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'Need to Develop Ecosystem for Technology Incubation

ET Q&A There is an urgent need to link research to finding solutions to societal problems with the involvement of industry, says **V Ramgopal Rao**, the newly anointed director of IIT Delhi. In an email interview to ET's **Prachi Verma Dadhwal**, his first interview since being named the director, he says the institute needs to focus on higher citations for research and attracting more foreign students and faculty. A leading researcher in nanoelectronics, who helped create a startup, Nanosniff Technologies Pvt Ltd at IIT Bombay, he says more companies need to be incubated on campuses in the country. Rao, currently the PK Kelkar Chair Professor for Nanotechnology at IIT Bombay, will assume charge at IIT Delhi around mid-April. Edited excerpts:

As the newly anointed director, what are the first steps that you are planning to take at IIT Delhi?

We need to focus on incubating more and more companies out of our campuses. Many of our students coming out of IITs need to become job providers rather than job seekers. There is an urgent need to develop an ecosystem for technology incubation on our campuses. Technology companies generate wealth, create jobs and can accelerate the economy in a major way. For example, if you boost the agricultural productivity levels by affordable and innovative technologies, you are directly creating wealth. These are the kind of problems IITD needs to be working on. A close interaction with industries will definitely help in bringing focus to our research. We must encourage IIT graduates to do an internship in rural areas, to understand the problems faced by them. Many students from elite American universities come to India and spend time in remote villages and take back many research problems. There is an urgent need to expose our students to the problems faced by the society. My focus will be to connect IITD research to solving societal problems, through involvement of industry.

The IITs are at the forefront among Indian higher education institutions. What more can the IITs do to be counted among the best institutes in the world?

The research done in IITs needs to look at the problems faced by the common man. A multi-disciplinary research culture is a key requirement when it comes to addressing such problems. IIT Delhi is a great institution having many strengths and with some of the finest brains among its faculty, staff and students. The key is to build multi-disciplinary teams with focused objectives and help deliver solutions to the problems faced by the society. This should not however be at the cost of basic research, as basic research today can become applied research at

IIT Delhi Director V Ramgopal Rao

a future point of time. However, I would like to see IITs do a bit more focused research addressing the problems faced by the country.

What are the areas that IITs need to focus more on?

There are many problems where IITs can help find a solution. I consider security, healthcare, agriculture, pedagogy and environment as the most important areas where we need to focus our energies and resources.

How can established IITs such as IIT Delhi help the new IITs?

The first five IITs have all been mentored by various institutions abroad. After over 50 years, these main IITs (Delhi, Mumbai, Kharagpur, Kanpur and Chennai) have establish excellence, be arch. They als brains on thei distinguished institution is r excellence bu excellence ov as the underg concerned, IIT the best instit over 2,500 Ph currently, ma are also on th distinction in traditions and among the ne

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