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State govts joining hands with private firms to use technology

New Delhi: Many state governments are in talks with firms such as NIIT Ltd and Teledata Informatics Ltd to forge partnerships to use information and communications technologies, or ICT, in education.

Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, Punjab and Haryana are looking to the private sector to build, operate, own and transfer (BOOT) ICT infrastructure in government schools.

This would typically require installing computers with educational software, and training teachers to use these technological aids. Educating India: A file photo of a computer class in Shree Sharada Vidyalaya school at Amruth Nagar in Bangalore. The new initiative by some state governments would require installing computers with educational software in educational institutions, and training teachers to use these technological aids. Hemant Mishra / Mint.

The assets created through this process would be transferred to the state governments after five years. The development comes after the ministry of human resource development, which oversees education, asked states to consider the BOOT model to utilize funds worth Rs900 crore for the fiscal year to March to set up e-learning infrastructure in schools and colleges.

The fund sharing arrangement for the scheme stipulates that the Union government would contribute 65% of the money and the states would contribute the remaining 35%. For north-eastern states, the ratio is 90:10.

“We prefer the BOOT model and ideally would want all the states to follow it for the programme,” Anshu Vaish, secretary, school education and literacy, told Mint. “So far, five states have been granted permission to follow the model.” Vaish clarified that the states are also free to partner or launch the scheme on their own.

India’s National Mission on Education through Information and Communications Technology, which has an allocation of Rs4,612 crore to be utilized by March 2012, aims to leverage the potential of ICT. This is expected to be a major intervention in raising enrolment rates in higher education.

L. Balasubramanian, president, school learning solutions at computer education provider NIIT, said the BOOT model in ICT was mutually beneficial. “It’s very simple. We create infrastructure for them and operate it before transferring assets, while government pays us for service development every three months.”

“Ten years ago, the Tamil Nadu government faced long delays in procuring hardware for its IT training programmes in schools and they, too, switched to a BOOT model,” Balasubramanian added.

NIIT currently has a Rs21.4 crore contract with the Rajasthan Council of Elementary Education to introduce computer-aided learning in 1,672 government primary schools in 22 districts of Rajasthan within the framework of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, India’s flagship welfare programme to put every child in school.