

# Marketing guru offers means to better profits

□ THE SPECIAL STORY

BY SONALI S. MAJUMDER



HANDS-ON LESSONS: Nirmalya Kumar, who is a professor of marketing and retailing at the International Institute of Management Development at Lausanne in Switzerland. A photograph by Subham Dutta

When Motorola was baffled by sudden losses in its Singapore market, the company promptly hired the services of a marketing guru for a fee of \$10,000 a day, who helped the semi-conductor firm to earn profits. Another company, Caterpillar, consulted him before launching an earth-moving equipment.

Meet 37-year-old Nirmalya Kumar, professor of marketing and retailing at the International Institute of Management Development in Lausanne, Switzerland. The lecturer, however, has not broken ties with the city where he was born and every Christmas he flies down to Calcutta to spend time with his parents. "I am very fond of the city (although he is quick to admit he will never come back to Calcutta for good)," Dr Kumar said.

The IMD Prof. is surprisingly very upbeat about the present political scenario. "Stable governments have not done the economy any good. Now, if a coalition government comes to power, it

will be busy trying to remain in power and will not interfere in the economy. This will help the economy to grow," Dr Kumar said. The government should focus on providing infrastructure and not interfere in the free market, he felt.

Educated at La Martiniere and Bhowanipur Education Society, Nirmalya secured the first position in B.Com from Calcutta University. "I wanted to become a chartered accountant but did not complete my articleship from Price Waterhouse," Dr Kumar said with a smile. He left for the US in 1985 where he did MBA from the University of Illinois. A Ph.D on distribution channels and relationship marketing from Northwestern University in Chicago followed.

"From 1990 to 1995 I was teaching at the Pennsylvania State and Northwestern universities," Dr Kumar said. In 1995 he was invited to be the faculty member of IMD, from where leading industrialists like Siddharth Birla, Ajit Sriram and Jay Mehta acquired their management degree.

"The institute recruits only 80 students every year from scores of applications

that it receives from 37 countries," Mr Kumar said. The institute also has one to 10-week crash courses for marketing executives.

When Dr Kumar is not conducting classes, he acts as a consultant to companies advising them on marketing strategy, distribution and retailing. He, however, defines his role "as that of a learning partner" with global companies which include over 20 Fortune 500 companies. To name a few — Caterpillar, Dow Chemical, Ford Motor, IBM, ICL, Motorola, Jardine Pacific.

The marketing expert has also written articles in Harvard Business Review and International Journal of Research in Marketing. At present, Dr Kumar is co-authoring a book titled "From Market Driven to Market Driving" with another marketing guru Philip Kotler.

The globe-trotter, (he has taken about 99 flights in the past four months), relaxes by listening to music and cooking. "My wife and I rustle up exotic Indian dishes at home." Dr Kumar is also fond of skiing — "From December to April I spend my leisure hours skiing," he said.