

Education is 'tipping point' in Indo-Canada relations



■ From right, C-IBC President Kam Rathee, Professor Balbir Sahni receiving the brick from Indian High Commissioner R L Narayan and, extreme left, Husain Neemuchwala, chair, C-IBC's education committee

AJIT JAIN
in Toronto

The Canadian Bureau for International Education, that is dedicated to the internationalization of education and the expansion of educational partnerships between Canada and India and other countries, is holding its annual conference in November in Ottawa during which one day will be devoted to the India Forum, says Dr Balbir Sahni, Professor Emeritus, Department of Economics, Concordia University in Montreal, who is co-chair of the Education Working Group, Focus India of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

The title of the forthcoming conference is 'Citizen of the World: Making an Impact through International Education.'

The emphasis now is on internationalization of education that is a corollary to globalization. Education has no borders, he said in his keynote presentation 'Canada-India Synergy in Education: The Tipping Point?' at the major symposium on education organized by the Canada-India Business Council July 19, with about 100 participants, mostly academics and senior administrators from Canadian universities.

There are a number of organizations engaged in promoting education linkages between Canada, India and other countries, among them the chambers of commerce, C-IBC, Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, Focus India initiatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canadian Education Centers Network, Focus Canada Forum that addresses key issues in India; Asia-Pacific Foundation that is geared to stepping up dialogue and research, the Canadian International Development Agency, Conference Board of Canada and provincial government missions.

Dr Sahni laid stress on how Indian students studying in Canada are contributing to 'synergy in education.' A number of Canadian universities have tie-ups or MOUs with counterparts in India, that is largely geared to the exchange of faculty, students. In many cases, the two sides undertake joint research projects in scientific fields, they also conduct joint research on national and international issues, work for social change and together the two countries "appreciate the ethnic and cultural diversity of one's nation."

The Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute has, since its inception in 1968, played a significance role in promoting Canadian studies in India and Indian studies in Canada.

As Professor Gary van Loon, incumbent president, Shastri Institute, a Professor of Chemistry at Queen's University, called the Shastri Institute "now a truly 'bi-national body with two offices - one in New Delhi and one

in Calgary.' It has 37 Indian institutions of higher learning and 28 Canadian universities as its affiliated members.

"We have good interaction on both sides. We talk about various initiatives in education. We talk about sustainable development as academics see it. The emphasis now is on environmental sustainability and social responsibilities," van Loon said.

Besides the Shastri Institute, the Canadian Education Centers Network has its presence in India and "has been proactive in promoting education linkages and conducts education fairs to facilitate student recruitment and provide support to mutually rewarding academic sector initiatives between Canada and India," he said.

At the C-IBC symposium, there was a special session devoted to the CECN Network. Gardiner J Wilson, director, Public Policy and Research, and Andrea MacIntyre, acting director, made a joint presentation on what CECN is doing in India.

"Now that relations between Canada and India are solidifying, the two countries are discovering there is untapped potential as there are opportunities," Dr Sahni said. He suggested that educational linkages between the two countries be further expanded to "incorporate technology and commercialization projects."

Dr Sahni suggested that participants at the symposium "keep stakeholders from provincial governments, the Diaspora, chambers of commerce, Citizenship and Immigration Canada involved." At the end of his presentation, he conceded he was not sure "whether or not we have reached the tipping point."

The overview of Canada-India relations in education field, Dr Sahni said, "exhibits ample unrealized opportunities" and so, it underscores, "an urgent need to complete and monitor inventory of Canada-India academic linkages, enabling Canadian institutions to identify respective areas of engagement."

Recent acceleration of Canadian efforts to strengthen educational links with Canada can yield rewards, he said. "These must be mutual and eventually entail sustained growth of two-way flows of students and scholars. Otherwise, we will face prolonged internationalization deficit, adversely impacting our competitiveness."

C-IBC President Kam Rathee, and chair C-IBC Education Committee, Husain F Neemuchwala, who is also co-founder, International Center for Education, requested High Commissioner Narayan to present a 'brick' as C-IBC's gift to Dr Sahni.

That brick has a very special meaning as it bears the inscription: 'This brick is in appreciation of laying the foundation and creating vibrant Canada-India education corridors.'

Canada universities admit part-term Indian students

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More and more Canadian universities are now admitting students from India who have completed half terms in India and complete the rest here.

"The Universite De Montreal receives visiting research students. These are students who are registered in another university (in India) but who would like to spend up to a year working in the laboratory or research center of a professor from the Universite De Montreal," says Dr Marth Crago, vice president (international), Universite de Montreal. She was amongst the participants at the education symposium organized July 19 by the Canada-India Business Council.

In an interview with *India Abroad*, she said July 21 "Typically, these are (Indian) students whose supervisors in their home university are working with or who are in contact with a professor at the Universite De Montreal. The professor at this university must agree to receive the student. The supervisors in the Indian university must be willing to have their students spend time at the Universite De Montreal."

They have different arrangements with French universities that the Universite De Montreal would now like to extend to India: "In this arrangement, doctoral students spend half their time at our university and half their time in another country. At the end of their studies, they are awarded a PhD degree from both universities."

The suggestion is this model, created by the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies for use among Canadian universities "could be extended to universities in India (and other countries)," noted Crago. "This would make it possible for international students to spend time in our universities."

She believes "It would be a good idea for Canada and India to work on collaborative models of graduate and undergraduate education (as) these models would allow the universities and students on both countries to profit."

Dr Mitali De, associate dean of business, Wilfred Laurier University, who was on the panel 'Destination India', said they have finalized a plan under which a student from India could study a part of his term in India, a part in Europe and the balance term at Wilfred Laurier. She calls it doing your MBA in three parts, at three educational institutions. She could not give much information on how this proposal would function in reality. "We are finalizing our plans," she said.

Kam Rathee, president, C-IBC, who was the principal organizer of the symposium, along with Husain Neemuchwala, chair, C-IBC Education Committee, said the agenda of the symposium was "to foster an exchange of ideas through networking to further the interests of those currently involved in or contemplating involvement in the education sector in India. An exploration and sharing of opportunities in this burgeoning sector and to create an awareness and highlight each other's experience about opportunities as well as pitfalls to avoid. It also represented an opportunity for institutions to showcase their programs and accomplishments in India."

There were four sessions. 'Destination India' focused on institutions currently operating in India and their experience. Another session featured the Canadian Education Center Network's work, followed by a session that introduced 'Edu-Canada', a new initiative undertaken by the federal government to promote Canadian education around the world, particularly in India.

Jean-Philippe Tachdjian, deputy director, International Education and Youth Division made his presentation on 'Edu-Canada'. He said for the first time in the last budget, the Canadian government allocated \$2 million for promoting Canadian education outside.

"The funding is part of the pilot project. The government says if you do well, you may get more money next time and the interest is branding the Canadian institutions," Tachdjian said.

There was a lot of criticism of the government over this limited allocation of \$2 million as against Canadian earnings of \$5 billion annually from international students studying in Canada. Many participants noted that \$2 million was a very limited amount and the government should place more resources at the disposal of different Canadian education centers.

Dr Balbir Sahni, professor emeritus of economics, Concordia University, who co-chaired the symposium,