

VanniTech Trip Report

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By

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After spending 13 months and 13 days in Sri Lanka to implement the VanniTech project, I have returned to the U.S. a few weeks ago.

When *ITTPO* - International Tamil Technical Professionals' Organization laid out the plan to establish Vanni Institute of Technology in Kilinochchi, and requested help in December of 2002, we at *ITTPO* were overwhelmed with the support and offer of help from all directions.

It's still less than a year since the inauguration of Vanni Institute of Technology, but we have done so many things in so little time, all with the help from hundreds of people including the dedicated faculty and staff. We have built an institution and created an environment where students can study just like their counterparts in any other developed country. The software and hardware we have at VanniTech is the latest and the greatest. No other single institution offers similar study program in the country. The syllabus was created in such a way to make the most efficient use of time, and teaching the latest technology that can be utilized immediately.

VanniTech was inaugurated on June 23, 2003. During their first quarter break in the month of September, VanniTech students conducted computer workshops for a week for school children. More than 1000 students from 17 schools from 6 districts of the North-East participated in the workshop. While the program enriched VanniTech students providing valuable experience, from time management to leadership skills, it offered an opportunity for the school children of North-East to see and feel the computer technology and the career opportunities it provides.

In the third quarter, our students created 18 software and hardware products for clients in the North-East as Field Deployable Project. The clients include local and international aid agencies, and government departments and secretariat. Students participated in setting up of computer network of the United Nation Development Program's Kilinochchi office through TechShack - VanniTech's Employment Incubation Center.

Having finished their study program in February 2004, students were showing off what they are capable of, at Vanni Vision '04 – a 2-day exhibition of high technology that was attended by about 1000 school children and potential clients. The proud products include several database applications both for Windows and Linux, computer networks, an automatic water tap, and a robot, all created by the students.

The majority of the students had enrolled without knowing how to use the computer keyboard or mouse, but today – in just 9 months, they are graduates of VanniTech, developing database using C#, creating websites, and PDA applications, setting up computer networks using the latest servers with raid controllers, and designing electronics circuits. Today, more than half of the graduates are undergoing on-the-job training, doing real technological work in Vanni, for both local and foreign clients.

While the monumental achievement we all were able to make through this project was rewarding for us, it's very significant to the people of North-East of Sri Lanka. With the help from several people from all around the world we have built an institution that we all can be proud of. Several generous persons have given numerous help from financial donation to personal visit to Vanni to donate their valuable time. Several have donated books and equipments, while others contributed to the course development and related work. Members from VanniTech@YahooGroups contributed in many ways. So many persons have helped in so many ways to the establishment of VanniTech and they include officials from Sri Lanka's Prime Minister's office in Colombo to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's political head office in Kilinochchi. Every time we needed help, people helped us with smiling faces.

During the past year, several people from several countries came over to Vanni and volunteered their services. For some, it was their first ever trip to far away Sri Lanka. Most of the board of directors of *ITTPO* came over to VanniTech to ensure its success. The Chairman Dr. Ratnam Sooriyakumaran visited twice within the same year. Some volunteers came from popular technology companies such as IBM, Intel, HP, Microsoft, HP and Philips. Their contribution includes setting up the institute to teaching the latest technology and the English language. Several volunteers conducted seminars on technology, effective communication, confident building, counseling etc. One volunteer happened to be the junior chess champion of South Africa, and his playing chess blind folded with two students simultaneously, was a scene, most students wont forget.

The invaluable contributions from the volunteers were significant to our achievement. The exposure our students had to both local and international visitors and volunteers, both academic and non-academic, during the 9 month period, will undoubtedly help shape their future to the better.

No one could thank enough the countless donors and volunteers who have contributed so much to VanniTech. It's only the smiling faces of the North-East people and one day, their economic prosperity, could convey the gratitude.

In less than a year, while achieving so many goals, VanniTech did not fail to attract the local and international media. From Sri Lankan state owned Rupavahini TV to Briton's BBC, and from Hong Kong based STAR TV to Canada's Vision TV, all came down to VanniTech. Newspaper and radio coverage were many to mention.

Although VanniTech is a success story, there are more to be done in the near future. VanniTech needs lot of help to maintain its momentum, and I hope volunteers and contributors would wholeheartedly offer their continuous support until VanniTech reaches its maturity.

If the progress can be maintained and if we stay the course, the history would certainly record the impact of VanniTech to the society!