

♦ SECOND ANNUAL CONVENTION OF NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MISSION 2007, JULY 10-12, 2005 NEW DELHI

Finding ways to realise a national dream

The second Annual Convention of the National Alliance on Mission 2007 and the First Convocation of the Jamshedji Tata National Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity (NVA) was held on July 10-12, in New Delhi, for ushering in ICT-led development in



The president of India APJ Abdul Kalam sharing moments with NVA fellows.

rural India.

Speaking on the occasion, President A P J Abdul Kalam said, "VKC (village knowledge centre) is one of the essential components for realising our goal of graduating into a knowledge society and lead to the transformation of the nation into a developed country before 2020," The President of India inaugurated the First Convocation of National Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity.

The National Alliance is Chaired by M S Swaminathan, and its partners like Nasscom Foundation, represented by Sukanya Rath as the Secretary General and One World South Asia, represented by Basheerhamad Shadrach, and Geeta Sharma who serves as the Operations Manager. Prof Arunachalam and Senthil Kumar from MS Swaminathan Foundation serve as Secretaries.

"I am sure that ultimately the National Alliance will be able to develop a user owned and managed network, which will help the rural population in terms of information," Kalam said. He also expressed hope that these centers will provide valuable information for agriculture, weather, health, fishermen, craftsmen, traders, entrepreneurs, unemployed youth and the students.

In this year's National Budget, the Union Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram recognized the Mission 2007 as a national initiative and supported it by joining the Alliance with a commitment of one billion rupees from the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund

being operated by NABARD.

Mission 2007's objective is to facilitate and accelerate, through multi-stakeholder collaborations, the provision of knowledge centers in each village. In its first phase, the target is to reach 240,000 panchayats (locally elected, governance body) and the final goal is to reach all the 600,000 villages in India.

A parallel session was the first convocation and PRA (participatory rural appraisal) meeting of the Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity fellows. The academy strives to create several hubs of knowledge, which will be useful as a resource centre. The parallel sessions of deliberations were intense and were facilitated in 4 languages. There were participants from 15 states.

The Union Commerce and Information Technology Minister, Dayanidhi Maran said it was time to use Information Technology (IT) and software skills to improve the social and economic conditions of the rural population. Technology should be harnessed to change the face of rural India by providing urban amenities to the under-privileged in the rural areas, he said.

The inaugural session was followed by a series of brief presentations by experts from the corporate sector, content providers, technology providers, key practitioners, and academics. The panel that oversaw this session included Namrata Bali (Sewa), Vasundhara Raje, (Chief Minister of Rajasthan state), MS Swaminathan (MSSRF) and Sayeda Hamid (Planning Commission).

On the second day, after a plenary presentation, the participants broke up into several task forces covering content, capacity building, coordination, etc. They then came back to a final plenary, including the sharing of the PRA exercise of the volunteers. Basheerhamad Shadrach presented an overview of the policy directives and the commitments needed to realise the mission objectives.

Two other Union Ministers, P Chidambaram and Mani Shankar Iyer – representing Finance and Panchayati Raj respectively were present in the final plenary. They reiterated their support to help mobilize the administration to enable this ambitious project into action. There are already 10,000 VKCs in the country, including the ITC's e-Chaupal's 5000. There are a number of business models of running a VKCs. Some are social entrepreneurship models, others are being run and managed by NGOs and civil society organisations, and panchayats or communities run others. ■



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