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DIGITAL UNIVERSITY TO EMERGE AS A GAME CHANGER

Following the announcement of budget 2022, analysts have appreciated the digital initiatives of the government, from the creation of a 'digital university' to a 'central digital currency' by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Besides the allocation of Rs 1,04,278 crore for the education sector, an increase of 11.86 per cent compared to the revised 2021-22 gross allocation of Rs 93,223 crore, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has proposed to set up a new digital university that will function on the basis of a networked hub and spoke model. This refers to a distribution method in which the main foundation originates from a centralised 'hub' and it then moves to smaller locales (spokes,) for final consumption.

The Central government plans to use India's best public universities and institutions as hubs while the students who consume the classes right from their home will be the spokes.

According to the budget, each hub will be expected to build "cutting edge information and communication technology expertise."

As per the finance minister's speech, the classes generated by the 'hubs' will be made available in different languages for wider appeal among students. The digital university will be set up as per ISTE standards (a benchmark employed for the use of technology in teaching and learning), the finance minister said.

ADAPTING IN THE PANDEMIC ERA

Tapping the rising opportunity in the e-learning space during the pandemic, the government appears keen to leverage this sector. "Due

The government's move to allow private capital in the infra sector has highlighted that capital investment holds the key to a speedy and sustainable revival



to the pandemic-induced closure of schools, our children, particularly in the rural areas, and those from scheduled castes and tribes, and other weaker sections, have lost almost two years of formal education. Most of these are children in government schools," the finance minister had said.

Welcoming the budget, Kalpathi S Suresh, executive director cum chairman, Veranda Learning Solutions, says, "The union budget has been designed to reflect the most recent developments and paradigm shifts in the educational sector.

We applaud the Indian government's efforts to promote digital education. The finance minister mentioned the establishment of

a national digital university, which could prove to be the answer for the higher education system's long-standing limitations. This year's union budget places a strong emphasis on closing the gap between students in remote areas and education by making quality learning more accessible to them."

Reacting similarly, Dishan Kamdar, vice-chancellor, FLAME University, says, "The decision to establish the digital university is a disruptive and futuristic decision that will benefit a large number of students even from the remotest part of the country by making world-class education accessible. This will surely give wings to the dreams

of deserving students and meet the goal of providing high-quality education to all students across the country."

TV FOR LEARNING

Apart from the proposal to create a digital university, Nirmala Sitharaman also pitched the "need to impart supplementary teaching and to build a resilient mechanism for education delivery." She said, "For this purpose, 'one class-one TV channel' programme of PM eVIDYA will be expanded from 12 to 200 TV channels. This will enable all states to provide supplementary education in regional languages for classes 1-12."

To this, FLAME Univer-

sity's Kamdar notes that "the plan to increase the one class-one TV channel' programme will enable students to learn through radio and DTH channels thereby overcoming the problem of internet connectivity." Kamdar adds, "The two decisions truly reflect the government's aims to leverage technology advancements and use them as tools to meet the educational aspirations of a large number of students in the country. They have set an example that is worthy of being emulated by others."

Prajodh Rajan, co-founder and group CEO, Light-house Learning, says, "The much-awaited union budget has delivered many positive developments

for the education sector. The implementation of one class-one TV channel programme should help mitigate the learning loss our children have endured during the past two years as schools remain closed. This will definitely support supplementary education in regional languages for students across classes 1 to 12."

Md Sajid Khan, Head of International Development, ACCA, says, "ACCA applauds the government for measures announced in the budget related to providing supplementary education in regional languages.

SKILLING UP THE DIGITAL WAY

The finance minister also

emphasised on skill development via the Digital DESH e-portal. She said, "In vocational courses, to promote crucial critical thinking skills, to give space for creativity, 750 virtual labs in science and mathematics, and 75 skilling e-labs for simulated learning environments, will be set-up in 2022-23."

She added, "High-quality e-content in all spoken languages will be developed for delivery via internet, mobile phones, TV and radio through digital teachers. A competitive mechanism for development of quality e-content by the teachers will be set up to empower and equip them with digital tools of teaching and facilitate better learning

outcomes."

Khan of ACCA noted that the launch of the Digital DESH e-portal for skilling, upskilling and reskilling the youth of India with the development of the digital university for world-class quality education "will set a clear path for India to create an advanced digital learning infrastructure and also reach far in educating learners who lack access to the internet and other resources."

Veranda Learning's Suresh says, "I welcome the focus on developing digital and free-to-air educational channels. The government's proposal to develop a Digital DESH e-portal is a significant initiative, making them more marketable and reducing the skill gap, which will benefit both job seekers and employers. This budget is in line with our aim of democratising education by providing students with high-quality learning opportunities, enhancing learning outcomes, and contributing to a thriving knowledge economy."

Santosh Kumar, CEO & Co-founder, 21K School, India's only digital school, says, "The deep focus on technology adoption was very evident in the union budget this year. A digital university will certainly provide students with more access to structured, high-quality programmes from their homes, anywhere in the world. By supporting digital education, the government is taking universities and schools to the homes of children of all ages. The introduction of technology into the education segment will help all levels of school and HEIs, as well as remove the traditional borders of location so that students can have access to programmes and formats that were never heard of before."

- S Akriti