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Conference Bulletin

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Information Management for Global Access
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INAUGURAL SESSION

WELCOME ADDRESS BY
DR R K PACHAURI

Director-General, TERI, New Delhi, India

As human societies evolve, it becomes imperative to find means by which knowledge is created and disseminated. We must realize that knowledge cannot be the preserve of ivory tower institutions. It must be available and accessible to all sections of society. It is only through spreading the richness of culture and cultural resources that we can bring about social harmony. We are grateful to the Ministry of Culture (Government of India) for the patronage that they have extended in our efforts towards digitization of knowledge.

Economists the world over tend to focus on the four key elements of economic progress – capital, labour, energy, and material – in their endeavour to unravel the finer nuances of the process of production. The missing element is usually attributed to technology. However, the contribution of culture and social capital to the development of societies is seldom highlighted. Spread of information, using modern communication and information technologies, would enhance the dissemination of cultural resources.

There is a mix of both formal and informal institutions in society. Often the informal institutions tend to command more power than the formal structures. Powers of decision-making are many a time vested with informal institutions, as is evident in rural areas on many occasions. Knowledge generated from these institutions also needs to be accumulated, stored, and disseminated for the benefit of everyone.

We, as an institution, have had deep interest in documentation and dissemination of knowledge. Digital libraries are a vital tool in spreading information. I hope this august gathering will provide comprehensive treatment to this important subject during the course of this conference.

SPECIAL ADDRESS BY
DR N BALAKRISHNAN

Professor of Aerospace Engineering and Chairman of the Division of Information Sciences and Services, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore

The world of communication technologies in future will be driven by the three Cs: computers, communication, and content. Creation of content is a formidable barrier that has to be overcome. All knowledge that is created must be digitized and made available to humanity. When we took up the task of creating a digital knowledge bank under the Indo-US Digital Library Project, two countries were regarded as being able to take up the task: China and India. Presently, we have in place 21 centres equipped with high-speed scanners with a capacity to scan 500 pages of a book without tearing the book. At the International Conference on Universal Digital Library held in Egypt last year, both India and China demonstrated close to 40 000 books on the World Wide Web out of which 24 000 were in Indian languages.

The vast pool of digitized data has become a great source of research. Mechanized translations and automated digitization are some of the key features of this information revolution. In 2005, the Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Mr Arjun Singh, presented a 300-GB compact disc with digitized versions of many Urdu and Arabic texts to the Government of Saudi Arabia.

Scanning and digitization of rare manuscripts under the National Mission for Manuscripts is a step in the right direction. It is time that the whole gamut of traditional material – such as Indian films, music from the All India Radio archives, and folk music – must be digitized on war footing to prevent the loss of a rich cultural heritage. Everything today points towards an Internet-dependent world, and one is not wrong when one says: 'You are in this world only if you are on Google.' Therefore, the greatest challenge before us is the dissemination of knowledge, as knowledge multiplies only when circulated. Technology

utilized by humanity to the fullest extent can bridge the digital divide. The younger generation must be involved in digitization of knowledge. Let us all unite and create a huge Indian digital repository, and I can assure you that tomorrow shall be better than today.

ADDRESS BY MS MINJA YANG

UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka; and Director, Information and Documentation Unit, Asia–Pacific Region

UNESCO is mandated to provide universal access to knowledge. Its primary function is development of information structures and strengthening of libraries and archives to bridge the digital divide. Providing access to knowledge and inculcating respect for culture are part of a larger objective that UNESCO aspires to achieve. Therefore, the organization is involved in the promotion of knowledge societies to the extent possible.

Dissemination of knowledge through libraries is a fundamental task of UNESCO. With the development and universalization of the Internet, the role of the library has infinitely changed. The knowledge gap has to be bridged soon. We have been involved in the development of a free and open-source software known as the Greenstone Digital Library software. The software supports Indian languages – such as Hindi, Bengali, Kannada, and Marathi – as well as English, Arabic, Persian, and Chinese. We are also working with the National Informatics Centre in India to develop the Open Enrich System and promote it as a resource for storage and dissemination of information.

UNESCO is also committed to safeguarding the global cultural knowledge system. The World Heritage Convention is a step towards facilitating the promotion of the culture industry across the world. All knowledge depicts the creativity of our own societies and the emergence of new forms of profit.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY MR BADAL K DAS

Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Government of India

Prosperity has always been facilitated by knowledge. Acquisition and comprehensive dissemination and sharing of knowledge is the key in any progressive society. Digitization thus is an important trend. A digital library allows information to be stored and accessed by anyone. We need to put in place policies and procedures by taking into account copyright and accessibility issues. A digital library needs to be user-friendly and interactive.

A number of initiatives to put digital libraries on top of the priority list are under way in India. The Digital Library of India portal is part of an ongoing project pioneered by the Ministry of Information Technology. This is all set to become a primary repository of all knowledge created in India. Close to 40 000 books covering some 9 million pages have already been digitized. The project includes a resource and manuscript centre, which offers a training programme on manuscriptology, conservation, and so on. There are attempts to capture full-text information such as complete dissertations and forms of traditional knowledge. However, absence of action plans and manpower is the major hurdle.

It is imperative to bridge the poverty gap and provide access to all. Lack of information for the rural masses is a hindrance on the path of the mission to provide access to digitized library. Knowledge has to percolate down to the rural masses. The thrust has to be on electronic resources, using computers. There is also need to develop new and useful infrastructure and comprehensive plans. It would also serve everyone well if all the Indian languages are covered in this move towards complete digitization.

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