

## Facebook inspires Indian bureaucrats seeking partners abroad

It's not just wired youngsters who think in terms of online social networking - even Indian government officials are planning to use them for foreign collaborations.

When Jawahar Sircar, development commissioner of the ministry of micro, small and medium enterprises, wants to describe a new concept in online partnership to get foreign collaborators for Indian enterprises - his model is the Facebook.

A wildly popular social networking website, Facebook has an estimated 59 million users worldwide.

At the pavilion of the Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre for Pravasi Bharatiya Divas last week, Sircar was in the midst of an intense brainstorming session with Harinder Takhar, minister of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Canada's Ontario province, to find a common ground between the two sides. That was when they hit upon the idea of a common website.

'We have now decided to start a Facebook-like portal where small businesses from India and Canada can set up their own profiles,' Sircar told IANS.

Sircar used Facebook examples to illustrate the preliminary concept of a networking site for Indian and Canadian SMEs to find the perfect partner.

'In Facebook, you can search for profiles by university or high school. Similarly, we can allow for certain keywords for organisers to search, like hand tools. Then, it could be sub-divided into more categories like spanners or fasteners,' Sircar told the Canadians.

The website, whose content would be user-generated, would also include useful information like best practices and industry information.

Sircar said he has not used Facebook but Takhar has had the experience of being part of the online network.

'Some of my constituents made a profile for me during the last election... I do not use it much, but I know that there is more potential to use it for interaction with my constituents,' he said.

India has an estimated 13 million micro, small and medium enterprises, which account for about 10 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and about 40 percent of exports.

The proposal, if implemented, will be the first ever effort to promote direct contact between Indian and foreign small enterprises. If successful, it could be copied for building ties with other nations, Sircar said.

He was enthused enough to say it has the possibility of starting a 'revolution', while Takhar called it a 'step in the right direction'.

The Canadian minister said: 'What we have now is a gentleman's agreement. Now, it will be up to them (gesturing towards a Confederation of Indian Industry official) to get the ball running. Maybe we will need to sign a formal pact.'

*Devirupa Mitra ( © IANS / India eNews)*