

'Need to integrate education with knowledge economy'

The education sector cannot remain isolated from other economic developments, says new UGC chairperson M Jagadesh Kumar, adding that online education and use of technology in physical academic setups will be his priority. Kumar spoke to TOI's Manash Gohain on a gamut of issues, including the common university entrance test and his term at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Excerpts from the interview:

■ You were the VC of JNU for six years, during which you have faced many controversies...

My stay in JNU had been wonderful for the simple reason that it has outstanding scholars and highly aspiring students. That's why it was possible for us to introduce very diverse academic and research programmes and also bring in reforms in administrative restructuring and admission policies of the university. When changes are brought, it is quite likely that people may not be used to them. I wouldn't say I had any brush with controversies because majority of the students and faculty were open to many of the changes we introduced.

■ Your plans as UGC head?



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Now, more than ever, there is a greater need to integrate our education with the knowledge economy. In this digital age, the education sector can't remain aloof from it. We need to reimagine our teaching and learning processes, restructure

our governance systems for better efficiency.

■ What changes are needed in our universities?

They need to recalibrate the way they are imparting teaching and learning, (considering) the financial capabilities and diverse cognitive abilities of students. We need to customise our education.

■ Your focus priorities areas will be...

To ensure higher educational institutes absorb this digital technology so that students are enabled to have better access to higher education. We should also encourage states and educational institutes to offer programmes in local languages. Thanks to NEP, we can now actually offer four-year degree programmes.

■ Aren't we over emphasising online education? Also the four-year undergraduate programme and graded autonomy to institutions, as per critics, will lead to commercialisation of education. Your thoughts?

Technologies are part of our lives. Out of the 300 million students in India, 40 million are part of higher education system. There are many reasons for which they (the remaining) are unable to get into colleges. Imagine, this child registers for a degree programme online, uses digital platforms, gets a degree and becomes employable. With the kind of digital university that's going to come up, as announced in Budget, to provide flexible access to high quality education, it'll be tough to commercialise education.