

Newspaper Clips

April 10-11, 2014

April 10

Indian Exp ND 10.4.2014 p-12



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Forget the rankings

India must focus on the quality of its higher education

THERE are very few, if any, Indian higher education institutions today that deserve to be reasonably placed in the international university rankings. The universities simply do not have the required quality of research and publication in their postgraduate departments. Undergraduate colleges, a small number of which are excellent, do not have either the size or the profile to do well. India's outstanding specialised institutions, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), are a bit too small and too specialised to compete at the top levels. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and many others have recognised the quality problems in Indian higher education and have urged the sector to improve.

Clearly, improvement needs to come first, and recognition by the rankings will follow.

Instead, there is much obsessing in India about the rankings, rather than a focus on what is really required — increased productivity and higher quality research. The latest bit of silliness is the reported proposal from the higher education secretary, Ashok Thakur, that the IITs should be counted as a single unit by the rankers rather than as separate institutions. Other proposals include providing lists of names of faculty from particular Indian universities to the QS

rankers so that they can praise their own schools when sent questionnaires — an effort to “game the system” in order to artificially boost an institution's placement — a tactic used by many schools, which may work with QS World University Rankings, but not with the Times Higher Education or the Shanghai rankings.

These efforts are symptomatic of two larger problems: placing emphasis where it does not belong and not focusing on the key challenge. India's obsession with international rankings is misplaced. In general, the rankings reflect sev-

Universities that have real research strength, this includes the IIT-IIM sector and one or two nascent private non-profit universities, are key to a presence in the rankings.

eral key things: research productivity as expressed by publications in major international journals and reputation among academics and university administrators around the world. The methodologies of the three main global rankings differ. The Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), known as the Shanghai rankings, is the most objective because it simply measures objective data such as research productivity and impact. But it is limited to research and gives an advantage to the main English-speaking universities in the United States and Britain.

Times Higher Education focuses on research but also has some measures for teaching and other university activities, and uses a reputational survey for 20 per cent of its ranking. QS, a for-profit education company based in Britain, relies most on a reputation survey; about half of the total score. The reputation components of these surveys are the most questionable in terms of validity, because of methodological and other issues. So the more reputation is counted, the less valuable the result.

The key challenge, of course, is improving the actual quality of In-

Indian higher education, particularly the research university sector. This means significant increases in funding for higher education; India does not compare favourably internationally. Neither the Central government nor the states provide adequate funding. But money is not the only thing needed.

The universities that have real research strength, and this includes a few of the traditional universities, the IIT-IIM sector, several specialised institutions, and one or two nascent private non-profit universities, are key to a presence in the rankings. More im-

portant, India urgently needs some “world class” universities that can compete globally and which can compete on equal terms with the world's top universities. This means identifying a small number of universities with the potential for research excellence and providing them with adequate resources. Research universities are only a small part of any academic system, and India must develop a rational system if it is to serve national higher education needs. Research universities sit at the top of a rational system.

It also means that the research-intensive universities must function like world class institutions — free of political interference, with appropriate governance structures, merit-based hiring and promotion arrangements, and without a stifling bureaucracy. Organising a system and an effective research university sector is not “rocket science”. The countries that score well in the rankings have done it. When India organises its higher education structure effectively and provides the support needed, it will do well in the rankings.

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JEE (Main): An analysis

About 14 lakh students wrote the JEE (Main) exam on Sunday, April 6. The top 1,50,000 students who clear the paper will qualify for the JEE (Advanced), for admission into the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). Here's a section-wise analysis of the exam.

Physics: The Physics paper was difficult as compared to last year. All options in a particular question (Code F, Q85) were wrong, which students wasted time on. Another question (Code F, Q84), demanded students to make unconventional assumptions. In two questions (Code F, Q73 and Q88), the units given in all four answer choices are wrong – unexpected from a body like the CBSE. In the question Code F, Q70, all the options have positive values, but the correct answer has a negative one.

Chemistry: The majority of the questions this year were straightforward. 12 questions were from physical, 10 from organic and eight from inorganic chemistry. About 75% of the questions were based directly on formulae or on information; two or three questions needed calculation based on unit-conversion, possibly leading to silly mistakes.

Mathematics: The mathematics section covered all sections of the syllabus and was moderately difficult but lengthy. Hence, time management played an important role. However, in one of the questions (Code H, Q33), there were no accurate answers. Students who attempted this question would have wasted precious time on this.

*Article courtesy Pravin Tyagi,
director, IITian's PACE*

HIGHER EDUCATION

IS COLLEGE WORTH IT?

Too many degrees are a waste of money. The return on higher education would be much better if college were cheaper

WHEN LaTisha Styles graduated from Kennesaw State University in Georgia in 2006 she had \$35,000 of student debt. This obligation would have been easy to discharge if her Spanish degree had helped her land a well-paid job. But there is no shortage of Spanish-speakers in a nation that borders Latin America. So Ms Styles found herself working in a clothes shop and a fast-food restaurant for no more than \$11 an hour.

Frustrated, she took the gutsy decision to go back to the same college and study something more pragmatic. She majored in finance, and now has a good job at an investment consulting firm. Her debt has swollen to \$65,000, but she will have little trouble paying it off.

As Ms Styles's story shows, there is no simple answer to the question "Is college worth it?" Some degrees pay for themselves; others don't. American schoolkids pondering whether to take on huge student loans are constantly told that college is the gateway to the middle class. The truth is more nuanced, as Barack Obama hinted when he said in January that "folks can make a lot more" by learning a trade "than they might with an art history degree". An angry art history professor forced him to apologise, but he was right.

College graduates aged 25 to 32 who are working full time earn about \$17,500 more annually than their peers who have only a high school diploma, according to the Pew Research Centre, a think-tank. But not all degrees are equally useful. And given how much they cost — a residential four-year degree can set you back as much as \$60,000 a year — many students end up worse off than if they had started working at 18.

PayScale, a research firm, has gathered data on the graduates of more than 900 universities and colleges, asking them what they studied and how much they now earn. The company then factors in the cost of a degree, after financial aid (discounts for the clever or impecunious that greatly reduce the sticker price at many universities). From this, PayScale estimates the financial returns of many different types of degree (see chart).

HARD SUBJECTS PAY OFF

UNSURPRISINGLY, engineering is a good bet wherever you study it.



Graduates cheer at New York's Barnard College. The cost of university per student in the US has risen by almost five times the rate of inflation since 1983, while graduate salaries have remained flat.

An engineering graduate from the University of California, Berkeley can expect to be nearly \$1.1m better off after 20 years than someone who never went to college. Even the least lucrative engineering courses generated a 20-year return of almost \$500,000.

Arts and humanities courses are much more varied. All doubtless nourish the soul, but not all fatten the wallet. An arts degree from a rigorous school such as Columbia or the University of California, San Diego pays off handsomely. But an arts graduate from Murray State University in Kentucky can expect to make \$147,000 less over 20 years than a high school graduate, after paying for his education. Of the 153 arts degrees in the study, 46 generated a return on investment worse than plunking the money in 20-year treasury bills. Of those, 18 offered returns worse than zero.

Colleges that score badly will no

doubt grumble that PayScale's rankings are based on relatively small numbers of graduates from each institution. Some schools are unfairly affected by the local job market — Murray State might look better if Kentucky's economy were thriving. Universities that set out to serve everyone will struggle to compete with selective institutions. And poor colleges will look worse than rich ones that offer lots of financial aid, since reducing the cost of a degree raises its return.

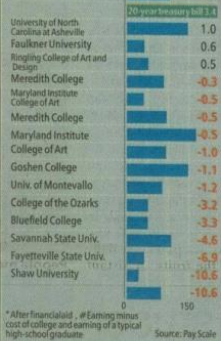
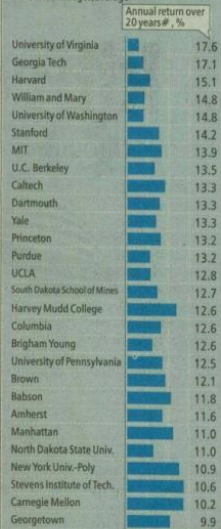
All these caveats are true. But overall, the PayScale study surely overstates the financial value of a college education. It does not compare graduates' earnings to what they would have earned, had they skipped college. (That number is unknowable.) It compares their earnings to those of people who did not go to college — many of whom did not go because they were not clever enough to get in. Thus, some of the

premium that graduates earn simply reflects the fact that they are, on average, more intelligent than non-graduates.

What is not in doubt is that the cost of university per student has risen by almost five times the rate of inflation since 1983, and graduate salaries have been flat for much of the past decade. Student debt has grown so large that it stops many young people from buying houses, starting businesses or having children. Those who borrowed for a bachelor's degree granted in 2012 owe an average of \$29,400. The Project on Student Debt, a non-profit, says that 15% of borrowers default within three years of entering repayment. At for-profit colleges the rate is 22%. Glenn Reynolds, a law professor and author of "The Higher Education Bubble", writes of graduates who "may wind up living in their parents' basements until they are old enough to collect Social Security."

The rewarding and the ruinous

Total cost of a degree*, 2013, \$'000
Selected colleges, average



* After financial aid. # Earning minus cost of college and earnings of a typical high school graduate. Source: PayScale

That is an exaggeration: students enrolling this year who service their debts will see them forgiven after 20 years. But the burden is still heavy for many. It does not help that nearly a third of those who take out such loans eventually drop out of college;

they must still repay their debts. A third transfer to different schools. Many four-year degrees drag on longer, and so cost more. Overall, the six-year graduation rate for four-year institutions is only 59%.

The lousy national job market does not help, either. A report by McKinsey, a consultancy, found that 42% of recent graduates are in jobs that require less than a four-year college education. Some 41% of graduates from the nation's top colleges could not find jobs in their chosen field; and half of all graduates said they would choose a different major or school.

Chegg, a company that provides online help to students, collaborated the study. Dan Rosensweig, its boss, says that only half of graduates feel prepared for a job in their field, and only 39% of managers feel that students are ready for the workforce. Students often cannot write clearly or organise their time sensibly. Four million jobs are unfilled because job-seekers lack the skills employers need.

GRADING THE GRADERS

FOR all their flaws, studies like PayScale's help would-be students (and their parents) make more informed choices. As Americans start to realise how much a bad choice can hurt them, they will demand more transparency. Some colleges are providing it, prodded by the federal government. For example, the University of Texas recently launched a website showing how much its graduates earn and owe after five years.

"Opportunity", said Mr Obama on April 2nd, "means making college more affordable." In time, transparency and technology will force many colleges to cut costs and raise quality. Online education will accelerate the trend. In 2012, 6.7m students were taking at least one online course. Such courses allow students to listen to fine lecturers without having to pay for luxurious dormitories or armies of college bureaucrats. They will not replace traditional colleges — face-to-face classes are still valuable — but they will force them to adapt. Those that offer poor value for money will have to shape up, or disappear.

Indian software market grew 10% in 2013

NEW DELHI: Software market in India grew 10 per cent to \$4.76 billion in 2013, driven by strong adoption of cloud or subscription-based services, research firm Gartner said.

The software market stood at \$4.334 billion in 2012. 'The Indian software industry is in the middle of a multi-year cyclical transition as organisations are focusing investments on technologies to support existing system structure,' Gartner Research Director Bhavish Sood said in a statement.

Organisations are doing this in order to maintain competitiveness, while still taking advantage of cloud/subscription-based pricing where it makes sense to grow and advance the business, he added.

Microsoft was the market leader with 20 per cent share and \$957.3 million in revenues. It saw its revenues growing 10.6 per cent from \$865.9 million



in 2012. There was a shift in vendor rankings from 2013 with Oracle ranking second in terms of total software revenue with approximately \$505 million in 2013 and capturing 7.3 per cent of the market.

'Trends around business intelligence and analytics, with increasing customer investments in database management systems, helped drive Oracle's top-line growth,' Sood said.

IBM ranked third

(\$446.6 million), followed by SAP (\$324.3 million), VMware (\$94.4 million), CA Technologies (\$52.7 million) and Adobe (\$42.5 million).

Others in the list included SAS and HP as well. Among the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) nations, the Indian software market experienced the highest growth rate.

Brazil grew at 7.8 per cent, while China regis-

Microsoft was the country's market leader with a 20% share and \$957 million in revenues. It saw its revenues growing 10.6% from \$866 million in the year 2012

tered a growth rate of 7 per cent. Russia grew at 8.9 per cent and South Africa at 6.3 per cent.

'India is growing faster than other emerging countries, which can be attributed to an export-oriented focus over the last decade. However, recent advances in IT communications infrastructure in the country has opened up new avenues for local consumption of IT software and associated services,' Sood said.

Although there is an economic slowdown,

Indian enterprises are still judiciously investing in technology that can be tied to the business objectives and impact their bottom line.

'Indian enterprises are generally more price-sensitive compared with enterprises in mature markets, but now they are spending on technology that offers a significant upside in terms of agility or productivity gains with diligent planning,' Sood said.

Besides large enterprises, the Indian market also boasts a large potential small and midsize business (SMB) segment that is playing a crucial role in changing the consumption patterns of technology.

SMBs are on the threshold of leveraging ICT, but they currently lack the scale, and in some cases experience, which is inevitable in understanding and handling technology-related issues, Gartner said. ■■

'Heartbleed bug' puts web security at risk

Virus In Protocols Used By 75% Of Servers Leaves Millions Vulnerable To Data Theft

Javed Anwer | TNN

A serious bug in security protocols used by over 75% web servers has left millions of internet users vulnerable to snooping and data theft. The bug, which was found in OpenSSL protocol has been dubbed Heartbleed because of how it allows "bleeding of data" from a web server.

Cyber criminals and hackers can exploit the bug to steal information such as private encryption keys, passwords of users, credit card details that users provide during e-commerce transactions and virtually every other piece of data transmitting on the affected website. They can also capture user data like chat logs for snooping.

The risk to private encryption keys is particularly worrisome. "These are the crown jewels... Leaked (private) secret keys allow the attacker to decrypt any past and future traffic to the protected services and to impersonate the service (like a social networking website or an

LURKING DANGER

WHAT IS HEARTBLEED?

It is a two-year-old security bug in OpenSSL protocols used by over 70% websites. It is called Heartbleed because it leads to 'bleeding of data' from affected servers

WHAT IS OPENSLL?

OpenSSL is a security protocol built using SSL/TLS encryption. Any website that has "https" or a small green lock ahead of its name uses SSL/TLS encryption. For example when you type your login name and password on your bank's website and hit enter, it uses a secure channel to transfer your details to the website server. This channel is encrypted by SSL/TLS. OpenSSL is one of the most popular and widely used implementation of SSL/TLS

HOW HEARTBLEED AFFECTS YOU

If the website that you use has been exploited by cyber criminals using Heartbleed, your private data is at risk. In case of a banking website, it could be card and account details. In case of email website, your user name and password is at risk. In case of chat service, your chat logs are vulnerable

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT

Web servers have to be patched or updated to fix Heartbleed. This is something website administrators will have to do. But as a user you can ask your bank, email provider, web administrator whether their service is affected by the bug or not. Also, if you can change your passwords on various websites, do that



email service) at will," OpenSSL explained a website set up to inform public about Heartbleed.

While large companies like Google and Facebook, which run their own customized security protocols, are probably safe, Yahoo was among the millions of websites that seem to have been affected. Yahoo officials on Tuesday said that they have taken required measures to secure Yahoo servers against Heartbleed.

The bug is so serious and widespread that Tor Project, which manages the anonymous (and popular) Tor network, has advised web users to go offline for a while. "If you need strong anonymity or privacy on the internet, you might want to stay away from the internet entirely for the next few days while things settle," it said in a blog post.

Bruce Schneier, a cryptographer and one of the top computer security researchers, called the bug catastrophic. "On the scale of 1 to 10, this is an 11," he said.

Though Heartbleed was discovered on April 7, it had existed for more than two years. "This

bug has left large amount of private keys and other secrets exposed to the internet. Considering the long exposure, ease of exploitation and attacks leaving no trace this exposure should be taken seriously," explained the Heartbleed website.

After the bug was disclosed publicly, thousands of websites have patched and updated their web servers. But given the nature of the bug, large parts of the internet remain vulnerable.

While Heartbleed directly affects web servers, the average web user invariably ends up a victim. In an answer to a question — Am I affected by the bug? — the OpenSSL website notes, "you are likely to be affected either directly or indirectly". "Your popular social site, your company's site, commerce site, hobby site, site you install software from or even sites run by your government might be using vulnerable OpenSSL. Many of online services use TLS to both to identify themselves to you and to protect your privacy and transactions," notes the website.

The Emergent Course of Economics in IITs

By [The CoolAge Reporter](#)

From [Buzz@Bangalore, Bangalore](#)

<http://www.coolage.in/2014/04/10/the-emergent-course-of-economics-in-iits/>

Posted Apr 10th 2014 12:50AM

Under the name of a prestigious technical institute there lies a department which sounds totally outlandish. The department of HSS offers many courses including its only major course for the undergraduate students, Integrated MSc.in Economics.

It is hard to find any connection between 'MSc.', 'Economics' and 'IIT' by the 'aam junta' but the [IIT Kharagpur](#) and [IIT Kanpur](#) authorities made it possible in 2005 by introducing such a course that was inspired by the corporate demand. Later it was changed to a 4 year BS course at IIT Kanpur. The subject with a huge scope in itself is made more venerable with the IIT tag. MSc. Economics is an interdisciplinary course having Mathematics and Industrial Engineering and management departments as its sisters. Further value addition is the responsibility of the Vinod Gupta School of Management located within the campus. Hence the course structure includes the core economics along with many technical, statistical and computational subjects.

Ultimately an Economist nurtured in [technical environment](#) is produced in 5 years. Also in terms of placements the Economics students have gained a respectable position in just 4 years. In fact the placement status of Economics is far better than many other engineering departments. This year a 100 percent placement was witnessed by this department.

Even though economics is outracing many other engineering streams, it is singled out by the top rankers in [JEE](#). The 45 students of this department spend their outside campus life explaining to others the existence and relevance of this branch. It proves out to be a very difficult task to convince the sceptical friends of their parents. But fortunately people have started knowing about this department and the closing rank is up shooting year after year. The time is close when Economics will become an integral part of all the IITs.

IITians drive new poli-technique

Vimal Chander Joshi, TNN | Apr 10, 2014, 02:08 AM IST

GURGAON: A bunch of IIT graduates working in Gurgaon is quietly running the engines behind high-octane election campaigns, offering consulting services to politicians to help them stand apart in their bid to win a Lok Sabha seat.

"I am currently working for some candidates in Haryana and other states; helping them assess the public mood in their respective constituencies through research carried out by our survey teams who are politically neutral," says Saurabh Vyas, a 34-year-old aeronautical engineering graduate from IIT Bombay who worked with an analytics firm before becoming a consultant in 2005.

Driven by mathematical models and backed by research, this growing tribe of political consultants is making hay out of the general elections in Gurgaon, a city which gives these professionals easy access to politicians both in Delhi and Haryana. "As the candidates remain busy most of the time during campaigning, they fail to gauge the public mood. We can't tell a client he is losing to his rival in a particular constituency. Instead, we offer him solutions to race ahead of his next rival in areas where he is found weak," Vyas adds.

City-based consultants are not only helping local politicians but also those in other states. Lalu Prasad Yadav's daughter Misa, has recently hired two IIT graduates to manage her campaign and reach voters through the social media. One of them, Pankaj Sudan, works in Gurgaon while the other, Perween Tyagi, runs his own company in Delhi, according to agency reports.

Gaurav Rathore, an IIT Bombay graduate and a consultant, finds his job both interesting and challenging, particularly when he has to advise a politician to change parties after a long association with one outfit. "We have to factor in all parameters before advising on such a crucial moves. But as everything is based on accurate data and analytics, the advice does not go wrong," he says.

Depending on scale of work, the consultant can charge anywhere between Rs 50,000 to a few lakhs of rupees.

NIT Director's house bombed

Source: Hueiyen News Service

<http://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=35..080414.apr14>

Imphal, April 07 2014: A hand grenade exploded at the residence of Director of National Institute of Technology (NIT)-Manipur Dr Sarangthem Birendra (57) of Nambol Bazar in Bishnupur district at around 11 pm yesterday.

However, there was no casualty except for some damage to his house.

The police also recovered another bomb from near the residence of Dr Birendra.

Meanwhile, the students and employees of NIT-Manipur staged a sit-in at the Institute's premises at Takyelpat here today decrying the bomb attack at the residence of Director Dr Birendra.

The womenfolk of Nambol also staged a sit-in-protest at Nambol Bazar today in connection with the bomb attack.

After 100 million users in India, Facebook aims at 1 billion

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-04-09/news/49000101_1_javier-olivan-mobile-users-one-billion-users

NEW DELHI: Facebook, the world's largest social media company, has crossed 100 million active users in India — the second country, after the United States, in which it has done so. And it already has a new figure in mind for India: one billion users. Confirming the crossing of the "landmark" of 100 million on March 31, Javier Olivan, the company official in charge of global growth, told ET: "Now, we look forward to 1 billion in India — that's a different focus and challenge."

Suicide cure: Lights out hour at IIT-KGP

Mou Chakraborty

■ Mou.chakraborty@hindustantimes.com

KOLKATA: Laptops and mobile phones — the closest companions of Generation Y — are also the biggest causes of their alienation from the real world, feel the authorities at IIT-Kharagpur.

Following two suicides on the campus in close succession, the institute has decided to cut off power supply on the campus for four consecutive evenings, so that students may leave their gadgets behind and spend time with each other.

A 'Reach-Out Week', beginning on April 9 at IIT-Kharagpur,



will have routine power cuts on the entire campus till the evening of April 12. During this time, the students will come out of their hostel rooms and communicate with their peers.

"Our main objective is to ensure that every student has enough interaction with the others in a

way that everyone is intertwined in a chain and everyone gets to know of, and discuss, each other's problems and perspectives in life," professor PP Chakraborty, director, IIT-Kharagpur, said. "We were planning to do this from July, but have brought the dates forward after the two back-to-back inci-

dents of students' suicide on the campus," he added.

The authorities feel that depression out of staying aloof is one of the prime reasons that pushes bright students towards this extreme step and increasing camaraderie among the students is the only way out. "These days, students are always on Facebook and Twitter. Social networking sites are not bad, and often give them learning experience, but many get addicted and can't come out of it. They need to strike a balance between virtual existence and real life. They need to interact with friends face to face.

CONTINUED ON P5

'Homeopathy pills as effective as painkillers'

Malathy Iyer | TNN

Mumbai: The tiny, white homeopathic pills could be as effective as allopathic painkillers, according to new research by the city's premier research institute. The study was carried out by researchers at the Institute of Chemical Technology, formerly called the University Department of Chemical Technology, along with homeopathic specialist Rajesh Shah.

Homeopathy has in recent years been termed "witchcraft" or alleged to merely have a placebo effect by western experts. "Homeopathy, at 220 years, is the youngest form of medicine and looked at with scepticism. I took up the study to show that our science is impeccable," said Shah. He got the idea after IIT, Bombay, showed in 2010 that homeopathy uses nanotechnology to deliver results. "The IIT study showed how our science works. I wanted to prove that it works well."

Associate professor Sadhana Sathaye from ICT conducted the study on rats. "The rats were divided into four groups.

In a study carried out on arthritic rats by Mumbai's Institute of Chemical Technology and Dr Rajesh Shah, homeopathic medicines were found to be as effective as painkillers by day 7 of the experiment

The first group hadn't been biologically engineered to suffer from arthritis like the rest," she said. The second was given water as a placebo, while the third was given homeopathic medicines. "The last group was given diclofenac, a painkiller which is widely used to treat inflammation of tissues in arthritic patients," she said.

The allopathic medicines reduced the pain quickly, but by the seventh day, the homeopathic pills were as effective, she said.

"By day 14, the homeopathic medicines seemed more effective," said Shah.