

IT Act comes into effect today

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT 17. The Information Technology Act, providing legal sanctity to electronic commerce and prescribing punishment for hacking and other crimes such as cyber porn, will formally come into effect from tomorrow.

Implementation will begin after two months following completion of formalities.

"I signed the rules and guidelines to the IT Act today and the law will be operational from tomorrow," the Minister of Information Technology, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, said at the Economic Editors' Conference here. He also announced the appointment of a "Controller" to supervise operational details such as approving agencies authorised to validate digital signatures. Mr. K. N. Gupta, on extension as the C-DoT Executive Director, has been appointed the Controller.

Interestingly, C-DoT's role during Mr. Gupta's tenure has come under fire by the Comptroller and Auditor-General as well as some former employees.

Defending the approval of rules and guidelines two months behind schedule, Mr. Mahajan said, "It was not an easy job. This was a new sector in which we

had no experience.

Yet we have ensured that India is among the dozen digital nations that have provided the legal framework for e-commerce."

Another reason was the Government's desire to seek comments to the rules from the public.

The draft was posted on the

web and finalised after comments were received. The delay jettisoned Mr. Mahajan's plan to make Prime Minister the first person with a digital signature on August 15.

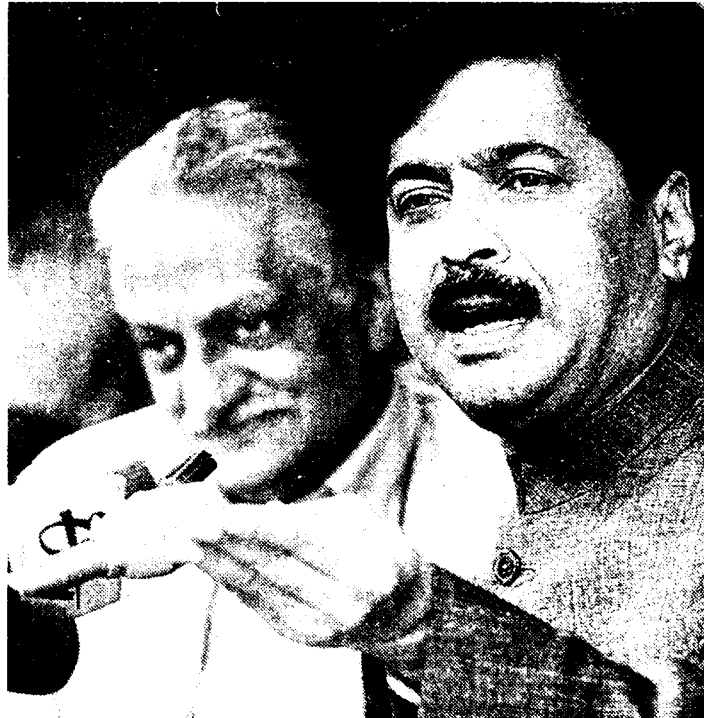
The Minister also announced the Centre's intention to finance personal computers in all blocks in remote and inaccessible areas.

These will include the hilly areas of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, as well as tribal areas of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and parts of Orissa.

The Planning Commission already approved proposals to finance installation of PCs in "community information centres" in all blocks of north-eastern States and Jammu and Kashmir.

"We have requested the Planning Commission to include these areas as well because the Government wants to connect all inaccessible areas, be they forests or mountains, in order to bridge the digital divide," he observed.

Mr. Mahajan said several initiatives of this kind were in the offing to equally diffuse the penetration of IT. So far it has mainly taken place among English-speaking urban-centric people in southern and western parts.



The Union Information and Technology Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, addressing the Economic Editors Conference in New Delhi on Tuesday.— Photo: Sandeep Saxena