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ASIA'S FIRST MONTHLY MAGAZINE ON E-GOVERNMENT

LIVE
Chicago City CIO Hardik Bhatt on new government ways

JULY 2010 › Rs 75/-
VOLUME 06 ■ ISSUE 07 ■ ISSN 0973-161X
www.egovonline.net

SAY YES TO ITS

SMART TRAFFIC SYSTEMS CAN HELP DECONGEST INDIAN ROADS

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Can he Change India AGAIN

Sam is envisioning a revolutionary public information infrastructure for the country

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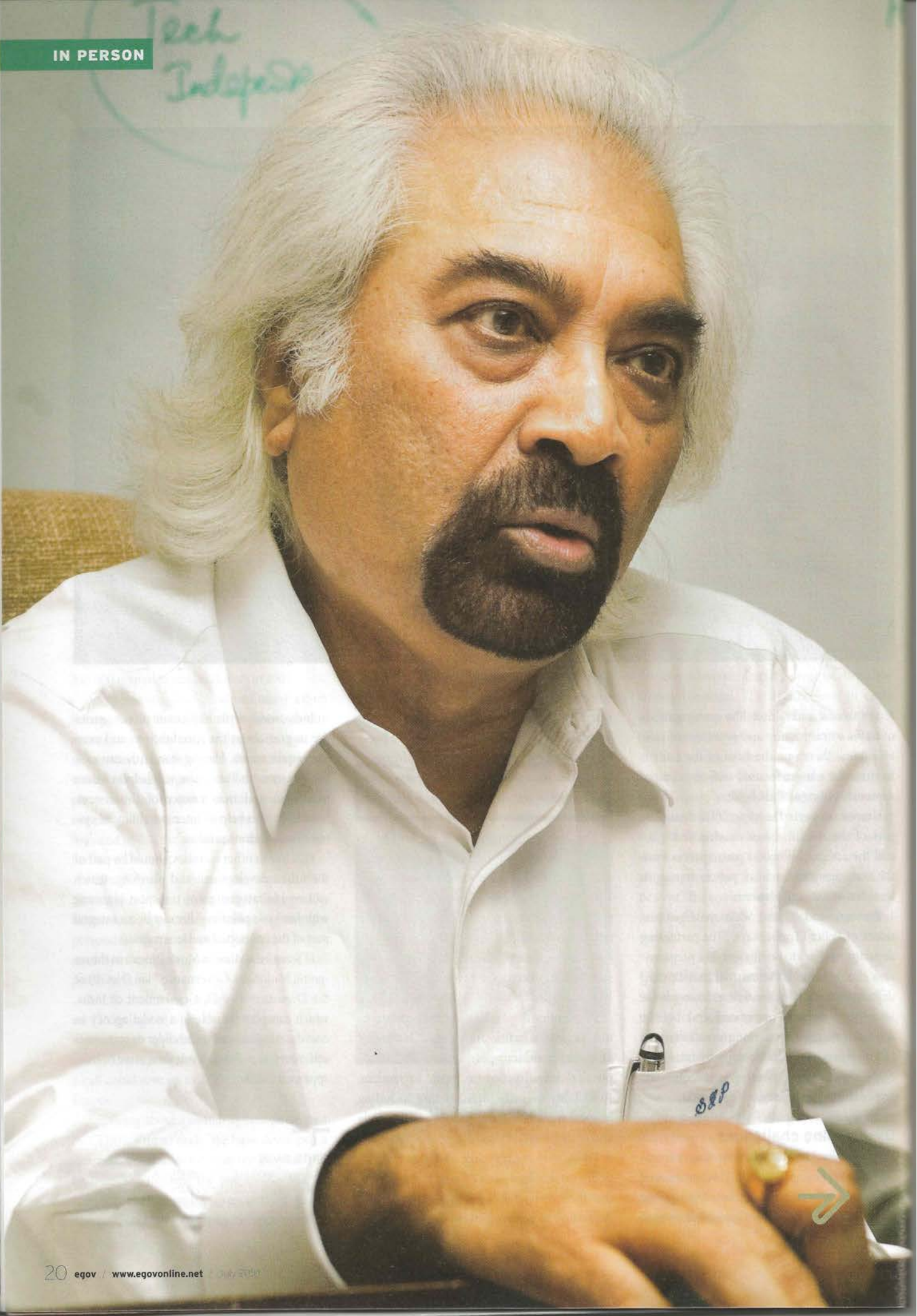


Sam Pitroda
Advisor to the Prime Minister on Public Information Infrastructure and Innovations

"INFORMATION NEEDS TO BE DEMOCRATISED"

A key architect of India's well-lauded telecommunication revolution, **Sam Pitroda** is currently entrusted with the role of Advisor to the Prime Minister on Public Information Infrastructure and Innovations. In this role, he will be driving creation of an information infrastructure for delivery of services to citizens and will also be charting a roadmap for a "Decade of Innovation" to drive benefits of technology at the grassroot level. In his usual candid and transparent manner, Pitroda spoke to **Ravi Gupta and Pravin Prashant** at length on how an all-inclusive development is at the core of the innovation objectives and on the progresses that have been made thus far.

What is your vision for public information infrastructure and innovations in India?

As we move into a growth era, India needs to be globally competitive and needs to innovate. Both the President and the Prime Minister of India have focused on innovations. The President has talked about 2010-20 as a decade of innovations. Today, there is a political will to support innovations in all spheres. Taking this political will forward and translating it into action is a key challenge.

India has been innovating for centuries. However, for the last 100 years or so the country has lost its edge, while a lot of innovations have come from the US in the last 50 years. Today, India needs to create its own models of innovation rather than adopting a US model, as that will not solve the problems of our country. There is also an urgent need to create various development platforms—for homeland security, applications, UID, education… the creation of these platforms is critical to empower millions of people around, and sure, the government is committed to creating this robust, universal, standardised, secure information infrastructure for the people of India.

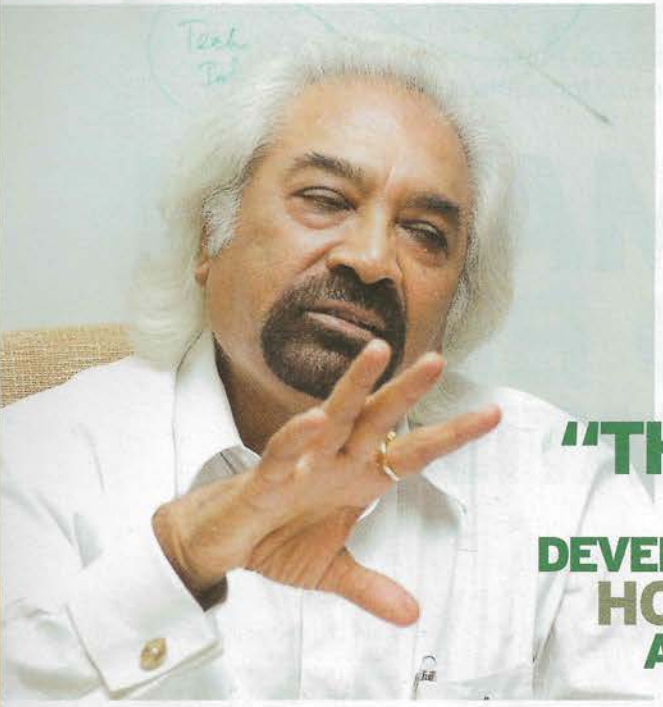
What kind of innovations will be relevant for India and which should be the focus areas?

There is an urgent need to create a broad platform for innovations that focus on the organisation and the system, rather than focusing on materials and technologies. Another important aspect is to have growth-based innovations that are sustainable, scalable and affordable.

The innovations should affect people who are at the bottom of the pyramid, i.e. should be able to change the lives of those millions who are not in the mainstream. It is also important to create the required ecosystems for innovations like the venture capital, recognition for young talent, provision of facilities to people, and creation of an innovation environment at our institutions and then identifying the key drivers for innovations.

What can be done to trigger this at a more fundamental level?

Traditionally, a few people have controlled information. People at the bottom of the



"THERE IS AN URGENT NEED TO CREATE VARIOU DEVELOPMENT PLATFORMS FOR HOMELAND SECURITY, APPLICATIONS, UID, EDUCATION..."

pyramid don't get the benefits of this information. If information is democratised then opportunities can be given to millions and millions of young people.

Looking at the telecom industry, the first phase of the telecom revolution is beginning to end.

The second phase is about to begin where the broadband platform will be provided for all. The major task in the second phase is to take high-speed broadband to 2.5 lakh panchayat members. Fibre will be taken to the doorsteps of panchayats.

Do you think this would help strengthen RTI as well?

The major challenge with RTI is that no particular information is available; it is not organised. For making the information available in an organised manner it is very important that a public infrastructure system is developed. RTI will get relevant only when accurate and transparent information is available. Only when RTI gets recognised will various other rights have a meaning for the public, including the right to education.

How do you see the education system changing in India with the active play of ICT?

The 11th plan is all about education, where the government will be spending 67 billion dollars on education. About Rs 6,000 crore have been approved by the cabinet to build a knowledge network. This network is about connecting 1,500 locations. The program is about connectivity of the nodes. The schools, all universities and R&D institutes will be connected and scientists will begin to collaborate, and teachers will be able to share the resources. This program has already been implemented, 15 nodes have been connected and are working. Within 18 months, all the nodes will be connected and made operational. This will be the mother of all networks.

Consolidation of old networks will also be done. The augmentation of networks will be the key to connecting 2.50 lakh panchayat members. This is the kind of revolution the government is aiming for in three years.

And how will the innovations and infrastructure impact healthcare in the country?

Education and health are the two key focus areas, besides various other government programs and schemes like NREGA and food distribution. At present, in the health sector, major work is going on through four major IT-related programs. The first is the creation of the national health portal in multiple local languages where all health-related information will be available. This can be accessed by doctors, hospitals and everybody else too.

The second is about emergency medical services for which a network needs to be created equivalent to the '911' in the US. All the emergency numbers need to be rationalised.

Then there is creation of electronic health record system. Many countries in Europe and the US have started it but have not been able to accomplish it, partly because of costs involved and challenges in creating standards.

Lastly, we need to create virtual health centres where all the hospitals, primary health centres and the medical research centres will be connected using the mother network as the physical network.

These programs are being driven by the ministry of health, with more than 80 professionals drawn from various parts of the world. The reports are ready and once reviewed and accepted by the government, the implementation work will start.

How do you see the digital roadmap for India over the coming five years?

Multiple platforms should be set up, which should not take more than three years. It is important to have the broadband platform, the UID platform, the GIS platform, the application platform, the security platform and the payment platform. The job of the government is to provide the platforms and see the larger and the holistic picture. People from various departments have to come forward and work towards the accomplishment of the goals.

On the national GIS plan for the country, the vision is that every bit of the physical asset, each and every building, road and street is mapped. egov

GETTING PERSONAL

REAL NAME
Satyanarayan Gangaram Pitroda

BORN ON
4 May 1942 in Titlagarh, Orissa

EDUCATION
Masters in Physics and Electronics from Vadodara; and Masters in Electrical Engineering from Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago

EARLY INVENTIONS
Electronic Diary in 1975, and the first digital switch, or the distributed processing stored program control PBX in 1978

PASSION
Painting; has close to 5,000 sketches. Has exhibited his work twice–July 2003 in Chicago and September 2006 at the Nehru Centre, London