

A newsletter of AIU North Zone VC Meet 2024 & Bharat-Nepal Higher Education Summit

Kathmandu University hosts prestigious AIU-North Zone Vice Chancellors' Meet

Divya Adhikari & Smriti K.C

Kathmandu, February 15, 2024--

The North Zone Vice Chancellors' Meet, in collaboration with the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) and Kathmandu University, organized a significant event in the history of South Asia. The meeting, hosted by Kathmandu University, was inaugurated by the Rt. Honorable Prime Minister of Nepal and Chancellor of Kathmandu University, Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal. The theme of the event was Globalization and Internationalization of Higher Education.

The ceremony had the participation of Vice Chancellors from various universities across Nepal, India, Bhutan, China, South Korea, Australia, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Italy, UK and Morocco, members of the academic community, and other dignitaries.

The AIU-North Zone Vice Chancellors' Meet is a part of AIU's annual agenda, conducting five zonal and one national level meetings on ongoing higher education challenges and opportunities that are available both locally and globally. The event was formally inaugurated by lightening the lamp by the Chief Guest followed by a chant of *swasti-vachana*. The guests were welcomed with floral offerings.

The event featured welcome remarks by the Vice Chancellor of Kathmandu University (KU), Prof. Dr. Bhola Thapa who pointed out the Asian-level program initiatives envisioned by KU for the future collaborative process of higher education. It was followed by the speech of the



Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal delivering his inaugural speech.

Photo: Raunak Shrestha

Secretary-General of AIU, Dr. (Mrs.) Pankaj Mittal focusing on the possible avenues that the Bharat-Nepal summit has created to envision a paradigm of higher education at the regional level.

The event also highlighted the collaborative efforts between Kathmandu University and Indian educational institutions, underscored by the release of a special issue of the University News by AIU. The meeting also discussed the future of higher education, the need for a collaborative approach, and the globalization/ internationalization of higher education systems.

Prof. Dr. Suresh Raj Sharma, the founder VC of KU mentioned that the VC meet should prove a milestone for envisioning future dimensions of higher education for research-based initiatives for innovative future generations.

Enhancing mobility in higher education, emphasizing cultural diversity, and advancing technological integration where the major highlights of the speakers. The Registrar of KU in his vote of thanks speech focused on the challenges of higher education where AI can be resolved with digital advancement and integration of art-based educational practices. He focused on the responsibility of higher education for preparing human resources with global competence for the emerging job markets.

This historic meet served as a platform for academic dialogue also as a step further, forming a stronger educational alliance in among the universities of Asian region, with a hopeful eye on creating an educational alliance such as Europe's Erasmus Mundus exchanges.

The conference concludes on February 17.

Building bridges for higher education

Rajasi Niraula & Prerana Subedi

Kathmandu, February 15, 2024

The first day of the AIU North Zone Vice-Chancellors' Conference included two technical sessions. The first technical session, titled "International Collaborations & Partnerships: Building bridges for higher education" focused on the internationalisation of higher education. The session was chaired by Prof. P. B. Sharma, Vice-Chancellor of Amity University, Haryana. The panellists, highlighted the possibilities and ventures made on international collaborations and partnerships.

Dr. Neelima Gupta, VC of Hari Singh Gour University, emphasized the criticality of internationalization in higher education for global efficacy and economic empowerment. She advocated for alternative approaches such as fellowships, joint degrees, and research-based collaborations with international organizations. Dr. Gupta also emphasized the pivotal role of the Centre for Advanced Research (CAR) in fostering future collaborations.

Mr. Matthew Johnston, Ministerial Counsel for Australian Government Education, spoke about the manifold benefits of internationalization, including heightened cultural exchange, economic growth, and academic excellence. His call for government contracts and community support, accompanied by legislative reforms facilitating international travel and cooperation, highlighted the importance of comprehensive policy development.

Prof. Dr Shilu Manandhar Bajracharya, Vice-Chancellor of Nepal Open University, highlighted the transformative potential of technology in bridging educational gaps, aligning with the global shift towards digital learning environments and emphasizing inclusivity and access. She also put forth the key message of making an open learning platform accessible to everyone, promoting inclusivity and subjugating the digital divide.

Dr. Gauri Bhasin, Executive Director of MRVPL, shed light on collaborative efforts



Technical session: International Collaborations & Partnerships: Building bridges for higher education

involving universities from 15 countries to revolutionize international education. She emphasized the significance of micro-level curriculum design and macro-level program partnerships in fostering sustainable educational systems. She underlined the Indo-Nepal relationship as a venture that will make collaboration and partnership in higher education more interconnected in terms of culture, economy, and job markets.

The technical conference provided a comprehensive overview of the opportunities and challenges in fostering international cooperation and partnerships in higher education.

From India's vision of advanced research hubs to Nepal's focus on digital accessibility and Australia's emphasis on strategic alignment and collaborative research, the forum set forth strategies toward a highly connected and globally competitive higher education landscape.

The panellists noted the evolving landscape of artificial intelligence (AI) and its implications on higher education business models. They argued that internationalization is imperative to bridge the gap between educational practices and the global economy. The Chairperson concluded the meeting by emphasizing the imperative for institutions to prioritize internationalization efforts through mutual participation and unity of purpose, hinting that failure to do so could render them obsolete within a decade.

Interface with officers from apex bodies

Rajasi Niraula & Prerana Subedi

The second session of the AIU North Zone Vice-Chancellors' Conference was chaired by Prof. Vinay K. Pathak, Vice-President, AIU and Vice-Chancellor of CSJM, Kanpur. The speaker of the programme, Dr. Abhay Jere, VC of AICTE, New Delhi, said the university has envisioned running masters and undergraduate programs in Computer Application and Business Administration. He also mentioned that the university aspired to reach 6,000 institutions to contribute to higher education in the management stream. Jere said that the AICTE had realized the need to expand higher education institutes with more approvals and faculty development initiatives provided by the university system.

Dr. R. C. Agrawal, Deputy Director of General Education, ICAR, New Delhi (online), focused on transforming agricultural education for innovation and entrepreneurship. He said Indian national missions, like Aatmanirbhar Bharat, look for structural expansion of the agricultural education system. He pointed out that the partner universities had advanced their educational practices for agricultural education by embedding a digital-based learning system. The focus on timely graduation (95.5%) and job placement is a higher educational achievement for universities so AUs have enriched its visions.

Harmonizing global higher education policy



Photo: Sumit Baruwai

Divya Adhikari & Smriti K.C

The second technical session on the first day of the AIU North Zone Vice-Chancellors' Meet was titled "Global Higher Education Policy & Regulation: Harmonizing Standards". The session was chaired by Dr. Bhushan Patwardhan, Executive Chairperson, NAAC, focused on advancing the dialogue on higher education policy and regulation and spotlighted the urgent need for harmonization in the face of globalization and internationalization of higher education.

Dr. Abhay Jere, Vice-Chairman, AICTE, New Delhi, shared AICTE's innovative strategy to establish physical centres in multiple countries, aiming to globalize the Indian education system through the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. This initiative, fostering study exchange and abroad program provisions, marks a significant step towards making Indian education globally accessible and recognized.

Prof. Dr. Balvinder Shukla, Vice-Chancellor, Amity University Uttar Pradesh,

emphasized the importance of a coherent policy for credit accumulation and equivalence. The discussion extended to scholarship provisions that enable students to secure opportunities in prestigious global universities, underlining the need for accommodating and recognizing varied educational standards.

Prof. Dr. Punya Prasad Regmi, Vice-Chancellor, Agriculture and Forestry University, Nepal, spoke about harmonizing higher education policies with local and Eastern value systems for a globally relevant educational practice. Highlighting the variation in university standards within Nepal, he advocated for policies that embrace humanity, global citizenship, sustainable development, and transformative education, addressing disparities in faculty-student ratios, credit hours, and quality assurance.

The session's discussions delved into critical issues such as faculty-student ratios, the need for industrial exposure at both local and global levels, and the duration of degrees in the context of internationalization. The speakers proposed an international clearing system



Photo: Sumit Baruwai

for credit transfer, emphasizing autonomy and flexibility in local educational practices. The speakers emphasized the collective resolve to tackle the complexities of harmonizing higher education policies and regulations. By highlighting innovative efforts and the need for global standards, the discussions paved the way for a future where education transcends borders, yet remains inclusive, equitable, and reflective of diverse value systems.

We need an alliance of Asian universities: Bhola Thapa

In this interview, Professor Dr. Bhola Thapa, Vice-Chancellor of Kathmandu University, speaks about the experience of hosting the AIU North Zone VC Meet and the future of higher education in Nepal and Asia.

Dr. Dinesh Kafle: How did the idea of hosting the conference at Kathmandu University come up?

Professor Dr. Bhola Thapa: Kathmandu University (KU) is a long-standing member of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU). Our founders requested membership in AIU, which also recognised the degrees and equivalence of the then-Intermediate in Science programme. So, Kathmandu University became the first international university to be an associate member of the AIU. Since then, we have been invited to the annual meetings and several other programmes of the association; even our founding Vice Chancellor and founding registrar have attended their annual meetings and conferences where many issues on higher education were discussed.

KU had a dream of planning a similar event in Nepal. Since Kathmandu University was a new one, we could not do bigger events at that time. However, we had organised a students' festival in 2007, and one AIU's steering committee meeting earlier. Based on my experience attending AIU's Annual General Meeting for the past two years, I requested if we could also host AIU's meeting in Nepal. AIU leadership kindly allowed us to organise this North Zone Vice Chancellor's conference. We have come to materialise our dream of hosting the conference this year.

Dr. Kafle: The theme of this year's conference is the internationalisation of higher education. So, what are your expectations from it?

Prof. Thapa: Being a university, our programmes should match with the international practices and international norms. Whatever we do should have

similarities or at least some connections with international academic institutions. So, in that sense, when we talk about the internationalisation of higher education, the universities are both the inbound and outbound of the students, how universities are functioning, and how the leaders are thinking. If we can sit down together and discuss the issues of what we thought alike, it will be internationalisation in a true sense. Once the leaders of the university have some common thinking on these issues, we can design programmes, orient our faculty and our students, and prepare them as researchers for either through its exchange of the students for joint academic and research programmes.

Dr. Kafle: And how will the International VC meet support Nepal's higher education landscape?

Prof. Thapa: Nepal's higher education is not that old compared to global higher education. In India, there are institutions, which are there for more than 100 years. In Nepal's context, Kathmandu University is only thirty-two years old. With the presence of so many vice-chancellors and academic leaders from different countries, especially from India, we learned how they think and prepare for the future during this conference. Accordingly, we will also gear up and prepare ourselves so that we can match with what is going on around the world.

Dr. Kafle: During the inauguration, you spoke about forming an alliance of Asian universities. So, what is the significance of such an alliance?

Prof. Thapa: We have been discussing these days like the youth migration and the students' migration as natural because we cannot stop them. The world



Photo: Raunak Shrestha

is becoming an open space because of the information technology. People from one part of the world know very much about other parts of the world. Then, they might desire to move from one place to another. If we don't create an environment or opportunity for students to take advantage of this openness within our country, we might lose them permanently. Here, if we can create a system where students from one country can even partially move with their education to other countries, they might continue their education as a structured, formal programme. Besides that, knowing other societies and cultures, they will always learn more. In such contexts, I'm also dreaming about the alliance of Asian universities because in Asia, especially South Asia, we have our own history, our own culture, and our own richness, and together, we are also competent to use them all. For example, Nepal might be strong in one sense, while India would be better in the other. Similarly, there are other countries where they can be strong in many other areas, which will be a win-win situation for all those participating stakeholders. There might sometimes be a challenge on political issues like visas and other agendas. But, if we join hands together, we will all be stronger.



Photo: Sumit Baruwai



Photo: Sumit Baruwai

Dr Kafle: Organising a meet like this with more than 250 top academic leaders from so many countries and so many vice-chancellors coming in must be a huge logistical challenge. Has there been any support from the government or any universities within Nepal? What kind of support have you got from outside of KU?

Prof. Thapa: Definitely, all the participants who are here are very, very important people, the VVIPs. Of course, we treat them as VVIPs, seeing them as our very good friends. On the logistical elements, if some of our family members are coming to our home for a visit, it's not a problem. Of course, I need to take care of the logistics department, which is the management of the programmes and essential things, it's important. And this will be possible with the support of all the stakeholders. All my colleagues at the university are hosts. Moreover, the government has always been very supportive of us.

Before requesting AIU for this programme, I had taken permission from the Chancellor and the prime minister of Nepal. He was so enthusiastic and motivated me to try for such a big event. Similarly, the education minister has also positively designed and planned the programme. Nepali University's vice-chancellors also agreed, saying, "Let's do it" and "Let's initiate" so that maybe in the near future, or in the coming days, other universities will also plan similar events.

We also organised a Nepali Vice Chancellors conference in November last year to prepare for this event. At the conference, we discussed some issues relevant to the Nepali universities, such as how we can organise the programme by ourselves so that we can harmonise it with the international universities. So, in a nutshell, I will say that we have the full support of the KU family, the government, and the country's academic stakeholders.

An interview with President of AIU



Photo: Prasun Rajbhandari

In this interview, Prof. Dr. G.D. Sharma (left), President of AIU, speaks about organizing the North Zone VC meet in Nepal.

Dr. Dinesh Kafle: How has your experience in Kathmandu been?

Prof. Dr. G.D. Sharma: Yeah actually, this is my first visit to Kathmandu. Kathmandu is a beautiful city in the Himalayas. I think this is the biggest city in the world on the hill region and the people are so good. Hospitable! Atithi Devo Bhawa is what meets our Indian traditions. And, we have a strong bonding on historical and cultural aspects. The names of many things are similar; that of places, of people, of Gods, and Goddesses. It gives us more feeling, particularly emotional feeling. This conference has brought us together, so closely by heart. We feel so close to students that they are having so much potential to learn with much enthusiasm.

The climate in Dhulikhel is really so good; because of the high amount of oxygen available here we feel more energetic, no tiredness. This gives us a special ambiance, particularly for learning. I remember many stories about our Rishis who used to come to the Himalayas only for search of the knowledge, and created new research for the benefit of the people. This is a reason we are holding this event, the Bharat Nepal Higher education summit for the first time along with North Zone Vice Chancellors' meet in the Himalayan

country, Nepal aiming for the internationalization of education with our neighbor.

The honorable vice chancellor of Kathmandu University is a dynamic leader who attended AIU's earlier meetings in India. Last year, Indian Universities Annual meeting was held in our university, the University of Science, Technology, Meghalaya (USTM), where nearly 550 Vice-Chancellors participated. The theme was again how we can have the role of our education to conserve the environment for sustainable development, as goals set by the UN such as what should be our approach in education and how the curriculum needs to be reframed.

Dr. Kafle: So, this year the theme is internationalization of higher education. What are your thoughts on this?

Prof. Dr. GD Sharma: This is actually the North Zone Vice Chancellors Meeting's Sub theme. The main theme of AIU is education and work for 2047: What kind of education we should have while the nature of change of work is changing very fast; the world economic forum report they say 90 million traditional kind of jobs will be lost while 80 million jobs, that are different from the present ones, will be

created. It is because of new technology, sharing of resources, the mode of development and also because of digital industries, the industry-five. So, education has to be liberalized. More flexibility has to be there for the student. And more collaboration has to be there because we can share our resources and use them.

Many universities and colleges still do not have an up to date technology and technical advancements. Things like social divides and technological divides have to be brought through the changing face of education. So, in this north zone we had internalization and globalization of education. Earlier we have already completed 4 zonal meetings.

The first zonal meeting which was held in south India focused on the use of technology. Then we had the indigenous knowledge focus meeting in the eastern zone because Nepal and Bharat are rich in indigenous knowledge. How this indigenous knowledge can create new businesses and entrepreneurship is another avenue to explore. This is a region of rich biodiversity and water resources.

This himalayan region is controlling the climate. How all these things can be converted into industrial development in

each college and university giving some linkage with the job creator, and the linkage with the knowledge creator. Because the government jobs are coming down, whether the student can apply their knowledge in the industry is a prime concern; just getting certificate will not help them.

Private jobs need a person which can give a new idea to them in creating new ideas. We have called Hackathon, Ideathon and we are inviting new ideas giving reward upto 3.5 lakh Indian rupees. But, that idea has to go upto incubator, at least. So these are the new ways now that is why we thought we should go now using our neighboring countries as an collaborative institutes where we come together and infuse the idea, use these youths and giving them opportunities. Now it is possible because the Indian government has recently brought a new education policy, the national education policy (NEP 2020).



Photo: Nishant Gaire

Dr. Kafle: During today's inauguration the Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal said that there is a problem of many Nepalis going abroad to study this year. A lot of Nepal's money is going abroad because students are going abroad to study. The data is that almost one lakh people are going abroad to study especially after class 12 or bachelors. So, at a time when so much money is going abroad basically to developed countries and the students are not coming back to contribute to the nation's economy. What are the plans that AIU has come up with to make sure that the students get the study opportunity in their homelands or to bring them back and use them for national development?

have a dual degree once we have an MoU. That means the students can study here in Nepalese University for 50 percent other courses, and the remaining 50 percent they can continue in India. They have now liberty not to remain in a tight compartment of subjects such as arts or commerce or science. The 40 percent courses can be chosen by the students; this liberty is helping them to pursue their education to wherever they have interest and their potential: A physics student can take courses from music. Their creations of new knowledge can be of enterprising nature, and will create new business to the youths of Nepal.



Photo: Sandeep Adhikari

Under this policy, a lot of liberalization has been done and the institutes are having more autonomy to reframe towards resurgent research and resurgent resources. For doing research we can start collaboration within university, within different departments, in between other universities, and within countries, and in between other institutes of other countries. Only thing we require is signing an MoU that means both institutes recognize the quality of education. When the students are going for either course or for a semester, they will understand that the quality will be the same. There will not be any problem related to the quality.

Prof. Dr. GD Sharma: Very right, he is right that after class 12 students go mostly to western countries even when the education is very costly. Second, the western countries do not have enough resources, the human resources. So, they give education which is required to them and our youths work for them. Whereas, we have so many resources but the access, equity, quality, affordability is always a problem. That is why AIU has planned to share the resources and give the students of Nepal a quality education by sharing. They do not need to go abroad, even to India. The NEP 2020 plan of the government of India now has different forms of collaboration so that they can



Glimpses of the inaugural ceremony



Photo: Sumit Baruwal

Prime Minister Dahal inaugurating the Bharat-Nepal Higher Education Summit 2024



Photo: Raunak Shrestha



Photo: Prasun Rajbhandari

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