

Satellite-based education? Kerala says, 'Do IT yourself'

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: When India launched Edusat in September 2004 — a dedicated satellite to fuel country-wide distance education — it created a powerful teaching tool. But three years later, with almost half the useful life of this cutting edge platform over, the user agencies are still grappling with a basic challenge: Where to find the thousands of hours of material needed to fuel the “24-by-7” availability of this valuable resource.

Kerala, one of the first States to exploit Edusat to network nearly 1,500 schools in 15 districts, is no exception to this software shortage. To augment the live classroom sessions that are beamed daily from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. to 1,400 receiving terminals and 88 interactive terminals (where students can respond in real time), the State's VICTERS programme — Virtual Classroom Teaching on Edusat for Rural Schools — has bought up over 50 hours of specialised programming from professional media agencies. But realising that

• Kerala, one of the first States to exploit Edusat

• Provides handycams to schools to create their own lessons

even this is a drop in the ocean, it has decided on a novel way to sharply increase the pool of teaching materials; it has invited participating schools to create video packages of their own classes — and share them with others teaching the same subject.

Last week, the nodal agency for e-enabling Kerala's school education, IT@School, brought together volunteers from almost 70 government-run schools Statewide for a workshop here — and handed each of them a semi professional Panasonic handycam or video camera. When they return to their schools these teachers will have picked up the basics to operate the camera something they will impart to a few students in each school.

IT@School's Executive Director Anvar Sadath hopes

the cameras will stimulate interest in creating visually exciting classroom material that hundreds of other schools can share.

They might not be as polished as professional products but he feels they will fill a vital gap in the programming of VICTERS ... and who knows, may even inspire some students to become filmmakers.

The workshop was conducted in a week when the International Film Festival of Kerala was on here — and a few film makers, hearing of the educational department's initiative have already volunteered their services to help students acquire a bit of professional polish as they join Kerala's Do-IT-yourself experiment in education.

Broadband links

Meanwhile, nearly 1000 of the State's government-run schools are tasting the zippy speeds of broadband Internet.

The initiative launched by Education Minister M. A. Babu on December 9, hopes to connect 2,800 schools by June 2008.