

May 5, 2010

Washington: An India-born professor and IIT alumnus who has long championed a pledge for organizational leaders and managers on the lines of the Hippocratic Oath for physicians to enhance accountability in the corporate world has been named Dean of the prestigious Harvard Business School.

Nitin Nohria, who is currently the Richard P. Chapman Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School (HBS), will become the School's 10th dean, Harvard President Drew Faust announced Tuesday.

Nohria is the first Indian, and indeed the first non-white, to become the dean of the 102-year old institution that typically ranks among the top three business-schools in the world.

Nohria, who will take up his new role on July 1, succeeds Jay Light, who in December announced his plans to retire at the end of the 2009-10 academic year after five years as dean.

"At a pivotal moment for Harvard Business School and for business education more generally, I'm delighted that Nitin Nohria has agreed to lead HBS forward," Faust said in his announcement. "He's an outstanding scholar, teacher, and mentor, with a global outlook and an instinct for collaboration across traditional boundaries... he's a person who not only studies leadership but embodies the qualities of a leader."

While Nohria's current academic interests include the theory and practice of leadership, the analysis of management practices critical to corporate success, and the strategic and organizational challenges of globalization, he is best known recently for promoting a Hippocratic Oath for business leaders, an idea he developed with his Harvard colleague Rakesh Khurana.

"The public trust in business and its leaders has never been lower. To restore trust, it is time for business leaders to embrace their own version of the doctor's Hippocratic Oath, which shapes a common understanding of the role of business in society and the conduct expected of business leaders," he wrote recently after critiquing the failure of leadership in the recent economic and corporate turmoil.

"Developing, adopting, and institutionalizing such an oath is not going to be easy. But there is no better or more important moment to try—because at stake is the very legitimacy of business leaders and the future of capitalism," he warned. His passion for the idea led to HBS students adopting a voluntary MBA oath.

Nohria received his bachelor of technology degree in chemical engineering in 1984 from the IIT, Bombay, which awarded him its distinguished alumnus medal in 2007. He received his Ph.D. in management in 1988 from MIT's Sloan School of Management, where he earned the outstanding doctoral thesis award in behavioral and policy sciences.

He joined the HBS faculty as an assistant professor in 1988, was appointed associate professor in 1993, was promoted to tenure in 1997, and became the Richard P. Chapman Professor of Business Administration in 1999.

Nohria is the latest of nearly half dozen dons of Indian-origins who have gone on to lead prestigious business schools, a list that includes Dipak Jain, who became Dean of Kellogg School of Business in 2001; Mahendra Gupta who was Dean of the Olin School of Business at Washington University in St.Louis; and Yash Gupta, who was the Dean at University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business. At HBS itself, Nohria is among some 25 teachers of Indian-origin in a faculty of just over 200.

Among the first Deans of Indian origin in the U.S was Beheruz Sethna, who headed the B-school at Lamar University in Texas way back in the 1990s. In fact, at HBS itself, Nohria's colleague Srikant Datar was strongly tipped to succeed Kim Clark as Dean in 2005 but was pipped by Jay Light in the final selection. Incidentally, the first Dean of Indian-origin at Harvard was Venky Narayanmurthy, who was Dean of the Harvard's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences till his retirement in 2005.

Harvard Business School has a strong India connection, too including a thriving alumni association that counts more than 600 graduates. Among the top HBS alumnus in India are Home Minister P.Chidambaram, Ratan Tata, ITC Chairman Y.C.Deveshwar, and DRDO Chief Controller Sivathanu Pillai.

In fact, there has been such a surge of Indian enrollment at HBS in recent years that at the school's first alumni new venture contest held recently, HBS Club of India team led by Krishna Mahesh (MBA 2005), founder and CEO of Sundaram Medical Devices in Chennai, took top honors against teams representing HBS Alumni Clubs in Boston, Chicago, London, New York, Northern California, and Southern California for devising a low-cost medical bed.