Newspaper Clips

February 16, 2012

DNA Ahmedabad
15.02.2012 P-11

IIT students unhappy with exam pattern

New Delhi: The students of IIT Delhi are against the new format of entrance examination that replaces IIT-JEEs from 2013. A new common aptitude test-cum-advanced knowledge test will replace the IIT-JEE and All India Engineering Entrance Examination (AIEEE). The test scores will have 60% weight in deciding admissions while the school board marks will get 40% weightage.

Dainik Jagran ND 16/02/2012 P-9

दिल्ली आइआइटी छात्र को मिली जमानत

कानपुर, जासं : दिल्ली आइआइटी के छात्र के लिए बुधवार का दिन राहत भरा रहा। विशेष न्यायाधीश अरूण प्रकाश ने जमानत अर्जी पर सुनवाई करते हुए छात्र को रिहा करने का आदेश जारी किया। साथ ही गिरफ्तारी पर स्टे होने के बावजूद छात्र की गिरफ्तारी होने के मामले में डीआइजी से 17 फरवरी तक रिपोर्ट मांगी गई है। दिल्ली आइआइटी के छात्र सुरेंद्र भोकाया को कानपुर आइआइटी की एक छात्रा द्वारा अपहरण की रिपोर्ट लिखाने पर कल्याणपुर पुलिस ने आठ फरवरी को गिरफ्तार किया था। दूसरे दिन पुलिस ने उसे जेल भेज दिया। इस मामले में छात्र के अधिवक्ता शिवाकांत दीक्षित ने सोमवार को अदालत में जमानत के लिए अर्जी दी। मंगलवार को जमानत पर बहस हुई। इस मामले में अदालत ने बुधवार को फैसला सुनाते हुए छात्र को 20-20 हजार रुपये के दो बधपत्र दाखिल करने पर रिहा करने के आदेश दे दिये है।

Sunday Standard 12 Feb 2012 p-8

Is Kapil Sibal Trying to Infuse a Hidden Agenda into Academics?

OPINION | J S RAJPUT

Rajput is a former director of the NCERT

Union HRD Minister Kapil Sibal has stated things very clearly for the benefit of all: his reforms are being torpedoed by 'uncooperative Opposition'. Why else 13 of his reform bills remain pending? Further, the Centre has already done all that it was required to do in respect of the Right to Education (RTE) Act. It is for the state governments to ensure its implementation, to see that teachers are appointed in time, that they are regular and punctual, are well-trained, schools are well equipped, and all that. It all looks so technically correct. It's another matter that the minister is keen to centralise practically everything that matters in education, including regulation of institutions, appointment of state university vice-chancellors, and much more. Now he wants a National Textbook Council (NTC), totally ignoring that it's against the basics of federalism, and smells of total lack of faith in state governments, and is an uncalled for intrusion in their authority. Everyone understands that the strength of functional federal structure of the Union depends on the level of mutual trust and transparency that exists between state and Centre.

The post-May 2009 MHRD has left no one in doubt that reforms would follow swiftly, if only when existing institutions are demolished and more and more new ones are created. Among many, the idea to have a NTC clearly establishes that the political class in power thinks only of remaining in power and to ensure its future continuity, prepare generations of those who 'think alike'. They never succeed but they never give up. Recall what Timothy B Tyson wrote: "It appeared clear to me—partly because of the lies that filled my history textbooks—that the intent of formal education was to inculcate obedience to a social order that did not deserve my loyalty. Defiance seemed the only dignified response to the adult world." Our politicians are ready to go to any extent to ensure adherence to their own ideological order. Their priorities always remain election-oriented and have invariably led to convoluted priorities, resulting in lethargic implementation of essentials like RTE Act.

PTI PHOTO

If it were not so, why should the Central government think of creating another structure for textbooks when it already has had one, that celebrated its 50 years in 2011, presided over by the minister himself? Is he not aware that the nation has already invested huge financial and academic resources in creating the national level organisation particularly for this task? The NCERT was created in 1961 when Central leaders were respectful to the spirit of the Constitution of India, had full faith in state governments, and were keen never to look partisan or lose the trust of state governments.

The NCERT was created to advise and assist the Union and state governments in all matters of school education and teacher education. Its textbooks have received appreciation nationally and internationally. It was also expected to revise curricula and textbooks in accordance with the changing times, incorporate new methodology and pedagogy, and ensure that apart from meeting national needs, global changes are also analysed and appropriately incorporated. It is a huge mandate, and the NCERT has lived up to the expectations. It has trained and prepared textbook writers, textbook evaluators, and has also contributed immensely in attempts to reform evaluation systems. Its role has remained advisory, state bodies are free to prepare their own books, bring in local elements of the curriculum, prepare and create a pool of its own expertise. It is the right of the state governments, and no state government ever accused the NCERT of twisting its arms. Suddenly, after Sibal, the task of preparing 'national level textbooks was given to a non-descript nonfunctional body COBSE—Council of the Boards of School Education—which has no expertise of its own. COBSE functions like sports bodies of India, in which one single individual continues to control the organisation for ages. Shocked academics protested: if the government of India created the NCERT, why was its role and responsibility being snatched away? It had not much impact, and the NCERT has yet to regain its unique role and responsibility entrusted to it by the nation for five decades. Because of the COBSE intrusion, even CBSE has plunged itself into textbook preparation, for which the expertise at the national level exists next-door in the NCERT. Why this duplication and triplication? Is it an effort to infuse the well-known hidden agenda?

Textbooks must remain under full control of state governments to ensure symphony of the content with constitutional values. Simply because the Union HRD minister does not like some state governments, existing arrangements should not be demolished and the Central government allowed to apportion authority to interfere.

The opinions expressed in this column are the author's own

Indian Express Pune 15.02.2012 P-3

A daycare centre for kids of construction workers at IIT-B

Temporary centre initiated after 3-year-old child died accidentally on campus

MIHIKA BASU

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 14

THE recent accidental death of three-year-old Aman, the son of construction workers at the IIT Bombay campus, highlighted the urgent need of a day care centre for children near the construction sites. Subsequently, a group of students along with some faculty members decided to address the issue and set up a temporary care centre for children of workers on campus.

The centre, named after Aman, started its operations last week from a temporary location and a permanent one is underway. "The day care centre for children of construction workers has started functioning temporarily from the lakeside community hall," said N Venkataramani, professor and dean of infrastructure planning and support at IIT Bombay.

Aman, said sources, usually accompanied his parents to work. Sources said the incident occurred in the first week of January, when Aman accompanied his mother to work on the fifth floor of the new biomedical school and fell from an open window while playing. Though he was immediately taken to a hospital, he sucumbbed to his injuries.

"At present, there are several construction sites on campus and as many as 50 children of construction workers live here. Construction companies are contractually obligated to provide a day care centre if there are more than 50 female labourers employed with them. With the unsafe working conditions prevalent at construction sites, children who play here are highly susceptible to infection, wounds, dust allergies, suffocation; they are also prone to the risk of accidentally swallowing dangerous objects," according to Insight, the student-body newsletter which has also highlighted this incident in their recent issue.

"A day care centre not only safeguards the interests and security of children but also empowers women. It enables them to participate in economic activities and retain their independence," says the newsletter.

The death of the child was followed by a signature campaign and preparation of a proposal to start a care centre for children on campus.

The proposal was submitted by "team Aman-keliye-IIT-B (team for Aman)" to institute director Devang Khakhar, who gave his approval and allowed the lakeside community hall to be used as a temporary location. It is currently being run by Mumbai Mobile Creche, an NGO.

"The contractor is supposed to provide a day care centre, but in this case, no such facility was being provided. The institute has now decided to set up a day care centre and take contributions from the contractor to run it on the campus. IIT Bombay is looking at providing basic facilities to the workers," said an official, requesting anonymity.

The newsletter further says that while the temporary centre is a major "milestone", the Aman team will continue to pursue the matter till a "permanent structure" for the centre is set up on campus.

Economic Times ND
16/02/2012 P-1

TIE-UP COMES AFTER ONE YEAR OF TALKS

Yunus, IIM-A set to Float ₹50-cr Fund to Seed Social Biz

AHONA GHOSH
MUMBAI

Professor Muhammad Yunus, the father of microfinance and chairman of the Yunus Centre in Bangladesh, has finally found a taker for his brand of social businesses in India. He is joining hands with the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A) to float a ₹50-crore fund to seed social ventures.

He will help raise the corpus and mentor social entrepreneurs. "I am in talks with several industrialists (in India)," Yunus said. He met some of Mumbai's biggest industrialists during his visit to the city this week.

For the uninitiated, Yunus defines a social business as one that pays no dividend to shareholders, but ploughs all profits back into the company whose purpose is to serve social needs. "It's a new class of non-dividend business done in a serious way to solve social problems," he said.

Yunus has pioneered many such social businesses, including a JV with Danone that sells fortified yoghurt to poor children for 6 Bangladeshi Taka; Veolia that sells clean water to 100,000 people across five villages for 1 taka (for 5 litres);

NITIN SONAWANE

It's a new class of non-dividend business done in a serious way to solve social problems
PROF MUHAMMAD YUNUS

and a third JV with chemicals multinational BASF that sells long-lasting insecticidal nets and multi-micronutrient sachets to the poor.

His alliance with IIM-A fructified after one year of discussions with its Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship (CIIE).

Strong Mentoring Network ▸▸ 25

CIIE, Yunus to Create Strong Mentoring Network

▸▸ From Page 1

We are exploring a collaboration with Yunus to build a stronger ecosystem to support fledgling entrepreneurs who are creating innovative solutions in the social sector," Rakesh Basant, chairperson of CIIE and professor of economics at IIM-A, said.

The CIIE has been involved in incubating early-stage enterprises across the healthcare, education and livelihood space. They will collaborate with the Mumbai-based arm of Grameen Creative Lab (GCL).

GCL, which seeds social businesses, is a joint venture between the Yunus Centre and circ-responsibility, a consulting company in Germany.

The CIIE and Yunus will collaborate to create a strong mentoring network, an incubation program to be designed by GCL to help entrepreneurs identify and build viable social business options.

The CIIE's initial idea was to raise a Rs 5-10 crore fund, Basant said. But Yunus raised the bar with the proposal for a Rs 50-crore fund. "Fundraising has not started yet and we don't yet know how much we will be able to raise," he added.

This is the Nobel Laureate's second visit to India in the past 26 months. He has been building the case for Indian industrialists to start social enterprises that do not return profits to shareholders. None has responded yet. Hence, the plan for a Rs 50-crore fund. Yunus hopes to raise the corpus from Indian corporate and philanthropic foundations.

"Rich industrialists in India prefer charity than investing in business without any return expectations," says Vineet Rai, founder and CEO of Aavishkaar, which invests in social impact enterprises with a profit motive. India as a country has only now started discovering the risk-reward paradigm and it will be a few more years before the Yunus model will find takers, he said.

Anu Aga, director on the board of Thermax, a $1-billion engineering solutions company, who met the professor in Mumbai last Sunday, is intrigued by the model but is not yet ready to try it out.

There are some exceptions, though. Recently, Piramal Group Chairman Ajay Piramal and Dr Reddy's Laboratories Founder K Anji Reddy independently started working on social businesses similar to the Yunus model. Reddy's project provides villagers with pure drinking water. Piramal has a low-cost healthcare delivery model and a rural BPO. Both do not expect returns, but plough profits back to scale up the businesses.

Yunus' personal journey in this sector has been long, and controversial in the recent past. On April 2011, Bangladesh's highest court dismissed Yunus as managing director of Grameen Bank, the path-breaking microfinance institution he founded. But Yunus is undeterred and has set up three international joint ventures and about eight social business enterprises over the last five years.

Times of India ND 16/02/2012 P-19

Space janitor: Satellite to get rid of orbiting debris

Switzerland Plans Launch Of $11M Craft In 3 Years

Geneva: The tidy Swiss want to clean up space.

Swiss scientists said on Wednesday they plan to launch a "janitor satellite" specially designed to get rid of orbiting debris known as space junk.

The $11-million satellite called CleanSpace One — the prototype for a family of such satellites — is being built by the Swiss Space Center at the Swiss Federal Institute for Technology in Lausanne (EPFL).

EPFL said on Wednesday its launch would come within three to five years and its first tasks are to grab two Swiss satellites launched in 2009 and 2010.

The US space agency Nasa says over 500,000 pieces of spent rocket stages, broken satellites and other debris are being tracked as they orbit Earth.

The debris travels at speeds approaching 28,000 kmph, fast enough to destroy or inflict costly and time-draining damage on a satellite or spacecraft. Collisions, in turn, generate more fragments floating in space. "It has become essential to be aware of the existence of this debris and the risks that are run by its proliferation," said Claude Nicollier, an astronaut and EPFL professor.

MISSION CLEAN-UP

Building the satellite means developing new technology to address three big problems, scientists say.

The first hurdle has to do with trajectory: The satellite has to be able to adjust its path to match that of its target.

Next, the satellite has to grab hold of and stabilize the debris at high speeds. And, finally, CleanSpace One has to be able to take the debris, or unwanted satellites, back into Earth's atmosphere, where they will burn on re-entry. AP

Hindu ND 16/02/2012 P-15

Are there more potentially inhabitable planets?

Astronomers have recently announced that a rocky planet named GJ667Cc, outside our solar system, is potentially inhabitable. It has water, a similar surface temperature as our earth, and absorbs about as much incoming light and energy as our earth does.

Chances are that it could support some form of life. To date, it is the fourth such potentially inhabitable planet, all of them outside our solar system.

Extrapolation

What is "habitable"? What are the criteria of habitability? In defining them, we go by what we know, and extrapolate from there.

And our Mother Earth serves as the model or guide. A planet, then, should have adequate water, energy sources, and conditions that would allow the assembly of complex organic molecules.

Stars are not habitable. The temperature and other conditions are too severe for any stable chemistry to occur. Hence planets are the more likely hosts for life. And in this, Earth is an excellent example. What all does it have?

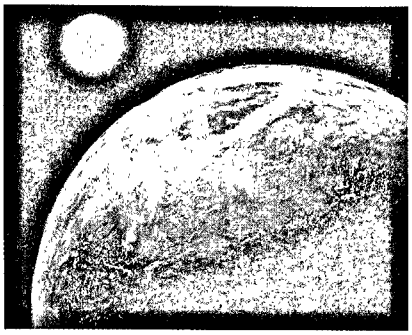
First, it is in the right place, orbiting the sun. The latter is a relatively stable source of energy for us; no major fluctuations or flares in heat, light or other types of radiation which can roast and burn off any life forms on planet earth.

In other words, our sun is a benign star, which offers the right type of energy for us. In looking for other potentially inhabitable planets, we need to look at where they are with respect to their suns.

Planet's weight matters

Next is weight. The planet cannot be too heavy nor too light; too heavy means too far from its sun and thus less energy. Also its atmosphere will be too thick; gravity will keep it too bound to the planet, making the surface too cold. Too light a planet is not that good either — not enough (if at all) an atmosphere not only will it be too cold but it will also be vulnerable for assault by meteors and high energy radiation.

Our Earth is just the right size. Not only is it able to hold a proper shield as its atmosphere, but its internal 'core' is also large enough to contain heavy metals, molten and providing a burning heat engine. This allows for geology to operate, providing plate tectonics, and an appropriate crust on the surface nourished by volcanic eruptions from the core. This churning has provided us on earth to have abundant amounts of crucial elements C, H, O, N, and P, and conditions suitable for life chemistry. Metals such as iron in the core make the orbiting earth a spinning magnet, protecting us from harmful cosmic radiation.



A CRITERION: *In looking for other potentially inhabitable planets, we need to look at where they are with respect to their suns.* – PHOTO: REUTERS

SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

Its size is right for orbiting the sun in a manner that we have a proper day-night cycle. Too long a cycle or too short would mean the temperature difference between day and night is either too long or too short.

And the orbit is better when it is circular and not too elliptical; if the eccentricity is too much, the day-night temperature differential could be too much to bear for the life forms on the planet. Mother earth is just a bit eccentric (just 0.02), not like many other extra-solar planets which are too eccentric to become hospitable.

Planets are spinning masses, and several of them tilt a bit around their spinning axis (just as a top does). It is this tilt that provides seasons.

Too little a tilt, there will be no seasons and too large a tilt, the seasons will be too extreme.

Neither is good for life forms to evolve and stabilize into a proper biosphere. Our Earth is just so tilted that it has allowed life forms to evolve and stabilize. Our moon too plays a role in stabilizing this tilt. An inhabitable planet should thus be expected to be of the right size, right eccentricity and right tilt.

A habitable planet should also be long-lived. Life of the type we know on earth has taken billions of years to evolve from the simple single-cell amoeba (3 billion years old) to us.

It is these combined properties of Mother Earth that has made her habitable. Thus in looking for other habitable planets, astronomers look for planets with similar properties. Mars, Venus, Saturn or Jupiter do not fit the bill.

No trace on Mars

Mars does (or did) have water and some chosen regions which might allow some life chemistry to happen, but so far there has been no indication of it. Going outside our solar system, GJ667Cc appears to be likely habitable.

How many more can be there? And will they support (have been supporting) not just amoebae but civilizations? Is there any such extraterrestrial intelligent life?

NASA had put together a program called Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence or SETI. Dr. Frank Drake had speculated that, in principle, there might be as many as 10 such. Others have brought that down to 2.3.

If there are, what do we tell them?

Even if there are only two other civilizations, how do we communicate with them, and in what language? Some have suggested sending signals of waves that are 21 centimeters in length, since that appears to be a universal radiation. If we can pulse it into an appropriate rhythm, perhaps some ETI would to know we are here.

But I like what the biologist Lewis Thomas wrote in his "Lives of a Cell". He says" "I would go for Johann Sebastian Bach, all of Bach, streamed out into space over and over again. We would be bragging of course but we can tell the harder truths later". I agree; a prosaic 21 cm radiation does not hold a candle to Bach (or Thyagaraja or Khusro). And we want them to know we are a civilization, after all!

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Parliamentary committee rejects RTI-immunised nuclear safety bill

ht SPECIAL

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NEW DELHI: The Nuclear Safety Regulatory Authority (NSRA) Bill, which the government had sought to immunise against the Right to Information Act, has got the thumbs down from a Parliamentary standing committee.

The Atomic Energy Department had introduced the NSRA Bill — aimed at setting up an independent nuclear safety watchdog — in Parliament last year with specific clauses limiting the applicability of the RTI Act, the government's first such move.

The bill proposed to incorporate additional proviso in section 8 (listing exempted clauses) of the RTI Act, prohibiting disclosure of information compromising the confidentiality of commercially sensitive information of technology holders. This would mean that no information related to nuclear safety would be disclosed.

The bill also sought to keep existing nuclear organisations outside the purview of the RTI Act by including them in the second schedule of the Act in the name of the country's defence and nuclear interests. Intelligence and investigating agencies such as the Central Bureau of Investigation are already listed in the schedule.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology which discussed the bill, felt that these clauses would restrict people's right to information.

"Such provisions do not augur well for a democracy," said a standing committee member who did not wish to be named as the report is yet to be tabled in Parliament. The report, finalised this week, would be introduced in the budget session starting from the second week of March.

Venkatesh Nayak, co-convener of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI), said the bill exempts people-centric information related to nuclear safety under the blanket phrase "sensitive information". He also wondered why the government was incorporating additional clauses related to exemption in the NSRA Bill when such provisions were part of the RTI Act.

IN THE BILL

- The bill proposed to incorporate proviso in section 8 (listing exempted clauses) of the RTI Act, prohibiting disclosure of information compromising the confidentiality of commercially sensitive information of technology holders
- This would mean that no information related to nuclear safety would be disclosed
- The bill also sought to keep existing nuclear organisations outside the purview of the RTI Act by including them in the second schedule of the Act

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Press Trust of India letters@hindustantimes.com

Science behind ponytail unravelled

LONDON: Physicists claim to have developed a simple equation that explains and predicts the shape of a ponytail, a finding they say could help scientists better understand natural materials such as wool and fur.

The new equation, the researchers said, also takes into account the stiffness of hair, the effects of gravity and the presence of random curliness or waviness.

The work, published in Physical Review Letters journal, could help scientists better understand natural materials, such as wool and fur. "It's a remarkably simple equation," Dr Raymond Goldstein of Cambridge University was quoted as saying by the BBC News.

According to the physicist, their findings showed how physics could be used to "solve a problem that has puzzled scientists and artists ever since Leonardo da Vinci remarked on the fluid-like streamlines of hair in his notebooks 500 years ago".

Prof Goldstein worked on the equation with Prof Robin Ball from the University of Warwick and Patrick Warren, from Unilever's Research and Development Centre.

The "Ponytail Shape Equation", they said, represents the first scientific understanding of the distribution of hair in a ponytail.

It provides new understanding of how a bundle is swelled by the outward pressure which arises from collisions between the component hair. Together with a new mathematical quantity known as the Rapunzel Number, the equation can be used to predict the shape of any ponytail, they explained.