

Need for fixing priorities in higher education system

The Government has recently decided to open 'world class universities' for the development of higher education¹. At present the country has 16 central universities besides more than 225 state and agricultural universities. The UGC has prepared a blueprint for the new universities and probably in the coming session of Parliament, a bill may be placed for the same. In the present plan period, higher education has been given recognition as a central subject, where allotment for education has been raised from 7.7 to about 19%, besides increasing expenditure on education to five times the present figure. To bring revolution in modern education and changes in the working condition of the universities, we must emphasize on scientific education and quality research. Basic changes in the education system for establishing a higher education commission which may govern universities and other educational institutions without bureaucratic hindrances are needed.

Our higher education system is not geared to attract talent. India has the third largest education system in the world, with only USA and China ahead of it. The country produces about 2.5 million graduates every year, which is 10% of the youth, but the quality of these graduates is not up to the mark. We take pride in having more youth in our population, but this demographic advantage will become a liability if we fail to address the fundamental issues of higher education. Barring a few premier institutions, the rest do not even have the ca-

capacity to meet the challenges of the new millennium. Universities should be the centres of research. According to Mashelkar (*Times of India*), 'Indian universities also need to excel in research and teaching without research is of little use'. India needs such world class universities¹ which should excel in research, so that the country may contribute substantially to knowledge-based economy of the world. Besides creating excellent education facilities, the country requires a more attractive teaching profession so that we can produce excellent teachers, as there is a chronic shortage of good and quality teachers². Generally, the university teachers are burdened with loads of teaching in addition to establishing good laboratories and other duties. In some cases, teachers are not allowed to attend refresher courses because of their role in other developmental activities of the institution. Until the teaching faculty is involved in quality research of global standard, the system may become stale and sterile. The Indian education system does not lay emphasis on scientific research and sadly, the symbiosis between teaching and research has been lost in the country. As mentioned by Balam¹, 'universities are key elements in driving economic development and in facing the challenges of global economic competition. Restructuring and reform of our existing system must accompany the process of expansion'.

The main purpose of education is to develop creativity in thinking and learning, enhancement of intellectual power,

character development for progress of S&T in the country, and building national character, but in this respect the Indian higher education has failed miserably. Barring a few, most of the universities do not have an integral link with research institutions. Our sole attention should not be only on opening new universities but to make the teaching profession more attractive by providing better opportunities to teachers³. The recent recommendations of the Chaddah committee to look into the various problems of university teachers will definitely stop the exodus of teachers and improve their working efficiency and conditions, so that the young talent may be encouraged to join this profession. The selection criteria must be made more transparent and only interviews should not be the sole criterion. The recommendations have made it clear that knowledge economy is the next big thing and the Government must invest on teachers for long-term gains, so that the profession may get due respect in the society.

1. Balam, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **94**, 153–154.
2. Desiraju, G. R., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **94**, 389.
3. Nagar, P. K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **95**, 1381–1382.

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Sharing biomedical journals in India

Rajagopal¹ and Joshi² have put forth their plans and experiences in the Indian plant research sector on sharing journals. However, methods of sharing scientific literature through consortia approach are not new, at least, to the health sector in India.

The Union Catalogue of Biomedical Serials (UCBS) in India and National Medical Library (NML) are the major initiatives by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) in this regard.

The ICMR-NIC Centre for Biomedical Information, designated as the 17th International MEDLARS Centre (Indian MEDLARS Centre, IMC), has been catering to the information needs of the medical community from National Library of Medicine MEDLARS databases. IMC provides document support services to the users through UCBS (<http://uncat.nic.in/>). This database of the periodicals holdings of major medical libraries in the country has been compiled

to serve as an important information tool for locating journals of interest in 188 libraries in India. The database is regularly updated and can be accessed by users free of cost.

At NML (<http://www.nlm.nic.in/>), the Electronic Resources in Medicine (ERMED) Consortium is an initiative taken by the Director General of Health Services (DGHS) to develop nationwide electronic information resources in the field of medicine for delivering effective