

EDUCATION SECTOR HAS MAJOR ROLE IN REALISING INDIA'S CHERISHED GOALS

Hon'ble Education Minister, India
Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal

Sir, in October last year, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had said that India has undertaken a 'trinity of reforms' in the field of education, labour and agriculture. The Prime Minister said that the reforms set the stage for more foreign universities to be able to come to India. Is the government also looking at initiating reforms in agriculture education in the country?

As you know that we are now implementing the National Education Policy 2020. It aims at increasing the professionals in agriculture and veterinary sciences through programmes integrated with general education. With the NEP 2020, the design of agricultural education will shift towards developing professionals with the ability to understand and use local knowledge, traditional knowledge, and emerging technologies while being cognizant of critical issues such as declining land productivity, climate change, food sufficiency for our growing population, etc.

The policy recommends that both capacity and quality of agriculture and allied disciplines must be improved in order to increase agricultural productivity through better skilled graduates and technicians, innovative research, and market-based extension linked to technologies and practices. As per the policy, schools/school complexes will be encouraged to hire local eminent persons or experts as 'master instructors' in various subjects such as vocational crafts, entrepreneurship, agriculture or any other



subject where local expertise exists, to benefit students and help preserve and promote local knowledge of professions. Specific courses in tribal ethno-medicinal practices, forest management, traditional (organic) crop cultivation, natural farming etc will also be made available. Universities shall aim to offer PhD and Masters programmes not only in core areas such as Machine Learning but also in multidisciplinary fields and professional areas like agriculture.

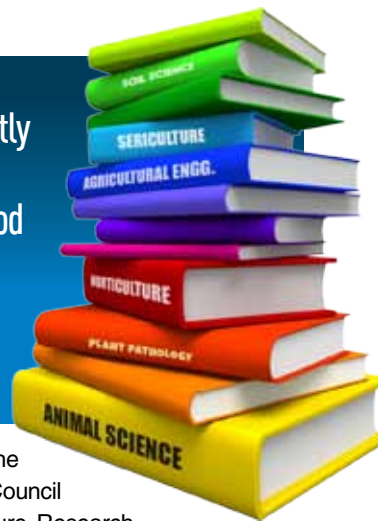
The government has emphasised upon the need for educating rural youth in modern farming techniques and farm marketing to promote agro-entrepreneurship in the country. What initiatives does the government plan to achieve these objectives?

I believe that there is immense scope for agro-entrepreneurship in India. Over the last decade, a huge influx of educated youth, innovative ideas, and indomitable passion for launching advanced technologies and business ideas have elevated the status of Indian agriculture. Our government has been undertaking several initiatives to ameliorate and give a boost to agro-entrepreneurship in the country. Recently, we organised an Agri-Food Techathon which was the first initiative of its kind that was totally dedicated to the agricultural sector.

This Agri-Food Techathon was launched with an aim to identify and select novel concepts and innovative ideas for agri-food start-up incubation and help transform these start-ups into successful business ventures. I am proud to share that the premier institutes of our country like Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, have a dedicated Agricultural & Food Engineering Department. The department has been contributing to human resources development in the agricultural and food engineering sector in India.

With NEP 2020, we shall be starting vocational education in schools from 6th grade which will also include internships. I am sure that augmenting the importance

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of vocational education will immensely benefit the development of agri-food start-ups in India. Local eminent persons or experts shall be hired for the purpose of promoting local professions, knowledge and skills for multitude of subjects including agriculture and entrepreneurship.

The government has stressed that education must be the means of fulfilling new India, new expectations, new requirements. In what ways shall this vision of the government shape the agriculture education sector?

Our Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi has envisioned a Swarnim Bharat of the 21st century which will not only be Aatm Nirbhar but will also become a Vishwaguru. I believe the education sector has a major role to play in realising these goals. It was in pursuit of these goals that our government introduced the National Education Policy 2020 for an overall 360-degree overhaul of the entire education system in India.

As I said, the NEP 2020 also focuses on the agriculture education sector and intends to bring Aatm Nirbharta in the agricultural sector through education. The NEP 2020 shall give a boost to the capacity and quality of agriculture and allied disciplines while producing skilled graduates and technicians, innovative research, and market-based extension linked to technologies and practices. Schools/school complexes shall be encouraged to hire eminent local persons as 'master instructors' in various subjects such as agriculture. Institutions that currently fund research at some level

such as the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) shall continue to independently fund research according to their priorities and needs. Our government is committed to transform the agriculture sector and I am sure the NEP 2020 will pave the way for these transformations.

The government had identified Institutes of Eminence, offering them financial support and unshackling them from regulations and restrictions. The government had stated that these institutes would enjoy complete academic and administrative autonomy. The 10 government institutes would receive special funding. The institutes would have the freedom to develop their own roadmaps and pursue their ideas of excellence. Is this initiative likely to be extended to the agricultural education sector? Please elucidate.

The Institutions of Eminence Scheme seeks to empower select Higher Education Institutions in the country to become world class teaching and research institutions, to enhance access to affordable, high quality education within the country. The selected institutions have the freedom to choose their own path to become world class institutions. The UGC has set guidelines and regulations for IoE which contains the eligibility criteria, selection procedure, monitoring, evaluation, and other regulatory aspects for world class institutions.