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on

BILINGUAL WEBSITE IN THE COUNCIL OF STATES (RAJYA SABHA), THE UPPER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT – A CASE STUDY

Bilingual Website in the Council of States (Rajya Sabha), the Upper House of Parliament of India – A Case Study

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The Rajya Sabha Website is a rich source of information both for the Members of Parliament and for the public at large. It provides up-to-date information about the Business before the House and its proceedings, legislative and other business transacted in the House. Various Parliamentary Papers such as Papers to be laid, Parliamentary Bulletins, Daily Synopsis of Debates, etc. are also placed on the Website. All information is published in English as well as Hindi, the national language. Thus, Rajya Sabha website not only caters to the people living in large cities knowing English but millions or rural masses who know Hindi only.

An important feature of the Rajya Sabha Website is that the work of each Section/Branch of the Secretariat has been computerized. The Computerized applications have been developed through which the data are collected on the central server, which is linked to the internet. All the manual record-keeping of the data/registers has been replaced with the computer-based applications and databases. For this, new rules and new procedures have been developed which support the IT based systems. All the computers in the Secretariat are linked through high speed local area network (LAN), for fast information transfer. All the users have been provided e-mail accounts and Internet browsing facility. A dedicated team of IT professionals of the National Informatics Center, Government of India, provides and manages the IT, and communication resources and services.

Members of Parliament have been provided with computers and communication facilities at their residences. Beside publishing information on the Rajya Sabha Website, daily information relating to the business of the House is also sent to them through e-mail. Rajya Sabha Website not only contains thousands of static HTML pages of

information but also number of database applications with web interface for making the information available to the outside world.

Some of the major database applications, which have access through the Internet, are:

- **Legislative Information & Bills Database:** A comprehensive database application system has been developed to monitor the progress of various legislative proposals (Bills) introduced in either House of the Parliament. A web interface provides query on number of parameters. Complete text of the Bills at various stages has been made available on the Website. It also gives the progress and status of each Bill.

- **Parliament Questions database:** Parliament Questions are the important instruments for raising matters of public importance in the House by Members of Parliament and get the reply/action taken from the Government. A database has been developed to store all the Parliament Questions, with the answers and a Query System has been built. Such databases are the performance-measuring instrument for the Members of Parliament. The public can know from the Internet how many questions/issues have been raised by their representative in the Houses of Parliament.

- **Government Assurance Database:** 'Government Assurances' is the unique feature of the Indian Parliament. If the Minister is not able to convincingly give the complete reply to a Question asked by the member, and promises to look into the matter later, it is considered as the assurance given by the Government. A Parliamentary Committee monitors all such assurances. A computerized application maintains the database of the assurances and these are published on the Internet with a search facility.

- **Special Mentions MIS:** The Rajya Sabha website also publishes all the special mentions made in the House by the members of the Parliament. Special Mention is a procedure for raising matters of public importance in the House A Query system provides the search facility into the Special Mention database.

- **Parliamentary Committees Information:** The website gives the information about the parliamentary committees, *their membership* details, rules governing their functioning and procedures, the meeting schedules and engagements and the reports (with text) made by the Committees.

- **Publishing of Debate in searchable format:** The verbatim debate of Rajya Sabha is published on the website in searchable format.

- **Members 'Who's Who' & Members' Page:** The Rajya Sabha Website publishes up-to-date information about its Members. Also generalized Members' Home Page has been designed for all the Members of Parliament. This acts as a showcase for members to show the work done by them in Parliament for the benefit of the public.

The Rajya Sabha Website acts as a portal for accessing various other types of information by the Members. It provides links to other State Legislatures websites as well s Parliaments of other countries. It also gives links to the various search engines, news services websites, linkage to the website of Indian Railways, Indian Airlines, Ministries of the Government of India, etc.

Besides these database applications, some of the new initiatives taken bz the Rajya Sabha in the recent past for use of IT are:

- Audio web cast of the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha
- Machine assisted Translation System for translating the text from English to Hindi.

After successfully testing the audio web casting of the proceedings, Rajya Sabha is planning to start the live video webcast of the proceedings of the House in order too make them accessible across the globe.

Implementing the new IT systems in the Rajya Sabha Secretariat required great efforts initially, but once all the systems were in place it has smoothened the working of the Sections. The benefits of the computerized applications are much more than the efforts made.