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Press Release

Chandigarh, March 15:- From "chalk-and-talk", they have since graduated to "click-and-enter" culture and no more shy away from any one speaking English. This tale of transformation relates to more than 50-odd students of Class V to VIII of a madrasa at Manimajra in Chandigarh. They have not only learnt how to operate computer but can also understand and speak English language.

The excitement of keeping pace with the present-day times is writ large on their faces. Their hearts filled with the desire to move fast and forward on the road to information technology (IT), and minds with determination, the young students of the madrasa have begun to let their dreams soar: some want to become doctors, others teachers or engineers.

This change has been brought about by IT going to the madrasa under the Chandigarh IT Reachout Programme (CITROP). This initiative of the UT Administration seeks to arm and equip students, belonging to the Muslim community, with skills, both IT and communication, free of cost. The madrasa in Manimajra has 250-plus students on its rolls.

"The objective of the programme is to equip the students with skills and instill in them the confidence to face the challenges of life. It's a marathon, not a sprint. Unskilled workforce, in fact, is a drain on the economy," said M. S. Brar, Director, IT, Chandigarh. Under this programme, the students are first trained to improve their basic understanding of the English language. "Once they complete the course, they are upgraded to the C-TOSS programme after being put to a test", Mr Brar added.

"With the global war for talent heating up and companies expanding their horizons at the rate of knots, there is urgent need for having more skilled workers. Gaining professional qualification is the highway to jobs, and a passport to the growing industry. Hence, the youth should be equipped with skills", Mr Sanjay Kumar, IT-cum-Finance Secretary, UT Administration, said.

Noticing the winds of change blowing on the campus and the students gaining in confidence, Mohamad Imran, principal of the madrasa, has started thinking big. "We plan to make the madrasa a model school and so equip the students here as to enable them to compete with their counterparts in any other school in Chandigarh," he said.

CITROP which had been started by the UT Administration in 2007 in collaboration with Infosys and

SPIC, and implemented in the madrasa a couple of years ago, has started paying rich dividends. "The popularity of the programme and the itch among the students to learn English language and computers has resulted in shortage of computers. Now, we have divided the students into two batches coming in different shifts," said Imran.

Since its implementation, the UT Administration spent Rs 4.25 lakh in 2007-08; Rs 5.88 lakh in 2008-09 and Rs 3.59 lakh up to December, 2009 in fiscal 2009-10. So far, as many as 2,000 students, especially those belonging to the underprivileged class, had been trained, Mr. Brar disclosed.