Announcements

ASERF has instituted Dr Stya Paul Young Educationist Award' for honouring Young Educationists who have demonstrated their potential by making an impact on Indian education.
Applications from the eligible scholars are invited for the Award of the year 2009. Click here to download the prescribed format along with the terms and conditions.

Apeejay Education Society launches courses in Biosciences & Clinical Research: Apeejay Education Society (AES), has now established an institute for Biosciences and Clinical Research to meet the growing demand for technical personnel in the Biosciences sector. The institute, **Apeejay Svran Institute for Biosciences and Clinical Research, Gurgaon, (AIBCR)** has been established in collaboration with leading companies in the industry, viz Martin & Harris, ASG Biochemicals and Walter & Bushnell Health Care.
For more, visit: www.apeejay.edu/aibcr

Partnership

Dear Partners,

The Apeejay Stya Education Research Foundation (ASERF) invites news, articles, resource material, opinions and analyses on relevant educational issues that can be highlighted in our by-monthly e-bulletins and on the ASERF portal.

We request if you could spare a few moments of your valuable time to have a look at our website and guide us on our regular initiatives.

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Politics of teaching

Talking about the role of the intellectual, Noam Chomsky says, "It's not a term I take all that seriously. Some of the most intellectual people I have met and known in my life were very remote from the so-called intellectual professions. Plenty of people who are called intellectual workers, who work with their minds, not their, say, hands, are involved in what amounts to clerical work. An awful lot of academic scholarship, for example, is basically a kind o f clerical work."

Humanistic culture has its limitations but is certainly the most resistant. But those who do engage in dissidence and resistance and believe in the act of disruption are measurably few in the humanities and minuscule in the sciences. Stanley Fish has views that are different from Chomsky's, especially on the role of the academic. He is fully opposed to those on the Left who call upon professors to go beyond the private, academic or technical terms to the "public sphere" and to the sphere of the citizen rather than that of the narrow specialist.

In a recent article; "Professor do your Job", Fish writes: "Pick up the mission statement of almost any college or university, and you will find claims and ambitions that will lead you to think that it is the job of an institution of higher learning to cure every ill the world has ever known: not only illiteracy and cultural ignorance, which are at least in the ball-park, but poverty, war, racism, gender bias, bad character, discrimination, intolerance, environmental pollution, rampant capitalism, American imperialism, and the hegemony of Wal-Mart; and of course the list could be much longer."

Fish then goes on to elaborate: "Wesleyan University starts well by pledging to 'cultivate a campus environment where students think critically, participate in constructive dialogue and engage in meaningful contemplation' (although I'm not sure what meaningful contemplation is); but then we read of the intention to 'foster awareness, respect, and appreciation for a diversity of experiences, interests, beliefs and identities'. Awareness is okay; it's important to know what's out there. But why should students be taught to 'respect' a diversity of interests, beliefs, and identities in advance of assessing them and taking their measure? The missing word here is 'evaluate'. That's what intellectual work is all about,

beliefs can be wrong, and identities are often irrelevant to an inquiry."

Politics and Academics

In the last century, until the 1970s and the 1980s, politics had not found its place in the formal reading of teachers who remained obsessed with the all-pervasive dominance of canonical texts. Unbiased "wisdom" in the field of interpretation, and not the individual commitment of the interpreter, had kept politics securely out of the humanities. As with other conservatives, it was the opinion of many that any change in the canon would embroil society in socio-economic problems and therefore urged the academic to stay apolitical.

Modern academics may like to believe that their mind is with the Left, but their lifestyles are decidedly with the Right. They live comfortably, discuss political issues casually in faculty rooms, and if they engage in the act of writing, they end up adopting arcane professional jargon, immersing themselves in the "muck" of fashionable theory, deceiving themselves that no relation exists between a piece of writing and the world they live in.

As in the case of the London School of Economics or the University of Berkeley, once conspicuously leftist, the New Left scholars are no longer progressive in their ideology. They accept the apolitical nature of their universities without any qualms, spending their time not in producing texts of social and academic relevance or scholarly brilliance but in the mundane pursuit of applying for fellowships, attending conferences, marking examinations, and trying to get on television.

The split between the theorist and the public critic has led to a divide in culture where literary studies have become bogged down in eccentric scholarship, opaque jargon and politically motivated cultural studies, forcing the common reader into a position of irrelevance.

This is the cultural-academic crisis of our time that has brought about a split between politics and aesthetics, between social ideas and literary values. With so much fascination for criticism, it has often been feared in the last few years that interest in literature might be displaced by the obsession with "sinister aesthetic ideology", which concerns itself more with evaluation, canon formation and academic instruction, and ignores the interests of the common reader. This is Fish's

apprehension and he would not like meanings of texts to expand arbitrarily, thereby rejecting traditional approaches with their bases in principle and order.

His book *Save the World on Your Own Time* asks whether meaningful criticism is still possible or if the professionalisation of criticism has turned it into an academic discipline and a scholastic technique.

To some extent, contemporary criticism has succeeded in balancing politics and aesthetics by creating a kind of middle ground between formal analysis and literary sociology. This becomes important in taking criticism out of the academic enclaves of literary theory, philosophy and cultural criticism and enabling the public to have access to a criticism that attempts to reassert the value of reason, truth, aesthetics and politics with a view to moving out of the politics of theory and into the politics of activist social concern.

Save the World on Your Own Time is a wide-ranging enquiry into the current state of academic activism. It draws attention to the speculation about reconfiguring the current critical sense and opposing it with a leftist Arnoldian standpoint. Especially concerned with the general economy of critical understanding and its operation and transformation within pedagogy, the book is both a contribution to and a demonstration of the contemporary role of the academic, emphasising that it should be largely apolitical.

Fish's approach coheres with the older forms of literary criticism, which considered political questions as peripheral to the appreciation of culture. Cultural criticism ought to be directed at deepening and widening experience, not for a moment losing sight of communal life, minority groups and subcultures which constantly resist the dominant ideology and the totalitarianism of meta-narratives.

'*Not the democracy business'*

Fish draws the attention of academics to some very important issues concerning activism and the overwhelming nature of one's responsibility to the job in hand. Seen in the light of his 1995 book *There's No Such Thing As Free Speech...And It's a Good Thing, Too,* he stresses: "It is a question finally of what business we are in, and we are in the education business, not the democracy business. Democracy, we must remember, is a political not an educational project."

In line with this is his primary argument in his latest book: "College and university teachers can (legitimately) do two things: (1) introduce students to bodies of knowledge and traditions of inquiry that had not previously been part of their experience; and (2) equip those same students with the analytical skills –

of argument, statistical modelling, laboratory procedure – that will enable them to move confidently within those traditions…."

This amply indicates Fish's perspective of academic freedom where teachers are not permitted to personal choices or views. Students, according to him, "must be allowed to make up their own minds without coercion".

But as a teacher, he writes, "I can conduct my class in any manner I like… and I can assign whatever readings I judge to be relevant to the course's topic. Those are pedagogical choices, and I cannot be penalised for making them. But if I harass students, or call them names, or make fun of their ethnicity, or if I use class time to rehearse my personal political views or attempt to win students over to them, I might well find myself in a disciplinary hearing, either because I am abusing my pedagogical authority or because I am turning the scene of instruction into a scene of indoctrination."

Fish is blatantly against "those who confuse advocacy with teaching". In other words, he would not like classroom teaching to bring about any views on changing the world. "Just teach and that is more than enough." Your job is not to act the "change agents".

The job of teachers is not to "develop such virtues as racial tolerance, honesty, and social responsibility" or turn students into "active, knowledgeable citizens in a democracy". Just do your job well. That is your mission.

Taking the example of teaching composition, he argues:

"More often than not anthologies of provocative readings take centre stage and the actual teaching of writing is shunted to the sidelines. Once ideas are allowed to be the chief currency in a composition course, the very point of the course is forgotten. Much as the instructors in those courses may want to use them to 'raise awareness' in the students about issues like poverty, the plight of native peoples, and the oppression of women, they should resist it. It's hard enough teaching young people how to write properly without the distraction of political advocacy."

As the intellectual on the Left would argue, would this not take the students away from controversial subjects so important to be aware of in a civil society?

Fish does not want classroom teaching to ignore the controversies; rather, the primary concern should be to analyse the controversies instead of politicising them and building "allegiance".

The need is to academise the issues of controversial importance: "By invoking the criterion of truth, I've already answered the objection that an academicised

classroom – a classroom where political and moral agendas are analysed, not embraced – would be value-free and relativistic. If anything is a value, truth is, and the implicit (and sometimes explicit) assumption in the classroom as I envision it is that truth, and the seeking of truth, must always be defended. To be sure, truth is not the only value and there are others that should be defended in the contexts to which they are central; but truth is a pre-eminent academic value, and adherence to it is exactly the opposite of moral relativism."

Role of the Intellectual

For a radical thinker, the role of the intellectual would be to approach the public in various ways to make it see the real state of affairs and its link to the state's ideological structure. It would be pertinent to draw attention to Daniel Bell's essay on the end of ideology, where he first takes up the notion of emancipation asserted by the bourgeoisie as a necessary condition of rescuing society. Then, Bell is of the view that ideology has been replaced by the views of social and political experts who bank upon the welfare state and the particularity of each situation to be dealt with in space and time. On one side, ideology is taken as "the conversion of ideas into social levers" and on the other as "a set of beliefs infused with passion… [Which]… seeks to transform the whole of a way of life"?

Thus, Bell's views emphasise the disappearance of "ideology as social levers" in the hands of the intellectuals who now have no ambitions of bringing any beneficial transformations in society. Within a heterogeneous and pluralistic society where the welfare state is in complete control, there is, according to these intellectuals, no need whatsoever to bring about any radical changes; we may tinker with our way of life here and there, but it would be wrong to try to modify it in any significant way. With this consensus of intellectuals, ideology is dead. And Fish would agree to the extent that the classroom teacher must not try to change the world or indoctrinate students during the time he has been given to teach. His attack is really on the politcising of higher education where the politician uses his vision to impose on the academe a programme that has behind it the power of funding and a political dominance that costs the universities their freedom. His underlying intention is to emphasise the inherent concerns of education and the pedagogical practice, thereby bringing to it autonomy from external political pressures.

Source: /frontlineonnet.com/

Class X boards to become optional from next year

From the coming academic year (2010-11), the Class X board exams will become optional in all CBSE schools. The board will make a formal announcement to this effect probably by Friday, once the blueprint of the new system to replace the board exams is frozen.

Sources in CBSE said board chairman Vineet Joshi will, on Thursday, hold the last presentation and consultation session in Madhya Pradesh on the changes being brought about before the draft is finalized and made public.

The sources said CBSE has prepared the format of an aptitude exam, which schools can use to test Class X students on their level of understanding in each subject. The emphasis, however, will be on continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) through the year instead of a single public exam at the end of Class X.

``CBSE has decided to go strongly on making the Class X board exam optional and implement CCE grading system and other alternatives. The process of review of the present Class X exam system is over,'' Joshi told TOI.

He said that CBSE had also conducted a survey among students on whether they want the board exam to continue. ``In a couple of days, we will come out with final modalities of the new system,'' he added.

Joshi said there were apprehensions that the new format would create two categories of students, those who take the exam and others who do not. ``Concerns have also been raised on the problem of certification for those who opt out. We have addressed these issues in the new plan and provided alternatives,'' he said.

Among these alternatives is the provision of an online, on demand test for those who do not take the board exam but want certification later on. ``The certificate issued after this online exam would be equivalent to the Class X certificate. This test will also help students who want to change streams in Class XI,'' Joshi said.

In another major decision aimed at ensuring that schools maintain the minimum basic standards, CBSE has decided to have an independent agency for accreditation of CBSE schools. All schools under the board will have to get themselves evaluated by this agency within three years. New schools will get CBSE affiliation three years after they have been accredited by this agency.

Joshi said the accreditation agency could be either a government or private body. ``The Quality Council of India has shown interest in the project,'' he added.

Source: New Delhi /timesofindia/27 August 2009

Grading system in, CBSE boards out

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is all set to roll out its grading system with a continuous and comprehensive evaluation package and make Class X exams optional. CBSE is also formulating a detailed plan for accreditation of schools by an agency prior to CBSE affiliation — all this while almost all the state boards voiced reservation and concern over making Class X board exams optional.

Speaking to TOI on the sidelines of the annual conference of Council of Boards of School Education in India (COBSE) in the Capital on Tuesday, CBSE chairman Vineet Joshi said all the apprehension of the state boards are uncalled for as CBSE had prepared a detailed blueprint for the changes and all their concerns were adequately addressed in it. ''We, at CBSE, have decided to go the CCE way soon, as it won't be a huge problem implementing it since the methodology of teaching we practice at Class X is same in Class VI and VII. Therefore, if we introduce CCE at Class IX and X, it too will have the trickle-down effect,'' said Joshi.

But it was the issue of making Class X board exam optional, which faced a lot of opposition at the COBSE meeting. Dispelling any fears, Joshi said the COBSE conference managed to address most of the concerns of the state representatives. On the issue of creating two categories of students, one who took the Class X boards and another who did not, Joshi said; ''First of all, it is to provide flexibility to students and de-stress the education system. But at any point of time if a student wants to test himself, he/she can go for the 'online on demand assessment test'. The test is equivalent to that of the Class X board exam and thus if a student need any certification, that test would suffice.'' Moreover, CBSE is also preparing an aptitude test that students can take to test their understanding of the study done during Class X days.

Meanwhile, in order to ensure credible internal evaluation, all new schools need to be accredited by an agency for three year before CBSE affiliates them. The existing affiliated schools also need to be accredited within three years.

Source: New Delhi /timesofindia/26 August 2009

Educating Indian youth for IT Careers

A good model for training the youth is important for the future of ICT industry in India

A new government, a new education movement in the country, and signs of revival in global economist will not be long before the old refrain of the war for talent starts all over again! The ICT industry itself will need close to 2,50,000 professionals every year to sustain and accelerate its growth.

With normal acceptance standards, this would call for a minimum of 6,00,000 students to be trained each year, and possibly another 1,00,000 to go through reskilling from different vocations. Add to that the need for providing advanced skills every year to at least 1-mn professionals, currently employed in the industry, and it is evident that nearly 2 mn trainees will have to go through skill development processes every year.

There are good models that are worth emulating all over the world. Community college system in the US, which enables continuing education and the opportunity to pick up relevant skills, has deteriorated through the years, through inadequate focus on quality, but is still one initiative that could work in many parts of the country.

The German dual system of education, which engages the corporate sector industry associations and young aspiring job seekers and provides internships for students in the system, is a system which has succeeded in controlling unemployment levels in the country and is now aspiring to be the model for the future for the European Union.

The alternative is the Chinese way, where hundreds of new universities are being opened every year with strong support from the Communist party as well as the provincial government to convert millions of aspirants to world class professionals.

While this scale of investment may be neither feasible nor appropriate for India and other parts of Asia and Africa, the involvement of the private sector in a more formal manner, and the opening up of higher education to high quality foreign universities prepared to invest in significant campuses and educational facilities may enable more capacity building in all participating countries and states.

A future model of resource creation for the ICT industry in India and every emerging nation may well be on the lines of the following four-part model:

⇒ Talent assessment of all young people in their early teens followed by awareness on possible career options that are in line with their aptitude. This could be provided by government funded agencies like the Maharashtra and Rajasthan Knowledge Corporations.

⇒ Employability skills should be imparted in all universities and colleges, so that the conceptual education provided in engineering, liberal arts and sciences, and other formal university programs with continually updated content is relevant to the needs of the corporate sector.

$\Rightarrow$ Employment training, aimed at graduates from the relevant and other disciplines should be conducted full time at centres near the employment zones and should be fully supported by the corporate sector. These would serve as finishing schools which may become unnecessary in the medium term once the employability movement takes firm root in the educational processes of the country.

$\Rightarrow$ Functional and technical update programs must provide advanced technical and management skills to industry professionals on a just in time rather than just in case basis, and prepares them to assume higher responsibilities in the industry.

There is a lot to be done in India to enable a model like this to be conceptualized and implemented, but early realization and robust design of the new model can ensure that the country begins to see the benefits in a few years. The corporate sector can play a major role by extending a helping hand to academia through the provision of industry projects and faculty development programs.

The days of everybody blaming somebody and nobody making the effort to collaborate are hopefully over, and the new season of hope for the industry can and should result in a determined effort to increase the skills pool in our country!

Source: Bangalore /ciol.com/26 August 2009

IGNOU to Train 10 mn Rural People in 12 Countries

The country's premier long distance education varsity, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has collaborated with nearly a dozen universities in as many countries to develop skills among 10 million rural people in the next six years.

The aim is to make rural people skilled. We will try to bridge the digital divide among people and thus empower them, IGNOU Vice Chancellor V.N. Rajasekharan Pillai told IANS Wednesday.

The skill development would be region specific and will be facilitated through tele-centres across the countries, including Uganda, Hungary, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Thailand and the Philippines.

The skill development would be done in local language and efforts are on to develop a global curriculum for this.

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC), a Canadian organisation, is collaborating with the IGNOU for the purpose.

B. Shadrach, a senior official of the IDRC, said; the skill development has four areas - soft skill, management skill, private and public service and computer training.

Also as part of the Bharat Nirman (Building India) programme, India is setting up over 100,000 tele-centres to facilitate information to people about several government schemes and opportunities.

These centres will be utilized to help rural people to develop employable skills, Pillai said.

They will be empowered in areas like agriculture, fisheries, handicrafts and other vocational skills, which are source of income for people in their own region. There will be hundreds of disciplines. It will educate and empower them. Education will lead to better livelihood and here we all will feel happy, he said.

The IGNOU is the world's largest Open University with a student enrolment of at least 2.5 million.

Source: New Delhi /taragana.com/19 August 2007

Mining school board to take up IIT tag issue with Centre

The governing board of the Indian School of Mines (ISM) here on Tuesday agreed to the demands of the students and teachers to upgrade ISM to that of an IIT.

The decision was taken after over 2,500 students of the mining school boycotted classes and went on a wildcat strike earlier in the day over the issue. Their teachers also joined in the demonstrations.

The chairman of the governing council, P K Laheri, asked the ISM director to prepare a detailed project report (DPR) within three months and that would be sent to the Union ministry of human resources. The council even passed a resolution, recommending an IIT status for ISM.

Earlier in the day, the ISM Teachers Association passed a resolution at an emergency meeting, asking the Centre to declare ISM an IIT. "The teachers support the students' demands and unanimously resolved that ISM should be declared an IIT since it fulfilled all terms and conditions required to become an IIT. ISM is a recognised institution of excellence and has a brilliant academic history of serving the nation for the last 80 years," said Pramod Pathak of the School of Management.

Student representatives, Nishant Kohli and Devdeep Roy Chaudhury, both in their fourth year, were allowed to place their demands with the governing board.

The students said admission to ISM since 1998 was being held from the list of successful candidates, who cleared the joint entrance exam for IITs. With the number of IITs going up to 15 from six, the brilliant students among the successful candidates opted for IIT. Even the teachers were quitting ISM for IITs, they claimed.

According to the students, the quality of the new candidates seeking admission to ISM has gone down. Same for the teachers. So, to sustain the competitive edge, ISM should be converted to an IIT immediately, they said.

Arguing that ISM had the entire infrastructure required to claim the status of an IIT and since the state had no IIT, the students claimed that ISM deserved to be upgraded to an IIT.

The students and teachers also decided to meet the Governor and ask him to send a separate recommendation to the Centre, seekimng IIT tag for ISM.

Both students and their teachers later agreed to resume classes from Wednesday.

Source: Dhanbad /timesofindia/18 August 2009

UCSD Health Sciences and IIT Form Partnership

Officials of the University of California, San Diego Health Sciences and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur today signed a historic preliminary agreement to collaborate in the development of an International Medical Center (IMC) at IIT Kharagpur.

This agreement – marked by a signing ceremony in Kharagpur, West Bengal, India – is the beginning of a strong educational, research and clinical partnership between UC San Diego Health Sciences and IIT, Kharagpur. IIT, Kharagpur is the first and largest of the IIT chain of higher education institutes in India that focuses on engineering and technology. The goal is to jointly establish a state-of-the-art medical center at IIT Kharagpur, which will be the first of its kind between a U.S. University and an Indian Institution.

''This exciting partnership is an extension of UC San Diego Health Sciences' traditional core mission – to provide excellent and compassionate patient care, advance medical discoveries and educate future health care providers,'' said Mounir Soliman, MD, MBA, executive director of UC San Diego Health Sciences International. "The establishment of an academic medical center to include the best in clinical care, as well as undergraduate and post-graduate programs in medical education, will be a perfect partnership – bringing together the strengths of both institutions."

''In addition to IIT's strong education and research focus in engineering and the sciences, we also are keenly interested in medical science and technology, including biotechnology, imaging, drug development and other important areas of medical research," said Professor Damodar Acharya, director of IIT, Kharagpur. "The collaboration is believed to be among the first between an IIT and a public U.S. university in the field of medical education and research." Acharya also pointed out, "The aim is to initiate technology leveraged medical education and research to provide holistic health care for the entire life cycle at affordable cost to underprivileged, poor and tribal population of the region."

The agreement describes the two institution's collaborative plan to build a 300-bed, state-of-the-art hospital on land provided by IIT, Kharagpur. The International Academic Medical Center (IMC) will include a research and development center, as well as an infrastructure for the training of health care providers. UC San Diego will partner in developing the IMC, providing leadership and training in such areas as nursing, hospital administration, health information systems, pharmaceutical practices, telemedicine, quality assessment and safety, among others.

''As a well recognized, world-renowned institution, UC San Diego has earned a highly respected, branded name in the areas of clinical service, management, education and research. It is the only academic medical center in San Diego with an array of training and educational programs which will be useful to train international-based medical and administrative personnel who have access to clinical trials, the latest treatments and technology," said Tom McAfee, MD, dean of Clinical Affairs at UC San Diego Health Sciences.

UC San Diego and IIT, Kharagpur's research collaboration will include faculty, student and resident exchange programs and jointly supervised clinical trials. As for the development of undergraduate and post-graduate medical education, UC San Diego will advise IIT, Kharagpur as it formulates a medical curriculum at the IMC, with the aim of meeting the accreditation requirements in India and the U.S. The IMC will be an academic unit of IIT, Kharagpur, where students can earn bachelors, masters, doctorates and postdoctorate degrees from the institute in fields including medicine and surgery. Physicians and researchers from UC San Diego will work at the IMC as visiting faculty to facilitate collaborative educational and research programs. IIT, Kharagpur faculty members will also spend several months each year as visiting faculty at UC San Diego.

''Our hope is to help transform health care by merging the resources of two world leaders in medicine and technology with the goal of promoting excellence in research and education," said Soliman. He added that the academic medical center at IIT, Kharagpur will provide a golden opportunity for UC San Diego medical students and faculty to study diseases from a new, global perspective.

''The long-term goal is to enable IIT to provide health care services to patients from the States of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa as well as low-cost care for medically underserved populations, including tribal groups of the region," said Acharya.

The Government of India established IIT, Kharagpur in 1951 as the first of 15 engineering and technology-oriented institutes of higher education. It is officially recognized as an Institute of National Importance by the Government of India and is regarded as one of the best engineering institutions in the country.

UC San Diego Health Sciences encompasses the School of Medicine, the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, and UC San Diego Medical Center – the system of patient services provided at Hillcrest, Thornton Hospital, La Jolla, the Moores UCSD Cancer Center, and other centers, primary and specialty practices of the UCSD Medical Group faculty physicians. As a top-tier academic medical center, its role is to provide leadership in improving health through research, education and patient care.

Source: /health.ucsd.edu/18 August 2009

HRD ministry at full swing

The joke is that the rate at which HRD ministry is framing cabinet notes and draft bills, many of the next sessions of Parliament will only be passing legislations on the education sector.

A new minister and a new work culture in the ministry is right now geared to meet the 100-day deadline that ends in the first week of September.

The biggest of them all, the Right to Education, has been passed in both Houses of Parliament. A lot of questions, many of them genuine, are, however, being raised about the legislation. Putting together its nuts and bolts will hit many roadblocks by various interest groups but a big step has been taken.

Though there are many other bigticket changes on the anvil, public interest will be on weather the class 10 board examination will be made optional and evaluation will shift to grading system. The answer to both questions is yes, at least for all CBSE-affiliated schools in the country.

Most of the groundwork has been done, public consultation has already been undertaken been with there being effusive support and a large section of educationists are rooting for the twin changes. Kapil Sibal will announce it on completion of 100 days. It is bound to have its impact on state boards who have promised to take a positive view if it clicks in the CBSE.

But it is higher education where the bulk of action is taking place. Sibal's promise of initiating a slew of legislations is on track. The idea of amending the Constitution to set up a higher education commission and legislation to create it is already with the PMO and other ministries.

Simultaneously, HRD has also moved bills to check educational malpractices by institutions, on educational tribunals, 14 innovation (also called world class) universities, accreditation system and a concept note on the brain gain policy.

As for cleaning the mess in regulatory bodies, Sibal played a key role in ensuring that vested groups do not protect top functionaries of the All India Council for Technical Education from CBI.

However, in case of UGC, Sibal seems to have committed a mistake by setting up two review committees one by the ministry and other by UGC — to look into deemed universities. The question being asked is — How can a committee of UGC that advised the ministry to give deemed status to certain institutions now find fault with the same institutes?

Also, why is the ministry's review committee not making a physical verification of claims made by deemed universities? It's a big let down in Sibal's first 100 days.

HITS: Right to Education Bill passed in both Houses of Parliament Making Class X board examinations optional A new regulatory body to oversee higher education

MISSES: Review of deemed universities not handled well A thorough probe into doling out deemed status not done Not enough attention paid to National Council for Teacher Education

CHALLENGES: Implementing the Right to Education and ensuring private schools abide by its provisions Cleaning mess in regulatory bodies like UGC, AICTE Gross Enrolment Ratio in both elementary and higher education should increase

Source: New Delhi /economictimes/29 August 2009

HRD, UGC eat humble pie on 'deemed' tag

It could be virtually called a scam which benefited deemed universities as they were able to attract a large number of students. In 2006, they were quietly allowed to drop the word `deemed' and just use `university'.

Three years later, faced with a court case, an embarrassed HRD ministry and UGC have admitted that this was a wrong decision.

A writ petition by Kapil Kumar of the Professors Forum of India in the Delhi High Court had challenged the legality of the 2006 decision and the subsequent

corrigendum of 2008 that allowed these universities to drop the `deemed' tag. On August 10, the HRD ministry asked UGC to withdraw the 2006 notification.

But the larger question is whether the ministry will order an inquiry into how such an order was issued in the first place and blindly followed by UGC. The commission quickly passed the blame on to the HRD ministry. UGC secretary RK Chauhan told TOI, "The 2006 notification was finalised by the ministry. We only issued it."

In its August 10 communication, the ministry told UGC, "We should accept the petitioner's stand as Section 23 of the UGC Act, 1956, has still not been amended. It is, therefore, requested that the UGC should ask its counsel to convey the same to the hon'ble court on August 19."

With the ministry having told UGC to withdraw its earlier notification, the commission informed the same to the Delhi High Court on Wednesday resulting in the petition being disposed.

Section 23 of the UGC Act clearly states that "no institution, whether a corporate body or not, other than a university established or incorporated by or under a central Act, a provincial Act or a state Act shall be entitled to have the word `university' associated with its name in any manner whatsoever."

In the August 10 communication, the ministry asked UGC not to file its affidavit in the present form, withdraw its notification dated September 13, 2006, and "communicate the same to all institutions `deemed-to-be-universities' so that the latter refrain from using the word `university' with their names".

Source: New Delhi /timesofindia/21 August 2009

ICSE to centralise evaluation system

In a bid to speed up the process of publication of results, the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations has decided to centralise the evaluation process of ICSE and ISC answer scripts from 2010. The council is also introducing e-registration of candidates appearing in the 2011 ICSE and ISC examinations.

About 250 schools in West Bengal, mostly in Kolkata and suburbs, are affiliated to the Council.

Currently, teachers are allowed to take the answer sheets to their home for correction and submit it to their head examiners within a given time period. But under the new system, the teachers would not be allowed to carry the answers scripts home. Instead, they will evaluate them at a designated centre during a 10-day period.

To modernise the exam system, the Council plans to enable the schools to electronically register students for the 2011 ICSE/ISC examinations.

The Council has also advised schools to grant duty leave to teachers selected for marking scripts. The schools, however, are not entirely happy. While some schools point out that this will hamper the academic activities, Council official insisted they would not require more than two teachers per schools.

Source: Kolkata /indianexpress.com/20 August 2009

Scientific collaboration between India, Israel soon

It is for the first time that a collaborative effort has been made with Israel wherein bilateral research will be carried out for the benefit of the two countries in the India Israel Institute for Industrial Research and Development, AK Sood, who was representing department of science and technology (DST) at IIT-K, told TOI.

"The areas identified for collaborative research work includes fields like agriculture, biotechnology, nanotechnology, IT, medicine and communications. Israel is one such country which has a lot of potential and India and Israel together can bring out high end results in the fields in which it has collaborated," added Sood.

He added, "Similarly, in the field of automobile engineering we have collaborated with Germany, in the fields of IT and health services, we are in collaboration with UK. China and India are working together in the area of earthquake and civil engineering. India, Spain, the Netherlands and Germany will together focus on renewable sources of energy (solar and wind energy)."

He revealed that the DST would soon be launching fellowships for the students and faculty members of African countries so that they come to India for higher education where they will be imparted scientific knowledge through expertise in various scientific fields.

The government of India is in agreement with 80 countries of the world for promoting scientific research and temper. The focus of the DST is to grab the meaningful knowledge or a know-how from other countries of the world with whom the deal has been inked.

Meanwhile, IIT-K will ink an MoU with the Malaysian government on Saturday for setting up of an electronic hub in Penang. It is noteworthy this development will take place during the ongoing golden jubilee celebrations of IIT-K.

"The aim of signing of this deal is to provide technical knowhow in setting up of an electronic hub in

Malaysia. We will operate through a research centre in this hub which will make our presence in the south east Asian region," said SG Dhande, director, IIT-K, while talking to TOI.

Source: Kanpur /timesofindia/22 August 2009

Sibal building consensus on education reforms

Afraid to be caught on the wrong foot again, HRD minister Kapil Sibal has embraced the 'consensus mantra'. With just 20-odd days to complete the 100 days agenda, Mr. Sibal is on a consensus building spree.

The minister is understood to be less than satisfied with the progress on the 100 days agenda of the ministry. The minister came under attack of his party and ministerial colleagues for announcing a slew of education reforms measures as part of his 100 days agenda. Some Congress leaders criticised Mr Sibal for not making the effort to discuss the matter with all stakeholders. To avoid a similar situation while ensuring that consensus building does not derail reform measures, the minister is actively reaching out to stakeholders.

Early next week, the minister will travel to Chandigarh to meet with stakeholders in the education reforms, particularly of the school sector. In a bid to get the states on board with reforms in school board examinations, higher education reforms on lines of the Yashpal Committee and National Knowledge Commission, the minister will be holding a meeting of state education ministers in the last week of August. This will be followed by consultations with the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) at the end of the month.

In the meantime, the department of higher education is pushing to get states' to respond to the Yashpal committee report and the proposed legislation on malpractice in education institutions and educational tribunal. Higher education secretary R P Agarwal has written to states soliciting early responses on all three issues. The two legislation and the Yashpal committee report will feature in both the state education ministers meeting and CABE consultation.

Despite the rush, the ministry is going out of its way to be solicitous to the states. Referring to the Yashpal committee report, Mr Agarwal writes, "the comments of the state government would assist the central government in taking quick decisions." While in a bid to get the states on board the two legislation, the higher education secretary writes, "both legislative proposals would require the active participation of state government to make the intent of the proposals rewarding.

Source: New Delhi /economictimes/15 August 2009

Sibal proposal on Class X

The human resource development (HRD)ministry's proposal for making class X examination optional received support today with stakeholders' consensually favouring the move.

During an interactive session held by the HRD minister, Mr Kapil Sibal, with Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) stakeholders at Panchkula (Haryana), 99.9 per cent participants favoured that the class-X board examinations be made optional. Tenth-graders who intend continuing in the eleventh grade at the same school should be free to take a school-conducted exam instead of the board exam. Apart from senior HRD ministry, CBSE and state government officials, about 450 participants, including school principals, teachers, parents and students, attended the session.

It was organised for seeking stakeholders' feedback on proposed reforms in school education. Similar sessions have already been held by the CBSE at Guwahati, Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram. Later speaking to reporters, Mr Sibal said board exams will be scrapped in classes fifth and eighth in schools across the country as they put undue pressure on the children.

"A uniform grading system would be introduced in schools across the country after the government arrives at a consensus with teachers, parents and students," he said. "For those schools that are up to Class XII level, we have proposed to scrap the board exams of Class X and to introduce a grading system. If a student has to remain in the same school, then he is not required to sit for board exams," the minister said. "If a school is only till Class X and the student has to take admission in some other school after that, then he has to give board exams. These exams are necessary so that the new school authorities can judge the past performance of the student before admitting him," Mr Sibal added. He maintained that the results of Class X exams alone would not be the parameter to judge a student. His or her overall performance will be assessed.

Source: New Delhi /thestatesman.net/18th August 2009

States adopt wait-and-watch policy on reforms

The two-day annual conference of Council of Boards of School Education in India (COBSE), which ended on Tuesday, concluded with the setting up of a committee of experts to prepare the outlines of the core curriculum for science and maths for Class XI and Class XII. The committee has a mandate to prepare the outlines of the core curriculum in two months.

Meanwhile, the state boards agreed in principle to the introduction of a grading system and continuous and

comprehensive evaluation (CCE) and have welcomed the three-language formula in all schools in the country. But they failed to reach a consensus on making Class X board exam optional, saying they would first like to evaluate CBSE's experience. The conference concluded with a set of recommendations including constitution of a national commission for secondary and higher secondary education

On making the Class X exam optional and on implementing the grading system, D V Sharma, general secretary of COBSE, said: "Let the CBSE first experiment and we will see how it works. As stated by the HRD minister, there is no compulsion, as individual boards have to make their own decisions."

COBSE recommended constitution of a national commission for secondary and higher secondary education, central government schemes for capacity building of state boards, standardization of affiliation norms, three-language formula and implementation of grading in state boards within three years.

Source: New Delhi /timesofindia/26th August 2009

Teacher cell survives

Education minister Kapil Sibal has vetoed a two-year-old plan to dismantle India's apex teacher education regulator accused of allowing sub-standard training colleges to flourish under its watch.

Top government officials said the minister had extended the life of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), but with fewer powers.

Sibal, the officials told The Telegraph, has rejected a ministry plan to disband the NCTE by repealing a law that created the teacher body, top government officials told The Telegraph.

The ministry will convey to the cabinet secretariat its decision to withdraw the NCTE (repeal) bill it had drafted after a review panel under late education secretary Sudip Banerjee recommended that the body be dissolved.

Instead of dismantling the teacher body, the ministry would now amend the powers of the council and hand over its key regulatory powers to individual universities, sources said. "The NCTE will not be dissolved. But the minister's decision does not mean that the ministry is happy with the functioning of the body," a source said. The council has been responsible for both setting and enforcing standards that must be followed by teacher training institutions.

The body has, however, been frequently criticised for its inability to regulate flourishing institutions imparting teacher training courses in violation of its rules and standards.

Its failure to stop such institutions from fooling students into joining classes has repeatedly thrust a dilemma on to the ministry — whether it should accept illegal degrees to save careers, or enforce rules stringently.

The latest such case involves Bengal, where Calcutta High Court struck down the legality of hundreds of teacher training institutes offering courses without recognition from the teacher education regulator.

The council's rules require primary school teacher training courses to be at least two years long. But most of the Bengal institutes declared illegal offered courses of shorter duration. A panel under Banerjee, the then higher education secretary, in early 2007 recommended scrapping the teacher body and replacing it with a new, stronger, teacher education regulatory structure.

The ministry, based on the panel's recommendations drafted a bill to repeal the NCTE act that governs the teacher education regulator.

The repeal bill was even approved by the cabinet and was awaiting nod from Parliament.

Now, Sibal is learnt to have suggested that instead of dismantling the teacher education regulator, the body's powers be amended to "realistically" match its abilities to regulate teacher education across the country.

The council may be allowed to continue setting standards for teacher education — adopting a role similar to that of the National Council for Education Research and Training in school education. The NCERT sets standards for curriculum and publishes textbooks used across central schools and many private schools.

Source: New Delhi /telegraphindia.com/26 August 2009

The alternative route to engineering

Those who are unable to pursue an engineering degree, course (B.E. or B.Tech.) from engineering colleges, can opt for AMIE.

Viable option: AMIE is recognised as equivalent to an engineering degree by AICTE.

AMIE (Associate Membership of Institution of Engineers) is an alternative option to become an engineer. AMIE is recognised as equivalent to an engineering degree by AICTE, UPSC, SSC and Central Government Departments and State government departments.

Those who pass the AMIE exams can appear for the Indian Engineering Service exam held by the UPSC, Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE) and Graduate Record Examination (GRE). They can also go for M.E. or M.Tech. programmes. The AMIE qualification will not be considered for teaching posts in professional colleges.

The Institution of Engineers India (IEI), Kolkata, conducts the AIME examinations all over the country. The course involves syllabus-oriented private study and students can utilise library facilities and oral coaching.

The AMIE programme has two sections. Section A is common for all and under Section B, the student member can choose a particular branch of engineering. Section A and B examinations are held twice a year — in June and December.

Student membership: There are two type of student membership — technician and senior technician.

Minimum entry qualification for technician is a pass in Plus-Two or equivalent examination with minimum 45 per cent marks in aggregate in physics, chemistry and mathematics. B.Sc. degree holders with physics, chemistry and mathematics can also apply for membership.

For the enrolment as senior technician, three-year engineering diploma in any branch is required. AMIE Examination is separately designed for diploma stream (senior technician members) and non-diploma stream (technician members).

After completing the Plus-Two examination, you can register for section 'A' examination under technician (non-diploma) stream with the Institution of Engineers. The application fee is Rs.375, and Rs.4,800 has to be paid as registration fee for Section 'A' examinations.

Application forms can be bought from any of IEI centres.

Section A: The Section A (non-diploma) examination includes the following 10 subjects.

⇒ Basic sciences: Engineering physics and chemistry, engineering mathematics.

⇒ Social Science: Society and environment

⇒ Engineering sciences: Fundamentals of design and manufacturing, material science and engineering, electrical science, mechanical science, electronics and instrumentation.

⇒ Communication: Engineering drawing and graphics, computing and informatics.

The student member should pass Section 'A' examination in all 10 subjects of which seven papers are compulsory and three optional. Each paper carries 100 marks, and the duration of examination for each subject is three hours. Grading system is followed for all subjects. Nobody is permitted to appear in more than four subjects in one-term.

Section A (diploma) stream covers four subjects — fundamentals of design and manufacturing, material

science and engineering, computing and informatics, society and environment.

Section B

After passing Section A papers, students should apply for registration for Section 'B' examination in any one engineering discipline of their choice in which examinations are being conducted by the institution. At present, Section B examination is being conducted in these engineering disciplines — chemical, civil, computer science and engineering, electrical, electronics and communication, mechanical, materials and metallurgical engineering, mining engineering, production engineering and textile engineering. Registration fee for Section B examination is Rs.4,800. Fee should be paid in the form of demand draft drawn in favour of the Institution of Engineers, payable at Kolkata.

AMIE examination centres will include Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, Coimbatore, Tiruchi, Madurai, Neyveli, Chennai, Mysore, Bangalore, Visakhapatnam, Goa, Hyderabad and Mumbai.

All technician and senior technician members are provided with identity card. Student member must pass the Section A examination within six years and Section B examination within six years after passing Section A.

Technician and senior technician members pursing Section 'B' examination can take up project work only after securing minimum grade 'C' in five subjects in an engineering branch of Section 'B'. The students should separately apply for project work to the headquarters of the institution. The grade cards will be issued to all the candidates who qualify in Section A and B examinations and those who pass Section 'B' examination will be given a provisional certificate of AMIE.

The Institution of Engineers also offers postgraduate courses for its graduates and corporate members in select engineering discipline in collaboration with the Birla Institute of Technology (BIT), Mesra, Ranchi. IEI chapters and some private institutes are also providing coaching classes for the registrants of AMIE examinations.

Source: /hindu.com/17th August 2009

The race for space

Colleges in Delhi have a major task — to accommodate the increasing, albeit phased, inflow of students into their campuses because of the OBC Reservation Act. A college that had says 2,500 students enrolled in the summer of 2008 will have 3,850 in 2012. So, what are the immediate challenges?

For one thing, the Act demands a uniform escalation in student intake across all colleges, without taking into account the vast disparity in the scope for expansion among them. Some colleges, especially those located within the main campus of DU, enjoy a ground area of perhaps more than 15 acres. The others, however, are contained within nine acres or less. The latter, in some cases, had already expanded academically and by way of infrastructure to their fullest capacities. Thus it would, have been more feasible had the increase in student intake been imposed based on an SAR or Student-Area Ratio.

Secondly, off-campus colleges are in many cases located on busy public avenues and therefore students face immense space crunch for parking their vehicles both within and outside the college. And the Metro, unfortunately, does not cater to most of these colleges.

Thirdly, the existing classrooms had been built to sizes compatible with university norms. The now swollen classes are already proving troublesome. Further, there will be a similar affect on other existing infrastructure facilities such as the auditorium, canteen, library, common rooms for faculty and students, not to mention open areas, sewage and electric systems.

It is important to note that the government has released grants to facilitate the constructions of more classrooms and laboratories. However, no college to the best of my knowledge has been able to commence construction yet. This is because preliminaries to construction — such as appointment of architects, finalisation of plans, multiple authority approvals, floating of tenders and selection of contractors — itself take two to two-and-a-half years. The actual construction, then, would take another two years or more. The interim period is nothing short of a nightmare for the college administration.

Possible Solutions

The Supreme Court has declared that vacant seats reserved for OBC should be made available to other categories after a stipulated time. Shouldn't this provision at least be deferred for another three years, till colleges are ready?

Also, there are almost a dozen governmental departments that have to approve building plans before construction can begin.

As principal of a college, where construction of an auditorium is currently in force, I have had the first hand experience of file-chasing, pleading, writing appeals, redrafting and of course waiting — it took more than 15 months for the approvals to come through. But this time around, I have not 'opted' to increase infrastructure, I have been 'ordered' to do so.

So, shouldn't the government cut out the red tape and award quick approvals of building plans through a single-window clearance?

Source: New Delhi /timesofindia/24th August 2009

Voices of dissent over children's education bill

The Children's Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, which has been passed by both Houses of the Parliament and is awaiting the President's nod, is being severely criticised by the activists of Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL), who have demanded for the re-drafting of the bill.

"The bill, in its present form, will never ensure equitable and quality education to all children because it excludes millions of children from the purview of the right to education," claimed Dr Rajni Kant, the state convener of CACL. The CACL is the largest network in 21 states in the country on child rights with 6,500 member organisations. "It has decided to send a delegation to the President of India with an appeal to send back the bill for re-consideration," informed Kant, adding that a national convention of CACL would be held in New Delhi in September to raise the issue.

According to him, the bill passed in Lok Sabha on August 4 is completely unacceptable because it prevents millions of children in the age group of 0-6 and 14-18 years from their right to education. Giving statistics, he said the bill- if enacted- would exclude 157 million children of the country, who were in the age group of 0-6 years and were already guaranteed the right to free and compulsory education by the Supreme Court way back in 1993. Besides, the bill is also not recognising right to free and compulsory education for the children of 14-18 years age group while the Government of India by ratifying the United Nations Declaration on Child Rights is responsible to ensure all rights to children up to 18 years of age. The bill is also depriving the poor children from the opportunity and eligibility of technical and higher education by providing free education only up to eighth standard as most of the technical and higher education need at least 10+2 passed eligibility.

Kant said the bill was not talking about the improvement of learning quality and infrastructural quality of schools. The bill limits the role of the government to ensure one school in each neighbourhood area and shifts the responsibility of bringing children to those schools on the parents. "This shows the government abdicates from its responsibility of making social provisions of bringing child labour, bonded labour, mentally and physically challenged children to school," he said.

He further pointed out that the bill did not have any clear direction or commitment on the financial responsibility of state and the Central governments. The bill also stops citizens to knock the doors of court if the Fundamental Right to Education is violated and direct people to complain to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, which has no judicial power.

"The CACL has been demanding for the re-drafting of the bill since it was first introduced in the Rajya Sabha in December last," he said, adding the Union government passed the bill without considering these issues for amendment and the bill was now waiting for the President's signature.

"The bill does not adequately address the issue of child labour. In Varanasi region, hundreds of out-of-school children are still engaged as child labourers in various sectors," he reasserted and added that the CACL would continue to raise the issue across the country for amendment in the bill before its enactment.

Source: Varanasi /timesofindia/22 August 2009

Court refuses to budge on closure of unrecognised schools

The two-judge bench which directed the closure of unrecognised schools in Vishakapatnam refused to budge from its stance in spite of repeated pleas from the state to reopen the schools. "The ruling of closure will be adhered to, but let the students go back to school," additional advocate general Sudarshan Reddy pleaded with the bench.

In a fresh affidavit on Monday, Sharath Chandra, principal secretary, school education, pointed out that notices to 488 schools to effect closure has been issued. He also mentioned that prosecution was launched against those who were not closing down the schools despite the notice. The additional AG pointed out that there were over 1.80 lakh students and 25,000 teachers who would suffer because of the order.

When information on action taken was brought to the notice of the court, justice Ramesh Ranganathan wondered whether the state of affairs in Vishakapatnam was illustrative of the entire state. "Is this just the tip of the iceberg?," he asked.

Visibly unimpressed with the stance of the government, justice Raghuram wondered: "Are we without a government for the last three years? There seems to be a mental block to live in accordance with the law," the judge commented. Recording its deep anguish, the bench said the government's

disinclination to execute the law would not be countenanced by the constitutional court.

In a separate writ petition filed by the Anagha Society challenging the action of the government in seeking to close down its school started under the Rural Public School scheme, the bench refused to interdict the closure order. The bench heard the counsel at length and pointed out that even if there was a memo of understanding (MOU) with the government, the school could not run without prior permission as required under the A P Education Act. The bench posted the cases to August 31.

Source: The Times of India/ 25 August 2009

ANALYSIS/OPINION/INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Are Indians really a challenge?

In a recent speech delivered in Green Bay, Wisconsin, United States President Barack Obama referred to Indians and Chinese students as a source of stiff competition for American children. He said the U.S. used to be ahead of other countries in producing graduates and doctorates, but it had now fallen behind. The Indians and the Chinese "are now coming at us, and they are coming hard at us," he said. One might guess that he was hinting at the visible presence of Asian students in American universities. Alternatively, he might have used India and China as popular symbols of economic competitiveness and growth.

This is not the first time Mr. Obama has used the two countries as symbols of a new world order in which America cannot take its hegemony for granted. A speech he delivered soon after his victory at a meeting of Hispanic community leaders made a similar point. In both speeches, he set up the example of Indian and Chinese children for their capacity for hard work, in apparent contrast to American children who supposedly spend more hours watching television and playing video games than they spend studying or doing homework.

Mr. Obama spoke about the amount of time American children spend on video games and television, suggesting that the system of education is not demanding enough to make children study hard at home. In his speech to the Hispanic community too, Mr. Obama had invoked the idea of decline in standards. He used the familiar discourse of testing as a means to assess the performance of teachers. The ideological roots of this approach lie in the neo-liberal insistence on applying management models to education, but Mr. Obama used it to communicate his ideas to a community, which feels that its children are

not being given the same serious attention that the upper middle class white children receive. Apart from the Hispanic community, Afro-Americans in general might also have felt that he was talking about their children. They have a long memory of being stereotyped as people whose children need not aspire for academic education. Prejudice towards non-whites has been a major theme in American research on education.

To make sense of Mr. Obama's educational discourse, we need to take into account the historical character of America's national concerns in children's education. One can hardly think of another country, which has remained, on the one hand, convinced of the crucial role of education in economic development and has, on the other, remained obsessed with the fear of loss of standards in education. Indeed, 'educational doom' has been a uniquely popular genre in American scholarship. A turning point in America's post-war policies in education came when the former Soviet Union placed the Sputnik in space. America's deep sense of physical insecurity shaped its response to the Soviet achievement. It was interpreted as evidence of something being seriously wrong with American education. A vast range of radical reforms in curriculum and teacher training followed, apart from enhancement of public financial investment in education. However, the anxiety never died and scholarly books claiming America's decline as a world leader in education kept coming at a steady pace.

The fact of the matter is that despite the constant alarm raised about standards, America has never really lost its top rank as a destination for foreign students and scholars. Nor has its output of scholarly books and journals shown any signs of shrinking. Like education in America, the knowledge produced there has consistently become more and more expensive to buy and the arrival of the Internet has made little difference. Over the recent years, extremist neo-liberal voices have gained a radical advantage over moderate voices. In her recent book entitled Academic Capitalism, Professor Sheila Slaughter discusses the ascendance of a corporate regime in higher education, which has focused on using universities and knowledge as instruments of power and control, both within America and across the globe. Personal cost of education has risen with the decline of state support for universities. Racial, class, gender and regional inequalities have deepened.

The neo-liberal regime has also sharpened the contradictions and contrasts within the system of education, leading to a sense of crisis in certain areas. One such area is teaching as a profession. Conditions in urban schools, as opposed to suburban

schools, which cater to the wealthier sections of society, are marked by chronic restive behaviour and violence. Teachers trained under four or five-year-long university programmes find their professional life in urban schools unbearably frustrating. The shortage created by teachers' decision to quit and move into more lucrative and less demanding jobs has encouraged private agencies to come up with fast-track training programmes, which focus on subject teaching and ignore psychological and sociological awareness. During the Bush years, slogans like 'anyone can teach' and 'good enough teaching' became popular. Yet another development, which undermined the professional status and autonomy of teaching, was the peddling of e-learning and other commoditised or packaged learning alternatives.

Altogether, this scenario is not unfamiliar to us. Our investment in education has been modest, and the number of institutions that have maintained rigour and quality are few. If the U.S. President is concerned about a competitive India, he is either being futuristic or else he is referring to that small fraction of the relevant age cohort of Indian youth, which belongs to the upwardly mobile strata of Indian society and is getting globalised in larger numbers than the U.S. has been used to. We can hardly afford to interpret Mr. Obama's positive remarks as an excuse to ignore our reality.

The recently submitted report of the Yash Pal Committee on higher education reminds us how huge the heap of our compounded problems now is and how determined an effort is required to cleanse the system. The report reminds us that there are no easy solutions and that there is no alternative to institutional rebuilding. Remedies like treating higher education as a market or opening it up for foreign universities look tempting but they are unlikely to provide even temporary relief. A dissenting member of the Yash Pal committee argued that opening up higher education for profit-seekers would improve quality by encouraging competitiveness. Such an argument ignores the nature of education in two specific facets: —

⇒ That any investment in education, which leads to social mobility and increased equality, has an extremely long gestation period before returns become visible,

⇒ That mono-subject higher education, such as stand-alone technical or management education is pedagogically flawed because it does not allow to creatively mixing disciplinary perspectives in their minds. This is why the best universities in the world provide technical or management education alongside almost every conceivable subject area.

It is usually only governments that can afford to wait for decades before social returns become visible, and provide education across multiple disciplines, even if many of them are not profit- making in a fee-payment sense. Private entities prefer to have tangible investment horizons, and they typically provide education in areas where students are willing to pay high fees, or the job market provides optimal incentives. This is why pedagogically and socially productive investments in education must come from the state.

The Yash Pal report focuses on the intellectual fragmentation of academic life and its consequences. The report compels us to ponder why our undergraduate education fails to inspire the young and how our system reinforces gender disparity. The challenge of reform it sets up invites us to think beyond ideological stereotypes of change. The report tells us that the challenge is not merely administrative and financial, but also curricular and pedagogic. And it is structural too, in the sense that it demands a systemic vision. Fragmentation of knowledge is at the heart of the problem posed by rigidities of admission to colleges, the isolation of engineering and medicine from science and social science, and the separation of research from teaching at the undergraduate level. Problems of this kind cannot be solved in a day. Instead of being taken in by Mr. Obama's reference to India as a rival in education, let us appreciate the scale of the challenge we face and the distractions we must avoid, especially the distraction of a populist discourse, which trivialises the challenges of educational planning or restricts it to the task of reproducing a small, globally mobile Indian elite.

Source: /beta.thehindu.com/19 August 2009

India's technical edu. best in the world: Hillary Clinton

Lauding India's technical education system, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton believes the country is one of the best in this field, though it faces a challenge of providing adequate primary education to millions of children.

"You can look at the very best in Indian education, and it's the best in the world. You can look at the technical education and it is to be envied. It is so effective," Clinton said in response to a question, which was texted to her during her recent trip to India.

Answers by the top US diplomat to select questions have now been posted on the State Department's website.

Clinton said millions of children in India, however, don't have adequate primary education or secondary education or, certainly, college education.

"India faces the challenge of so many people to serve in very rural areas, often without adequate infrastructure, so you have to come to grips with how you actually produce the schools that are needed, the teachers who will be dedicated, the curriculum and materials that are required," she said.

"It is truly up to all of us -- families, governments, businesses, educational institutions -- to do everything we can to give every child a chance to grow up and fulfill his or her God-given potential," Clinton said. (MORE) PTI LKJ PMR

Referring to her trip to Mumbai last month where she discussed education with volunteers from Teach India and Teach for India, Clinton said their passion for service lit up their faces as they talked about the importance of giving every Indian child the chance for an excellent education.

"The underpinning of global progress is education across the entire spectrum, from early schooling to the advanced research and post-graduate work," she said.

The question was asked by Ashish from Massachusetts who on a recent trip to Mumbai, had the opportunity to talk to many young migrant workers who arrive in the country's financial capital from remote villages every week, in a bid to earn their livelihood.

"In this process, they are permanently starved from an education, which could perhaps give them a better future some day. Do you feel that under the new administration, the United States would take a consistently active interest in monitoring and assisting the educational challenges of many children and young adults in developing countries?" Ashish had asked.

Source: Washington /economictimes/19 August 2009

Why millions of the world's poor still choose to go private

Imagine that your daily earnings were less than the price of this newspaper. Would you consider buying private education and private healthcare?

Before you make up your mind, here are a few considerations: government healthcare and primary education are free; the private-sector doctors are ignorant quacks and the teachers are poorly qualified; the private schools are cramped and often illegal. It doesn't sound like a tough decision. Yet millions of very poor people around the world are taking the private-sector option. And, when you look a little closer at the choice, it's not so hard to see why.

Take the doctors of Delhi, who were studied carefully by two World Bank researchers, Jishnu Das and

Jeffrey Hammer. These doctors are busy people – the average household visits a doctor every two weeks, and the poor are particularly likely to visit. And, surprisingly, three-quarters of those visits are to private practitioners – despite the fact that public-sector doctors are better qualified. Why?

Das and Hammer tested the competence and the practices of a sample of doctors by sending observers to sit in their surgeries. They discovered that "under-qualified private-sector doctors, although they know less, provide better care on average than their better-qualified counterparts in the public sector". This is not particularly mysterious, because private-sector doctors don't get paid unless they can convince their patients that they're doing a decent job. Public-sector doctors draw salaries and, if they are held accountable at all, it is through indirect channels.

There is a similar story to be told about education – and it is well told in a new book, The Beautiful Tree, by James Tooley. A professor of education at the University of Newcastle, Tooley first encountered private schooling for the poor while exploring the slums of Hyderabad, again in India. It took little more than Tooley's curiosity to unearth a network of 500 private schools, typically charging less than $3 a month, and providing an education of sorts to thousands of children from very poor families. Many of the poorest children were on scholarships, educated for free by school owners with an eye on their standing in the local community.

Tooley has since gone on to catalogue cheap private schools for the poor across the world, and has also tested their quality. His research team discovered more committed teachers, and better provision of facilities such as toilets, drinking water, desks, libraries and electric fans. Most importantly of all, the children were learning more.

It is hard to be sure quite how widespread these cheap private schools are, but Tooley and his colleagues have found them in west Africa, east Africa, China and India. In the areas Tooley has studied, private schools are educating at least as many children as government-run schools – and sometimes up to three times as many.

Again, the outperformance of the private schools – in spite of low budgets and teachers with sometimes doubtful qualifications – is not a surprise when one looks at the weaknesses of state-run schools in some developing countries. Tooley toured Lagos, in Nigeria, with a BBC film crew and found teachers sleeping in lessons in the public schools – even though the film crew had given notice of their visit.

The lesson here is that a little accountability goes a long way – and fee-paying customers are in an excellent position to hold schools and clinics to account. By all means let's work out how to make government facilities more accountable, in order to provide better education for the world's poor. But we should also investigate how low-cost private services could be nurtured.

Source: By Tim Harford / [Financial Times]/ August 22 2009

Uncage higher education'

Renowned scientist and educationist Yash Pal, whose report on reforms in higher education early this year received wide acclaim from reformists, has said it is high time that the whole education sector goes for an absolute freedom movement. A movement that creates an atmosphere where talent is not caged in a set pattern, as is being practiced in the present education system.

Delivering a lecture at the Ahmedabad Management Association here on Wednesday, Yash Pal said that in the journey of preparing the report he found that most of the universities had lost the basic qualities to be called a university. There were no connections between departments in varsities and they acted like separate entities.

He was delivering 8th Shri Ramanbhai Patel Memorial Lecture on 'Inner process of developing an advice to radically change the culture and management of higher education'.

"Most of the varsities in the country have lost their meaning. They are becoming narrower in focus. There are gaps in every department. For example, department of political science has no links with department of physics because of rigid and outdated approach," Yash Pal said.

Sharing his experiences while preparing the report, Yash Pal said that he found that because of political interference in the running of education institutions in the present system, posts of heads such as vice-chancellors had become a ground of political battles.

He said over the years nearly 16 governing bodies, such as University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), were set up just to separate different streams of education. He said these apex bodies were riddled with corruption, wanton interference and delays.

"These bodies are doing nothing expect creating drift among different streams of education. It is high time for a freedom movement for universities. They should have the power to teach what they want. All decisions must be taken by the varsity head," he said.

"We must create institutes such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I have also suggested that IITs should start courses other than engineering, like music or humanities," he said.

Clad in jeans and red kurta with sport shoes, the veteran educationist said that he has recommended for a National Institute of Higher Education that will control the entire education system. The government should not appoint top functionaries of the body.

"After thinking for three months, the committee has suggested that appointments to important posts in the proposed institute should be done by prime minister himself with the help of leader of opposition," he said.

Source: Ahmedabad /dnaindia.com/20th August 2009

Universities have become money-minting machines

Every revolution becomes a new orthodox," is how Professor Yashpal, noted academician and chairman of the Committee on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Indian Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, defines the different paradigms that are emerging in the field of higher education.

Professor Yashpal was in the city to attend an education summit organised by Confederation of Indian Industry. Commenting on the current education scenario, he said it was a cross between the average and the worst. "Commercialisation has eroded the quality of education. We are breeding cretins rather that intellectuals. The state of higher education in the country is zero, which is gradually moving towards the negative index," he said.

The academician also expressed his resentment on universities vying for deemed status without qualifying for the same. He felt that with the real purpose of generating knowledge lost, universities have become money-minting machines.

"Deemed status came into being as an effort to give impetus to subjects like Sanskrit, philosophy and the humanities stream. However, it is driven by money today. A university lacking the basic infrastructure can be a deemed institution because it can grease palms of those who do not know an iota about education. As fallout of this, reputed universities too are losing their brand value," he said.

Regular inspection of educational institutes does not find much favour with the former chairman of the University Grants Commission as he feels that those brainstorming about improving education need to educate themselves first. "They may call themselves educationists but there is still a long way for them to go before they could relate to real issues affecting higher education," said Yashpal.

IITs too do not cut much ice with him as he bluntly called them "engineering factories." He opined: "IITs have diluted their prestige. If they continue to focus on technology, it would further deteriorate. To maintain its status, these institutes must initiate humanities as well. The chasm between technical education and humanities would not be fruitful in the long run."

Source: Chandigarh /indianexpress/28 August 2009

Aspiring to world-class universities achievable

The prestige seeking behaviour of universities is ever increasing as the global war for talent intensifies and education's role in the knowledge economy becomes more critical. In this process, the quest for world-class status among universities has become more prominent.

For example, the Prime Minister of India has announced establishment of 14 world-class universities in the XIth five-year plan 2007-2012. Likewise in 2007,Pakistan announced its ambitious US$4.3 billion project to create nine world-class engineering universities in collaboration with European universities, with 50% of its academics and administrators coming from Europe.

The big question is how achievable these aspirations are. Are countries and universities being unrealistic in benchmarking what a world-class university is and what resources are required to achieve it?

The notion of world-class universities can be broken down into three stages: self-declared, aspirational, and externally validated. The issue of self-declaration of world-class status is most serious as it results in failure of vision and also duping of the stakeholders' expectations.

Recently, the World Bank released a report by Jamil Salmi, _The Challenge for establishing world-class University_ It points out that, "Becoming a member of the exclusive group of world-class universities is not achieved by self-declaration; rather, elite status is conferred by the outside world on the basis of international recognition."

Self-declaration of world-class status often results because of two primary reasons: lack of knowledge and understanding of what world-class standards really mean and how to achieve them, and exaggeration of the relatively mediocre standards of the institution.

Universities are in a haste to declare themselves as world-class because of competitive pressures to gain attention from stakeholders and attain prestige.

Gaining external validity is not easy as it takes significant investment of time and resources to achieve world-class standards.

"The lack of an absolute set of performance criteria and measures may mean that world class will always be positional, referring to those universities that are at the top in terms of academic reputation rather than those that fit a class of standards." Levin, Jeong and Ou reported in 2006. Thus, self-declaration works as an easy way out for institutions.

The definition of what makes a world-class university is subjective and contextual. Given the diversity of global education systems and different societal needs and priorities, it is extremely difficult to define common standards.

For example, Indira Gandhi National Open University in India is the world's largest university with an enrolment of more than two million students. The university serves a very different mission of providing access to disadvantaged segments of society through distance education and may not have the resources and even the need to adhere to "world-class" standards.

Its noble mission and low-cost operations appropriately serves its mission. It has created its own standards, which has implications for developing countries. Global fascination for rankings and its parameters discounts the local contexts and the institutional missions.

"There is no universal recipe or magic formula for 'making' a world-class university. National contexts and institutional models vary widely. Therefore, each country must choose, from among the various possible pathways, a strategy that plays to its strengths and resources," Salmi writes.

But despite the subjectivity involved in defining world-class standards, there is a need for it so that institutions may appropriately benchmark themselves with the best in the world and strive to work towards quality improvement.

It will also help in better planning and execution of the institutional mission.

Salmi provides an interesting framework for building world-class universities by leveraging three complementary sets of factors:

⇒ a high concentration of talent (faculty and students)

⇒ abundant resources to offer a rich learning environment and to conduct advanced research

⇒ favourable governance features that encourage strategic vision, innovation, and flexibility and that enable institutions to make decisions and to manage resources without being encumbered by bureaucracy

Likewise, Philip Altbach suggested a combination of conditions and resources for creating world-class universities

⇒ Sustained financial support, with an appropriate mix of accountability and autonomy

⇒ The development of a clearly differentiated academic system--including private institutions--in which academic institutions have different missions, resources, and purposes

⇒ Managerial reforms and the introduction of effective administration

⇒ Truly meritocratic hiring and promotion policies for the academic profession, and similarly rigorous and honest recruitment, selection, and instruction of students

Educational excellence is a gradual and resource-intensive process and excellence in the local context is a must before setting aspirations for global standards. This results in a realistic assessment of the institutional capability to serve societal needs. Furthermore, resources are better allocated to meet the needs of the vision.

Institutions also need to recognise that achieving world-class standards requires a strong commitment to global best practices adapted to the local context. There is nothing wrong with the aspiration of achieving world-class status but the challenge is the mismatch between resource availability and societal needs, which results from the lack of understanding of what it takes to build a world-class university.

Some new projects are aiming higher and establishing appropriate standards, processes and resources to achieve excellence. King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia is one such ambitious project.

Continuous quality improvement and innovation is a must for higher education and to that end we need more success stories where universities are able to aspire and achieve world-class standards.

Source: /universityworldnews.com/16 August 2009

Develop, support system for quality education

Teachers play a pivotal role like a candle that consumes itself to light the way for others. And need for teacher development and support system for quality education with conceptual mastery of both their subject content and pedagogical skills.

For any educational reform to succeed, teachers play a pivotal role. Many educators firmly believe that

teachers are the primary agents in translating the innovations like child-friendly teaching learning in the classroom.

For teachers, it is necessary that they must have conceptual mastery of both their subject content and pedagogical skills. Also, equally necessary is the provision for the capacity building of teachers with a follow-up and support system to develop the understanding of innovations and attendant pedagogy.

According to a UNICEF document titled 'Happy Learning' the following aspect of teachers' capacity building need be built into the school system itself.

⇒ Building a unified in-house teacher education and training system, which views pre-service and in-service learning as a continuum.

⇒ Practice oriented teachers training, with sufficient training materials, handouts, teaching aids and reference books.

⇒ Making in-service training a continuous process of educational renewal.

The document further says that the teachers need to be trained in a real classroom situation so that they can translate their theoretical knowledge into practical realities of classroom interactions. The document further states that the teachers need supportive working conditions to provide quality education. The condition of infrastructure, availability of reference books, textbooks and other learning materials and class sizes influence teacher to maintain positive attitudes towards teaching and learning.

When teachers are central to quality, the so-called supervisory system becomes the supportive system.

According the document, the support system has to play the following roles.

⇒ The Head teacher (or Headmaster/Principal) is in the best position to undertake the supportive responsibilities of her/his school. Schools should no longer be 'inspected' or 'supervised'.

⇒ Do not find fault of the teacher, instead, work alongside the teacher so that she or he could see what was not being done correctly.

⇒ Focus on the teaching-learning process inside the classroom.

⇒ Discuss progress made by each individual child in each area of the curriculum.

⇒ Ensure availability and effective use of wide range of learning materials and resources inside the classroom.

⇒ Provide for a wide range of developmentally appropriate reading materials inside each classroom.

⇒ Ensure sustained professional development of the teacher.

Also, there is need for periodic review workshops and classroom observations of the teachers to transfer new skills acquired from the training to the classroom and learn from one another as a team of professionals.

Source: /merinews.com/ 26 August 2009

India renews its tryst with destiny

Nandan Nilekani represents an Indian entrepreneurial class that is spearheading a quiet revolution. He claims the forces of information technology, economic liberalization and globalization have created resurgence in India that resembles the heady days of the founding of the nation.

In the words of his friend and confidant, Thomas L Friedman, who has written the foreword to the book, India's economic rise could potentially level the playing field for more than one billion people. Weaned off of a half-century of dependency on quasi-socialist ideologies, India's forays into the information technology sector have demonstrated its readiness to take on the challenges of the free-market economy and become the largest and the fastest growing democracy on the planet.

Nilekani's rediscovery of India through entrepreneurship tells the story of an ancient civilization entering the information age - an antique land with one of the world's fastest growing cell phone penetration rates. India today stands at a crossroads, facing a major demographic transition and bustling with the spirit of technological innovation. It can embrace this, take the arduous path less traveled and reshape the country for the 21st century, or due to a lack of political resolve forego an economic tidal wave that could improve the living standards for its hungry masses.

As a co-founder of Infosys, Nilekani stumbled upon the idea of a technology start-up in the early 1980s. He describes himself as "an accidental entrepreneur" trying to renew India's outlook.

"[A]s an IT company, Infosys always faced challenges different from the rest of the Indian industry. Shortages in infrastructure did not affect us, as our markets were international, and all we needed to do business was a wire and some computers. We experienced little of the labor problems and strikes that plagued India's traditional industries" (p 3).

Nilekani concludes that India's recent victories in economic reforms have been gained "despite the state", an idea encapsulated in the underlying theme of the book: "India's weaknesses are all within, in the ongoing struggle to define the direction of our future ideas and policies for the future" (p 5). Like a piece of software code or an Indian classical *raga* (melody), this theme plays throughout the book in different variations, tempos and pitch.

This is a book driven by ideas, both large and small. In part one, the book examines ideas that have arrived and where attitudes in the Indian population have changed. For example, the English language was once seen as a vestige of the Raj but with the onset of outsourcing, it has become the language of choice and a ticket to globalization. Not long ago, India's large population was seen as a burden but now it forms the human capital reserves needed to meet the challenges of affordable labor. Prior to liberalization, global brands were driven out of India; yet, today no one raises an eyebrow when another KFC or McDonalds opens in a local town or city.

The second part of the book examines new ideas that have not yet been fully adopted. For example, the idea of universal literacy. Similarly, the idea that the "real India" is to be found in its villages has been central to the romantic notion of India, but lately this has given way to the need to build modern cities.

The third part of the book examines controversial ideas the role of government in private education, the reform of labor laws and the building of integrated financial markets. In the concluding section of the book, Nilekani challenges readers to create innovative Indian solutions to uniquely Indian problems, rather than simply importing ideas from other countries. India's economy, population and energy challenges demand Indian solutions not necessarily pre-configured in Western ideas about development.

For a man of technology, inclined to measure progress in nanoseconds, Nilekani has a long view of Indian history; "The problem was that the curve of India's history and its ideas had been an extremely discontinuous one. But a foreign occupation had long divorced the region from its pre-British ideas and economic and social structures ... What we saw in its place instead was strange grafting of the Indian identity with an entirely new culture. The British brought with them the English language and Western education, and with such education came the ideas of modern nationalism, self-determination and democracy. However, these ideas only reached a small elite - the British consensus was that, on the whole, Indians were best left alone" (p 10).

Nilekani states that fissures created by the British have endured; India has remained divided between the elite civil service class and the mass of humanity, which is predominantly feudal and rural. The chasm between the old India, "the village India", and elite India, "the *babu-sahib* [term for British colonials] culture", saddled the post-independence India through the stagnant years of growth, leading up to the economic liberalization of the 1990s.

India was unified in the two decades after independence due to the national goodwill created by the transformational leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. There were also brief moments of unity during the 1962 war with China and wars with Pakistan in 1947-1948, 1965 and 1971. Otherwise, India has been divided along traditional lines of rural-urban region, religion, caste, social class and gender hierarchy. Economic liberalization was the singular event that marked the beginning of the great Indian middle class, which approximates the population of the United States.

Partly due to his global vision, Nilekani breaks through with clear insights. He recognizes that India at the time of its independence and shortly thereafter was a unified nation under the shadow of its founding fathers. This was a short-lived moment, however, and India has not been unified ever since; post-independence India has been splintering from within and without. Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi tried to create a national identity driven by genealogy, personality, and an iron-fisted rule. But after her demise this led to the rise of the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, a fragmentation of multiple communal parties and the weakening of the traditional center.

Today, Nilekani regretfully admits, "Our politics are broadly organized along the lines of caste, religion, region and class. These form the basis of our loyalties and, often, of our development policies." He adds that hope is not lost, however, as "our divisions were overcome once, in the heady days after independence, and this may happen again" (p 15) as demonstrated by the consensus formed in the recent elections in favor of the Congress Party.

Nilekani is boldly envisioning a second Indian renaissance. Is he an overly optimistic dreamer, buoyed by success and confidence in the private sector, wishing that all of India will soon possess laptops, flat-screen monitors and manicured lawns like the Infosys campus? Or, is he a cautious realist who knows that structural changes will require a paradigmatic shift in the social and moral order, which may have been jump-started by the growth in the information technology sector but still has a long way to go?

Nilekani represents a combination of both of these attitudes; parts of the book are inspirational, yet other parts are weighed down by serious policy analysis. As someone who has examined India from the perspective of social and marketing sciences, I found Nilekani's vision a much-needed antidote to outdated social and cultural theories as well as to the recent hype and hopes about India. This book will certainly go a long way towards correcting the romantic view of India as the land of snake charmers and levitating yogis.

The top-heavy policy analysis lays out a systematic argument for why India is poised to make a significant contribution to the world economy and how the next century might be the Asian century.

"India has gained dramatically from similar, massive changes in our attitudes towards our population, entrepreneurs, the English language, globalization and democracy. It has made India a country that right now has a unique cadence, where all our major strengths have come together and matured at the same time" (p 32).

Nilekani discusses how India was once considered the basket case of the world, an overpopulated and unsustainable country of a billion hungry stomachs, but is no longer seen in these Malthusian terms. In light of the information technology boom, India is the preferred destination due to its untapped pool of talent and affordable labor.

Comparing different government policies, India and China stand at the opposite ends of the demographic and political continuum; India's destiny is tied with democracy and the demographic boom, while China's growth is the byproduct of autocracy and the one-child policy.

Nilekani of course believes that history favors the Indian model of development to reap what he calls "the demographic dividend", while China may have already peaked in terms of population growth as the typical family structure now consists of four grandparents, two parents and only one child. This has led to irreversible levels of fertility and a shortage of labor supply. Thus, India appears green and young demographically, while China is already graying, not unlike the baby boomer generation in the developed economies.

Nilekani suggests that India in fact has "a camel" in its demographic graph, consisting of a double hump or a bimodal distribution, representing a different population rate for its advanced southern region versus the backward northern states. While the southern hump has already peaked and led to irreversible birth rates in states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the northern hump, consisting of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, will peak sometime near 2020.

According to many demographic models, the majority of India's population will remain younger till 2050 in comparison to the rest of the developing and the developed world. Thus, the benefits of democracy coupled with the demographics of a younger population support the Indian model of development over the long haul. The challenge is that the Indian government and the populace at large must have its own house in order to fully take advantage of these demographic trends.

Having been colonized by the East India Company, Indians have always had an uneasy alliance with the profit motive and the world of private enterprise; even ancient Hindu scriptures warn against the profit motive as *maya* or illusory. Thus, the founding fathers when confronted with the challenges of governing an independent India opted to not give much weight or responsibility to the private sector. This led India down a socialist path in its development of industry, with the government the majority stake owner. While this fostered strong local businesses, India remained parochial, closed-off and uncompetitive vis-a-vis the rest of the world.

As the path of last resort, when India faced bankruptcy and was forced to adopt economic liberalization in the early 1990s, Nilekani along with nine other entrepreneurs received a call from Montek Singh and the current Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to attend a meeting of American and Indian business leaders for a conference with the president of the United States. The agenda of course was how to jump start the Indian economy. This in essence began India's American revival with technological innovation, which in the two decades since has doubled if not tripled its growth rate.

There are other fascinating connections between America, the first democracy, and India, the largest democracy in the world. When George Washington's armies finally trounced Charles Cornwallis in Yorktown in 1781, Cornwallis was sent packing to Bengal as the governor general of India who first pushed the English language on the subcontinent. Anyone who has driven along the East Coast on highway US-1, can easily trace the names of towns back to the old world and then connect the dots to Calcutta or West Bengal across the Indian Ocean. Even today the English language remains the common thread across time and space; it is the lingua franca of commerce and trade, except now it is transmitted through high-speed fiber optic lines.

India's feelings over the English language have blown hot and cold over the centuries; however, post-

liberalization Indian companies have won software contracts on the back of English becoming the principal language of commerce, and this has indelibly shaped the Indian mind. Nilekani provides a fascinating exposition of how the rise, the fall and the eventual rise of English as the language of IT and Business Process Outsourcing services has put India at a distinct advantage in the global economy.

Because language is the often the medium of cultural exchange, India's reaction to the English language has reflected in its attitudes towards the West. Like any human relationship, this has included a range of emotional and intellectual postures ranging from outright resistance to unspoken admiration and everything in between. Resistance and admiration of the West has ebbed and flowed depending on the mood and tenor of the country. However, what seems to have swept in after the liberal reforms of the 1990s is a reversal of a staunchly inward-looking stance.

As Indian businesses have succeeded in the global marketplace, the internal fissures that held India back have resurfaced, shedding new light on the real stumbling blocks towards progress. Nilekani observes, "But even as the world is acknowledging India's new promise, the opportunity of the global economy has highlighted our internal differences - between the educated and the illiterate, the public and private sectors, between the well and poorly governed, and between those who have access and those who do not. In this sense, even as we Indians define ourselves in the context of our home and the world, we face incredible contradictions" (p 139).

India's founding fathers, while they chose a quasi-socialist economic policy, put their faith squarely in the democratic ideals of a civil society, free press and human rights. The Indian populace could not have known it at the time, but this was an immeasurable gift. The million little mutinies that have come and gone could not consume the nation state because the democratic ideals among Indians had become resilient and strong. Except for a few glitches, for example, during the emergency in 1970s, Indians have stayed on the path of democratic rule, even though it has come neither easily nor naturally.

Today as India faces a multiparty system, democratic governance has led to greater regional voices participating in the electoral process. Thus, an institutional framework that was once considered "essentially foreign" has now simply become essential to the Indian experiment (p 163), again as demonstrated by the outcome of the recent elections which has voted in the architects of the economic reforms.

"The ideas that the country has become more optimistic over the last sixty years - demographics, entrepreneurship, the English language, the role of IT, globalization and democracy - have been the foundation for an expanding economy. They have also led to a kind of catharsis - it now finally looks like India has escaped from its sense of persecution and the limitations of its history" (p 271). Yet, for all its strengths and optimism, India's quantum leap forward has potential pitfalls that cannot simply be shrugged off. India suffers from significant challenges in terms of building its human capital, literacy, educational system, urban infrastructure and an integrated market to name just a few of the urgently needed social projects.

The challenge that India faces now is how to sustain the economic reforms and to continue on its growth trajectory. This is where the narrative becomes fuzzy and the path appears less certain: "In this we confront the paradox of a nation that is blessed with the most talented and diverse entrepreneurs but which still does not trust the market to deliver on broad-based development. We are struggling with constrictive labor laws even as the economy is rapidly creating more jobs and markets worldwide are eager to recruit India's young people.

We are battling growing shortages in higher education as we face a crunch in skilled workers. And our battles for better ideas here require us to vanquish a monster with many heads - of old ideology, deep-rooted caste groups and the many temptations of short-term populism" (p 273). Here, Nilekani finds parallels with Latin America, particularly, with the recent Brazilian experience, where a socialist government has also adopted liberal economic policies.

Yet, his well structured arguments are at their best when he compares India's past with its present. "At the time of independence, India's leaders were clearly ahead of the people. The creation of new, secular democracy with universal suffrage, anchored by the Indian constitution, was a leap of faith the government took with an uncompromising yet trusting country. Sixty years on, however, it seems the roles have reversed" (p 297). Now, the Indian people have taken the lead on reforming the country, while the leaders are lagging behind.

Nilekani claims that India is in the midst of a bottom-up economic revolution against the backdrop of globalization. Freed from the socialist government controls, Indian people have been motivated by creativity and entrepreneurship. While India has proven its metal in the service economy, it has yet to gain the same success in the traditional manufacturing sector. Top-down planning was not able to achieve

what the people have been able to unleash in the last two decades as the Indian growth story is beginning to cut across the traditional sectors and industries. Clamorous debates in the media reflect the engaging mood of the country. Rural populations and everyday folks from small towns are coming forward and taking big risks in the private sector.

The growth of the Indian middle class, concentrated in the cities, is supporting all of these trends. "We are closest today than we have ever been to a truly effective "deliberative democracy" where individuals and groups across the country are chipping away at the once absolute power of the state" (p 456). Political leadership has been put on notice with a high anti-incumbency rate.

Entrenched skepticism against economic reforms will be overcome with real results; as the economic reforms spread to wider segments of the Indian population and improve people's lives, the changes will gain a solid footing. If the returns of globalization do not reach the masses the reforms might be stalled or even worse fail miserably. As in business, implementation is the key to success.

As the recent elections made clear, political leadership may have to be steered to follow the will of the people to ensure future growth; and because the demographic window of opportunity is limited, Indian people must keep moving ahead and must not linger. According to Nilekani, the growth model has to be owned, underwritten and managed by the private sector and cannot be left simply in the hands of government officials.

The entrepreneurial as well as the philanthropic class must contribute the ideas and the capital to push the reforms forward; the reawakened India cannot afford to pass up its renewed tryst with destiny. *Imagining India: The Idea of a Renewed Nation* by Nandan Nilekani. Penguin Press HC, (March 19, 2009). ISBN-10: 1594202044. Price US$29.95, 528 pages.

Source: /atimes.com/22 August 2009

IIT, open resources key to higher edu.: experts

Providing access to quality higher education opportunities across India is possible only if emphasis is laid on open education with thrust on information communication technology (ICT), experts said Friday.

A two-day symposium on "Open Education Resources for Network Enabled Education", organised by the country's largest open university, the Indira Gandhi National Open University, concluded with a consensus among experts to push for an action plan based on National Knowledge Commission (NKC) recommendations.

Experts from the field of education and information technology, including NKC chairman Sam Pitroda, Human Resource Development (HRD) Joint Secretary N.K. Sinha, Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) S. Vijay Kumar, IGNOU vice-chancellor V. Rajashekharan Pillai and others participated in the symposium.

MIT professor Vijay Kumar and Pune University's former vice-chancellor Ashok Kaloskar highlighted important aspects of the action plan drafted at the end of the conference.

''There are two basic aspects that need to be addressed. One that higher education courses be available with easy access in any field through open educational resources (OER) free. The other that the direct access to educational content and teachers has to be improved through ICT, which in turn, will kill red tape," Kaloskar said.

Kaloskar added that the HRD ministry was "eager about the prospects of open education resource models for higher education."

''We feel that technically enabled open education, as not just an education agenda for the rest but in a central way to provide scaled access to quality education is most important for India now," Vijay Kumar said.

The action plan aims at addressing five main issues in a fresh higher education model. This includes thrust on enhancing ICT infrastructure including education via TV and radio as well as internet, "addressing legal constraints" for education content, "interoperability" of educational content and creating and maintaining sound database and "ensuring that there is flexible framework to identify quality open resources."

In addition, the action plan also hopes to address qualms about certification of such learning programmes by developing an integrated credit bank system to which established institutions can map curriculum as well as pushing for a "sound enabling national level policy".

Pitroda noted the NKC was established to build capacity to develop knowledge, and it covered literacy, libraries, translation, affirmative action and knowledge networks in almost all areas, while Pillai held that "enhancing the reach of education was the main aim."

''The deliberations on OER will facilitate these aspects of open access in light of the NKC recommendations, which have also facilitated the initiation of the national mission of education through ICTs so far," he said.

Source: New Delhi /thaindian.com/21 August 2009

Top

Innovate or perish

Empowering higher education India needs to find a way to advance its higher-education sector. A McKinsey study reports that only 25% of India-trained engineers and 15% of finance and accounting professionals have the skill sets to work for multinational companies. The report also highlighted the dismal quality of education in many private colleges, where the curriculum is not in sync with the industry's need. ICRI aims to enhance the clinical research culture in the country to international standards of development, management and monitoring. For decades, foreign universities have been an integral part of India's higher education.

Whizkids across the country with the financial means have left for highly regarded global universities to study. Many of these students never return, taking both their tuition money and their talent overseas. More than 160,000 students are currently studying in schools in the US, Australia, UK, and elsewhere. Over 100,000 pack up and head to study abroad every year, spending $7 billion on tuition and housing due to the unavailability of career-oriented courses in India. In order to make India a world-class hub for education we need to bring in new technologies, new courses and set up new departments. To achieve this, reduce red-tapism, deregulate and grant autonomy to universities and offer liberty to access global Institutions.

Paradigm Shift

The foundation of good teaching is to understand a child's attitude and then adopting to one particular way of teaching. There is more research now on how people learn and more specifically, on how children imbibe learning than ever before. It has lead to a lot of debate in the educational field and in the public domain about curriculum and pedagogical practices. These aspects of classroom transaction are as important as the question of what is worth teaching. Teachers are usually provided with syllabus, which outlines what is to be taught with some dos and don'ts.

Syllabus is often equated with curriculum. However, curriculum represents the totality of planned learning experiences provided to learners to enable them to construct knowledge, nurture their domains of development, and grow up as responsible citizens. XSEED curriculum programme is a comprehensive curriculum that uses all elements to encourage children to construct their knowledge while also guiding them towards achieving their larger learning goals. It does so in an environment that reflects the classroom community: teacher, student and parent. Detailed learning experiences are designed to provide opportunities for students to explore concepts using manipulatives, represent their ideas in multiple ways to make their learning visible and use symbols and language to move from a concrete to abstract form of thought. The learning experiences provide scope for each child to develop at his/her own pace and at the same time scaffold the child to achieve the essential learning for the grade.

Integrating Technology

In the 21st century, knowledge is the most valuable resource, long-term success of our future generation is based on its ability to innovate and adapt. Education plays the most crucial role in that. Intel is actively involved in education programmes, advocacy, and technology access to enable our tomorrow's innovators.

We believe that any true education transformations require sustained partnerships that can scale. We have introduced multiple programmes in public private partnership mode in school education, teacher education, higher education sector etc., for this purpose.

Intel Teach Programme is a teacher-professional development programme that helps classroom teachers for effectively integrate technology to enhance student learning and important life-skills like critical thinking, problem-solving etc. The quality of education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and hence teacher quality improvement is the key issue on which we are working with various partners and state governments in India. We have been able to train more than a million government teachers and teacher educators across 20 states and 73 teacher education universities all over India in the last 10 years in this journey.

Pioneering initiatives

One of the key activities of AEPC is to promote education and training initiatives. These initiatives consist of the largest vocational training network for apparel sector.

With its network of 52 centres and 2 campuses, its aim is to fill the strategic gaps in apparel and fashion education. Creating a work place for ready professionals, integrated managers and innovation led designers to take the industry to a notch higher to influence and 'value-add' to the fashion-eco system as a whole, especially the export and domestic sectors in the coming years.

Source: /timesofindia/18 August 2009

It's education vs welfare schemes

The elders of Yanam may not support the proposal of the former French colony merging with Andhra Pradesh, but the youngsters beg to differ. They do

want it to happen. For, they worry losing opportunities in the field of higher education if they continue to live in this enclave.

The town, which is close to the port city of Kakinada in East Godavari district, is located at a point where Koringa tributary joins the Godavari river. The majority speak Telugu, but they still want to be part of the Union Territory of Puducherry. Reason: the welfare schemes in the town are no match to those implemented elsewhere in the state.

However, an official who prefers to be anomalous, says there is no point in Yanam remaining a union territory 55 years after the French handed it over to the Government of India. "Yanam, which geographically falls in the premises of Andhra Pradesh, totally depends the state for drinking water, power and food supply,'' ,'' he says. "As there are no farming activity and production units, Yanam's economy is dependent on the state.''

Yanam was handed over to India as part of an agreement with France in 1954. As per the agreement, a few residents of the erstwhile colony took citizenship of France, and they continue to live in Yanam even today.

Bavisetti Ramakrishna, a cool-drinks vendor, says he and several of his folks would have lost all the benefits they enjoy today if Yanam gets merged with Andhra Pradesh. "We will lose all our benefits,'' he says animatedly. "You know, I have a red ration card on which I would get rice at Rs 4 a kilo, besides sugar and kerosene. Who would want to lose it?"

This is apart from his children's free education in schools, where breakfast, lunch and snacks are served. "The government, on its part, takes care of health needs of all the residents,'' he notes. "Besides, there are widow pension and monthly allowances to physically handicapped and elderly people. You do not have such facility in Andhra, do you?"

There seem to be no administrative problems by being part of the UT, according to municipal vice-chairman P Suryaprakash. "The case with us is that our grievances can be settled at the office of the regional administrator. Luckily, one need not go all the way to Puducherry to get justice."

Yanam Block Congress president M A Sirauddin has a crucial point to add to what his fellow folks maintain. "See, our economy is dependent on decisions taken at national level. By merging the town with Andhra, no benefit is going to accrue to us."

However, the students are worried over Yanam continuing to be under the UT. They think they are losing out on higher education opportunities, unable to compete with their counterparts in Puducherry as there is no uniform syllabus across the UT. "The Puducherry government doesn't offer fee reimbursement in professional closes the way Andhra Pradesh does for BCs,'' says K Vali Babu, a lecturer. "Besides, Yanam students will be treated as non-locals in professional college in AP."

He says a lecturer in Yanam can do research in Andhra University only if he has studied in one of its affiliated colleges. "Distance education in Pondicherry University is not feasible, as one has to attend contact classes in Puducherry once in a week," he adds

Source: Hyderabad /expressbuzz.com/16 August 2009

Manufacturing world class knowledge

Minister Kapil Sibal hit the nail on the head by categorically laying down that the real challenge for India is to produce world class knowledge at home. Great universities are not only manufacturers of engineers, managers and computer geeks. These emerge from a culture of innovation embedded in structures of autonomy and responsibility, not as buzzwords but operating principles. The university I got my doctorate from discovered the first analog computer in world history at the Moore School of Electrical Engineering at the University of Pennsylvania. It would not have been possible without its Quaker roots.

Autonomy goes with responsibility and the Minister will have to ensure that responsibility is not just that of the students, teachers and karmacharis but also of the Vice-Chancellor, the Registrar and the Departments of Higher Education at the Centre and the States.

Universities have to be global in thinking in this wired age, but our V-Cs and teachers need a babu's dhobi mark to go to attend a seminar abroad. The best way to build up global links is at the academic worker level, and principles of autonomy and responsibility have to be operationalised at that level. These are fairly complicated questions of detail. Supervisory mechanisms built up by technocrats, space scientists and lady principals of Convent schools are not always relevant, however articulate they may be because you have to ensure accountability. This is difficult as compared to a factory, since you can't sit on a scholar preparing a lecture, reading or writing. The views of those who have done good teaching and research and have published globally, have been conspicuously missing in the present round of discussion and debate. It would be good to get real. It was disturbing when inspectors were sent to each one of India's deemed universities. It is correct to say that some of them are the worst in India. But some are also the best, and we need to learn from them and replicate their experience.

Going back to my global experience, in my last professional exam at the University of Pennsylvania, I was hauled over the coals. A great development theorist told me, "Yoginder, you are a good product of this school and have proved with algebra, logic and facts answering questions that your friend Myrdal is wrong on trade theory, but you are defending him because he is partial to poor countries and you come from one." Young and very intransigent, I shot back, "You are saying this because you are in authority and I am not." But the chairman of the exam intervened, "Gentlemen, remember he is one of our best."

I passed without conditions, rare for a student taking the exam in eighteen months flat, and my teachers always supported me since, anywhere in the world. I can contrast this with a student in the best arts school in India not given his degree, and his teacher a distinguished arts historian still suspended. I didn't myself like the painting that was in question, but if universities insist on conformity, we would never have progress. In another university, a defeated politician was made the lifetime Chancellor by his party. We need to build firewalls for autonomy.

JNU was rated as one of the top universities of the world while I was its V-C, the only Indian general university to make it. This meant for me a place in the elite Global Rectors group, but its origin went back in my mind when I came back from my jog on the campus and read that a JNU hosteller had rebuked a news correspondent for saying that one of its experiments would fail because of the experience of another Delhi University. This young person said, "the other experience is not relevant, for we are one of the best". I knew then they would make it, maybe after I finished with them. But they did it when I was there. That is the heat we must generate, for as the Knowledge Commission says, we need a thousand global universities.

Source: New Delhi /indianexpress.com/28 August 2009

Need to liberate Indian universities from regulatory bodies: Ex-UGC chief

Eminent educationist and former chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Prof Yash Pal on Wednesday gave a call for 'freedom movement' for the universities in the country.

The professor was in Ahmedabad to deliver a lecture on the 'Inner processes of developing an advice to radically change the culture and management of higher education' the Ahmedabad Management Association office. "We have cubicalised the world of knowledge by creating a plethora of regulatory organisations. Now is the time to liberate our universities from them. There should be a freedom movement for the universities in India," he said. He

also referred to his report recently submitted to the Human Resource Ministry whose mandate was to 'advice on renovation and rejuvenation of higher education in India'.

Speaking on the need for scrapping of all higher education regulatory/monitoring bodies and replacing these with a super regulator — National Commission for Higher Education and Research — which would be a constitutional body, he added,

''This is necessary to check the growing corruption and political influence in the decision making of our higher education step-up.''

Addressing apprehensions expressed in some academic quarters regarding such a move, he noted, "The chairmen of UGC and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) were the members of my committee who wholeheartedly supported this move." Prof Yash Pal was also critical of the way premier higher education institutes like the IITs and the IIMs function. "These have simply become 'exporting factories', which train highly skilled manpower for the benefit of other countries," he observed. He defended his committee's recommendation of restricting the jurisdiction of the Medical Council of India to administrative jobs only and transferring the academic responsibilities to the universities. Calling for support from medical practitioners across the country, Prof Yash Pal stressed, "Teachers should have the freedom to design courses and students must be able to study subjects outside their courses. This is needed if we don't want to remain just a technology importing country, especially in the health care sector."

Source: Ahmedabad /indianexpress/20 August 2009

Revamping the Indian educational system

New Education System Proposed

⇒ I am worried on seeing the plight of the present generation students. In spite of repeated warnings from the social scientists and educational psychologists, parents want to begin schooling for their kids even before 3 years. Kids shall be let free until they complete five full years of age.

⇒ Mother tongue must be the medium of instruction until 5th standard (basic, primary education).

⇒ More than one language must not be taught or imposed on a child, until 8 years.

⇒ Till the age of 10, only 3 to 4 subjects must be taught.

⇒ Grammar is to be taught only after the child attains 10 years.

⇒ Similarly, complex subjects/topics in Mathematics, Advanced Sciences are to be taught only after 15 years.

⇒ Examinations are not to be used as a tool to filter children going from one class to the next higher class. Instead, simple tests may be conducted to enable the children remember and internalize what they have learnt and to apply them in practical situations in life. This is especially so, up to fifth standard.

⇒ Apart from mere tests and exams, activity based learning, inter-active learning, peer group learning and other simple, effective tools and techniques to be adopted.

⇒ All children shall not be treated alike. Depending on a particular child's interest, aptitude and capacity or IQ, they must be exposed to different teaching methods.

⇒ Under-performing students and sub-normal students require special care and attention. They need constant monitoring and help. Their self-esteem must remain intact and whatever is felt unfavourable or adverse is to be removed.

⇒ Homework and bulky school bag must be abolished. Excessive homework imbibes fear and negative image in the minds of the young children. Further, too much of homework exposes the weaknesses and deficiencies of the school as well as the teaching staff.

⇒ Corporal Punishment must be declared illegal and even criminal. Instead, positive reinforcements and reward for better performance are to be provided.

⇒ The ratio of teacher to students is not to exceed 1:40. *(Ideally, it is to be at 1:30).*

⇒ Private Tuition on commercial lines to be banned, teachers, and schools who tacitly encourage them must be de-recognized and stripped of their approvals and licences. Any government support also to be stopped or withdrawn.

⇒ The schools shall not become a commercial organization by selling everything from uniform, notebooks, textbooks and tools.

⇒ Story-telling sessions and moral instructions period to re-introduced.

⇒ A separate period on general knowledge/awareness to be kept every week.

⇒ Games, music and fine arts to be promoted.

⇒ Educational tours with government subsidy (not less than 75%) to be arranged at least once a year.

⇒ Students shall not be persuaded, directly or indirectly, to adopt the religion of the management of the school.

⇒ Students should not be utilized to mobilize donations for whatever cause.

⇒ No student, who could not pay the fees in time or could not score a minimum cut off marks in an internal test, shall be denied the right of appearance for the annual examinations

Source: /tamilbrahmins.com/18 August 2009

Road to reforms

Education Times recently organised a seminar, 'Road to Reforms: Rethinking the Curriculum,' providing a platform for educationists, policy-makers and industry leaders to share their views and chalk out the roadmap for education.

With India poised to become a knowledge economy, the focus is on building a strong educational system that helps the country win a global edge. As part of the continuing efforts to highlight the road ahead, Education Times recently organised a seminar, Road to Reforms: Rethinking the Curriculum, providing a platform for educationists, policy-makers and industry leaders to share their views and chalk out the roadmap for education.

Addressing the inaugural session, N K Singh, Member of Parliament and chairman, board of governors, Management Development Institute (MDI), set the tone for the event by stating that the vision of education is to create an innovation society. He pointed out that attitude, teaching methodologies, evaluation procedures and so forth have to comprehensively change in order to fulfill this aim.

The sessions — Restructuring the Path, Current scenario and the need for a new curriculum framework, and the road ahead — addressed a range of issues, thus, encapsulating an agenda for action.

School Education Scenario One of the major concerns of school education in India, today, is that it does not integrate with our higher education system. As the speakers pointed out, it is imperative that — along with a holistic curriculum — children are trained to join the dots to get the bigger picture. Ideally, education at the elementary, primary and secondary level should be in sync with what is taught at the higher level.

School education should focus on devising teaching and learning methodologies that are engaging and contextual. Unless and until learning is placed in its context, it cannot equip a child with life-skills and problem-solving abilities. According to Ashish Rajpal, co-founder & CEO, iDiscoveri Education, learning is all about community participation and real-life contexts.

India, he stressed, is in need of volunteers who can contribute towards a free flowing and flexible classroom learning.

However, a range of issues continues to plague the school education system in India. For instance, despite emphasis on access to elementary education — and the apparent school enrolment ratio going up — quality is yet to be a priority. To achieve that goal, most speakers felt, students should not be spoon-fed. Instead, a hands-on-approach and self-learning can generate curiosity and make them lifelong learners. Integration of pedagogical research within the classroom is also another area that needs to be focused upon. Finally, the National Curriculum Framework, which is comprehensive in approach, is yet to be implemented in a full-fledged manner to achieve the results.

Higher Education Scenario

Higher education in India needs a reality-check. According to a recent McKinsey report, a mere 15% of our finance graduates and 25% of our engineering graduates are employable. In fact, around 83% of our graduates do not have industry skills. Amitabh Jhingan from Ernst & Young stressed that the higher education system should reinforce soft-skills. Anshul Sonak, head, Intel Education South Asia, agreed to say that, ideally, education should be porous and produce future generations of contemporary problem-solvers.

Education should essentially be application-oriented. That will encourage students to branch out and not remain restricted within the limitations of a specific discipline. P P Bhojvaid, dean (academic), TERI University, added that academics should have a lateral context. That can help students think critically and question what they are taught. In fact, Pragya Srivastava, joint commissioner, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, pointed out that an interdisciplinary approach was important to facilitate unconventional thinking.

While an out-of-the-box approach is commendable, a structured but contemporary curriculum is important. Deepak Pental, vice-chancellor, Delhi University, emphasised the need for timely curriculum review and upgradation. He stressed that the submissions of various committees (in terms of curriculum modification) need to be addressed with more seriousness.

Besides, most educationists agreed that an exam-oriented system needed to be substituted by a system of continuous assessment through which individual progress could be monitored. Some other areas of concern that were discussed were shortage of skilled faculty, teacher recruitment and training. Hari Gautam, vice-chancellor, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and former chairman of UGC, pointed out that the Indian education system is in need of objective teacher evaluations.

As far as higher learning is concerned, lack of a research environment is an issue of concern. The need for a more competitive funding to boost research initiatives was stressed. In addition, the need for a collaborative industry-academia framework was emphasised to make research more relevant. In this context, Pental pointed out that universities abroad enjoy federal grants in terms of pursuing their research. "If we want to leverage the acumen of these universities to further our research initiatives we have to make funds available for research. Also, adequate mechanisms have to be in place to safeguard Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)," he added.

Way ahead

Rise of the information society and the knowledge economy at a global level has reinforced education as a key economic and business driver. The demographic differentials reveal that in the next 20 to 30 years, India would have a youth-centric population profile. In such a situation, new opportunities are likely to be optimised. As far as the future is concerned, while greater coordination between regulatory bodies and policy-making agencies is required, Kiran Datar, chairperson, Working Group on Undergraduate Education, said that universities should adopt a student-centric approach and stress on practical innovations.

To sum up, what evolved from the seminar was that India needs to promote an education system that stresses on innovation, incorporates a digital environment and devises university-level education in such a manner that it can contribute to the economy.

Source: /timesofindia/18 August 2009

Vocational education to reach all

Even with the right to education bill being passed, India has along way to go in ensuring education that can fetch employment for all. Currently only 6% of the student population in India clear Class XII and only 15% clear class X. To put employment into the hands of these undereducated youth, and bridge the divide between urban, semi urban and rural areas, vocational education has emerged as the only ray of hope.

"Vocational education is the need of the hour. Today only 2 million students are registered for Vocational Education and Training in the country; despite 57% of those seeking work aged between 18 and 50 years being unemployable………..

Service sector, has contributed over 40% to India's GDP in the last decade. In two decades this figure is

set to double which means there will be around 40 million jobs in the service sector alone………..

Today there are over 37 million people registered with employment exchanges in India……...

Source: DNA/ Mumbai/Monday, August 24, 2009

Sibal for uniform core maths, science syllabi

Even as the state boards, continue to raise their concerns over making the class X exam optional. Also agree to shifting single board system for secondary education in country, HRD minister Kapil Sibal presented a proposal for a core curriculum for Maths and Science in all school boards on Monday at the Council of Boards of Secondary Educations (COBSE) two-day annual conference.

The minister also urged the boards to ensure fluency of three languages among the students.

Stating that India should now be a producer of knowledge, rather than a recipient, Sibal said, "We should set up a system of core curriculum in respect of professional courses. There should a core curriculum for Maths, Science, and a one-time exam to enter the university system for professional courses. This will ensure the level of uniform and equivalence of quality. Subjects relating to environment and others can be different according to the state and city. But why should Science and Maths be different?" He asked the representatives of the different boards to come up with a roadmap to be implemented in the next three years.

On the challenge of Indian becoming a producer of knowledge and set it own bench mark, on standardization of education and uniformity, the minister said: "I shudder to think how 41 boards in this country will bring this change. How do we interact with each other?" He urged the representatives of the boards to make a move towards grading system "as soon as possible. Grade system will be implemented in CBSE schools soon. So, that there is no difference between children who score 99 per cent and 98 per cent Once this is first implemented in the CBSE schools we will see the paradigm shift." He also placed the proposal for discussion of moving away from state boards to four regional boards with equivalent standards, adding that this is just an idea.

Advocating for a three language system in school education, Sibal said that schools needs to emphasize on teaching of Hindi and English, along with mother tongue so that the students can integrate easily. "We need to ensure that our children are fluent in all three languages, English, Hindi and the mother tongue, because mother tongue would help in cultural integration, Hindi in national integration and English would help us globally."

There will be a paradigm shift in the education system, while the HRD Minister said if the classes X board exams are made optional. in the country not many seem to buy his argument as representative after representative of different state boards, while welcoming his proposal for a core curriculum in Maths and Science stated that the views expressed by the minister cant be applied uniformly everywhere and that grading system too have their own disadvantages.

Secretary of Secondary Education Board of Assam, D Mahanta provided a classic example of his state, which had experimented with optional class X from 1960 to 1970 before abolishing it to the present form. He said, "The system which we are now proposing is more or less the same which we experimented for 10 year before abolishing it. We had a system of class X, which is optional, followed by a board exam before going to undergraduate programme. There we found no homogeneity among students who opted out of class X and those who took the exams. In fact those students who opted out of the class X exams had lesser options other than staying in the same school and pursue whatever it offers."

The representative of the Bihar Board said that making class X exam optional to destress a child is ideal for a particular environment. "But 80% of our students are from rural areas whose parents are farmers or labourers and have low level of awareness. In such a situation, the child will not study at all," he said.

On a similar note, representatives from Goa, Manipur, West Bengal, Orissa, Meghlaya and Tripura, among others stated that making class X is not an option. The representatives also said that a single board system with uniform curriculum would dilute the sense of ownership among the teachers in the states and that it would interfere in preserving the language, script and culture of the states.

Source: New Delhi /timesofindia/25 August 2009

Shri Kapil Sibal calls upon states for partnership in education reforms

Shri Kapil Sibal, Union Minister for Human Resource Development, has called upon the states for support and partnership for bringing in educational reforms in the country. He was speaking during the inaugural session of the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) Meeting here today. The Minister underlined expansion, inclusion and excellence as the three underlying principles for educational reforms. Shri Sibal particularly called for collaboration from State Governments with regard to the Right to Education. He pointed out that Rs.1,50,000/- crore would be required for implementing the RTE in the country. It is

perceived that there will be a shortfall of Rs.60,000/-crore as regards this massive exercise, which will have to be addressed he said.

Shri Sibal pointed out that in order to provide equal opportunity to all students trying for professional courses, a core curriculum in Maths and Science needs to be formulated. He informed the Members of the Meeting that in a recent Meeting, COBSE, has endorsed the framing of this core curriculum in Maths and Science and a Committee of COBSE has been constituted to draft the outlines of this curriculum in two months. Shri Sibal emphasized that diversity in education was to be respected and there was no intent of having a single board in the country.

With regard to higher education Shri Sibal, in his address, indicated the reforms being mooted in this sector. He said that his Ministry was in the process of formulating the structure for an overarching body for higher education that would be responsible for higher education policy. He said that some of the proposals for higher education included complete autonomy to universities for devising courses, cross fertilization of courses, research oriented universities etc. He also said that he was open to the idea of Indian universities collaborating with foreign universities or with the corporate sector. He pointed out that the corporate sector was showing increasing interest in education as they require trained manpower.

The HRD Minister stated that he is in the process of dialogue for the creation of a Central Madrasa Board. He clarified that he did not want to interfere at all with religious education. But he emphasized that he wanted to empower minorities with equivalence of Board exams so that they could move into the university system and be eligible for jobs. He also underlined commitment towards the Schedule Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, the differently abled, and other disadvantaged sections for which the same opportunity as the rest of the children of the country must be provided.

The Union Minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Shri C.P. Joshi, the Union Minister for Labour & Employment, Shri Mallikarjun Kharge, Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, Shri M.S. Gill, Union Minister of Tribal Affairs, Shri Kantilal Bhuria also addressed the Inaugural Session. The Minister of State, for Human Resource Development, Smt. D. Purandeswari, Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Shri R.P. Agrawal and Secretary, Deptt. of School Education and Literacy, Smt. Anshu Vaish were also present besides Ministers In-charge of Education of State Governments. Nominated members (representing different interests) including

Shri Javed Akhtar, Ms. Teesta Sitalvad, among others, were also present at the meeting.

Source: New Delhi /pib.nic.in/31 August 2009

The greater connect

With the changing face of economy and education, there is a growing need for stronger industry-academia interface. Praveen Vishakantaiah, president, Intel India, talks to Proyashi Barua on how it can be achieved.

<u>Is there a gap between classroom teaching and industry requirements?</u>

There is a perceivable difference between the two. In India, industry requirements move at a fast pace. However, the pace of change in academics is relatively slower. While the syllabi get updated over periods spanning over five to 10 years, the industry evolves in a matter of few months, so does its resource requirements. Hence, faculty development and teaching modernisation have to be accelerated so that a young population can make the most of the industry opportunities.

<u>What is the existing gap?</u>

Some of the areas in which the gap exists include lack of quality faculty, lack of high quality ICT and connectivity infrastructure. The curriculum needs to be overhauled. There is a need to introduce application-oriented learning with meaningful exercises so that academic learning becomes relevant when students join industry. The focus on research areas should be on a par or ahead of the global innovation pace. Moreover, higher education in India does not focus on soft skills (verbal or written communication, working on interpersonal skills and team collaboration), which should be a priority.

<u>How can the gap be bridged?</u>

Higher education reform should be given utmost importance in terms of policy as well as implementation at the university level. We need to have a coordinated central, state and university level plan in place and the progress tracked by MHRD. Public-private partnerships in higher education can play the role of a catalyst. Specific opportunities abound in areas of faculty development, skill development and curriculum changes — where industry partners can provide knowledge, expertise and support to address gaps. Research and innovation should also be encouraged and incentivised.

<u>How can India create a competitive edge?</u>

Education modernisation is the key to any country's socio-economic development in a competitive world. As the world is going through an economic slowdown and facing demographic challenges, India can

leverage a unique opportunity. For, India can now create a competitive advantage in many areas by channelling the energy of its young workforce. But, this can be possible only if the young workforce is adequately trained to operate efficiently within the dynamics of a changing work environment. Human capital is the key to a long-lasting sustainable advantage for nations as well as organisations. India could lose a golden opportunity to use this valuable human capital and drive sustainable socio-economic development that is commensurate with the aspirations of its citizens.

What is Intel doing to address this problem?

Specifically for higher education, we have been focusing on advancing innovation in key areas of technology and, thereby, developing a pipeline of diverse world-class technical talent. We have been trying to achieve this through our faculty development and exchange programmes, academia research engagements, curriculum modernisation support programmes, student employability programmes (high-tech areas like parallel programming) and academia entrepreneurship building. We are also addressing some of the critical challenges that India is facing today like, for instance, the inadequate pool of technical PhDs. In fact, we have introduced a unique industry-sponsored PhD programme in India.

What is the need of the hour?

Academia should join hands with the industry to strengthen research, curriculum, entrepreneurship and employability agendas. For these changes to actually fructify and create ground-level impact, faculty development and incentives should be given top priority by the academia.

How can public-private partnerships make students industry-ready?

It can play a strong role when such partnerships are effectively implemented in areas like curriculum and faculty development. Employability programmes like student internships and soft-skill developments can also be implemented through public-private partnerships. Developing and strengthening an innovative mindset by encouraging more students to do PhDs and attracting them to teaching as a career are some of the initiatives that can be taken by joining hands with the industry.

Source: /timesofindia/18 August 2009

Educational institutes should be provided tax benefits, says HC

Educational institutes having multiple objectives, including imparting education, cannot be denied the benefit of income tax exemption, the Delhi High Court has ruled.

Allowing a petition of Jaypee Institute of Information Technology Society (JIITS), a division Bench headed by Justice A K Sikri asked the Director General of Income Tax to register the deemed university under the Income Tax Act and provide tax benefits.

The Bench rejected the arguments of the IT department that Jaypee Institute could not be registered under the Act as it was also providing extramural studies, extension programme and field outreach activities, besides imparting education.

Extramural studies are provided by a university or an institution for students who are away from the campus or those who are unable to attend the classes.

''Real education is one that makes a student socially relevant. For this purpose, his greater interface with society is required. The UGC perceives this can be achieved through extramural, extension and field action related programmes. If pure learning, which is one of the purposes of the university, is to survive it will have to be brought into relation with the life of the community as a whole, not only with the refined delights of a few gentlemen of leisure,'' the court observed.

Source: Business Standard/ August 24, 2009

Teach Hindi in all schools: Sibal

Human resource development minister Kapil Sibal presented a proposal for a core curriculum for mathematics and science in all school boards on Monday at a two-day annual conference of Council of Boards of School Education in India (COBSE). The minister also urged the boards to ensure fluency of three languages among students, and said the knowledge of Hindi would aid in national integration.

Stating that India should now be a producer of knowledge, rather than a recipient, Sibal said, ''we should set up a system of core curriculum in respect of professional courses. There should a core curriculum for maths and science and a one-time exam to enter the university system for professional courses. This will ensure a level of uniform and equivalence of quality. Subjects relating to environment and others can be different according to the state and city. But why should science and maths be different?''

He also asked the representatives of the different boards to come up with a road map to be implemented in the next three years.

On the challenges, India must confront in becoming a knowledge superpower and setting its own benchmark in standardization of education and uniformity, the minister said, ''I shudder to think how 41 boards in this

country will bring this change. How do we interact with each other?''

He urged the representatives of the boards to make a move towards grading system ''as soon as possible. Grade system will be implemented in CBSE schools soon, so that there is no difference between children who score 99% and 98%. Once this is first implemented in the CBSE schools, we will see a paradigm shift.''

He also placed a proposal for moving away from state boards to four regional boards with equivalent standards, adding that this was just an idea.

Advocating for a three-language system in school education, Sibal said schools need to emphasize on teaching of Hindi and English, along with the mother tongue, so that students can integrate easily. "We need to ensure that our children are fluent in all three languages — English, Hindi and the mother tongue — the mother tongue would help in cultural integration, Hindi in national integration, and English would help us globally.''

In marked contrast to the HRD minister's enthusiasm for doing away with Class X board exams, which he says if made optional will result in a paradigm shift in the education system, not many seem to buy his argument.

Representatives of state boards from Goa, Manipur, West Bengal, Orissa, Meghalaya and Tripura, among others, while welcoming Sibal's proposal for a core curriculum in maths and science stated that the minister's views could not be applied uniformly everywhere and that grading system too comes with its own set of disadvantages.

Source: New Delhi /timesofindia/25 August 2009

RESOURCE

Establishment of seven New IIMs

The Union Cabinet today approved the proposal for setting up of seven new Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) in Tami Nadu, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan.

Background

The XI Five Year Plan endorsed by the National Development Council (NDC) in December 2007, envisaged, inter-alia, establishment of seven new IIMs in the country, out of which one IIM namely Rajiv Gandhi Indian Institute of Management (RGIIM), Shillong has already been established in Shillong (Meghalaya) commencing its first academic session from 2008-2009 and the remaining six IIMs will be set up in the Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Chhattishgarh, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand. In

addition, an IIM is also to be set up in the State of Rajasthan in view of the Finance Minister's Budget announcement on 25.2.2009.

In the first phase, four IIMs at Tiruchirappalli (Tamil Nadu), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Raipur (Chhattishargh) and Rohtak (Haryana) will be set up in 2009-10, which would become functional from academic session 2010-11. Postgraduate Programme (PGP) in Management would be the flagship programme though in the first year several executive programmes including those in the public policy domain focusing on civic and municipal services etc. would be started. In the second phase, the rest of 3 IIMs will be set up in Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan in 2010-11. In phase-I there would be intake of 140 students in the PGP course & by the end of phase-II, it would reach 560 students per year. Admission shall be through the Common Admission Test (CAT).

The Institutes would also contribute to generation of a highly competent and trained manpower which would be a major catalyst for developing a knowledge society that would inevitably impact on the economic growth of the country. Apart from this, research in management and emerging areas would evolve a potential for generating significant intellectual properties that would generate sizeable revenue.

The Cabinet has also approved an outlay of Rs.451 crores (Rs.333.00 crores for non-recurring expenditure and Rs.118 crores for recurring expenditure) in the XI FYP and XII FYP for each IIM. The projected outlay for XI Five Year Plan for each of the 4 IIMs to be established during 2009-10 is Rs.166 crore (Rs.135 crore for non-recurring expenditure and Rs.31 crore for recurring expenditure). For the remaining three IIMs to be set up during 2010-11, the requirement for XI Plan would be Rs.131 crores each (Rs.107 crores non-recurring and Rs. 24 crores recurring expenditure). The total requirement of funds for establishment of seven new IIMs during XI Plan works out to Rs.1057 crores.

Postgraduate Programme in Management would be the flagship programme. It is proposed that in phase-I there would be an intake of 140 students in the PGP course and by the end of Phase-II, it would reach 560 students per year. These trained personnel will join the skilled manpower pool of the country each year.

Locations of IIMs in Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan are yet to be decided.

Source: New Delhi //pib.nic.in/27 August 2009

Students in online learning perform better than those in traditional classroom?

A study by the U.S. Department of Education 'Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online

Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online learning Studies' has found that "students who took all or part of their class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction". It has also found that combining online and face-to-face instructions is even better. That is, online education when combined with traditional classroom is better that pure classroom teaching or a pure online course.

This is a valuable finding for India as well, where online education is growing.

Though the U.S. study is about K-12 (the term used for Kindergarten to 12th class), it is colleges in India which are making an effort to start tech-based distance learning courses. Mint covered one such course from XLRI in a story on industry-university partnerships last week.

I am a little skeptical, though, if online education is making a difference in K-12 education in India though it is becoming more and more popular in private and government schools (where the government allocates a big ICT budget every year). Last year, Mint ran a profile of Educomp Solutions Ltd's owner Shantanu Prakash whose company sells online lessons to schools. The lessons I witnessed comprised of teachers clicking a mouse and showing seed germination/climate change on a wall-mounted plasma screen. While some students responded enthusiastically, it seemed like our rote-based education system in a new form. That is, old wine in a new bottle. Education experts such as Krishna Kumar favour a learning-by-doing approach; he feels a child will learn more if she is encouraged to germinate a seed in a pot. Reading the lesson in a book or watching it on screen makes little difference.

For the full study, click on the link -

http://www.educause.edu/Resources/EvaluationofEvidenceBasedPract/174235

MINT, 24 Aug 2009

Scheme to provide full interest subsidy during the period of moratorium on loans taken by students belonging to economically weaker sections.

Scheme to provide full interest subsidy during the period of moratorium on loans taken by students belonging to economically weaker sections from scheduled banks under the Educational Loan Scheme of the Indian Banks' Association, for pursuing any of the approved courses of studies in technical and professional streams, from recognized institutions in India – in short "Scheme of Interest Subsidy on Educational Loans from scheduled banks for professional education of students from economically weaker sections".

The CCEA has approved a Scheme to provide full interest subsidy during the period of moratorium on loans taken by students belonging to economically weaker sections from scheduled banks under the Educational Loan Scheme of the Indian Banks' Association, for pursuing any of the approved courses of studies in technical and professional streams, from recognized institutions in India. The Indian Banks' Association (IBA) had formulated a comprehensive model educational loan scheme for adoption by all Banks, aimed at providing financial support from the banking system to deserving/meritorious students for pursuing higher education in India and abroad.

One of the major concerns of the Government is to ensure that nobody is denied professional education because he or she is poor. The Hon'ble Prime Minister in his Independence Day Speech on 15th August, 2009 had, among other things, announced that "a new scheme will be started to help students form economically weaker sections of society by way of reduced interest rate on their education loans. This will benefit about 5 lakh students in getting technical and professional education". Earlier, Hon'ble Finance Minister in his budget speech 2009-2010, had, among other things, made the following announcement:

''To enable students from economically weaker sections to access higher education, it is proposed to introduce a scheme to provide them full interest subsidy during the period of moratorium. It will cover loans taken by such students from scheduled banks to pursue any of the approved courses of study, in technical and professional stream, from recognised institutions in India. It is estimated that over 5 lakh students would avail of this benefit."

The broad parameters of the Scheme are:

(i) The scheme would be applicable for studies in technical and professional courses in India. The interest subsidy shall be linked with the existing Educational Loan Scheme of IBA and restricted to students enrolled in recognized professional courses (after Class XII) in India in Educational Institutions established by Acts of Parliament, other Institutions recognized by the concerned Statutory Bodies, Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and other institutions set up by the Central Government.

(ii) Under the Scheme, interest payable by the student availing of the Educational Loan Scheme of the Indian Banks' Association for the period of moratorium (i.e. course period, plus one year or

six months after getting job, whichever is earlier) as prescribed under the Educational Loan Scheme of the Indian Banks' Association, shall be borne by the Government. After the period of moratorium is over, the interest on the outstanding loan amount shall be paid by the student, in accordance with the provisions of the existing Educational Loan Scheme and as may be amended from time to time.

(iii) The benefits under the Scheme would be applicable to those students belonging to economically weaker sections, with an annual income upper limit of Rs. 4.5 lakh per year.

(iv) The interest subsidy under the Scheme shall be available to the eligible students only once, either for the first undergraduate degree course or the post graduate degrees/diplomas. Interest subsidy shall, however, be admissible for combined undergraduate and post graduate courses.

(v) Interest subsidy under this scheme shall not be available for those students who either discontinue the course midstream, due to any reason except on medical grounds, or for those who are expelled from the Institutions on disciplinary or academic grounds.

(vi) The National Minorities Development & Finance Corporation (NMDFC) has an Educational Loan Scheme for individual beneficiaries, which is implemented through State Channelizing Agencies (SCAs). The national Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment also provides educational loan to the students of the target group for higher education. Interest on Educational Loan provided under these two schemes shall also be subsidized for the period of moratorium.

(vii) Modalities for implementation and monitoring mechanism shall be finalized in consultation with the Canara Bank. There would be a tag/marker on the degree of the student indicating his repayment liabilities.

(viii) The scheme shall be applicable from the academic year 2009-2010.

(ix) The Scheme is expected to ease the financial burden on the target group of students to pursue technical and professional studies (after Class XII) in recognized institutions in India and thereby increase their access in these streams of education. This Scheme will benefit about 5 lakh students in getting technical and professional education.

Source: PIB/Thursday, August 27, 2009

The future of ideas

It is only appropriate that the report of the Yash Pal Committee on higher education was being discussed by the Central Advisory Board Education (CABE) before being implemented. The Yash Pal Committee makes a bold appeal for the revival of the state universities and asks the planners to bridge the huge gap that exists between them and the centrally created universities. One can only hope that the state ministers are not daunted by the report's call to grant real and substantive autonomy to the centres of higher learning. Such autonomy would effectively mean leaving educational matters to academics and cessation of interference by the ruling party or ideology of the day, not only in matters like selection of vice-chancellors and faculty but also curriculum and syllabi.

Autonomy is the fulcrum of the Yash Pal report. Perhaps this partly fuels the scepticism with which Left intellectuals have received it. They suspect that autonomy would lead to privatisation, and therefore they see it as part of a large conspiracy by market forces proponents to take over higher education. Interestingly, the ideologues of for-profit universities are also unhappy with the report as it firmly rejects the argument that quality education can only be ensured by opening the doors of higher education for market forces and strong competition. One member of the committee, who is at Cornell university, presented a dissenting note arguing that the state-funded universities should be left to deal with 'esoteric' knowledge areas like humanities and social sciences where as the commercially lucrative areas like management, engineering, medicine and law should be the concerns of private, for-profit educational entrepreneurs. Prof. Shyam Sunder , an economist at Yale countered this by asking which of the leading hundred universities across the globe are for-profit entities! What is to be noted is that the report welcomes the participation of non-government or private players who are serious in their intent and are not here to earn profit. Surplus generated should be ploughed back into the institutions rather than being siphoned off for other purposes. The contribution of TIFR, IISc, TISS to higher education of India cannot be overemphasised. One should not forget that many of our leading universities are the result of private initiatives. The role of individuals and communities cannot be ignored and the state cannot be the sole source of all educational endeavours. Non-state

initiatives bring colour, diversity and vitality to higher education.

Separating knowledge areas from each other and setting up specialised, single-discipline universities robs education of its essence. The history of knowledge is full of instances of new knowledge being created at margins of disciplines or through their cross-fertilisation. State or non-state, all institution builders should keep this in mind when they create a university. The report makes a case for diversifying IITs and IIMs where humanities and social sciences are but service departments. It calls upon them to move beyond the role of producing undergraduate engineers and strive to equal institutions like MIT or Caltech which are institutes of technology but have Nobel laureates in areas like economics and linguistics too.

The desire to become world leaders in education would remain empty if we are unable to create new knowledge. And it is here that the report disagrees with those who argue that since quality is in short supply here, we need to import it and invite foreign universities to plug the gap. The report says that true universities grow in organic connection with the cultural soil and develop their unique character over a very long periods, and cannot be transplanted mechanically. It is the metaphor of agriculture and not engineering which needs to be evoked. Education or knowledge is a touch sport. Our universities should have space for academics from all over the world and they should not feel constrained by 'universal' rules regarding compensation etc., while inviting them. It is here that the principle of autonomy becomes crucial.

A strong role for the state, space for creative non-government initiative, respect for the unique individuality of an institution, elimination of the distances between disciplines and between knowledge and life outside, a scheme of education which is relevant to the student and the society in all respects are some of the critical features of this report. These are the principles on which the new all-encompassing regulatory agency proposed as the National Commission for Higher Education and Research(NCHER) would replace the existing regulatory agencies like the UGC, AICTE, MCI, COA, NCTE which take a fragmented view, depriving the education of a holistic vision which alone can make innovation in their respective fields possible.This would not be a regulatory body to lord over the higher education institutions but to play the role of a catalyst for lively exchange between diverse educational experiences, a defender of their individuality and protector of their autonomy from all extra-educational interferences, be it from the government of the day or ruling commercial interests. Are we mature enough to take this call?

Source: Indian Express/1 Sept, 2009

Contribute

If you are an academician, a researcher, an investigator or a thinker then, Apeejay Stya Education Research Foundation invites you to send your inputs by way of your opinion, information, suggestions and experiences in the field of education.

Researchers are also invited to send in their published documents so that they can be hosted on this site.

Please email your contributions to aserf@apeejay.edu

Apeejay Stya Education Research Foundation (ASERF) is guided by the vision of eminent educationist, industrialist and philanthropist Dr. Stya Paul's vision of value-based holistic education for a responsive and responsible citizenship with a finely ingrained attitude of service-before-self. It is supported by Apeejay Stya Group, a leading Industrial & Investment House of India with interests in diverse fields. It will attempt to shoulder the efforts in serving the broader issues of Access, Quality, Equity & Relevance of Education and gear up to face the challenges of the new world order using collaborative and multidisciplinary approach. The foundation will become the repository of information on education and conduct research in new educational methodologies while collaborating with premier educational institutions globally.

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