

EDITORIAL

Renew commitment to end TB

TB treatment in all government hospitals and recognized centres is free in India. Early diagnosis and treatment is the most effectual way in the prevention process of Tuberculosis. After the two weeks of medication, the majority of patients don't remain infectious. Tuberculosis is an air-borne disease; hence it's very important to keep our surroundings clean. The risk of the infection can be reduced by keeping the good ventilation, natural source of light as UV light kills off TB Bacteria, maintaining good hygiene such as covering mouth while coughing and sneezing will reduce the spread of TB bacteria. World Tuberculosis Day is an opportunity to organize political as well as social commitments for future progress by eliminating TB as a public health disorder. It's high time now that we should think about eliminating disease and consider consulting the doctors to make sure the timely diagnosis and treatment and make our communities TB free. Despite the progress made in recent years, TB continues to pose a substantial global health challenge. World TB Day provides an opportunity to raise awareness about the global burden of TB and the efforts being made to eradicate this disease. It is a day to reflect on the progress made in the fight against TB and to renew the commitment to end this epidemic. The day also serves as a reminder that TB is not just a health issue but a social issue, as poverty, malnutrition, and poor living conditions contribute to the spread of the disease. You don't have to worry or get into the panic state when you hear your doctor saying that you have been diagnosed with Tuberculosis (TB). With all the latest advancements in the medicine, tuberculosis is now treatable and hence curable. Majority of people are hesitant of consulting their doctors and some can't even afford the basic course of treatment due to financial or some other issues. We are aware of the fact that TB is being the ninth leading cause of death worldwide, and somewhere the credit goes to everyone who doesn't consult their doctors or completes the full medication course. 24th March is being observed as World Tuberculosis Day all across the globe. Let us make our efforts to put a full stop on this fatal disease. The day not only enlightens the people about this disease but also tells them all the preventive measures that they can take to keep themselves healthy. In various countries, the government provides free screening and free dose of medications to all the people suffering from tuberculosis.

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Transforming Indian higher education

BY
T V KATTIMANI

The proposed binary accreditation system is set to revolutionise the assessment, accreditation and ranking of higher education institutions

Indian education system saw a revolutionary change with the arrival of New Education Policy 2020 also known as NEP 2020. While the previous education systems i.e. Sarva Shiksha were based on numbers, the Samagra Shiksha gave more attention to inclusivity and equity. Along with it highlighted quality over quantity thus extending its support towards universal and holistic education. The concept of "Access, Equity, Quality, and Affordability & Accountability" under this was also applied as a pillar for NEP 2020 for implementation in higher educational institutions (HEIs).

The motto is to enhance the quality of education in HEIs and to compete Indian HEIs with the best institutions in the world. Based on this notion another transformative reform has been done by the Ministry of Education, Government of India through the formation of Dr. Radhakrishnan's

committee for revisiting the NAAC accreditation.

Dr. K. Radhakrishnan who is the Former Chairman of ISRO and Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the IIT Council proposed a new binary accreditation system for assessing HEIs where the assessment will be more technology-driven. It is a trust-based, transparent, and integrated 'Unified Elicitation Tool' where higher academic institutions will provide their information on the "One Nation One Data" platform. It will reduce the annual visits of the teams in HEIs and validation of the data will be transparent over the digital portal.

A system of high penalties is also proposed for those providing wrong information. Besides, two major features of this accreditation report were Binary Accreditation and Maturity-Based Graded Accreditation. While the Binary Accreditation will segregate the HEIs based on "Accredited" and "Not Accredited", the Maturity-Based Graded Accreditation will customise it in five different levels i.e. Level 1 to Level 5 where the HEIs have to cross each level to go up to Level 4. "Institutions of National Excellence" and Level 5 "Institutions of Global Excellence for Multi-Disciplinary Research and Education". It will also create a roadmap for aligning ranking

and accreditation bodies like NAAC, NBA, and NIRF by providing them with a centralised database.

The new accreditation system has suggested various categories of HEIs including Multi-disciplinary Education and Research-Intensive Institutions, Teaching-Intensive Institutions, Specialised Institutions, Vocational and Skill-Intensive Institutions, Community Engagement & Service related Institutions, Institutions of Rural & Remote location under its "one-size-fits-all model" where the levelling will be done on the orientation of the particular HEI. Further, the aim is to convert the present Score-based, Multiple Grade Accreditation with Binary Accreditation, Portal Self-Disclosure with Public Self-Disclosure, Single Accreditation institutions with Approved Accreditation institutions, One-Size-Fits-All Model with University-Type-Based process, and Input-Process-Limited-Outcome approach with Majorly Outcome-Based approach. All these actions will convert HEIs from a Generic policy to a Universal policy.

Since the Dr. Radhakrishnan Committee's recommendations were put together to improve the calibre and reputation of Indian higher education institutions, they represent a paradigm shift in the accreditation process. The Committee while



preparing the report has gone through numerous procedures from putting the suggested draft on the 'MyGov' portal and 'MoE' website for soliciting public opinion/stakeholder engagement. The workshop featured 34 panellists, more than 250 diverse HEIs and 950 participants from HEIs around the nation. This report discusses establishing criteria and policies for these accrediting organisations, choosing specialists, creating self-assessment report formats, and growing the Accreditation Network to reach the HEIs located in rural areas, remote areas, tribal areas, and other smaller territories. To achieve its goal the report has also done a comparative analysis of the existing accreditation system and the

visions of NEP 2020. It has also studied the best global practices of education to understand their model of education and to establish the Indian education system on the same platform.

Based on the suggestions received while formulating the draft, the committee has also classified the accreditation system into three different parameters. They are Pre-Accreditation, Accreditation Process, and Results and Post-Accreditation Incentives. The Pre-Accreditation includes processes like training the institutions, data collection, uploading the self-disclosure guidelines, etc., the Accreditation Process and Results as the name suggests focuses on validation and credit given to the HEI by the peer team.

The Post-Accreditation Incentives are important for providing priority status to the institutional body. Care has been taken for step-by-step reforms to ensure the creditability of the system. Thus, the vision is to implement the new accreditation policy proposed by Dr. Radhakrishnan's committee by December 2024. This new policy is aimed at creating futuristic universities for future generations. It will bring a transformative change in the HEI-Approval, Accreditation and Ranking System to make Bharat Vishwaguru.

(The writer is Vice-Chancellor at Central Tribal University of Andhra Pradesh; views are personal)

Leave a legacy of pure air

BY
PK JOSHI

We will not be gauged solely by material wealth or tech advancements, but by the purity of the air we pass on

Air pollution emerges as a critical environmental challenge, bearing significant health implications. Among its array of components, Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM2.5) looms large as a principal concern. PM2.5 denotes tiny particles suspended in the air, measuring 2.5 micrometres or less in diameter. These particles emanate from diverse sources such as vehicular exhaust, industrial operations, construction undertakings, biomass burning, as well as natural phenomena like wildfires and dust storms.

PM2.5 poses a heightened risk due to its tiny size, capable of infiltrating deep into the respiratory system and even entering the bloodstream, precipitating health problems including asthma, bronchitis, lung cancer, heart disease and premature mortality. Moreover, prolonged exposure to heightened levels of fine particulates can impede cognitive development in children, exacerbate mental health issues

and exacerbate existing ailments like diabetes. Its ramifications extend to complex environmental processes impacted by the Earth's climate, which is also related to fatalities.

Poor Record

It is imperative to monitor air quality levels and take proactive measures to mitigate PM2.5 emissions, crucial for safeguarding public health and environmental preservation. The 6th Annual World Air Quality Report 2023 by IQAir, a Swiss air quality technology firm, endeavours to apprise individuals, organisations and governments of air quality conditions for necessary intervention.

Drawing from data collected from 7,812 locations, encompassing 30,000 regulatory air quality monitoring stations and low-cost sensors across 134 countries, the report highlights that only 10 out of these nations have managed to meet the WHO annual PM2.5 guidelines (=5 µg/m3). With a mere 9% of cities globally meeting this benchmark, there remains significant work ahead to combat air pollution effectively.

India, ranked third with regard to air pollution in the region following Bangladesh and Pakistan, grapples persistently with severe air quality issues. The annual average concentration of PM2.5 increased

marginally in 2023 to 54.4 µg/m3 compared with 53.3 µg/m3 in 2022. In the National Capital Territory of Delhi, the concentration surged by 10% in 2023, peaking at 255 µg/m3 in November.

Alarming, 96% of India's population endures PM2.5 levels surpassing the WHO guideline by more than sevenfold. This concerning trend reverberates across cities, with over 66% of urban areas in India reporting annual averages exceeding 35 µg/m3. India boasts an extensive air quality monitoring network, hosting more stations than all other regional countries combined, with data collected from 256 cities in 2023. Despite this, a significant proportion of Indian cities feature prominently in the list of Asia's most polluted, with 13 out of the top 15 located in India.

Persistent Challenges In northern India, including Delhi, persistent challenges stem from a combination of factors such as vehicle emissions, construction, coal combustion, waste burning, biomass burning for heating and cooking and often crop burning. The annual burning of crops in northern India and neighbouring regions in the winter frequently leads to air quality reaching emergency levels. Vehicle emissions notably contribute to 40% of PM2.5 emissions in metropolitan areas, particularly in the national capital.

Recently, the scientific community has explored cloud seeding as a potential solution to alleviate Delhi's smog. Measures have been implemented, including the prohibition of coal usage for most commercial and industrial activities, enforced with hefty fines for violators. Despite efforts to reduce coal dependency, the region and the country still face numerous challenges in combating air pollution.

The air quality report may have multiple limitations, including the aggregation of the data sourced with a variety of uncertainties and varied spatial distribution density. For instance, Begusarai, in eastern Bihar, has emerged as the most polluted metropolitan area in this report for the first time. However, there is no scientific evidence of pollution in this city, except for the possibility of solid fuel or solid waste burning being a contributing factor.

Of particular concern is the calculation of the annual average PM2.5 concentration, which incorporates population data to provide a human-centric perspective on air quality in a given area. The use of population weighting as a normalisation factor can yield biased results, exerting a notable influence on Asian countries like India and specific hotspots such as Delhi. Another unofficial reason to doubt these reports

might stem from concerns about potential conflicts of interest due to IQAir's involvement in selling high-performance air purifiers, HVAC-based air cleaning, air quality monitoring units, and face masks with potential markets in Asia and North America.

Proactive Step Efforts to combat PM2.5 pollution encompass various strategies, including enhancing emissions standards for vehicles and industries, enforcing stringent regulations, fostering cleaner energy production (such as solar, wind and green hydrogen energy), implementing energy efficiency initiatives, and promoting public awareness and behavioural changes. The integration of green and blue infrastructure, along with the establishment of active air quality monitoring and management systems, can further aid in this endeavour.

The government has taken a proactive step by launching the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), targeting a 20-30% reduction in PM2.5 and other pollutants by 2024. This programme focuses on 102 cities, employing tailored action plans, technological interventions, and capacity-building measures. Initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which provides clean cooking fuel to households, and the promotion of

renewable energy sources, as well as the nationwide implementation of Bharat Stage VI emission norms (equivalent to Euro VI), aim to mitigate PM2.5 pollution from household and industrial sources. Additionally, the country collaborates with international organisations and engages in global initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA) to combat climate change and reduce air pollution. The significantly high PM2.5 concentration, as reported, is not just statistics but a stark testament to our shared impact on both the environment and human well-being. Such pollutants know no borders, show no regard for boundaries and impact us universally, regardless of race, nationality or belief. In our pursuit of progress and prosperity, let us commit to investing in sustainable technologies, promoting eco-friendly practices and advocating policies that prioritise public health and environmental stewardship. Ultimately, our legacy will not be gauged solely by material wealth or technological advancements, but by the purity of the air we pass on to future generations.

(The author is Professor with School of Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Views are personal)