

IIMA's 45th Annual Convocation: March 27, 2010

Address by Prof. Samir K Barua, Director, IIMA

Dr. C. Rangarajan, Chief Guest of the convocation, Dr. Vijay Pat Singhania, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Institute, Members of the IIMA Society, Members of the Governing Board of IIMA, colleagues from the Institute, family members and friends of the graduating students, the graduating students, ladies and gentlemen, my warm greetings on the occasion to all of you.

As I stand here, I can not help going down the memory lane. Dr. Rangarajan was the Chair of the Fellow Programme in Management when I joined the programme. Dr. Rangarajan taught us the nuances of monetary and fiscal policy. We were mesmerised by the eloquence of his brilliant discourses in the class. Sir, it is indeed a privilege and an honour to have you with us today at the convocation.

The year that has gone by was a year of pull back from the financial and economic mess of 2008. In line with the upturn in the global economic performance, the performance of the Institute also showed significant recovery in the second half of the year in the segments of activities that are directly impacted by corporate performance. Barring unexpected developments, we would do much better in these segments next year.

The Institute's flagship programme, the PGP, continued its dominant position as the most coveted post graduate programme in management in the country. The year witnessed full implementation of the revamped curriculum for the PGP. Based on the experience, we would make the changes needed to ensure that the programme is further fine tuned to reflect the emerging needs of the larger society. The year also witnessed the implementation of the second phase of expansion related to the OBC quota. We have already put in place measures to deal with the full implementation of quota in 2010-11. Dealing with the rapid expansion was a challenge; it has been met through support from all concerned. Maintaining the quality of delivery and the output of the programme will be a challenge going forward.

With galloping food prices, the agriculture sector has taken centre stage. The Institute's academic programme in the sector, the PGP-ABM, was transformed several years ago to focus on agri-business management. It continues to do reasonably well; yet, there is a need to revisit the programme design with a view to integrating it better with the emerging issues related to livelihood and sustainable development of the rural sector.

The doctoral programme of the Institute - the FPM, would set a record this year by graduating the largest batch of students in the history of the programme. The institute has received proposals from foreign academic institutions for cross-border collaboration with their doctoral programmes. This possibility will be explored going forward. There is also a need to explore the feasibility of opening the programme to external candidates from the practicing world. Such innovations are needed to enrich and expand the programme.

The post-experience one year post graduate programme for executives – the PGPX, again attracted quality applications. The average GMAT score of the cohort selected by the Institute – for the fifth batch of the programme continues to be comparable, if not better, than those for cohorts of the best b-schools globally. Placement of individuals with considerable prior experience is always a challenge, particularly when such experience is to be suitably rewarded in terms of compensation and nature of job offered. There are as yet a few graduates from the programme who have not been placed; we are certain however that they would be meaningfully placed soon. Having completed four cycles of the programme, the Institute has decided to review the programme design and delivery with a view to strengthening the programme.

The Institute completed the third offering of the one year post-experience post graduate programme in public management and policy - the PGP-PMP. With this, the commitment that had been made to the government has been fulfilled. While there is clearly a need for improving public policy making and management of public institutions and the government itself, the demand for such a programme as well as the demand for graduates from such a programme, appears to be limited. This has not only been the experience of IIMA but also of a few other institutes that have similar programmes in India. The institute has therefore decided to take a break from offering this programme; the experience of the last three years is being reviewed. After the review, the institute will frame an appropriate response to deal with the need to make an impact through training and education in public management and policy.

The Institute continued to offer the four-month Faculty Development Programme to enhance teaching and research skills of management teachers. Over the last two and a half decades, the institute has made significant contribution to teaching in management schools in the country. The programme design needs a review to increase its efficacy even further. The institute is also examining the possibility of attracting participants from other countries to this programme.

The Institute also offered about 130 management education programmes, training over 3500 participants from a diverse set of organizations. The Institute is attempting to expand its global foot-print through offering executive education programmes outside India.

As regards research, the faculty of the Institute continued to be as productive as it has been over the last several years. The year also witnessed the usual number of seminars, lectures and addresses by eminent speakers from academic institutions and other organizations. Conferences provide an opportunity for exchange of ideas as well as to create network of individuals working in specific areas. A major thrust is underway to hold a number of conferences at the institute on a regular basis.

Considerable focused research and other academic work in the Institute is done by centres that are created for the purpose. The existing centres include Centre for Management of Agriculture (CMA); Centre for Infrastructure Policy and Regulation (CIPR); Centre for Management of Health Systems (CMHS); IIMA IDEA Telecom Centre of Excellence (IITCOE); Gender Resource Centre (GRC);

Centre for Electronic Governance (CEG); Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship (CIIE) and Centre for Retailing. These centres continued to be active and completed significant amount of research and academic work during the year.

The institute pioneered the case method of learning in India. Over the years, however, the fervour for case writing and case based research has declined. With heightened global interest about India, there is clearly an opportunity for the institute to seize the initiative to provide meaningful cases and related teaching material on India for use by schools all over the world. Steps are being taken by the institute to give the necessary impetus to writing and dissemination of cases.

Over the last five decades, IIMA has become an institution in management education in India. As the lead institution it has never shied away from the responsibility it must assume to innovate and bring about changes to improve the functioning of management institutes. The year that has gone by saw IIMA undertake several new initiatives; of these, I would like to mention two in some detail.

Many of you may be aware that in 2003, the common admissions test (CAT) had to be conducted twice, since there was an allegation that the confidentiality of the test had been compromised in at least one centre. Similar allegations were again made in 2004. In a paper and pencil test, since the same paper is administered simultaneously to all candidates, a breach of this nature requires that the test be conducted again for all candidates. With burgeoning number of applicants, IIMs realized that a way had to be found to deal with this high risk of having to repeat the test for all in case of breach even in one centre. Computerization of the test and tests at multiple times in a year was clearly the answer. The much needed initiative towards computerised CAT was spearheaded by a faculty member from IIMA. The key individuals who participated in the academic process underlying the change were largely from IIMA. Yes, the process did get into trouble due to a variety of reasons, beyond our control, and yet the proof of the concept did get established.

The second major initiative at process change pertains to the final placement of students. All IIMs and several other leading business schools in the country followed a process that resulted in 'spot offers' being made to students. The process is exceptionally stressful for the students since they get no time to think about the offers made – they have to decide on the spot. IIMA took the initiative this year to organize a recruiters conference to discuss what came to be called a 'cohort based' system that would give more time to students to consider the offers made before deciding. In addition to reducing the stress on the students, the process would result in much better fit between the student and the organization he/she chooses to join. The other IIMs were invited to adopt the new process; they refrained from coming on board. Following the success of the new process at IIMA, however, other IIMs and several other B-schools are examining their placement process for similar improvements.

Over the years, innovation, the spirit of enterprise and the desire for relevance of existence to the larger society have been the hallmark of the initiatives taken by

the institute. Ravi Mathai, the first full-time director of the Institute, was convinced that principles of management must be applied to the most under-managed situations for the benefit of the least privileged in society. He also believed that to be effective a person attempting to bring about change must become a part of the change. He started the Jawaja experiment, an action research project, to transform the lives of the deprived community in one of the most backward districts of Rajasthan. The goal was to empower the weavers and the leather workers of Jawaja by making them self-reliant. Unfortunately, he passed away before full realization of his dream. I am proud to report that in the last one year, we have gone back to Jawaja, to revive the intervention at social transformation that was started over three decades ago.

The curriculum, the pedagogy and the ambience combine magically at IIMA to produce leaders and entrepreneurs of tomorrow. IIMA has contributed by far the largest number of professional CEO's to Indian organizations among all business schools in the country. It has also produced perhaps the largest number of professional entrepreneurs in the country. Over the years, about 10% of the graduates from the PGP have become entrepreneurs. They have contributed significantly to development of the country through setting up of innovative organizations that make a significant difference to the lives of millions of underprivileged.

IIMA has always been conscious of its obligation to the larger society. As a responsible public Institution, it has to preserve the excellence of its academic programmes while making its education accessible to the economically weakest sections of society. In 2008-09, IIMA became perhaps the first business school in the world that educated 23 students absolutely free. In 2009-10, another 18 students were educated at no cost by the Institute. We are planning to continue this initiative next year too.

IIMA aspires to become a globally acknowledged management school that functions in a manner that is consistent with the needs of a developing society. It has demonstrated its commitment over the last five decades to this mission. It is time for the government and the larger society to set it free from all government controls so that it can compete without its hands being tied against the foreign b-schools that are being allowed entry into India. The need for full autonomy to decide its destiny is urgent. If the autonomy is withheld, future generations will hold us responsible for sowing the seeds of demise of some of the excellent public institutions of higher learning we have in the country today.

The Institute will complete fifty years in December 2011. It has clearly more than fulfilled the promise of professionalizing management of organizations that the founding fathers made to the nation in 1961. I would urge all the stakeholders of the Institute to actively contribute to showcasing the achievements of IIMA during the golden jubilee year.

To the graduating students: first, my congratulations to you on successful completion of your respective programmes; my congratulations to your families and to your teachers who provided the supportive ambience and shaped your intellect for you to achieve this academic distinction.

You have now become a part of the large community of alumni of the Institute. This community enjoys very special privileges in society; doors will open for you that are shut for others. Use the privilege that you have acquired responsibly and with wisdom. Make sure that every action of yours adds to the reputation that has been built over the years, by thousands who have preceded you. Use the power you have acquired to make a difference to the world, to make it a better place for millions who are less privileged than you.

As you go through life and build new relationships, do remember the time you spent on campus and the relationships you built here. Come back as often as you can to re-live the sights and sounds that you leave behind. Come back and talk to us about your experiences, both good and bad, so as to go back to your world, with renewed vigour and confidence.

I wish you the very best as you chart out your own distinctive paths of glory.

Thank you.