

Rs 25,000 crore plan to take IT to villages

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THE centre proposes to set up public information infrastructure (PII) with an investment of Rs 25,000 crore to take broadband connectivity to 2.5 lakh villages.

Unused funds lying with Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF) will be used to set up this mega IT infrastructure across the country to take e-governance to rural areas. Prime minister Manmohan Singh's information technology advisor Sam Pitroda confirmed the move in a chat with *Financial Chronicle*.

This information technology infrastructure with high-speed connectivity will enable the third tier of governance to deliver pub-

lic services with efficiency and cost effectively.

With the PII network in place, the centre would be able to reach out to government workers providing basic services in hygiene, cleanliness, water supply, electricity and others.

From farm implements, seeds and fertilisers to providing up to date information on prices of commodities would be possible through this network.

"We will use Rs 25,000 crore from the USO Fund for sure. The idea is to take broadband capabilities to 2.5 lakh panchayats. If we do not take bandwidth, we won't be able to use the video. Video streaming requires lots of bandwidth. So, if we want to do training for healthcare, teachers, gov-



REACHING OUT: Unused funds lying with Universal Services Obligation Fund will be used to take e-governance to rural areas

ernment workers, panchayats and many more, we need lots of bandwidth," he said.

The former telecom commission chairman said if the project is to work with panchayats and manage 5,000 people, the panchayat people need to be trained. "Lots of these will require videos and if we don't have

big bandwidth, data is of no use," Pitroda said.

He said the PII project might not go to all 2.5 lakh villages owing to inaccessible terrain in states like Arunachal Pradesh.

Asked if he had the PMO's backing for this project, Pitroda said: "We are just going to do it because

it's badly needed. I don't expect the PM to understand this. It's my job as a technical guy, because country needs a sea change. We can make a difference because we have a green-field situation. Like in America, there are 1,000 data centres, but we need only one per state," he added.

FC had reported on July 11 that the government proposes to set up India Telecom Innovation Fund (ITIF) to incubate technologies and support 20 'start up' telecom entrepreneurs who could help spread of wireless telephony in rural India. Telecom penetration in rural India is as low as 15 per cent as against 88 per cent in metros and smaller cities.

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