

Bridging the digital divide

E-EDGE At the digital literacy conclave organised by *Hindustan Times* & Intel, experts brainstormed over how the common man can leverage technology for daily use



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NEW DELHI: What would you expect a student in the hinterlands to do with a computer replete with broadband connection? Well, what they actually do is listen to music, watch movies and play games.

And, when it comes to conducting a simple computing task such as checking exam results on the net or uploading resumes for job postings, they reach out to a digitally literate *bhaiya* or *didi* in the locality.

Vijay Kumar and Sunita, such a *bhaiya* and *didi* respectively, offered these and more valuable insights at the conclave "Digital Literacy — Keeping India ahead in the Information Age" jointly organised by *Hindustan Times* and Intel here on Wednesday.

The panelists at the conclave included Sachin Pilot, minister of state, communications and IT, Debjani Ghosh, MD, Intel South Asia, Sanjay Kapoor, CEO, Airtel India and South Asia, Rajendra Pawar, chairman and co-founder, NIIT Group, and Osama Manzar, founder and director, Digital Empowerment Foundation.

In fact, Vijay and Sunita set the tone of the conclave, where, for the next couple of hours, the panelists debated and discussed issues that need to be ironed out if India is to become digitally literate in both letter and spirit.

Moderated by Gautam Chikermane, executive editor-Business, *Hindustan Times*, the panel discussion focused on issues and solutions beyond the obvious. The panelists brainstormed over how an individual should leverage a 'connected device' such as a computer, smartphone or tablet to access information on education, healthcare services, land records and so on.

Discussions also focused on India's cultural diversity and how internet penetration is behind other emerging economies such as Brazil and China.

NOT REALLY NETWORKED?

e 120 mn

No. of Indians connected to Internet. This is expected to hit 222 mn by 2015

Despite the IT boom, India is lagging the world in per-capita Internet penetration, in proportion to its population.

INDIA 10.2%

CHINA 38.4%

BRAZIL 42.2%

UNITED STATES 78.3%



From left to right: Rajendra S Pawar, co-founder and chairman, NIIT Group; Debjani Ghosh, MD, sales and marketing, Intel South Asia; Gautam Chikermane, executive editor-Business, *Hindustan Times*; Sachin Pilot, minister of state, communications and information technology; Sanjay Kapoor, CEO, Airtel, India & South Asia; and Osama Manzar, founder and director, Digital Empowerment Foundation at the Digital Literacy Conclave in New Delhi on Wednesday. PHOTO: M ZHAZO/HT

Sachin Pilot

Minister of state, communications & IT

'ONE IN EACH FAMILY TO BE E-LITERATE'

SACHIN PILOT underlined the importance of English-led digital access wherein an individual needs to be well versed with English first so that he can make sense of the digital world.

He pointed out that there are cultural challenges to our digital growth, as multiple languages make it difficult for the government to reach out to all netizens with common content.

"We are dismantling barriers by creating the right ecosystem that will help increase digital literacy rates in India. We want to create an India where at least one individual in every family is digitally literate," he said.

He added that the government remains committed to connecting every village in India with a fibre optic network.

Debjani Ghosh

MD, sales & marketing, Intel South Asia

'EMPOWERMENT AT THE GRASSROOTS'

DEBJANI GHOSH made a case for generating awareness around the ways in which an individual can connect through any device to the Internet.

"In today's day and age, merely being in possession of a device such as a mobile or a laptop is not important, rather the awareness of how to leverage the device to access the Internet is more important," she said.

"For our grass root citizens to know what they can do with technology is important," she added.

"The government, on its part, is making efforts to lay down optic fibres across the country and it should be a shared responsibility to empower people at the grassroots level to drive personal growth," she said.

Rajendra S Pawar

Co-founder & chairman, NIIT Group

'SWITCHING ON SELF-CONFIDENCE'

RAJENDRA PAWAR elaborated how India is at a tipping point where connectivity is becoming all pervasive. He pointed out that over the three decades of its existence, NIIT had touched as many as 33 million lives.

"Digital literacy means different things to different people. An economically challenged individual sees his life being radically transformed through the use of a 'connected' device. The very thought of being digitally literate 'switches on' the individual's self confidence," he said.

Pawar stressed the need for all leaders in the IT industry to 'make things happen'. At the same time, he emphasized that it was equally important that the majority of Indians, the 'last leg', must 'let IT happen'.

Sanjay Kapoor

CEO, Airtel, India and South Asia

'YOUTH TO POWER OUR DIGITAL DRIVE'

SANJAY KAPOOR said an entire plethora of home delivery jobs have been created due to rapidly rising mobile phone penetration in the country.

"Mobiles have hitherto been used for voice but with proliferation of internet-enabled smartphones there will be a stupendous increase in data-related traffic." The data related traffic will increase by 1,000 times in the coming months, he said.

He also spoke of the Indian edge, stating that we have the advantage of a large youthful population that is raring to try out new technology.

"We have financial, educational and entertainment services that are under-resourced. We can use digital technology to bridge the resource gap."

Osama Manzar

Founder, Digital Empowerment Foundation

'CHANGE CULTURE TO BREAK BARRIERS'

OSAMA MANZAR said that digital literacy is a cultural challenge and India must do the right things to break these barriers.

"Digital literacy requires transparency, interactivity and promptness and being digital means speed. But India is so feudalistic that even a reply to an e-mail by an elected representative takes ages. This needs to change," he stressed.

"Elected representatives do not have dedicated websites for their constituencies," he said. "Around 14 million schools and 70% of small and medium enterprises do not have any websites. We must take steps to ensure at least functional digital literacy. A first step would be to target institutions and elected representatives so that it percolates."

ILLITERACY TO E-LITERACY



The Digital Literacy Pledge, and the signatories.

PHOTO: M ZHAZO/HT

Intel has initiated a **Digital Literacy campaign** with the intent of spreading public awareness and building up the desire for digital literacy. The partners in the campaign include DELL, HP, Lenovo, NASSCOM, NIIT and Microsoft. More partners are expected to join from the government, the industry, and the NGO space.

A **Digital Literacy Week** will be conducted by year-end,

wherein Intel has committed to participate. *Hindustan Times* will be the media partner for the Digital Literacy Week.

A special purpose vehicle named **Bharat Broadband Network Ltd** has been created that will lay down fibre network to connect 250,000 gram panchayats. As a pilot project, around 500,000 km of fibre network will be laid in Tripura, Vizag and Ajmer.