

Digital India is politics neutral, will empower India and Indians: Ravi Shankar Prasad

NEW DELHI, September 17, 2015. Digital India is a transformational programme which has been launched in a mission mode to bridge the digital divide between the haves and have nots, said **Mr Ravi Shankar Prasad, Union Minister for Communication and Information Technology at the India Economic Convention 2015, organised by India Foundation and International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), here on Thursday.**

"Digital India is politics neutral," Mr Prasad said even as he highlighted the government's achievements in strengthening Digital India to "empower India as well as Indians". The minister, in his address during the panel discussion entitled: 'Is India's Digital Revolution a panacea to its infrastructure challenges', said that the government through its Bharat Net initiative is creating a digital architecture for delivery of services to common man. Nearly 9,000 km of work under the programme has been completed in the past 14 months, he said.

He cited the example of a recently launched programme 'Digital Pramanam' to highlight how digitisation has been helping thousands of pensioners by eliminating the requirement for them to get physically verified that they are alive in order to claim their pension.

Mr Prasad said that people in India are waiting for Digital India to become a success as the "initiative gives them a voice".

He also said that electronic manufacturing in India has immense potential. "We have approved 20 electronic clusters and now the state governments are competing to get more approved," he said.

The minister informed that Rs 104,000 crore worth of electronic manufacturing proposals are under consideration of the government.

Session moderator **Mr Kiran Karnik, Former President of NASSCOM**, said that Digital India is ambitious and has far reaching consequences for India. He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent push for Digital India has energised the initiative.

Speaking about the India.org initiative, **Mr Kevin Martin, Vice President, Mobile and Global Access Policy, Facebook**, said that his company has started providing free internet to empower people. Speaking through his experience, Mr Martin said that 50 percent of people became subscribers of internet services within 30 day when they were provided free internet. This, he said, can benefit not only developers but also infrastructure providers. He also said that net neutrality was important as it allows people to go anywhere they wish to on the internet.

Mr Kunal Bahl, CEO, Snapdeal, said that e-commerce was efficiently solving infrastructure problems in the country and was also efficiently utilising the infrastructure. Highlighting the constraints, he said that India needed more entrepreneurs than governance. Mr Bahl said that logistics had been a major challenge in India and that his company has been working with 60-70 local logistics companies to reach its customers.

He said that e-commerce companies need to frontload their investments to create the infrastructure in order to benefit in long term.

He also said that international certification was an important aspect of his business to maintain his credibility with customers. The young CEO said that there has been massive improvement in terms of digital payment in India as people were quickly adopting it.

Ms Cherie Nursalim, Vice Chair, GITI Group, called for more collaborations between governments to leverage the Internet to address sustainable development issues.
