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How to build top universities in India

By: FE Bureau | New Delhi | Published: May 21, 2018 1:34 AM

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The government has made some useful reforms to promote internationalisation of universities.

India's aspirations for building world-class universities is legitimate and understandable. However, we don't have a favourable higher education ecosystem that enables building of such universities. There is a very strong and substantive desire at all echelons of government, academia and civil society to see the establishment and evolution of such universities.

I propose we develop a detailed plan of action that will help India build truly world-class universities within the next two decades. The plan ought to have four critical and interrelated aspects.

Substantive regulatory reforms

The government has undertaken a number of regulatory reforms in higher education. The effort to provide autonomy to 52 universities, and the proposal to select 20 higher education institutions in India to be designated as Institutions of Eminence (IoE), are path-breaking. However, they are inadequate. The regulatory framework for higher education requires a thorough re-examination. To

a large extent, the existing regulations have not helped universities achieve their full potential, let alone enable them to become centres of excellence.

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Higher education in India is regulated at three levels. First, at the national level by the government, including the national-level regulatory bodies such as the University Grants Commission; second, the state governments that regulate state universities, including state higher education councils and state university fee fixation committees; third, statutory bodies (Medical Council of India and Bar Council of India) that regulate universities on the basis of the disciplines of study offered in a particular un

In addition to this three-tier structure, there are several judgments of the Supreme Court and High Courts on various conditions and regulations which universities are expected to follow. The graded autonomy regulations brought in by HRD will directly impact centrally-established and deemed universities. There is an urgent need for the government to engage with state governments and regulatory bodies for them to give effect to graded autonomy regulations.

Significant increase in funding

The quality of higher education and the aspiration to build world-class universities cannot be achieved without a significant increase in funding for universities. The IoE framework has envisaged some additional resources to be allocated to public universities. I believe this is woefully inadequate and requires significance enhancement. There should not be any distinction between public and private universities in the IoE process, or any policy impetus that seeks to build top universities. Funding may not entirely come from the government; we need to tap the extraordinary potential of philanthropic initiatives and CSR. I would like to propose an amendment to CSR regulations to facilitate and strengthen funding to universities. The government should also consider significant tax benefits for individuals and corporations that are funding universities. Any limits imposed on the purpose for which funding is given deters philanthropists and corporations to contribute financially for establishment and growth of Indian universities.

Promote internationalisation

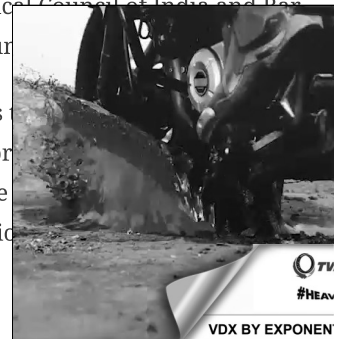
The government has made some useful reforms to promote internationalisation of universities. Setting up the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) with to attract international scholars to pursue visiting professorships in Indian universities, the Study in India programme to attract students from across the world, and initiative for autonomous institutions to recruit global faculty will help our efforts to promote internationalisation. But we need to remove barriers that undermine efforts to create an international higher education ecosystem. The existing visa regime for students and faculty, the Foreigner Regional Registration Offices regulations that govern the stay of foreigners in India, and tax structures for international faculty to earn salaries in India will have to undergo a thorough revision. India will not be an attractive higher education destination until we look at internationalisation holistically. The infrastructure challenges faced by many universities need to be improved, including issues relating to safety, security and well being within and outside campuses.

Incentivise research, publications

Research output and citations are pivotal for building world-class institutions. This is particularly true for universities that rely on research resources to become research universities. Faculty-student ratio of 1:10 can ensure that teaching commitments of faculty members do not come in conflict with research aspirations. Indian universities need to be more flexible when it comes to recognising contribution of faculty members in research—more financial and non-financial incentives for faculty to pursue research, and more opportunities for them to seek and receive research grants, fellowships and conference grants.

The Times Higher Education recently released the 2018 ranking of universities in emerging economies. Seven out of top-10 are in China, one each in Russia, South Africa and Taiwan, and none from India. China is grappling with an issue of narrowing the gap between the rapidly growing elite universities and other domestic universities, yet these rankings reveal that China's impetus towards higher education and initiatives of the government are showing results. India needs to closely examine the public policy initiatives taken by China in the last few decades.

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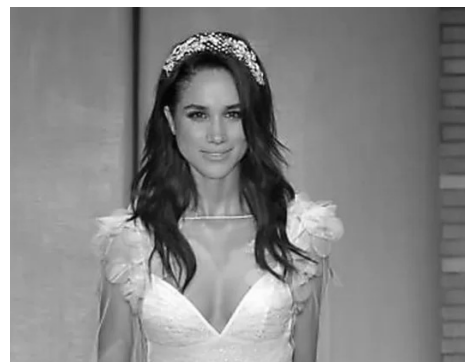
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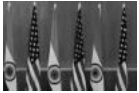
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