

## **Ministry of Co-operatives and Internal Trade, Ministry of Education, State Trading Corporation and Etisalat collaborate to boost ICT literacy in the education sector via an innovating e-learning platform**

Sri Lanka's ICT sector, a key driver of the country's socio-economic development programme envisioned by HE President Mahinda Rajapakse, will be provided a boost through the joint efforts of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Co-operatives and Internal Trade, Etisalat, and the State Trading Corporation (STC). This project was officially launched on 12th May 2011 at Taj Samudra by signing the MoU. Minister of Education Hon. Bandula Gunawardena, Minister of Co-operatives and Internal Trade Mr. Johnston Fernando, Chairman of STC Mr. Pradeep Gunawardena and Chief Executive Officer of Etisalat Mr. Dumindra Ratnayaka graced the occasion.

Etisalat will provide their 3.75G services and connectivity to Sri Lanka's education sector via the STC, providing a special bundle offer to all Sri Lankan schools, students and children at an affordable price and scheme. A sophisticated Notebook PC, a high speed Etisalat Internet connection with their 3.75G HSPA+ mobile broadband connectivity, Educational e-learning content which comprises the school curriculum content on an e-learning platform and a HSPA+ modem unit, providing unmatched speeds both on up-link and download shall be included in the bundle offer. In addition, easy payment schemes from government and non-government financial institutions will be provided by STC to students and teachers at an affordable price.

Furthermore, extensive research reveals that one of the main barriers for Internet growth in Sri Lanka is the caution exercised by parents due to the misuse of this service. This has been addressed by incorporating world renowned parental control software known as NetNanny into this special bundle offer. This software can protect students to the maximum level while making valuable internet resources available to them, which will be good news for parents in Sri Lanka.

As a CSR initiative in partnership with STC, Etisalat has come forward to donate this full-fledged educational system to all Sri Lankan schools. This initiative will take this technology to the grass root level, aiding in bridging the gap between urban and rural whilst expanding various possibilities.

School curriculum-based e-learning content shall be provided on an e-learning platform powered by Etisalat. This e-learning content will be developed with the direction and endorsement of the Ministry of Education and the quality of the service will be ensured by utilizing the best qualified and trained resource personnel in the country, with strictly monitored standards. This portal shall be equally important to teachers and students, and teachers can use this service as a reference prior to teaching, thus improving the service delivery of teachers. Further this can be used as an innovative teaching medium to make the class room experience more interesting and interactive. As a whole, the teaching community in Sri Lanka will greatly benefit through this initiative on a major scale, and students can also use this as a supplementary mode of education for revision. Parents who are concerned of the time spent on traveling and

safety of children while attending tuition classes can use this platform as an alternate method of education without compromising on quality. All ground work related to this innovative e-learning platform is currently underway and the service will be made available in a short span of time.

The exclusive distribution channel in this regard will be the State Trading Corporation (STC) and these products will be sold through the Corporation's extensive distribution channel. The services will function on a tri-lingual platform, thereby breaking language barriers and enhancing accessibility and availability for all. With the farsighted objective of developing ICT literacy in Sri Lanka, this endeavor backs up Sri Lanka as it reaches the grass root level via STC's extensive distribution channel.

The proposed concept being "Internet for Everyone," it is on par with this broad vision of the state sector, aiming at making the Internet available to all, thereby establishing it as a 'necessity' as opposed to a 'luxury'. Having understood the invaluable role of the Internet in the education sector, The State believes that new generational trends and habits should be revolutionized and it should begin from the education sector. The project will primarily target teachers and secondly the students, ensuring that the education sector will be strengthened on all terms.

The Hon. Minister of Education Mr. Bandula Gunawardena cited "We have seen National IT literacy increase from 5% to 30%, due to initiatives such as "e-Sri Lanka programme", "Nenasala-wisdom outlets" and so on. With the ultimate aim of reaching the 75% mark in ICT literacy by 2016, we are dedicated to achieve this goal via such initiatives within the education sector. Educating and enabling the teachers will be the key starting point so that this learning can be passed on to the students and parents. We appreciate the efforts by Etisalat for taking steps to distribute Notebook PC's and Etisalat connections to all schools in the island through the STC". He added that the project will further enable the Ministry of Education to circulate any curriculum, memorandums, model papers, teacher handbooks, revision kits etc. or any information via the system, enabling faster and more effective information dissemination. "I would also like to thank Hon. Minister Johnston Fernando and Etisalat for taking the initiative to introduce projects of this nature".

Mr. Johnston Fernando, Hon. Minister Co-operative and Internal Trade added that "We must familiarize ourselves with technology in order to ease our day to day lives and activities. The hallmark of this project is that students have access to knowledge at any given time with the flexibility to study at their own pace, allowing them more time to pursue extracurricular activities. I wish this project all success and hope that it will pave the way for a knowledge-based economy". He went on to thank Etisalat and the Hon. Minister of Education for the support rendered towards this project.

"As a Government institution which focuses on trade and profit, we never forget to pay special attention to our social responsibilities. We initiated this project with the aim of designing it in a manner expedient to students, teachers, parents and all of society. One of our main goals is to grant a computer to every household at a reasonable cost and by way of easy payment schemes, and we are dedicated to achieving that target" states STC Chairman Mr. Pradeep Gunawardena. "The reasons

we chose Etisalat for this venture stem from the fact that the Company provides high tech services coupled with the recently introduced 3.75G technology with speeds up to 21Mbps. When selecting our partner, we considered their abilities as well as the investment they made in Sri Lanka in order to enable this technology. I believe that with Etisalat, we will be able to reach the zenith of technology. I would like to thank HE President Mahinda Rajapakse for his support towards this venture, Minister Johnston Fernando - Hon. Minister Co-operative and Internal Trade for his constant guidance, Hon. Minister Bandula Gunawardena and the Ministry of Education for accepting our proposal and project report and for joining us in our endeavour to uplift the ICT literacy of our students. I also wish to thank Dumindra Ratnayaka and Etisalat for their dedication and support towards this project”.

Etisalat CEO Dumindra Ratnayaka said in this regard that Etisalat is proud to be aiding HE President Rajapakse's initiatives to improve ICT literacy in Sri Lanka. “We are more than happy to be part of this nationally significant initiative and strongly believe that this can create immense possibilities across the island”. He added, “Etisalat brings fast, safe and meaningful internet for everyone. The proposed initiative will take the latest 3.75G technology to the grass root level thus opening a world of knowledge for schools, teachers and students. This innovative technology can bring supplementary educational support to the whole country no matter the distance or affordability. We are also proud to reassure parents that we offer safe internet to your child which will allow your child to learn at home in a safer internet space. Hence all fear factors which were preventing you from offering this knowledge to your child can be eliminated. I re-iterate that with this initiative we change the education landscape of Sri Lanka and Etisalat is proud to be part of this.”