

2021... And. The Big Picture!

I hope that everyone reading this blog, their loved ones, friends, are well and safe!

Since our last newsletter we have got new, interesting stories and activities to share with all of us. It's heartening to see Engage serving as a conversation starter, opening new dialogues with our intellectual community at-large. The nuts and bolts of SICI's work continues in a professional manner, despite global challenges. This is an important year for us in India and Canada. We are at a crucial time with potential enterprises in higher education and research on the horizon and a new beginning for all of us.

We opened the year with India celebrating 72nd Republic Day and remembering fondly Babu ji (Mahatma Gandhi) and Babu ji (Sh. Lal Bahadur Shastri) on their death anniversaries. Our determined, great leaders and thinkers paved way for the Indian Constitution coming into effect on January 26, 1950 declaring India's emergence as an independent republic. Carrying its core values forward, as expressed in the Constitution, India's most effective response to the pandemic came in the form of implementation of covid-19 vaccine by driving the world's largest vaccine programme and the fastest in terms of reaching out to the people being vaccinated. I believe the exceptional planning and strategic handling of dispensing the vaccine by the Indian government, led to country's 'Vaccine Diplomacy' responding very well to a global challenge of a huge magnitude. Plus, all other factors, India is rebounding and marching towards becoming a USD five trillion, world's fastest-growing economy, as projected by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), also predicting its growth at 11.5% in 2021 and 6.8% in 2022, despite the Covid challenge.

Promoting excellence in higher education and research in India-Canada bilateral corridor is at the heart of all we do at SICI, and I still cannot help but recognize International Education Day (January 24) an important day for reflection and future planning. We all witnessed disruptions, interruptions of unprecedented scale with institutions of learning closing all across the globe, affecting lives of 1.6 billion students in over 190 countries! The pandemic has further made me believe firmly to share SICI's goal of harnessing the full potential of every scholar, learner, no matter what their circumstances. And this sentiment finds its voice in the recent Union Budget of India announcing an outlay of INR 50,000 crores, spread over five years, for National Research Foundation. Its indeed a big leap towards strengthening the overall research ecosystem of the country with a focus on national-priority thrust areas to boost innovation, research and development. Meaning more opportunities for growth for our member institutions, scholars, students, and faculty. Related to this news comes another announcement, based on the recommendation of new National Education Policy 2020, which is setting up of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). This umbrella body will be responsible to ensure the unique and distinct functions of regulation, accreditation, funding,

and academic standard setting be governed by independent and empowered bodies. All of these reforms point towards one goal - preparing our youth to become well-rounded learners equipped with the 21st century skills.

While many administrative details have been covered by Dr Thomas, President, SICI, in her message, I too wish to congratulate the winners and recipients of Golden Jubilee Golden Jubilee Conference & Lecture Series Grant (GJCLSG). With this we have closed our golden jubilee celebration now.

How does a day in SICI looks like? Well. We are off to a busy start ever since the new year dawned upon us. Our first stop was supporting and participating in academic events funded by SICI such as a three-day programme convened by Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad with support from SICI's Shastri Programme Development Grant and a two-day workshop conducted by Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering & Technology (SLIET), again funded under Shastri Membership Development Grant of SICI. The next stop turned out to be a dynamic one too. In a first step towards forging ties with our Indian states and their Higher Education Departments, I had the honour of hosting the Honourable Dr Audimulapu Suresh, Minister of Education, Andhra Pradesh over a virtual meeting to discuss engagement between our two entities. Closer on the heels of this marathon, I had another great opportunity to host Ms. Anita George, Executive Vice-President & Deputy Head, CDPQ Global. I would like to say that both of these interactions, alongside all other conversations and meetings that we had with a couple of companies towards end of last year, are SICI's humble yet bold steps towards expanding goals, intended to align with the priorities of each of our states, provinces and companies. If you ask the purpose, this will help us in empowering key areas of operation, setting up the research clusters and facilitating partnerships amongst the major stakeholders.

Finally, before I sign off, I would like to extend best wishes to the Honourable Marc Garneau, the new incoming Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Canada. We had the honour of interacting with him a couple of times earlier. Our Institute aspires to engage closely with his office and Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, to nurture, advance and maintain people-to-people ties between our two great democracies while keeping with the demands and needs of 2021 and many more years to come.

Thank you.