Newspaper Clips

July 25, 2012

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US award for 4 young Indian-origin scientists

Washington: US President Barack Obama has named four Indian-American scientists among 96 researchers as recipients of the prestigious Presidential Early Career Awards for Scientists and Engineers.

The awards bestowed on Sridevi Vedula Sarma, Pawan Sinha, Parag A Pathak and Biju Parekkadan is the highest honour given by the US government to science and engineering professionals in early stages of their independent research careers.

"Discoveries in science and technology not only strengthen our economy, they inspire us as a people," Obama said. "The impressive accomplishments of today's awardees so early in their careers promise even greater advances in the years ahead."

An associate professor of computational and visual neuroscience in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Sinha received his undergraduate degree in computer science from the IIT-New Delhi and his Masters and doctoral degrees from MIT.

Sarma is assistant professor, Department of Biomedical Engineering, Institute for Computational Medicine at the John Hopkins University.

Parekkadan is associated with Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, whereas Parag A Pathak is from the MIT. PTI

India wins five medals at Physics Olympiad

HT Correspondent
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MUMBAI: All five students who formed the Indian contingent at this year's International Physics Olympiad in Estonia won a medal each on Tuesday.

The 43rd International Olympiad that comprised 400 students from across the world was held between July 15 and July 24 at Tartu and Tallin, Estonia.

Among the 88 countries that participated in the competition, India bagged one gold medal, three silver medals and one bronze medal. There is no official ranking of nations.

"Our students were competing with the best students from other countries. We did well despite stiff competition," said professor Vijay Singh, national coordinator, science Olympiads, Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (HBCSE).

HBCSE is the nodal centre for all science Olympiads and students are selected in a three-tier process to represent the country in international Olympiads. While the first level consists of a nationwide examination, the remaining two levels comprise a series of theoretical and practical tests of which the final five are selected.

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>
> VIJAY SINGH,
> national coordinator,
> science Olympiads, HBCSE

Those who won medals are Rahul Trivedi from Lucknow (gold), Bijoy Singh Kochar from Mohali (silver), Inala Jeevana Priya from Secunderabad (silver), Kunal Singhal from New Delhi (silver) and Pulkit Tandon from Jabalpur (bronze)

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Meta-college courses open

Manash Pratim Gohain | TNN

New Delhi: Delhi University has started the admission process for the new BTech in humanities courses under the meta-college. The announcement came within 24 hours of the getting the final nod by the executive council. The four-year degree programme will be offered by DU's cluster innovation centre (CIC) from August.

Students can apply from Wednesday. The forms can either be downloaded or collected from CIC. Last date for submission of forms is August 1. Applicants will have to sit for a written entrance test involving multiple choice questions on August 5. This will be followed by an interview of shortlisted students. Selected students will forfeit their college seats. Those who are currently enrolled in any of the regular full-time programmes at a DU college are eligible for the course. The total intake is 40. VC Dinesh Singh said, "Students will be able to design their own degree by choosing courses from different colleges. These make up 50% of the syllabus, and the rest will be specialization.

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Einstein's right: Higher you live, faster you age

London: The world's most accurate atomic clock has clearly proved the nearly 100-year-old theory by Albert Einstein that time is a relative concept and the higher you live above sea level the faster you should age.

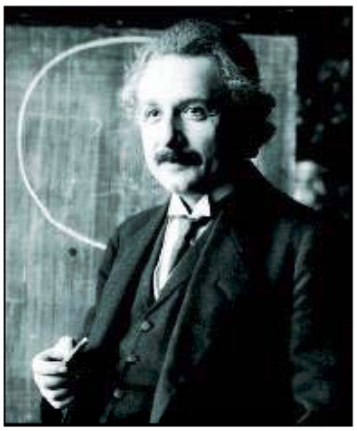
Einstein's theory of relativity states that time and space are not as constant as everyday life would suggest. He suggested that the only true constant, the speed of light, meant that time can run faster or slower depending on how high you are, and how fast you are travelling.

Now researchers have demonstrated the true nature of Einstein's theory for the first time with an incredibly accurate atomic clock that is able to keep time to within one second in about 3.7 billion years — roughly the same length of time that life has existed on Earth, The Independent reported.

James Chin-Wen Chou and his colleagues from the US National Institute of Standards and Technology in Boulder, Colorado, found that when they monitored two such clocks positioned just a foot apart in height above sea level, they found that time really does run more quickly the higher you are—just as Einstein predicted.

"These precise clocks reveal the effects of gravitational pull, so if we position one clock closer to a planet, you also increase the gravitational pull and time actually runs slower than for another, similar clock positioned higher up," Chou said.

The atomic clocks used in the study are based on the tiny vibrations of aluminium atoms trapped in an electric field. These vibrations are in the same frequency range of ultraviolet light, detected by lasers, which means that the atomic timepieces are optical clocks, accurate enough to measure billionths of a second.



SECONDED BY ATOMIC CLOCKS

It means that the clocks were able to perceive the dilation of time with height above ground. For every foot above ground the clocks showed that someone would age about 90 billionths of a second faster over a 79-year lifetime, Chou said.

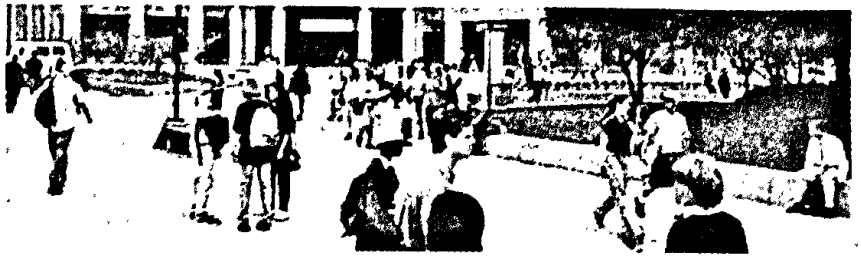
Besides, the scientists demonstrated that when the atomic clocks were altered in a way that mimics the effect of travelling through space, time began to slow down, as the theory of relativity says it should. PTI

Financial Express ND 25/07/2012 P-4

B-schools plan variable pay for foreign tag

Kirtika Suneja

New Delhi, July 24: The lure of foreign accreditation has made Indian business schools go for more research, thanks to the research-linked incentives that they will get. Many management schools have developed a system for faculty salary which includes variable components based on performance.



Most Indian B-schools are opting for three kinds of global accreditation — London-based Association of MBAs (AMBA), the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) and the American Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).

Consider this: Ghaziabad-based Institute of Management Technology (IMT) plans to introduce a financial bonus for its faculty over and above their salaries from this year onwards. This bonus incentive will be based on rigorous performance appraisal on the basis of the faculty's intellectual contribution in terms of quality of research productivity, pedagogical innovations and academic entrepreneurship. This is so because the institute is vying for AACSB certification which it expects to get by 2015.

"We are in the process of introducing this system this year and the best performers will get up to 50% of their annual CTC as bonus pay. We want to genuinely incentivise quality in everything we do, and hence are offering reasonably reduced teaching load to the faculty and giving them space to be more productive in research. The introduction of this performance-based variable pay is extremely important as we are pursuing multiple prestigious international accreditation," said Bibek Banerjee, director, IMT-Ghaziabad.

Same is the case with Mumbai-based Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS), which has applied for two foreign accreditation and is in the process of changing its faculty salary structure. "Till now, we used to reward our faculty based on their experience and competencies but the new system will take into account their performance and contribution to research," said NMIMS' vice-chancellor Rajan Saxena.

These recognitions are awarded on the basis of various criteria like facilities, teaching faculty and standards, alumni and research, and hence, Indian B-schools are preparing to ramp up their publications in international journals. It takes, anywhere between 3-5 years for institutes to get accredited.

At present, four B-schools in the country have AMBA accreditation, two are EQUIS-accredited and another two are AACSB-recognised.

In fact, Hyderabad-based Indian School of Business became the first business school in South Asia to get accredited by AACSB last year.

Accreditation by AACSB has been earned by less than 5% of the world's business schools as the process includes rigorous self-evaluation and peer-review elements.

Increased research would mean lesser teaching hours and the institutes are all set to increase their faculty strength. IMT-Ghaziabad has 55 permanent faculty, which it aims to increase to 80.

"We don't have any performance-based faculty salary at present but in the next few years we will take into account teaching, research and intellectual investment of the faculty. This will be crucial in getting foreign recognitions," said H Chaturvedi, director, BIMTech.

The institute has already started rewarding its faculty on the basis of getting their papers published in reputed international journals and is vying for Belgium-based EQUIS accreditation.

Busniess Standard Nd 25-07-2012
P-18

'43% engineers in India can't write correct English'

LANGUAGE BARRIER

Indian engineering graduates grapple with English

- More than 25% engineers don't possess English comprehension skills required to understand engineering school curriculum
- Only 57% engineers can write grammatically correct sentences in English
- Less than 48% engineers understand moderately sophisticated words of English
- More than half of all engineers (52%) would not be fluent in a majority of words that are used with regular frequency at the workplace
- Not more than 30% of engineering students, who undergo stress and exhaustion while preparing for entrance exams, were acquainted with the word 'exhaust'
- Around 50% engineers possess grammar skills that are not better than a Class VII student

Source: Aspiring Minds report

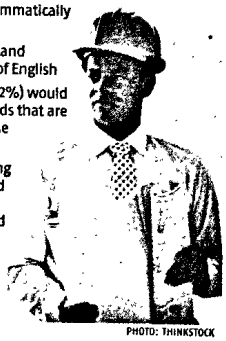


PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

BS REPORTER
Mumbai, 24 July

"Did you had cereal for breakfast?" Though most people may prefer to 'have' cereal for breakfast, almost a third of engineering graduates in India would prefer to 'had' breakfast. This poor grasp over grammar by engineering graduates is highlighted in a report by employability measurement and recruitment firm Aspiring Minds.

The report on the English learning levels of engineering graduates, based on the firm's employability test, Aspiring Minds Computer Adaptive Test (AMCAT), said only 57 per cent of Indian engineers could write grammatically correct sentences in English. According to the report, 25-35 per cent of engineers are unable to comprehend in English, which included their day-to-day conversation and academic lectures, affecting the overall delivery of knowledge.

According to Varun Aggarwal, director, Aspiring Minds, "Recruiters and HR managers around the world report that candidates with English skills above the local average stand out from the crowd and garner 30-50 per cent higher salaries than similarly-qualified candidates without English skills. The trends in India are no different, with English fluency being one of the key qualities recruiters look for during the interview process."

In terms of vocabulary, the report said while comfort with conversational English words was high at 78 per cent, only 48 per cent of engineering graduates showed aptitude for words often used in business parlance. In terms of classification of vocabulary levels based on frequency, only 28 per cent per cent of engineering students displaying competency in words like decadent, nefarious and impasse. These words were classified in the low frequency, high difficulty category, meaning infrequent in common facets of life, but are important for knowledge-based profiles such as research and business analysis.

Further, it said 36 per cent of engineering graduates would be unable to read official reports and transcripts and derive information out of these, even when the information is explicitly stated.

The firm also conducted a survey of mid to senior managers across organisations in the knowledge-based industry, to know if the findings are more relevant to the employment context. They were asked about the relative requirement of knowledge of different English words in daily life, and entry-level positions as software engineer (English for internal communication) and business analyst (English for business writing and client interaction). Here, it was shown that familiarity with words for knowledge-based jobs was poor. For example: The word 'tacit' was known by only 21 per cent engineers while 'accrue' was known to 25 per cent of the engineers surveyed.

The report also offered suggestions to bridge these gaps by way of interventions in the higher education system. "Level of language fluency cannot be developed in four years alone. The onus lies on schools to clear the basics and inculcate in students a love for reading and writing in the English language. Consistent efforts over the four years of engineering education would bolster the command over all aspects of the language, making students more employable," it said.

It also added that scientific assessment should be done in the first semester of the undergraduate degree programmes to identify students with deficient skills. The report is based on a test conducted on 55,000 students from around 250 engineering colleges in India. All findings in this report are based on the objective test-attempt data of these engineering students who undertook AMCAT English, a competency-based standardised assessment of English developed by Aspiring Minds.

50% engg grads worse at Eng than Class 7 students

QUESTIONS THEY COULDN'T ANSWER

- There is a dearth of woman doctor in our state. We may have to recruit some from other states.

Only 47 % of the engineering graduates selected the correct answer 'women doctors'

- For many teachers, having the freedom to teach what they desire most, is more important than drawing a handsome salary.

Only 27% managed to rephrase the sentence, making it read better

- Did you ..... cereal for breakfast?

Only 50 % were able to give the correct answer – have. Also, 30% of the engineering graduates did not know the meaning of the word 'exhaust'

Chetan Chauhan
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NEW DELHI: India may be the biggest producer of engineering graduates across the world, but about half the number can't match Class 7 students of the Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) when it comes to English grammar skills.

Nasscom, an IT industry body, pointed out this problem in 2011, when it stated that almost 50% of the engineers in India were unemployable. Only a meagre 25% of the graduates were found worthy of employment without in-house training.

An evaluation of the Aspiring Minds Computer Aptitude Test (ACMAT) on 55,000 engineering graduates — held in 2011 — has further accentuated this issue. Around half the engineering students were unable to differentiate between the words 'had' and 'have' in the context of a simple sentence. One-third were unable to answer entry-level math questions.

"Their poor English and Math skills indicate low learning levels," said Himanshu Aggarwal,

THE STUDY SHOWED THAT 47% GRADUATES COULD NOT CONSTRUCT PROPER SENTENCES

an IIT-Delhi alumnus who co-founded Aspiring Minds.

SS Mantha, chairman of the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), does not agree. Though he expressed concern, Mantha said the sample size of 55,000 candidates was too small to arrive at a definite conclusion. Around 7,50,000 engineers had graduated in 2011.

The study showed that 47% were unable to write grammatically correct sentences, less than 48% understood moderately sophisticated words, and 52% were not even acquainted with simple English terms.

Hope, however, is on the horizon. Dilip Chenoy, managing director of the National Skill Development Corporation, said the government has joined hands with the industry to resolve the issue.

DU admission process challenged by SC/ST students

PBD BUREAU/PTI

NEW DELHI, JULY 24

THE Delhi University was today directed by the Delhi High Court to respond to a plea challenging the University's admission process for undergraduate courses for Scheduled Caste(SC) and Scheduled Tribe(ST) students this academic year.

Issuing notices to DU and the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Justice G S Sistani sought their responses by October 11 on a petition filed by a group of students alleging DU's admission policy for SC/ST students was "discriminatory".

The petitioners alleged the University has failed to follow an uniform procedure for admission of SC/ST students and general category students for under-graduate courses.

"While the general candidates could register using the online facility from anywhere in India, SC/ST candidates had to come physically to Delhi with all their original certificates to even obtain the registration form. This prevented a lot of outstation SC/ST candidates from applying to the University," the petitioner said.

With regard to the University's Information Bulletin, the petitioners said "while a 70-page Information Bulletin printed in colour with a personal message from the Vice-Chancellor and lot of useful information like the last year's cutoff marks, information about Grievance and Placement Cell, a detailed city map locating the colleges were given to the General Candidates, SC/ST candidates were given a shoddily-printed eight-page Bulletin without necessary informations."

The petitioners further alleged the students of general category were allowed to register for all or any of the courses and colleges SC/ST candidate were not.

"An SC/ST is constrained by a limit of thirty choices, which is hardly enough to cover even single a course that is offered by around thirty to forty colleges. Moreover, the candidates have to indicate their choices in order of preference and allocation is done by the computer on the basis of their merit and the order of choice...," the petition said.

The petitioners contend the University has adopted one procedure for general category and OBC students but SC/ST candidates were treated differently.

"This discriminatory procedure for admission is only applicable to SC/ST and not to OBC, although both SC/ST and OBC are governed by the same Act, namely the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act 2006," the petition also said.

59% Indian students in UK were 'bogus' last year

SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE
SHYAM BHATIA IN LONDON

An estimated 59 per cent of Indian students admitted to the UK last year may have been bogus applicants, a newly published study says.

The startling claim is made by London-based think tank Migration Watch UK which bases its assessment on the findings of a Home Office pilot scheme that examined student visa applications to see if they were genuine.

The Home Office scheme applied two tests to determine whether applicants were genuine students and also if they intended to return to their home countries after completing their studies.

The tests found that the highest percentage of bogus students came from Burma (63%), followed closely by Bangladesh, India and Nigeria (59%). Based on these statistics the total number of bogus students entering the UK last year is estimated at some 63,000.

"Following this pilot, the Home Office has introduced plans to interview 10,000 students a year and has set out the criteria on which they will be judged", said a spokesman for Migration Watch. But it is now clear that the government has lost its nerve and has dropped the second test (intention to return) from the student interview scheme which comes into force as the end of July.

The latest figures have intensified the debate about how many international students should be allowed into the UK and under what conditions, including the right to work after they graduate. Adding to the controversy is the awareness that foreign student tuition fees (£5billion) make a massive contribution to the UK exchequer.

Foreign students are also seen as making an important contribution to British business. Hence the recent call by top UK business leaders for a more flexible visa regime to attract greater number of foreign students.

These considerations have been brushed aside by Migration Watch Chairman, Sir Andrew Green, who said: "We now have clear evidence of abuse on a major scale. Bogus students come here to work illegally and thus take jobs from British workers. If it is clear from the circumstances that a student is unlikely to go home, the visa should not be granted in the first place. After all, many of the advantages claimed for foreign students depend on their going home after their studies.

"These half measures simply will not do. The government have bottled out on bogus students. If they are serious about immigration, they must face down the self-interested demands of the higher education sector and pursue the public interest."

Commenting on the call by UK business leaders for students to be taken out of net migration statistics, Sir Andrew said: "It is, in fact, impossible to take students out of net migration because, unlike the US and Australia, we still have no exit checks so nobody knows how many who came as students have actually left the UK. It seems that business leaders are clueless about immigration policy and will sign whatever is put in front of them."

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RBI studies cheap & quick remittance mode

Mayur Shetty | TNN

Mumbai: Sending money home for millions of migrant labourers may become a lot cheaper and faster if the recommendations of an IIT panel are adopted by RBI and public sector banks. The IIT study has shown how existing infrastructure could be used for instant transfer of small amounts at a reasonable cost.

The reason why the report gains significance is that the earlier recommendations made by the author of the report—on allowing free access to all ATMs and on reducing charges on debit cards—were accepted by RBI. In the latest report: "Including the poor—need for reforms in remittances," Ashish Das of the department of mathematics at IIT-Bombay, estimates the domestic remittance market to be around $10 billion in 2007-08, 60% being inter-state transfers and 80% directed towards rural households. However, 70% of these remittances are estimated to be channeled through the informal sector even though banks have a robust system for instant and low-cost funds transfer.

According to the report, there is a need to showcase the existing interoperable platform of cash-national electronic funds transfer (Cash-NEFT) which allows even a non-customer to walk-in and deposit cash in a bank branch in India for credit of the funds in any other bank's account. NEFT is used extensively by those who practice online banking. However, for those not familiar with electronic channels remitting funds by depositing cash in a bank branch continues to be a huge challenge.

EASIER MONEY TRANSFERS

At present, bank charges for depositing cash into a bank account from a non-home branch counter is more than the charges to do cash-NEFT. "With RBI mandating a low charge of Rs 2.5 or Rs 5 for even Cash-NEFT, it may not be viable for banks to offer this product and they invariably resort to varied tactics to avoid accepting cash under NEFT," the report said.

One of the most innovative suggestions in the report is the possibility of a reverse debit transaction using a card swipe machine. The report suggests that workers should be allowed to hand over cash to a merchant with a point of sale (card swipe machine) with the money being sent to the account of the cardholder. To promote such a system, the report recommends that urban business correspondents of banks should be provided with PoS machines to facilitate such remittances.

The panel has recommended that since most banks have started offering unique account numbers to customers, the need to provide branch codes could be discontinued. Second, the report suggests that since regional rural banks now have access to computer systems of their sponsor banks, there should be a system where a migrant can deposit funds in any branch in a city and have the money sent to the rural branch using Cash-NEFT.