

Speech of Hon'ble Minister/IT during inaugural function of SIKITEX

The Government of Sikkim has placed Information Technology high on its agenda. The Government aims at empowering citizens through e-governance and making Sikkim a favourite IT destination. It is facilitating income and employment generation in the private sector. Information Technology tools are being used to bring about efficiency in administration. Through various capacity building and training programmes, Sikkim is well poised to become a totally computer literate state in another five years. We also aim to use Information Technology to make the physically challenged gainfully employed.

To meet the objectives various initiatives have been taken like the establishment of 45 Community Information Centres now Common Service Centres in the state. Citizen centric websites have been hosted. Land Records and VAT in the state is on-line. Many other areas are also in the process of being computerized by the NIC and the State Government. The State Wide Area Network in the State is fully functional. The DPRs for 12 Departments have been submitted to Ministry of Information Technology for funding. We are also well poised to establish our State Data Centre the Request for .Over the last 9 years we have provided a wide spectrum of computer training to 15000 citizens including Government officials and unemployed youth. The political leadership in the state is also being sensitized on how e-governance can benefit the citizens. Last year, I had the honour of leading a group of 16 Ministers and MLAs from Sikkim for a two day Orientation Programme on E-governance organized by the National Institute for Smart Government at the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad. These initiatives have not gone un-recognised. We were ranked first amongst the North Eastern States in the E-readiness Report of the Government of India. We also bagged the prestigious SKOCH Challenger Award for the best use of IT. And recently we had the distinction of being conferred the Bharat Nirman Award in E-Governance by the India Today Group that was received by our HCM at a ceremony presided over by the Hon'ble Union Finance Minister, Shri Pranab Mukherji.

We have formulated for ourselves our roadmap for the next ten years. The highlight of this plan is to make Sikkim a Completely knowledge based society, issuing smart cards to each and every citizen on the state, making internet available to every household and making all transactions in the state cashless. In the administration a total paperless environment would prevail. All natural and manmade features would be mapped through GIS. The rich biodiversity and the old heritage records in monasteries would be inventoried. Sikkim has the advantage of high literacy, absence of labour problem, a population that speaks good English and a pleasant climate. These attributes would be leverage for setting up of BPO and Animation Centres. We have established a full fledged institute of Capacity Building. A policy titled CM – Youth Empowerment Scheme was unveiled last year and aims at empowering the Youth so that they become employable. It also addresses the issue of generating employment locally in various sectors which includes Information Technology. We are mootng a proposal making it compulsory for all candidates applying for Government jobs to be computer literate. They should have a Basic Computer Concept Course certificate to make them eligible applying for any government job. This would ensure that they can make full use of Information Technology in the day to day work if they are recruited for a government job. It would go a long way in improving administrative efficiency.

A full fledged DOEACC centre under the Ministry of IT, government of India is being established here at Gangtok for which inauguration is going to take place tomorrow. The DOEACC centre would besides running courses of its own provide for certification of its BCCC, O'level and A'level courses that would be run by other computer institutes.

The internet notwithstanding its benefits, has also exposed Government data and information to hackers and virus attacks. In order to ensure that the Government computer systems and IT infrastructure is not compromised, we are constituting a cyber task force that would inspect all computers in the state Government organizations for vulnerability. This cyber task force would consist of highly professionals trained in aspects like ethical hacking.

As HRDD Minister, I am quite alive to the benefits ICT can bring about in revolutionizing the teaching methods. E-Learning, Tele-education and use of audio-visuals can make learning educative, interesting and fulfilling experience. I feel that the role of teacher is going to undergo a decided change to that of a mentor with most of the teaching material being taught through electronic means.

As a first step in this direction we have taken a decision to make all the teachers computer literate. A training programme aimed at computer familiarization has begun through the Common Service Centres of the Department of IT that are located all across the state. So far approximately 500 teachers have been trained over the last 3 months.

With rapid modernization taking place in the state, there is an immense demand for new technologies both in the Government as well as the private sector. There is also a need to network the local entrepreneurs with big IT companies so that they can set up investments in the state. The two day IT exhibition SIKITEX will surely address these issues.

I hope that the exhibitors, delegates and visitors will find participating in this event meaningful and beneficial. This is the second successive year we have organized SIKITEX and we intend to organise the event every year so that we start figuring prominently in the IT map of the country. This would also give us an opportunity to develop long term relationship between the Government, local industry and big IT companies.