

# UN vet to head Balsillie school

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Waterloo's Balsillie School of International Affairs, the fledging organization begun last year with a grand aim to become a global academic powerhouse, has tapped a UN veteran with ties to Canada as its first leader.

Ramesh Thakur, 59, said after weighing offers from Canada and Australia, he was drawn to the new Waterloo, Ont., school because of the calibre of academics already associated with it and the chance to fashion a new organization. His past ties with the country and Waterloo scholars also played a part. "I had an urge to come back to Canada," Prof. Thakur said in an interview yesterday.

A native of India, Prof. Thakur did his graduate work at Queen's University in Kingston before moving on to top posts in New Zealand, Australia and Japan. He is the school's first director. Until last year, he was assistant secretary-general of the United Nations and the vice-rector of the United Nations University in Tokyo.

After a decade in Tokyo, Prof. Thakur said it is a welcome change to move to Canada. Since accepting an appointment at the University of Waterloo, he has lived for the past year in a small, largely Mennonite community outside of the city. "It is paradise after Tokyo," he said.

While the pace of life is more relaxed, Prof. Thakur described Waterloo as "a very exciting academic centre," in large part because of the huge amounts of funding directed to research by the two founders of BlackBerry maker Research In Motion.

"It is really putting us on the world map at a time when so many higher institutions and research institutions are facing major financial cutbacks," he said. "It is such a luxury to have really substantial fresh funds injected into new institutes."

The new school was created last year with \$50-million from provincial and local governments and RIM's co-chief executive officer Jim Balsillie. It has ties with the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and the Centre for International Governance Innovation, a think tank also established by Mr. Balsillie.

The Balsillie School is set to welcome its first group of graduate students next year and a home for the school is under construction.

Prof. Thakur said his first task is to recruit faculty to fill the dozen research chairs at the school, posts he predicts will have a special appeal to Canadian academics working outside the country.

He said more than salary dollars, he expects scholars will be attracted to the school's facilities, its research funds and research assistants and the chance to work with top people. It will have a critical mass, he predicts, that will be "important for sparking interest, sparking enthusiasm and generating excitement."