**Politics has to be kept out of education | The Indian Express**

Politics has to be kept out of education Summary. University of Mumbai is trying hard to change its mindset to meet new challenges in the rapidly expanding higher-education sector. The university is reaching out to alumni to get funds for some of its ambitious plans. All seems to be falling in place under Vice-Chancellor Rajan Welukar in the last almost two years. The veteran academician spoke to The Indian Express on a variety of issues,including the controversial removal of a book from the English graduate course under political pressure. Excerpts: Related. University of Mumbai is trying hard to change its mindset to meet new challenges in the rapidly expanding higher-education sector. The university is reaching out to alumni to get funds for some of its ambitious plans. All seems to be falling in place under Vice-Chancellor Rajan Welukar in the last almost two years. The veteran academician spoke to The Indian Express on a variety of issues,including the controversial removal of a book from the English graduate course under political pressure. Excerpts: P VAIDYANATHAN IYER: Is there a disparity between the functioning of state and central universities? If yes,is this disparity in terms of financial resources? RAJAN WELUKAR: Central universities were established by an Act of Parliament. All central universities are campus universities,they are not affiliating universities. Affiliating institutes are limited in number and are conducting colleges. Recently,a decision was taken by Government of India to establish 15 new central universities and the grants they have received are not less than Rs 400-w500 crore. In contrast,state universities have not got development grant,they only get salary grant. No development grant has come from the state government. If you really want development,communication has to be there. For example,we want to have a sub-campus of Mumbai University in Thane where the infrastructure cost alone is Rs 400 crore. Similarly,infrastructure cost of another planned school of engineering on Kalyan sub-campus is Rs 600 crore. You cannot compare central and state universities. P VAIDYANATHAN IYER: Have you generated money for the sub-campuses? RW: We are sending proposals to different agencies and trying to donations with the help of alumni. We are meeting people and trying to convince them that the Thane centre will be good for Thane city. Thane Municipal Corporation has given us land for the project. Further,we have received Rs 35 crore from an alumnus for a convention centre on our Kalina campus. When I joined University of Mumbai,I found that Mumbai does not have an international convention centre where conferences,seminars,talks and other mass enrollment events can be organised. We have already identified five-and-a-half acres on the Kalina campus. Through this project,we will earn money which can be used for development of the university. MIHIKA BASU: An RTI query has revealed MU has not been successful in attracting grants from industry/alumni like the IITs. Any specific plans in this regard? RW: We have specific plans for Thane,Kalyan and Ratnagiri projects and we are going to industry and alumni with them. Mumbai University has received Rs 70 crore in the last two years from industry/alumni,which is the highest ever for the university. RW: We are meeting a lot of corporates and making presentations. We are planning to invite people and explain them what we want to do in the university academically,with infrastructure and what resources we need. DIPTI SONAWALA: Is there a skill gap? What is Mumbai University doing to address the mismatch between industry requirements and what is taught in classrooms? RW: Yes ,there is a skill gap across the country. We are starting a soft-skill programme for teachers and students in remote and tribal areas. We started developing a module with Yashwantrao Chavan Academy of Development Administration (Yashada) last year through which we will train two-three teachers every year. The teachers,in turn,will impart skill-based training to students. We are also starting community colleges with Coca-Cola Limited. Forty colleges in rural and tribal areas will participate in this. Of these,four community colleges will be selected to be sponsored. They will get two years training and will be absorbed by Coca-Cola after that. We are also going to other companies for similar initiatives. We have been approached by some from the construction industry. To give students a chance for vertical mobility,we are offering a one-year degree programme. Further,we have a tie-up with Deakin University,Australia,through which training will be given to our Board of Studies members on curriculum design and ways to integrate skills. DIPTI SONAWALA: Do you think students are opting for shortcuts when it comes to project work and outsourcing it? How can this issue be addressed? RW: Yes,this is a problem and students are outsourcing project works. This shows a lack of sincerity and maturity. They fail to understand they may not get such opportunities while working and they will have to perform. I think the problem here to some extent is the teacher-student ratio. There are less number of teachers,so proper scrutiny is not done. BHARAT SUNDARESAN: Do you think our country is ready for an open-book exam and questions based on case studies? RW: The open-book system has more difficulties and it will also be difficult for teachers to set question papers. If your concepts are clear,you dont need to read a book. We will have to first bring about changes in our school education. There is no communication between school education and higher education. Hence,continuity is missing. SUKANYA SHETTY: We dont have full-time,qualified teachers for professional courses. Instead,we have visiting faculty. Is there a quality check? RW: In a huge system like ours,this becomes a difficult job. Nonetheless what we are trying to do is to attract young intellectual capital. The moment that happens,things will change. In the next academic year,we are starting a training institute. We are trying to bring in more practical component and creating open-education resources. We are starting with economics,maths and management. Content development is the most difficult part. SAGNIK CHOWDHURY: How challenging is it to keep politics separate from academics in a place like Mumbai? For example,the episode of removing Rohinton Mistrys book Such a Long Journey from the syllabus after Yuva Senas protest? RW: Politics has to be kept out of education,it has no role in academics. As far as removing the book from the syllabus is concerned,it was not because of any political party but because experts felt the book should be removed. The issue was misunderstood by people. SWATEE KHER: What is your stand on the Lyngdoh committee report on elections in the university? RW: I am of the opinion that the youth should be given an opportunity to participate in decision-making. They need to be empowered. While taking a decision,the government has to take into consideration all incidents that took place in the past due to elections and ensure such incidents do not occur again. I strongly believe politics should not come to the campus. When there are vested interests,malpractices start. SWATEE KHER: Do you think providing autonomy to colleges will reduce MU burden to some extent? RW: We should not think from the point of view of burden. Freedom will give colleges better exposure,which they cannot get otherwise. It should be given with a view to achieve improvement. Currently,seven colleges have autonomy and in three years,20 other colleges affiliated to MU may get autonomy. RW: There is an ongoing debate across the world on the issue of ranking institutes. The parameters and factors on which universities and institutes are ranked should be uniform. The kind of intellectual capital Harvard University can get with its operative budget,I am sure even premier Indian institutes such as IIT Bombay cannot,and thus there is a vast difference. Since there is no uniformity in ranking parameters,people are debating whether institutes should be ranked at all. MIHIKA BASU: MU has been grappling with paper leaks and rumours of paper leaks. Do you have a concrete plan to prevent such situations during the October exams? RW: We are using technology in the process of conducting exams. We are sending question papers to exams centres through web-links and password-protected CDs. We dont know since when this is happening. Just that this time we caught people and everyone came to know of it. We are preparing question banks for all subjects and randomly,we will select one question paper from that. We are staring with professional programmes and will slowly move to conventional arts,commerce and science. DIPTI SONAWALA: Citing workload,teachers have raised a hue and cry about the MU decision to have nine paper sets instead of three. Hows the university dealing with it? RW: I dont see any workload increasing due to this method. According to me,it is exactly like the functions of brain. Brain does not accept change. Whenever you try to bring in changes in the system,this is bound to happen. But one has to remember change is mandatory and survival is optional. If they want to survive,they will have to accept the change. AAKRITI VASUDEVA: The results of revaluation are mostly delayed,do you have any concrete plan to check delays? RW: This year,we have declared most of the revaluation results on time and for next year,we have a plan. We will scan answer papers,so the moment a student applies for a photocopy of his/her answersheet,we can provide it to them in no time through email or other means. However,the process may take a year as it needs approval of various bodies. DIPTI SONAWALA: There are almost 300 colleges where posts of principals are vacant or there are no full-time principals. What do you think is the problem? RW: This is not just the problem of Mumbai University and its affiliated colleges,but institutes across the country. One thing I have observed is that many people do not want to take additional responsibilities for the same salary. The criteria of qualification too is a factor. Besides,many people do not want to go to rural areas. SHARVARI PATWA: Does the university have a strong placement programme? RW: The focus has to be on the subject of learning,not placements. MANASI PHADKE: Are there chances of colleges misusing the internal evaluation introduced by the university? What is the university doing to check such malpractices? RW: Not all colleges,but we have found cases where colleges have generously awarded marks to students. We identified such colleges and sent our representatives there. Now,we are looking at how we could deal with this issue. Internal assessment is in the interest of students and if something is in the interest of students,we have to do it. In doing so,we may face some problems,but we should find ways to resolve them.