

Abolish to create

Over and above discussing policy priorities, a recent session on Indian higher education, writes **Payal Shah**, dwelt on contrasting methodologies and the debates that still elude solution

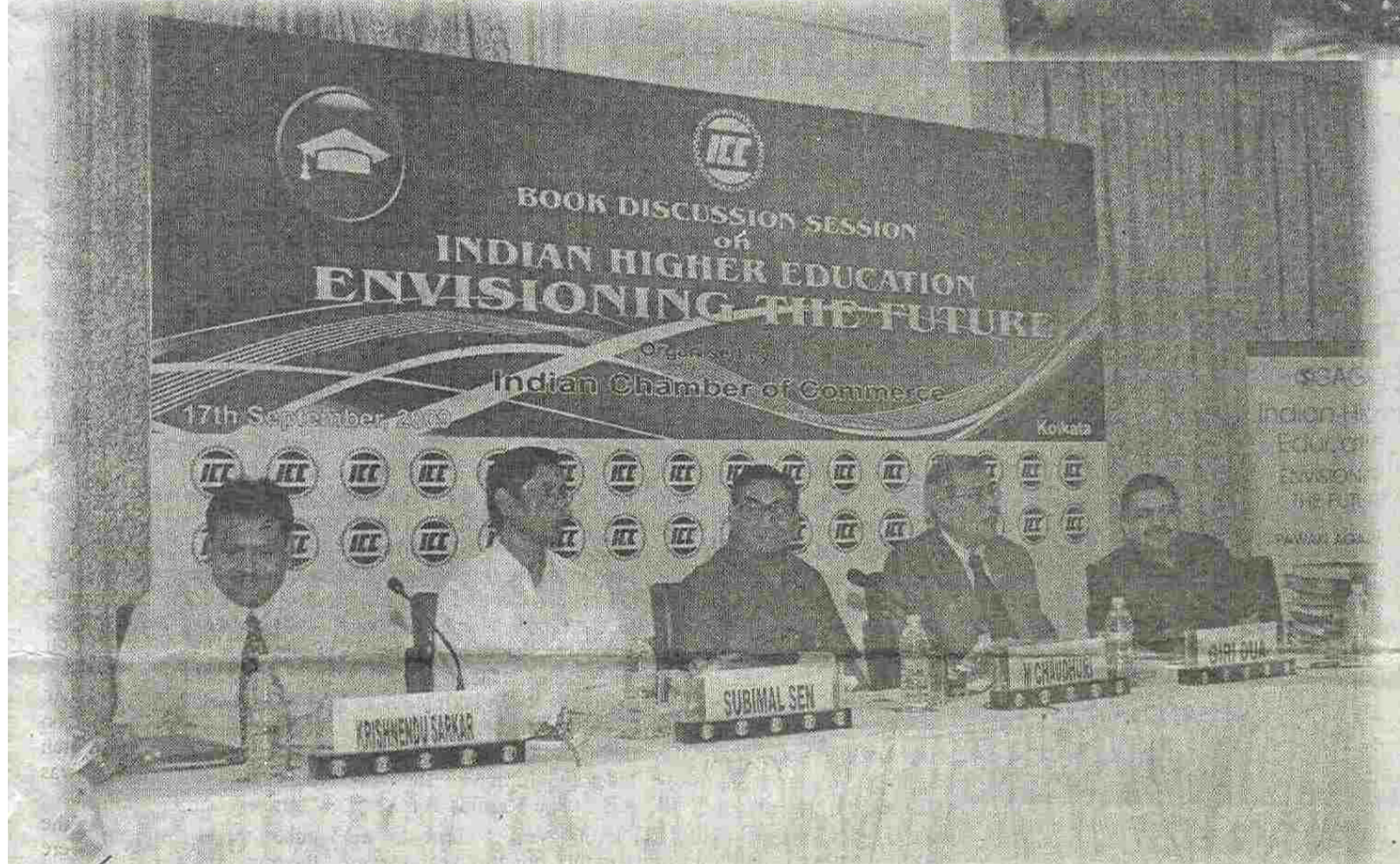
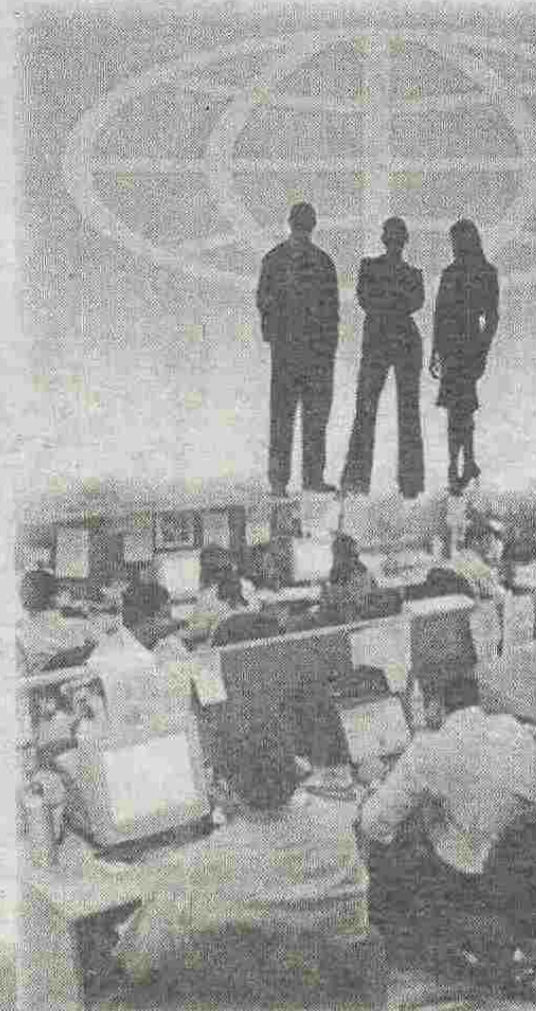
THE emergence of a global economy as a result of increased trade, investment and mobility of people and, more recently, work across borders has forced nations states to fine tune systems of higher education in sync with changed global realities. In India it has also emerged as a burning issue and especially higher education has received a lot of attention over the past few years.

In a recently organised session on "Indian Higher Education: Envisioning the Future" at the Indian Chamber of Commerce, dignitaries like Dr Giri Dua, chairman and managing director, Tasmac, Pawan Agarwal, secretary to the government of West Bengal, and Subimal Sen, chairman, West Bengal State Council of Higher Education expressed their views suggestions on the issue.

Dr Dua praised Kapil Sibal, minister-in-

charge of human resource development, who about a month ago in a seminar in the city emphasised on the fact that all educational institutions should be freed from, what he called, dictatorship and free and creative learning should be encouraged. Dr Dua further said that the education system in India need not be changed, rather it ought to be abolished. He also referred to the education bill that makes education mandatory for children from 6 to 14 years of age. The groundwork needed to implement the bill, however, has not been carried out and the plan is far from clear.

He also spoke about the high donations charged by various educational institutions in India thereby making education a profitable venture. According to him the knowledge economy in India will surely benefit and



Statesman

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Clip: 2 of 2

develop from the policies introduced by Sibal. He concluded by saying that we should "give the best to all our students to retain them in their country for the sake of the nation and its development."

If Dr Dua looked at things from the economic point of view Sen looked at it from a human point of view and questioned the fundamentals of the current education system. "How many good human beings the current arrangement is churning out?" he asked. According to him education today has become technical and concentrates on creating "market ready" professionals rather than inculcating moral values. Youths today have the power to change the world for the better and make it much more conducive to overall creative development.

Agarwal stressed on the fact that there were different visions of the role of higher education. The Indian economic structure does not support a European or US model. The education system in India is suffering from various structural problems. Teachers, the pillars of the system, need to be motivated to perform

better, but lack of opportunity and incentives make this difficult for them. Research needs to become a part of any curriculum and teachers should keep themselves updated on the latest developments.

India also lacks "literal art education", like a course on electronic engineering coupled with music, that can help students grow for a wider job market. There is also the need to integrate higher education with vocational education to bridge the gap prospects and skills and make the unemployed job-ready.

Education cannot, rather should not, be discussed in isolation because all the sectors of economy are interlinked to each other.

Agarwal suggested that an associate degree programme along with broad-based, technical, communicative skills from the undergraduate level could help students to a great extent.

While addressing the session Krishnendu Sarkar, chairman of the NSHM Knowledge Campus said, "Education today is an important business. Higher education is like the proverbial "holy cow" that produces finished goods in the form of market-ready professionals. Industries need to join hands with various educational institutions to cater to the three Ps: people, planet and profit.

"Today, education is an oxymoron because students are given the best training to produce the best services. After all it's basically the fit who survive," he said.