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A close look at higher education

India has to find its own solutions

by Suresh Chadha

TODAY we are moving from a mass production system to a new era where the principal source of value creation and productivity is knowledge. In the knowledge-driven economy of the 21st century, talent is the scarcest of scarce resources. The economy requires quality and higher levels of education, including high-tech skills, and open-mindedness for lifelong learning to meet the constantly evolving demands of the knowledge age.

India aspires to be the next knowledge capital, but the dismal state of the country's higher education system is at odds with the ambition. In the opinion of Mr V. Balakrishna of Infosys, "People think that infrastructure is the biggest problem. It's not. It is education. The quality of students who come out of our institutes isn't that great." Today, universities should see the changes in the country and respond to them by opening new departments. It is essential that we focus on knowledge as India's future; as our prime advantage in an increasingly competitive world.

As stated by Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul, a country becomes great only when it is the repository of knowledge, learning, art, theatre and literature. We must build new institutions as Nehru did in the 1950's. Only then can we be sure to have an Indian century.

India was a leading economy in 1 AD contributing to around 33 per cent of the world's GDP. Until 19 AD, China and India accounted for about half of the global GDP. Also, till 1450 AD China, and India were technologically more advanced than Europe. In the olden times, the universities such as Nalanda, Taxila and Alexandria were the hotspots and renowned seats of higher learning, and played a major role in the prosperity of this region. The decline of India and China in the 18th century

is attributed to the Industrial Revolution in Europe, the expansion of the US and British rule.

Then came the colonial education model of the 19th century which laid down a new syllabi, and rules for regulating affiliated colleges. Universities were essentially about managing and disseminating knowledge. Since Independence various committees on higher education have been constituted for improving the quality of higher education in India, but with no substantial outcome. The Radhakrishna Commission (1948) emphasised on making higher education accessible to all sections of society, whereas the Kothari Commission (1966) focused on educational development and creating integration among various institutions.

The National Policy on Education, (1986) enunciated a comprehensive framework to guide the development of the education sector and the National Knowledge Commission (2004) deliberated transforming India into a knowledge society and submitted 300 recommendations in 27 focus areas. The Yash Pal Committee (2008) emphasised the need to provide more autonomy to the universities and make them accountable. In 1947, there were around 25 universities, 700 colleges, and around 1, 05,000 students, but since then there has been mindless proliferation. The number of universities has increased manifold and around 16 million students are there in the country.

A country like India, where more than 70 per cent of the work force languishes in the under-skilled and poorly regulated informal sector, has every reason to give serious thought to the idea of self-governing interdisciplinary institutions. But the education system continues to perpetuate its colonial legacy, and treats a university like a govern-

ment department, meant more to administer knowledge than to produce it. Knowledge is, therefore, constricted and universities are cut off from the concerns of society and the economy. As the Ramamurthy Committee Report (1990) stated, the system of higher education encourages memorisation of facts and regurgitation rather than creativity. We cannot ignore the fact that today we do not have many colleges which we can mention with pride for imparting education of high quality, comparable to some of the well-known

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institutions of the world.

Education as we understand today is all about nurturing and developing the mind. Education involves cultivating the mind, and our educational system strives to accomplish this purpose by filling the mind with information and knowledge. Higher education must focus primarily on constantly expanding the frontiers of knowledge, not forcing the students to cram.

It has been observed that knowledge which is not applicable is as useless as the bath of an elephant, which soon after showering itself with good water proceeds to shower itself with mud and sand. The responsibility of higher education system is to educate people and make them learn to solve their prob-

lems. A graduate should be a chiselled individual who, while being able to compete with the best in the world, should also be a responsible corporate citizen.

The universities need to develop well-groomed leaders by providing infrastructure on a par with the best in the world; a faculty that is an eclectic mix of the best academicians; research and training facilities that could be the envy of any top business conglomerate; best incubation facilities and arrangements for the protection of IPRs to promote innovative thinking. We need to create a different kind of environment, not only in our educational institutions but also in industry that encourages innovation and creativity. If higher education and research infrastructure built by the universities collapses for lack of funds, Indian industry too will suffer. We need financially healthy universities that can carry out world class research and produce skilled manpower to raise and maintain India's profile in the global economy.

There is need for providing incentives for pursuing research and making teaching a more attractive profession. In this knowledge era, intellectual capital — everything from patents and trademarks to software and ideas — has become a greater source of value. The availability of quality teachers is a pressing concern. The situation can change only when universities become the centres of excellence where there is a genuinely critical spirit of inquiry and experimentation.

New paradigms of progress, governance and leadership are required, as blind progress cannot show the way. We have to find our own solutions by learning from the successes as well as mistakes of the West. ■

The writer is a senior professor at the University Business School, Panjab University.

Hindu ND 28/04/2012 P-3

Grand new plans for DU

Vijetha S.N

NEW DELHI: A degree in which you choose all your own subjects from whichever stream you want to, a train to take just you and your entire college all round the country and courses that let you just take off for a year without losing any credits – all these and more are part of grand new plans for Delhi University spelt out by Vice-Chancellor Dinesh Singh.

“In July 2012, we will introduce a B.Tech. humanities course which will be through a meta-college. In this course, students will be allowed to design their own degrees; they can choose whatever subjects they want to study, at whichever semester and from any college in Delhi University,” said Prof. Singh.

Another ambitious plan is to convert the existing three-year undergraduate courses in the university into four-year courses in 2013 with some special features. “The entire university’s undergraduate courses will be for four-year, with exit options after the second, third and fourth year. A student exiting after two years can earn himself an associate degree, after three a Bachelor’s degree depending on the courses and the fourth year will be an honours programme, which will be more research

oriented.”

Another unique feature is that if the student exits before getting through the fourth year, then he has the option of coming back even after 10 years to complete the remaining course.

Athletes also have good reason to cheer. “If a person is good in any sport and has to regularly practice for it, then he or she will be allowed to knock off one course without losing any credits for the degree. If the athlete makes it to the college team, then he or she will be allowed to knock off two courses and if the sportsperson is really good and requires more practice, then three courses,” he said, adding that he did not want to constrain good athletes from striving for their best, just because of a worrisome thing like a degree.

He added that the hunt was on for good coaches from all over the country and that the current university coaches would be sent to train at some of the colleges that had really good sports programmes. Another feature of the course allows a student to take off one year from the regular course and complete it in the school of open learning. Prof. Singh attributed this to the fact that students sometimes need time to think beyond what was taught in the classrooms and that education should be ex-

perienced and not just taught from black-boards, which is also behind the idea of a train to take students across the country. “The entire train will be rented by the university.”

A new course to be introduced is the M.A. in mathematics education which will be a joint degree with Jamia Millia Islamia. “A student can take whichever subject he wants from either university,” he said, adding that following the concept of the meta-university, if any student of DU wanted to do a subject from any other university; he would make arrangements for the same. “IIT or JNU whichever university the student wants... can be arranged and we will give the credits,” he said.

Jamia Millia Islamia Vice-Chancellor Najeeb Jung also confirmed the tie-up with DU on Friday.

However, Prof. Singh cautioned that all of these plans are yet to receive approval from the Academic and Executive Councils.

Other plans include LCD projectors for each classroom where important events in history will be shown, laptops for each student, special English courses to improve the presentation skills of Hindi medium students, central online and offline applications and decentralisation of SC/ST admissions.

Indian Express ND 28/04/2012 p-4

On DU table: Proposal to let students design degree

If approved, B Tech in Humanities will allow students to pick and choose courses from July

NANDINI THILAK

NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

DELHI UNIVERSITY has proposed introduction of online registration for admission to its undergraduate courses from the coming academic session. The University has also announced a new 'meta college' course, B Tech in Humanities, to be offered through its Cluster Innovation Centre (CIC) from July 2012.

Though online admissions are proposed for the coming season, the offline system will also continue. "The new admissions mechanism will be announced by us in a few days. There will be online and offline forms. Assistance centres and flying squads will be put in place to help students," the University Vice-Chancellor Dr Dinesh Singh said on Thursday night.

Announcing a slew of reforms to soon be presented before the University Academic and Executive Councils for approval, officials said on Thursday night that the new B Tech course will let students "design their own degree", allowing them the freedom to pick and attend courses from different DU colleges along with the courses they attend at the CIC.

"The course is designed to enhance students' practical knowledge coupled with a good theoretical base.

IN THE OFFING

- Excursions for students to neighbouring countries
- E-newspaper/journal for University students
- Projectors and laptops for all classrooms
- Better support for sportspersons
- Founder's day to be celebrated on May 2
- Exam reforms OR question bank for different University exams



Students of the course will be able to register for courses happening in different colleges and take them sitting in that college, along with formal course work at the CIC," Dr Singh said. The new course will start off in July 2012 with a minimum of 20 seats.

The University has also announced the first of its Meta-University courses - a Masters in mathematical education to be offered jointly by DU and the Jamia Millia Islamia from July 2013. This proposal too will soon go to the University Academic Council for its approval.

The introduction of the new B Tech Humanities course is a step towards the conversion of all of DU's undergraduate courses into four-year programmes, a step slated for the academic session starting July 2013, Dr Singh said.

The University had ear-

lier announced its plan to introduce four-year graduate programmes with exit options at the end of the second, third and fourth year, from July 2013. As with these courses, the B Tech Humanities course will have provisions where students can gain credit for their achievements in sports and co-curricular activities. It will also have provisions for students to complete part of the course work in the open-learning mode. The University is also considering giving School of Open Learning students the opportunity to attend some courses in the regular mode from 2013.

The process of consultation with teachers has already begun for the introduction of four-year undergraduate programmes, the V-C said. "An academic congress for teachers of all departments in June is also planned," Dr. Singh said.

What Kapil Sibal must already know by now

India is challenged by a big problem of unemployable youth

Salad
DAYS

BIJOY SANKAR SAIKIA

WHENEVER Sunil Bharti Mittal talks about the formative years of Bharti Airtel, he willy-nilly ends up making a huge comment on India's education system. "The best engineers always went to big companies. So, we decided not to handle the technical part of the business on our own and outsourced all non-core functions to the big names in the service management space," he would say.

Even in those days, India was producing close to 200,000 engineers a year, but, Mittal was not ready to bet on the second best to drive his dream.

Almost two decades later, studies by myriad HR management firms and bodies like Nasscom only prove him right: That only about 25 per cent of India's engineering graduates are readily employable. Every year, close to 3 million graduates and post-graduates are added to the country's workforce. Of them, only 25 per cent of the technical graduates and 10-15 per cent of regular graduates are considered employable by industry.

It's true that economic reforms accelerated India's growth and the expansion of trade and industry created more jobs that would turn any developed nation green with envy. Yet, the rate of joblessness in India has remained high. And more than an unemployment itself, India is increasingly staring at a much bigger problem today, that of the huge number of unemployables.

In planning commission's own estimates, only about 20 per cent of graduates get employment in India, mostly because the



DEEP ROT: Prospective employers are no longer ready to look at the curriculum vitae. They want to know what you bring to the table

rest fail to qualify for jobs. And this is what has added up to 40 million educated unemployed, rendered professionally useless by obsolete education.

HR managers across Indian industry would tell you they are facing a severe shortage of trained personnel because of which in-company training costs have gone up significantly. The IT industry's frustrations with graduate engineers are well documented. The banking industry, which requires close to 700,000 young people to drive growth, fears that the shortage of manpower could throw a spanner in their plans.

The nation, furiously pushing growth, is facing a curious situation of being dragged down by an unprepared workforce because the education system remains out of tune with the needs of the economy. Colleges would tell you, universities don't allow them to upgrade. Universities cite their own of reasons for failure to keep pace with time. That leaves us with a close-ended education system to prepare the youth for a borderless world.

Prospective employers are no longer ready to look at the curriculum vitae. They want to know what you bring to the table. Unfortunately, nine out of 10

won't know what, simply because the degrees did not prepare them for a particular job. Our course curriculum fails to draw a definite career path for students. It is impractical and lacks focus. The IIMs, IITs, N-IITs and even the venerated IISc do produce world-class engineers and management graduates, but, they barely account for one per cent of the workforce.

The problem has multiple dimensions. Because the education system has proved to be inefficient, today's employer insists on all sorts of additional qualifications, forcing prospective candidates to run from one institute to another to acquire all sorts of degrees and diplomas that, in most cases, add up to little. This leads to huge wastage of resources and, most importantly, crucial prime years. This is one reason why a full-blooded 23-year-old Indian youth is still busy studying when his counterpart in Silicon Valley is already raising his first million dollars for a startup, or readying for the first career jumps.

Because the system is so hollow and because there are so many unemployed, employers too take the liberty to use highly qualified people for low-paying jobs. For long, ordinary graduates who could crack geometric puzzles were suitable en-

ough for clerical jobs in banks. Now, those banks insist on MBAs.

The systemic loophole has also created conditions for the mushrooming of myriad private institutions, most of which are there only to make money without being able to inculcate any skill or add value to the lives of the hapless youth. We have private universities operating from one-room setups all over the country; we have aeronautical engineering institutes training science graduates to be ground staff at airports for course fees that add up to several lakhs, and we have universities that are ready to dole out degrees for those who can bear the cost.

The system allows all this to continue. The nation that can tame the toughest of insurgencies is incapable of rooting out fake universities. The country that flashes all kinds of beacons and insignia to distinguish ranks and positions of bureaucrats and ministers, cannot have a system in place to clearly demarcate a private institution from a public one, and a coaching centre from a regular college, to ensure that gullible students do not fall victims to frauds.

That's nothing but outright exploitation of hapless students from all sides. It's possible because people who manage education do not care much about the need to update it and make it more relevant, and educators responsible for keeping the system in shape refuse to come out of their comfort zones. And then, there are too many powerful people benefitting hugely from the entire mess.

If all of the government's 100-day governance agendas, programmes for universal education and skill development missions can so conveniently miss their targets, it cannot be without reason; there must be a purpose behind it, if not a motive.

bijoysankar@mydigitalfc.com

Hindu ND 28/04/2012

P-5

Allahabad varsity closed as V-C is held hostage; students go on rampage

Atiq Khan

LUCKNOW/ALLAHABAD: Allahabad University has been closed till Monday after large-scale student violence and arson erupted on Thursday, leaving two dozen persons injured, besides huge loss of public and private property. Conceding students' demand, the administration on Friday allowed them to stay in hostels until after the summer vacation is over.

Uttar Pradesh Inspector-General (Law & Order) Badri Prasad Singh told journalists here that patrolling by police, Provincial Armed Constabulary and Rapid Action Force personnel was intensified on the campus and in adjoining areas following Thursday night's violence.

A first information report was lodged against 500 unnamed students, but no ar-



PEACE SHATTERED: Allahabad University students holding a rally on Friday. PHOTO: BRIJESH JAISWAL

rests were made, Mr. Singh said, adding the situation was under control.

The violence was the fallout of a face-off over Vice-Chancellor A.K. Singh's circular asking students to vacate hostels at the end of the 2011-12 academic year. The students protested

against the move and the situation turned volatile when the police used force to disperse a dharna by 1,000 of them, including girls, at the university guest house, where the Vice-Chancellor had been held hostage for about 30 hours since Wednesday. His office is sit-

uated in the guest house.

It was at around 7.30 p.m. on Thursday that the students went on the rampage and resorted to heavy stone-throwing on the police force, after the Vice-Chancellor was rescued and whisked away in a car. They torched the guest house, four vehicles belonging to teachers, a roadways corporation bus and the official car of the Additional District Magistrate. The police resorted to lathi-charge and burst teargas shells to disperse the students. The mayhem continued till late at night.

Tension had been brewing on the campus for the past one week. The students demanded that they be allowed to stay in the hostels as many of them were preparing for competitive examinations. The university authorities, however, refused to back off.

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IN FOCUS | NIRANJAN KHATRI

MANAGER OF GREEN

Sanchita Pathak

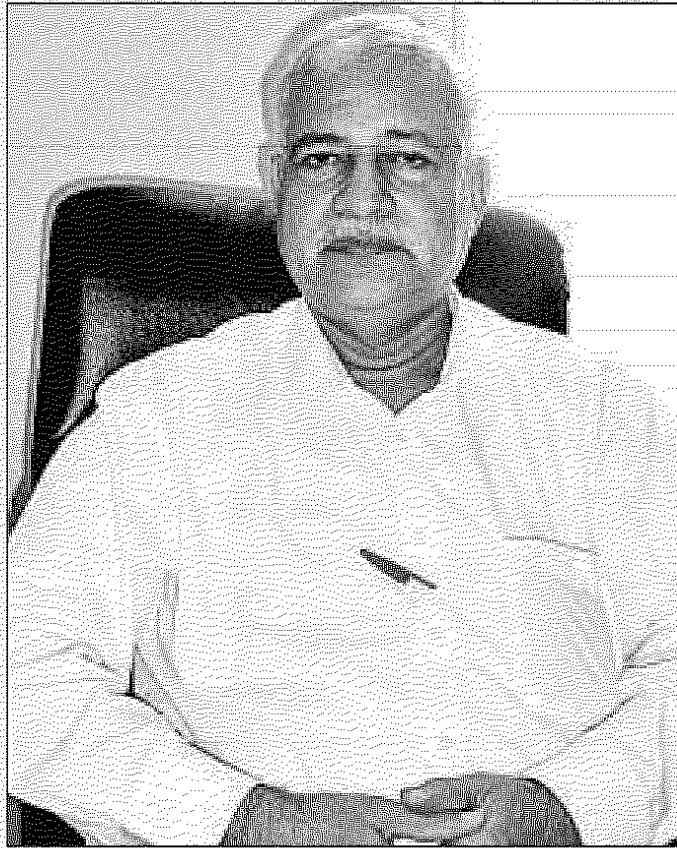
It's easy to grumble, complain and write a book on 9,999 ways to crib. And then there are those like ITC WelcomGroup's Niranjan Khatri. Not one to sit back and whine, the general manager of WelcomEnviron Initiatives takes initiatives to implement the change he wishes to see in the world, especially the changes related to the environment.

An ecological pioneer in his own right, Khatri has been implementing environmentally responsible ideas, green practices and most importantly, been sharing his ideas and educating people about a greener environment.

"Well, my role is to address developmental issues which are evolving and require out of the box thinking in trying to conserve our resources," he modestly explains.

The man isn't all talk. His office is equipped with double-glass windows, which allow light but not heat to

Khatri has developed an eco rating for the Delhi Government



enter, thereby decreasing the load of air conditioners and saving energy by minimal electricity usage.

For someone who has dedicated 22 years of his life towards a better environment, he feels strongly about the inception of a world in which humans live in harmony with the environment.

He highlights his eco-mantra covering the 4R's—Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rethink.

"We have to work towards

the betterment of all aspects of life including water preservation, energy conservation, waste management and the economic and social issues that are in sync with the above," says he. Khatri developed eco rating for the Delhi Government, which has been employed in 1,200 schools, translated into Marathi and further distributed to 6,000 more schools all over India. He has even taken sessions on eco-design at IIT Mumbai

and Delhi, and at the Delhi University.

He expresses serious concern on effective and efficient use of natural energy resources and emphasises on producing enough to fulfill the needs of every human being of the world. "The aim is to bring about Ecological Literacy and fill knowledge gaps," elaborates Khatri.

He asserts that few people know about the various eco-friendly practices they can apply in their daily lives. Planting trees, using separate storage bins for recyclable materials, using energy efficient lighting and sharing excess water with neighbours. Such practices not only conserve immense amount of energy and water but are also highly economical in the long run. "We all have to hold hands and work together," he says. "People won't hold hands without knowing the merits."

As for the future, Khatri wants to constantly innovate, engage stakeholders and raise the bar. He wants to work to improve the Triple Bottom line (TBL) which is a criterion that properly acknowledges the interplay of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of our lives. It is remarkable to witness someone working willfully towards the issues that concern each and every citizen of the world. The initiative has been taken. All we must do is follow suit.