

# Net services for the aged? T-Gov may lead the way

ACRONYMS such as e-Gov and i-Gov are easily recognised here for representing electronic and online ways of transacting with government departments. But T-Gov?

It stands for Television Government, and Singapore is exploring the idea, with South Korea, to give the elderly who are not computer savvy access to public-service information.

Once implemented, the elderly can simply turn on their TV sets to make use of services, such as reports about queues at polyclinics, provided by operators of Internet Protocol televi-

sion (IPTV) and cable TV.

Mr James Kang, assistant chief executive of the Government Chief Information Office, said: "The elderly need information as much as anybody else. Maybe the smart young guy needs only to switch on his phone or use the Internet.

"But using a four-button concept to navigate, the elderly should be able to access basic information, too."

South Korea's T-Gov system has already been rolled out in various parts of the country.

Ms Ko Won Seon, director of the e-Government Planning De-

partment at the National Information Society Agency (NIA), described it as a form of communication that bridges the digital divide between different age groups and classes.

Just 30 per cent of South Koreans aged 50 and above access the Internet, compared to the 95 per cent of South Koreans from all age groups who access television.

Some of the applications used in South Korea include remote video-health consultations, where the elderly can speak to doctors via video conferencing without leaving the house.

T-Gov has also been used to broadcast public-service announcements on missing people and traffic congestion.

By the end of the year, all South Korean military bases will

have access to IPTV services. Some will have video-conferencing facilities which enable soldiers to speak to their parents.

In Singapore, almost every household has a TV set. But when it comes to Internet usage, only 40 per cent of those aged between 50 and 59 years of age have used the Web in the past 12 months.

Both countries yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding to share information on improving public access to government services.

Mr Ko Yoon Seok, senior researcher at NIA, said South Korea was hoping to learn more about how Singapore has implemented mobile government services, such as allowing people to check CPF account information and putting out SMS alerts for

road tax and passport renewals.

He said that establishing a common standard among South Korea's three IPTV operators was one potential hurdle in the implementation of T-Gov.

"This is because the companies are private, so you can't really interfere and make them do it for public convenience."

But, if this comes to fruition, it will be a good idea, said 73-year-old Phua Kok Tee, CEO of the Singapore Action Group of Elders.

"In general, using TV as a medium to reach out to the elderly is a good idea, because many can't use the Internet," he said.

"The question is how long before it can be fully implemented, and whether it will be available in multiple languages."

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