

## Apply for the FPJ Management Scholarships!

The announcement for the seventh Free Press Journal Management Scholarships is out! Scholarships worth Rs. 2 lakh are being offered to management students admitted to the first year of an MBA/PGDM programme and intend to take finance as a specialisation in the second year. Ten scholarships are up for grabs, so each student will receive Rs. 20,000. The main selection criteria are past academic and other credentials and the need of the student. Students can download the application form from <http://www.freepressjournal.in/fpj-management-scholarships>. The applications are going to be accepted until September 30, 2016. The filled application form may be sent to Prof. A. K. Sen Gupta at [aksengupta51@gmail.com](mailto:aksengupta51@gmail.com). For any further clarifications, check the above-mentioned link.

# "ENGINEERS ARE NOT GOING TO BE CREATED OVERNIGHT"

**Dr. Vijay V. Bedekar, Chairman – Vidya Prasarak Mandali, Thane, talks to Knowledge about setting up an engineering college in rural Maharashtra, the challenges faced and the benefits to students**

*Dr. Dr. Vijay V. Bedekar - Chairman – Vidya Prasarak Mandali (VPM), Thane, has a vision, and the Mandali has been successful in its progress over the last few years. VPM, under the aegis of which several schools and colleges are run, including Dr. V. N. Bedekar Institute of Management Studies, set up VPM's Maharshi Parshuram College of Engineering (MPCOE) in Velneswar, a few years ago, with the first batch of engineers graduating this year. Excerpts from an interview regarding his vision for a college in rural Maharashtra:*

PIC: B. L. SONI



Dr. Vijay V. Bedekar

Hard talk

### What is your vision for an engineering college in rural parts of the country?

India is an emerging market, and the Make in India campaign needs qualified engineers as well. This is not an overnight process, for them to be educated as well as gather the technical experience and expertise for the market. The present situation is such that the urban centres are flooded with colleges where as the rural centres are ill-equipped for any such institute. Velneswar is a small town, with hardly a population of 3,000. Even though our college is located in such a town, there is no compromise on the infrastructure, and our aim is to make the programme a fully residential programme. The existing programme was launched in 2012 and the first batch of engineers will graduate this year.

### What are the some of the challenges of running the institute in a rural setting?

The biggest challenges an institute like ours faces are the regulatory challenges from the government. Their benchmarks for the standards needed for a college like ours requires massive capital investments. Ours is a 100-crore project. Secondly, banks have no category to issue

loans to education institutions to develop at reasonable rates of interest. The availability of loans has provided opportunities for several sectors, but the government has not yet promoted financial assistance to the education sector for institutes and colleges. And that's why a majority of them are left at the mercy of the donors. As an after-effect, even the parents and students have become attuned to this system. You see, all involved in this scenario should understand that the best does not come cheap and cheap is not the best.

### Do you have a message for the government?

Institutions and colleges should also be given the freedom to operate their activities. They should be allowed to set a fee structure as well as make other such decisions. Unfortunately the colleges have all the responsibilities of running the programme but no power or freedom to do so in the best fitting manner. Also, the government-run institutes like the IITs and IIMs cannot provide education and training for all, the government does not have the capacity. So, it should let other private and competent organisations to do so, by lifting the multitude of regulatory norms that it has.

If we are able to make institutions where students can get their fill of education, and which students can trust, then perhaps we can stop the outflow of students going to study abroad and retain them here.

### You spoke about quality and how it does not come cheap. What is the quality of faculty available in Velneswar?

I have full faith in the parents that they want a good quality education for their children, and that begins with good teachers. We have some well-trained faculty members and to retain them we offer incentives and high pay scales. We

also have a senior scientist council comprising of a number of extremely experienced and senior scientists who have retired from BARC and have the ability to train our students. These scientists are very scholarly and have put in hard work at a time when things did not come as easily as now. They go to Velneswar and teach, train and mentor students in their respective areas and help us with our goal of creating application-oriented engineers. The College of Engineering in Pune (COEP) has designated our Velneswar College as a Virtual Labs Nodal Centre (VINC) of Virtual Labs. Virtual Lab is an initiative of Ministry of Human Resource & Development. Here students

get to learn a lot, and our students at Velneswar are still running the Akash Tablet Project at Velneswar.

### What is the value that a student gets in rural parts?

There is some great value addition to the students in these areas. There are fewer attractions in the rural areas and that's why there is greater engagement. I feel that we are in a better place with a college located in Velneswar, since the student population is far more serious than that at the urban centres. Here the students have come to realise their dreams of becoming engineers, and they know what they are giving up to live for

four years in Velneswar, so they want to make the most of their education. However, globalisation has reached every corner, with mobile phones and television sets. The students and public here are clued in to all the information from around the world.

### Do you believe that there is a lot of scope for innovation in rural areas?

Definitely. There is a huge potential, since most of these students have actually faced the difficulties which they seek out to solve or ease through their innovations. For instance, a farmer's son might have faced a certain difficulty on the field, which he might work towards solving with his knowledge. A student from the urban centre can only hope to imagine what such a difficulty might be, even if he thinks about it. I believe there is ground for innovation.

### How can a student from rural India compete with one from urban India?

It is difficult for a student from the rural areas to compete with a student from the urban areas. This is especially true in the job sector, and I believe that start-ups could provide a good solution. That's why we engage and support our students to work on start-ups. For instance, the B and C towns have great potential because the markets are well developed, but the service sector is not. Students can tap that opportunity to set up something innovative that caters to such needs. The idea is that they should remain in the rural areas that they belong to and create work opportunities over there, rather than move to larger towns and cities in search for work. It would be more advantageous for them to live at home with their families rather than come to urban areas and incur high costs of living.