Occasionally we get chiding admonishments that our editorials have an irritating proclivity to highlight only negative trends. Good point! We stand corrected. As a publication which strives to generate ideas, share experiences and create learning forums, Public Eye needs to imbibe every sinew of its’ being with positive and optimistic energy. Let’s do it!

What better starting point than welcoming Y2K. Despite a small-scale global hysteria, we have survived and the doomsday soothsayers have packed up their wares. Some unfortunately don’t give up that easily, like the failed Ugandan prophet Mr. Joseph Kibwitere who led hundreds in to a man-made inferno - just to prove a point. However, set to dominate the millennial landscape (and cyberscape!!) for some time for sure is the letter ‘e’. This innocuous alphabet is today a prefix for almost anything one could think off: e-commerce, e-publishing, e-governance...

What is of particular interest to us is the increasing applications of information technology in matters of the State. The short report on a study of IT applications in governance we published in the previous issue of Public Eye elicited considerable responses and enquiries. In this issue we take a closer look at the emerging landscape of IT applications in governance in India (p.2). State of the art is certainly transforming in to the Art of the State. However, the real challenge lies in the parallel metamorphosis of archaic rules and structures in to a transparent and citizen friendly set.

The coming decades will witness an interesting clash between forces of globalisation and affirmative local actions. As the world shrinks in to that ideal state of a global village, interesting and innovative local applications are getting highlighted. We take a look at one such initiative (p.4) that provokes some retrospection. Think local, Act local, Learn global. Closer home, in a rare show of good intentions translating to real action, the Karnataka Government has set up a broad based Task Force (p.6) to resurrect the falling image of Bangalore. Long since pampered by the sobriquet -Silicon Valley of the East, Bangalore is fast losing its’ USP. And in this era of easy cross border investments, inaction amounts to committing hara-kiri. And to top Bangalore’s over flowing cup of woes, a new contender has come up for the title of India’s cybersicity - Hyderabad. This in short is the backdrop for setting up the task force. Did somebody say competition is a dirty word?

End note: What is the most effective way to clean up our cities? Invite President Clinton! Unbelievable but true. Right from Dhaka to Hyderabad, the cities fortunate enough to have attracted the attention of the President transformed themselves overnight. Scrubbed clean, given a fresh coat of paint, made litter free and free of hawkers and beggars. No wonder a quick wit was heard to remark “Guess who is coming? Bill Clean-town”. So much for good tidings!

Gopakumar

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THEME ESSAY

E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: THE EMERGING ARCHITECTURE

Broadly defined as the use of Information Technology (IT) for efficient delivery of government services to the public, business and industry, e-governance is today being increasingly used as a synonym for an information technology-driven system of governance that works better, costs less and is capable of servicing people's needs.


But what does the concept mean in the Indian context? "The objective of e-governance in India goes beyond mere computerisation of government offices. It means fundamentally changing the way the government operates and implies a new set of responsibilities for civil servants, business and the public. Plans such as online services will give the average citizen access to government services, with faster response at convenient hours. These services include providing information, collecting taxes, granting licenses, administering regulations and paying grants and benefits." And going by the declaration made at the conclusion of the national conference on e-governance held recently at Bangalore, the approach to governance has to shift from 'government-centric' to 'citizen-centric'. The use of IT must facilitate efficient delivery of government services to citizens and business. Even among citizens, the facilities have to be extended not just to the literate and the well-to-do, but also to ordinary people, who need information about, say, housing schemes and grants available.

THE PRESENT-FUTURE: EXAMPLES OF E-GOVERNANCE

On the brighter side, the time frames to implement e-governance are short. The entire network can be in place in 2 years, and it is not terribly expensive. It would, for example, cost Rs. 150-200 crore to inter-connect all large towns in a state like Karnataka. This may be one of the reasons why the central government and many state governments look eager to embrace the e-revolution.

- Karnataka has the distinction of having the first legislator in the country to have a web site of his own - Mr. UR Sabhappathi, the MLA from Udupi)

- An ambitious $100 million project to take the Internet to the villages through a network of community Internet centres is poised to take off in Tamil Nadu.

- KisanNet, an Internet based application to present information on farmer markets on the net is currently being piloted in 90 farmer markets in the state of Andhra Pradesh. KisanNet, developed by Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is aimed at streamlining the distribution channels of agricultural produce by eliminating the role of exploitative middlemen.

However, the following obstacles still remain.

As already said, introduction of IT in administration is aimed at fundamentally changing the way the State operates. As Dr Chandra Sekhar, Director, C-DAC, emphasises: "Governments have to overhaul the physical system of the administration and rethink the strategy and the whole philosophy behind administration. They have to learn to digitise documents quickly and effectively to make information will be easily accessible". Such radical designs are enough to alarm the status-quoist bureaucracy and strengthen its negative mindset about reforms.

Examples of this attitude are evident everywhere. Take Orissa. Even as one sees a renewed thrust on attracting IT enterprises there, a Bhubaneshwar-based Web developer and ISP AIOLL complains that after the government invited them to start operations in Orissa a few years back, "nobody bothered to check how we have been operating".

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Similarly, in Delhi, the initiative of Parivartan, an NGO, to act as a bridge between the Income Tax department and the 13 lakh income tax assessees of Delhi by facilitating a hearing of their complaints related to tax refund through its website has run into controversy. Although Parivartan maintains that the Chief Commissioner has promised it his full support, the IT officer has his reservations about the billboard campaign run by Parivartan to advertise its effort, which he looks at as the NGO’s attempt to gain mileage out of the project.

If such is the government’s attitude towards the private/non-governmental sectors, then its e-governance efforts, which will inevitably depend upon the latter’s participation and assistance, might suffer.

To be completely effective, e-governance needs to have a strong infrastructure. Network and Web connectivity in India are poor. According to a study by Goldman Sachs Investment Research, the number of Internet users in India is only 0.5 million. In a population of 1 billion people, this figure means an Internet penetration of just 0.05 per cent. Besides, India totally lacks Internet Access Nodes (IANs). According to the Action Taken Report of the Ministry of IT, the DoT (Department of Telecommunications) would be able to set up only 5 IANs by March 30, 2000 as against a National IT Task Force target of 327 recommended for completion before January 26, 2000. Though to make up for this delay, the DoT will levy only local call charges in the remaining 322 telecom districts, this could at best be an interim measure besides leading to a revenue loss.

India can, however, make up for these shortages by virtue of its pool of skilled people and know-how in the field. DoT has good fibre optic cables that can be used for electronic transmission initially, while we continue to look for alternatives simultaneously.

Cheap models of computers need to be built and made widely available, may be even to schools and colleges, so that the computers can reach every section of the society. Without this, e-governance will not work. Half the components that are offered in computers today are not needed by the average customer. If we can make a computer without frills—one that costs between Rs 5,000-10,000 and has only word processing, a modem that provides access to the network and the ability to calculate along with the option of using it in an Indian language—the demand will be in millions and the State governments will have the answer to the present predicament. This way, even that other formidable obstacle to e-governance—computer illiteracy—can be overcome to a great extent.

There is the issue of disparity between the rural and urban Indian in terms of awareness of (a) his/her right to information, in general, and Net access, in particular and (b) utility of computers. The problem is not just one of inadequate computer access, but one of the common man not even knowing that he is denied this access.

Two brilliant exceptions to this have, however, been seen in Dhar (Madhya Pradesh) and Wamanagar (Maharashtra).

In what must be a shock to them, middlemen and petty bureaucrats are finding themselves sidelined as people in Dhar, with surprising ease, have begun dealing directly with the government online, whether it is to check out prices in other mandis before selling their crop, so as to avoid getting cheated by the local trader, or to get land records in order to raise bank loans, a process that earlier involved running around the tehsil office and paying bribes. Special medical advice and referral services are also available at the click of a mouse.

Wamanagar in southern Maharashtra’s sugar belt is India’s first wired village, one of the 70 in this area learning to reap the benefits of e-connectivity. This village was where the Rs.5 crore pilot project was started by the Centre in August, 1998. The e-mail facility has meant a world of good for the local people. For the farmers, it is now possible to (a) contact local government officials without travelling all the way to their offices, (b) buy fertilisers or harvesting machines through an arrangement with the local bank for instant money transfers and (c) find buyers for their assets, e.g. cattle, by putting their details on e-mail. This helps them concentrate on farming. The dairy farmers have benefited too. With e-mail, there is no cheating or milk wastage. The minute the owner is ready to sell, he sends a mail and the van is sent. The response of the 80,000 members of two sugar and milk co-operatives has been so enthusiastic that they are ready to even pay for the free service.

Once the villager learns that at the push of a button, he can access court documents, ration quotas, licenses, poll lists and land records, and pay bills, he
will get emboldened by this de-monomisation of information and elimination of middlemen and corruption and demand access, just as common folk in Waranagari are doing.

This will have two consequences. Firstly, with the mounting of public pressure, the government will have to take steps to make information readily available and make a success of e-governance. Secondly, an attitudinal change due to the new-found user-friendliness of the government systems would lead to their more frequent use and an increase in demand for the products and services of the IT companies who were the first to make these ‘social investments’ in IT, which in turn will attract more players in the field and give both the government and the users greater choice.

REFERENCES
1. The Financial Express, Bangalore, Friday, December 17, 1999
2. Sanjoy Das Gupta, Secretary, IT, Government of Karnataka.
4. In India, the state has so far played only a marginal role in fostering computer literacy, leaving the field open to the private sector. However, now, in recognition of the need to spread computer literacy across the country, the idea of smart schools has been mooted.
6. India Today, p.82, January 10, 2000
   - Prasann Thatte, PAC


Public Affairs Centre in association with Transparency International (Bangladesh) organised a three day Workshop for civil society organisations in Bangladesh on the potency of using Report Cards as local accountability strengthening mechanisms. The Workshop drew participation from 27 participants. The programme was supported by Actionaid, Bangladesh.

BUILDING BETTER MUNICIPALITIES
A SUCCESS STORY FROM VENEZUELA

The following is an account of a World Bank Institute (WBI) Programme which successfully adopted an innovative and participatory civil society - local government institutional framework to generate a set of desired outcomes at the local level.

The municipality of Campo Elias (Venezuela) has an area of 572 sq. km. Out of the 120,000 residents, the urban population comprises 89 percent and the remaining 11 percent is rural; almost 40% of the population is estimated to be living in poverty. In the past, corruption had adversely affected both the provision and maintenance of services and the quality of life in Campo Elias. A survey conducted in July 1998 by the World Bank Institute (WBI) showed that the administrative and regulatory framework that existed previously in Campo Elias generated confusion and was inaccessible to the general population. Due to unpredictable procedures and the duplication of functions, there were no accountable or transparent institutionalised methods for the provision of public services.

The intervention under discussion —which was implemented in April of 1998 and was completed in December of 1999—was designed to help encourage an efficient, accessible, and transparent municipal government in Campo Elias and required the joint efforts of WBI, the municipal government, and civil society in order to approach these goals.

STRATEGISING FOR ACTION
As a first step a diagnostic study was conducted in order to identify problematic areas throughout
Campo Elias. Using this study and the training received by the local government from WBI during workshops, the mayor, her staff, and civil society worked in participatory working groups to prioritise areas for reform and develop a detailed action plan for governmental reform. The working groups, comprising of members from civil society and the state, identified and confirmed the existence of critical problem areas to be addressed such as the lack of information and accountability in public policy making and the overly complex regulatory framework. This was an exciting initiative because, in essence, the citizens of Campo Elias developed the entire action plan, making them an integral part of the program and giving them a major incentive to implement reform—they were indeed true stakeholders.

An action plan was then put in place. The action plan included technical assistance from the Bank to enhance accountability, transparency, cost-effectiveness, and credibility in the delivery of services. In order to achieve these standards, the following instruments were implemented: (i) simplification of administrative procedures, including the implementation of procedural manuals (ii) Neighbourhood Public Audiences (iii) Public Budget Municipal Session (iv) Public Accountability Committee (v) Communal Control and Fiscalization Committee (vi) Local Public Management Plan (vii) Trilateral Neighbourhood Commission (viii) Trilateral Municipal Commission (ix) Diagnostic Workshop (x) Public Contracts Commission (xi) Office of Development and Citizen Participation procedures. The diagnostic study concluded that one of the main factors affecting corruption was the complexity and unpredictability of such procedures because inefficient procedures create confusion and breed corruption. Therefore, the action plan, with the Bank’s technical assistance, developed several tools to simplify administrative procedures for obtaining construction, tax, and industrial/commercial permits. Two particular tools included administrative manuals and a computerised data system. Several manuals to simplify, rationalise, and standardise administrative procedures were drafted. The manuals assisted in improving co-ordination among offices, avoiding duplication of duties, and eliminating the use of unjustified administrative discretion, thus speeding the permit process. All administrative data was integrated into a computerised data system which also includes tax registers and estimates. Ordinances aimed at institutionalising mechanisms for guaranteeing a role for citizen participation were also implemented as a direct result of the Bank technical assistance.

MEASURING THE IMPACT

In order to assess the impact of these policies, surveys of citizens and businesses, representing at least 5 percent of all users demanding specific services subject to performance monitoring, were conducted in 1998 and 1999. These users were stratified based on gender, wealth, region, and education. At the same time, a representative sampling of those services demanded by those same users was conducted during the same period in order to evaluate objective measures of municipal productivity and cost-effectiveness.

From the Table of Impact Indicators it is quite evident that the perception in all monitored areas of government performance have improved significantly between 1998 and 1999. For instance, the number of people who perceived deficient channels of information towards the public have

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Lack of information</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>81.23</td>
<td>74.19</td>
<td>38.88</td>
<td>77.54</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>94.25</td>
<td>79.33</td>
<td>16.07</td>
<td>84.04</td>
<td>13.0</td>
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(xii) Citizen Participation Municipal Ordinance  
(xiii) Municipal Ordinance for the Office of Citizen Participation  
(xiv) Corruption Control website  
(xv) Free Access to Local Government Information.

DESIGNING INNOVATIVE TOOLS

One of the remarkable measures implemented by the municipality was to simplify the administrative
decreased to 4.3 percent from 9.6 percent of those surveyed. Perceived effectiveness of government services increased from 81.23 percent to 94.25 percent of users while the public perception of efficiency increased from 74.19 percent to 79.33 percent of those interviewed. Perception of corruption decreased from 38.88 percent in 1998 to 16.07 percent of the public interviewed for our survey in 1999.

The experience in Campo Elias demonstrates the powerful and beneficial effects of an innovative mix of local political will, instilling the technical capacity to execute reforms, and a strong partnership with civil society in the drive to enhance efficiency, equity, and transparency. The rest of the municipalities are learning from this experiences and now the tools used in Campo Elias are being tried out in more than 400 other municipalities.

(For further information contact: Maria Gonzalez de Asis, Public Sector Specialist, World Bank Institute. Email: Mgonzalezasis@worldbank.org)

**SPECIAL FEATURE**

**BANGALORE AGENDA TASK FORCE
A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION**

The battle royalé is on. At stake is the enviable title of India’s ‘cyber-city’. The gladiators are no light weights either. On one side is Bangalore, host to IT initiatives which have virtually authored the incredible saga of an Indian Diaspora in to the cyber-millionaire club. On the other side is Hyderabad the dark horse jockeyed by a dynamic Chief Minister who at present is the toast of the International community. Though Bangalore is still touted as Silicon Valley of India despite the emergence of Hyderabad, concerns of the Garden city losing its silicon sheen are increasingly being voiced. The government has done precious little to develop infrastructure to sustain the city’s growth and its hard earned ‘brand-equity’. The challenges facing the governance of city are overwhelming – deteriorating infrastructure, insufficient resources, pollution, corruption and general laxity in administration, cash-strapped civic agencies, general apathy and lack of civic and many more...

The erosion of people’s faith in the civic administration has attracted the attention of Chief Minister of State, Mr. S.M. Krishna. As an indication of the government’s seriousness in addressing the city’s problems, the Stat Government has created a momentum for the improvement of city by embracing the 14-letter word – INFRASTRUCTURE as its mantra and has started actively mooting partnerships between Government-Corporate-Community groups to reinforce the city’s USP.

In a unique and ambitious experiment of its kind in the country, the Government of Karnataka (GOK) constituted Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) to make Bangalore the finest/best city in India by 2004 A.D by upgrading information systems; enhancing internal capacities of civic agencies by introducing efficient revenue generation model, fund based accounting system to expand resource base; creating an accountable system of monitoring public projects and an administrative framework that is responsive, efficient and pro-active by stimulating corporate and industry involvement.

BATF (comprising of eminent personalities and professionals) headed by software tycoon Mr. Nandan Nilekani, Managing Director, Infosys was created by the Chief Minister in November 1999 to provide intellectual and technological support. Dr. Samuel Paul, Chairman, PAC is also in the Task Force. The Bangalore Summit, titled Bangalore Forward, organised by the BATF on January 24 2000, kick started the process.

The one-day summit, the first ever mega event in connection with the city’s development saw the
coming together of politicians, representatives of local Government, CEOs of public service delivery agencies and eminent citizens.

In the first phase, the immediate focus is on city projects. Some of the short term plans of these agencies for the city which are to be completed and reviewed by June 2000 are: development of 300 km of road surface of decent standards and free of potholes; completion of 100 roads under the municipal bonds scheme; developing civic assets; simplifying property tax collection procedures; introduction of house level garbage clearance in at least 25 percent of city area; night clearance in commercial areas; plugging of major sewerage leaks; providing telephone on demand in 12 more exchanges and facilitating Internet services; refurbishing existing power distribution lines; introduction of police patrols and reorganisation of beat system; completion of new bus depot and replacement of old buses.

The long term plans expected to be completed by 2004 are: Planning & implementation infrastructure improvements with flyovers, public market complexes & multistoried parking lots; systems for slum development, waste management; quality education in municipal schools; daily water supply in most BCC areas; expansion of sewage treatment plants; development of ring roads, introduction of digital network to subscribers' premises; provide zero-defect power system by strengthening transmission and distribution network; improved safety and security using international standard equipment for prevention and detection of crime; traffic decongestion with better staffing and traffic signals.

The above targets were based on people's priorities as per the results of a survey commissioned by BATF covering 1258 respondents belonging to different strata of society. Priorities as listed by respondents were better roads, good garbage removal system, pollution control, public toilets, proper sewage lines, power transmission management and ban on alcohol outlets in residential areas in that order. The survey also revealed remarkable response from the residents in Bangalore as most of them are not only willing to cooperate in improving civic amenities but also willing to make 'sacrifices' in their own capacity. Six percent of interviewees were willing to donate money for city development, 14 percent were ready to pay additional charges for civic amenities and others were willing to be 'good citizens'.

Corporates, Industrialists, Developers, Private sector companies like Volvo Consortium, Exodus Communications, Infosys, BPL, ABB, Prestige Group, Brigade Group of developers, Coca Cola, Aditi Technologies, Biocon, also were interested in participating in this ambitious venture and together contributed Rs. 3 million to meet the diverse needs of the city.

Amid scepticism's & cynicism about the seemingly unattainable targets set at the Summit, believing in the four A's - Action, Accountability, Audit and Activism, BATF & Civic agencies are working to effectively address the citizen concerns by first addressing the issue of crippling financial position of these civic bodies. The process had already began in BCC's case. A thorough overhauling and streamlining of Property Tax system is underway. The present developments in the city have many FIRSTS to it -

The preliminary proceedings for the launch of the first ever comprehensive slum development plans estimated to cost around Rs. 1 million, in keeping with the announcements made during the BATF summit was initiated by the BCC. For the first time in the history of BCC, property tax collection exceeded the targets fixed for last financial year! For the first time, in a marked departure from the normal practice, BCC presented its budget for 2000-01 well before the start of financial year and introduced the concept of performance budgeting in order to increase revenue generation and plug revenue leakage. And self-assessment scheme of property tax was also introduced making Bangalore one of the first metropolises to introduce such a scheme. BDA has also successfully fulfilled one of its short term target by allotting land sites to about 1500 applicants across the city- this is the first time in many years that the BDA has allotted such a large number of sites!

Bangalore never had it so good. Hopefully, it will carry on...

Smita Bidarkar, PAC
CAUGHT IN THE NET!

THE AMAZING CRUSADE OF A NET-SAVVY WATCHDOG

Here is a case of technology coming to the aid of fighting corruption. That too in the terrain of the hitherto unshakeable Indian bureaucracy. The Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC) N. Vittal has posted on the CVC website (http://cvc.nic.in) the names of 85 Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers, 22 Indian Police Service (IPS) officers and three Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officials against whom the commission had sought criminal and/or departmental proceedings for major penalties.

Vittal-Mantra...

"I believe in the principle of RAMA. R stands for rejection and ridicule. A for annoyance. M for mellowing and A for acceptance. My website decision was subjected to ridicule and annoyance...But after six weeks, I see some mellowing down of anger and eventually it will lead to wider acceptability and achieve its purpose"

- Mr. N. Vittal, Chief Vigilance Commissioner

Source: India Today, March 6,

The Central Vigilance Commissioner, who is of the rank of Chairman, Union Public Service Commission, heads the CVC. The jurisdiction of the Central Vigilance Commission extends to all Central Government Departments, Central Government Companies including nationalised Banks and Central Government Organisations. The CVC is not controlled by any Ministry/Department. It is an independent body which is only responsible for the Parliament.

CYBER CHAT

INTERNET AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

"Community Internet access is a means to an end......the end being the community revitalisation and local economic development."

The Internet is growing at the rate of 30 per cent per annum in number of users, and 100 per cent per annum in hosts on Internet. It is expected that by the end of the year 2000, the user base will touch 200 million. Internet access has matured beyond the basic email services of the early 1990s to full fledged world-wide access.

The Internet is a two-way communications and publishing medium. Computer mediated communication can offer much to community development. It allows people to communicate as a group, regardless of time or place and it gives people access to an enormous amount of information, entertainment and opportunities for personal development.

The following sections discuss two important means of using Internet for community development.
Community Networks

Provision of appropriate content.

Community Networks. A community network is a very important tool to leverage the power of Internet for community development. Community networks have the ability to harness the technology of information retrieval, providing information when it is most needed. Before computers took center stage, the term “community network” was a sociological concept that described the rich web of communications and relationships in a community. New computer-based “community networks” are a recent innovation that are intended to help revitalise, strengthen, and expand existing people-based community networks much in the same way that previous civic innovations (like public libraries) have helped communities historically.

They are also known as Civic Networks, Free Nets, Computer Computing Centres or Public Access Networks. Some key goals of these community networks include:

- Building community awareness
- Encouraging involvement in local decision making
- Developing economic opportunities in disadvantaged communities
- Provision of communication services which will be of interest to the local neighbourhood and probably not provided elsewhere.

Some of the means to achieve the above goals could be:

- Community Forum Page – a place for discussion of local issues using a discussion board.
- Community Bill Board Page – listing of all events in the neighbourhood.
- Community Assistance Page – a do it yourself contact point for community skill sharing and co-operatives.
- Community Advertising Page – for buying and selling items.
- Community News Electronic Magazine – news articles submitted from, or otherwise relevant to the community.

- Community Market Place – listing local business and the services they provide.
- Provision of community information such as local history, facts about demographics, geography etc. of the neighbourhood.
- Provision of links to other relevant web sites.

In most cases these services require very little ongoing labour inputs as they can be set up through simple applications such as e-mail, web based Intranets, bulletin board services etc. Some of the existing Internet providers may render such services for an additional fee. This kind of service would be similar to local T.V cable channels being provided by cable operators in addition to national and international channels.

Community networks are distinguished by their focus on local issues. They are frequently involved in placing computer equipment in publicly accessible places such as community centres and libraries, government offices and mall kiosks etc. These networks are operating under the belief that the system with its communication and information can strengthen and vitalise existing communities.

Use of community networks requires one to own a computer or travel to a library or other institution that makes computers available to the public. One of the earliest community networks, the Santa Monica Public Access Network, established kiosks that allowed even the homeless of Santa Monica to have e-mail addresses. This access had some great benefits for Santa Monica. It improved communication between the homeless and other residents of the city, allowed those who had been voiceless to articulate their needs and led to the creation of some innovative city services for the homeless.

Provision of Appropriate Content. Developing nations are far behind the more advanced economies not just in number of ISPs, hosts connected to the web, number of users, number of connections etc. This imbalance also extends to content in terms of number of web sites in developing countries, amount of local language content and use of online content by key sectors. Concerted efforts must be launched to ensure that content development is driven by real needs, extending the Internet as a tool in solving local problems.
For the purpose of assessing content coverage eight key sets of categories for online content can be looked at:

- **News and general information** – most English language newspapers and magazines in India have an online presence. These traditional media groups also face stiff competition from web only publications such as rediff.com. News content is also available in aggregated form on newly emerging portals such as Satyam online.com, 123India.com etc.

- **Public health** – Internet can be used effectively for public health information and disaster relief operations. Some organisations have used the web to raise relief funds during the recent Orissa cyclone, but much more can be done in this regard.

- **Education and Research** – In India, Internet diffusion in schools, colleges and universities has not yet reached adequate levels. Very few academic journals are published online and access to research oriented content is limited.

- **Government Resources** – Some Indian government agencies are actively publishing reference information online, notably National Informatics Centre (NIC). A number of state governments have announced local Internet initiatives ranging from online trade and investment services to high tech corridors conducive to foreign investments. There is a scope to provide information and services related to land records, taxes, citizen information and application for certificates.

- **Non governmental resources** – National NGOs have a modest online presence. There is a scope for NGOs to network better amongst themselves and make their presence felt through web and also to attract more international funding.

- **Local language content** – there is a huge content gap in local language publishing though a few regional language newspapers, individually published literature and academic work is available online.

- **Rural initiatives** – some state governments are discussing projects for the launch of public access Internet community centres with World Tel. Kerala and Karnataka have unveiled IT policies which lay stress on taking information technologies right down to the villages.

- **Business content** – it will profoundly transform inter organisational commerce, retail and government procurement sectors world-wide. Indian retailers like Shoppers Stop (www.shoppersstop.com) use IT to cut costs, improve market responsiveness and manage customer royalty programmes.

In conclusion it can be said that IT revolution represents an opportunity for the disadvantaged communities and developing countries. The opportunity will become a reality only if communities become the masters of the new information environment.

**Rati M. Bhatt, PAC**

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**Biblio**

**Child Labour in India. Lakshmidhar Mishra. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000. Rs. 495**

This book by the Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Labour, provides a comprehensive macro perspective on the nature and scale of the issue of child labour in India. Apart from national scenarios the author also discusses global trends and explores the potency of proactive responses like Public Interest Litigation.


Drawing upon many years of research in three continents, this work provides a stimulating discussion on the comparative history of the environment movement in India.


This book provides an interesting case study of Delhi by highlighting the qualitative dimensions of water supply and evaluating the consequences of unreliable supply on household’s behaviour and estimating their costs.
New Release

MONITORING THE QUALITY OF ROAD WORKS
A CITIZEN'S GUIDE

Public Affairs Centre in association with Department of Science and Technology has published this guide for monitoring the quality of road works. The guide is an attempt to demystify the task of monitoring the quality of road works.

The guide describes some of the standard procedures and specifications as may be provided for in the contractual/tender documents. Only those methods of routine maintenance, resurfacing and overlaying of road pavements, which are most commonly being practiced in this region have been covered and the coverage is itself however, not comprehensive, but critical nevertheless.

The specifications stated in the guide are based on those given by Ministry of Surface Transport (MOST) and relevant specifications and code of practices of Indian Roads Congress (IRC). The extent to which they are followed and implemented by state PWDs and local governments like Municipalities and Panchayats is a matter which merits wide spread public debate. This is precisely what the manual aims to achieve in the longer run.

Information listed in the guide relating to pothole repair, siting and maintaining drains and countless other matters concerning road conditions can be applied by any person who is concerned about the condition of public works and is willing to make civic authorities perform their jobs properly.

- Price: Rs. 50.00 + postage for Community Based Organisations / Citizen Groups
- Rs. 100 + postage for others
- US $ 50 for sale abroad (inclusive of postage)

For ordering copies write to:
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Internet mail: pacindia@vsnl.com

WEB SIGHTINGS

http://www.mit.gov.in
Ministry of Information Technology, Government of India aims at bringing the benefits of electronics to every walk of life in India and developing the Indian Electronics Industry as a major global player. The site offers list of publications, electronics associations, investment policies and more...

http://www.gksoft.com
Comprehensive database of governmental institutions on the World Wide Web: parliaments, ministries, offices, law courts, embassies, city councils, public broadcasting corporations, central banks, multi governmental institutions etc. Also includes political parties. The site contains more than 14,000 entries from more than 220 countries and territories as of January 2000.

http://www.govnetworks.com
America's e-governance portal! Its mission is to help shape and enable transformational change in governance through the introduction, use and management of Internet technologies in government, democracy, politics, campaigns, elections and citizenship.

http://www.icg.ibm.com
An IBM Center for Electronic Communities is a leadership resource in strategy, policy and development of online services in government, education and healthcare.

http://www.ezgov.com
Online government services page providing immediate access to all government services that are currently available online. ezgov.com partners with government agencies and content providers to bring government to the netizen in a secure, intuitive environment. By harnessing the power of Internet ezgov.com is e-volutionizing government!
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