

Panel on Information and Communication Technologies for Development

Statement by Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, PR on December 13, 2000

Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to compliment you on organising this important panel discussion. We have carefully heard the opening statements of all participants and those made from the floor, and thank them for their presentations. All of us have witnessed the epochal and transforming electronics and information technology revolution and its impact on society, particularly in the last decade. For the first time in our history, we are witnessing the growth of a technology that has the potential for assisting in bridging the gap between haves and have nots. Information Technology in its fully convergent form, encompassing various modes of information delivery, such as printed media, radio and television, computer and internet, into one integrated environment provides an unique opportunity to touch the lives of everyone, overcoming earlier divisions. We believe that India's capabilities in the field of Information Technology provide not only an opportunity to participate vigorously and effectively in a globalising world, but also to use it as a major vehicle for all round socio-economic development of the country. ICT is no immediate panacea for all developmental problems; the real challenge lies in its potential and impact on the broader developmental goals. To ensure that benefits of an IT based knowledge economy reach the people, we, in India, have adopted a two fold strategy: on the one hand, the Government has taken a number of steps to ensure that the Indian IT industry grows at a fast pace in consonance with international trends, & on the other, we intend to take all possible measures to ensure that the benefits of this technology are meaningfully felt by the common people, even in the remotest parts of the country. We see ICT as a potent tool for achieving social progress. It is our strong belief that Information Technology to be successful must be pro-people and pro-development, which can happen only if it reaches out to the masses in rural areas and if its use in local languages is promoted. We have set for ourselves the target of 'IT for All by 2008' whose centre-piece is a major national campaign 'Operation Knowledge' focussing on universalising IT and IT based education at all levels of the education pyramid.

2. A Working Group on Information Technology for the Masses has also been recently constituted with the objective of formulating a set of policy initiatives to be implemented not only by the Government, but by industry and entrepreneurs, for widespread application of IT in all possible areas within the shortest possible time. In the true spirit of transparency which guides democracies; we have requested, through the Internet (<http://itformasses.nic.in> email: itformasses@nic.in), suggestions not only from Indian citizens, but from anyone who has an interest in this subject. We look forward to constructive contributions from all - governments, private sector, entrepreneurs, civil society organizations and individuals, in India and abroad.

3. For India, the increasing spread of information technology represents a major opportunity to overcome historical disabilities and disempowerment, to compress the time required to reach the various goals of comprehensive development. To give only a few examples:

t Information Technology industry in India has achieved phenomenal growth in recent years. The domestic software market has expanded from around \$490 million in 1995-96 to \$1.7 billion last year. Software exports have also increased considerably from US\$734 million to US\$ 4 billion over the same period.

t In the past one and a half years, Indian software companies have achieved significant stock market capitalisation. In January 1999, the market capital of Indian software industry on Indian stock exchange was US\$ 4 billion. Within one year, it peaked to US\$ 95 billion in February 2000.

t Apart from traditional onsite software development, Indian companies are also venturing into e-commerce and IT-enabled services such as Call Centres, Medical Transcription, Data Digitisation, Legal Data bases, Revenue Accounting, Data Processing, Back Office Operations, Web content development, Animation etc.

t Indian electronics industry is one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy, having achieved a combined annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 25% in production and over 40% in exports during the period 1994-1998.

t Software exports have recorded a CAGR of over 60% during the last five years.

t More than 500 portals are being launched every month.

t Model of e-commerce in India has already shifted from 'eye balls' to 'sticky balls' and is now converting to the revenue model.

t The turnover of IT industry in India in 1999 was valued at over US\$ 8.5 billion including software and hardware, both exports and domestic consumption and training and human resource development.

t Out of 23 global software companies that have the highest SEI CMM Level 5 certification for quality control, as many as 15 are Indian companies.

t India is already operating one of the largest telecom networks in Asia with over 123,000 kilometers of optic fibre network and over 24 million lines.

t India has been liberalising IT and IT related services. Private operators are functioning as internet service providers; domestic long distance calls are already open for private participation and opening up of international telephone services has been brought forward to 2002.

t Notification of IT Act 2000 last month is a major step in bringing India at par with leading countries in IT sector. With this, internet documents would be acceptable in Indian courts as evidence and cyber-crime will be a punishable offence.

4. To bring in greater transparency in government functioning, e-governance has been introduced in many government departments. It is clearly a method which empowers

citizens to act for themselves. We believe that e-governance adds value in at least three ways:

t It provides better quality service in terms of response time, accuracy and usefulness.

t It provides widespread access to services through the Internet.

t It lowers transaction costs by avoiding the duplication of infrastructure.

5. Some Indian state governments have already taken a plunge into E-governance through initiatives such as:

t The State Government of Andhra Pradesh (AP) Government has been proactive and made E-governance a priority for the benefit of citizens. The AP government has adopted the CIO programme to build leadership among the different departments to lead E-governance. Under this programme, people with skills and ability to understand processes, select technology and take techno-commercial decisions lead E-governance in their departments.

t Another initiative by the AP government has been to set up a Wide Area Network (APSWAN) connecting the state secretariat and all district headquarters and sub divisions, complete with video conferencing. Other states such as Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Gujarat are also taking similar steps towards E-governance.

t Many other Indian States including Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Delhi, U.P. and Himachal Pradesh too are taking steps to establish some level of E-governance in their territories.

t Most States have separate and comprehensive IT policies and a game plan to take Government services to citizens.

t The Gujarat Government has implemented a driving license issuance programme to reduce the time taken for making available a license to aspirants. Gujarat has emerged as the first State to provide driving licenses on a smart card.

t Issuance of passport and other similar documents has already been fully computerised and applicants can check the status of their applications through the Internet. Similar facilities also exist for railway reservations and the like.

Mr. President,

6. In brief, we visualise ICT as creating resources for development through trade and exports, but also as an enabler of development within the country itself through improved services and their delivery. We propose to continue on this task and would be happy to share our experiences with others, as indeed we have been doing through our Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme, and also, to benefit from the knowledge that others may have gained in different situations. The United Nations, and its General

Assembly led by you, obviously has a major role to play in promoting this mutually beneficial cooperation and sharing.