

***Speech of H.E. Sok An,
Senior Minister, Minister in charge of
The Office of the Council of Ministers***

During the closing of the seminar on Information Technology Awareness
(On 13th September 2001 Intercontinental Hotel)

*Royal Highness and Excellencies, Members of the Royal Government
Ambassadors and representatives of International Organizations to Cambodia
Ladies and Gentlemen*

The seminar on IT awareness, held by the Royal Government with the support from UNESCO, UNDP and sponsorships from private sectors particularly IBM, Mobitel and Big Pond, proceeded from 11th –13th September under the high leadership of Samdach Hun Sen as Prime Minister with the participation of the members of the government, representatives of ambassadors and national and international organizations, national and international honorable guests, civil society, and private totaling 500 persons.

During the past three days speakers from Cambodia and overseas have contributed a wealth of knowledge and insights. We intend to study these carefully as we develop NiDA from its fledgling status into the strong institution we know Cambodia needs. We are heartened by the fact that speakers indicate that we are indeed on the right track, and I wish to thank all the speakers for their care and energy in making these contributions.

We have heard frequent mention of “ the digital divide”, but an important and recurring point has been that this is itself a manifestation of the other divides in the world, and indeed in our own society- the development divide, the urban/ rural divide and the gender divide. We understand that IT itself is not a panacea for these divides, but can be used as a valuable tool to bridge them, and it is in this spirit that we will go forward.

The Prime Minister stressed the need for us to develop a national information plan, and NiDA will seriously devote ourselves to this task. He emphasized the need to focus on Khmer language and literacy, a point that was focussed on by a number of speakers. Here I must mention the critical need for an integrated approach to developing an acceptable national and international standard for the coding of Khmer characters for computers. At the same time we need to develop competence in foreign languages such as English, French and a language of one of the countries of East Asia so that the Cambodians can communicate and make maximum use of it.

Speakers from Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand shared with us their experience, giving us valuable examples to follow, and some tips on what to avoid. The needs for long-range planing and for coordination of effort come through as crucial lessons for us. Time and again speakers made the point that “ information” is more important than “technology”, that the human and organizational factors are more important than the technological ones.

We have to acknowledge that Cambodia is today at a very low point in IT development, but its very late start means that we have the possibility to leapfrog, and adopt the latest technology. In telecommunications, for instance, we are on the way to develop a nation wide microwave network without needing to invest in the impossible task of bringing wired connections to all, a point that was made by UNESCO in the opening session. Here let me refer back to the Prime Minister's call for the encouragement of private investment in this sector.

I would like now to share with you our preliminary thinking on an action plan for NiDA

Action Plan for NiDA

- 1- Establish NiDA on a firm foundation
- 2- Formulate policy & Regulation for the IT sector
- 3- Mobilize Information Resources
- 4- Promote IT Awareness nationwide, in both urban and rural communities

1-Establish NiDA on a firm foundation

- ?? strengthening the Authority, with involvement of all concerned parties,
- ?? seeking expert advice, involving both the public and private sectors in ensuring NiDA's ongoing ability to tackle the complex and dynamic IT sector and
- ?? actively operationalising the NiDA Secretariat

2-Formulate policy & Regulation for the IT sector

NiDA shall:

- ?? review existing arrangements and legal framework in the IT sector,
- ?? formulate Cyber Laws and other laws, regulations and guidelines for the IT sector, referring to UNICITRAL and international and regional models, especially in Asian, and
- ?? require all government agencies, and other agencies operating in the IT field to submit IT development plans and annual status reports demonstrating that policies are being followed.

All laws, regulations and policies in the IT sector will reflect the following guiding spirit and philosophy:

- ?? to uphold the interests of the consumers and general public
- ?? to guarantee security of information, while facilitating the broadest possible access to public information
- ?? to respect individual rights, and
- ?? to avoid dependency on proprietary systems, instead promoting open systems and interoperability.

The Royal Government of Cambodia recognizes it must actively pursue standardization. Cambodia must take its rightful place in setting standards, both national and international, for Khmer language information processing (as used in Unicode and ISO/IEC 10646-1). Cambodian experts and officials need to develop an understanding of all relevant international and regional standards, both to facilitate their implementation, and so that Cambodia may become actively involved in the future development of these standards.

3-Mobilize Information Resources

In recognizing that Information infrastructure, with the explicit intention of mobilizing all resources towards achieving our mission.

Such resources include not only the:

?? physical infrastructure

- Telecommunications networks
- Number of computers & telephone
- Software applications and content
- Libraries, archives and documentation centers

But also

?? human capacity (including oversea Cambodians)

- Level of access to information (both urban and rural)
- Level of understanding
 - Basic literacy in Khmer
 - Information literacy
- IT education at basic levels in schools
- Skilled IT and IM professionals

?? financial resources

- National, regional and international
- Encouraging significant private investment across the IT sector,

?? and, not least, the content of information, which needs to reflect local, national and regional interests and concerns. In this regard, we will emphasize and give priority to development and delivery of Khmer language information resources, for which national standards are a first step.

4-Promote IT Awareness nationwide, in both urban and rural communities

NiDA shall:

?? conduct publicity and outreach (such as this IT Awareness Seminar)

?? run public education and awareness campaigns and activities

?? promote an understanding of IT in the whole community, especially through educational institutions

?? participate in IT training initiatives such as the Cisco and

?? Networking Academy

In conclusion, let me re-emphasize the point that in developing this plan, we will review and attempt to incorporate the many valuable insights brought by each and every one of our speakers during the past three days, in carrying out NiDA mission to establish an environment for IT to grow, so that every Cambodian has access to information and the knowledge and opportunity to use it.

NiDA is to be established for the cause to found Cambodia with environment for IT to grow, which actually integrating Cambodia into region and community in the world, joining WTO and likewise implementing globalization in a new era.

On behalf of the whole seminar and myself, I would like to express my deep thanks to Samdach Hun Sen, Prime Minister, members of the Royal Government, ambassadors, Royal Highness, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen sharing the priceless experience and recommendations with the seminar especially the support from UNDP, UNESCO, private sectors particularly IBM, Mobitel and Big Pond, making the seminar successfully.

We would like to call upon senators, parliamentarians, the Royal Government, civil servants, royal armed forces, civil society, NGOs, Cambodian citizens, and monks to actively join NiDA, a real partner in regional and global affairs, in dissemination and implementation of IT in Cambodia ensuring that every Cambodian has access to IT towards the agreed-upon poverty reduction.

Thank you for your attention.