



product of an Indian business school — young, dynamic and used to responsibility.

At an age when her UK counterparts might be starting to think about studying the MBA, the 28-year-old brand manager for Tata Interactive Systems graduated with an MBA from Sydenham College, Bombay, five years ago.

In India it is the norm for students to take their MBA on completion of an undergraduate degree. Often, as in Dixit's case, the MBA is studied at the same university where students take their degree. This contrasts with Europe, where a minimum of three years' management experience is considered essential.

India's education system is unashamedly elitist and graduates are at the top of a pyramid with a base of a vast peasant population. The country pro-

pared with 50,000 in the US.

Sanjaya Sharma, chief executive of Tata Interactive, says MBA graduates from India are really bright and are among the most accomplished students at undergraduate level. "The quality of teaching on an Indian MBA programme may not be as good as a US business school but the quality of graduates is much better".

The MBA came to India in 1960 when the Government called in Harvard Business School to help it to establish the Indian Institutes of Management, a network of elite business schools. The institute at Ahmedabad is rated one of the best institutions in Asia for its two-year, full-time MBA. Fees are £1,200 a year, and there are bursaries for the poorest 20 per cent.

Indira Parikh, dean of the Ahmedabad institute, says: "My belief is that by recruiting people straight from university we get the brightest and the best — young people with all their idealism and their creativity intact."

These are boom times for Ahmedabad, partly on account of the school's reputation and because cities, such as Bombay and Bangalore, India's Silicon Valley, swallow up graduates as fast as the business schools produce them.

It hopes to run 10 to 12 tailor-made programmes per year by 2006, compared with five last year.

If business schools are to extend their connections with the region, they must also be sensitive to religious and cultural issues. Warwick, for example, looks for steady market growth in this area, based on word-of-mouth recommendation rather than other more aggressive marketing methods.

The growing interest of the business schools in the Middle East is reflected by a rise in the numbers of students travelling from the area to take an MBA in Europe. As interest in Western management practices increases, so more European and American schools are keen to attract MBA students from the region.

Middle East is the big growth market

Business education is on the rise, says **Steve Coomber**

NOW that the American, European and Asian graduate business education markets have matured, where is the next big growth market for the MBA? One area of the world to which business schools are turning their attention is the Middle East, and in particular the Arab nations.

Hassan Hakimian, associate dean at Cass Business School, London, says: "It is the fastest growing market for financial services in the world.

The Middle East market is growing and expanding at an exceptional rate."

Economic progress has been substantial and it is against this background that business education is finally moving up the agenda in a part of the world where qualifications in medicine and engineering traditionally have been the most highly regarded. For many years students who wanted to take an MBA locally had a restricted choice. Until recently the main option was Egypt's American University of Cairo.

Now the choice is broadening. Several business schools in the US and Europe are in talks with organisations in the area with a view to delivering business education both at a graduate and executive level.

Dubai is a popular location. It is positioning itself as the regional centre for business and has invested heavily in its infrastructure.

Hakimian says: "We are in active negotiations with the Dubai International Finance Centre to explore ways in which we can deliver our world-class business education in the region."

Others already have well-established links. Warwick Business School in 2001 launched a fourth partnership scheme on its distance-learning MBA to cover the Gulf

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states. "The partnership, with the Dubai Knowledge Horizon group, was set up on a belief that there is potential for the Middle East, to develop into a significant market for MBAs," says Matt Snowden, Warwick's distant-learning MBA programme manager.

"This has already paid dividends with several leading companies putting regional headquarters there. This provides a very fertile ground for business schools, such as Warwick, willing to take a risk that the market will grow."

Ashridge is another school that is active in the area. The Middle East is an important market for the school. It now has an office in Dubai and David Klewin, Ashridge's strategic partner for the Middle East, says the school is "reach-



Dixit: achieved MBA at 23