



SAHAJ & IGNOU Bring Higher Education to Villages

A giant step towards Bridging the Rural- Urban Divide

New Delhi, 8 June 2009: Srei Sahaj e-Village Limited, a subsidiary of Srei Infrastructure Finance Limited, has partnered with Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), the largest Open University offering distance learning programmes, today to deliver international quality education at affordable costs to the rural population of India through 27,000 Common Service Centres (CSCs) that Sahaj is setting up in the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, and Jammu & Kashmir.

This prestigious partnership is aimed at making higher education available to the villagers in their own villages thus bridging the massive rural-urban educational gap. An estimated 100 million rural youth population across the country stands to benefit through the Sahaj-IGNOU partnership.

Srei Sahaj-IGNOU will jointly develop new certificated programmes especially designed for the rural youth, providing training in a blended learning environment to enable students to undertake a range of internationally recognized qualifications.

All courses will be accredited to IGNOU for its use. Srei Sahaj will administer the programmes including enrolments, registration, fee collection, evaluation and do the certification online or manually (by IGNOU directly).

Currently there is a yawning gender gap in the educational status of boys and girls and more so amongst the disadvantaged castes and tribes. Cultural, social and economic factors still prevent girls and SC/ST youth from getting educational opportunities. The net enrollment ratio of the rural youth stands at a mere 7.48 percent for boys and 4.5% for girls, remarkably lower than 17.84% and 16.9% respectively for urban boys and girls.

The Srei Sahaj – IGNOU partnership will help bridge this gigantic educational barrier within the rural landscape. With the use of modern ICT platform of Sahaj available at 12,000 Gram Panchayat units, the prestigious IGNOU higher education will be made available to the rural youth in digital format at the Sahaj Common Service Centers (CSCs). The rural youth would have unprecedented opportunities to acquire IGNOU's internationally recognized certification, diplomas, degrees right in their village within a distance of 3 kilometers of their homes at ICT backed, computerized Sahaj CSCs. By the end of 2008-09, Srei Sahaj-IGNOU promises to make this on-line university available at 27,255 CSCs in the states of Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

The education gap cannot be bridged by merely building more universities, as it would mean acquiring land and putting together the necessary infrastructure for thousands and thousands of new universities to cater to the 150 million college-age rural youth. On-line Universities, which do not require physical infrastructure, have facilitated greater accessibility to education world over. This is especially true for kinds of courses designed to cater to the needs of students who do not have financial backup or family support. The Sahaj-IGNOU tie up aimed at re-engineering higher education will bring in great advantage to women and those who cannot afford to travel and live in the cities for education.

Commenting on the collaboration, Hemant Kanoria, Chairman & Managing Director, Srei said “As acquiring higher degrees is directly related to greater socio-economic status, this is a powerful step towards making the growth and development of India broad-based and accessible by the hitherto, remote, marginalized and disadvantaged communities.”

Elaborating on the partnership, Dr Sabahat Azim, CEO, Srei-Sahaj said, “This is historic step to bridge the educational gap between Rural and Urban India. Now parents who for their own socio-economic reasons were diffident about sending their wards to pursue higher education can now rest easy. Girls who could not pursue higher education can do so from their own villages. In the next three months this partnership would be operationalised and with that I believe we would set up a landmark in the area of Public-Private Partnership model to meet pressing social needs. Soon we will extend these centres to all common service centre across India by partnering with other Service Center Agencies under the National e-Governance Plan of DIT, Government of India.”

About Srei Sahaj e-Village Limited

Srei Sahaj e-Village Ltd. is a subsidiary of Srei Infrastructure Finance Ltd. It is a business integrator in the field of IT infrastructure with a focus on rural India. It has 65 offices across 6 states and is emerging as one of the largest implementers of ICT-based projects in India. It has taken up the task of eliminating the undemocratic digital divide between rural and urban India, under the flagship of NeGP of the Government of India. It brings government, business, and services to the rural India through an expanding network of Village Level Franchisee Partners. Srei-Sahaj is set to launch 26,146 CSCs across the country. Above 12,000 CSCs have already been established, providing a single-window, one stop solution to the citizen’s needs, under the Private-Public- Partnership (PPP) arrangement.

The parent company of Sahaj, Srei, is a Holistic Infrastructure Institution, constantly and consistently ideating to deliver innovative solutions in infrastructure space, thus playing a significant role in nation-building for over two decades, both in urban and rural India. Srei’s businesses include Infrastructure Equipment Leasing & Finance, Infrastructure Project Finance, Advisory & Development, Insurance Broking, Venture Capital, Capital Market and Sahaj e -Village. Srei has a pan-India presence with a network of 63 offices and has also replicated its business model overseas with three offices in Russia. Srei is the first Indian infrastructure financing institution to get listed on the London Stock Exchange. Srei Equipment Finance Pvt. Ltd., a joint venture between Srei Infrastructure and BNP Paribas Lease Group, a wholly owned subsidiary of BNP Paribas, is a Srei Group company engaged in Infrastructure Equipment Leasing and Financing Business.

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Background Note for the editors:

1. Under the Prime Minister Flagship National E Governance Plan, Srei-Sahaj e-Village Ltd, a subsidiary of Srei Infrastructure Finance Limited, has taken up the task of eliminating the undemocratic digital split between rural and urban India. It brings government, business and services to the rural India through an expanding network of Village Level Franchisee Partners i.e., Village Level Entrepreneurs.
2. Today, Srei-Sahaj in partnership with its 12,000 Village Level Entrepreneurs, is serving about 160 million rural citizens.
3. Sahaj is mandated to set up a total of about 27000 Common service Centres in states of Assam , Bihar, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal. Recently it tied up with Jammu and Kashmir Bank to help roll out the CSC project in the challenging terrain of Jammu and Kashmir.
4. A total of 32 services are now available at Sahaj CSCs including digital photography, digital video-shoot, NREGA photograph, NREGA data collection, government form submission, information regarding electoral processes- addition and deletion in the electoral roll, data entry (LA and LR), DTP, ROR, Internet, death certificate, birth certificate, property tax payment, agricultural soil testing, agricultural diagnosis, e-Learning, electric bill collection (WBSEDCL), BSNL bill collection, mobile top ups, railway reservation, LIC premium collection, advertising, rural-job portal and examination results. There are many more services in the offing like e-Commerce, matrimonial services, distance education, postal service, IEC (Information, Education and Communication), and infotainment.
5. Visit www.sahajcorporate.com for more information.