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Joint MS-BS program, recruitment center, India chair in the offing

UH eyes stronger links with India

By Haider Kazim

Houston: Renu Khator, President of the University of Houston and Chancellor of UH System, has taken or is considering several major initiatives to strengthen the university's links with India.

These include a MS-BS joint program with several Indian universities, a recruitment office in India, establishment of an India Chair at UH, a scholarship fund to offset the cost of higher education, and possibly a UH campus in India if everything goes well.

The initiatives will help UH forge stronger links with India than any other university in the United States.

"We are looking at issues that have not allowed stronger relationship between Indian universities and American universities," Khator told Voice of Asia in an exclusive interview on Friday.

There are two major barriers in the way, she said. First, the credit system in both countries is different – semester in the US and annualized system in India. Secondly, BS is three years in India and four years in the US, creating problems for Indian students seeking admission into the MS program here.

"I have studied in both countries and I know the pains and strength of both systems," she said. This knowledge has put her in a strong position to surmount these barriers. Moreover, this has given her more credibility in India where her proposals are taken up more seriously by official and academic circles.

Born in Farrukhabad, Khator took her bachelor's degree from



Renu Khator poses with her Indian Award at her office on April 10, 2009.

Kanpur University in north India and her master's and Ph.D. degrees from Purdue University in the United States. She took over dual position of President and Chancellor in January 2008, thus becoming UH system's first woman chancellor and the first Indian-American to head a comprehensive research university in the United States. Her takeover was followed by a record-breaking surge in enrollments at UH as she was able to raise the university's profile with her determined campaign to get UH the status of Tier I university. She serves on numerous advisory boards and councils in Houston.

Khator is also a member of the Global Advisory Board of

the Prime Minister of India and chaired the session on education at the Bharatiya Pravasi Divas in January 2009.

Though there are international students from 136 countries in UH, she said, "Our competitive advantage is in India" because "India is a huge market and has a huge relationship with us." UH's largest contingent of international students comes from India.

She said that deans of different schools are looking up at the proposal of tie-up with Indian universities. "As President, I set the direction and articulate the vision, and after this the deans will take the ownership."

The MS-BS joint program will also have a reverse flow in

which students doing BS here can go to India for one year to do their master's there. Several UH students have shown interest in this program, she said.

Khator said that she had received a letter from Minister of Overseas India Affairs Vayalar Ravi suggesting establishment of a chair of study "in the fields of Indian languages and culture." Once the proposals are made and accepted, the chair will be the first of its kind sponsored by the Indian government in a US university.

She said that the India Studies Center at UH needs to be strengthened, facilitating more visits by Indian scholars.

Khator said that the Indian government wants to set up

1,500 new universities and colleges to meet the demands of higher education by the burgeoning population but the country lacks talent or the faculty to teach at these colleges.

She said that UH can help India in three ways: link up with India to increase the pool of qualified teaching staff, help through distance education, and establish joint programs.

Asked if UH would consider starting a campus in India, she said: "I always dream big. That is definitely on the table and if all the things are right, I will consider that."

Khator said that she was planning to start a scholarship fund to help offset cost of education for Indian students and the Indian community can help in that respect. She will be setting up a core group soon to help in fundraising and in recruitment of students from India. UH will also open a recruitment office in India for which office space has been assigned.

She said that anonymous donor gave the university \$8 million to help in its efforts for Tier I university. Of this \$7 million will be earmarked as matching fund for new donors. For instance, a donation of \$25,000 will be matched equally by the university and the amount of \$50,000 will be shown against the donor's name.

Another area in which she envisaged partnership with India is energy. India's growing economy has created a huge demand for energy and UH with its pool of award-winning researchers can help in new projects for renewable energy or more efficient use of energy.