

## Light at the End of the Tunnel!

It was a year ago when we launched Engage, and I then wrote “India & Canada, and indeed the entire world, are facing an extraordinary public health crisis and treading through unprecedented, evolving situation in the wake of coronavirus pandemic which is affecting lakhs of people.” Twelve months down the line, we have discovered the vaccine. And, we know that vaccines save lives. So get vaccinated, if eligible. I also quickly want to touch upon the wonderful turn of events in the India-Canada bilateral relations in this regard when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reached out to his Indian counterpart, Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi to sought the supplies of COVID vaccines for Canada. A true and authentic example of excellent collaboration efforts by both the countries and, as anyone would agree, Vaccine Diplomacy done well!

Our office in India is now partially open with staff taking alternate days to operate from the office premises, however, it’s hard to tell how and when the winds of change will act in the next few days, weeks, and months. The ongoing surge in Covid cases and travel restrictions, as result of it, will threaten the gains made despite a robust vaccine rollout. Keeping fingers crossed for now!

My mindset too switched to spring at the onset of February, a season that brings warmth and blossom and as an effect created and brought opportunities to engage a great deal! In the past two months, we engaged thoroughly with our member institutions, as many academic and research oriented activities were convened in the bi-national corridor between India and Canada, all funded and supported by the Institute. The versatility of these events could be seen from a wide range of areas covered by these events – right from One Health to Sustainable Habitat, from AI in Health, Rehabilitation and Linguistics to Waste to Wealth, and from Gandhian Philosophy to Gandhi as a Designer. Pandemic indeed taught us well the digital methods to create, share and disseminate knowledge and these online events were a testimony to this fact. The super success of these events in this uniquely challenging year is not only commendable but they also provided the best possible learning environment and the best possible experience to students, researchers, faculty and participants from all walks of life under the current circumstances.

This past year social media didn’t cease to amaze me for once. It continued to keep me close to the ground on information about how well our member institutions in India and Canada have done exceptional work despite Covid-19 challenges. There are many success stories which can fill this column to the brim, but I cannot help but recognize and notice people and institutions we feel proud to be associated with. Such as my heartiest congratulations to Dr Benoit-Antoine Bacon, President & Vice-Chancellor, Carleton University, to serve as Honorary President of the Canadian Psychological Association - the national association for the science,

practice & education of psychology in Canada and also joining the list of acclaimed Canadians who are presented with the Transformational Leader for Mental Health Award from the Royal Ottawa Foundation. On the other hand, IIT Delhi researchers developed zero-emission technology to manage and recycle e-waste to wealth and University of Saskatchewan doing something similar by utilising federal funds to target reduction of 4,230 tons of greenhouse gas emissions and annual utility savings of about \$650,000. University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus launched Canada's first Indigenous language degree programme! Students now will soon be able to receive an Indigenous language fluency degree as this historical breakthrough opens door for "Learning for All". Another marvellous work done by IIT Kanpur team who came together to build a world-class ventilator in just 90 days when the COVID pandemic struck India. It doesn't end here... In a unique step to address stress of deadlines, coursework, and other professional pressures, Union Education Minister Sh. Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank inaugurated Ānandam: The Centre for Happiness in IIM Jammu with an aim to help people, in general, students, faculty overcome mental stress and help spread positivity and encourage holistic development – all with a view to also align with one of the core objectives of India's National Education Policy 2020. These are some of the many innovations we came across, that are well on their way to change the course of academic and research innovation landscape and narrative in India and Canada.

As I shared with you last time how SICI is forging ahead to connect academia, government and industry to benefit one & all, I am happy to share that the Government of India, under the mandate of National Education Policy 2020, is also taking steps to develop linkages between educational institutions, Industries and R&D Institutions. Whether its Impacting Research Innovation & Technology (IMPRINT) that provides solutions to the most relevant engineering challenges and translating knowledge into viable technology in 10 selected technology domains or the establishment of Research parks at IIT Delhi, IIT Guwahati, IIT Kharagpur, IIT Kanpur, and IIT Chennai. This initiative is to provide an interface between entrepreneurship and Industry to establish their R&D units in collaboration with students & faculty members of the IITs, and Uchhatar Avishkar Yojana (UAY) to promote innovation of a higher order directly impacting the needs of the Industry and envisaging collaboration between academia and industry - within or outside India. On that note, a major expansion in India-Canada bilateral relations is the establishment of Infosys office in Calgary, Canada, that pledges to bring many jobs to the city over the next three years. Isn't it timely as we see changes happening for good and for the benefit of all?

So the pandemic is here to stay and we will continue to come across some stress as we navigate ourselves through one adjustment after another. However, I am glad to see the progress we have made this past year by emerging adaptable and resilient in the face of the pandemic. I thank you all for your time, attention and tremendous support to our joint goals and successes. Our journey will continue holding hands of 157 institutions across India and

Canada for the betterment of humanity. Wishing all of us a safe, healthy and happy remainder to 2021.

Stay connected!