

Secretary's speech at UN-ESCAP seminar "Leveraging digital innovation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific"

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to be representing Sri Lanka as the Secretary to the Ministry of Technology (MoT) at this important seminar which is part of the 80th session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific.

In the context of Sri Lanka, the Digital Economy Strategy 2030 launched in last year aims to use technology and innovation to drive economic growth and social development in the country. With the support of all the ministries, government institutions, and private sector entities, we planned to commence the implementing the strategy.

Sri Lanka works on improving its digital infrastructure to support its digital economy strategy. This includes expanding and upgrading broadband networks and data centers. Public-private partnerships are being encouraged to invest in infrastructure development, such as fiber optic networks and data centers.

We are working on digital identity systems and also introducing online portals for services like obtaining licenses, accessing healthcare, and making electronic payments for government taxes and other fees.

Sri Lanka wants to create a thriving environment for innovation and entrepreneurship. We are supporting startups, incubators, and accelerators.

Sri Lanka understands the importance of cybersecurity and protecting personal and sensitive data and information. We plan to strengthen our cybersecurity frameworks and enact data protection laws.

On this connection Data Protection Act enacted in 2022. We have drafted a national cybersecurity strategy for 2024-2027 and it is now open for public comments. Additionally, we are in the process of implementing a Cybersecurity Act and establishing a Cybersecurity agency.

Sri Lanka also introduced National QR code payment system during 2018 called LankaQR and now its connected with UPI in India and working with WeChat Pay and Alipay to connect with LankaQR.

The government also collaborates with the Inclusive Digital Agriculture Transformation (IDAT) program, which is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This programme aims to develop agriculture, nutrition, and financial inclusion, and to provide data-enabled decision-making support for policies and programs targeting food security.

Recently the President himself as the Minister of Technology, formed a committee to create Artificial Intelligence (AI) policies, and committee already submitted their first report. The next step is to implement these policies.

We currently work on upgrading the Lanka Government Network (LGN) which provides internet connections to all government agencies and Lanka Government Cloud (LGC) to include modern security features. As part of this upgrade, we will also be setting up an email platform for all government employees, allowing them to communicate using a single system.

We are also in the process of formulating policies for the email, cloud, and digital government services.

The government will also consider reestablishing a public grievance system that was developed few years back. This system allows citizens from all over the country to submit their requests, comments and suggestions.

We consider the implementation of a seamless payment solution and pave the way for a true digital government through various applications such as eHRM, eOffice, eGovernance, eCourt, eProcurement, and the establishment of data sovereignty policies.

Additionally, we aim to introduce a digital locker for storing identification documents, passports, driving Licenses, revenue licenses, insurance policies, and all other educational certificates.

In recent years, Sri Lanka has made progress in its digital journey. However, there is still untapped potential. This session is important because it can help us speed up our efforts and fully embrace digital innovations for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.

We must work together to develop robust policies, invest in digital literacy, and address cybersecurity concerns. Government officials hold a vital role in this process.

I strongly urge all the officials gathered here to embrace this new era and become pioneers of digital innovation. By doing so, we can contribute to the sustainable development of Asia and the Pacific.

Thank you.