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IIT Ropar selects teachers from foreign universities, signs deals

<http://paper.hindustantimes.com/epaper/viewer.aspx>

RUPNAGAR: Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ropar, conducted an offshore recruitment of faculty and signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with foreign varsities for research collaboration. A team of delegates headed by IIT Ropar director Prof Sarit Kumar Das travelled to United Kingdom, Canada and United States recently to select the best faculty for electrical engineering, computer science engineering, mechanical engineering and civil engineering from amongst the Indian diaspora “to further improve the educational quality the institute”. Out of 14 candidates screened for electrical engineering, computer science engineering and mechanical engineering, six candidates were selected, two were recommended for final evaluation and two more probable candidates were identified. The team also signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) for faculty and student exchange programmes with Cardiff University, United Kingdom; University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Canada and State University of NY, Binghamton, US, to establish research collaboration joint projects on areas like biomedical engineering, energy, agriculture and manufacturing. The team visited Cambridge University, McMasters University, Perdue University, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to initiate a dialogue on research. “The purpose of the visit was to attract meritorious faculty, to reach out to Indian diaspora seeking support for the growth of IIT Ropar and to forge research collaboration with reputed universities. On all counts, the visit was extremely successful,” said director Prof Sarit Kumar Das.

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आईआईटी मुंबई के दीक्षांत समारोह में छाएगी खादी

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नई दिल्ली। उच्च शिक्षण संस्थानों में खादी की लोकप्रियता बढ़ती जा रही है। गुजरात विश्वविद्यालय के बाद अब खादी देश के अब्बल भारतीय प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थान (आईआईटी) मुंबई में आयोजित होने वाले दीक्षांत समारोह की शोभा बढ़ाने जा रही है। आईआईटी मुंबई के छात्र दीक्षांत समारोह में खादी की पोशाक पहनेंगे। इस बात की पुष्टि खादी बोर्ड ने की है।

खादी बोर्ड के मुताबिक, आईआईटी मुंबई के दीक्षांत समारोह के दौरान छात्रों द्वारा पहने जाने के लिए 3,500 खादी की पोशाक बनाने को कहा गया है। खादी बोर्ड के सीईओ, अरुण कुमार ने बताया कि प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी द्वारा मन की बात में खादी को अपनाने की अपील के बाद लोगों के बीच खादी

- 3,500 खादी पोशाक बनाने का दिया गया ऑर्डर
- मोदी की खादी जैकेट की बढ़ रही लोकप्रियता, नहीं हो पा रही मांग के मुताबिक आपूर्ति

की लोकप्रियता लगातार बढ़ती जा रही है। आईआईटी मुंबई ने खादी की पोशाक बनाने का ऑर्डर दिया है और हमें उम्मीद है कि आने वाले समय में देश के अन्य आईआईटी संस्थान भी अपने-अपने दीक्षांत समारोह में खादी की पोशाक पहनने की प्रथा को अपना सकते हैं। उन्होंने बताया कि प्रधानमंत्री मोदी की खादी जैकेट की लोकप्रियता इतनी बढ़ चुकी है कि खादी स्टोर की मांग के मुताबिक मोदी जैकेट की आपूर्ति नहीं हो पा रही है। प्रधानमंत्री के सफर वाले विमान में सभी वस्त्र आइटम खादी में बनाने का फैसला किया गया था।

CUTTING IT SHORT

THE HRD MINISTRY IS TOO IMPORTANT A FIELD TO BE LEFT WITH NOVICES

History is ruthless and when the “her” figures in there’s reason to go back two years when Smriti Z Irani, a higher secondary passout with a soap entertainer background, was gifted a cabinet rank she could never have hoped for otherwise even as higher education experts and political observers were at their wits’ end trying to decipher the Narendra Modi ministry-making exercise.

Initially the general thought was that this would buy the Prime Minister some time to subdue as also persuade Murlidhar Joshi to head the department but what resulted led to questions about whether Irani was being used as a proxy, a stop-gap arrangement till a political heavyweight agreed to step in. Guesswork and political speculation apart, one thing was certain – astute politician as he comes across as being, Modi had to be answerable for all those whimsical decisions that were translated into making mountains of molehills.

With series of decision-making blunders in tow, on 5 July he made the required amendment in his ministry — nearly two years late — and removed Irani from the Union ministry of human resource development, replacing her with Prakash Javadekar, elevated to Cabinet rank. And however poor the comparison to Joshi, the hope is that Javadekar won’t push the future of the country from the frying pan to the fire.



Prakash Javadekar

It’s no secret that for the last two years the HRD ministry has been the Achilles’ heel of the Modi government, with Irani triggering one controversy after another to plunge the state of higher education into desperate times. That said, Modi’s decision to give it a go with Javadekar is indicative of his lack of understanding of the importance of education in the country and forget the portfolio. According to a PTI report that quotes a UGC member as having said, “Being a state chief minister for years he (Modi) mistook the HRD ministry for a state education department where the minister has little to do because the state universities are under the control of the chancellor”. The situation has been bad for over six years now. The 14th Parliament did pass some bills that the ruling Congress thought would reform the higher education system, but the cumulative result has been far from satisfac-

tory. In retrospective, it is sensible to say it was Joshi’s term in the ministry that managed some concrete groundwork in the education sector. His decisions were mature, pragmatic, apolitical and definitely lasting.

Arjun Singh, in the UPA 1 government, brought in a lot of complexities – the deemed university mess, Muslims’ appeasement, Other Backward Caste reservation, etc — that eventually boomeranged on him. Kapil Sibal, who inherited the legacy in UPA 2, had to bear the brunt of Singh’s political game plan. Then the Spectrum scam precipitated a cabinet reshuffle that brought in MM Pallam Raju, a “poor player”, leading to a dead end in the ministry.

Looking back on the early days of the UPA 2, an enthusiastic Sibal announced a 100-day agenda in June 2009, promising to fast-track radical reforms in higher education, including a law to check and punish “malpractices” in higher education institutions.

He also proposed setting up an overarching authority for higher education and research. His ministry formulated over a dozen bills, most of them aimed at bringing greater transparency and accountability to the education sector. Five years after, most of the plans still remain a far-fetched dream.

Then came Raju. Defining the broad contours of his policy at the 60th meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education in Delhi on 8 November 2012, he promised to toe the legacy line. However, within days it was obvious that the Sibal days were over. He left with 13 bills stranded in Parliament – and poor Raju couldn’t muster enough political backup to see them through. Helpless as he was, Raju instead found solace in Telengana politicking, leaving the ministry to its secretary Ashok Thakur. The only bill Congress bigshots were interested in was the one to squeeze through to set up a Central university for women in Rae Bareilly, the constituency of Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

The riddle of another important bill to regulate the entry and operation of foreign institutions in the country, which was tenaciously entangled in parliamentary rigmarole, was solved on a cue from Sibal. The MHRD implemented the spirit of the bill by an executive order and formulated rules for setting up foreign universities’ campuses in the country. The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion and Department backed the move. The matter is now, unfortunately stuck up in the Union law ministry.

Technical education “progressed” in UPA 2 but brought more pain than pleasure to stakeholders. Eight new Indian Institutes of Technology, 20 National Institutes of Technology, seven Indian Institutes of Management, 16 Central universities and five Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research were set up. As the bills for the IITs, NITs and the Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research were delayed in Parliament, many students cleared the hurdle but without valid degrees, which were, fortunately, revalidated later.

The smooth conversion of the University of Roorkee to an eminent IIT and that of BHU-IT to similar connection make for a monumental study in contrast to understanding the modus operandi of the Joshi ministry and later entrants like Singh, Sibal and Raju.

Similarly, consider the move to streamline the entrance/admission tests in the country. Joshi roped in the Central Board of Secondary Education to organise the All Indian Engineering Entrance Examination to facilitate admissions to engineering colleges in the country leaving the IITs and the various states to have their own corresponding state entrance exams. The Congress government clubbed the AIEEE with the IIT-Joint Entrance Examination and made a hash of two distinct systems. Cutting it short, the HRD ministry is too important a field to be left with novices like Irani or Raju or hardboiled politicians like Singh or Sibal.

Lesson Plan

Javadekar must free education from political meddling and red tape

A theme song of the Modi government goes, 'Mera desh badal raha hai, agey badh raha hai'... the country is changing, moving ahead. It's true that signs of this desire to move ahead are everywhere. But the problem's an acute shortage of opportunities. An educational deficit in particular is clogging up the aspirational pipeline, creating multiple distortions. For example, the hunger for getting into IITs - a rare assured route to a good job - seems to have sent different boards racing to inflate school scores. So 99% has become routine in the all-important Class XII exam without a corresponding uptick in learning outcomes. Increasing both the supply and quality of education - the first will also lead to the second if free competition is assured - is the key task facing new HRD minister Prakash Javadekar.

At 23.6% our gross enrolment ratio in higher education is one of the lowest in the world. On top of this, India routinely fails to place in the top 200 of world university rankings. Experts warn of an employability catastrophe rather than demographic dividend unless there is a dramatic improvement in the skilling ecosystem. Clearly the command and control mindset that's brought things to this sorry pass can't deliver the necessary course correction. Only academic and financial autonomy will deliver excellence - and growth - in higher education.



At the school level there have been important gains in infrastructure and enrolment. Previous HRD minister Smriti Irani can boast meeting the Swachh Vidyalaya target of over four lakh toilets in government schools. But teaching standards in many of these schools are simply appalling. For example a new survey has found 41 government schools in the Gurgaon district alone functioning as one-teacher wonders: He or she also has to be clerk, warden, midday meal server, nurse and much else. Even more than schools India needs more teachers, but properly trained ones who are made accountable for learning outcomes - rewarded for success and punished for failure.

Javadekar must recognise that the time for band aids is long past. Nothing less than a radical unshackling of the educational system from political patronage and red tape will suffice. The illiberal saffronising mindset is a path to becoming Pakistan; instead what India must aspire for is a free-thinking, innovative ecosystem. If educational reforms are politically difficult, a second best strategy is to set up special educational zones where experiments are really free to soar, including foreign and for-profit ones.