

ICT start-ups get a helping hand

The National Computer Board (NCB) last week launched an incubation centre which has already attracted six new companies in the field of information and communications technology (ICT).

The centre will assist start-ups in the commercialisation of their products and services and will also enhance their capabilities through an entrepreneurial development programme, including financing, marketing and business management.

The start-ups, which will be assisted and supported by the National Computer Board, will have to find other premises after three years of operation. For that purpose, arrangements have been made by the ministry to offer them working space at CyberCity.

The incubation centre, located at Jade Court in Jummah Mosque St., Port Louis, offers the start-ups facilities such as shared Internet connection, telephone and furniture. Other services include logistics support and technical assistance.

Information Technology and Communications Minister Pradeep Jeeha said that it is important to give top priority to the development of the ICT sector in general and to the setting up of a strong ICT industry to create more wealth for the nation and more job opportunities for the island's young people.

The ICT minister also appealed to the NCB to approach the Business Parks of Mauritius Limited (BPML) to obtain a plot of land for the setting up of a technology centre for incubators. He added that BPML can itself consider reserving one floor in the cyber tower to promote the start-ups.

The NCB has set a number of criteria to be respected by aspiring start-ups including that they must have been in operation for less than a year and that priority will be given to e-business, Internet content development, software development and bio-informatics and multimedia.

According to Mr Jeeha, the success rate of incubators does not necessarily have to be 100% to make the project viable. "In some developed countries, a 30% success rate is considered acceptable. The most important thing is that facilities need to be provided to young people to allow them to develop and incubate their ideas into business opportunities and from there to set up their businesses."

The NCB recently signed a memorandum of understanding to develop a synergy between the ter-



Minister Pradeep Jeeha

tiary education sector and ICT start-ups. In this context, an awareness campaign was launched at the University of Mauritius with the objective of informing young entrepreneurs regarding business prospects in ICT.

"It is my view that as more and more people come to know that the Incubation Centre exists, the demand from young entrepreneurs will increase considerably and we might not have sufficient space to accommodate a larger number of start-ups.

"The government and the NCB, because of budgetary constraints, will not be in a position in the short term to set up new incubators to meet the increasing demand," the minister said. He appealed to the private sector to consider offering similar facilities to young entrepreneurs.

At present, the new businesses which are being supported at the Incubation Centre are Tekidea Ltd., Connect Ltd., E-Station Ltd., Blee Technologies Ltd., Alliance Reseaux Ocean Indics Ltd. and Innovative Creative Lines Ltd.