

**Today's Paper » FEATURES » EDUCATION PLUS**

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## **Honours courses to become a reality**

*The universities have geared up for the admissions with concerns more or less having subsided, writes ABDUL LATHEEF NAHA.*



The Honours degree programme being introduced this year by the Higher Education Department in four select colleges in the State has made headway with the respective universities gearing up for the maiden admissions. The concerns raised by different quarters about the programme, some of which were highlighted in these columns earlier, have more or less subsided. The government has set a September 15 deadline to close the admissions.

The government introduced the programme at Government Women's College, Thiruvananthapuram; Maharaja's College, Kochi; Government Victoria College, Palakkad; and Government Brennen College, Thalassery, from the current academic year as part of its effort to enhance the quality of higher education.

Those colleges were chosen for the Honours pilot project, envisaged by the State Planning Board, considering their potential for excellence. They are among the top government colleges currently enjoying repute in the State.

When the Government Women's College is affiliated to the University of Kerala, Maharaja's College is under Mahatma Gandhi University. Government Victoria College is under the University of Calicut and Brennen College is affiliated to Kannur University.

### **Flexible**

Although the government introduced the Honours programme simultaneously, the respective universities have been given freedom and flexibility in their implementation.

When the Government Women's College, Thiruvananthapuram, is earnestly going ahead with its BA English Honours programme, Maharaja's College, Kochi, is gearing up for its BA Economics Honours programme. Government Victoria College, Palakkad, is enthused about its B.Com. Honours programme, and Government Brennen College, Thalassery, is all set to launch its B.Sc. Mathematics Honours programme.

All universities except Mahatma Gandhi University have finalised the programmes. Mahatma Gandhi University is awaiting the Governor's sanction for the programme. Government officials say that the Governor's nod will come in a few days.

The respective universities have made good use of the liberty granted to them by the government in altering and modifying the Honours syllabus. "In fact, syllabus is the best attraction of the Honours degree," says P.K. Velayudhan, Director of the State Collegiate Education Department.

What makes the Honours degree programme different from the conventional degree courses is its syllabus and the course content. Dr. Velayudhan says unlike the syllabi followed by the State universities, the syllabus of the Honours degree programme will be most modern and up-to-date. The government has offered to make all arrangements for internship and other hands-on training programme as part of the new course.

N. Jayakumar, Vice-Principal of Government Women's College, says the syllabus designed for its BA English Honours programme has been so strong and up-to-date that it can stand at least for a few years. A team of experts at the university revamped the English syllabus given by the State government by including Latin American, Caribbean, Australian

and Dalit literature. Folklore, traditional popular culture and cinema too have been included.

The government has succeeded in addressing most of the concerns raised by the teachers and students. The allegation that the Honours degree will create two types of educated citizens is hardly heard these days.

The universities have found alternatives to address the concern about delayed introduction of the Honours programme.

“That is not an issue at all,” says N. Muhammadali, Director of the College Development Council at the University of Calicut. He says that the Honours programme will set a model for the conventional programmes. Dr. Muhammadali says the Honours programme will serve as a signpost for the conventional degree courses.

Government Brennen College last week closed its applications for the B.Sc. Mathematics Honours programme.

The admission process is beginning this week and the interview will take place on September 9.

College authorities say the admissions will close by September 13.

Government Victoria College under the University of Calicut is just behind. The college will start issuing application forms for its B.Com. Honours programme on Monday.

Principal Thomas Kuruvilla has exuded confidence about the new programme.

“The Honours programme has had good response from the student community. The initial reservations aired by certain sections have given way for curiosity now,” Dr. Kuruvilla says.

He says the initial resistance to the Honours programme has died down because of the selection of government colleges for the pilot project. Had it been introduced in private colleges, the criticism would have been severer.

Notification for admissions to the BA Honours programme of Government Women’s College is expected this week.

Although the government has set a September 15 deadline, the college is unlikely to stick to it.

The college union elections taking place on September 13 are expected to pose a hurdle.

The government says that extension of the Honours programme to private colleges in the aided sector will be considered when the initiative becomes a success. The current response from the academic community to the programme indicates that it will become a success.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) had awarded six colleges from the State with the honour of College with Potential for Excellence a few years ago.

Those colleges, generally held in high esteem in higher education in the State, are Farook College, Feroke; St. Berchmans College, Changanassery; C.M.S. College, Kottayam; Sacred Heart College, Thevara; Mar Ivanios College, Thiruvananthapuram; and University College, Thiruvananthapuram.

University College was the only government institution to get the status in Kerala. Farook College (under the University of Calicut) was the only college from Malabar to bag this coveted honour.

Principals of some of those colleges hope that they will be considered for the Honours programme in the second phase.

Dr. Velayudhan has been positive about extending the Honours programme.

He sees no problem for the government in introducing the programme in private colleges.

It is a question of acceptance and acclimatisation.

Unlike the regular degree courses, students should have 70 per cent marks for Plus Two to apply for the Honours programme.

When Scheduled Caste students need 60 per cent marks, Scheduled Tribe students should get minimum 55 per cent. From next year, centralised admission will be conducted for the Honours programmes.

Dr. Velayudhan says the demand for the Honours programme is likely to increase considerably from next year.