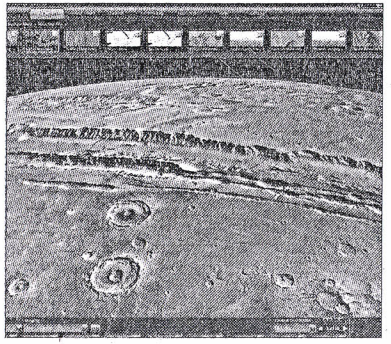
CITY ANCHOR 3D INTERFACE ALLOWS ONE TO LITERALLY DELVE INTO THE UNIVERSE AND SEEK OUT ITS NOOKS ON A TERAPIXEL IMAGE

Universe comes home through first-of-its-kind workshop

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
SPETEMBER 2

A WORKSHOP in Pune tomorrow will help bring the planetarium home. Co-hosted by Microsoft Research, California Institute of Technology (CalTech) and the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), the event will introduce Indian skywatchers to WorldWide Telescope (WWT) — virtual, interactive and comprehensive map of the night sky aggregated from various space missions and observatories that allows the user to pan out, zoom in, search for and access information on celestial objects.

The seamless 3D interface allows you to literally delve into the universe and seek out its nooks and crannies on a 'terapixel' image—the largest and clearest image of the night sky ever, constituted from a collection of thousands of images taken over a period of 50 years. While new WWT users—it is downloadable for free—can choose from hundreds of conducted, cacheable, interactive tours, such as on how dust in the Milky Way condenses into stars and planets, that appear in a 'context menu' at the bottom, advanced users can create their own tours and share them.



Screen shots of WWT

"Though there has been a fair amount of adoption of WWT in India, this workshop, the first in India, will take it to a broad spectrum of audiences, including students, teachers and researchers. We chose Bangalore and Pune as there are a lot of astronomy enthusiasts in these cities," said Sridhar Vedantham, head, communications and external projects at Microsoft Research India. The workshop is under way in Bangalore at the Indian Institute of Science and will be held at the University of Pune campus on September 4. "The WWT workshop mainly aims to educate both professional and amateur astronomers regarding the use of the virtual observatory to scan and obtain research data about the universe and the night sky," said Vedantham.

At least 400-500 people are expected to attend the workshops. This is the first leg of the outreach programme, Vedantham says, adding that the long-term plan includes reaching out to schools and introducing portable domes that can serve as tiny planetariums in rural areas where there aren't any, to give the students a feel of the universe.

"We are going to incorporate Chandrayaan data as soon as it is made public. We have spoken to ISRO about it," said Ashish Mahabal of Cal Tech, one of the speakers at the ongoing Banglaore workshop.

Pune Newsline Dated 03/09/10 Page No-1