**E-governance in India**

*The Indian government is using IT to facilitate governance. The IT industry is doing its bit to help as public-private partnerships become the order of the day.*

**The last couple of years have seen e-governance drop roots in India. IT enables the delivery of government services as it caters to a large base of people across different segments and geographical locations. The effective use of IT services in government administration can greatly enhance existing efficiencies, drive down communication costs, and increase transparency in the functioning of various departments. It also gives citizens easy access to tangible benefits, be it through simple applications such as online form filling, bill sourcing and payments, or complex applications like distance education and tele-medicine.

According to Sudhir Narang, vice-president, government & service provider business, Cisco Systems, India & SAARC, "Almost every state has an IT policy in place with the aim of evolving itself from being an IT-aware to an IT-enabled government. State governments are fast recognising the benefits of an IT-enabled working environment."

As of now, e-governance projects are being run only in certain departments. This approach will gradually be extended to all departments eventually, leveraging the power of IT to streamline administrative functions and increase transparency. IT has a vital role to play in all transactions that the government undertakes. It helps the government avoid corruption, and reach citizens directly. Such initiatives will help citizens learn about the various policies, processes and help-lines that the government offers. The governments of Singapore, Canada and Switzerland have implemented such portals, and set the benchmarks in this regard. With the help of IT, the government can process citizen to government transactions such as the filing of tax returns, death and birth registration, land records, etc.

Adds Rajiv Kaul, managing director, Microsoft India, "A strong technology infrastructure can help central and state governments deliver a comprehensive set of services to citizens." Microsoft is working with several state governments to help evolve a long-term technology blueprint for IT infrastructure. It is working with various departments of the central government, and has undertaken several projects and initiatives with state governments as well. As far as e-governance projects are concerned, the government is gradually changing its role from an 'implementer' to a 'facilitator and regulator.' It will encourage private sector participation in e-governance projects, so more projects in e-governance based upon the public private participation (PPP) model should come about in the near future. The National e-Governance Plan of Indian Government seeks to lay the foundation and provide the impetus for long-term growth of e-Governance within the country. The plan seeks to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms, set up the core infrastructure and policies and implement a number of Mission Mode Projects at the center, state and integrated service levels to create a citizen-centric and business-centric environment for governance.

Agriculture, power and education are fields where the government makes use of IT to provide services to citizens. The revenue collection department is in the process of using information technology for applications such as income tax. Some notable examples:

* A Kolkata-based hospital leverages e-governance for tropical medicine. The hospital employs tele-medicine to assist doctors in rural areas as they analyse and treat panchayat residents. This method does away with patients having to travel all the way to Kolkata for treatment. Patients feel better being examined in their own village. Using tele-medicine, the hospital is able to dispense its expertise to far-flung districts. The patient goes for an examination to the local doctor in the panchayat. This doctor is in contact via a voice & data connection with a doctor at the hospital for tropical medicine. Thus, the panchayat resident gets the benefit of being treated by both a local doctor and a hospital specialist.
* The Karnataka government’s ‘Bhoomi’ project has led to the computerisation of the centuries-old system of handwritten rural land records. Through it, the revenue department has done away with the corruption-ridden system that involved bribing village accountants to procure land records; records of right, tenancy and cultivation certificates (RTCs). The project is expected to benefit seventy lakh villagers in 30,000 villages.

A farmer can walk into the nearest taluka office and ask for a computer printout of his land record certificate for Rs 15. He can also check details of land records on a touch-screen kiosk by inserting a two-rupee coin. These kiosks, installed at the taluk office, will provide the public with a convenient interface to the land records centre.

* In Gujarat there are websites where citizens log on and get access to the concerned government department on issues such as land, water and taxes.
* In Hyderabad, through e-Seva, citizens can view and pay bills for water, electricity and telephones, besides municipal taxes. They can also avail of birth / death registration certificates, passport applications, permits / licences, transport department services, reservations, Internet and B2C services, among other things.
* eChoupal, ITC's unique web-based initiative, offers farmers the information, products and services they need to enhance productivity, improve farm-gate price realisation, and cut transaction costs. Farmers can access the latest local and global information on weather, scientific farming practices, as well as market prices at the village itself through this web portal-all in Hindi. eChoupal also facilitates the supply of high quality farm inputs as well as the purchase of commodities at the farm.

Given the literacy and infrastructure constraints at the village level, this model is designed to provide physical service support through a choupal sanchalak-himself a lead farmer-who acts as the interface between the system and the farmers. The contents of this site in their entirety are made available only to the registered sanchalaks.

**Government initiatives**

The national e-governance plan (2003-07) reflects the strategic intent of the central government in the right perspective. Many projects are earmarked under this plan, and it is trying to address the digital divide. From a political perspective, after watching the performance of some IT-savvy states in the recent elections, the system has woken up to the need to focus more on rural development. The political systems are keener to use IT to disseminate information faster to farmers, disburse loans, improve education and the health systems in villages, etc. There is a clear-cut incentive to do it as 60 percent of the vote-bank still lives in rural India. E-governance has to be supported by the will and resources of those who are in governance, be it at the central or state level. The central government has analysed and appreciated the concept by creating a separate e-governance department headed by a secretary to trigger e-governance in India. The World Bank, ADB and UN have been approached, and in response they are generously funding e-governance projects. In future, education, agriculture, state wide area networks (SWANs) and Community Information Centre projects will be rolled out backed by a strong public private participation model (PPP) to achieve long-term sustainability. Projects with PPP models in these segments can revolutionise the governance experience. In the next couple of years the industry is expected to grow by 22-25 percent. Most vendors foresee strong government initiatives to make the most of IT, and the future for e-governance looks bright. Besides deployment and training on e-governance applications, Cisco is working with various state governments.

**Use of electronic records and digital signatures in Government and its agencies.**

Where any law provides for-

* + the filing of any form. application or any other document with any office, authority, body or agency owned or controlled by the appropriate Government in a particular manner.
  + the issue or grant of any licence, permit, sanction or approval by whatever name called in a particular manner.
  + the receipt or payment of money in a particular manner.   
    then, notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, such requirement shall be deemed to have been satisfied if such filing, issue, grant, receipt or payment, as the case may be, is effected by means of such electronic form as may be prescribed by the appropriate Government.
* The appropriate Government may, for the purposes of sub-section (1), by rules, prescribe-
  + the manner and format in which such electronic records shall be filed, created or issued.
  + the manner or method of payment of any fee or charges for filing, creation or issue any electronic record

# State Wide Area Network (SWAN)

Wide Area Network is an advanced telecommunication infrastructure, which is used now-a-days extensively, for exchange of data and other types of information between two or more locations, separated by significant geographical distances. The medium of connectivity can be copper, optical fibre cable or wireless, as may be found feasible. Such wide area networks, in a way, create a highway for electronic transfer of information in the form of voice, video and data. Department of IT in Government of India is implementing an approved Scheme known as State Wide Area Network (SWAN) Scheme, envisaged to create such a connectivity in each State / UT, to bring speed, efficiency, reliability and accountability in overall system of Government-to-Government (G2G) functioning. When fully implemented, SWAN would work as a converged backbone network for voice, video and data communications across each State / UT. SWAN is designed to cater to the governance information and communication requirements of all the State / UT Departments. When fully implemented, SWANs across the country are expected to cover at least 50000 departmental offices through 1 million (10 lacs) route kilometres of communication links.

## State Wide Area Network Scheme

Department of IT obtained Government approval in March 2005, for the SWAN Scheme for an overall outlay of Rs. 3334 Crores. This outlay has a Grant In Aid component of Rs. 2005 Crores, to be expended by Department of IT in five years. The Scheme has a State / UT share of balance Rs.1329 crores, which has been provisioned by the Department of Expenditure, Govt. of India, under Additional Central Assistance (ACA). Under the SWAN Scheme, Wide Area Networks are being established in 27 States and 6 UTs across the country. The State of Goa and UT of Andaman & Nicobar Islands have implemented Wide Area Networks in the respective State / UT, outside the SWAN Scheme.

Implementation of the SWAN Scheme is in full swing in 33 States/ UTs and the Department of IT has so far approved an outlay of Rs. 1965 Crores of GIA for this purpose.

**SWAN Features**

A wide area network deployed in a State or UT would have two components viz.

* Vertical Component
* Horizontal Component

The vertical component of SWAN is implemented using multi-tier architecture (typically, three-tier) with the State/UT Headquarter (SHQ ) connected to the each District Head Quarter (DHQ) which in turn gets connected to the each Block Head Quarter (BHQ). Each SHQ, DHQ and BHQ point of connection is called a Point of Presence (PoP), which is a point of bandwidth aggregation for several network links getting connected at this point. The bandwidth provisioning for network connectivity between all the above PoPs is a minimum of 2 Mbps. Presently, the connectivity provisioning between every SHQ and DHQ is for 4 Mbps and DHQ to every BHQ is 2 Mbps. For the horizontal component, the government departments at each tier are connected to the respective PoPs.

The SWAN aims to create a dedicated Closed User Group (CUG) network of minimum speed of 2 Mbps by connecting around 7500 pops, providing Data, Voice & Video connectivity to more than 50,000 govt. offices. The networks aim at increasing the efficiency of the government delivery mechanism and optimizes the performance. The backbone thus created would provide reliable, vertical and horizontal connectivity within the State / UT administration and would facilitate electronic transactions between all the government departments.

# Common Services Centers

The CSC is a strategic cornerstone of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), as part of its commitment in the National Common Minimum Programme to introduce e-governance on a massive scale.

The CSCs would provide high quality and cost-effective video, voice and data content and services, in the areas of e-governance, education, health, telemedicine, entertainment as well as other private services. A highlight of the CSCs is that it will offer web-enabled e-governance services in rural areas, including application forms, certificates, and utility payments such as electricity, telephone and water bills.

**Online Services under National e-Governance Plan**

* [Income Tax](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#incometax)
* [Passport/VISA](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#passport)
* [Company Affairs](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#company)
* [Central Excise](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#central)
* [Pensions](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#pensions)
* [Land Records](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#land)
* [Road Transport](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#road)
* [Property Registration](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#property)
* [Agriculture](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#agriculture)
* [Municipalities](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#municipalities)
* [Gram Panchayats (Rural)](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#gram)
* [Police](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#police)
* [Employment Exchange](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#emp)
* [E-Courts](http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan_online.php#ecourts)

Im ports and exports - Even as the energy requirements of the Indian economy are rapidly increasing, capacity expansion of the refineries both at public and private level would help maintain the growth momentum of the exports of petroleum products.

SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY PARKS (STP) SCHEME

STP scheme is a 100% Export Oriented Scheme (100% EoU) for the development and export of computer software using data communication links or in the form of physical media including export of professional services. STP can be a virtual software development unit or can be infrastructural complex set-up for providing necessary support for the STP units.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Exports and Imports** |  | |
| spacer |
| Imports and exports are the two important components of a foreign trade. Foreign trade is the exchange of goods and services between the two countries, across their international borders. 'Imports' imply the physical movement of goods into a country from another country in a legal manner. It refers to the goods that are produced abroad by foreign producers and are used in the domestic economy to cater to the needs of the domestic consumers. Similarly, 'exports' imply the physical movement of goods out of a country in a legal manner. It refers to the goods that are produced domestically in a country and are used to cater to the needs of the consumers in foreign countries. Thus, the imports and exports have made the world a local market. The country which is purchasing the goods is known as the importing country and the country which is selling the goods is known as the exporting country. The traders involved in such transactions are importers and exporters respectively.  In India, exports and imports are regulated by the [**Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://indiacode.nic.in/rspaging.asp?tfnm=199222), which replaced the Imports and Exports(Control) Act, 1947, and gave the Government of India enormous powers to control it. The salient features of the Act are as follows:-   * It has empowered the Central Government to make provisions for development and regulation of foreign trade by facilitating imports into, and augmenting exports from India and for all matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. * The Central Government can prohibit, restrict and regulate exports and imports, in all or specified cases as well as subject them to exemptions. * It authorizes the Central Government to formulate and announce an [**Export and Import (EXIM) Policy**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://dgft.gov.in/exim/2000/pol/contents.htm) and also amend the same from time to time, by notification in the Official Gazette. * It provides for the appointment of a Director General of Foreign Trade by the Central Government for the purpose of the Act. He shall advise Central Government in formulating export and import policy and implementing the policy. |

* Under the Act, every importer and exporter must obtain a '[**Importer Exporter Code Number' (IEC)**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://dgftcom.nic.in/iecpage.php) from Director General of Foreign Trade or from the officer so authorised.
* The Director General or any other officer so authorised can suspend or cancel a licence issued for export or import of goods in accordance with the Act. But he does it after giving the licence holder a reasonable opportunity of being heard.
* As per the provisions of the Act , the Government of India formulates and announces an Export and Import policy (EXIM policy) and amends it from time to time. EXIM policy refers to the policy measures adopted by a country with reference to its exports and imports. Such a policy become particularly important in a country like India, where the import and export of items plays a crucial role not just in balancing budgetary targets, but also in the over all economic development of the country. The principal objectives of the policy are:-
  + To facilitate sustained growth in exports of the country so as to achieve larger percentage share in the global merchandise trade.
  + To provide domestic consumers with good quality goods and services at internationally competitive prices as well as creating a level playing field for the domestic producers.
  + To stimulate sustained economic growth by providing access to essential raw materials, intermediates, components, consumables and capital goods required for augmenting production and providing services.
  + To enhance the technological strength and efficiency of Indian agriculture, industry and services, thereby improving their competitiveness to meet the requirements of the global markets.
  + To generate new employment opportunities and to encourage the attainment of internationally accepted standards of quality.

Besides this Act, there are some other laws which control the export and import of goods. These include:-

* [**Tea Act,1953**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://indiacode.nic.in/rspaging.asp?tfnm=195329)
* [**Coffee Act, 1942**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://indiacode.nic.in/rspaging.asp?tfnm=194207)
* [**The Rubber Act, 1947**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://indiacode.nic.in/rspaging.asp?tfnm=194724)
* [**The Marine Products Export Development Authority Act, 1972**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://indiacode.nic.in/rspaging.asp?tfnm=197213)
* [**The Enemy Property Act, 1968**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://indiacode.nic.in/rspaging.asp?tfnm=196834)
* [**The Export (Quality Control and Inspection) Act, 1963**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://indiacode.nic.in/rspaging.asp?tfnm=196322)
* [**The Tobacco Board Act, 1975**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://indiacode.nic.in/rspaging.asp?tfnm=197504)
* At the central level, the [**Ministry of Commerce and Industry**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://commerce.nic.in/) is the most important organ concerned with the promotion and regulation of the foreign trade in India. The Ministry has an elaborate organizational set up to look after the various aspects of trade. Within the Ministry,the [**Department of Commerce**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://commerce.nic.in/) is responsible for formulating and implementing the foreign trade policy. The Department is also entrusted with responsibilities relating to multilateral and bilateral commercial relations, state trading, export promotion measures and development and regulation of certain export oriented industries and commodities.The matters relating to foreign trade are dealt with by the following [**divisions of the Department**](http://business.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://commerce.nic.in/setup.htm):-
* 1. Administrative and General Division  
  2. Finance Division  
  3. Economic Division  
  4. Trade Policy Division  
  5. Foreign Trade Territorial Division  
  6. Export Products Division  
  7. Export Industries Division  
  8. Export Services Division  
  9. Supply Division