

**SPEECH BY MR. G.S. VOHRA, CHAIRMAN, SAROVA GROUP OF HOTELS
DURING THE PRE-LAUNCH OF ISOC PROGRAMME
“Focusing on the Individual Internet User”
AT GORDON MELVIN HOUSE, NGONG ROAD ON 29th DEC 2005.**

Your Excellencies, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an important moment for Kenya while the internet society has commenced project to focus on the individual internet user and to enrich the internet experience. There are plans being laid down to reach the rural people where vast majority of them live to give them internet exposure and to ensure that more and more children have IT connectivity.

Google was launched a little over a year ago with a capital of USD 1,000 and is now bidding to take over one of the largest American companies Times Warner. Googles biggest block of customers is 'individuals' with 65% of hits. This is how rapidly wealth creation can take place when one is keyed into internet, and there are no constraining mechanisms by officialdom.

A while ago the fibre optics were being laid around the Cape of Good Hope and the East African Governments missed a great opportunity when they were not supportive of the venture and failed to contribute towards laying of the cables on the ocean floor. India took advantage and had the cable diverted to its shores and we all know what happened thereafter. Broadband internet access has enriched that nation beyond its wildest expectations. In today's context I would appeal to the government to ensure lowering of the cost of mobile phones and at the same time reducing taxes thereon. I can make an international call from an Indian mobile for five rupees a minute whereas the same call will cost me ten times from a local mobile. Surely there can be no excuse for such discrepancy, and look at all the missed opportunities.

Kenya has an educated manpower and more and more graduates are joining the ranks. We have a population that speaks English without an accent. So why do we have no call centres here? These centres continue to make billions of dollars in India but we are encumbered with heavy costs and preservation of vested interests and the entire nation continues to delve in poverty reduction, instead of enrichment.

As luck would have it, the private sector is now fitting in the fibre optics cable but what about the missed years which would have propelled us into job creation without much effort? Even at this late stage by liberalizing telecoms and tariffs we should be propelling skyward.

Internet is a communication pipeline. It is of little use if it does not help us focus on resolving our priorities. Internet has created a vast new world of openness, transparency and accessibility. It is a tool that the leadership, properly advised, how best to use this tool, can take the country forward.

Local Council delivery is not at its best. How can you use it if you are not transparent and do not encourage transparency. Local councils are a good starting point for this purpose and thus the countrywide exposure will also be enhanced.

The local constituency funds can be better utilized to make an enabling environment and to fund internet connectivity in rural areas.

These are matters that need serious consideration from the authorities. Who knows, one day soon, some of our bright young stars may shine and become wealthy enough to obviate the necessity of donor funding.

These are the dreams for the youth to dream while we contemplate that this is a gorgeous universe of wonder and possibility.

Buddha says 'The greatest truth is the present'. This is also a good starting point.

Thank you.

“Focus on the individual-the individual internet user and the individual who has not yet been able to connect. Focus your attention on issues that will affect their lives and the way they use the Internet. And most of all focus on giving them more choice and more control over this incredibly powerful, enabling technology.”



STRENGTHENING THE INTERNET COMMUNITY THROUGH EDUCATION, POLICY, STANDARDS, AND MEMBER ACTIVITIES

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