

Sikitex 2010- IT Exhibition & Conference
Chintan Bhawan
October 7, 2010
Speech delivered by Hon'ble Chief Minister

Speaker, Sikkim Legislative Assembly, Shri KT Gyaltzen, cabinet colleagues, Members of Parliament, MLAs, senior officials from Ministry of Information Technology, NIC officials, officials from other States, distinguished guests representing IT giants including IBM, Sify and ILFS, members of Press, ladies and gentlemen

Narayana Murthy of the Infosys fame recounted how in the early 1980s, he had to literally make 25 visits spread over 18 months to the bureaucracy in New Delhi to import one computer! Now the scenario has changed completely with Infosys and all other information technology companies which have made India a front runner in software exports.

With liberalization of the early 1990s and the simultaneous abolition of licence-permit raj, India has earned fame and distinction excelling in the IT sector. Computer Software in India is the miracle sector growing at 40 per cent annually for a decade earning \$ 8 billion in exports last year. By all account and global submission, India's knowledge power and knowledge industry is ever expanding providing jobs to lakhs of young people. The demographic dividend is playing out very well in this sector for our country.

I am happy to join this distinguished gathering of IT professionals of the Country who have made their high mark in IT applications worldwide. I also welcome distinguished guests from other States and officials from central Ministries to deliberate on how best we could harness the IT tools for the welfare of the people at large. India is a vast Country and the responsibility of providing access to IT benefits to all sections of population is a big challenge. The big question we have to answer is how far we are successful to bridge the digital divide in this country. This gathering and all Seminars and Workshops that will take place later will define our benchmark of where we stand in terms of access and affordability to use this facility. You are aware that India has also embarked on a ambitious project of bringing Universal Identity to all citizens. This project is being headed by another great stalwart of the IT industry, Mr. Nandan Nilenkani. Universal financial inclusion will ensure that much of the benefits can flow directly to the poor.

Sikkim is a State nestled in the Himalayas, 7096 sq kilometers in size and with a population of over 6 lacs. We are amply blessed by its natural diversity in physical features, natural wealth and socio-cultural features. Sikkim is one of the 18 biodiversity hotspots in the World. With altitudes ranging from almost sea level to 28,156 ft Sikkim has alpine landscapes, luxuriant forest, water bodies and tranquil lakes. Sikkim is a veritable island of peace and mutual brotherhood.

With this background of immense natural wealth and socio-political stability, the State Government has been working hard to promote sustainable growth and development in every sphere of human activities. Working on a range of development priorities during the last one and half decade, we have been able to introduce large number of socio-economic measures raising the living standard of people to a new high.

In every front, Sikkim has witnessed over 3 fold increases over and above the pre-1994 scenario. We have worked out a long-term Mission in the State to make Sikkim poverty free and total literate state by 2015. We are also focusing in making Sikkim a completely Organic State, self reliant, healthy, a producer state, a Green State, an eco-tourism destination, complete decentralization and devolution with the year 2015 as the target year.

While we deliberate on the IT revolution, it is necessary to determine how best we can pitch in information technology tools to quickly fulfill the Missions spelt out by the Sikkim Government which also form part of the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations. In the context of Sikkim and from the Sikkimese point of view, I look at IT boom as an effective enabler to empower people in terms of quick delivery of human services and easy access to information and world knowledge.

I am happy to state that the State Government begun works a decade back to firmly modernize our development approach by providing emerging expertise to our people and also making our delivery system more effective through use of IT tools. We started working in various areas like strengthening our data base, land record and extensively used it in our day to day functioning of State administration.

Next, we seek to derive rich dividend out of this modern tools in our decentralization and devolution program both with regard to administrative and financial powers to the Panchayats. Village level planning based on the principle of bottoms-up approach to the entire planning process in the State has been introduced.

In order to enable us to implement our policies in a meaningful manner we formulated two milestone documents, namely Sikkim- The People's Vision and Human Development Report. These important documents have identified various thrust areas that can bring about eco-friendly sustainable development using a judicious mix of traditional ethos and modern technology including information technology.

We are aware that Information technology can play an important role in reducing the carbon foot print. We are focussing on e-governance and putting an increasing number of public services like payment of electricity bills on-line including many other services like posting of government circulars. Online media, e-Commerce, e-Paper, telecommuting replacing face-to-face meetings - could play a substantial role in reducing emissions.

Information Technology identified as one of the major areas that we feel can come up as vibrant service sector in the state, like eco-tourism which is already the mainstay of the economy of the state.

The Government of Sikkim is acquiring over 800 acres of land close to the upcoming Airport for a township at Pakyong. One of the thrust programs in this township is going to be creation of Information technology hub. Information Technology specially the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO) sector has immense potential to become a source of income generation for the local entrepreneurs.

Sikkim has a considerable number of English speaking population, neat and clean with salubrious climate and absence of labour problems. These are all the right ingredients for development of the BPO and KPO industries in Sikkim. Sikkimese have an inborn talent for art and this can be leveraged to produce animation films based on local folklores.

I understand that the central government is equally keen to wire up the entire northeast and remote border regions with telecom, wimax and broadband connectivity and unleash an IT revolution in the region. Proposed investment under the domain of universal service obligation fund will go a long way to meet the demands of rural connectivity in the northeast. However, until we are able to provide a robust and fault tolerant set of piping, bringing in the connectivity and the bandwidth, the dreams that I talked about will stand unfulfilled. It is, therefore, imperative that the deliberation is not about just what to do but how to do it within a stipulated timeframe.

We had the privilege of welcoming the Union Minister of State, Information Technology, Shri Sachin Pilot earlier and discussed with him range of related issues like separate BSNL Telecom circle for Sikkim, alternative Telecommunication Links, improvement of bandwidth and providing subsidies to call centre industry, introduction of 3G technology and IT Park.

Information Technology can become a prime mover in economic activity in the state. However, some major issues that we still face and which dampens our potential are large gap in terms of IT infrastructure requirement and land availability. Crucial among them are lack of Internet Pipeline for and to Sikkim. In the absence of reliable and steady flow of internet services, we are greatly handicapped to undertake many of the ambitious IT projects in the State. Such and some other serious impediments should be urgently addressed to fully exploit the potential available worldwide.

I suggest that this workshop and others can deliberate on the number of other players besides BSNL who can help in bringing the connectivity. I understand that organisations like Power Grid Corporation of India also provide this kind of infrastructure. Similarly our power department could also explore means of providing the last mile connectivity via their towers which has reached every village of our State. We have to think innovatively to be able to face the challenges posed by our mountains and sparse population. Satellite based technology is increasingly becoming reliable and cheap. We need to see if that is also another candidate for consideration.

I am sure that the large convergence of IT professionals and enthusiasts during the next two days here will be able to thrash out many of the crucial issues we face in this region and the country at large. We have young educated people best suited to take IT related ventures in the State. I am sure the two-day Workshop will provide an effective window for all of them to chart out a new path and a new destination for themselves.

Winston Churchill once very aptly said, “The Empire of the future is going to be the Empire of the mind”. That means building of the mind is what matters, honing of the mind and the mind power would, for sure, determine the future economic and political contours of the world that we together share and experience.

I once again welcome all our guests and congratulate the organizer here for this important Workshop. I also wish the 2-day workshop a grand success.

Thank you