

C-11 Information technology and what it can do for Sri Lanka

Purnima Rajapakse¹ Lal Jayawardena² Gaya Cumaranatunge³ S R H Hoole⁴

¹ National Development Council ² Presidential Secretariat³ Presidential Task Force on the Service Hub ⁴ Institute of Fundamental Studies

The challenge before Sri Lanka is to compress into 15 years the development achievements of other East Asian countries over the past 30 years. With an expected trailing off of the labour force in the next decade, achieving and maintaining the required high growth rate by traditional means is difficult.

This paper describes how a serious commitment to IT, with judicious government guiding, can help Sri Lanka become a serious player in the software business, thereby achieving the necessary growth rates. The paper reports a study by the National Development Council, forging a plan of action encompassing comprehensive training programmes, public information, pilot flagship projects in government and fiscal measures based on duties and taxes.

Examples under training include the introduction of computer science as a subject at the G.C.E. O. Level. Also recommended is the allocation of resources to the Open University to offer more distance education courses through Internet. To acculturate the public, providing internet facilities at all public libraries is suggested. The computerisation of drivers' licences with same-day service could serve as a flagship project. Fiscal measures such as the removal of all import duties on computer-related items, have already been adopted.

The window of opportunity is narrow. Although Sri Lanka is blessed with a skilled workforce, other countries with far more resources, such as India, are likely to be players. It is believed that with immediate implementation of these recommendations, the opportunity may be grasped.