# Education - The Neglected Tool of Indian Diplomacy

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Education is an important component of soft-power diplomacy. The Delores report of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century¹ emphasizes the immense potential of higher education to use globalization as a tool for bridging the knowledge gap and enrich the dialogue between peoples and cultures. Exposure of the youth to a liberal environment and a pluralistic democracy like India promotes the cause of human rights and democracy. Capacity building is the biggest challenge for the development of the poorer countries of the South. India, with its unique location and a long tradition of knowledge power, can play a useful part in capacity building in these countries.

The quality of education offered by a state has become an important barometer of its standing in the international arena. Can a nation seek a place at the high table without internationalization of its higher education? It is hardly surprising that USA, the sole superpower, has also been the leading education power since the end of World War II. Recognizing the importance of education in the international power hierarchy and its role in the pursuit of national interests, developed countries, particularly USA, UK, France, Australia, Canada and Germany, have given renewed emphasis to internationalization of higher education, actively supporting the efforts of their universities to recruit foreign students. In Asia, China, Korea, Japan and Singapore have also stepped up their efforts to attract students from abroad.

It is estimated that the demand for international education would increase fourfold over two decades, from 1.8 million students in 2002 to 7.2 million by 2025. The global education market is estimated to be worth US\$ 2.2 trillion. Table 1 provides a brief summary of the foreign students studying in various countries and their contribution to the economy and employment.

<sup>\*</sup>The Author is a former Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs.

**Country** No. of Contributionto **JobsCreated** Year foreign students the economy USA# 723,277 US\$21 billion 2010-11 UK## 368,970 £8.5 billion 2008-9 469,619 A\$15.5 billion 125,000 Australia France 266,400 2008-9 China 260,000 2010 233,606 2010 Germany Canada 178,000 US\$6.5 billion 2008 Singapore 91,500 US\$1.8 billion 22,000 2010 83,842 Won 160 billion 2010 Korea South Africa@ 54,784 2010 India 50,000 2008-9

Table 1
Foreign Students in Various Countries

# **Education Diplomacy Around the World**

#### USA

It is seen from Table 1 that the USA is the most preferred education destination in the world. Education diplomacy has been one of the bright spots in the United States' somewhat dismal record of foreign policy. USA has attracted bright immigrants from every part of the world through its campuses. Internationalization of higher education has played a significant role in making the US the number one knowledge power of the world. US universities have been able to create highly influential alumni networks all over the world that have been instrumental in promoting US foreign policy goals and commercial interests. The President of Taiwan was able to visit USA to attend an alumni function,<sup>2</sup> which would otherwise not have been possible because of the United States' 'One China' policy.

The economic faculties and US education have deeply influenced the economic thinking and policies of most of the nations and international institutions like the World Bank, IMF, etc. Education diplomacy has been a

<sup>#</sup> http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=105842.

<sup>##</sup> Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 26 March 2011.

http://www.ieasa.studysa.org/resources/Study\_SA\_11/International%20 Students%20 Trends%20in%20South%20Africa.pdf

major asset in the field of intelligence as well. The alumni networks have been successfully used for certain diplomatic objectives. The alumni have also contributed generously to their alma mater. For example, in 2011, Ratan Tata donated \$50 million to Harvard Business School; Anand Mahindra donated \$10 million to Harvard for its Humanities Center.

# Europe

The UK too has effectively leveraged the alumni network of foreign students for promoting its commercial, political and economic interests and for attracting talent to provide it a competitive edge. Many scholarship programmes are available for higher studies in the UK through British Council offices all over the world.<sup>3</sup> Australia and Canada have accorded high priority to attracting foreign students particularly from the Afro-Asian region. Their numbers have risen rapidly in the last ten years. They have also made significant contributions to the economy and employment generation and have been a major source of quality migration.

In France, foreign students constitute approximately 12 per cent of students in higher education. Swallowing their linguistic chauvinism, the French have even introduced courses in English medium. Francophone Africa and Asia constitute a major portion of foreign students in France. A total of 27,100 Chinese students are studying in business, engineering and arts schools.

Germany is another major education provider in Europe. The Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) is responsible for promoting international cooperation and attracts foreign students to Germany.<sup>4</sup> In order to attract foreign students, Germany has also introduced courses in English medium. Germany attracts a large number of foreign research students.<sup>5</sup>

## China

China has drawn up an ambitious programme to attract foreign students. According to the China Scholarship Council (CSC), China is expected to welcome 500,000 overseas students by 2020, including self-sponsored ones.<sup>6</sup> The number of overseas students in China has been steadily increasing in the last five years. South Korea, Japan, the US, Vietnam and Thailand had the largest number of international students in China. The central government provided 800 million Yuan (\$121.7 million) in scholarships to such students in 2010 and local governments offered about 110 million Yuan in scholarships.

The Ministry of Education is working with the US to implement a four-year education programme initiated by President Hu Jintao and his US counterpart Barack Obama. US students in China are set to become one of the largest foreign groups, as Beijing and Washington work together to bring 100,000 students to China in the next four years.<sup>7</sup>

## Korea

The government introduced the "Study Korea Project" in 2004 with the objective of making Korea the education hub of North-East Asia. In order to attract foreign students and reach the figure of 100,000 students by 2012, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology intends to grant scholarships to approximately 3000 foreign students by 2012. The government has given generous grants to universities to upgrade infrastructure and rules will be eased for student visa holders to work in Korea.

# Singapore

As part of the policy to develop Singapore as a high-tech and knowledge hub, the government has accorded very high priority to quality education. This has been done by upgrading the quality of local institutions and inviting foreign institutions of repute to set up campuses in Singapore.

The government has set the target of 150,000 foreign students by 2015. This would result in creating 22,000 jobs and boost the education sector's contribution to GDP from 1.9 per cent (US\$ 1.8 billion) to 5 per cent. Singapore's international student intake has seen a sharp increase over three years, from less than 50,000 in 2002 to 80,000 in 2006. Asia has been the main source of students; students from the US, Europe and Africa have also been enrolling in Singapore.

## **India and Education Diplomacy**

## **Pre-Independence Times**

India is recognized as one of the oldest knowledge societies of the world. Takshashila (now known as Takshila, near present Islamabad), established in 700 BCE, was the world's oldest university. Nalanda, established in the fifth century by the Gupta emperors, was a major seat of learning and it attracted students from several Asian countries, including China, Korea and Indonesia. A letter of reference from an *Acharya* of Nalanda was the most prized

testimonial for a scholar.

India's soft power has left an indelible imprint on most of Asia, which it has done without any conquest and involvement of military power, unlike other cultures. Asia was the most prosperous continent of the world till the medieval times. Nalanda died a slow death about the time that some of the great European universities, including those in Oxford (England) and Bologna (Italy) were just getting started. The establishment of these universities marked the beginning of the emergence of Europe as a knowledge power. Foreign conquests, colonialism and control of international trade by Europe shifted the centre of gravity to that continent.

In order to serve colonial interests, the English language and the British system of education was introduced in India. Several institutions of higher learning and professional colleges were established by the British. Because of the ancient tradition of knowledge, the Indian elite made full use of these opportunities and India emerged as a leading practitioner of the European knowledge system in the Afro-Asian region. Some students from Indian Diaspora in the British colonies came to study in India. Indian teachers were also recruited for imparting education in some of the British colonies in Asia and Africa and in Fiji.

# After Independence

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, realized that for India to realize its potential and become a self-reliant nation education was an essential requirement. He placed great emphasis on higher education and research institutions. Nehru and his Minster for Education and Culture, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, were keenly conscious of India's soft-power potential. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was established in 1950 and was tasked with India's cultural diplomacy. Nehru also realized the importance of education and training as an instrument of diplomacy. He took a keen interest in developing the human resource potential in the newly emerging nations of Asia and Africa. A scheme for grant of scholarships to foreign students, particularly from developing countries, was introduced in 1949. India emerged as an important destination for higher education and training for the English-speaking developing countries. Nehru took a personal interest in the welfare of foreign students, particularly the students from Africa.

India also facilitated the recruitment of teachers by some of the African countries, particularly Ethiopia and Nigeria. Almost every Ethiopian school

had a sizable number of teachers from India, particularly for Science, Mathematics and English. Thanks to the dedication of these teachers, India earned the respect and goodwill of a large number of people in Africa, which is still paying India handsome dividends.

The growth of population and increased literacy led to an exponential increase in the demand for higher education in India. This led to a rapid increase in the number of universities and colleges throughout the country. The huge demand also led to the establishment of a number of professional institutions, particularly engineering and medical colleges, by private promoters. This resulted in substantial differences in the quality and standards in different institutions. The mass expansion also eroded the quality of education in the humanities and liberal arts. Only a few Indian institutions met the rising international standards. Adequate attention was not paid to education reforms, particularly in terms of regular revision of syllabus. Several Indian campuses also witnessed unrest. Uneven standards made the quality of Indian professional education suspect in foreign countries and gradually many countries stopped recognizing Indian degrees. The Indian education system became inward looking and insular to changes. Because of the severe pressure for admissions in good institutions, internationalization of higher education was neglected. Recruiting foreign students was not a priority for Indian universities.

The government's efforts were mainly confined to giving scholarships to foreign students under various schemes such as General Cultural Scholarship, Colombo Plan, scholarships to students from Bhutan and Sikkim, and scholarships under various bilateral agreements and exchange programmes. In addition, several other scholarship schemes were introduced from time to time to meet special requirements like scholarships for Indonesian students in 1948–49, for African students in Cottage Industries in 1953–54, and for Bangladeshi students in 1972. Special scholarship schemes were introduced under the assistance programme to Nepal, Sri Lanka, etc. Foreign students have also studied in India under the Commonwealth scholarship, Colombo Plan and several bilateral exchange programmes. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has mainly confined its efforts to short-term training programmes under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme.

The AYUSH scholarship scheme was introduced in 2005–6 for the six BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) member countries to pursue technical courses in traditional systems of medicine, i.e. *Ayurveda*, *Unani*, *Homoeopathy* and *Siddha*, offering

thirty scholarships every year. Currently, 675 scholarships are given to Afghan students under a special scheme known as Afghanistan Sponsorship Scheme. Currently, India offers General Cultural Scholarships to 2404 students.

In order to realize the potential of the education sector, the government established a public sector company, Educational Consultants (India) Limited (EdCIL), in 1981 to provide consultancy and technical services in different areas of Education and Human Resource Development. In the early years the EdCIL's efforts were more national in nature. However, in subsequent years, maximizing the placement of international students in Indian institutions through promotion of Indian education abroad has been listed as number one among its objectives.

# The Era of Globalization

India went through a major change in the 1990s with the introduction of the policy of economic liberalization and globalization. Rising income standards and easy availability of foreign exchange enabled a large number of Indian students to enrol in foreign universities. India emerged as the major destination for student-recruiting missions from foreign institutions. It is estimated that currently Indian students spend approximately \$4 billion per annum on fees alone. The steady growth of the economy gave India a new confidence and the country was recognized as an emerging power, second only to China. The government as well as organizations like the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Association of Indian Universities (AIU) started paying attention to internationalization of higher education and to attracting foreign students to India.

The AIU organized a Roundtable on "Internationalization of Indian Higher Education" at Mysore University in February 2001. This was followed up with another conference at Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar in February 2002. The recommendations of the Mysore Roundtable (the "Mysore Statement") and the Amritsar conference looked at internationalization of education as an essential element for India to be a knowledge society. It would lead to an improvement in the quality of education, promote Indian culture abroad, generate goodwill and understanding and yield both shortand long-term political, commercial and economic benefits. The recommendations of both conferences urged the government, the AIU and academic institutions to take all necessary steps to promote Indian higher education internationally.

Salient recommendations in the Mysore Statement to the government were:

- Constitute a Committee for the Promotion of India Education Abroad (CoPIE) at an early date to finalize government policies relating to the promotion of Indian education.
- Frame and amend existing Acts and regulations to enable Indian universities to open offshore campuses and export Indian education through distance mode and regulate the operation of foreign institutions, to prevent commercialization of education, and allow only genuine academic institutions to participate in twinning activities.
- Simplify procedures relating to registration, entry-test requirement, issue of no-objection certificates as also issue and extension of visa.
- Establish education counselling and assistance units for providing information on higher education at Indian Embassies and High Commissions abroad.
- Adopt an open-door policy for self-financing students.
- Strengthen the data and information base to enable prospective international students to obtain information relating to academic programmes.
- Set up a single-window clearance mechanism for admitting students to different professional programmes.
- Establish a financing mechanism for international education, say an International Education Development Bank, to provide soft loans to students going abroad, foreign students coming to India and to institutions to develop the infrastructure for international education.
- Set up a mechanism for monitoring education standards imparted by foreign universities. Establish a national Quality Framework to provide lateral transfer as well as vertical progression, both nationally and internationally. This would facilitate coming in of students for shorter duration.

The Mysore recommendations to the academic institutions were:

- Have a good infrastructure in terms of lecture halls, laboratories, library resources, sports and recreation facilities and international houses/ hostels. Provide a separate complex for short-term courses with quality facilities.
- Simplify procedures for granting admission to international students and complete admission formalities through a single-window operation.

Evaluate the strengths in different disciplines of education and identify areas that would attract international students at different levels.

- Have an Office for International Education (OIE) and an International Student Advisor to enable international students to have all the information at one place.
- Establish partnerships and develop networks with foreign universities in both the developed and the developing countries. Sign memoranda of understanding (MoUs) only after ensuring the viability of the programme.
- Develop an academic structure compatible with the universities abroad to facilitate internationalization of the curriculum.
- Conduct special English classes for the first few months for students from non-English-speaking countries.
- Develop one-semester and short-term "Study India" programmes for students from developed countries and Diaspora, covering culture and heritage, natural resources, diversity, languages or indigenous technologies and systems.

The Mysore Statement also recommended that:

- AIU should assume the role of a coordinator to facilitate the internationalization of Indian higher education. For this purpose, it should create a Consortium for International Education (CIE).
- AIU should help develop a Study India Programme (SIP). It could coordinate with the Institute for International Education (IIE) and other similar agencies to identify programmes and undertake the placement of individual students or student groups.

# Proposal for South Asian University

In a major initiative, India proposed the establishment of a South Asian University (SAU) at the 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit in Dhaka in November 2005. The cost of fully establishing the university by 2015 is expected to be \$309 million. India's contribution is \$230 million, including the entire capital cost. It is planned that the university would have 7000 students and 700 faculty members. The success of the university would greatly depend on the state of relations between the member countries, particularly between India and Pakistan, which is evident from the initial wrangling on issues like visas for students.

# Nalanda University Project

A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, President of India, proposed the revival of Nalanda in an address to the Joint Session of Bihar Vidhan Mandal. A high-profile International Mentors' Group has been constituted, with Professor Amartya Sen as Chairman. The university, which has been designated as an institution of national importance, came into existence on 25 November 2010 after the Act constituting it received presidential assent. Since the hallmark of Nalanda was its internationalism, the Government of India decided to share this proposal with the leaders of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in January 2007. At the fourth summit held in October 2009, the members supported the proposal and encouraged regional networking and collaboration between the proposed university and existing centres of excellence in East Asia. <sup>16</sup> This initiative has good potential and will give a boost to India's "Look East" policy, provided the required resources are made available and implementation is not unduly delayed.

# ITEC Programme

The Indian Technical and Economic Programme (ITEC), established in 1964, is the flagship programme of the Government of India for delivering technical assistance to developing countries.<sup>17</sup> Over 6500 slots were allotted for the year 2011–12 for participants from 160 ITEC/SCAAP partner countries to attend occasional civilian training courses covering a wide range of subjects every year, in addition to training in India's defence institutions. The ITEC programme enjoys prestige among the partner countries because of the major contribution made in capacity building. It has made a useful contribution to attaining India's foreign policy objectives. It must be noted, however, that while it is useful in terms of soft-power diplomacy it cannot be a substitute for education for young students in academic institutions.

# Assistance to Africa

The government has taken several initiatives for enhancing cooperation with Africa under the Africa-India Forum Summit I and II. Special attention has been paid to capacity building and special scholarships were offered in the fields of Agriculture and Science and Technology (C.V. Raman Fellowships). An increase in the number of scholarships was announced during the Africa-India Forum Summit II. Distance education programmes are run by IGNOU. India also offered to set up twenty-one capacity building institutions in

diverse sectors. Most of these initiatives are under the ITEC programme.

#### **Private Sector Initiatives**

In the wake of the policy of economic liberalization since 1991, the apex chambers of commerce – Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Associated Chamber of Commerce – also started paying attention to the education sector. The interest was driven because of growing opportunities for the private sector in the field of education and capacity building in Indian industry. The foreign universities' interest in recruiting Indian students, twinning programmes and setting up offshore campuses in partnership, was another motivating factor. FICCI has been organizing an Education Summit and an Education Fair annually since 2004.

Authentic data are not available on the number of foreign students in India. The data given by different organizations have substantial variations. Details of international students in India given by the AIU<sup>18</sup> are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
AIU Data on the Number of Foreign Students in India, 1988–2008

Year	No. of International Students	Year	No. of International Students
1988–89	11,844	1998–99	5,323
1989–90	12,463	1999–2000	6,988
1990–91	12,899	2000-1	Not Available
1991–92	Not Available	2001–2	Not Available
1992–93	12,765	2002-3	Not Available
1993–94	13,707	2003-4	Not Available
1994–95	11,888	2004–5	13,267
1995-96	10,087	2005-6	14,456
1996–97	5,841	2006–7	18,391
1997–98	6,701	2007-8	21,206

# **Towards the Future**

It is seen from Table 2 that the total number of students in 2007–8 was only 21,206; the number of students from SAARC countries was 4,965. These figures, however, cover only students studying in the universities. According

to the ICCR, the number of foreign students in India was around 50,000 in 2008–9; including those studying at universities: the rest are pursuing certificate, diploma, degree and other programmes in private universities/institutions.<sup>19</sup>

It is obvious from these figures that India has failed to emerge as a destination for higher education. This is unfortunate considering that the developing world, particularly Asia and Africa, hold India in high esteem as a knowledge power. India also has a 22 million-strong Diaspora, out of whom about 16 million are foreign citizens.

## Remedial Measures

A major rethink is required if India is to be promoted as a destination for higher education. The first and foremost need is clear recognition of the importance of education as a tool of diplomacy and the usefulness of internationalization for India's own education system. Like the ITEC programme, the MEA must play a leading role in attaining this objective.

Education cooperation must receive the highest priority as part of India's neighbourhood diplomacy. For this purpose, special attention must be paid to universities located close to the border areas. These selected universities should also be assisted and encouraged to become centres of quality research in respect of the neighbouring countries. They must also be encouraged to have collaborations, including twinning arrangements, with the universities in their neighbouring countries.

## Establishment of an India International University

In order to send a strong message that India accords the highest priority to cooperation in the field of education, the government may set up an India International University with focus on the Afro-Asian region in public-private partnership. The government must work in close cooperation with the chambers of commerce and the leading business houses to not only share the costs but also leverage their expertise to ensure relevance of the course content. Suitable tax incentives may be given to the private sector for this purpose. Corporations which have large international exposure may be encouraged to set up schools in their area of interest

Alternatively, trade bodies like NASSCOM, Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers/Automobile Component Manufacturers Association, Indian

Drugs Manufacturers Association, etc. can be approached to set up institutes in their respective fields.

## PIO Universities

The proposal to establish PIO (people of Indian origin) universities must be implemented at the earliest. This would facilitate recruitment of students from Indian Diaspora as well as promote close ties with the younger generation of overseas Indians. These universities may also be established in public-private partnership with institutions of repute and the Indian Diaspora.

## India Study Programmes

One-semester and short-duration India Study Programmes must be introduced in select universities, particularly in states with large overseas communities like Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh. The programmes should be flexible enough to cater for both science and humanities students. They may include visits to various parts of India. Israel's MASA programme is an excellent example of such an initiative. The objective should be to provide a holistic view of India to Diaspora as well as other foreign students. Subsidy would not be required for students from developed countries.

# Promoting India Research

Scholars with India specialization invariably become important resource persons for other governments. In most cases they become goodwill ambassadors for India. Developing a suitable programme to promote India-oriented research among foreign scholars would, therefore, be a positive step. Diaspora scholars are particularly interested in India-oriented research programmes. It would be in India's interest to provide facilities for field studies and other support to attract larger numbers of scholars.

## Conclusion

Education is an important asset in soft-power diplomacy. Because of English language, cost advantages, vibrant open society and pluralistic ethos, traditional ties of friendship, civilizational linkages and geographic location, India has tremendous potential to emerge as a major higher-education destination for students from the Afro-Asian region. What is required is a clear-cut vision,

allocation of resources and a time-bound action plan to become a major force in this field. The rewards would be comparable to any other investment for promoting international cooperation.

## **Notes**

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