

## Drive to familiarise rural people with benefits of IT

Two of India's reputed IT firms rolled out a campaign here Thursday to familiarise and enthuse rural people about the benefits of information and communications technology (ICT) for socio-economic empowerment.

The initiative called 'Bharat Saksham Yatra' will cover 300 villages in Rajasthan as well as Nasik and Sangli districts in Maharashtra.

The 30-day campaign, which was rolled out by leading networking services company Hughes Communications and IT firm Microsoft Corp India, will make its first stop at Alwar April 4.

The objective of the campaign is to familiarise and enthuse village communities about the benefits of ICT for socio economic empowerment and, leveraging rural IT entrepreneurship opportunities.

The initiative will serve as a catalyst to drive franchisee opportunities for rural masses to set up IT kiosks or 'Sangam Net Kendras' providing new revenue streams to kiosk owners and villagers.

The kiosks can offer a host of services in regional languages including agricultural prices, market rates, weather forecasts and animal husbandry programmes along with other broadband services ranging from online education, Internet access, to international voice calling.

Speaking on the occasion, Pranav Roach, president of Hughes Network Systems India, said: 'Bharat Saksham Yatra is the crystallisation of our commitment with Microsoft to roll out 5,000 ICT kiosks announced late last year. The Sangam Net Kendras are aimed to bring rural India closer to the urban India with content and applications customised to the needs of the rural market. In addition, the kiosks will help in the creation of over 15,000 jobs and self-employment opportunities that will help opening up new streams of revenue and wealth creation.'

Microsoft, on the other hand, is creating an engagement model with kiosk service providers and governments for delivering e-governance and other services.

Hughes has adapted its successful HughesNet Fusion Center model for rural deployment in the form of IT kiosks that will be enabled through broadband satellite.

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