Regaining lost intellectual leadership

By K P SHASHIDHARAN

President Pranab Mukherjee in his address to the nation on the eve of its 65th Republic Day reminded that India, being a land of ideas, philosophy and intellect, should find own solutions to its problems. Even when presenting India's 25 Greatest Global Living Legends awards instituted by NDTV as part of its 25-year celebrations, he emphasized that India must build a world-class education system. Indian universities have not been able to produce any Nobel Laureate after Sir C.V. Raman, though "there is no lack of talented teachers, students but what we are failing in is to coordinate them, to give them the priority to create the atmosphere which can produce Amartya Sen, Venkat Rama Krishan, Har Gobind Khorana and many others". Education, being a universal right and the "seed of a nation's destiny", should be used as a launching pad for national resurgence.

Considering responses from 70,000 academic experts and graduate recruiters worldwide, World University Rankings were determined within the areas of expertise, research productivity and impact by qualitative and quantitative parameters. The 2013 Academy Ranking of World Universities was conducted by the Center for World Class Universities in Shanghai's Jiao Tong University based on transparent methodology and reliable data. It had 149 US universities, 28 Chinese universities and six of Brazil, two of Russia and only one institution of India—Indian Institute of Science—with a rank of 301.

Of the 30 disciplines, the number one spots are taken by US and UK institutions like Harvard, MIT, UC Berkeley, Oxford and Cambridge. American institutions remain preeminent for research. The survey indicates that employers regard Cambridge University graduates as the world's best in 13 of the 30 subjects. The shift in global economic power is reflected in the international higher education landscape. The rankings feature notable performances from Asian universities in science, engineering and technology. Nine of the top 20 institutions in civil engineering are Asian, led by Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong and two from mainland China. There are Chinese universities in the top 20 in ten disciplines. Brazil's universities have been steadily improving their international standing in recent years, ranking among the top 50 universities in the world in four disciplines. The Indian Institutes of Technology reach the top 50 in at least one of the engineering disciplines, but in 11 subjects not a single Indian institution makes the top 200.

No doubt, India lost its intellectual prominence despite having about 700 universities, including 44 Central universities and 67 public institutions of national importance like IITs, 35,500 affiliated colleges having more than 20 million students. In the near past no world renowned original technological innovations like *Facebook*, *Google*, *Apple Amazon* or scientific research works were created by Indian minds from Indian universities. Indian premier engineering and management institutions contribute negligibly to make any dent in resolving challenges being encountered by the present day world. Most of them emulate meticulously Harvard and Stanford by choosing their case studies but seldom apply them appropriately to find solutions to real problems of millions living in urban or rural India. As in the case of Indian performance in the Olympic Games, India's research contribution to the world of knowledge and the resolution of challenges being faced by the present-day world remains disproportionately low compared to the size of the country and the magnitude of its energy, efforts, time and money invested in education by over 1.21 billion people constituting 17.5 % of the world population.

It is high time for Indian universities and higher educational institutions to focus on quality research that can lead to world class innovations securing the country the top intellectual leadership commensurate with its size, population and magnitude of investment in education. There should be more and more Indian case studies based on ground realities affecting the people of this country. Higher education needs reorientation encouraging the young minds to apply science and technology for solution to Indian problems. An excellent teaching framework must address this issue focusing on professional virtues, strategies and practices. ∎

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