

## All Gujarat villages to get broadband connectivity

Ahmedabad: After getting hooked to television through the Jyotigram Yojana, villagers in Gujarat will soon become Net-savvy. In a couple of months, an ordinary farmer in Gujarat might well be seen checking up commodity rates and weather reports on the internet, thanks to the state's initiative to provide 13,693 villages with broadband connectivity.

Observing May 1, 2008 as 'Gujarat Day', Chief Minister Narendra Modi dedicated the state government's ambitious 'e-gram' project for all the 590 gram panchayats of Amreli district. Kickstarting the initiative, Modi claimed this was the largest and first-ever project of its kind under the e-governance initiative by any state across Asia.

Recently, the government successfully completed the project of providing three-phase 24x7 electricity supply to all the villages in Gujarat. Now, it has taken up this ambitious project of providing e-connectivity. Through the project, each village panchayat will get broadband internet connectivity, video conferencing facility and multicasting broadcast services.

The panchayats will also have access to information on agriculture, health, employment and education. Farmers will also be able to collect land documents from their respective village panchayats.

The state has roped in Bharti Airtel to set up VSATs in 13,693 villages with speed as high as 256 kbps. Moreover, three private operators - CMS, Reliance Communications and 3i Infotech - have been chosen to set up common facility centres in as many as 6,020 villages.

While Bharti Airtel will provide what is called government-to-community (G2C) services, like revenue records, ration cards and agro-commodity rates, the other three players will provide business-to-community (B2C) services, like air bookings, rail bookings and payment of telephone and electricity bills.

For broadband connectivity, the state is going to provide Q-band dish antenna and DDRS sets to 7,400 gram panchayats at an investment of Rs 60 crore.

According to Bharti Airtel chief operating officer Sharlin Thayil, the telecom operator had sourced around 13,000 SkyEdge IP VSATs from Israel-based Gilat Network Systems to provide last-mile connectivity to these villages under the project.

Bharti Airtel will provide the internet facility for Rs 76.47 crore for five years, while the other operators will together offer Rs 14.12 crore per year to the government for providing B2C services.

Source: Business Standard, May 2, 2008