Dr Mani Lal Bhaumik, the first student to get his PhD degree from IIT Kharagpur, gifted the world eye corrective LASIK surgery technique. The Indian-born American physicist who was awarded Padma Shri in 2011 was recently in town for his new book launch. Your next project, IIT research campus at Kolkata, aims to create Nobel laureates from India. Tell us more about it.

An international centre for advanced research will come up near Ruby in a joint venture with IIT Kgp. I'll be donating 50 per cent of the fund from Mani Bhaumik Foundation. The focus will be on disciplines of Bio-informatics and Energy Science. But it has to be done according to the IIT Acts of the central government. I made a trip to New Delhi to meet Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh to see what would speed up the process of the construction of the centre. He showed much interest and said that this centre would be an advantage in the research field. I have also planned to come up with a Science Park in Rajarhat.

Union HRD minister Kapil Sibal said a national level common entrance test for science and engineering UG courses will be introduced soon. IITs and NITs have approved it. What's your take on this?

Just one test shouldn't be the criterion for judging a student's capabilities. In the West there are cumulative tests, giving the student a chance to show his learning skills through a number of tests. We, in India, are still following the old British system. What if a student gets unwell during exams? Just one test can be risky and unpredictable. Do you think a students' grievance redressal cell will help bridge the communication gap between students and teachers?

There's always some interaction between students and teachers. Earlier people taught because they loved to share knowledge and students too had a passion for learning along with respect for their teachers. But today we get news of students beating up teachers. This violence has to be stopped. What are your suggestions on quality of teachers and improvement of text books?

Teachers should be appointed on the basis of merit. I was fortunate that my mentor Satyen Bose was genuinely interested in guiding me. For the last 30 years, only qualifications have mattered and not intelligence. Politics and favouritism should be kept aside both in case of recruiting teachers and deciding on textbook content. The lacunae in education system that need to be filled up... I must say I am not that much familiar with the present situation but I have seen immense pressure on students. The system needs to devise better counselling methods and bring back the balance. More student exchange programmes are essential as first hand experiences leave an indelible impression. Your suggestions for a better education system...

There should be multiple cumulative tests much like what they do in the West. Look at China and how it is marching ahead. The Chinese Academy is getting world recognition. The number of universities and colleges can be increased in rural pockets but again better infrastructure; high pay-packages are required for people to teach in these areas. Experts say that by 2050, 70 per cent people will leave urban areas. So, there's hope. We need to focus on practical education which again is a matter of funds. In a few states $300 computer tablets are being introduced. It is going to be the language of the future; we need to be prepared for that.

How important do you think edutainment is for passive stimulation to arouse interest for science in young minds?

That's a key to spark interest in students who find certain subjects dry or dull. TV is a great medium. In rural areas there's immense talent but students from these areas don't get as many chances as their urban counterparts. What do you think can be done?

In most developed countries, high school qualification for students is compulsory. We, on the other hand, are moving from an agricultural society to a more service oriented system. Basic education in rural areas should be made compulsory. Also, in villages people want help from their children in the fields. They need to be encouraged to let their children study.

What more can be done to take Indian education system on a par with international level?

One of the problems I have heard of is regarding the quality of students graduating every year. It can be changed. Since India is a heterogeneous country, standardisation is necessary and that way educational levels can be improved.

— Saima Afreen