

Salient features of NEP 2020

■ Dr Sadiq Hussain

Even as the higher education institutions (HEIs) are gearing up to implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Assam and other parts of the country, let's explore some of its salient features. The most prominent features of NEP 2020 are focus on quality research, the multidisciplinary framework of courses, student-centric holistic education and emphasis on local language as a medium of instruction.

Creating multidisciplinary institutes by 2040 is one of the goals of the policy. Enhancement of the gross enrolment ratio (GER) to 50 per cent by 2035 is another highlight. The system of affiliated colleges will be phased out through a system of graded autonomy over 15 years. The National Research Foundation (NRF) will promote the culture of research among the universities by funding peer-reviewed grant proposals across all disciplines. The NRF will be governed by a board of governors consisting of the best innovators and researchers across different research domains. The National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHRC), National Accreditation

Council (NAC), Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) and General Education Council (GEC) are the proposed regulatory empowered bodies of regulation, accreditation, funding and academic standard setting respectively.

Restructuring vocational education is another prime focus of the NEP 2020. Vocational education will be integrated into HEIs in a phased manner. By 2025, 50 per cent of the learners will get exposure to vocational education through higher education and school. HEIs will offer vocational education of their own or collaborate with NGOs and industry. 'Lok Vidya', a vocational knowledge hub, will be accessible to students. Open distance learning (ODL) may be a way to impart vocational courses.

High performing Indian universities will get offers to set up campuses offshore. Top 100 universities in the world will be encouraged to operate in India. Teaching/research collaborations and student/faculty exchange with top-ranked foreign institutes will be facilitated. The policy encourages HEIs to prepare professionals in cutting-edge areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), big data anal-

ysis, machine learning, nanotechnology, neuroscience, genomic studies, etc. According to the policy, creation of employable youths is another area of concern.

Initiatives are suggested by the NEP 2020 to foster Indian language, culture and art among all spheres of teaching and learning. High quality programmes including 4-year BEd dual degrees in Indian languages, creative writing, arts, music, philosophy, etc., need to be developed. More HEIs will use mother tongue/local language as a medium of instruction and/or offer programmes bilingually.

Programmes in graphic design, web design, art and museum administration, archaeology, translation and interpretation will be created with high standards. An Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI) will be established to promote e-content. It will utilise technology extensively in its translation and interpretation tasks. Local languages and their associated arts and cultures will be preserved by documenting via a web-based portal/wiki.

HEIs need to curb opportunity costs and fees for pursuing higher education. The government must encourage students by facilitating scholarships and financial assistance. All facilities and

buildings of HEIs need to be wheelchair-accessible and disabled-friendly. They also need to create bridge courses for students from poor educational backgrounds. All HEIs need to be equipped with the basic infrastructure facilities. HEIs will have a clear, transparent and well-defined process of recruitment. There should be counselling systems for students for handling emotional trauma and stress. Such institutions should be equipped with quality medical facilities for all their students.

MERUs (multidisciplinary education and research universities) at par with IITs, IIMs will be established for multidisciplinary and holistic education of global standards. HEIs will aim to set up technology development centres, start-up incubation centres and centres in frontier research areas.

Multiple entries and exit options will be a boon for the students. The undergraduate degree course will be of either 3 or 4-year duration with multiple exit options: a certificate after completing one year of study, a diploma after two years and a bachelor degree after completion of three years of study in that discipline or field. After completing four years in the particular discipline or field,

a multidisciplinary honours degree will be awarded. An academic bank of credit (ABC) has been set up to store digitally the academic credits earned from different recognised HEIs so that the degrees from an HEI can be awarded by considering credits earned. The ABC (<https://www.abc.gov.in>) will help students' mobility among various institutes to fulfil a programme. If one goes through the draft of undergraduate curriculum framework (UGCF)-2022 prepared by the University of Delhi, one will find a course called 'Value Addition Course' (VAC) besides Discipline Specific Elective (DSE), Generic Elective (GE), Skill Enhancement Course (SEC) and AEC (Ability Enhancement Course). VAC is meant for ethics, culture, constitutional values, soft skills, sports education, etc., that will help students in their all-round development. If a student secures 44 credits, he/she will be eligible for an undergraduate certificate in the field of study/discipline. Total 176 credits will entitle the student to a bachelor of the field of multidisciplinary course of study (honours). The student may leave the course with a certificate by fulfilling 44 credits criteria facilitating the multiple entry and exit option of the NEP 2020.