

BV Selvaraj

eGov @

Lakshadweep

When one talks about Lakshadweep, what immediately comes to mind is a beautiful place, blessed by nature. However, if given a chance to work there, few would be willing. I should be humble in claiming that for me working there as administrator has been a privilege, and along with my team and people, we are trying to make Lakshadweep not only better known than Maldives, but significantly accessible, and a sought after place for all. In this respect, the locals have taught us a lot in terms of what should be given preference and how their economic situation and livelihood can be improved. I am going to narrate some stories of our efforts in the light of how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been used to leverage developmental work, and how many such efforts are of national relevance.

Lakshadweep is the only coral archipelago of our country. However, visiting Lakshadweep is not easy. It is an inter line territory a restricted area where entry permit is required. This is keeping in view the ecology of the area and the interests of the tribals, as Lakshadweep is a tribal area. A Web enabled Entry Permit Management System has been introduced for this purpose, which has led to a large number of tourists getting attracted to Lakshadweep. So the virtual means have made ways to real life linkages.

Shipping is the lifeline of the people here. Therefore, the introduction of complete digitization of the ticketing system and advance reservation system in shipping has brought considerable relief to the people. Owing to its geographical isolation and remoteness, transportation is a major issue.

I might feel proud in claiming that Lakshadweep is the third most literate place in India, but in terms of computer literacy, it is not upto the mark. There is hardly any industrial activity other than copra, tuna fisheries and tourism. Government continues to be the biggest employer. Sadly, unemployment is soaring.

Therefore, a large population has registered itself at the employment exchange. Fortunately, Lakshadweep has accomplished total digitalization of employment services, perhaps first of its kind in the country, which is proving effective in dealing with the unemployment problem. In fact, last year we were recognized by Manthan Award for this initiative as one of the best e-governance application in the country. Incidentally, Lakshadweep is a predominantly Muslim state. What is encouraging for us is that Muslim women have shown great enthusiasm in learning computers hoping to be a part of the digital employment exchange.

Another sector where the Union Territory has progressed well is electricity. Electricity is generated through diesel generator sets and you can well imagine how expensive this must be, and how difficult must it would be to transport diesel all the way through ships to the various remote islands. However, I can say with satisfaction that we have been able to handle the situation very well. Also, we have trusted our people with meter reading. Under the system, self reading of meters and self preparation of the electricity bill is done. Checking and counter checking of the meters takes place after three or six months, as the case may be. This project also brought us recognition from the Computer Society of India. The CSI-Nihilent Award 2007 has been conferred upon our Electricity department, as one of the best E-governance departments of the country.

Health they say is wealth, and it might not be a cake walk to achieve high level primary and secondary medical facilities in a place like Lakshadweep. But, I would like to inform that we have tried to improve the standard by making use of e-alerts. The facility has consciously been named e-Ever-Alert, we are trying to tackle the problem of availability of medicines, life saving drugs and equipments at government hospitals with this facility. Even in an island like Bitra with 250 people, this particular system has helped in improving the situation. The e-Ever-Alert software is keeping the health department really alert.

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ICT has justified its worth by improving healthcare in the Union Territory with initiatives like telemedicine. Courtesy ISRO, Lakshadweep has telemedicine facilities in five of its Islands. It has been decided that this facility will be extended in each inhabited island. Consultation will be possible

freely with various ISRO - sponsored health hubs, which are 42 in number. Talks are on with AIIMS, Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences and Christian Medical College for this purpose.

Lakshwadeep on the path of development

I would like to briefly explain some of the schemes we have undertaken to put Lakshadweep on the path of development. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is a central flagship Scheme that aims at providing supplementary nutrition for children, adolescent girls, pregnant & lactating mothers, non-formal pre-school education to children, immunization, health check ups, referral services, self employment programme for women and adolescent girls under Swayamsidha.

At present, there are 87 Anganwadi Centres, functioning in all the ten inhabited islands. All these Anganwadi Centres have been designed to become Community Information Centres (CIC) for the disadvantaged women, children and adolescent girls. The centres have been provided computers with internet facility so that Anganwadi workers can utilise ICT tools in all their activities thereby bringing computer education to vulnerable women, adolescent girls, school dropouts & pre-school children. These centres will be used to institutionalize participation of ethnic Scheduled Tribe communities at the grassroots level.

Through universalized State Wide Area Network (USWAN), we proposed to establish effective connectivity backbone that will provide a platform for e-governance and other IT enabled services. This will also ensure a communication channel with high bandwidth and high uptime required for effective public services and for disaster management in these islands which have a very high risk of natural disasters.

The connectivity proposed is through the BSNL network via satellite medium. The existing BSNL infrastructure at each island is being upgraded. At Kavaratti, it is proposed to have a 16 Mbps dedicated pipe through satellite medium which will terminate at the administration's Secretariat, which will be further distributed to all the departments under UT administration either by leased line or by DSL connection. Similarly, 2 Mbps dedicated pipe has been proposed at each of the nine Islands terminating at Revenue Sub Divisional Office in each island and further distributed to all departments of UT administration, banks, post offices etc by either leased line or DSL connection. The satellite medium which provides both high-speed data and video conferencing services has been proposed for all the ten Islands.

Besides, the Lakshadweep State Data Centre (LSDC) will act as a mediator and convergence point between open unsecured public domain and sensitive government environment. It will enable various departments to host their services/applications on a common infrastructure leading to ease of integration and efficient management, ensuring that computing resources and the support connectivity infrastructure (U-SWAN) is adequately and optimally used. The LSDC will be equipped to host / co-locate systems (e.g. Web Servers, Application Servers, Database Servers, Anti Virus Server and Server Area Network etc.) with firewall, L2 and L3 switches to use the centralized computing power. LSDC will have high availability, centralized authenticating system to authenticate the users to access their respective systems depending on the authentication matrix.

State Data Centre (SDC) has been identified as one of the important elements of the core infrastructure under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). It is proposed to create State Data Centre for States to consolidate services, applications and infrastructure to provide efficient electronic delivery of G2G, G2C and G2B services. These services can be rendered by the administration through common delivery platform seamlessly supported by core Connectivity Infrastructure such as U-SWAN and Common Service Centre (CSC) connectivity proposed to be extended up to island level. State Data Centre would provide many functionalities and some of the key functionalities are Central Repository of the State, Secure Data Storage, Online Delivery of Services, Citizen Information/Services Portal, State Intranet Portal, Disaster Recovery, Remote Management.

“The greatest form of Brain drain in India is the drain of brains from rural to urban India” said Mahatma Gandhi, when the computer was hardly understood by many. It remains true to this day. If we are able to bridge the digital divide, we would be in a position to create a true knowledge society or knowledge economy. Without ICT a society can never become a knowledge economy. Unless we rope in all the citizens the 'last mile' would never be traveled. I would be needing help of all of you to make this happen with us and I would be more than happy and privileged to work with you to make our serene Lakshadweep a neighborhood next door to all of you, at least digitally.

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