

ABROAD PERSPECTIVE

Indian Board To Diversify Education

The Chairman of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), India's largest secondary education board, told CBSE-affiliated schools in Asia's Gulf region there are significant changes coming to adapt to a changing global employment scenario and reduce the pressure on students. Gulf countries have hundreds of thousands of Indian expatriate workers and families who most commonly school their children in the Indian system. As of December 2002, there were 81 CBSE-affiliated schools in the Gulf region.

"We want to tell students they might not get the right marks in exams, the right college admission or even the right career option, but still they can have a life which will be meaningful," Ashok Ganguly said at a conference last week in Sharjah (just next to Dubai). Within a year the CBSE will introduce laboratories for mathematics and some science subjects with the aim of making the subject more enjoyable. Attempts to modernize curricula include changing Class Ten Science to "Science and Technology," and introducing "Life Skill" and "Disaster Management" education from Classes Six through Ten.

OVER THE COUNTER

Religion On Campus

The debate over religious icons and their place in schools has reached its zenith in France, where there are plans to ban the wearing of all overtly religious symbols in state schools. Included in the ban would be skullcaps, headscarves and large crosses. Muslims, the largest visible minority in the country, took to the streets this past weekend to protest the proposal, claiming that female students being forced not to wear their headscarves is a violation of their rights.

While the French government's proposal stems from the secular tradition of the country, the issue does raise an important question. Are there implications for higher education institutes, given France's current attempts to deal with this issue?

We invite our readers to e-mail Higher-Edge their opinions for our new Op-Ed section. Click [here](#) for more information.

Source: "[French Muslims Protest Rule Against Head Scarves](#)," *The New York Times*, 18 January 2004.

THE PLAYING FIELD

Financing An Overseas Education

As debates over the rising cost of an education sprout across American campuses, those hit the hardest are international students, who, according to one source, can expect to pay anywhere between \$30,000 to \$60,000 per year. Indian students, who already make up the largest contingent of international students, are now finding new ways to finance their education. Currently, Indian parents often pay tuition fees, although students may work on campus to supplement their education costs.

As of the beginning of 2004, the Indian government is looking to reduce the interest charged on education loans (from 11% to 8%) taken out by student's parents from Indian banks. Foreign finance institutions are starting to offer options. At a November 2003 UK education fair in Kolkata, HSBC had a stall displaying information for student loans, while its Indian branches also have an in-house student counselor to advise on higher studies abroad.

The January/February edition of [Insight, On-site: India](#) will take an in-depth look at how Indian students finances their overseas education.

Source: "[Hike in US colleges fees to hit Indians hardest](#)," *The Economic Times*, 1 January 2004; "[Interest on education loans may be slashed](#)," *The Times of India*, 2 January 2004.

GLOBE TIPPING

Visiting Hong Kong?

Last year saw the emergence of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which crippled the travel industry in some Asian countries, especially in the high traffic area of Hong Kong. If you are planning to visit Hong Kong in the near future, be prepared for stringent screening measures designed to filter out potential carriers of the disease.

Visitors will need to fill out health forms and be scanned by an infrared camera, that measures temperature and the possibility of fever. Currently on "yellow" alert (which involves preventative measures such as tests on potential carriers, and preparation of isolation wards) the territory is ready to raise the threat level to "red," which will give extended powers to police to track down and quarantine infected people. Travelers in Hong Kong are warned that they must comply with all health laws.