

Sowing seeds, planting

By Altaf Hussain Asad

HAVING taught in places such as Germany, Holland, America, etc., Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan may be the best-suited person to run the prestigious University of Agriculture, Faisalabad. He holds a PhD in horticulture from the University of California. He started his teaching career from the University of Faisalabad and later moved to USA for higher studies.

Educationist

As Vice Chancellor of the University of Agriculture, he is leaving no stone unturned to convert the institution into a world-class seat of learning. Established in 1906 as Punjab Agriculture College and Research Institute, it was the first university in the subcontinent to solely focus on agriculture and was updated and given the name of University of Agriculture in 1961.

“Ours is the first agriculture university of the subcontinent so we are the trendsetters in this regard and have a specialised mandate. Faisalabad was chosen by our colonial rulers to set up an agriculture university as it was sandwiched between two canals. An irrigation system was launched in this region quite early as compared to other regions. Later, when the crops produced healthy yields, the city was also selected for setting up a college which focused on agriculture,” Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan gives us the initial history of the university.

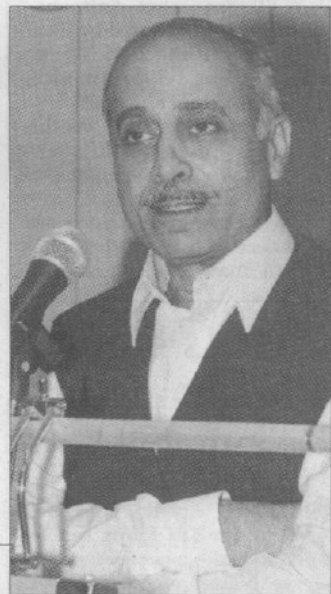
There are 46 departments, six faculties and nearly 11,000 students studying at the university at present. It has three sub cam-

puses in Toba Tek Singh, Dera Ghazi Khan and Okara. Nearly 6,000 students are studying in the post-graduate classes.

Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan adds further: “We didn’t have a single female student when I was studying here and there were only two female teachers at the time. But the situation has changed now. Of the 700 faculty members, more than 275 are female. More than 30 per cent students consist of female students also. Some 275 of our faculty members are PhD holders. All the faculty members must have PhD degrees if you ask me. If the initiatives taken by the HEC are sustained, there will be no room for non-PhD teachers in universities here.”

The university’s performance was acknowledged by the HEC in the year 2007 when it was termed the best university in the country. Its graduates later started another university in Ludhiana, which speaks volumes about the contribution of the university not only in Pakistan but the whole subcontinent.

Dr Iqrar claims that his university is not lagging behind in any aspect as compared to the University of Ludhiana. “We are at par with Ludhiana University. You can compare the yields of all the major crops. With meagre funds at our disposal, we are producing excellent results in all the crops. The real problem is the access of



Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan



University of Agriculture, Faisalabad

saplings ...

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technology in our country. Only big farmers have access to the latest technology in our country. We need to reach out to small farmers too as they don't have any access to technology. Here lies all the difference. In Indian Punjab, it is the vice chancellor of the university who chalks out the agriculture budget. But there is no such thing here in our country. They provide free electricity to their farmers. The World Bank has recently compared both West and East Punjab in its report. It stated that we are futuristically ahead of Indian Punjab. But I must confess that the work ethics are better in India," Dr Iqrar states.

The three sub campuses of the University of Agriculture will help the farmers grow the crop, which is a specialty of their area. The initiative will bear fruit in the coming days. "We have established sub campuses to train the farmers to cater to the requirements of their area. For example, Toba Tek Singh has a vast number of poultry farms. We have introduced short courses and other programmes in order to train them. Our focus is on poultry and other related fields. We want to train our farmers. We want to make them more skilled. While in the Okara (Depalpur) sub campus, we are laying more emphasis on corn, potato and other crops produced in the area. We intend to train the farmers in order to get better results in growing these crops.

"D.G. Khan faces a shortage of water. If we solve the water problem in that area, it will become the most fertile region," Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan elaborates.

He is of the view that our farmer is very hard working and there is a need to support him to

get more crop yields. The water level is also going down slowly, he opines. "We must support our farmer. We must give him subsidy. We have fertile land and our farmer is hard-working. We offer loans to all segments of society except farmers. When it comes to them, we only do lip service. We also need to invest more in research and development. We heavily invested in agriculture during the 1960s, which resulted in the green revolution. There is need to focus on our farmer now," Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan states matter of factly.

At present there are nearly 3,500 students studying abroad on HEC-funded programmes. Of all these students, more than 650 belong to this university. It is heartening to note that no other university has so many foreign scholars. Similarly, the students of this university have so far written almost 435 research papers.

The university is way ahead in research too. There are 60 foreign students at present here. Dr Iqrar says he has signed 56 MoUs with many top-notch universities of the world. He plans to research more in the fields of biotechnology, home economics and molecular biology. He says that the departments of food technology, soil management and horticulture have been very successful. Other fields will also scale new heights in research, he thinks.

He is spot on when he says: "A university has to be a global player. It must prepare students for a global market. We will have to be the role models. We plan to give admission to students after matriculation, which will surely be a revolutionary step. I believe agriculture development and rural development can eradicate poverty." ■