

IT to speed up road projects

Our Special Correspondent
NEW DELHI, May 22

CHIEF engineers of State and Central Government departments and officials of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) have mooted a proposal for using information technology for effective monitoring of on-going projects on roads and bridges in the country.

According to an official communique here, the proposal which was thrown up during a recent meeting in Aizawl, envisages that valuable information for planning and policy making will be available which will help in taking timely remedial action wherever necessary.

It has been often felt that non-availability of information related to various aspects of pro-

jects in time resulted in serious bottlenecks. The meeting has underscored the urgent need to bridge the information gap.

To achieve this objective, it has been suggested that in the first phase, computerisation of offices of PWD and highway research stations should be taken up, including development and implementation of software to monitor road and bridge works and road inventory systems.

In the second phase, all the systems at state levels may be networked using NIC network (NICNET) — the computer communication network of the Government. The required software is being prepared by the NIC cell attached to the roads wing of the Surface Transport ministry.

Library networks provide access to books worldwide

By ASHA RAMACHANDRAN

New Delhi, May 29: Suppose you want to refer to a book which is difficult to get. You waste time, energy and your peace of mind trudging from one reference library to another.

Now those woes are over, thanks to the network of libraries connected electronically, which offers a variety of facilities.

The advantage, say librarians and scientists, is instant global access to information.

With the development of a computer network, it is now possible to access any of the

libraries, in a city, country or even abroad, go through the catalogue and read the book or journal and download the relevant reference material.

A boon to academicians and scholars, the network allows them to access directly from home or office.

For a nominal fee and strict password control, a student can be linked to his own university and can also access other university libraries. He can also surf on internet to obtain any information needed.

In India, says Mr H.K. Kaul of Delnet, though the need was felt for networking

libraries in the '80s itself, it still remains at an early stage.

Promoted by the National Informatics Centre, Delnet right now only offers a catalogue of books, periodicals and articles on various subjects as well databases on specialists in different fields.

Through this network, in which over 71 member libraries have pooled in their database resources, one can not only locate the requisite information but also place orders, says Mr Kaul.

However, the facility is limited only to libraries. Individuals are not yet members,

he says adding that efforts are on to extend the facility to them.

In India, says Mr Kaul, national libraries have books on a variety of subjects. However, so far, they are not modernised and there is need to create a national catalogue so that one can at least find out what books are available even if one cannot access the information. Prof. T. Vishwanathan, director, Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre said at a recent seminar organised by the American Centre Library, that India has a large treasure of libraries — there are 65,000 across the country. (PTI)

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Computerisation: teething problems in Secretariat

HYDERABAD, May 27.

The issues raised by the Secretariat employees about computerisation, following the death of a Section Officer in the Finance Department, having been sorted out, there is now a demand that the pace should be slowed down so that senior employees, accustomed to writing on files, get adjusted to the new method of entering data into a "file monitoring system" on a computer.

The system installed in the Secretariat, supplied and maintained by the National Informatics Centre, has turned out to be rather slow, because it employs FOXBASE languages, while there is need for shifting to a faster system such as ORACLE.

The Government has asked the NIC to install six servers in the six buildings in the Secretariat, with a "mirroring" facility, so that even if one fails, the departments can still operate with the other servers.

Enquiries show that Mallikarjuna Rao, the Section Officer who died last Friday following a heart attack, had entered data pertaining to 69 files into the "file monitoring system" and had only 35 files pending with him for less than three months, which is considered to be a good record.

The Section Officers do not enter data directly into the computer, they dictate details to a staff member who enters the data. On March 25, the Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, addressed a meeting at which the need to improve the pace of computerisation was stressed, and on April 11, the first review meeting took place in the Finance Department to see that the data pertaining to every file received is entered, so that its progress can be monitored.

There are 55 sections in the Finance department, of which files pertaining to 45 were required to be computerised. On Wednesday last, Ms. Sujata Rao, Finance Secretary, was informed that data pertaining to 11 sections were not entered, and she asked her private secretary to find out what was happening. The private

secretary asked these 11 Section Officers to explain "in writing" why the task was not done.

Enquiries show that Ms. Sujata Rao did not issue any memo to the Section Officer, and Mallikarjuna Rao reported that he entered the data by Wednesday evening itself, thus completing his task.

The agitation by Secretariat employees could be defused easily after this fact was brought to their notice. Ms. Sujata Rao visited Mallikarjuna Rao's residence on Saturday, consoled the widow and the children, and suggested that the Government should aid the family because one educated son was unemployed and two daughters were young.

Last year, the Chief Minister's office was computerised at a cost of Rs 1 crore while Rs 4 crores was allotted for computerisation of movement of files in the departments.

This year, the Government is spending Rs 6 crores on the computer system. Mr. R. Chandrasekhar, IAS, who is now the Managing Director of Infrastructure Development Corporation, has been made Secretary, Department of Information Technology, to develop the "info-structure".

At present, the Chief Minister's office can monitor the movement of a particular file in any department in the Secretariat, but the additional computer systems can enable it to access files in the Heads of Departments offices in Hyderabad. It, however, may take a year or more for the Chief Minister's office to monitor files in the District Collectorates, which is the ultimate aim.

The agitation by the Secretariat employees shows that the computerisation system still has teething problems to surmount. For one thing, the system itself requires to be upgraded and made faster, and for another, the employees entertain apprehensions about superior officers hauling them for mistakes which they make because most of them are not computer literate and a genuine mistake can be misconstrued as a deliberate attempt to conceal information.

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INDIA

THE SUNDAY TIMES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI, MAY 4, 1997

dialogue is Balraj Puri

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“sense of participation.”
As to the progress on the task entrusted, Mr Puri said that he has been meeting people, receiving memoranda, inviting representatives of ethnic communities to spell out cultural problems and studying different models on the issue of autonomy in the country. The problem, as he sees it, is that “various groups are asserting their identity and are seeking their

Transparency will run on NICNET

Business Times Bureau

NEW DELHI: The “facilitation counters” to be set up at government offices to provide information to the public will have access to a computerised database maintained by the ministry concerned and will be linked through NICNET to offices at various levels. Accordingly, the ministries have been asked to identify all the offices with a public interface, streamline internal procedures and undertake computerisation. In the first phase to be comple-

ted by June 30, the ministries and departments located in Sanchar Bhavan, Shastri Bhavan, Krishi Bhavan, Udyog Bhavan, Nirman Bhavan, Rail Bhavan and North Block have been asked to set up such counters. Simultaneously, the Union department of consumer affairs and public distribution is arranging to set up citizen information centres in all state capitals. To be operated by voluntary agencies, these centres will be allowed to access information from the databases avail-

able in various local offices of central government agencies. Shortly before the Congress withdrew support to the HD D Gowda government, the Prime Minister and finance minister had addressed a meeting of secretaries of economic ministries and delivered sermons on transparency and responsiveness. Administrative reforms exercise continued even as the Deve Gowda government was struggling for its survival.

INTERNATIONAL

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