Enrolling for the future

India crosses Plan targets on kids going to college

Increased competition in the job market and the realisation that education can level the odds has ensured a dramatic hike in the proportion of Indians going to college. Data from the University Grants Commission (UGC) shows that the proportion of people aged 18-23 years who entered college level courses rose from a mere 5% in 1980 to 12.5% in 2007-08 and a whopping 17.27% in 2009-10. Indeed, according to the UGC chief, the data they have used is a bit dated and the actual number may really be around 20% right now—it also speaks volumes for how data is collected that, instead of its own database, the UGC has to rely on a sample survey conducted by an outside body to know how many kids are in college. According to the UGC chief, the number could well reach 25% by 2017, the end of the 12th Plan period. The ratio of college-going people in the population is around 50 for the eurozone, 80 for the US and 23 for China (in 2008).

True, there are the usual problems of quality. IIT-Delhi was among the top 500 universities in the world in 2003 (it was ranked between 451-500) but by 2010, it was nowhere to be seen on the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) list. China has 16 universities in the top 500 (13 in engineering, 1 in medicine and 1 in social sciences) while India has just 2 (IIT-Kharagpur is in the 401-500 list while the Indian Institute of Science is in the 301-400 rank). China has 6.8% of the world’s top 500 universities and accounts for 19.8% of global population—India’s figures are 0.4% and 17.1%, respectively. Which is why, there are enough reports that suggest 30-40% of college graduates in India are unemployable and in need of what’s inelegantly called ‘repair’.

It’s important, however, to keep the sequencing in mind. When you’re scaling up, it’s near impossible to get quality as well—the University of Phoenix in the US has nowhere near the quality Harvard has, but it has nearly 5 lakh students while Harvard has only 21,000. India’s gross enrolment ratio has shot up because the market is working—young people have realised the only way to get higher salaries is to go to college. Once the market tells them they can’t get promotions, or higher salaries, based on the quality of the colleges, that too will get fixed—the fact that many engineering and MBA institutions aren’t able to fill their seats is testimony to precisely this.
Sky's the limit: China unveils space plan

By 2016, Aims To Launch Space Labs & Manned Missions Besides Starting To Work On Space Station

Beijing: China plans to launch several space labs and manned ships to prepare to build space stations over the next five years, according to a plan released Thursday that shows the country's space program is gathering momentum.

China has already said its eventual goal is to build a space station and put astronauts on the moon. It has made rapid progress with its ambitious lunar and human spaceflight programs, but its latest five-year plan, beginning next year signals an acceleration. By the end of 2016, China will launch space observatories, manned space stations, and ships for the construction of space stations, according to the white paper setting out China's space program and future missions.

China's space program has already made significant breakthroughs in a relatively short time, lagging behind the US and Russia in space technology and experience. The country will continue exploring the moon using probes, starting gathering samples of the moon's surface, and planning to bring back lunar samples, possibly in 2017.

It will use spacecraft to study the properties of black holes and begin monitoring space debris and small near-Earth celestial bodies and build a system to protect spacecraft from debris.

The paper also says China will improve its launch vehicles, improve its communication, broadcasting, and meteorological satellites and develop a global satellite navigation system, intended to rival US' global positioning system (GPS) network. China places great emphasis on the development of its space industry, which forms a symbol of national prestige. Its space principles — including peaceful development, enhancing international cooperation and deep space exploration — are largely based on the two documents detailing the progress of China's space missions, released in 2000 and 2006. In 2003, China became the third country in the world after the US and Russia to launch a man into space and, five years later, completed a spacewalk. Toward the end of this year, it demonstrated automated docking between its Shenzhou 9 craft and the Tiangong 1 module, which will form part of a permanent space laboratory.

In 2007, it launched its first lunar probe, Chang'e-1, which orbited the moon, collecting data and a complete map of the moon. Since 2006, China's Long March rockets have successfully launched 67 times, sending 79 spacecraft into orbit. Some elements of China's program, notably the firing of a ground-based missile into one of its dead satellites four years ago, have alarmed American officials and others who say such moves could set off a race to militarize space.

That the program is run by the military has made the US reluctant to cooperate with China in space, even though the latter insists its program is purely for peaceful ends.