

Education Mail  
**DISCUSSION  
FORUM**



RAMESH SHARMA



**Our universities today, either in the private or public sector, are highly regulated. An attempt to create universities or transform existing ones with a focus on research and innovation is an option that the system must have.**

B.N. JAIN, Vice-Chancellor, BITS Pilani

# Universities must have a place for the next big idea

**At the moment, we need institutions that can offer multidisciplinary research. By starting innovation universities we are expanding higher education; there will be a systemic movement. We will also discover new ways of doing things in the process.**

P. RAJENDRAN, Director and Chief Operating Officer, NIT

## Do innovation universities mean the end of the higher education system as we know it? Academic visionaries share their views

By Sangeeth Sebastian

**E**MINENT SCIENTIST Professor Yash Pal has expressed his reservation on innovation universities at a meeting of experts called by the Union Ministry of HRD (MHRD) recently. The scientist was of the view that the plan in its current form could destroy Indian higher education. Coming as it does from an educationist who is the architect of the United Progressive Alliance's education reform, Yash Pal's words assume significance. Will innovation universities, actually spell the death-knell for our higher education system? Leading educationists share their views.

"The concept of innovation universities is only at the stage of discussion now. At this stage both positive and negative suggestions should be welcomed," said P. Rajendran, director and COO, NIT. According to him, the word 'innovate' means leading new type of research. "We need institutions that can offer multidisciplinary research. By starting innovation universities we are expanding higher education, there will be a systemic movement. We will also discover new way of doing things in the process," said Rajendran.

Announced by PM Manmohan Singh, innovation universities are envisaged as centres of excellence that will focus on interdisciplinary research on selected sub-

### INNOVATION UNIVERSITIES

**1** Innovation universities are envisaged as centres of excellence that will focus on inter-disciplinary research on selected subjects.

**2** They promise to expand higher education and research in association with the corporate sector.

**3** There's a need for a change in the structure, regulation and status of existing universities, which had been set up decades ago, say experts.

jects without administrative interference or other red-herrings usually associated with universities.

An aspect opposed by the former UGC chairman in the MHRD meeting. The fact that innovation universities are exempt from scrutiny of Comptroller and Auditor General and that there will be freedom in academic and administrative matters, makes these institutions vulnerable to be misused, said Yash Pal.

V.S. Rajasekharan Pillai, V-C, IGNOU, begs to differ. "We need universities of a different kind. The government alone cannot be expected to finance all institutions," he said. "The new structure of innovation universities will involve participation from the corporate sector. Only by permitting independent initiative can we expect auton-

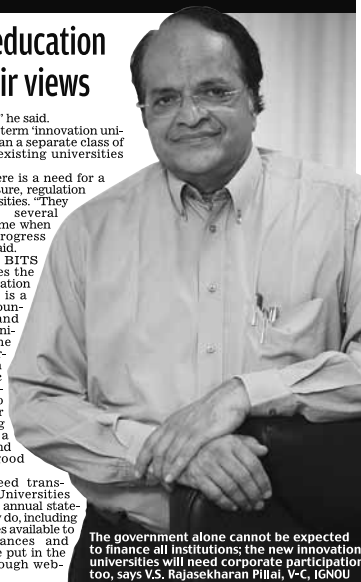
omy and excellence," he said.

As per MHRD, the term 'innovation universities' do not mean a separate class of universities, even existing universities can aspire for it.

But Pillai says there is a need for a change in the structure, regulation and status of universities. "They were formulated several decades ago, at a time when the indicators of progress were different," he said.

B.N. Jain, V-C, BITS Pilani, too welcomes the move to start innovation universities. There is a clear need in the country for research and innovation in the university system, he said. "All our universities today, either in the private or public sector are highly regulated. Attempt to create universities or transform existing universities with a focus on research and innovation is a good one," he said.

"But then we need transparency as well. Universities should declare their annual statement. Whatever they do, including curriculum, resources available to the students, finances and tuition fees must be put in the public domain through websites," added Jain.



The government alone cannot be expected to finance all institutions; the new innovation universities will need corporate participation too, says V.S. Rajasekharan Pillai, V-C, IGNOU