until June 1 this year by submitting a single electronic application from any computer connected to the Internet. The Ministry of Higher Education has set up the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) to process all admissions using a new centralised computerised system.

The HEAC would notify the students through the schools about the nearest local centre for submitting the applications thus saving them from unnecessary long distance travel or undue expenditure. The HEAC would also provide a student guidebook providing all the details about the new system.

Kuwait, Singapore for e-Governance tie-up

Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, Kuwaits's Minister of Communications and Health announced that Kuwait is considering Singapore's cooperation to establish e-Governance in the oil-rich Emirate. Al Sabah disclosed this during the inauguration of the Info-Connect 2006 exhibition at Kuwait International Fair Grounds in Mishref. The exhibition took place from February 6 to 12 in which 41 companies participated

including those from China and Korea. Al Sabah remarked, "The institutions in Kuwait are upgrading their technological capabilities and our nation will soon be on par with some of the technologically advanced countries."

ictQATAR up with first e-Education project for schools

The first e-Education project has been launched by Qatar's Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR) in eight Independent Schools under the e-Education initiative, the School Knowledge-Net (K-Net) project. The initiative mandates the implementation of learning management systems for enhancing teaching and learning process.

Under the K-Net project, a teacher-training programme was conducted from January 29 to February 8. The focus of the project is on promoting the development of educational content, portals, applications and knowledge bases in addition to facilitating the integration of ICT tools into education by enhancing teaching activities and improving the learning experience, and facilitating the administration's intervention.

The eight schools under the K-Net project include Al-Resalah Independent Secondary School for Girls, the Doha Independent Secondary School for Boys, the Amna Bint Wahab Independent Secondary School, the Al-Wakra Independent Secondary School, the Al-Wakra Preparatory Independent School for Girls, the Omar Bin Al-Khattab Preparatory Independent School for Boys, the Al-Wajba Preparatory Independent School for Girls, and the Muaither Preparatory Independent School for Girls.

DTCM, Dubai launches e-Diploma course

A diploma course on Customer and Employee Values was recently launched by the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) and Dubai e-Government. Beginning from February 11, the course would be held in three

Amounts doing 'vanishing' act from e-Dirham cards

'Vanishing' amounts from e-Dirham (Electronic Dirham) cards issued by the bank operating within the Department of Naturalisation and Residency (DNR) in Abu Dhabi has raised alarm amid allegations of fraudulent practices flying thick and fast. This has undoubtedly put the DNR in quandary after residents complained that their 'loaded' e-Cards reportedly turned dud after being submitted at some counters.

Gulf daily Khaleej Times quoted the victim Yeshu Babu, a private company employee, as saying: "I had to pay AED300 (US$81.68) twice for my son's visa but the first e-card showed zero amount when swiped. I submitted my documents at counter number nine and the staff took all my papers along with the e-card. After examining my documents, he swiped the card and told me there is no money. I showed him the receipt but he swiped again and insisted that there is no cash. I went to an officer, but they ignored my complaint. I had no choice but to buy another e-card, and luckily, it worked the second time."

Also, the bank employees contend that such incidents are rampant these days. However, the DNR officials refuse to acknowledge such incidents and state that the department was capable of detecting any thefts occurring in e-Dirham cards and returning the rights of people. A DNR official said, "The Department of Naturalisation and Residency provides the e-Dirham cards through a bank at our premises, serving the public, though the responsibility of these cards falls on the Ministry of Finance and Industry which is the source of these cards. The cards should be obtained from the bank and the machines that dispense them. People receive a receipt for the amount paid to buy the cards. So, when the e-Dirham card is presented with the transaction and has no credit, then the person has the right to claim from the Ministry of Finance and Industry."

stages in which the employees are required to pass examinations at every stage before proceeding further.

The content of the courses has been specially designed to enhance inter-departmental communication and cultivate values of respect, employees focus, innovation and commitment to quality among the DTCM employees, and comprise organisation ethics, office protocol, teamwork fundamentals, team communication, resolving conflict in teams, decision-making in teams, customer service, communication with seniors.

Besides topics like Travel and Tourism products and services, the role of marketing and type of market and introduction to marketing mix of the tourism industry would be covered under the e-learning course.

e-Gates system at Abu Dhabi International Airport

The e-Gates system at Abu Dhabi International Airport was recently inaugurated by Lt. General Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Interior. The e-Gates system, which is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Interior and the Civil Aviation Authority, was inaugurated in the presence of Sheikh Ahmed bin Saif Al Nahyan, Chairman of Civil Aviation Department, and other senior Ministry of Interior officials. Some 40 e-Gates are to be installed at all the airports in the UAE in the coming months.

With its installation, the highly sophisticated e-Gates system would now enable smooth passage of travellers through airports, which is expected to

take only five seconds. Under this system, travellers would now be able to use e-cards bearing their fingerprints while passing through e-Gates thus doing away with the process of passport checking and stamping. Valid for two years, e-Gate cards can be obtained from airports and Naturalisation Departments countrywide against a fee of AED200 (US$54.45).

Qatar to host symposium on e-Government challenges

The Qatar e-Government would be hosting a symposium titled "e-Government challenges" on April 14 to discuss major issues and challenges facing the implementation of e-Government in the region. The symposium include topics such as the infrastructure to establish e-Governments, a case study of the Qatari e-Government, laws covering e-Governments, cooperation between e-Governments, e-payment gateway, challenges confronting e-Governments, Post as a mode of enhancing services and purchases and the role of communication in further developing e-Government. Experts from local banks, other leading companies and corporations and international organisations, besides representatives from Arab e-Governments are expected to participate.

Dr. Ahmad Hamed Al Mohanadi, Director of e-Government, said, "The major challenge faced in the implementation of e-Government in Qatar was to change the mindset of people in the process of migrating from the conventional system to the electronic one. Despite the obstacles, Qatar had gone a long way in implementing e-Government in the functioning of various ministries and government departments. In the number of transactions, Qatar comes among the nine countries leading in implementation of e-Government with some 4.5 million person having visited the e-Government website and more than 4,450 transactions made through the facility only in February. It has been growing at a rate of 15.6 per cent every month. There is a plan to expand the electronic services for issuance of exit permits after its successful implementation in the issuance

and renewal of visas, residence permits, health cards etc."

In 2005, www.dubai.ae gets 167% more visitors

The Government of Dubai recently announced that its e-Government portal www.dubai.ae has registered a record 167% increase in the user traffic in 2005. The number of visitors increased by 115,777 from 69,286 in January 2005 to touch 185,063 visitors in December 2005. Significantly, the percentage of international visitors increased by more than three times from 13.28% in March 2005 to 47.74% in December 2005. The number of new visitors accessing the portal more than doubled during the year, from 18,959 in January to 48,365 in December 2005 while repeat visits increased three-fold from 4,562 in the first month of the year to 12,893 by December end. There was also a steady increase in the average number of visitors accessing its online services throughout the year. From a low average of 2,235 daily visitors in January 2005, the number more than doubled to 5,969 by the end of the year but rose three-fold in September, reaching the highest average of 6,538 visitors per day.

Salem Al Shair, eServices Director, Dubai eGovernment, said, "The marked increase in number of people adopting eServices through the portal is an indication the ever reducing gap between state-of-the-art infrastructure, quality of eServices and the expectations of the people using the services."

Securing Land Tenure
New possibilities via e-Government

Ahmad Darian

Security of land ownership and housing continues to remain a mindboggling issue with no immediate remedy in sight. In the present time therefore the issue of secure land tenure has become a complex and important social fact.

Promotion of securing land tenure is important for both governments and people living in a community. Access to land and securing land tenure is one of the main needs of living. The goal of "Adequate Shelter for All" can be achieved by access to land and securing land tenure. However, the million dollar question remains as to how land tenure be secured and who is to address this vital issue appropriately. Securing land requires systems to collect data, process and disseminate information about land title and provide services to the public. Governments are key players in securing tenures because it is they who can implement systems supporting land information for individuals and market. Providing adequate and reliable information to stakeholders buying a piece of land or transferring property can considerably reduce disputes on land and property.

Security of tenure can enable the poor to receive credit and directly contribute to enhance their living conditions. It also provides confidence guaranteed by systems implemented in different government sections. Security of tenure instantly makes dwellers confident that their tenure is guaranteed for a specified period of time. Tenure is subject of "preference and aspiration". The concept of tenure "security" is defined as being independence for the use of land or any belonging property. Many people cannot own a home but can surely rent on. Land information and tenure security are not satisfying people because of traditional approach. New and innovative approaches are therefore needed by taking advantage of new technology. Property rights to land should be defined in a way to make easy use of land and secure land tenure. Low cost mechanisms for receiving services are intended by community. e-Government has mechanisms to provide such services and formal mechanisms can be adopted to produce frequent services to community.

Tenure security is important because of reducing time and resources of individual to spend on securing the land rights. In many countries, insecure land tenure causes loss of investments on land. Suitable management of resources will be achieved by secure property rights to land. Informal tenure causes insecure land rights. Rural land users are reported to make higher investments in land when the tenure security increases. In land market tenure security is very important. e-Government is one of the best possibilities to give confidence to dealers on land and home. e-Government systems can produce information needed to claimers and this can bring security of tenure and even increase its level for those involved. Giving security rights to user needs institutions within government agencies.

e-Government and Securing Land Tenure

Importantly, securing land tenure is one of the government's prime functions. Government approval and its support are fundamental for land marketing. Recognition of the right to housing, access to land and property can be achieved by securing land tenure through government agencies. In this regard, government should arrange to meet the goals and e-solutions are bringing good possibilities to meet the goals.

Government plays a direct and important role to produce reliable services. Land Information Systems (LIS) supply information to decision-makers and provide services to the public. E-services are providing new possibilities for collecting, maintaining and disseminating information on land for better decision-making and securing land tenure. Central government with local authorities can arrange the best situation for providing services. Governments can take advantage of e-services to provide different range of services to the public. Information systems on land are becoming very important and are one of the fundamental systems in e-Government phenomenon.

Today, the public can avail LIS through e-Government solution since the requirement of valid and relevant land information is being increasingly felt. Land information systems are practiced and developed by e-Government for managing, planning and keeping records. Most countries have provided

electronic system for registration but their services are either incomplete or not widespread, and needs to be immediately addressed.

Accountability of LIS

In order to meet a reasonable state of security on land tenure, LIS needs to be transparent and accessible. e-Government has the capacity to manage and control the information on land by keeping records of land. Land record arrangement will bring transparency and accessibility to land information. Land data collected by different databases within e-Government systems can produce services to the community and assist stakeholders of their need while providing enough security of land tenure. e-Government encourages people to receive information on land and use them with confidence.

This necessitates that the government firstly become accountable to the community. Security in land tenure needs accountability, which can only be achieved following high assurance about security on land tenure. Governments can provide information by registeration of land assets and land inventory. The community thus can take advantage of information by accountability. e-Government should address all requested information for its security behind the land. It should provide information including its legality. This is the key factor for ensuring the land records for their information and security.

Innovative approaches to LAS

Many systems have failed to provide adequate land information and tenure security, especially for low-income people thus requiring new and innovative systems to be in place. Of course, new approaches to land management and land administration are planned for providing services on land information that the community looks after. New systems are planned to set up and maintain land records in order to provide enough information on securing.

Systems should be able to protect the interests of people without considering their social position. To strengthen the position of governments is one of the approaches for providing better and more reliable services. Innovation in land administration systems (LAS) needs the combination of new management styles, computerisation of activities, creation of databanks containing a wealth of land information, and improved interoperability of valuation, planning, address, spatial and registration information allowing much more flexibility. However, modern society needs new and innovative systems that are able to provide updated and reliable information on land.

The way forward

Land Information Systems are moving to produce better and wider services.

Implementing good property registration systems is becoming very important. Land systems need continuous reform for providing reliable information for the community. Spending more time to land law and land management is a need for future. Ensuring people for their property registration and receiving information on land tenure becomes important.

Firstly, governments need to set up a public land asset register or land inventory in securing land tenure to provide reliable services to the community. Almost every country has some sort of registration system, but they need to be able to produce land information for securing land tenure. Land systems should be transparent, simple, fast, relatively cheap, reliable and free from corruption. LIS should be built for easy access to the related information and look for one stop shopping of land and property registration and information services prepared for electronic conveyance, real time mortgaging and direct registration by authorized agents.

Increasing land tenure security is important for its effect on economic affaires. It can be achieved by institutional reforms and coordination between government and private sections to collect information about land and disseminate information. Property rights should be delivered effectively in the community and this will be achieved through policies implemented by government. Limitation in land rights can cause problem in land tenure security. Private property rights are one of the possibilities of increasing land tenure security. One of the important factors to perceive land tenure security is the increase in land user's investment incentive. Transferability of land will increase by increasing the land tenure security.

Addressing security on land tenure requires systems that are able to answer questions regarding land ownership and land tenure. Effective Land Information Systems are best government solution to produce reliable information on land for stakeholders. LIS is based on cadastre consisting of mapping and information about a land parcel. Cadastre or LIS and land registration system should be developed to supply land tenure security. Technology and its processes and procedures are bringing new possibilities for land registration systems. Government can arrange suitable systems to record land information in centralised or localised systems. e-Government followed by e-Commerce is the possibility for land registration systems to produce new services for land issues.

Conclusion

e-Government is bringing new possibilities for legalising, titling and assisting more security on land tenure. Legalising land tenure requires a great deal of organisation activities and high cost. Technology can assist to reduce the cost and secure land tenure by collecting, processing and dissemination information of land titles. To bring community in a reasonable state of land tenure security state, Governments should produce environment for secure titling of land and property.

Lack of land tenure and security can postpone development of the community. Land registration systems are mostly inaccessible, expensive, not transparent, and unable to register illegal land parcels that e-Government can overcome these problems. e-government by laws and policies related to land can reduce the hurdles to obtain land and housing legally. e-Government can produce more accessible services in terms of location, cost, time consuming and user friendliness. A flexible approach to innovative and securing land tenure is the way to future. ⓔ

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On promoting e-Government in ME for progressive change

Simon Moores

If e-Government is to be promoted as a tool for progressive change across the Middle East then it has to be in a sound local context and with the financial and technical support that will take modest projects to the point of being able to deliver simple, useful shared, services for the many. This is the Kalashnikov theory of e-Government.

Back from a visit to the Middle-East where I've been sharing my unorthodox 'Kalashnikov theory' of eGovernment at the invitation of the British Council in a speech in Amman. I've never really written it down beyond the looser concept appearing in my PowerPoint deck but as we try to come to grips with the new challenge of Transactional Government, here in the UK, we might remember there's a wider world out there, struggling with the internet as a new medium for public sector reform.

"Bureaucracy", said Karl Marx in one of his wittier moments, "Is the ultimate purpose of the state" and eGovernment works best in societies with a relatively thin and efficient public sector. We know this, intuitively at least, from our own experience in the UK and can observe that where government is at its fattest and most Byzantine, e-delivery projects are most likely to fail because being large and being 'joined-up' are mutually incompatible concepts in an environment which demands agility, initiative and shared services.

I'm now in danger of oversimplifying a complex argument but let me return to the example of the Middle-east where many people, seeking reform, might like to see the arrival of some degree of eGovernment, even Syria, as their Ambassador tells me but not everyone is entirely sure what it really offers in practice. What people often tell me in the Arab world is that if you are a small and oil-rich state, then eGovernment looks good on your CV, impresses the Americans and that there's no shortage of willing software companies and consultants willing to plug your population into a new world of online services. There's no real legacy infrastructure to worry about and rather like a visit to PC World or Toys r Us, a handful of very large technology incumbents are more than happy to sell you something resembling eGovernment in a box, often still not quite as advanced using a Sky satellite remote but improving slowly over time. At this point, if you're a small nation, then you will appear on the eGovernment 'readiness' index and for some, that's where progress slows, for a number of reasons, frequently related to competitive suspicion and a deep-seated cultural reluctance to share information and authority between politicians and their personal fiefdoms in the shape of government ministries.

This problem becomes more acute in countries with much larger populations, relatively low Internet and teledensity and very little hard currency to spend. Led by a handful of innovative and reform-minded thinkers they want to achieve a result they can point at as a sign of progress and a source of national pride. Once again the big software and hardware companies are only too happy to sell the boxes with "Works best with e-Government" written boldly in English on the side but the arrival of a national technology strategy invariably opens a political can of worms, which reveals among other things, that in societies where the oral tradition is prevalent and personal authority counts, nobody has taken the time to write down and describe the business processes that underpin the people and paper-intensive operations of government departments since the Ottoman empire collapsed in 1918.

So while we are trying to help Iraq towards true democracy with the help of liberal amounts of money and explosive I would argue that we are missing the opportunity to help some of its neighbours who lack the wealth and the infrastructure to use a technology in a way that reaches the lives of the many and not

> **If we in Europe are going to promote e-Government as a tool for progressive change across the Middle East then it has to be in a sound local context and with the financial and technical support that will take modest projects to the point of being able to deliver simple, useful shared, services for the many.**

Thailand's Road to Better ICT and Software Industry

IT growth rate reached 11.8% and is worth some THB86bn (US$2.2bn) in the year 2004. Thailand entered the early 1980s with an asset in the IT field in that a significant number of Thai professionals had gained Computer and IT experience either with the US Military during the Vietnam War period or in US Universities. From the later 1980s onward, the country has worked to build on this and develop a nationwide IT infrastructure that could serve the private sector and the government. As Thailand entered the new Millennium, dissatisfaction with the somewhat limited success of earlier efforts to take advantages of Thailand's advantages in the IT and Software field grew. In 2002, Thailand established the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and gave the new Ministry the Mission to develop and support more comprehensive electronic processes for government, commerce, industry, business and education. This new ICT policy aims to incorporate IT into every aspect of Thai society and, ultimately, transform the economy and the nation.

Through the recent creation of the Ministry of ICT, the current government aims to strongly encourage growth in the ICT sector. According to the International Data Corporation, the Thai IT market will grow at an annual rate of 16% with a total value reaching US$ 3.4bn in 2006. The software market will grow 37% a year thanks to government enforcement of copyright law.

Source: http://www.business-in-asia.com/telecom_software_electronic.html
http://www.thailand-focus.com/market.htm

Also see: Country focus – Page 13, 16

the few. This is where my Kalashnikov theory comes in and it's very simple. What I've been telling government leaders in my own middle-eastern travels is that not every country can look towards Dubai or even Singapore in planning their national technology strategy. Instead, most countries with larger populations should remember the rugged examples of the Kalashnikov rifle and the T34 tank and build their own nascent services in the same way; resistant to sand, and a great deal of harsh treatment and still capable of delivering what it says on the box in what are often the most hostile bureaucratic and technology-limiting conditions imaginable.

My personal message to the companies and countries that really wish to encourage good governance, progress and public-sector reform in developing countries, is that simply selling fibre, boxes and licenses to a large country is little different to doing the same to my small, technology-challenged and struggling local council. If we in Europe are going to promote e-Government as a tool for progressive change across the Middle East then it has to be in a sound local context and with the financial and technical support that will take modest projects to the point of being able to deliver simple, useful shared, services for the many or to quote Winston Churchill: "It is no use saying, 'We are doing our best.' You have got to succeed in doing what is necessary." 🄴

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WORLD

Online tax system in Czech Republic soon

In an attempt to develop the e-Government system rapidly, the Czech Republic's Finance Ministry has decided to launch a web portal in H206 to ensure efficient tax collection from businesses through online tax reports submission. The proposed new system has been widely welcomed by businesses organisations. The portal would be developed by IBM at an estimated cost worth CZK70mn (US$2.9mn).

Initially, the portal would only allow companies to monitor the balance of tax accounts, but would later on facilitate full online communication between financial authorities and businesses. The new system is expected to significantly streamline both the paperwork and procedures for submitting corporate tax returns while ensuring transparency at the same time.

Earlier, in the fall of 2003 e-communications was launched between state offices and the public by the government. According to a study made by *The Economist* magazine in late 2004, the Czech Republic has been acknowledged as the most developed country in the region in terms of the spread of e-Government. Even, a report by the European Commission stated that the Czech e-Government system was clearly above the EU standard.

Jamaica's move towards e-Government

Philip Paulwell, Jamaica Minister of Commerce, Science and Technology, has said that Jamaica is fast moving towards a paperless system of Government and Jamaicans would soon be able to have easier access to government and its services through the use of information communications technology (ICT). The Minister pointed out that with faster broadband system being put in place, there would be even greater commitment

to e-Government. Paulwell said this recently while speaking at Government Communications Group-organised discussion on 'Going for growth and development through ICT' at Jamaica House.

"The "12-lane highway for broadband", which is being created by government, would allow for speedier and cheaper access to the Internet and a full range of e-commerce transactions. The success of the e-government project, now being undertaken, hinges on the provision of adequate bandwidth, which would allow persons to take advantage of the full range of government services being offered online. People have been complaining about access to government, transparency of government; we are going to enable Jamaicans to have easier reach of government through ICT and it has already started."

Antigua and Barbuda NSWMA launches official website

Antigua and Barbuda's National Solid Waste Management Authority (NSWMA) recently launched its official website, www.solidwaste.gov.ag, created in association with the government's IT Centre and the Ministry of Health after a seven-year planning period, and is part of the government's agenda to develop e-Government. Through the website, the students and teachers would be able to access information about waste management authority and use it as a research tool.

Bulgarian parents for e-Textbooks

According to a Bulgarian Education Ministry survey, 75% of the parents in

Bulgaria have supported the idea for the introduction of e-Textbooks and Internet in schools. The parents felt that e-Textbooks would not only educate children about working with a computer but would also induce them to study more in general. The Education Ministry also announced that the local high schools in the country would soon be equipped with electronic textbooks in thirty of the subjects. Also, a test educational web portal would be opened by the middle of May this year where students would be able to access the textbooks.

Finland to have new e-Government coordination unit

To provide the much-needed boost to e-Government interoperability between different tiers of government, the Interior Ministry of Finland has decided to create a new unit 'KuntaIT' to coordinate the compatibility of e-Government services between municipal and regional authorities. The new unit would begin functioning from 1st September 2006 with full operations being established by 2007. The new unit would aim to bring an increase in the efficiency of public administration and ensure availability and quality of public services by relying on information and communication technologies.

e-Passports in Botswana soon

The Botswana government would introduce machine-readable passports in 3-4 months to address the issue of stolen passports and fight identity theft. Oliphant Mfa, Assistant Minister of Labour and Home Affairs, lately announced in Gaborone.

However, it is still unclear what system Botswana intends to use for its passports. Of late, 3D face recognition has become a popular option for the use of biometric identifiers in many countries. It may be recalled that the use of automatic identification technology in passports was firstly used by the United States after the

9/11 events. In November 2005, the first biometric passports were issued to British diplomats, and more such trials have taken place in Paris and Washington. In January 2006, the US launched a second test of its electric passport initiative. The smart passport tests were also carried out in San Francisco International Airport, Changi Airport in Singapore and Sydney Airport in Australia.

Kazakhstan to expedite e-Government implementation

Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, in an address to the joint session of Parliament stressed that the Government need to speed up the process of introducing e-Government urgently. "This would increase effectiveness of state bodies' activity and decline corruption and administrative barriers," he said.

Earlier, Askar Zhumagaliyev, head of Kazakhstan's Information and Telecommunications Agency, said that Kazakhstan would put into effect its e-Government system in mid-April. Mr Zhumagaliyev said, "Already some 32 of the 34 state bodies and institutions have their own websites thus forming the infrastructure for implementing the e-Government portal. The people of Kazakhstan can take advantage of the portal's interactive information services, such as obtaining tax declaration forms and licenses over the Internet, and online shopping. In addition, all Kazakh residents will be assigned identification numbers, which are to be quoted in their new passports and other documents. This electronic number will help identify the person on the Internet, and serve as an access key to officials and various services."

In Australia, e-Tax system to be revamped

The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) officials have indicated that the e-Tax system would soon be revamped in Australia. According to the officials, the revamped e-tax system would expand on current functionality that allowed taxpayers to download Centrelink payment summary and Medicare medical expense data into their electronically-filed tax return, eliminating the need for manual inputs. Future connectivity to client e-return preparation applications and commercial record keeping applications would also be allowed by the redeveloped system, which would be available for piloting from the lodgement season starting 1st July 2007.

Bahamas MOH launches website

The Bahamas Ministry of Health (MOH) has launched its official website, *www.bahamas.gov.bs/health*, aiming to provide efficient public healthcare system. Dr Marcus Bethel, Minister of Health, informed about the website at a press conference and said, "The Ministry of Health has long been about making healthcare person-centered [services] accessible to all residents, regardless of where they live in The Bahamas. The website is a part of the government's recently launched e-Government initiative. It is all about co-ordinating health services around the needs of people, rather than service types professional boundaries or organisational structure. It's about health system reform that anticipates future growth and technologies, consumer and market trends and building capacity in the community, as a means of improving access to healthcare," and added, "This is merely the first phase of our four phase/ three year project. I hope that after the completion of phase four of the project, that is, the creation of chat rooms, e-surveys and all services made as E-facilitated as possible, our dream would be reality."

Currently, the web surfers would be able to access step-by-step instructions regarding critical healthcare services online, email concerns or health education questions and access community health clinic schedules. At a later stage, the website would also provide option of making appointments to see the public healthcare providers online, besides distance education about breast-feeding and labour to expectant mothers.

e-Government programme in France restructured

The French government has effected major changes in its e-Government programme. Jean-Francois Copé, France's minister in charge of the budget and administrative reform, said the government wanted to do away with the proliferation of eAdministration agencies over the past few years, and has integrated four government agencies into one to simplify and standardise the effort. Accordingly, France's national agency for developing electronic administration, known by its French acronym as ADAE, along with three other government agencies have been brought under one roof – the new Directorate-General for State Modernisation (Direction generale de la modernisation de l'etat - DGME), which opened its doors on 3rd January 2006.

Frank Mordacq, newly-appointed DGME Director, said, "DGME's workforce consists of 160 specialists drawn from all other ministries, as well as from the private sector and from abroad. They are grouped into three divisions responsible for quality and simplification, modernisation of government functions, and development of eAdministration."

Geo-Informatics

India, Myanmar sign agreement in the field of RS

Underlining the need for restoration of democracy, India on Thursday offered Myanmar assistance in establishing the democratic structure in the country as the two sides signed a number of agreements, including remote sensing, energy sector, marketing sector along with strengthening of information sharing, technologies, projects and trade.

A Framework Agreement for Mutual Cooperation in the field of remote sensing between the two sides was signed as per which India will provide Myanmar access to data from Indian remote sensing satellites at subsidized rates.

India announced a grant of USD 1.3 million for upgrading Remote Sensing Ground Receiving Station in Yangon and another grant of USD three million for assistance with delineation of Myanmar's continental shelf in addition to technical assistance for the project.

China to launch "seed satellite"

Zhang Qingwei, president of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp said, "Nine satellites, including one that will carry seeds, are set to be launched into space this year." The first one a scientific experimental satellite would blast off at the end of April.

For the first time, the country will send into orbit a "seed satellite" specially designed for seed-breeding in space, he said. It is scheduled for September.

The recoverable satellite will enable scientists to try to cultivate high-yield and high-quality plant varieties after the seeds are exposed to special environments such as cosmic radiation and micro-gravity.

Zhang said another important satellite to be put into space in 2006 is SinoSat 2, the country's first direct broadcasting satellite, which is expected to beam TV programmes to even the most remote rural regions in the country. He said SinoSat 2 will be based on the country's newest generation of satellite platform Dongfanghong 4, which has a designed life mission of 15 years.

Other satellites in the pipeline include a meteorological satellite and oceanic satellite that will monitor ocean colour and red tides.

Intergraph announces new version of G/Technology

Intergraph Corporation recently announced a new version of G/Technology that provides significant usability enhancements for mobile users and flexible licensing for Web users. The new version further demonstrates Intergraph's commitment to addressing market requirements for mobilizing field workers and extending data access via the Web.

G/Technology MobileViewer supports field-based, round-trip workflows so that users in the field can create intelligent redline sketches, generate cost estimates related to the designs and send all this information back into the asset database via automation using XML. MobileViewer also supports pre-configured applications for the field, such as vegetation management and field inspection, with requisite data traveling round-trip to the field and back with changes to the asset database.

Specific new features of G/Technology address data integration and manipulation, user interfaces, viewing options, tools for precisely controlling data sent to the field and license recycling to maximize concurrent Web usage.

Intergraph's G/Technology delivers an integrated geofacilities management system that provides powerful tools to support the facilities maintenance and management needs of utilities and communications companies.

ESA, EUMETSAT to launch MetOp Satellite

The director generals of (ESA) and EUMETSAT signed an updated agreement recently to launch the Meteorological Operational satellite (MetOp), Europe's first polar-orbiting satellite dedicated to weather and climate monitoring.

ESA will develop the space segment of the mission, while EUMETSAT will handle overall operations, including launch services. The spacecraft is scheduled to lift off from Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan via a Russian Soyuz rocket on June 30.

EUMETSAT will own MetOp-A after liftoff, and will grant ESA access in space research and technology, including scientific and applications research, study contracts and instrument development.

The overall EUMETSAT Polar System program includes a series of three MetOp satellites, each with a nominal life in orbit of five years, to be launched sequentially over 14 years. MetOp-A will be armed with a new generation of European instruments and a set of heritage instruments supplied by the US.

The new European instruments- provided by ESA, the Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES) and EUMETSAT- will augment the accuracy of temperature and humidity measurements, wind speed and wind direction over the ocean measurements and profiles of ozone in the atmosphere.

The ESA MetOp program is funded by twelve countries, including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The total cost of the overall system - including the three satellites, launchers and ground segment and operations - is 2.4 billion euro.

Impact of climate warming on Polar ice sheets confirmed

In the most comprehensive survey ever undertaken of the massive ice sheets covering both Greenland and Antarctica, NASA scientists have confirmed that climate warming is changing the amount of water remaining locked in Earth's largest storehouse of ice and snow. The survey, published in the Journal of Glaciology, combines new satellite mapping of the height of the ice sheets from two European Space Agency satellites. It also used previous NASA airborne mapping of the edges of the Greenland ice sheets to determine how fast the thickness is changing.

The survey shows that there was a net loss of ice from the combined polar ice sheets between 1992 and 2002 and a corresponding rise in sea level. The survey documents for the first time show extensive thinning of the West Antarctic ice shelves and an increase in snowfall in the interior of Greenland, as well as thinning at the edges.

In Greenland, the survey saw large ice losses along the southeastern coast and a large increase in ice thickness at higher elevations in the interior due to relatively high rates of snowfall. This study suggests there was a slight gain in the total mass of frozen water in the ice sheet over the decade studied, contrary to previous assessments.

NASA is continuing to monitor the polar ice sheets with the Ice, Cloud and land Elevation Satellite (ICESat), launched in January 2003. ICESat uses a laser beam to measure the elevation of ice sheets with unprecedented accuracy three times a year. The first comprehensive ice sheet survey conducted by ICESat is expected early next year, said Zwally, mission's project scientist.

mPower Technologies, PlanSight LLC develop new Land Records Portal

mPower Technologies (link: http://mpower-tech.com), a technology consulting firm, software developer, and service organization; and PlanSight LLC (link: http://plansight.com), an ESRI authorized developer and provider of a full range of GIS products and consulting services, announce their business partnership recently. Together they have developed a new GIS-based land records portal application, CivX Integrator, allowing organizations to easily create, manage, distribute, and share GIS-based land records data without expensive and time-consuming programming or outsourced consulting.
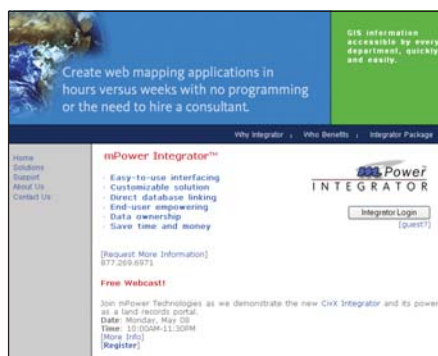
Tools within mPower Integrator (link: http://mpower-tech.com/integrator) combined with software developed by PlanSight provide a sophisticated geographic data distribution and query application. CivX Integrator becomes more than the sum of its parts as a powerful and cost-effective way to distribute database and mapping information through a local network or the Internet. Workload and website implementation times are drastically reduced and revenues increased by quickly and efficiently sharing and distributing data from multiple sources.

Intergraph to aid security operations at the 2006 Olympic

Intergraph Corporation announced recently that Intergraph customer-Istituto Geografico Militare Italiano (IGMI), one of the national institutions providing the Italian government with digital cartography and integrated feature data, used Intergraph software to aid in the security operations at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Torino, Italy.

IGMI's task was to integrate and validate data from multiple sources to assist in securing Olympic venues, which spread across Italy from the city of Turin to the mountains bordering France. IGMI collected, validated and integrated mapping data to create valuable location-specific information for use by security personnel in the prevention and response to critical incidents.

China ranks among world's most wasteful users of resources

China ranks among the world's most wasteful users of natural resources, according to a report by a government-linked academic group released recently. The study by the Chinese Academy of Science ranked China 56 out of 59 countries surveyed, with Denmark, Switzerland, Ireland, Britain, Holland and Norway the earth's most efficient allocators of resources.

China's inefficiency in the use of five major commodities- energy, water, cement, steel and non-ferrous metal was 1.9 times higher than the global average level in 2003, the report said.

The State Council, or China's cabinet, announced last month that environmental improvements, including the control of water, air and soil pollution, would be a major national priority over the next 15 years. ▣

Benchmarking Excellence in Public Service Delivery in India

Shyamalima Banerjee

Since the past 50 years and more the Government of India has been constantly endeavouring to bring efficiency, particularly in public service delivery through more accountability, transparency and responsiveness. However, this has remained no more than a theoretical exercise with little or no impact on service delivery to vulnerable sections that were in dire need of change. There is, therefore, an urgent need to focus on creating the Indian model on benchmarking excellence in public service delivery to bring about good governance.

Criteria to Assess Quality of Compliance

It has always been the endeavour of our government to improve quality of service delivery for the citizens. Over the last more than 50 years various attempts have been made by successive governments to bring about greater accountability and transparency across the government machinery. However, despite far reaching changes in the country's governance structure, the government is largely seen as dictating its own terms, especially with respect to public service delivery. While there was reasonably good progress by late nineties in making and adopting policies towards good governance, the progress in translating the initiatives into actual outcomes for the citizen has not followed suit. Most concrete step towards improvement of service delivery was taken up by the government in 1997 through mandating implementation of Citizen's Charters by government departments. However, the initiative remained a theoretical exercise with little or no impact on service delivery to vulnerable sections that were in dire need of change. The progress regarding public service delivery had not been uniform even though a resolution on Citizen's Charter was adopted during the conference of Chief Ministers addressed by the Prime Minister of India on 24th May 1997 and various government organisations coming up with their own Citizen's Charters. Often the exercise remained on paper and there were several instances where organisations formulated charters in response to government guidelines without really understanding the logic of these guidelines.

The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Government of India, is the nodal agency in the areas of reform initiatives in governance and has been continuously endeavouring to bring efficiency, particularly in public service delivery through more accountability, transparency and responsiveness. The DARPG conducted several studies on the issues of improvement of quality of public service delivery in the country, and by 2003 the studies clearly indicated that there was very little impact of citizen's charters on service delivery by government departments. It was felt that unless there is a mechanism to assess impact of citizen's charter on service delivery with respect to certain standard, the initiatives would lose steam and would fail to deliver the desired results. Further, several factors impact the government service delivery — the scale of operations is massive, resources are relatively limited, stakeholders are too many and very often there are conflicting priorities to be reconciled. Hence, there was a requirement for service delivery to be assessed on different parameters for the government.

The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) later on took up a World Bank sponsored project on Capacity Building for Good Governance to develop a world-class model on benchmarking excellence in service delivery by government organisations in the country.

Current initiatives

Some of the current initiatives that formed the backdrop in which the scheme has been conceived are: Citizen Charters and Information and Facilitation Counters were introduced in 1997 – DARPG issues guidelines for their effective implementation; Public Grievance Redress Mechanism exists in all Government of India Departments with designated PG officers to redress grievances and prevent their recurrence – DARPG monitors these activities regularly; RTI Act makes it mandatory for Ministries/ Departments to publish certain details of their working and put them in public domain; National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) seeks to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms for a citizen-centric and business-centric environment; and Outcome-based budget requires placing Ministries' spending information in public domain for public scrutiny.
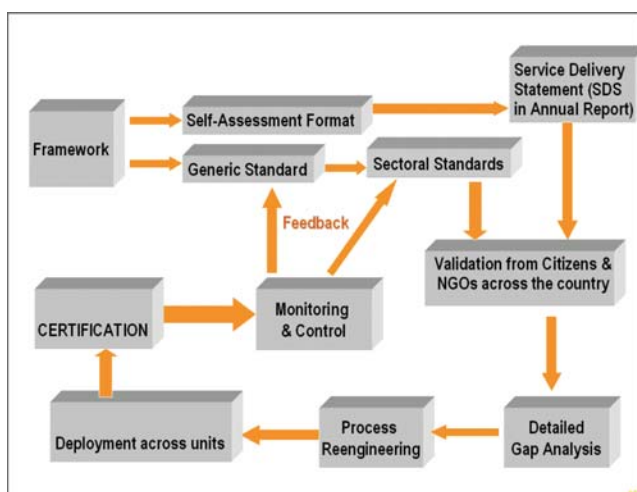
Action Plan for Service Delivery Assessment and Improvement

International Best Practice

Apart from the findings of studies conducted by the DARPG, the study of international best practices in the areas of public service delivery also suggest that government departments need separate benchmarking systems. Some of the advanced countries like the UK, the USA and Canada have also developed separate benchmarks for government service delivery.

The Charter Mark (UK 1991) is based on a six-criterion evaluation to award the prestigious Charter Mark. The Charter Mark requires a self-assessment to gauge preparedness for Charter Mark application. The six evaluation criteria includes the setting of standards and performing well; actively engaging with customers, partners and staff; being fair and accessible to everyone and promoting choice; continuous development and improvement; using resources effectively and imaginatively; and contributing to improving opportunities and quality of life in the communities that are being served.

The Malcolm Balridge Model (USA 1987) is a seven-criterion model for organisational excellence in running a business. This is one of the most prestigious international awards and has been designed with an extremely rigorous assessment process. The major issues to judge the performance have been decided on leadership, strategic planning, customer and market focus, measurement, analysis and knowledge management, human resource focus, process management and business results.

ISO 9000 series of Standards for Quality Management System embodies high quality and comprehensive documentation and has several supporting standards and guidelines.

Model for India

The Indian model on benchmarking excellence in public service delivery has been designed after detailed field study and upon examining the results of studies on the impact of various initiatives of the government towards citizen-centric governance in the country. The ground realities of the country have also been examined with reference to the international best practices and the model has been tailor-made for the country.

The initiatives towards developing the assessment-improvement mechanism were conceptualised as a model to assess implementation of Citizen's Charters, public grievance redress and to recognise publicly the excellence in service delivery. The project began with the desire to make marked improvement in these areas and thereby bring accountability and openness into public governance. An extensive field study was carried out before developing the assessment criteria. Eventually a set of nine criteria was identified covering charter implementation that consisted of formulation, implementation and evaluation of charters; grievance redress mechanism consisting of receipt; redress and prevention of grievances and service delivery capability of customers; and capacity building of employees and infrastructure availability. These criteria consist of 33 elements suggesting a comprehensive evaluation of public service delivery by any organisation.

Salient features

There are five compliance criteria based on DARPG guidelines in respect of citizen's charters and grievance redress mechanism. A Compliant Organisation should have done the following: Published an approved Citizen's Charter; Circulated Charter among service delivery units; Appointed a Public Grievance Officer/Nodal Officer for Citizen's Charter for the Department; Set up a task force for formulation, implementation and review of citizen's charter as per standards and for conducting self-assessment with involvement of representative citizen groups; and Published grievance lodging and redress procedure and timeliness for redress.

There is a mechanism for assessment at two levels – one at the parent department (responsible for making policies) and the other at service outlet where policies get implemented and maximum citizen interface takes place. The nine "QUALITY* of compliance" criteria for which a requirement standard has been developed, cover the three areas of citizen's charters, grievance redress and service delivery capability.

In May 2005, the Prime Minister addressed a conference of District Collectors emphasizing the need to improve service delivery. District Collectors being field functionaries are expected to provide a new perspective on implementation issues for the model. Before the validation of the model, a careful examination was made to look at similar work globally to identify points of similarity and uniqueness. The double step validation has ensured that it is a world-class model and yet suited to realities of a fast developing country like India. Finally, the validation inputs were received from civil society representatives and also from the government agencies that would own the various aspects of the implementation so that it leads to measurable improvements on the ground.

Formulation of Standard

The Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS) through an expert panel constituted from BIS, DARPG, Quality Council of India (QCI), National Productivity Council (NPC), RITES and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has now developed a generic standard for benchmarking service delivery. This standard has been validated after receiving comments/feedback from the Ministries and Departments of the Government of India. The feedback from the citizens was also obtained by putting the draft standard on BIS website. This resulted in the development of Indian Standard – "IS 15700:2005". The standard on public service delivery developed in the country is a unique one that highlights documentation requirements including service quality manual and documentation control, management responsibility for customer focus, service quality policy and commitment, Citizen's Charter, definition of authority and internal/external communication requirements, and resource management including both human resource and infrastructure implemen-tation, monitoring, measurement and improvement requirements.

Action Plan

The steps as designed in the model towards improving public services delivery in the country have been summarized as illustrated in the given figure. Over a period of time, the implementation of the scheme will make it mandatory to comply with the service delivery standard based on the three modules of Citizen's Charters, Public Grievance Redress and Service Delivery Capability. This would in turn bring about citizen

Supporting Good Governance through E-delivery

empowerment, redress satisfaction and delivery capability enhancement.
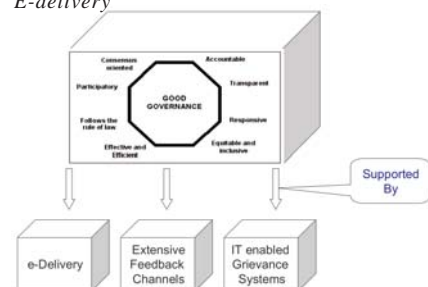
As the generic standard has been developed, all Ministries and Departments of the Government of India will develop sector specific standards for their areas of operation with assistance from the various Training Institutes some of which are attached to concerned Ministries and other agencies like Quality Council

Benefits from Model Implementation

of India, Tata Consultancy Services Ltd. etc. To institutionalise the certification mechanism all Government of India Ministries and Departments will start preparing for achieving certification and give a commitment on the date by which they aim to achieve it. This exercise will take into account the role played by policy-making and coordinating Ministries/Departments of Government of India, including those with no direct citizen interface and those which are dependent on State Governments for delivery of services to citizens. Over a period of 2-3 years, all offices of the Government of India would be expected to be compliant with these standards and demonstrate by example, the practical application of the model in actually improving the standard of their services.

Role of e-Governance

Across the world Good Governance practices are ably supported by e-delivery, existence of extensive feedback channels for stakeholders and IT-enabled grievance systems. The model takes care of these aspects as given in the figure.

Conclusion

This is a unique initiative taken up by the government to improve service delivery by synthesizing multiple concepts — standardization and certification for ensuring a benchmark, transparency through introduction of self-assessment results to be published in public domain, capacity building and back-end support to enable organisations to actually improve services before they seek certification and providing incentives to monopoly organisations to strive for excellence. India would be one of the very few countries in the world to have a published Requirement Standard for Citizen Service Delivery. This is a big step forward for a country with so much diversity and varying levels of performance on service delivery across regions, sectors and sometimes even across organisations in the same sector and region. A pioneering start has been made and all efforts are being made to deal with the uphill task still ahead. e

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INDIA

Budget 2006: Mixed package for IT industry, Telecom

P Chidambaram, Union Minister of Finance, while presenting the Budget for 2006 said that India need to make its presence felt on the IT World map more aggressively. The Ministry of Information Technology would formulate a policy in this regard soon. Mr Chidambaram, however, announced a mixed package for the IT industry and telecom sector. "There would be a full exemption from excise duty for computers, DVD Drives, Flash Drives and Combo Drives," the Minister said, and added, "The packaged software would be costlier with an 8% excise duty on packaged software sold over the counter, while the customised software and software packages downloaded from the Internet would be exempt from this levy." According to Mr Chidambaram, India would be promoted as a "preferred destination" for the manufacture of flat LCD/OLED/Plasma panel displays and storage devices.

Regarding the implementation of e-Governance, Mr Chidambaram disclosed, "The National e-Governance Plan will be approved shortly, and 25 projects, in mission mode, will be launched in 2006-07. Among them is Project MCA-21 to enable companies to file returns electronically and a project for setting up

Ever imagined this happening in INDIA!!

The way bureaucracy functions in India is an open secret – its lethargic attitude, insincerity et al. But, it's official now! The government is listening and acting too thus proving that e-Government in India is effectively in place and fully functional.

The Government of India (GoI) has an online Grievance forum at *http://darpg-grievance.nic.in*, which is for the citizens to highlight the problems being faced by them while dealing with Government officials or departments like Passport Office, Electricity Board, BSNL/MTNL, Railways etc. However, until now the general perception among the common citizens is that e-Government doesn't function properly. But a news received by *egov* from Faridabad, Haryana, would surely make citizens sit up and think anew.

According to the report, Faridabad Municipal Corporation had laid new roads in a locality, which however was dug up two weeks later by the BSNL for installing new cables. This naturally left the residents of the locality annoyed and fuming. Out of the blue, one of the residents of the locality used the GoI Grievance forum to highlight his concern. Much to his surprise, the BSNL and Faridabad Municipal Corporation were served a show cause notice, and the complainant too received a copy of the notice within one week of his complaint. This has not only elated the complainant and the residents of the locality, but seeks to finally change the very perception of the way the Government and the system as such had been functioning until now. The complainant has profusely thanked the GoI for its sincerity and timely action.

It must be noted that the citizens can register online grievances regarding the following departments: Railways, Posts, Telecom (incl. BSNL & MTNL), Urban Development (DDA, L&DO, CPWD, etc), Petroleum & Natural Gas, Civil Aviation (IA, AI, AAI, etc), Shipping, Road Transport & Highways, Tourism, Public Sector Banks, Public Sector Insurance Companies, National Saving Scheme of Ministry of Finance, Employees Provident Fund Organization, Regional Passport Authorities, Central Government Health Scheme, Central Board of Secondary Education, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, National Institute of Open Schooling, Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, Central Universities, and ESI Hospitals and Dispensaries directly controlled by ESI Corporation under Ministry of Labour.

common service centres and assigning unique ID to BPL families. It is Government's intention to bring a number of services online, in a web-based mode, including applications under the Right to Information Act, applications for house sites, ration cards, transfers of teachers, inclusion in the electoral roll, filing of police complaint, and issue of birth/death certificates and copies of land records."

"The telecommunication sector in India is recording one of the fastest growth rates in the world. Tele-density stood at 11.75 per hundred at end-January 2006. The target is to reach 250 million connections by December 2007. To bridge the digital divide more than 50 million rural connections will be rolled out in three years and, thereafter, a connection

will be available on demand. This measure is intended to support infrastructure for cellular telephony in rural areas," the Finance Minister said.

Meanwhile, the Budget had its immediate fallout. The proposal to include ATM operations under the service tax net has impacted some 24,000 employees of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) since the KMC is switching over to e-transfer of salaries. Till now, KMC was paying over 13,000 labourers working for it, in their respective accounts. It recently, however, took steps to introduce the e-transfer system by deciding to pay 24,000 employees directly into their bank accounts. The announcement that there would be a 12% service tax on the ATM operations has made the KMC employees do a rethink.

Duplicate voters on the block for eWeeding

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has finally decided to remove dead and shifted voters, known as "duplicate voters", from the electoral rolls of five States due for legislative elections in May this year. This would be done through the deployment of an 'E-roll cleaning' package, which was successfully implemented in the recently concluded Bihar Assembly polls on an experimental basis. The four States and one Union Territory slated to go for elections include Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Pondicherry.

BB Tandon, Chief Election Commissioner, said that the ECI received numerous complaints from political parties from West Bengal about stuffing of duplicate voters. Following complaints, some one million names from West Bengal and over three lakh names from Tamil Nadu electoral rolls have been removed. Tandon said, "The Commission had already filed 470 cases against those who had filed wrong claims for stuffing of names in the rolls in Tamil Nadu. The poll officials have been asked to re-verify the rolls wherever there was four percent increase in the rolls in the 13 constituencies in Pondicherry. Strict instructions have been issued to Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to follow EC guidelines. The poll panel would also address the issue of booth jamming."

62,000 old files in Gujarat to set afire

Some 62,000 old files gathering dust in the Gujarat secretariat would be set on fire in a bid to give more teeth to e-Governance there. The Gujarat government is according top priority to this. However, the remaining 22,000 more files would be scanned and stored in a state-of-the art 90,000-file facility.

President dedicates AWAN to the nation

President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam dedicated the Army Wide Area Network (AWAN) at the Rashtrapati Bhawan on 24th February 2006, which was organised by the Indian Army's Corps of Signals. In his inaugural address highlighting the

subject 'Transforming AWAN into e-Governance Grid', President Kalam said, "I am very happy to dedicate the Army Wide Area Network to the nation on behalf of the Indian Army. Successful fielding of AWAN covering all the hundred and seventy-four signal centres with state-of-the-art system design, system integration and system implementation is definitely a commendable effort towards self-reliance in establishing a complex communication and IT infrastructure in the Indian Army. I am happy to see the integrated services framework built on top of the secured virtual private network over the AWAN data centre."

It may be noted that the AWAN data centre provides messaging services, directory services and security services along with VoIP and Internet access amongst its signal centers under the umbrella of public key infrastructure with digital signature.

At Stake

Coal e-auction process faces mafia threat

An e-Governance project going in for tumbles! This is what lie in store for at least some of the e-Governance projects that are either being implemented or await implementation. The Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) and other subsidiaries are facing repeated threats from the coal mafia to abolish their e-auction process. Even different trade union leaders are up in arms against the BCCL and other subsidiaries' moves. However, the Coal India Limited (CIL) has decided not to be cowed down by these threats, and is seeking services of the IIM for its expert opinion on how to improve the existing state of e-auction and go ahead with its plans.

It may be noted that the newly-adopted e-auction has significantly helped CIL to tide over financial losses while making BCCL earn INR50 crore (US$) more profit till January 2006 as compared to the earning made in the same period in 2005. Further, through e-auction the BCCL was also able to tackle coal mafia effectively since they continued to eat into its profits.

The Telegraph quoted a senior BCCL official as saying: "Why should we abolish e-auction, which has been giving us more profit and will definitely help us earn more in coming years once the suggestions made by the IIM is implemented."
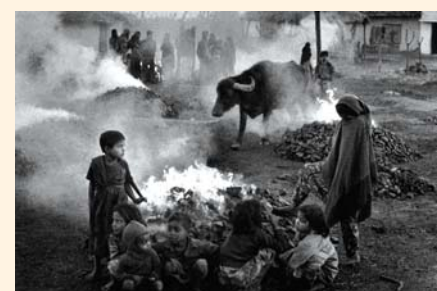
Orissa's march towards e-Governance

From "Below Average Achievers" to "Average Achievers"

Surendra Nath Tripathi

Significantly, Orissa's march towards e-Governance has been rather satisfactory. In 2004, the State was placed in the league of "Average Achievers" in India in terms of its e-Readiness. "It is important to note that Orissa has moved from "Below Average Achievers" in 2003 to "Average Achievers" in just one year," stresses **Surendra Nath Tripathy***, Commissioner and Secretary Panchayati Raj and IT, in an interview with* **Anuradha Dhar** *of egov.*

■ **What have been the key achievements of Orissa in terms of e-Governance?**
The State of Orissa was among the "Average Achievers" States in India in terms of its e-Readiness in 2004. However, it is important to note that Orissa has moved from "Below Average Achievers" in 2003 to "Average Achievers" in just one year, and to continue progress in this specific area the State Government has framed the Information Technology Policy in 2004 through which it aims to develop a well planned, robust and futuristic IT architecture in the State. The basic objective of the policy is to help the Government reach out to common people and minimise the digital divide existing in the state as of now.

Orissa Telemedicine Application Network has been set up to connect Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS), Lucknow, with three Medical Colleges in the State enabling remote delivery of healthcare.

The Orissa Computer Application Centre (OCAC) – an agency of the State Government, is implementing a scheme that seeks to provide computer-based training in 400 high schools in 30 districts across the State. The project entails an investment of Rs 12.90 crores (US$2.91mn).

■ **What are the major IT projects initiated by the Government of Orissa?**
The Government of Orissa has initiated quite a few e-Governance projects at the State level as well as on Sectoral levels. These projects can broadly be divided into 3 main categories namely IT Infrastructure Projects, State Level Core e-Governance Projects, and, State Level Sectoral e-Governance Projects.

The State Government has already obtained approval from Government of India for State Wide Area Network (SWAN). From the Secretariat to the Districts, 2 Mbps Data Link has been established, and connectivity to the Sub-Divisions, Blocks and Tehsils will be provided in partnership with BSNL (with OFC backbone). The ultimate aim is to provide connectivity upto the grassroots levels at the earliest.

The Government would be setting up Information Kiosks throughout the State, particularly in the Urban and Semi-Urban areas through Self-Employment Mode targeted at the unemployed youth. A variety of services would be offered by the Kiosks such as e-mail, Internet browsing, computer education, photography, DTP work, display of movies through CDs, and PCOs.

The Ministry of Information Technology (IT), Government of India (GoI), has set up a Resource Center at OCAC and Utkal University for technology development in Indian Language for development and promotion of Oriya Language -based tools and application under the aegis of Bhasa Project. Word Processor, Spell Check, Thesaurus, OCR, Bilingual Chart and E-Mail Application in Oriya have already been developed. Web -based Bilingual English to Oriya e-Dictionary, Oriya WorldNet Software for Language Query and Trilingual Word Processor (English-Oriya-Hindi) have also been developed.

PRIASOFT (Web -based Application for monitoring Funds Flow), PAMIS (Panchayati Accounts Monitoring Information System), RURALSOFT (Web -based Application for monitoring Physical Progress of Projects/Schemes under various Poverty Alleviation Programs), BETAN (Integrated Payroll Package for preparing Repetitive Pay-Bills as per a set of standard formats) and Online Management & Monitoring System (Web Enabled System to monitor and manage the physical and financial progress of the schemes under Pradhan Mantri Gram

Sarak Yojana) are being utilized by the Panchayati Raj Department as a part of their e-Governance Plan.

Directorate of Land Records & Surveys has taken up Computerization of Land Records to facilitate maintenance and updation of changes occurring due to consolidation of land holdings, transfer of ownership, land acquisition etc., and to provide accurate copies of Records of Rights (ROR) to the landowners across the State. The initiative involves two issues – Record of Rights and Digitization of Cadastral Survey Maps. Thirteen leading DSR/SR Offices in the State has been computerised and made operational. In addition, funds have been provided for the computerisation of 13 other DSR/SR offices during current financial year.

The Department of Transport has taken up the Integrated Transport Management Information System (ITMIS) in order to streamline the issue and renewal of Driving License, Registration of Motor Vehicles, Issue and Renewal of Permits, Collection of Motor Vehicle Taxes etc.. Issue of Computerised Driving License has been started from RTO, Bhubaneswar.

Supervision and control of the RTO offices and border check gates and issue and renewal of permits for passenger and goods vehicles are being computerised and automated. The department plans to introduce smart cards for license and registration certificates, modernise check gates with e-connectivity and create consolidated data bank.

Under the aegis of Department of Education, the data capturing of around 70 lakh children has been completed. A database is being developed through ICR (Intelligent Character Recognition) for all the children. VSAT and computer servers are being installed at all District Offices of OPEPA and its HO to have a Web -based Application to avail online information throughout the State.

■ **What are your efforts to connect Gram Panchayats and bring e-Governance in Villages?**
In addition to targeting the Villages via the SWAN Network System, through Gramsat the process of connecting up the DRDAs/Blocks has already been established. Efforts are on to connect all

Orissa e-Government projects

- Setting up state-wide Information kiosks
- Development and promotion of Oriya Language-based tools and application under Bhasa project
- PRIASOFT for monitoring Funds flow
- PAMIS or Panchayati Accounts Monitoring Information System
- RURALSOFT for physical progress of Projects/Schemes under Poverty Alleviation Programs
- BETAN – Integrated Payroll Package for preparing Repetitive Pay-Bills
- Computerisation of Land records
- ITMIS or Integrated Transport Management Information System
  Development of database through ICR for all the children under Department of Education

6,234 Gram Panchayats with VSAT and to computerise the Panchayat level Administration via e-Panchayat, which has been developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC), taking into consideration all the information and knowledge management requirements in a Gram Panchayat.

■ **Orissa Government has tied up with National Institute of Smart Government (NISG) to prepare the e-Governance roadmap for the State. Could you throw some light on its progress?**
This assignment was initiated in September 2005, and Consultants from NISG and Wipro had a series of discussions with senior officials of the State Government to explain the context and scope of the whole exercise, including an introduction to NeGP. The aim of these meetings was to make all the stakeholders aware of the purpose of the assignment and also to prepare the ground for future interactions with the same.

Further, a Special Task Force was created to facilitate and participate in the EGRM and CBRM preparation. This Task Force selected 15 Sectors as Mission Mode Projects and also supervised the entire assignment.

As a part of this exercise, the Consultants had a series of meetings with State's political leadership (from ruling parties as well as from opposition parties), with academicians and intelligentsia (University VCs, Newspaper Editors, etc.), with representatives of business establishments and industrial units and with the common citizens of the State. In

addition to these respondents, senior officials from various Government Departments were also consulted to get their views on how would they like to see Orissa in future and what should be done to achieve that.

The Consultants have submitted the initial Draft of the e-Government Strategy for the State, which is currently undergoing a department-wise reviewing. Upon the finalisation of the document, a one-day Strategy Workshop would be organised under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary and all the Line Secretaries would also participate to formally unveil the State's e-Government Strategy.

■ **How is Orissa Government encouraging Public-Private Partnerships in e-Government projects?**
State Government specially aims at inviting investments in the fields of ICT network and infrastructure creation, procedural reengineering, and community capacity building and training. The Government understands that Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can substantially aid in achieving the e-Government Vision of Orissa and would explore the possibilities of PPPs to supplement the financial resources or expertise of the State Government. In this respect, a number of important partnerships have already been forged with organisations such as Infosys, Wipro, TCS, Merit Track etc., for a number of important e-Governance Initiatives and the State Government would continue to explore the possibilities of newer partnerships appropriately. ⊙

e-Panchayati Raj in Orissa
Successfully strengthening PRIs through ICT

S. N. Tripathy and B. P. Mishra

Strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is a must if the fruits of development are to be truly reached to the rural poor. Undoubtedly, the effective and wide usage of information and communication technology has brought about a major turnaround in the rural context too thus bringing the Mahatma's dream to near fruition in bettering the lot of the rural populace further. As such, through the application of e-Governance applications like Priasoft, Ruralsoft, PAMIS and BETAN, the Government of Orissa has taken a step forward in successfully implementing these e-Governance applications for transparent and effective management of PRIs with an avowed objective to propel the e-Government movement in the rural hinterland.

India's soul lies in its villages where 70% of population resides at present. The Government of India and various State governments spend a lot of money for rural development. After more than 50 years of independence, the rural villages have come up with many developmental programmes but still continue to lag behind in terms of desired progress. Expectedly, this may be because of the lack of proper monitoring of these developmental projects due to some age-old methodology of manual system. However, now things have changed for good. Of late, a new form of government, popularly referred to as e-Government, has emerged as a new way of reaching out to the people.

The rural development programmes in India are executed and monitored by the 3-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The objective of these rural development programmes can be achieved only if the execution and monitoring can be done in more effective manner, which is possible only through the use of ICT. In retrospect, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, recommended the use of ICT in PRIs during its 7th Round Table Conference held from 17-19 December 2004 at Jaipur in Rajasthan. Accordingly, theGovernment of Orissa has taken this as a mission mode project and implemented some e-Governance applications for transparent and effective management of PRIs. The project includes applications like Priasoft that monitors financial position of PRIs; Ruralsoft that gives the picture of physical progress of projects implemented at the village level; PAMIS that keeps track of day-to-day financial transaction with cashbook generation; and, BETAN that is implemented to prepare the salary.

Panchayati Raj

"Every village ought to be a republic …with the authority and resources to realise the potential for economic and social development of the village" – This was the vision of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, for a vibrant democracy in India. This vision of Mahatma Gandhi was ultimately realised through the

Constitutional amendment of Article 243G of Part IX of the Indian Constitution during the tenure of the then Primer Minister Rajiv Gandhi, which empowers the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to function as "Institutions of self-government" to plan and implement programmes of economic and social justice.

The PRIs were introduced through the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, as an enhancement to the democratic set-up of the country below the level of states. The Act was a landmark in decentralized development as it envisions grassroots people's participation in the process of planning, decision-making, implementation and delivery. However, the constitutional provision by itself has failed to bring about this revolutionary transformation due to the failure of many state governments, who were unable to follow it in letter and spirit. More than a decade has passed ever since the 73rd Amendment came into force but effective implementation of Panchayati Raj in many states is yet to fructify. However, the formation of a separate Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) under the Government of India in 2004 has instilled hopes of realising the dream of "Poorna Swaraj through Gram Swaraj".

Particularly, the scope for ensuring effective performance of the PRIs has considerably increased with the emergence of e-Governance due to the advent of ICT and the Internet., The MoPR has recommended the use of ICT in PRIs in the 7th Round Table Conference held in Rajasthan in 2004. The development programmes in the country are designed to meet the objectives of alleviating poverty and area development with an ultimate aim of improving the standard of living. The planning, implementation and monitoring of such developmental activities is extended through PRI to ensure maximum participation of people. The PRIs have the responsibility of creating and maintaining the basic amenities, alleviating poverty and building up of developmental infrastructure. This is being accomplished by self-initiatives of PRIs or state and centrally sponsored schemes, which are implemented through rural local bodies such as Village/Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti/Block Panchayat and Zilla Parishad/District Panchayat in the rural areas. Effective management of funds provided to PRIs by various agencies is one of the most challenging tasks. The Eleventh Finance Commission gave a serious consideration to this aspect and recommended IT-based solution for fund management.

Initiatives in Orissa

The Panchayati Raj department, Government of Orissa, has successfully implemented some ICT-based applications as a part of e-Governance initiative in the state. The Department has introduced e-Governance applications such as PriaSoft, RuralSoft, PAMIS and BETAN.

PriaSoft

The Panchayati Raj Institution Accounts Monitoring Software or PriaSoft (*http://ori.nic.in/priasoft*) is a web-based e-Governance application designed and developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC) for the purpose of monitoring of funds at 3-tier PRIs under different account heads in the shape of P. L. Account (not in Village Panchayat), Bank, Cash and advance on a month-end basis. It also contains the database of all Self-Help Groups (SHGs) created under different key activity besides monitoring the financial health of each SHG in the shape of different savings, advance and stock position.

PriaSoft empowers the administrators to monitor the fund receipt, expenditure and availability at all levels of three-tier administrative set up of PRI. It generates a number of reports and has a module that gives the data entry status. The software is designed so as to allow addition of new account heads at the state level as and when required. It provides financial status of each 6578 (30 District + 314 Block + 6234 GP) PRI on public domain over Internet.

The PriaSoft architecture has two modules namely Citizen section (G2C) and Government section (G2G). Citizen section provides financial information to the public whereas Government section captures data and generates MIS reports in the specified format as per requirement at the state, district, block and GP level. The account is maintained under three layers of account heads— Major account, Sub account and Minor account for all 3-tier PRIs namely District Panchayat, Block Panchayat and Village Panchayat. The Major account head covers all the rural development schemes. Currently, there are 84 major account heads at the district level, 66 at the block level and 24 at the Village Panchayat level. There are four sub account heads namely P. L. Account, Bank, Cash and Advance at the district and block level while three sub account heads at the Village Panchayat level. There are two minor heads namely inflow and outflow at all the three layers.

The Public domain deliverable provides the financial position of each PRI (30 district + 314 block + 6234 GP) on monthly basis under different Major

account/schemes. Orissa is the first and perhaps the only state in the country where this information is available in the Public domain over the Internet. Under the Government domain, each PRI has been given a user ID and password. Major account heads are created at the state level. The software has an analytic module, and provides the facility to monitor the data entry status at the next higher levels. State user has the privilege to monitor all three layers, district user can monitor two layers below it within its domain and the block user has the permission for GP layer within the block. The report module generates reports on different parameters. The reports are designed as per the need of state, district, block and Gram Panchayat levels. The SHG Module provides financial status of SHGs, and also gives the bankwise loan position under different key activities.

RuralSoft

RuralSoft (*http://ori.nic.in/ruralsoftr*) is a web-based e-Governance application designed and developed by the NIC for monitoring the physical progress of the rural development projects being implemented at the village level.

The RuralSoft architecture has two modules namely Citizen section (G2C) and Government section (G2G). Citizen section provides physical status of rural development projects implemented at the village level whereas Government section captures data and generates MIS reports in the specified format as per the need at the state, district, block and GP level. The rural development projects are implemented by all the 3-tier of PRIs. The details of projects are captured from all three levels in the prescribed format that includes Name of the Scheme from where money has been sanctioned (SGRY/IAY/ MPLAD/MPALAD etc.); Name of the project; Description of the project; Location of the project; Amount sanctioned; Date of commencement; Man-Days generation; Status of the project; Date of completion; and Sanctioned financial year. Besides, it has also the provision of capturing the information from DRDAs in the format prescribed by the Government of India for Monthly Progress Report (MPR) for schemes like IAY, SGRY, SGSY and NFFW.

PAMIS

Panchayat Accounts Monitoring Information System or PAMIS is a web-based as well as desktop application developed by Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneshwar (XIMB) for the Panchayati Raj Department. The platform is Oracle 9i and D2K. PAMIS is capable of capturing each transaction of DRDAs/Blocks, and is based on double entry system wherein daily transactions can be entered. Cash Book as well as Journals can be generated through the package. The package has been implemented to standardise the accounting system of all the DRDAs and the Blocks to save delay and better transparency. The package is being used in 30 DRDAs and 314 Blocks.

BETAN

BETAN is an integrated Pay Roll package developed by OCAC (Orissa Computer Application Centre, Bhubaneshwar) for the Department. The platform is Oracle 9i and D2K. The objective is to save time and manpower in preparing the repetitive Pay Bills, have a standard format for all the employees of DRDAs and Block level officials. The package is being currently used in 30 DRDAs and 314 Blocks.

Data Web Hosting

Information can now be accessed regarding villages with demographic details, which are now Panchayat compliant. Rural BPL Household Survey was conducted in 2002 and the collected data were put in the database. The total household survey is now available on the Internet and can be accessed by the public. Reports are available at *http:// rural.nic.in*, while individual details with village-wise list at http://ori.nic.in/bpl. Gram Chahat package is being developed to enlist prospective job seekers available at the village level. Besides, other departments are being encouraged to use INDIA village database to ensure wide dissemination of information to the public for better transparency and accountability.

GRAMSAT VSAT Network

All the 30 DRDAs and 314 Blocks have been connected over VSAT connectivity. All the DRDAs and Blocks have been provided with email accounts for mail transactions. Interactive Training Programmes over GRAMSAT were conducted for sorting out the difficulties at the DRDA and Block level.

Panchayati Raj-related Portals

Panchayati Raj Department Portal (*http:// orissagov.nic.in/panchayat/default.asp*) has been hosted by the Government of Orissa, and contains links to all major government sites besides all information related to PRI act, rules, elected members list etc. The Panchayati Raj Department in the State has also hosted the DRDA Portal (*http://ori.nic.in/drdaportal*) using e-NRICH developed by the NIC for creating a standard portal for all the DRDAs of Orissa. e-NRICH has the feature of remote content management.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, has hosted National Panchayat Portal or NPP (*http:// panchayat.nic.in*) using e-NRICH developed by the NIC for creating portals for all the 3-tier PRIs, with remote content management feature. Orissa is the first and perhaps the only State in the country to upload information on this portal.

Conclusion

All these however could be achieved through consistent hard work and a willingness to achieve after undergoing the resultant pain. It is now a widely acknowledged fact that rural prosperity and sustained growth can only be achieved through land reform and decentralisation. As such, the advent of ICT has truly changed the roles people and PRIs are playing in Orissa. The rural populace cannot merely achieve prosperity just only because of the mandatory 100 days of wage employment to 74 lakh rural household who are at bottom of pyramid with minimum wage under NREG Act 2005, but the use of ICT has a lot more to do with it. 🔴

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ICT in Indian Agriculture: A powerful intervention

M. Ariz Ahammed

State of Indian Agriculture:Bullocks and Internet. But still more needs to be done?

The Indian agriculture is on the wheels of mission mode transformation. A look at the observations of the latest situation Assessment survey of Farmers 2005 of NSSO highlights the factors afflicting the most important sector in the country with a focus on the issue of access to technology, government endeavor, markets, institutions and services indicating limitations in the current public service, thus calling for ICT intervention.

The latest Situation Assessment Survey of Farmers 2005 of NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation) (*http://mospi.nic.in/mospi_nsso_rept_pubn.htm*) observes that the average Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) of a farm household has been just Rs.503 (US$11.32) in 2003 across regions, classes and income groups, with 27% of farmers not liking farming while 40% felt that given the option they would prefer other career owing to poor earnings. The survey also pointed out that only 29% understood the meaning of minimum support prices while only 40% of farmer households accessed information on modern technology in farming. The observations thus clearly illustrate the maladies that afflict the Indian agriculture as such, and bring into focus the issues of access to technology, government endeavour, markets, institutions and services, indicating the limitations in the current public service delivery and need for new intervention with right means.

The impact is visible with low GDP (Gross Domestic Product) contribution (22%) of agriculture sector at the national level even though more than 65% of Indians are dependant on it for their livelihood. Despite the avowed target of 4% in agriculture to achieve 8% growth in overall GDP during tenth plan (2002-07), agriculture performance has till date been a serious concern for the economy and become an issue of serious discussion in the nation –the government, industry and civil society. From the economic aspect Agriculture is taken to encompass all farm enterprises namely Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, Fishery and Sericulture, and several other allied activities. Thus the uplift of agriculture would not only benefit farmers and a large section of the rural poor but also give fillip to the overall growth of the economy through backward and forward linkages of agriculture with the rest of the economy. Under the prevailing circumstances and new global trade regime,

the government has been endeavouring to make the agriculture sector perform.

However, the performance of agriculture basically means the performance of smallholder farming in the Indian context. It is only by empowering small and marginal farmers to overcome their handicaps that they can become instruments of evergreen revolution and growth in agriculture sector. Already, the major limiting factor of farmers such as access to technology, government endeavour, resources, markets, institutions and services, in maximising their farm incomes and to contribute growth in the sector has been cited. This is particularly so since the farming is becoming highly knowledge intensive, commercialised, competitive and globalised against traditional resource based approach. This therefore emphasises the immediate need to adopt a right means to bring in all players of agribusiness such as farmers, government, knowledge, R&D, finance and other institutions, corporate and markets, onto an umbrella platform on real-time basis transactions that is able to overcome the limitations of conventional extension with respect to access. The innovations in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) therefore in this context are of immense help in offering a communication platform transcending all traditional physical barriers and backwardness with its wider reach out and neutrality to social and gender bias. Besides, its inclusive nature of public and private sectors and its innate strength of offering a reliable, good and cost effective communication platform to various management agencies involved in the extension to and from to the farmers is also beneficial. With these features, the usage of ICT would surely strengthen the current ongoing extension reforms in bridging gaps in access and in bridging rural economy with globalised markets.

Agriculture in Assam

A case study of agriculture in Assam would strengthen the already stated observations of a need for the use of ICT for any sustainable development and growth in farm sector. In one of the recent workshop organised by the Government of Assam, the Agricultural Development Officers, civil society and farmer representatives could only recall 8 schemes whereas there were numerous schemes that were offered by a number of agencies and institutions. Moreover, even the information that they had was incomplete as they admitted that the guidelines available were only for 2-3 schemes. This is thus bound to raise the basic issue as to for whom the schemes/programmes/projects/ technologies were being developed by the Centre and State governments and several other agencies at the cost of convergence and synergy. On the contrary, given the compartmentalisation of government, extension functionary of a department/agency are not aware of opportunities offered by multitude of agencies related to the same target group and enterprise.

If we analyse the magnitude of the problem taking up again the case study of Assam , wherein there are 2.5 million farm families, the Agriculture department extension machinery comprises approx. 5000 personnel (VLEWs + ADOs + Others) and is expected to provide service to more than 5 million farmers (if we consider two farmers in each farming family). This is

naturally a herculean task, illustrating the limitation of traditional extension in providing access to the farmers and the role of ICT.

In India knowledge revolution through ICT is being spearheaded by Mission 2007 (www.mission2007.org), an alliance for providing every village one knowledge centre that would engage government, institutions, technologists, civil society and corporate under the chairmanship of Prof. MS Swaminathan.

Till date, the available Indian ICT public service delivery models in Agriculture sector are very few and are mostly in private sector such as Knowledge centres of MSSRF (*http:// www.mssrf. org/special_programmes/mission_2007_NA/ namain.htm*), e-choupal of ITC (*www.echoupal.com*), Ikisan of Nagarjuna Fertilizers & Chemicals Ltd (*http://www.ikisan.com*), and Parrys' India agriline (*www.indiagriline.com/english/corp/ index.html*). Besides, a number of Agribusiness corporates like TAFE (*www.jfarmindia.com*), Mahindra and Mahindra, and several others are adopting ICT in their businesses. The private sector initiatives are very critical and essential given the strong presence of the corporate in Agriculture sector. The cooperative sector already includes Dairy Information Services Kiosk (DISK) of NDDB and wired village WARANA (*http://www.mah.nic.in/ warana*). Amongst civil society, GRASSO (*http://www.grasso.in/ agri/cropmngt_soil.asp*) of West Bengal is pioneering the ICT access in farm sector. It may therefore be seen that increased realisation of rural markets potential has become a driving force for the concerned corporate.

The major ICT based service delivery initiative in government is limited to ASHA initiative (*www.assamagribusiness. nic.in*) of Assam SFAC (Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium) with its networking with large ICT infrastructure (CICs) spread all over the State. Kerala has come up with two different initiatives – Kissan Kerala (*www.kissankerala.net*) and e-Krishi (*www.e-krishi.org/site/*), which is yet to be operational-ised. The Government of Andhra Pradesh is providing agribusiness services under Parishkaram. The IIIT Hyderabad is experimenting with e-Sagu (*http://agriculture.iiit.net/esagu/ esagu2004*).

The State of Uttaranchal is setting up Kisan Soochna Kendras in private partnership while the Haryana recently inaugurated its first Agribusiness Information Centre. The States of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra are pursuing comprehensive Agrisnet. Besides, Agricultural Universities in several States have launched telephonic helplines. Taking land records management into consideration, the Bhoomi Project in Karnataka has been acknowledged as one of the highly successful public sector initiatives in the country having direct impact in improving health of Agriculture sector and is being replicated in several other states. Even the commodity exchanges are not left behind as they are using ICT extensively in their agribusiness.

At national level the Government of India is undertaking a number of initiatives. Some of the popular public service models include Kisan Call Centres (www.kisancallcenter.net) and web portal initiative www.agmarket.nic.in, which provides market price information. Most of the Central organisations are accessible through their websites. The Government of India initiative of AGRISNET (*http://agricoop.nic.in/PolicyIncentives/BRIEF% 20NOTE%20ON%20AGRISNET.htm*) to institutionalise IT

empowerment and networking of research and development institutions and services under the Ministry of Agriculture is a harbinger of ICT in the Agriculture sector. It is expected that National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), the AGRISNET, proposed Common Service Centres and Village Knowledge Centres by the Government would further take India forward to harness emerging potential of ICT comprehensively for the benefit of farmers and all partners of agribusiness offering both synergy and value addition.

ASHA initiative

Accordingly, a case study of Government of Assam initiative – ASHA (*www.assamagribusiness.nic.in*) (Hope for Farm Prosperity) deserves consideration. The initiative is an outcome of Assam SFAC's vision to empower farming community by harnessing public investments in schemes and programmes, R&D, and markets, effectively by bringing all players of the farm sector (Agribusiness) into one communication channel using technological innovation of ICT. The existing ICT infrastructure–Community Information Centres (CICs) in all 219 Community Development Blocks set up in 2002 in the state, are being used as service delivery points. The initiative won National e-Governance Award 2006 for exemplary leadership and ICT achievement.

The illustrative list of agribusiness services being offered under ASHA includes Scientific Production Practices, Weather, Market Watch, Schemes, Various Training Institutes and their Calendars, Ask Expert facility, Names and Telephone Number of Government Functionaries, Laws and Policies, Statistics, Credit and Banking, Insurance, Marketing, Processing, Technology, Entrepreneurship, Quality Certification, Consultancy, Corporate Corner, Exports and WTO, Employment, Buy and Sell, Agri-Business News, Success Stories, R&D Institutions, Disaster Management, Events, Producer organisations, NGOs/SHGs, Project Profiles etc. The farmers can avail these services after paying nominal user fees on quarterly and annual membership of Community Information Centres (CICs) through walk-in and telephone.

In the ASHA initiative, Assam SFAC undertook the responsibility of content development, capacity building of government functionaries, civil society, farmers and traders, besides looking after the coordination, resources and administration issues. The National Informatics Centre (NIC) of Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT) is hosting the services. The success of this initiative has been in its partnership with all relevant agencies that includes various state government departments –such as Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, Fishery, Sericulture, Industry and Commerce, Information Technology, Soil Conservation, Irrigation, Panchayat and Rural Development, Welfare Plain Tribes and Backward Classes, Minorities Welfare and Development and several others; Government of India; R&D Institutions like Assam Agricultural University, Financial Institutions, Corporate, Local Self governments, Civil Society, Farmers and Media.

The ASHA initiative has a number of unique features, and is the only portal in the country that offers services on five sectors of farming under one umbrella. It is also perhaps the only web portal that brought most of GOI Ministries and State Government departments related to farm sector with their schemes on one platform. The ASHA portal offers modern cultivation and management practices of a number of crops, and livestock / enterprises from various reliable sources. Besides, it offers a comprehensive list of training institutions of farm sector in the country while offering market information, weather service and statistics in the state of Assam. Above all, ASHA offers wealth of information of Assam farm sector for the attention of corporate and to facilitate Agribusiness in the State.

The response of farmers, Government functionaries, civil society, rural traders and scientific community to ASHA is very encouraging. In a short span of 8 months since its launch on 30th May 2005, around 6000 farmers have become enrolled as user fees members of CIC with their collections exceeding INR3 lakhs (US$ 6,765.14), is a clear demonstration of farmers' interest, and Government functionaries and Civil society's involvement in the ICT initiative. It also illustrates the financial sustainability of CICs both as business model and as rights model with due promotion. The CICs that used to be Youth Computer Literacy Centres have transformed into Community Knowledge Centres. Agriculture Marketing network got activated from its moribund status and increasingly realising its accountability and responsibility with growing awareness of Farmers and Traders. Most important observation is a sense of collective ownership of this initiative and transparency in organisational structures and activities of farm sector related departments.

The vision of ASHA is to reach out to 3000-5000 farmers per CIC and to develop content in local language on dynamic basis to the extent possible and localisation of content; to develop an alliance/networking of institutions of content and technology of common interest; to offer services in partnership with Corporate and Institutions such as Buy and Sell, Agribusiness, Credit, Insurance, Distance Learning, employment etc; to expand the service delivery through Private cyber cafés/Computer Centres and proposed Common Service Centres and Village Knowledge Centres.

Conclusion

Despite its prospects and practical uses the ICT is not without limitations, the foremost being the that of masses to understand and avail its benefits in the prevalence of endemic functional illiteracy. However, given the current CIC/Kiosk models based on intermediary the problem is being addressed suitably. Then connectivity, infrastructure, content development (especially in local language), affordability, coordination, management issues and access to reliable power supply are to be accordingly addressed. The just concluded World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) at Tunis (16-18 November 2005) rightly symbolizes the global commitment of using ICT for sustainable development.

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numbers

5,000
and above problematic websites were reported in 2005 aiding and abetting terrorism, promoting racial violence, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, thus registering a growth of 25% in Internet hate sites over 2004.

31
million are the number of computers linked to the web in China up till 2004, up 48.3%. These numbers show that China has overtaken Japan to have Asia's largest online population, second globally only to the United States.

62,000
old files gathering dust in the Secretariat are to be burnt by the Gujarat government as part of its e-Government drive.

£10,000
is the average cost borne by a small business on account of e-crime alone. Three-quarters of Welsh businesses have been victims of e-crime. Eighty seven percent of Welsh businesses now depend almost totally on the Internet day-to-day.

2/3
of the Local governments in the US are seven years old or less. According to the 2002 Census of Governments, there are 87,525 local governments in the US.

167%
is the overwhelming increase in user traffic by the Dubai e-Government portal in 2005. The number of visitors was 115,777 from 69,286 in January 2005 and touched 185,063 in December 2005.

Source:

£10,000 – http://icwales.icnetwork.co.uk/0300business/0100news/ tm_objectid=16761859& method=full&siteid=50082&headline =three-quarters-of-firms-are-e-crime-victims-name_page.html

5,000 – http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/October2005/07/ c8976.html

62,000 – http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/ subcontinent/2006/February/subcontinent_February 232.xml&section= subcontinent&col=

167% – http://www.uni-potsdam.de/db/elogo/ifgcc/index.php?option= com_content &task=view&id=19741&Itemid=93&lang=de_DE

2/3 – http://www.uni-potsdam.de/db/elogo/ifgcc/index.php?option =com_content&task =view&id=19766&Itemid=93&lang=de_DE

31 – http://topics.developmentgateway.org/e-government/highlights/ viewHighlight. do~activeHighlightId=107123

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

14 - 15 March 2006

Smart Cards & e-Government Conference
London, UK & Northern Ireland
http://www.symposium-events.co.uk/pages/
attending/LA002/overview.htm

28 - 29 March 2006

E-Government Evolution 2006
Canberra, Australia
http://www.iqpc.com/cgi-bin/templates/
singlecell.html?topic=592&event=8611

30 March 2006

E-government practices: Assessing the present for a better future
Toronto, Canada

http://www.econtentinstitute.org/conference/
seminars.asp

30-31 March 2006

European e-crime Congress 2006
London, UK
http://www.e-crimecongress.org/ecrime2006/
website.asp

5 - 6 April 2006

local e-gov London EXPO 2006
Docklands London
http://www.localegovnp.org/
default.asp?sID=1133363230094

5 - 7 April 2006

Government Technology World 2006
Canberra, Canada
http://www.terrapinn.com/2006/gtw%5Fau/

10 - 13 April 2006

2nd International Conference on Web Information Systems and Technologies (WEBIST-2006)
Portugal
http://www.webist.org/cfp.htm

9-11 April 2006

govNET Summit 2006
West Virginia, USA
http://www.govnetsummit.com/

19 - 21 April 2006

Knowledge Management Conference (E-Gov)
Washington DC
USA
http://www.gurteen.com/gurteen/
gurteen.nsf/id/X000D3FFA/

19 - 22 April 2006

Eastern European e|Gov Days 2006
Prague (CZ)
http://www.uni-koblenz.de/FB4/
Institutes/IWVI/AGVInf/Conferences/
eeegovdays2006

24 - 28 April 2006

2nd International Conference on Information & Communication Technologies: from Theory to Applications - ICTTA'06
Damascus, Syria
http://ictta.enst-bretagne.fr/
index.php?PAGE=callforpapers.php

26 - 28 April 2006
Bangkok
Thailand
www.egovasia.net
www.DLasia.csdms.in

e|gov Asia 2006
digital LEARNING Asia 2006

27 - 28 April 2006

ECEG 2006: 6th European Conference on e-Government
Marburg
Germany
http://www.academic-conferences.org/eceg/
eceg2006/eceg06-home.htm

15 - 19 May 2006

Government Technology Conference West 2006
Sacramento, CA
USA
http://www.govtech.net/gtc/index.php/
GTCWest2006

6 - 9 June 2006

4th International Conference on Applied Cryptography and Network Security (ACNS'06)
Singapore
http://acns2006.i2r.a-star.edu.sg

26 - 27 June 2006

International Conference on Mobile Business (ICMB) 2006
Copenhagen
Denmark
http://www.cbs.dk/forskning_viden/
fakulteter_institutter_centre/institutter/
oekonomi/inf/h_jreboks/arrangementer/
1151309100_icmb_conference_2006

26 – 29 June 2006

EEE'06- The 2006 International Conference on e-Business, Enterprise Information Systems, e-Government, and Outsourcing
Monte Carlo Resort
Las Vegas
Nevada, USA
http://www.world-academy-of-science.org/
worldcomp06/ws/EEE/index_html

12 - 13 July 2006

The European Conference on IT Management, Leadership and Governance
Paris, France
http://academic-conferences.org/ecmlg/
ecmlg2006/ecmlg06-home.htm

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

Tell us about your event at info@egovonline.net

Worldwide broadband Statistics Q3 2005

The latest world broadband statistics Q3 2005 from Point Topic reveals East Asia leads broadband penetration in the world, after United States of America (USA). Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore are regarded as the leading "Asian Tiger" countries with significant amounts of export by their electronics industry, and also as the "Net Tigers" when it comes to the Internet. However, in the case of broadband, China is the sole front-runner followed by Japan. At current rates China will overtake the US in Q4 2006 as the largest broadband country in the world.

This analysis is taken from the quarterly Point Topic report on World broadband statistics. This series of Point Topic's quarterly World Broadband Statistics reports. The series originated with the DSL reports first published in June 2002 (Q2 2002), which were eventually expanded to include cable modems and other technologies from Q2 2003. Whereas the previous report covered some 75 countries, this edition covered 87. This indicates global availability of broadband and its universal appeal as an ICT service.

The country ranking in Figure 1 shows that the four biggest
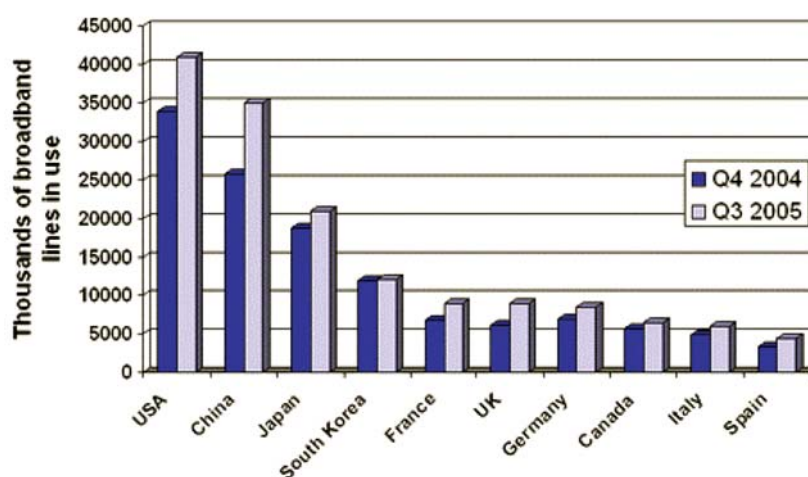
Top ten broadband countries
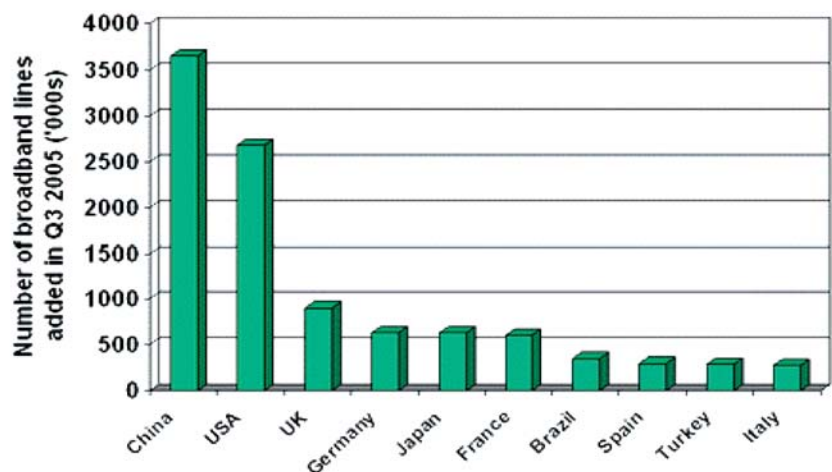
countries have held their places in Q305. The USA remains the largest broadband market with over 40.9m lines. China comes in second place reaching 35.0m lines and Japan is third with 20.9m lines. South Korea is some way behind with just over 12.0 m lines, but is now being gained on by the bigger Western European countries - France, UK and Germany, which have all passed 8m lines.

Whilst in Q2 2005 France with 8.3m lines was still clearly ahead of the UK (8m lines) and Germany (7.9m lines), the UK has now almost caught up with France as Europe's biggest broadband nation, only 70,000 broadband accesses behind. The UK added nearly 2.8m lines since 31 Dec 2004 and has grown significantly faster than both France and Germany during 2005.

Figure 2 shows the number of lines added in Q3 2005. China added 3.6m - somewhat more than the USA, which added 2.7m lines. The UK having added 1.9m lines in Q1 and Q2, has added an additional 0.9m lines. Three representatives of the G7 follow it: Germany (0.63m), Japan (0.63m) and France (0.60m).

Top ten countries by number of lines added

Source: World Broadband Statistics: Q3 2005, December 2005, Point Topic Ltd, London.

An exhibition of latest
e-Solutions, services and corporate firms
combined with technical sessions for
policy makers, practitioners, academicians
and industry leaders to showcase the
best practices in

digital LEARNING
Asia 2006

www.digitalLEARNING.in

We invite stakeholders from NGOs, governments,
private sectors, donors and development agencies
to join this forum and exhibition for taking stock
of Asian Telecentre movement, the issues of
sustainability and capacity and showcasing best
models to

Asian
Telecentre
Forum 2006

www.asiantelecentreforum.net

April 26 - 28, 2006, Rama Gardens Hotel and Resort Bangkok, Thailand