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## Tamil Nadu

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Tamil Nadu - Coimbatore

### Higher education: 2008 promises a lot

Amutha Kannan

*'It is up to the students to make use of opportunities'*

File photo: K. Ananthan



Going global: A view of Bharathiar University in Coimbatore. —

COIMBATORE: Having seen the activities of the institutions here in the year gone by, it is time to look to the future, what with the promise of an additional institution, that too an Indian Institute of Management on the anvil.

According to Rural Industries Minister Pongalur N. Palanisamy, the Human Resources Development Ministry has mooted the establishment of the eighth IIM in Coimbatore, thanks to the initiative of the Chief Minister.

Will such efforts of the Government and the higher education institutions help in increasing the number of students going in for higher education (which is a meagre seven per cent at the national level)?

The same academic experts who spoke about their 2007 achievements also thought aloud their 2008 goals. To find out whether their combined goals will result in achieving the ultimate aim of attracting more students towards higher education, read on:

R. Radhakrishnan, Vice-Chancellor of Anna University, Coimbatore, says that there will be more foreign tie-ups and outsourcing. He has plans to introduce the variable fee structure, by which students who can afford will pay more while those who cannot will pay less for the same course. "The idea of an Anna University free education corpus fund will be placed for approval before the Finance Committee. With public and industry participation we expect to collect Rs. 10 crore. This fund will be

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utilised to give free education to the deserving students.”

The university has 20 new colleges waiting for affiliation. It will admit at least 1,000 students in the engineering course (Tamil medium) that is expected to take off in August.

After introducing e-learning and Wi-Fi connectivity, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University is poised to start dual-degree programmes as an outcome of tie-ups with four international universities. The university has the unique privilege of preparing the online syllabus and course material for B. Sc. Agriculture for the students of all 44 agricultural universities in the country. A new nanotechnology centre for research will get under way soon. “We will release new hybrids. The prestigious project of installing automatic weather stations in each of the 385 blocks, which will broadcast agro advice, will be undertaken this year,” says Vice-Chancellor C. Ramasamy.

For the Bharathiar University, access to and internationalisation of higher education will be the areas of key focus in 2008. “The university is looking to double the strength. It will give more opportunities to the underprivileged. We are also talking to universities in France, Uganda, Malaysia and Sri Lanka to send their students here for education,” says Vice-Chancellor G. Thiruvassagam. The university is planning to make optimum use of technology for its distance education programmes and also in its 43 new courses. However, its most ambitious goal for the year will be to establish an engineering college on its campus.

The insulin pump prototype that Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham has successfully tested in 2007 will be taken up for manufacturing and marketing in 2008. “We are planning to market the pump for 1/15th of the international cost of the existing pump,” says the university’s Chief Operating Officer Abhayamitra Chaitanya. The university will offer a post-graduate programme in embedded systems.

#### Green campus policy

In continuation of its green campus policy, Karunya University will now turn its attention to wind energy. “We are talking to private players to set up wind mills on the campus. We are also increasing the acreage for jatropha cultivation for the bio-mass project,” says its Registrar Anne Mary Fernandez. Since the B.Ed. programme introduced in 2007 was well received, the university will begin the M. Ed. programme in 2008. It also has plans of introducing multi-disciplinary programmes in the science streams to deal with the demands of the time.

These are some of the projects the universities have envisaged for the students. The welcome changes show that there has been a lot of spade work done to bridge the gap between the needs of the industry and the output of the institutions. Almost all the varsities have felt the pulse of the industry before choosing the new courses and the relevant syllabi.

If one thought that these changes would be enough to work wonders for higher education, they are wrong. Because, according to the Vice-Chancellors, it is up to the students to make use of the opportunities placed before them to carve a niche for themselves in the competitive world.

What ultimately matters is not just the number of graduates coming out of the portals of these institutions, but their quality that will make them employable.

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