



ATR



'Resource-sharing is needed'

A quarter century ago, when IIM Lucknow was set up at a sprawling campus, there was hardly anyone willing to take up a job there. Faculty accommodation, a central school, a public health centre and a bank branch followed one after the other, to woo faculty to the campus and make them stay. IIM-L is now a mature campus with a global agenda. In its silver jubilee year, "There is a lot of churning, soul-searching going on. We want to make IIM-L different from what it is today," says **Devi Singh**, the institute's director since the past six years. In an interview with **A. Thothathri Raman**, Singh talks about the IIMs and the role they are expected to play, besides elaborating on his plans for the institute

A quarter century later, how do you perceive IIM-L's status among the IIMs?

Most comfortable! I must admit the institute has gone through tough times, especially in its initial days of growth. All that is past. It is a global campus now with all the best ingredients of intellectual capital, research, conferencing, a basket of innovative courses and a highly evolved brand equity. Also, we are the first IIM to have a second campus. Our sprawling modern campus at Noida in NCR will be the focus of much future activity, now that the Lucknow campus has settled down well. We are now all set to go to the next phase of becoming one of the best global schools. In financial terms, we are comfortable with a Rs80 crore investment made at the Noida campus, and the Lucknow campus' expansion entirely from our own reserves – still leaving aside a sizeable corpus to take care of future plans. Our surplus is due to prudent financial planning and expansion of the corporate training business.

What are your future plans?

We have concrete plans to expand our basket of courses and training programmes along with our Fellow programme. This year, for instance, for the first time, we will be introducing a dual degree programme – a one-year post-graduate diploma programme in finance in association with McGill University of Canada. Both the institutions will jointly offer the certificate programme for students. This is a beginning; there will be similar strategic alliances with global schools in the near future. The Noida campus is getting a world-class convention facility along with other infrastructure additions that will make it a hub for executive training in the country. We are planning a faculty retreat this year to mull over future plans.

What are your areas of concern while planning for the future?

The biggest problem at Indian campuses is the severe shortage of faculty. The worst part is that things are not going to improve in the short to medium term, as the

capacity for Fellowships is just not growing. We have been investing heavily in this area and plan to set up a National Faculty Development Centre at our Noida campus. The centre will aim at providing developmental skills to the faculty of other business schools. We have around 65 faculty members at present; my immediate target is to recruit at least another 10 this year, and reach the level of 80 within a short period of time.

Do you think IIMs will be seriously affected by the proposed Foreign Universities Act?

Yes, there is a general concern that the entry of foreign universities will lead to serious attrition of faculty at good institutes. Without equal opportunities, it will be difficult for us to compete with foreign institutions. Already, the IIM system is under severe strain owing to sudden expansion in capacity at individual campuses because of OBC reservation and the government's decision to open 14 more campuses in a phased manner.

Do you think the IIM system can't cope with these developments?

Technically, it should; after all, we are the leaders in management education. The issues can be tackled, provided there is greater co-operation. Apart from the conducting of the Common Admission Test (CAT), in no other area is there any visible sharing of resources and people by the IIM system. That is my regret. There are, of course, sporadic attempts by individuals. Ravichandran of IIM Indore, for instance, has been conducting faculty training across the IIMs for a long time. The IIM system will be brought under further pressure with the new order of things – for instance, the logistics associated with admissions across the system. I can't see how we can handle this without a common approach by the IIM system. Maybe we could look at faculty sharing, resource sharing, joint Fellow programmes, common admission interviews and so on, besides looking at institutional mentorship more seriously to contribute to the B-school community. There is a lot to be done!