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Farrukhabad to Houston
20 Mar, 2008, 09:41 IST, Ishani Dutta Gupta, TNN

When Renu Khator took over as the president of the University of Houston and chancellor of the UH system, early this year, the entire Indian community in Houston came forward to welcome her to her new and prestigious job. "I feel humbled and honoured by this experience," says Dr Khator, who is the first person of Indian origin to be appointed to such a senior academic post in the US.

While on one hand she has unveiled a 100-day plan to seek ideas from the entire academic community to strengthen the reputation of UH, she has also launched an India desk to reach out to Indian students in a bigger way. "I feel that the University of Houston has very good resources and is in a position to be among the top tier public universities in the US. However, we need to go in for greater branding for ourselves," she says.

As for Indian students, those who join the undergrad courses at UH will now be entitled to the President’s scholarships. "There are around 1000 Indian students on our campus, which makes them the largest group of international students. Besides, we have a large number of faculty members of Indian origin," she adds.

After joining UH, Dr Khator has personally looked into the security and safety arrangements on the campus and believes that it’s now the safest place in the city of Houston. "The acts of violence on US college campuses in the past few months are a cause of concern for all of us and we are making efforts at UH to ensure safety and security of the entire community even while protecting the open-ness which everyone values.

In this context, I feel that it is important for education to become a vehicle to reach out to different cultures," she says. Indian students, she feels, bring the “world to American classrooms”.

For her, the horizontal knowledge on all things Indian including food, culture, business and music, is what American students gain from their Indian classmates. “Having lived and grown-up in Farrukhabad in Uttar Pradesh for 18 years of my life, I have strong Indian values.

I feel we have a lot to learn in terms of team-building from the Indian extended family system,” says Dr Khator who went to America after she was married to Dr Suresh Khator, who has now moved to UH with her and has joined the faculty.

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