PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI'S DIGITAL INDIA VISION TO BOOST EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE SECTORS

NEW DELHI: One can't make available thousands of medical specialists or school teachers to the remotest corners of the country, but one can make their services available through broadband at multi-service centres in every village. That, in essence, is the vision of Digital India initiative that the Cabinet cleared on Wednesday.

Digital India, which promises to transform India into a connected knowledge economy offering world class services at the click of a mouse, will be implemented in a phased manner by 2019 at an estimated cost of about Rs. 1,13,000 crore, including ongoing enabling projects run by telecom and electronics and IT departments, officials said. At the end of the day, it promises to change the life in rural India, according to some bureaucrats who helped ET piece together Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Digital India.

"Common service centers (CSC) in villages will serve as critical pivots around which most goods and services will be delivered. Once connected to broadband, an entire village's requirements of goods can be placed through these service centers and people can use these service centers as onestop shop for all their e-needs," said a senior official at the telecom department. Another official said e-medical facilities will ensure specialist services on a dial.

"A patient at the health center in a village can be connected to any medical specialist hundreds of miles away and diagnosed online," the person said. Thus, various government or private specialists will be able to diagnose and treat people who otherwise don't have access to specialist medical facilities. The same will go for schools.

"We obviously can't ensure the quality and quantity of teachers but we can deliver world class education to children through massive online open courses," the first official said. He added that subject modules prepared by the private sector could be delivered online to the CSC which can be accessed by children. Despite making right to education a fundamental right, India struggles to fill its schools with teachers across the hinterland, leading to poor quality of education and innumerable dropouts.

Rakesh Kaul, executive director, government and public sector, at PwC India, said Digital India has the potential to transform existing public service delivery system, improve productivity, create jobs and induce economic activity in areas that are not digitally connected. "All this is possible by overcoming barriers of soloed implementations, non-availability of robust last mile connectivity, processes improvements, capacity constraints, efficient operational models and by leveraging the emerging technologies like cloud, social media, analytics and mobility," he said.

According to information released by the government on Wednesday, Digital India envisages making India a leader in digitally delivering health, education and banking services.