

## Only eight percent of Indians go for higher education

Only eight percent of Indian students finishing school go for higher education - compared to 20 per cent in China - and the country needs 1,500 new universities in the next seven years to bridge the shortfall of skilled workers, India's Knowledge Commission has said.

The 82nd annual conference of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) that came to an end here Wednesday saw some such hard truths being spoken about universities in India.

The three-day meet at the Anna University campus discussed the content of the Knowledge Commission policy and the various higher education policies being implemented in India at present.

'Higher education sets the standards for development,' said Y.C. Simhadri, AIU president.

A Knowledge Commission report has said that India would need 1,500 new universities in the next seven years.

It also says that only eight percent of Indian students finishing school go for higher education. In China, the figure is 20 percent while in developed countries, as much as 70 percent students leaving school go to college.

Nasscom chairman and Cognizant chief N. Lakshmi Narayanan said India may face a shortfall of half a million skilled workers by 2010 if universities do not churn out well-trained students.

'If India wants to be a knowledge economy, it will need 2.3 million professionals in three years time,' he added.

'The need of the hour is to create more research parks in the country and encourage innovation by students,' he said. He advocated that a statutory body should be given the task of enforcing regulation.

'A major cause of concern about higher education in India is the regulatory system.'

Pitching for self-regulation, he said: 'This may well be the time for the country's academic leaders to evolve a new self-regulatory regime that puts the onus of maintaining standards on the collective wisdom of academicians.'

He also advocated the need to look at opening up the education sector to foreign universities to ensure a steady flow of globalised talent.

Narayanan said that Nasscom is planning to introduce a National Assessment of Competence-Technical (NAC-Tech) that would test the skills of technical graduates from higher education institutions across the country.

Tamil Nadu Minister for Higher Education K. Ponmudi, in his opening address, said in many Indian universities, especially the private ones, today 'we have a situation where the father is the chancellor of the deemed university, one son is the pro-chancellor and another is the vice-chancellor.'

'Where is the space for scholarly academicians to lead such institutions into latest and relevant research and produce brilliant students?' he asked.

'Most vice chancellors give more importance to administration than academics,' the minister charged.

'You should concentrate more on academics because that alone can help improve the quality of institutions,' he told the gathering of 150 vice chancellors from Indian universities and delegates from 20 foreign universities, including France and the Netherlands.

'We only have vice chancellors, whereas we need wise chancellors!' was his parting shot.

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