

## **US foundation to be partner in IT@School project**

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THE American Indian Foundation (AIF), a leading institution engaged in building a bridge between the NRI community in the US and development activities in India, has expressed its willingness to partner the IT@School programme in Kerala under its 'Digital Equalizer Program'.

According to the Kerala State IT Mission, the official implementing agency, the partnership envisages a three-year commitment in terms of AIF in bringing in resources, including funds, for managing IT education at a few select schools. In the first phase, AIF has announced a sum of \$100,000 (Rs 45 lakh) for immediate rollout of the programme in about 10-12 under-equipped schools in Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulam districts.

This partnership is a result of month-long interaction between the AIF and the Department of IT, Kerala, aimed at evolving a platform for facilitating participation of NRI community in development activities in the State.

The AIF had last week organised a fund-raising reception with former President Bill Clinton in San Francisco. The guests included luminaries from the Indian Diaspora representing trustees and wellwishers. This event was an opportunity for the foundation to present its success stories and forge new partnerships with the Government of Kerala. Proceeds from the event will go towards funding AIF's focus programmes and the Digital Equalizer centres in India.

Kerala's initiatives in dissemination of IT at the grassroots level, namely IT@School and Akshaya, have caught international attention.

Akshaya envisages setting up of over 5,000 tele-centres at the ward level in every panchayat, with each centre catering to about 1000-1200 households. The project also envisages training of one member from every household (6.5 million households in the State) in basic computer usage.

The tele-centres will be connected to Internet and data centres with a large repository of local content in key sectors such as agriculture, health and so on. The IT@School programme, an initiative of the Ministry of Education, envisages institutionalising computer education at school level.

Partnership with AIF and its successful implementation is expected to spin off more credible platforms for philanthropic interventions in mass IT ventures in future.