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SIMPUTER PROJECT RECIPIENT OF THE FIRST DEWANG MEHTA AWARD FOR INNOVATION IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Communications & IT, Shri Pramod Mahajan today announced the recipient of the first Dewang Mehta Award for Innovation in Information Technology. The Award instituted by Department of Information Technology in the Ministry of Communications & IT has been conferred to the **Project conceived by the Simputer team**. The team has devised a low cost hand-held device with multiple connectivity options based on free software. This award was constituted after the sad demise of Shri Dewang Mehta, on the 12th April, 2001. The award has been instituted as a mark of respect to his memory and to commemorate his contribution to the IT industry. The Simputer project was conceived by seven trustees drawn from Faculty of Computer Science & Automation at the Indian Institute of Science and Encore Software Limited (formerly Ncroe Technologies). The recipient of the Award shall receive Rs.5 lakhs.

The Simputer team recognised by this award consists of S/Shri Vinay L. Deshpande, Managing Trustee, co-Founder, Chairman and CEO of Encore Software Limited, Bangalore, Vijay Chandru from Indian Institute of Science, Shashank Garg from Encore Software Limited, Ramesh Hariharan from Indian Institute of Science, Swami Manohar from Indian Institute of Science, Mark R. Mathias from Encore Software Limited and V. Vinay from Indian Institute of Science. The Award has been instituted to recognise innovation which has the potential to make a significant impact on national development in bringing fame to the country. The concept behind the award is to encourage innovations in an industry which thrives on brilliance.

A brochure outlining the scheme for the Dewang Mehta Award for Information Technology was sent to institutions such as IITs, IIITs, IIMs, NASSCOM, MAIT, STPI, C-DAC, NCST and other premier R&D organisations, Heads of major educational institutions in IT as well major software units. For wider publicity, an advertisement was also inserted for this Award in the National Newspapers all over the country and was published on Department of Information Technology and NASSCOM websites. The last date for nomination was February 28, 2002.

In all, 92 nominations were received for the First Dewang Mehta Award. A Committee of eminent persons was constituted to evaluate the nominations and give its recommendations. The Committee comprises of S/Shri Rajeeva Ratna Shah, Secretary, Department of IT, Prof. Sanjay Dhande, Director, IIT, Kanpur, Dr. Vijayu Bhatkar, Dishnet, Kiran Karnik, President, NASSCOM, Ajay Choudhary, HCL, S. Ramadorai, TCS, Harish Mehta, Chairman, Onward Novell & Member TiE and Prof. S.K. Brahmachari, Director, Centre for Bio-Tech. The Committee in its deliberations felt that during the first year of the award, those applicants who showed ingenuity and worked on innovative concept should be considered. The basic thrust was to identify a concept/product which was not only innovative but whose application would have had an impact on the lives of the common man. The Committee observed that the development of Simputer stands out significantly higher than others and meets the criteria set out. It was noted that Shri Vinay L. Deshpande and his team at the Simputer Trust qualified for the First Dewang Mehta Award.

Simputer is a low cost hand-held device with multiple connectivity option, based on free software Open Source Initiative. Its primary input is a touch-sensitive LCD display panel. It is based on GNU/Linux Software technology that is open and modular. It enables the use of Smart Card Reader/Writer. Simputer is targetted as a shared computing device for a local community of users like village panchayats, village

school, a kiosk, or a shopkeeper. Simputer also has text-to-speech capability in a variety of Indian languages. The Simputer can have a wide range of Applications some of which are – Microbanking, data collection, internet access, agricultural information, the school laboratory, the Kiosk simputer, smart card & simputer, general purpose Citizen's ID card, driving license, land records, income tax records, passport, bank passbook and digital cash.

The Simputer as a concept/tool has the potential to put computing power in the hands of the masses in the true sense of the word. The Simputer is one innovation that can break barriers that prevents the common man from using computing devices which are not only high priced but also exotic.

Shri Dewang Mehta was born on 10th August, 1960 and was one of the strongest proponents of the India Inc.brand equity in IT. Shri Dewang Mehta was the first Executive Director and then President of NASSCOM spanning over a decade. His ambition and vision was to make India a global IT destination of the 21st century. A die-hard optimist, his outlook was always bullish even during the global IT down turn. That he was right in the Indian context, is amply proved by the IT industry having clocked the growth rate of 30% even during last year.

