

Govt, IT cos tie up for ICT programme in schools

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THE government's universalisation of elementary education programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, has — away from the glare of those who talk the most about public-private partnership and a bigger role for the private sector — found a way to make the partnership work on the ground. In schools across the country, the government and private sector players like the Azim Premji Foundation, Educomp, NIIT, Microsoft Corporation, Aptech and IBM have come together to provide ICT solutions.

Some 27,000 odd schools across 29 states encompassing as many as 53 lakh students are the beneficiaries of this partnership. Built with the idea of making schools attractive for children at elementary level, the partnership seeks to draw on the strength of each sector. While educational institution provides the curriculum and syllabus, the IT-enabled private partner translates the material into interactive multimedia material to be used for computer-aided learning. It would seem that the scheme is catching on. Spending on the programme in the current year is Rs 53.43 crore, up Rs 13 crore. Spending in 2005-06 was Rs 40.33 crore.

Private or even public-owned IT firms negotiate or often bid to supply software for the schools. The software is customised and delivered in local languages. "IT skill and talent find its way into the system," said a ministry official. The idea behind this partnership is simply to get the requisite skills outside the government to supplement efforts being made by government and government-aided schools.

Computer-aided learning is an attempt to reduce the dropout rate and increase retention in schools, as well as help develop communication skill and innovative approach.

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