

THE Indian University Grants Commission (UGC) has decided that emphasis during the Fifth Plan will be on consolidation and strengthening of existing university departments. Because of severe financial constraints, the UGC has asked all universities to curtail expenditure and limit their programmes according to its guidelines. Accordingly, the universities have been asked to formulate detailed programmes for development of existing teaching and research departments; introduction of new areas of specialisation in existing departments and setting up of individual departments; measures such as updating and modernisation of courses, and giving specific orientation to research activities; improvements in library facilities and services and general amenities for students and staff, such as study centres, hostels, residential quarters and health centres. The universities have also been asked to see that, while they plan new programmes, those initiated during earlier Plan periods are properly implemented.

At the undergraduate level, the UGC proposes to allow little or no further expansion in enrolment during the Fifth Plan, at least for formal, full-time studies. Expansion, if any, will come about only through part-time evening classes or correspondence courses. It has also been decided that the affiliated colleges would receive UGC assistance during the Plan, primarily for strengthening their faculty, improving their library and laboratory facilities, and installing workshops and related facilities. The colleges have also been advised to give priority to re-orienting their courses so that they become relevant to local, regional and national needs and emphasise utilisation of available natural resources.

● The UGC report for 1972-73, analysing the emerging problems and perspectives of higher education in India, blames unrest among students on the present system of examination, obsolescence of university curricula and the lack of good social life in colleges and universities.

The report points out that enrolment in university-level courses has left growth rate of the national economy way behind, resulting in lower per capita investment in higher education and also deterioration in standards of institutions where facilities are being

stretched to breaking point in accommodating increased student populations. (In 1972-73, there were 35.44 lakh students enrolled in 4,153 colleges in the country.)

Referring to growing unemployment among the educated, especially women and those who graduate from the universities in sciences and various professional courses, the report says that

## Educating India

from Narender K. Sehgal, Jullundur.

much undergraduate education is not relevant either to the abilities and aptitudes of students or to the needs of the nation. With a very high failure rate at first degree level (about 50%) and large proportions of students being placed in the "third division" (aggregating less than 50% in an examination) at the postgraduate level, the report feels that "the present system of higher education is generating much waste and stagnation" and that "this raises serious doubts about the well being of the university in India."

The report further points out that the spread of higher education has not been very even, both area-wise and population-wise. Neither backward areas, nor students from these regions, have been able to get their fair share of facilities or opportunities for higher education — meaning that disparities have grown worse.

The commission blames on paucity of funds its inability to play a role in developing a system of higher education best suited to the genius of the people and the development of the country. It proposes a dialogue with the universities with a view to determining what can be done during the period of the Fifth Plan to make higher education a "little more meaningful and ultimately a fit instrument of change and development."

● The University Grants Commission has proposed 'radical' reforms in the present examination system. Meerut University, in Uttar Pradesh, is likely to be the first to try out the reform on an experimental basis during the next academic year. Similar experiments are

also expected to be launched in universities in other states.

Central to the proposed reforms is what is called a 'question bank'. Such a bank will have up to 100 questions which will be published and made available to both students and teachers at the beginning of the academic term. Seventy-five per cent of the questions asked in an examination will be taken out of the bank and the rest (25%), mostly numerical problems, from outside. The curriculum and the question bank for each course of study will be framed by Boards of Studies to be constituted for the purpose.

Also proposed is a card system for the examination questions. The cards containing questions, to be answered by individual examinees, will be picked up using a random process from a collection. (This will hopefully help reduce the use of unfair means at examinations—a very prevalent feature at present.) The candidates will be able to appeal to a committee if, on receiving the evaluated answer books, they feel dissatisfied with the evaluation. The committee will consist of the college principal, the teacher for the course and a representative of the students.

A university will be free to cancel a student's admission if he/she gets a 'D' grade in all his/her examinations and assessments. The grades A, B, C and D will replace the 'marks' being awarded in evaluations at present.

Universities as well as colleges will be required to conduct sessional or continuous assessments of students which will be shown on their grade sheets separately, as this will be aimed at measuring their "essential abilities". The name of colleges will also be mentioned on the degree/diploma of a qualifying student. The performance assessment of students will be required to be made over well distributed intervals of time.

Meanwhile the Union Education Minister recently told a meeting of the consultative committee attached to his ministry that the present examination system had collapsed completely and that reforms in this direction were urgently needed. He informed the members that 11 out of the 12 universities selected for launching examination reforms suggested by the UGC had already set up special implementation committees for the purpose. □

the production of tufted carpets".

Cooperation in the field of raw materials likewise ranges from window glass and timber products to "the enrichment of uranium in the Soviet Union from the raw material of British customers".

In general, the technological section of the programme tends to become

bogged down in detail, and the order of the items would surely form a fascinating study for the psychologist (cars, for example being listed immediately before toys). There is, however, a general overall stress on computer hardware and software, power production, including atomic power stations, heavy ridge group of exposed sediments. □

## Wrong skull

THE skull illustrated on page 578 (February 20) was in fact KNMER1470 found at East Rudolf in 1972. It has been assigned to the genus *Homo*, sp. indet., and was found during prospecting in area 131 on the Karari industry and means of transport. □