

ICC's 6th Globalised Education Forum in Kolkata Highlights Inclusive Education Initiatives

The session emphasises on promoting inclusivity in education and in the perspective of professional courses

Kolkata, 27th April 2024: The Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) organised its 6th Globalised Education Forum on Saturday, 27th April 2024, to discuss promoting inclusivity in education and in the perspective of professional courses. The session witnessed valuable insights from Smt. Chandani Tudu, IAS, Senior Special Secretary, Higher Education Department, Government of West Bengal; H.E. Dr. Andrew Alexander Flemming, Deputy High Commissioner, British Deputy High Commission, Kolkata; Mr. Hemant Sahal, Founder & CEO, Digii (Formerly CollPoll); Mr. Satyam Roychowdhury, Chairman, ICC National Expert Committee on Higher Education & Training and Chancellor, Sister Nivedita University; Prof. Dhrubajyoti Chattopadhyay, Vice Chancellor, Sister Nivedita University; and Sardar Simarpreet Singh, Chairman, ICC National Expert Committee on Higher Education & Training and Director, JIS Group.

Emphasised the policies implemented by the Government of West Bengal, Smt. Chandani Tudu, IAS, Senior Special Secretary, Higher Education Department, Government of West Bengal, stated, "Every individual, regardless of their background, must have access to quality education and equal opportunities in the field of education. The State Government has prioritised inclusive education, ensuring accessibility and equality for all. Universities have been established in every district to provide equal educational opportunities across different geographies. These universities offer a variety of courses in different languages at both graduate and post-graduate levels, enabling individuals to access education in their own language. Recognising the financial constraints students face, the state government has introduced various scholarship schemes, including Shikhashree, Medhashree and Swami Vivekananda Scholarship, to provide financial support. Additionally, the Student Credit Card scheme allows students to obtain loans up to 10 lakhs for higher education. Professional courses play a crucial role in shaping the future of education through technical education and skill development. The government is committed to promoting inclusivity in education to enhance the learning experience. Furthermore, over 400 Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) have been signed with universities in India and abroad to enhance inclusive learning and education policies. The state has witnessed a commendable rise in the number of higher education institutions, soaring from 1056 in 2011 to 2049 in 2023, with colleges per thousand square kilometers escalating from 11.9 to 25.4 during the same period. Notably, gross enrollment in higher education has surged from 13.24 lakhs in 2011 to 27.22 lakhs in 2023, with female enrollment witnessing a substantial increase from 5.62 lakhs to 13.46 lakhs during the same timeframe. The female gender ratio in higher education has also experienced a notable uptick, climbing from 42 percent in 2011 to 49.50 percent in 2023. Moreover, the annual budget allocated to the higher education department has demonstrated a significant augmentation, rising from Rs. 10724 Crores in 2011-12 to 6500 crores in 2024-2025. It is my earnest hope that through collaborative efforts, we can usher in a transformative era, ensuring the fruition of these initiatives and fostering inclusive and accessible education for all."

H.E. Dr. Andrew Alexander Flemming, Deputy High Commissioner, British Deputy High Commission, Kolkata, stated, "Inclusive Education is something which resonates with me. Everybody's learning requirements and needs are different, so the education system must accommodate things accordingly so that we can build a more inclusive educational environment, making it accessible to all. I am keen about my role, which is to get more British agencies to explore the eastern zone of India. All individuals have the

potential to succeed and shine bright, therefore it's necessary and important for us to collaborate and work towards building a more inclusive education system."

While delivering the welcome address, Mr. Satyam Roychowdhury, Chairman, ICC National Expert Committee on Higher Education & Training, and Chancellor, Sister Nivedita University, said, "Quoting Nelson Mandela, I believe India has effectively implemented various strategies, such as The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, demonstrating our commitment to inclusive education. However, challenges persist, including the need for adequate resources and educational infrastructure. Collaborative efforts are essential to foster a more inclusive and diverse culture. We must strive to create an environment where every individual has equal opportunities to contribute to society, thereby promoting inclusivity in education and empowering countless individuals. Together, we can make a meaningful difference in this realm."

Mr. Hemant Sahal, Founder & CEO, Digii (Formerly CollPoll), remarked, "India has made significant strides in promoting inclusivity, yet there remain essential aspects to integrate into the education system to ensure equal opportunities for all. Moreover, it's imperative to contemplate the intricacies of learning when discussing inclusivity."

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Prof. Dhruvajyoti Chattopadhyay, Vice Chancellor, Sister Nivedita University, remarked, "In 2018, with the program conceived by the Indian Chamber of Commerce, we realised the need to amalgamate academia and industries. As predicted in 2018, this vision manifested in the Generalised Education policies of 2020 and the subsequent bill passed in 2022. West Bengal, renowned for its intellectual pursuit and inclusivity, stands as a melting pot of diversity, a shift towards inclusivity evident in recent decades. This transformation is particularly crucial in education and professional courses. Inclusive education fosters a culture of acceptance, emphasising diverse learning techniques and equal education for individuals from various backgrounds. This initiative has gained global momentum with Europe practicing inclusive education and policies like the American with Disabilities Act and The Equality Act facilitating its implementation. Despite the growing need for inclusivity, lack of infrastructure and inclusive teaching practices remain significant hurdles. Additionally, curriculum redesign and investment in technology are essential. Navigating the complexities of inclusive education requires collaborative efforts to create an environment where inclusivity prevails, empowering individuals."

While concluding, Sardar Simarpreet Singh, Chairman, ICC National Expert Committee on Higher Education & Training and Director, JIS Group, stated, "During this enlightening discussion, we gained valuable new insights into the workings of the education system. The key takeaway is the imperative for collaborative efforts between the private and government sectors to enhance inclusivity and foster development, especially in professional courses, within our dynamic and multifaceted educational landscape."