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Training ITs guns

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Here's someone who's willing to put his money on West Bengal despite the current atmosphere of industrial uncertainty. Prateek Agrawal, in fact, gave up a very successful career as senior consultant with Capgemini in New York, to move back to Kolkata last year and has set up a niche IT training institute, Ivy Professional School. "I have always felt that Kolkata has huge potential in terms of human capital, with low entry barriers," says the 30-year-old Agrawal who represents the modern face of a Kolkata-based business family with its roots in Rajasthan.

The pullout of the Nano project has not dampened Agrawal's spirits because he sees the IT sector still enjoying a big advantage in Bengal. "The state chief minister made a commitment towards supporting the IT and education sectors in the state during the opening ceremony of our new facility, his first public speech after the Nano pullout," he says.

Agrawal relocated to India when he was asked to join the family business that spans education, infrastructure, manufacturing and trading in cement and steel, real estate and gas stations. And now with the financial crisis hitting the US, he feels he was lucky to have made the move. "Even as the US economy faces a huge crisis, the education sector in India—and specifically in West Bengal—has huge potential for growth. In fact, even as companies in India gear up to tighten their belts, we have been seeing the number of students increasing. While those in engineering colleges are joining our courses to get an edge in this competitive job market, companies too are asking us to create training programmes for developing the right kind of skills among their workforce," says Agrawal.

He adds that tying up with Orion Tech Parks—the upcoming \$1.2 billion IT SEZ in Kolkata—to set up Ivy Professional School, gave him the knowledge edge as an entrepreneur. "As an auditor with Capgemini, I had interacted extensively with financial clients and I found that everyone who was important was trying to tap into India or China. While our family businesses are in cement, steel and manufacturing, I was looking at entering the IT services sector right from the beginning," he says.

As the exclusive training and education wing of Orion SEZ, Agrawal feels that his firm enjoys an edge over IT training companies that follow the franchisee model and spread themselves too thin. "Companies located within the SEZ will be looking for specialised skill-sets and that's exactly what we're out to provide. Our courses are highly specialised, and include a data analytics and research-based KPO finishing programme, a corporate finishing programme and one on ethical hacking," he says.

Having interacted with a large number of engineering students in West Bengal, Agrawal feels that most of them are looking for specialised IT courses after finishing their degrees. He is himself a computer engineer and has a masters degree in management from Texas A&M University. Agrawal's wife Eeshani—a civil engineer with a masters degree in geotech engineering from the US—is also on board, handling corporate relations for the company.

Agrawal has ambitious investment plans lined up for his company over the next few years despite the economic downturn. "We have planned for a staggered investment of Rs 20-25 crore (\$5 million) over a period of three years," he says, adding that he plans to start operations in Siliguri by the end of 2008 and a third centre in Rajarhat near Kolkata in 2009. "While our North Bengal centre will be spread over 7 acres and will have the

capacity to train over 10,000 students; the Rajarhat centre is envisioned as the biggest professional IT training campus in Bengal," he says. Agrawal is also looking at tapping his overseas networks for tie-ups with specialised training institutions.

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