E-Governance — the revolutionary plan

Muhammad Irfanullah Arfeen

New budget has been announced. If government wants to improve economic conditions of our country, they have to spend on e-governance so that government can generate vast amounts of foreign exchange through software exports. The e-governance would be the first step toward modernizes governmental administrative structures.

The challenge of transformation and the increasing need to modernize administrative practices and management systems has become a major goal to Governments worldwide. This is more so in the last one-decade and especially the last three and half years in Pakistan.

As is true all over the world, government in the developing nations costs too much, delivers too little, and is not sufficiently responsive or accountable. e-Governance offers a new way forward, helping improve government processes, connect citizens, and build interactions with and within civil society.

New information and communication technologies can make a significant contribution to the achievement of good governance goals. This e-governance can make governance more efficient and more effective, and bring other benefits too.

E-government involves access to government information and services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in a way that is focused on the needs of our citizens and businesses. E-Government relies heavily on agency use of the Internet and other emerging technologies to receive and deliver information and services easily, quickly, efficiently, and inexpensively. To provide access to information and services is only the initial stage in e-Government. In order to make Government truly citizen-centered, agencies will have to work together to consolidate similar functions around the needs of citizens and businesses

Broadly, Electronic Democracy (e-Democracy) refers to the processes and structures that encompass all forms of electronic communication between Government and the citizen. In a narrower perspective, e-Democracy refers principally to the processes and structures that encompass all forms of electronic communication between the Electorate and the Elected.

E-Governance lies at the heart of two global shifts: the information revolution and the governance revolution. Both shifts are changing the way society works and the way that society is governed. They bring the opportunity for not just incremental but radical gains in efficiency and effectiveness. But, at present, any such benefits are accruing to the few, not the many. It is the few who have access to ICTs, to digital information and knowledge, and to the benefits of reform in governance. We can thus talk of an e-Governance Divide that is increasingly separating developed and developing countries, and elites and ordinary citizens within developing countries.

This growing divide must be addressed if the poor in developing countries are not to fall even further behind. We must seize the digital opportunity for governance and seize it now.

The majority's understanding of e-governance is electronic delivery of government services to the people whereas the potential for e-governance is beyond electronic delivery of government services to the people. E-Governance in its real sense is the use of information and communication technologies to support good governance. The areas noted e-administration, e-citizen and e-services initiatives, and the government-related components of e-society together represent a Networked Government model for e-governance, the overall aim of which is to more effectively utilize ICTs (Information Communication Technology) for good governance reforms. These new connections strengthen existing relationships and build new partnerships within the civil society.

However, the potential remains largely untapped to date due to poor human, organizational and technological infrastructure and because of the inappropriate approaches taken by donors, vendors and the government. It is essential to explore the possibilities, challenges, and the prospects of implementing an ICT based governance mechanism.

Recognizing the power of information and communications technology (ICT), Pakistan is promoting it as a way of helping businesses improve efficiency, create jobs and reduce poverty.

Government's anti-corruption drive will be given boost through e-governance because it will bring openness and transparency in government affairs. Every ministry and division would be mandated to register information about their procurements and other affairs at the government portal by the use of e-governance. In this connection, the Electronic Government Directorate (EGD) has been established by conversion of IT commission, which was established in 1997. The EGD is headed by a programme coordinator and supported by the director general (projects) and a small group of IT professionals.

The directorate has been entrusted with implementation of different projects under e-governance programme. Projects will be outsourced to private sector firms, while the EGD will monitor the work of the firms.

The directorate will also prepare plans for other e-governance projects and provide technical support to all federal, provincial and local governments on matters pertaining to advancement of e-governance in the country. At present the main assignment of the EGD is to maintain the first ever web-portal of Pakistani government (www.pakistan.gov.pk).

All the information regarding taxation, utility bills and rules and regulations of different government departments would be available at the portal, which would help the public at large. Links are being developed between the State Bank of Pakistan and other commercial banks after which the performance of the banks will improve.