TILL WE MEET AGAIN

Since all good things have to come to an end, PCF6 also wound up on Sunday with a musical evening and a gala dinner.

Deviating from the format of the evening programme witnessed since the commencement of the conference on November 24, the organisers gave a go-by to Kerala’s traditional dances such as Kathakali, and instead dished out a noisy Bollywood musical fare. Later in the evening, a live band played with many delegates dancing their hearts out.

Earlier, during the valedictory session, Dr Burchell Whiteman, Chairman of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Board of Governors, hailed the coming together of COL, UNESCO and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) which had made PCF6 a grand success.

Referring to the Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Dr Whiteman said ODL had given voice to the voiceless and was playing a great role in facing the challenge of delivering learning to millions who did not have access to the conventional means of education.

COL Vice President Asha Kanwar referred to the technological developments that had taken place over the years, and pointed out that "when PCF was born, the world was facing a huge digital divide. Today, content is being generated at the grassroots level and local communities were far more aware of their livelihood and developmental issues."

She hoped that the platform of PCF would be able to bridge the digital divide further, and help deliver education to learners at doorstep.

Apparently referring to Dr Shashi Tharoor’s call to “educate girls,” Dr Kanwar said in our efforts to provide facilities for the education of girls,
PCF6 ends on a high note

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we should not lose sight of the education of boys as without them the mission of creating an educated society would not be possible.

To support her argument, Dr Kanwar cited the example of West Indies where equal importance was being given to education of male child.

IGNOU Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof PR Ramanujam, who was the coordinator of PCF6, thanked COL, IGNOU and UNESCO, and several others who provided support in making the conference a great success.

He hoped delegates had a chance to learn from various discussions and presentations that took place during the 5-day conference, and enjoyed interacting with fellow delegates who were drawn from 70 countries.

“It is with a sense of sadness that we are concluding PCF6, and I hope we will meet again,” said Prof Ramanujam.

IGNOU Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof PR Ramanujam with other delegates at the keynote session of PCF6.

Blended delivery brings best of ODL, Face-to-Face

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She pointed out that distance delivering traditionally works best for self-directed, self-motivated learners within mature institutional systems of learning support and quality assurance – conditions that do not apply to vast numbers of people and contexts requiring improved access to skills development.

“The reach of effective distance delivery is further constrained where there is a practical requirement to ‘learn by doing’ and to demonstrate physical competence in a given skill or skills,” she stressed.

Conversely, said Dr Seelig, traditional face-to-face teaching setting simply cannot meet the scale of demand we now face for education and training.

She emphasised that “Blended delivery brings together – potentially at least – the best of ODL and face-to-face teaching and instruction.”

For this reason, she said, “variants of blended delivery are now increasingly being used in both developed and developing nations, with theory component delivered by distance and practical or face-to-face elements delivered in the classroom, workplace or community.”

Dr Seelig pointed out that a key imperative for skills development was ensuring that education programmes deliver the core skills employers and industry need.

She gave the example of New Zealand where Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) were playing a key role in designing the industry training framework, enrolling the industry trainees and coordinating a system of workplace-based competency assessment.
Although some of the delegates left for their homes on the fifth and last day of PCF6, brainstorming sessions on the four major Form themes — Social Justice, Community Development, Skill Development and Formal Education — were attended by educationists and practitioners in a great PCF6 atmosphere.

Addressing a session on the role of ODL in strengthening the empowerment process among the marginalised, Rama Mathew of Delhi University said that inappropriate language pedagogy, teachers’ own inadequate language competence and insufficient assessment procedures have led to the poor proficiency in English language among learners, especially the underprivileged.

“Delhi University has addressed the issue through its English proficiency Course that focuses on all the skills — reading, writing, listening and speaking. An important component of this course is the end-test that assesses all the skills.”

Dr K. Murugan of Tamil Nadu Open University, in his paper titled ODL: Quest for Social Justice Beyond Access,” stressed on the growing need for the ODL institutions to refocus and frame robust policies for human development and restrain themselves from partaking in the viciously subversive process of institutionalising mediocrity.

In an another session on ICTs and ODL, Wynand Diergaardt of Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) shared his experiences about ICTs and how it has enhanced the capacity of NAMCOL staff in the development and production of video-based multimedia resources.

Neeti Agrawal of IGNOU stressed upon the need to study the effectiveness of Self Learning Materials (SLMs) used for skill-based programmes like MBA, MCA, etc. “It’s time to explore the efficacy of SLMs for management programmes and what measures can be taken up to develop course materials with more of problem-based instructional forms,” she said.

In his presentation, Prof K Elumalai of IGNOU touched upon the timely topic of human rights and right to education in the Indian context, stressing upon the problems and issues involved in realising the Right to Education.

In a session on University-Community Linkages, Dr KS Divakaran Nair of IGNOU said: ‘IGNOU can transform its Centres and Community Colleges into knowledge hubs. Digital libraries can be set up at these centres, in order to transform India into a knowledge society.”
FIFTH DAY IN FRAMES

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Delegates during a discussion; outside the Oman Hall; and in a group photo.
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Delegates outside the COL stall: during the tea break; 
Dr KS Divakaran Nair, IGNOU Regional Director, at a session on University-Community Linkages; another session in progress; and two delegates from Nigeria.
FIFTH DAY IN FRAMES

Cultural programmes underway on the last day of PCF6 and a live band performing to the audience delight.
Cultural programmes underway on the last day of PCF6 and a live band performing to the audience delight.
Six things I have learnt at PCF-6

GRINS
Software that has been developed to support community radio stations by providing an integrated system for scheduling programmes, telephony integration and managing radio content. Zahir Koradia of Gram Vaani developed the software in India.

FREEDOM FONE
Freedom Fone was developed in Zimbabwe by a woman called Bren Burrel. The software allows listeners and learners to call a telephone number and hear any audio information, for example, daily market prices, a short radio programme or agricultural tips. Callers can also feedback by leaving a voice-message.

QUEENS IN GHANA
Every village, hamlet and town in Ghana has a traditional queen. Ebenezer Koomson is working with traditional queens to reduce the stigma associated with HIV. 22 traditional queens are working with sexually active young people to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS in order to reduce incidence and stigma.

ENGLISH IN ACTION
A 9-year project in Bangladesh aims to improve the ability of 25 million people to communicate in English.

FIRST PERSON

Cathryn Elizabeth Wood from UK
The project involves developing new training materials, teacher training, radio broadcasts and English lessons delivered on mobile phones.

STORY THINKING
Evolutionary biologist, Gregory Bateson believes that all living things “think” in stories.

LIVES TECHNOLOGY.
Researchers at the University of British Columbia have developed a mobile phone learning management system that can deliver short lessons followed by quizzes that can assess learning using the mobile phone. The technology has been trialled with 200 women goat-farmers in India.

Memories, sweet memories!

Blythe McKay, Farm Radio International: I had a wonderful time. Sessions, particularly on Community Development, were well-organised and quite informative. I am leaving Kochi with wonderful memories.

Hear Judy Macdonald, Vanier College, Montreal: I met here someone from Tanzania who had been to the same school where I used to teach from 1966 to 1968. It was a nostalgic moment for me when we began sharing memories.

Dr Jan Rae, Institute of Educational Studies, UK Open University: Kochi is great! I enjoyed shopping spices, saffron, pepper seeds, pickles, etc, etc. So much so that I ran out of money!