

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE LAUNCH OF WI-FI FACILITY IN THE PRESIDENT'S ESTATE

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1. I am happy to join the residents of the President's Estate on a momentous occasion, which is the launch of Wi-Fi services. At the outset, let me congratulate the President's Secretariat team ably led by Smt. Omita Paul, and also the Team-NIC, for conceptualizing and implementing this unique project.

2. Information is power. But unfortunately, as borne out till this day, access of information to the people at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid is either unavailable or at best limited. This deficit creates *haves* and *have-nots* in the society and translates into social inequality. Without bridging the information gap, such disparity will persist. Of course, thanks to modern communication system, the asymmetry in information access is slowly getting eroded.

3. The government launches many programmes for the benefit of the common man. Substantial investment in terms of money and effort go into making policies, schemes and programmes aimed at eradication of poverty and other socio-economic ills. Yet, in the absence or poor presence of an effective communication strategy, a large segment of the intended beneficiary population remains unaware of the various benefits they are entitled to. Many a times, it becomes difficult to ensure that the government policies and programmes reach the general population in various parts of the country. In this context, the idea of bringing information to the doorsteps of citizens through network is a revolutionary step to transform India to a Digital India.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

4. Technology has an innate capacity to change lives of the people by ushering in greater convenience and physical well-being. Relatively weak countries have experienced revolutionary changes and become emerging economies in a matter of one or two generations; all due to the effect of greater technological application. Technology-led economic growth makes transformational changes possible.

5. Technology is usually considered a logical extension of knowledge gained from science. But, to my mind, it is much more than mere application of science. Technology is contextual. There is an economic value to technology. In the past two decades, we are witness to the radical change brought about by mobile telephony and internet. India too experienced a socio-economic upheaval brought about by these two path-breaking innovations. India, with 960 million mobile phones today, stands second in the world behind China. We have more than 77 mobile phone connections per 100 citizens, which is commendable in terms of the penetration achieved by us in mobile telephony. The other marvel of technology – internet - has become a critical source of information and communication round the globe. India, with 244 million, ranks third after China and USA in terms of number of internet users. However, the penetration of internet use as a

percentage of the population is only twenty, indicating not only a huge gap but a significant potential for future growth as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

6. Internet is a powerful tool of connectivity which can bring socio-economic transformation through access to information and services. The leveraging capacity for Information and Communication Technology to boost competitiveness and well-being stands as an important indicator of how effectively we are able to deploy technology for people and society. According to the Global Information Technology Report 2015 released by the World Economic Forum, India is at the 89th position in Network Readiness Index. Countries like Singapore, Finland and Sweden are leaders in this Index. We have some distance to cover in order to ensure that infrastructure for Internet and ICT-enabled services is available all over the country and used widely in a systematic manner. One of the key steps in this endeavour could be to roll out Wi-Fi services in public places across the country, both in urban and rural India.

7. I am glad that in the President's Estate which has a population base of about five thousand, we have moved a step forward in this direction. With each resident having an access to the Wi-Fi network now, they will be conveniently disposed to seek information and database and 'virtually' connect with the world outside. I hope this will be a crucial step in breaking the hierarchy in access to information of public databases and services.

8. In the end, I call upon my Secretariat to further leverage the strength of ICT for the residents and working population, and make this a model for other government townships.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.