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## This is IT

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Talk of Information Technology (IT) and the first thought that invades our minds are the computer screens bleeping in corporate offices. IT has definitely revolutionised our lives what with computers becoming part and parcel of our daily lives. In the public sector, however, its reach has so far been limited. Be it government offices or public institutions, IT has not been implemented in a major way. The only exception is perhaps the Indian Railways that has implemented computerised passenger booking systems with the help of IT.

Academicians observe that education is one sector that has not been touched by e-governance. "This is very unfortunate since education is the

cornerstone of our efforts to build future generations," says Som Subhra Gupta, Lecturer, Mass Communication, Rabindra Bharati University. Experts like Professor Bula Bhadra of the Department of Sociology, Calcutta University, observe that the education system is chaotic. "The dropout rate of students from primary schools is high. In most schools, teachers do not attend classes and the syllabus is obsolete. There is no system to monitor the progress in schools. There is no meaningful evaluation of the teachers and the taught. There is also no proper system in place to send feedback to the players involved like the faculty, students, parents and administrators."

Professors Bhadra and Gupta observe that the education system can be streamlined only if e-governance is introduced. They feel a proper system should be put into place that would be able to answer not only the reason behind a particular trend but also what led to it, where it happened and from when. For instance, the system should be able to give you the reason behind the increasing dropout rate in a particular school or why the students of a particular class have been faring badly in a subject. The e-governance system should also be able to address queries at the micro as well as at the macro level. For instance it should be able to point out to the reason behind the poor performance of a bright student in a particular class. It should be able to evaluate a teacher's performance, etc.

Take the example of an e-governance system that has been implemented in various schools — the M-Star Education Expert System. Developed by MGRM NET after a detailed study of various educational formats, this highly flexible method can be customised to a high degree to fit in with all the required parameters of an institution.

Professor Bhadra says that the M-Star or systems like it, allow school boards and directorates to keep tabs on the functioning of the school. "The system should not only allow administrators to monitor the academic performance of schools but also gauge the impact of national schemes like the Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan." The system should be able to function through the various levels of the education chain — right from kindergarten to the university level and help bridge the gap between parents, teachers, students and faculty. For only then will education have truly arrived!

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