

Newspaper Clips

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Yes JEE, but ...

Common entrance exams can't succeed without the quality of higher education institutions being raised

The noted French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault prophetically observed: "The examination is at the centre of the procedures that constitute the individual as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge. It is the examination which, by combining hierarchical surveillance and normalising judgment, assures the great disciplinary functions of discipline and classification."

Recently, there was a conference of the state education ministers of the country in which some important policy decisions were taken. The proposal for a common entrance examination for admission to engineering institutions received widespread support among states. However, there are a few areas in which the consensus is yet to emerge among the states. A number of states have expressed their reservation to join the new IIT-JEE entrance format for state-run institutions. However, there was no such opposition for implementing this proposal in the central institutions. The states have also observed that the IITs should be treated at par with the NITs and IITs, so that there is no perception of any institution inferior to the other. The IITs have not accepted this suggestion, as they fear that their ability to maintain high academic standards and to be attractive for the best students of the country will be undermined, if this suggestion is accepted.

The debate relating to the admissions process and common entrance examination raises some fundamental

questions in relation to our policy on higher education. This issue by no means is confined to the engineering institutions of the country. Law, like engineering, is a professional degree, and there are nearly 1,000 law schools in the country. However, there is no single common entrance examination for admission to these law schools. In fact, there is not even a uniform requirement for having an entrance exam. Many law schools do not require an entrance exam; some have their own entrance exam; and some are part of a common entrance exam like the CLAT or the LSAT. There is a case for evolving a common entrance examination for admission to law schools as well.

One of the concerns that have been expressed by states in relation to common entrance examination for engineering or law or for that matter any discipline is the fear of proliferation of entrance examination coaching centres across the country, which will undermine the larger aspirations of higher education. There is a serious problem with regard to pedagogy and methodology of the techniques adopted at these coaching centres for preparation for the entrance exam. While it is important to address this issue, a mere non-adoption of a framework of common entrance examination is not going to

solve the problem.

It is important for us to rationalise the entrance examination system for all disciplines so that there is a stronger correlation between what is being tested in the entrance examination to what has been studied in the past by the students in their qualifying examination. This will also ensure that the students take their studies in high schools far more seriously than what they do now, as the overwhelming emphasis is to ignore the school curriculum, but to focus on the preparation for the common entrance examination. It is indeed disheartening to see students studying in classes IX onwards across schools in India preparing for the common entrance examinations for various subjects, including engineer-



CRAJ KUMAR

ing and law, while not paying adequate attention to the core curriculum and classroom teaching at their high school.

There is an urgent need for a coherent and transparent policy with regard to a common entrance examination and this effort by the government of India is indeed in the right direction. However, any effort to reform the entrance examination system cannot be done in isolation without making equally important efforts to raise the quality of higher education institutions in the country. One of the major challenges of higher education in India is that there are extraor-

dinary disparities that prevail between premier higher education institutions on the one hand, and the rest of the institutions on the other. This disparity is at multiple levels: the quality of faculty, the ability and competence of the students, the teaching and pedagogy in these institutions, the research and knowledge creation that takes place, and the importance given to creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship—all of which are critically relevant for higher education.

Among the options that are available in determining who is most suitable to study in our higher education institutions, the method of using a common entrance examination is indeed proven to be effective. However, the strength of the system will be based on the fact that the pool of students who are competing for these exams are sufficiently prepared in relation to their opportunity to compete effectively in the entrance exam, which is a question of equality and fairness; and the quality and standards of the institutions to which they are seeking admission is indeed comparable, which is a question of merit and excellence of higher education institutions. Unfortunately, in the Indian context, this is not the case, and this is where the next set of reforms relating to higher education need to take place.

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IIT just won't work

The Common Engineering Test will not only cause irreversible damage to the brand value of IIT but will also clip the institution's autonomy, writes SOMNATH BHARTI

The seeds of technological and business excellence, for which the alumni of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are known worldwide, were sown by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1950. In 1946, the 22-member Satkar Committee of the education ministry was formed to consider the setting up of top-notch technical institutes for post-war industrial development in India. Based on its recommendations, the first IIT was founded in Kharagpur, West Bengal, in May 1950.

As Nehru summed it up at the first convocation of IIT Kharagpur in 1956, "IITs represented India's future in the making." A nation is known by its academic institutions and an institute is known by its alumni. In league with Takshashila of ancient India and other, present-day, top British and American universities, the IITs have helped India acquire intellectual and technological prowess. The achievements of IIT alumni have brought unparalleled glory to not only the IIT system but also to the nation. More than 2 lakh students have cleared the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) and graduated in the past 60 years from the seven older IITs. It's unlikely that even one of them won't swear by the institutions' success.

The JEE is the examination that all of them took to enter into the IIT system. Unlike almost every other competitive examination in the country, JEE has no history of any allegation of corruption. However, for reasons best known to his ministry, human resource minister (HRD) Kapil Sibal recently announced that from 2013, the JEE will be replaced by a Common Engineering Test (CET). This examination will be held for entry into the National Institutes of Technology (NIT), Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIIT) and other centrally-funded technical institutions.

Sibal attributes the decision to the IIT Council, which, though a statutory body, is given only an advisory role regarding the admission process to the IITs. But he fails to give a satisfactory reply on how the Council can give a unanimous decision when the IITs, whose interests the IIT directors are expected to represent, have dissented on the decision on the CET and that too in writing. Six out of the seven older IITs have refused to allow any change in the entrance examination before 2014 because of the lack of deliberation; five out of seven disagree with the move completely. However, the HRD ministry claims that there is unanimity in the Council and it has gone ahead with the proposed plan, which is a body blow for the statutorily granted autonomy to the IITs and is, therefore, illegal. This is the second major decision by the ministry to dilute the IIT brand as it is known worldwide. The first major — and successful — decision resulted in the creation of eight new IITs, perhaps guided by the ridiculous belief that just naming an institute IIT makes it one.

The older IITs are struggling to keep pace with demands

for facilities of their counterparts in the US and other south Asian countries due to lack of funds. As a result, they are slipping in global rankings. But instead of coming to their rescue, the government is diluting the IIT brand and its standards by dropping the JEE, which helps in ensuring that only the best candidates make it to the institution. That IITians are revered worldwide can be gauged from the fact that the US House of Representatives passed a resolution on April 26, 2005, to formally acknowledge and appreciate the contribution of IITians to their country in every profession and discipline.

Any change in the admission process of students to the IITs can only be done by the process as laid down in the Institutes of Technology (IT) Act, which compulsorily warrants an ordinance by the senates of the IITs to state the details of the admission mode, which they wish to opt for to admit students to their undergraduate courses. Any deviation amounts to a violation of the legislative mandate. However, the introduction of the CET is one such deviation which has shocked the IIT fraternity and the nation. Various stakeholders believe that this decision has been construed as an attack on the IITs' autonomy, which is pivotal to the institutions' excellence.

Sibal claims that all senates were consulted before arriving at the decision. He further states that it is the IIT Council that has arrived at the decision and not the ministry. However, this does not qualify as a decision arrived at by following due process in view of the laws governing IITs. This means that the decision is likely to get shot down if scrutinised judicially. It is worth noting



KAPIL SIBAL FAILS TO GIVE A SATISFACTORY REPLY ON HOW THE IIT COUNCIL CAN GIVE A UNANIMOUS DECISION WHEN THE IITs HAVE DISSENTED ON THE DECISION ON THE COMMON ENTRANCE TEST

that the 'fraud' of giving the senates' views a go-by has been going on for years. The IIT Council meeting on September 14, 2011 has minuted that the Joint Admission Board (JAB) is authorised to frame the policies, rules and regulations of JEE under the guidance of the Council, which is against the legislative will. The majority of the Council members, which is chaired by the HRD minister, are not IIT directors. Surely, the autonomy which has been given to IITs by an Act passed in Parliament can't be secured by a council where IIT directors are in a minority. Infosys founder NR Narayan Murthy, objecting to the ways in which the Council is being used to meddle with the IIT system, said, "Nobody is bothered about an institution more than its alumni. We must somehow persuade the Government of India to let go of its control and make sure a majority of the Council members are the IIT alumni." But Sibal seems to be in no mood to heed Murthy's suggestion.

Also, the changes proposed in the admission process have serious flaws and will surely compromise the quality of the students entering the IITs. As a result, the IIT brand, as it is known worldwide today, will get severely and irreversibly damaged and will no longer be held in high esteem. Clipping the IITs' autonomy won't make students interested in studying or reduce their dependence on coaching institutes. IIT alumni, if invited, are willing to extend help to find solutions to the problems that the government believes will be fixed with the CET. The HRD minister's dream 'one nation, one exam' through the CET is a myth, as the CET will club only two exams — JEE and All India Engineering Entrance Exam (AIEEE). Students will still have to take a plethora of exams to enter regional and private engineering colleges. Institutions of the stature of the IITs need to be given more autonomy in their affairs to help them compete with other world-class institutions.

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The views expressed by the author are personal

New JEE format: right questions, wrong answers

Contrary to the HRD Ministry's plans, the new system will still benefit the coaching centres even as it lowers standards

Saaz Sakrikar

J.C. Chaudhry must be a worried man. He is the managing director of Aakash Institute, which makes crores charging huge fees to coach aspirants for the IIT-JEE (Joint Entrance Exam). And the Human Resource Development Ministry has announced that there will be drastic changes in the JEE from next year, which will make coaching classes redundant. Is that why Mr. Chaudhry appeared on TV last week to say this was a bonanza for coaching institutes who could now offer three different courses each?

Under the new format, admissions to all Central government engineering institutes will be through a common exam, scrapping the current system of JEE for the IITs and the All India Engineering Entrance Exam (AIEEE) for other institutes. A common merit list is to be prepared with an unprecedented 40 per cent weightage for Class XII board examination marks and 30 per cent each for two examinations — JEE Main and JEE Advanced — to be held on the same day.

The Ministry claims its main intention is to reduce the stress of multiple entrance exams on students. It should have asked students their opinion. More than the difficulty of the exam, the stress associated with the JEE is due to the huge imbalance between the number of seats and aspirants. The proposal does nothing to change this. In fact, the pressure now to do well in three exams is sure to increase stress.

Also, by keeping both exams on the same day, a random event — the candidate falling ill, even a bus breaking down — can destroy a student's future. Whereas previously there were options if one entrance test went badly, the new system has an all-or-nothing feel to it. It's no surprise that parents are thinking of taking the matter to court.

The Ministry also aims to re-vitalise school education by giving more importance to the Class XII board examinations which, it feels, are ignored by students. Again, had it asked students it would have realised why. Though nominally the syllabi for the board examinations and the JEE are the same, board examination papers are based on memory-based learning with easy, expected questions, while the JEE's focus is conceptual with unexpected, challenging questions. No JEE question is ever repeated.

Besides, most State board examinations are plagued by rampant

copying and question paper leaks, while the practical examinations are famously a farce. The final issue with board examinations is normalisation. Even though normalisation across the 42 boards in the country is statistically possible, the vast differences in question styles and marking schemes make such a comparison meaningless.

HRD Minister Kapil Sibal claimed on TV that he is proud that the proposals have been passed without dissent. Perhaps the five IIT Senates that have disagreed with these changes — with IIT-Kanpur threatening to have its own exam — don't count as dissent.

A senior professor, speaking on the condition of anonymity, described the move as an assault on the academic autonomy of the IITs — sacrosanct in the IIT Act. These changes, he said, had been pushed down the throats of the IITs by the IIT Council. This is contrary to the IIT Act which states that the Senates are the deciding bodies on all academic matters. It is telling that the Council which approved these changes has a majority of non-academics, while the Senates which rejected them comprise IIT professors.

The Senates had proposed changes to the current system — including a screening test followed by a subjective-style main test, giving detailed reasons for this. The consultations of the Council with the Senates were pure posturing, the senior professor said, since none of the latter's proposals were considered.

The skewed rural-urban and poor-rich ratios among those entering IITs is what bothers the faculty most, said another professor, attributing this to coaching classes being out of reach for most poor and rural students. The proposed changes, however, would do nothing to solve this problem, he said; in fact they would increase dependence on coaching classes.

Under the guise of "democratisation", reducing stress and destroying the coaching industry, the Ministry wishes to replace an efficient system with one that keeps IITs just as "elite", which lowers admission standards by including board examination marks, which increases student stress and finally, mints more money for the coaching industry. Surely if all the true stakeholders — the IIT professors, students and teenaged aspirants — can see this, there is no reason Mr. Sibal, a shrewd lawyer and politician, cannot.

(Saaz Sarikar is a second year student at IIT-Bombay.)

States shy of one engineering entrance test

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 6: The Centre's proposal for one-nation one-exam in engineering yesterday drew mixed responses from states, many of which including Congress-ruled Kerala, remained non-committal about adopting it.

At the state education ministers' conference, Union HRD minister Kapil Sibal suggested that the proposed (central) joint entrance examination would help students as they would not have to take multiple entrance tests for admission in engineering.

"If you adopt the (central) JEE, children will not have to

appear in multiple exams. Capitation fee will cease to exist as students qualifying the national entrance will have the flexibility to decide which institution to join," he said.

But the proposal failed to convince many ministers who backed its implementation in central institutions but did not commit whether they would adopt it in their states.

The education ministers of Kerala, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Puducherry said there was no plan to adopt the central JEE now. There was no representation from Bengal at the conference.

"We support the JEE for central institutions. But we have no plans to adopt it in our

state," said Kerala education minister P.K. Abdu Rabb.

According to IIT Kanpur director S.G. Dhande, there are about 20 engineering entrance exams in the country. The IITs conduct the IIT-JEE; the CBSE conducts the AIEEE for admission into central institutions like NITs and IIITs. Each state conducts its own engineering entrance test. Almost all deemed universities have their own entrance tests.

Last week, the IIT council and the NIT council decided to replace the IIT-JEE and the AIEEE by a single JEE from 2013. The JEE will be conducted in two parts — JEE-Main and JEE-Advanced — and the

performance of students in Class XII will get weightage.

However, the selection process will be different: for IITs and other central institutions. The IITs will follow 50-50 weightage towards performance of students in Class XII and the JEE Main exam for filtering purposes. Nearly 50,000 students would then be selected through screening. These candidates will be eligible for admission into IITs. They will be awarded all-India rank on the basis of their performance in the JEE-Advanced test.

Other central institutions like NITs and IIITs will follow a different methodology. These institutions will give 40 per cent weightage to Class XII board

marks and 30 per cent weightage each to the JEE-Main and the JEE-Advanced tests. The Class XII board marks would be calculated through a percentile-based formula.

"In principle, we support the single entrance in engineering. Multiple entrance exams are a burden on students. We will examine it and decide if we can adopt it," said Bihar education minister P.K. Shahi.

Shahi opposed the IITs having a separate selection procedure. He was supported by Assam education minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who said "IITs should not be allowed to dictate terms".

Haryana, Maharashtra and Gujarat have agreed to ad-

opt the central JEE from 2013. Assam's Sarma and Madhya Pradesh's Laxmikant Sharma said their states might adopt the national test from 2014.

Gujarat's education minister Ramanlal Vora said JEE question papers should be available in Gujarati. At present, IIT-JEE is conducted in English and Hindi only. An IIT director said setting question papers in regional languages raised the risk of leaks.

Sibal asked states to decide by month-end whether to adopt the central JEE by 2013.

IIT/IIM austerity

Carrying forward its austerity drive, the Centre yesterday restrained autonomous bod-

ies, including IITs, IIMs and universities, from creating new posts and holding meetings in May to reduce non-Plan expenditure by 10 per cent, have been extended to government-funded autonomous bodies like trade bodies, educational institutions, medical colleges and cultural organisations.

"...it has been decided to extend the economy measures outlined in the Office Memorandum dated May 31, 2012 to autonomous bodies funded by the Government of India," a note issued by expenditure secretary Sumit Bose said.

Deccan Chronicle 08-06-2012 P-5

Sibal rejects criticism over common IIT test decision

New Delhi, June 6: The government on Wednesday rejected criticism of the decision to have a common IIT-JEE examination from next year, saying it was approved without dissent at the IIT council meeting and had the backing of the senates of four of the seven Indian Institutes of Technology.

As IIT alumni wrote to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh complaining against the move, HRD minister Kapil Sibal termed it as "complete misrepresentation of facts" by them.

He told reporters that he

had categorically said at the IIT council meeting that if "there is a single dissent", he would not go ahead with the proposal.

"The council consists of the IITs, the IIITs and the NITs. There was not a single dissent. It was unanimously adopted. Therefore, I went forward," he said.

"I also said the views of the senate would be taken into account. And will not move forward till their views are taken into account. Their views were taken into account," he said.

Last week, Mr Sibal announced that from 2013,

aspirants for IITs, NITs and IIITs will have to sit under a new format of common entrance test which will also take plus two board results into consideration.

This was not a government decision and all directors of IIT, NIT, and IIIT sitting together unanimously said that "this was a right decision," Mr Sibal said.

"There is a statute. Under the statute, there is a council. And a decision is taken under the statute by the council. I, as the minister, happened to be the chairman of the council," he said. — PTI

New JEE got council nod: Sibal

HT Correspondent

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NEW DELHI: The Centre on Wednesday rejected criticism of a decision to have a common IIT-JEE examination from next year, stating that it was approved without dissent at an IIT Council meeting, and had the backing of the senates of four of the seven IITs.

Even as IIT alumni wrote to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh against the move, HRD Minister Kapil Sibal said, "The council consists of IITs, IIITs and NITs. There was not a single dissent. It was unanimously adopted. Therefore, I went forward."

According to sources, some ministers even opined that IITs, in the long term, should adopt the same format as other

SOME MINISTERS SAID THAT IITs, IN THE LONG TERM, MUST ADOPT THE SAME FORMAT AS OTHER CENTRAL INSTITUTIONS.

central educational institutions.

The states have been asked to convey their decision on the year of joining in the common admission process and the relative weightages to normalised Class XII Board marks, performance in JEE-Main and JEE-Advanced by June 30.

Sibal, however, was non-committal about a demand to make the selection criteria for IITs the same as that for other institutes.

WITH PTI INPUTS

Coaching Institutes Spot Gold in Revamped Engg Entrance Plan

Offer to teach subjects that affect board exam scores, and see student intake increasing rapidly in a year's time

DEVINA SENGUPTA
BANGALORE

Private coaching institutes are eyeing a business opportunity in the government's decision to have a common engineering test. They have begun to alter their training modules in an attempt to attract younger students.

"Earlier, students would look at class XII exams as a mere qualification for the joint entrance examination (JEE) and All India Engineering Entrance Examination (AIEEE) but now, they have to become more serious," says Pramod Maheshwari, director, Career Point. The 20-year-old training centre based in Kota, Rajasthan, is betting on school students to increase enrolment rate by 20% next year. Career Point coached 30,000 students last year and admissions for this year are on.

The institute moved in for the kill in January itself, when there was a buzz around the government creating a single entrance examination that paid heed to board examination marks. It began enrolling students with the new objective of helping them secure the maximum marks possible in board examinations.

"We will now coach them on scoring above 90% and not just 70%. Our fees will increase

The Big Picture

₹1,000 cr

The market size for engineering examination tutorials, expected in a year's time

It is currently at nearly

₹500 cr



50%

Of the 11 lakh students who appear for AIEEE and

5 lakh

students who take the IIT-JEE go in for private coaching

from 2013 by 15% as well from Rs 50,000 per annum," says Maheshwari.

The Union HRD ministry recently replaced multiple examinations like the IIT-JEE and AIEEE with a single entrance examination to the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs) and National Institutes of Technology (NITs). Under the new rule, students will have to appear for two admission tests on the same day — JEE Main and JEE Advanced, and the merit list will take into account board examination marks as well as the two admission tests.

In 2012, nearly 5 lakh students appeared for the IIT-JEE examination to test their luck in 15 IITs while 11 lakh took the AIEEE for a foothold into NITs and other engineering colleges.

Coaching institutes see their pot of gold in increased student numbers. CL Educate, for instance, expects it to go up to 5,000 by FY14 from the current 2,000. "A back-of-the-envelope calculation shows that the market for engineering tutorial examination is around Rs 500 crore and in all possibility, will double in the next year," says Gautam Puri, MD. At least half of the 11 lakh students who appear for the AIEEE and the 5 lakh who take the IIT-JEE go in for private coaching, he says.

Since it is not clear if the new pattern will accept scores in physics, chemistry and mathematics or include other subjects as well, coaching centres like Career Point plan to give tuitions in the languages as well.

However, some institutes are walking the thin edge, wondering whether the new decision on entrance tests will eat into their niche offerings. Patna-based Super 30, for instance, only takes 30 students from underprivileged backgrounds who are sure-shot IIT successes. If the government considers such students' Class XII scores, it may be in a bit of a spot.

Most of the students come from rural backgrounds where the emphasis on languages, for instance, is nil. "We hope they give us sample papers because it has now become a matter of survival," says founder Anand Kumar.

The institute currently has four professors teaching physics, chemistry and mathematics. "Although we will not recruit another faculty member, the stress will now be on how to take in students who have a natural flair for languages as well," adds Kumar.

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Suspense continues for minority IIT aspirants

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: A full week after the Andhra Pradesh High Court quashed the 4.5 per cent job and education sub-quota for minorities, suspense continues on the status of those aspiring to get into the IITs under the sub-quota. Said Sahique Mustafa whose minority rank of 203 all but guaranteed him an IIT seat: "Last week my family was celebrating. Today, I have no hope."

On Thursday morning Law and Minority Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid said the government would move the

Supreme Court against the judgment only in July, after the summer break. If this virtually ended any lingering hope of last-minute relief for the hundreds of IIT aspirants seeking to use the minority quota route, there was fresh confusion by evening with top sources from the Human Resource Development Ministry indicating that the government would approach the court for a stay on the judgment as early as Monday. The sources said the two Ministries held renewed consultations following feedback of growing unrest among minority students banking on the

sub-quota for entry into the premier institution.

The IITs were quick to react to the High Court ruling. In a statement soon after the judgment, the IIT-JEE-2012 said: "... the judgment of the Andhra Pradesh High Court will be implemented by ignoring the provision for reservation of 4.5 per cent seats and by converting seats meant for OBC (non-creamy layer)-minority community to OBC (non-creamy layer) category." The IITs made it clear that the sub-quota would be revived only in the event the government obtained a stay before June 13, the deadline

for closure of the admission process.

With the government in no hurry to get a stay and the IITs of their own bat deciding to end the sub-quota, Minority students, most of them Muslims, were seized by confusion and despair. Of a total of 9,647 seats up for grabs, the IITs this year set aside 2101 seats for OBCs under the 27 per cent quota and another 434 for minorities under the sub-quota. The sub-quota ensured that virtually all of the 391 Muslim students shortlisted for counselling would get into the premier institution — and quite possibly to a branch of

their choice.

But now competition has got stiffer with the minority students having to compete for admission within the broader OBC quota. The fate of aspirant Mustafa, a student of Rahmani-30 coaching institute in Bihar, illustrates the point. With an all-India rank of 15,803, there was no way he could have got into any IIT, much less one of his choice. However, his minority rank of 203 ensured that he would be through. He says: "I'm upset at the extremely causal approach adopted by the government. With an OBC rank of 2928, there is almost no

chance that I would make it to that quota."

Top IIT sources admitted that the cancellation of the sub-quota would leave out many minority students who were otherwise assured of admission. However, this assessment ran counter to the view of Mr. Khurshid who said at the press briefing that the minority students could all be squeezed into the OBC quota. Said an IIT administrator: "This is illogical. When you compete with more people, there can be no guarantee of your getting a seat. I'm afraid many minority students are going to be disappointed."

OBC SUB-QUOTA ROW Govt to move SC against HC order

ADITI TANDON/TNS

NEW DELHI, JUNE 7

With minority students on tenterhooks about admission to IITs, the Centre has decided to approach the vacation bench of the Supreme Court coming Monday against Andhra Pradesh High Court's order quashing the 4.5 per cent minority sub-quota within the 27 per cent reservation available to OBCs.

The decision came this evening after day-long confusion over the issue within the government. Law Minister Salman Khurshid had said this morning that the government would file the matter in the Supreme Court when it reopens after vacation on July 2.

"We don't want to take any chances with the vacation bench. If the vacation bench doesn't hear the matter, we will lose time. We are in touch with the Attorney General and have decided to prepare, file and get the matter heard in the Apex Court in the first week of July," Khurshid had said.

But the HRD Ministry later flagged the urgency of the issue to Khurshid and stated that minority students hoping to get admitted to 15 Indian Institutes of Technology, IT-BHU and Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad, would be at a loss if legal protection is not sought for them at the earliest.

"There's no problem as far as other central educational institutions are concerned but admission process in IITs is set to begin. We can't afford any delay. The government has therefore decided to approach the apex court on

Monday to file the Special Leave petition and get it heard," top sources in HRD Ministry said.

The candidates shortlisted and ranked in IIT-JEE this year have to fill their choice of courses up to June 10. Details of first seat allotment will be communicated by IIT Joint Admission Board on June 14. Seats not accepted in the first round will be allotted on All-India rank basis afterwards. The second seat round allotment will be released on June 25 and the third and final round of allotment will be done on July 6.

Much of the IIT admissions would thus be over by July 2 when the SC returns from after vacation. As many as 325 minority students have been ranked for admissions to IITs this year on the basis of 4.5 per cent sub-quota made available to them within the 27 per cent OBC quota. Of these 325, 303 are boys and 22 are girls. Maximum minority sub-quota seats are available in IIT Madras (96), IIT Kanpur (44) and IIT Delhi (43).

Overall, 4,805 OBC students have been ranked this year for IITs out of 1,36,572 who appeared. Of these, 325 minority students can get courses of their choice if they are ranked separately within the 4.5 per cent sub-quota.

Khurshid had earlier said, "I have spoken to the HRD Minister. He has no worries on this issue (admissions of students)." But HRD Ministry sources pointed out that there was some miscommunication on this issue as there was a real urgency in case of IIT admissions.

Mail Today, ND

8/06/2012 P-4

IIT Kanpur's 'eye in the sky'

AFTER launching India's first nano-satellite Jugnu, IIT Kanpur is set to steal the limelight again.

Its students are now working on developing an aerostat that will serve as a surveillance device and monitor an entire district. It can help in crop control, traffic management, checking flood damage and law and order. "It will be like an eye in the sky," IIT Kanpur director Sanjay Dhande said. "It will be on the lines of an aerostat blimp, except that it will not be tethered but move freely because it will be propulsion-based. I don't think we have such a device in our country yet."

"Aerostats are large fabric envelopes filled with helium. The one to be developed by IIT Kanpur will be controlled wirelessly and be equipped with communication facilities, infra-red imaging and a camera," Dhande added.

The project will take about two years to complete and will be developed, controlled and monitored by the students.

Ritika Chopra/New Delhi

STUDENTS OF IIT ROPAR LAUNCH SIFE INITIATIVE

RUPNAGAR: Students of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ropar, have launched an initiative to bring together the potential leaders under one umbrella to create a better, more sustainable world through the positive power of business under the aegis of Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE), an international non-profit organisation.

IIT, Ropar, is only the third IIT in the country to have started SIFE, along with IIT Delhi and Kanpur. SIFE, Ropar, has been run by about 40 students, including Puneet Puri, president; Arpit Jain, vice-president, marketing and PR; and Anmol Singh Mann, vice-president, operations and finance. **HTC**

It's a race against time

Nishant Uppal

The new common engineering test scheduled for 2013, under which the 'earlier neglected' board exams are now being given 40 per cent weightage, has fetched mixed opinions from people across the city.

As per the new change in the format, a weightage of 30 per cent each will be given to JEE-main and JEE-advanced papers. This latest development, which will be brought to effect from this year by the HRD Minister Kapil Sibal, is likely to cover all government institutes including the IITs, National Institute of Technology (NITs), and the Indian Institute of Information and Technology (IIITs).

"The students had stopped focusing on their CBSE syllabus and only cared about the engineering entrances. Having a common entrance exam for all colleges and including the 12th score is really a great step. It's a bit confusing but has given an element of uniformity in the system," says Savita Gupta, a teacher.

Satyam Awasthi, who is currently enrolled in the two-year program at FIITJEE, feels that they have no choice but to change their study approach. He shares, "Time management will be the key and we will have to refocus on their board exams as there is no choice.

Parents too are a worried lot as they feel that the changes will ruin their wards' chances in JEE-2013. "My son will be appearing for the exam next year and suddenly there is a total change in the pattern. For the last one year, his focus has been on cracking the competitive exam with board exam studies on the back burner. However, with a 40 per cent weightage to the boards

Students need to shift their focus on boards

in the JEE, he has to shift his focus to board exams but there is not enough time left," says a parent.

According to PK Soni, a physics teacher, there will be a significant change in the method of teaching since the board marks have been included. The institutes will now focus on the CBSE syllabus, along with the course for the entrance examinations, as they hold a 40 per cent weightage now. "The types of problems in JEE are completely different from the basic CBSE text books, and they have to be approached differently. This will make it difficult for the students, as they have to manage both now," Soni adds.

"The quality of students getting into the IIT has seen a major change. It seems like people of this country are in a rat race. Every other person gets into engineering, due to which the course has lost its value. But people don't understand that you need a different aptitude to get into the IIT," says a professor at an IIT institute, who wishes to remain anonymous.

"The coaching institutes are just stuffing the students with knowledge, which stops their thinking ability and hampers their creativity. These institutes are showing them unreal dreams, which only leads to disappointment and nothing else," he adds further.

Hence, a pertinent question arises here. Will a common entrance exam mean lesser chances for talented students to get into the country's leading engineering institutes?



SUCCESS ABROAD

An Indian spark in US university's new super-battery

Vanita Srivastava
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NEW DELHI: Is your mobile phone in the habit of dying just when you need to make an urgent call? And does your laptop do the same when you need it the most? Don't fret, because the future holds some hope for you.

An Indian researcher with

the Washington State University (WSU) has developed a technology that can triple the capacity of lithium ion batteries. As they will be able to last three times as long, you will be able to take your gadgets that much farther without having to hunt for charging points.

Uttara Sahaym and Dr Grant Norton of the WSU, along with a team of students,

(We hope to attract global investors, so this can be taken to the next level)

UTTARA SAHAYM
 Researcher at WSU

have devised the battery in which tin — when used as the anode — has the capability to increase the storage capacity by three times, compared to

ones that use carbon for the purpose. The new tin anode can store almost three times the energy.

"At present, we are testing the batteries at the laboratory level. Taking a product from the laboratory level to the industry level takes a lot of effort and resources. We are hoping to attract the attention of manufacturers and investors across the

world, so this can be taken to the next level," Sahaym told HT.

The researchers have filed patents for the technology. "Currently, the anode represents 14% of the total cost of the Li-ion battery. The new tin anode, because of its simple one-step processing method and low-cost materials, will be cheaper than existing ones," she said.

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CREATING ENTREPRENEURS FOR TOMORROW

Thoughts Shine Brighter than City's Blazing Sun

OUR BUREAU KOLKATA

Even as asphyxiated Kolkataans struggled to hide from the blaze on a day when temperature soared over 40°C, the city's entrepreneurs showed no dearth of enthusiasm when they flocked in droves to the ET-The Power of Ideas 2012 Start-up Session here.

From students, who'd travelled all the way from IIT Kharagpur, middle-aged professionals to even the odd senior citizen, the packed-to-capacity gathering was a motley mix of those who have either started up or are planning to launch their own set-ups, and had turned up to get tips, guidance and their queries addressed by those in the know.

The start-up meet saw a keynote session by Anjan Chatterjee, founder and managing director of Speciality Restaurants, followed by Rajeev Mantri, executive director at venture capital firm Navam Capital and Amit Bansal, chief technology officer at eDominer Systems.

Chatterjee gave a stirring account of the

key learnings from his own journey from the only catering college grad in a family of academics to the entrepreneur behind India's largest chain of fine dining eateries, which recently went public.

Stressing on the fact that business in today's world is all about branding and marketing, Chatterjee said while research was all very well, ultimately it's about going with one's gut. "The biggest mistake in business is thinking that the bank's money is your own. You have to take calculated risks in business but don't get into financial indiscipline," he cautioned.

"There is no substitute for hard work, but without Divine Grace, you can do nothing. Believe in yourself, have conviction. Money for the business will never be a problem if you have power in your idea," Chatterjee summed up.

Chatterjee's rousing speech was followed by tips from investor Rajeev Mantri, who elaborated on what VC investors look for in a business. "Investors like businesses that have potential for high growth; without offering something novel or differentiated to your end customer, a business has no

chance of succeeding," he said.

Next up was Bansal, who spoke about how spotting an opportunity had made all the difference to his career. He also emphasised the importance of professionalism and honouring one's commitments. "It can make or break your reputation," he said.

After Shashank Rastogi of IM Ahmedabad's Centre for Innovation, Incubation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) took the audience through the Power of Ideas presentation, the floor was opened for questions. And as the questions came flying thick and fast, the enthusiasm of the crowd was there for all to see as eager entrepreneurs jostled to know about a wide range of issues — from the break-even period for a restaurant to low to project financials to what VCs are looking for to the minutest details about the PCI programme.

A 14-year-old boy Nirman Sarkar, stole the show when he rued his inability to participate in the contest because of the 18-year age cut-off at the entry level.

The time, when it ended, came all too soon for the gathering, who continued to throng the panelists for more.



(From left) Anjan Chatterjee, MD of Speciality Restaurants, Amit Bansal, chief technology officer at eDominer Systems, and Rajeev Mantri, executive director of Navam Capital, at the ET event. — Subhajit Pal

Not every company can do what Google, Hewlett-Packard or Apple did – start up in a garage and strike it big. That's why India needs plenty of incubators like those in Silicon Valley. **Rituparna Chatterjee** writes from San Francisco

Why India Needs Larger No. of Start-up Factories

Prosenjit Sen has everything it takes to be a successful entrepreneur in Silicon Valley. He has a great idea—his startup Vizl lets you to try out and mix and match garments virtually on your iPhone before you buy them online. He is a serial entrepreneur having founded or been part of founding teams in start-ups like Informatica, SaleMinder etc. He is also a Valley veteran with over two decades of experience in the high-tech and Internet industries.

Still, Sen didn't want to go solo with his latest venture. He approached Plug and Play (PnP), arguably Silicon Valley's largest incubator and home to well over 300 start-ups, about six months ago. PnP would take a small equity stake in the company and present a prescreened pitch to its own extensive network of investors and venture capitalists. "Sure, I have a rolodex of my own, but this process saves me a lot of time and helps me find the right investor," says Sen. He is now seeking \$4 million in Series A funding for his digital dressing room that's custom-built for fashion retailers.

Not every company can do what Google, HP or Apple did—start up in a garage and strike it big. They need incubators to help see them through the difficult early stages of a new venture until they raise meaningful funding.

Plug and Play, now home to Sen, even housed Google briefly in 1999. It also housed Paypal, which was later acquired by eBay. This is why even serial entrepreneurs like Prosenjit Sen, who know the who's who in the Valley, still feel the need for incubators.

That's also why new incubators are sprouting up across the Valley all the time. Some like Plug and Play provide office rentals to pretty much any start-up and hold seasonal 'expositions' for start-ups to make timed elevator pitches to investors. Others like Y Combinator (YC) select a bunch of start-ups that they then mentor, seed fund and help pitch to investors.

Some of today's most celebrated Internet darlings like Reddit, Dropbox, Airbnb, Scribd, Bumpand Heroku have come out of here. Down the road from Y Combinator is 500 Startups—a messy, noisy floor full of tables rented out to early-stage companies that have received between \$10,000 and \$250,000 in funding.

Incubators are a vital cog in the Valley's vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem, but they are only now gaining early traction in India as well.

Hardly any start-up graduating from the Indian incubator and accelerator ecosystem has made it big. Money is still hard to come by for raw start-ups that need to build a business from an idea. So far, the gap has been filled only by incubators in state-run educational institutions such as the IITs and IIMs.

IIM Ahmedabad's Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship (CIIE) has over 50 incubatees; IIT Bombay's Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SINE) has about 20;

What US Incubators Offer

Y COMBINATOR

Silicon Valley's most well-known incubator

Based in Mountain View, California, it carefully selects Internet start-ups for a three-month mentorship programme

Invests (less than \$20,000 each) in these startups; helps them raise money; hands-on mentoring from Silicon Valley heavyweights like Paul Graham; offers lifetime support through influential alumni network

Gets the likes of Mark Zuckerberg to give talks to the selected entrepreneurs

PLUG AND PLAY TECH CENTER

Home to over 300 start-ups

Offers rental office spaces, facilitates investment and networking

Headquartered in Sunnyvale, CA, it has offices across Silicon Valley and worldwide

ENVIRONMENTAL BUSINESS CLUSTER

Founded in 1994 in San Jose

Focuses strictly on clean tech companies

Provides office rental space, mentoring and support with networking, R&D and funding

ROCKHEALTH

A healthcare incubator

Targets early-stage start-ups building health-based mobile and web applications

Start-ups selected to its five-month programme receives a grant of \$20,000 and free help from healthcare veterans

500 STARTUPS

Early-stage incubator cum seed fund in downtown Mountain View

Focuses only on early-stage start-ups

Invests between \$10,000 and \$250,000 in these start-ups, mostly mobile, cloud or Internet companies

ANGELPAD

Founded by a bunch of ex-Googleers in San Francisco

Offers a 10-week-long detailed mentorship programs for Internet start-ups. Does not fund the start-ups

IIM Bangalore's Nadathur S Raghavan Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning is nurturing a few including Millaap.org, the online social lending portal focused at the base of the pyramid population, and community library chain JustBooks. Their success has been patchy.

"An academic setting has a lot of constraints. They are mandated by government-set rules. Private accelerators, on the other hand, attract more entrepreneurial talent, and hence, can identify true agents of disruption," says Vijay Anand, founder of Chennai-based Startup Centre. But private incubators and accelerators in India have emerged only over the last three to five years, and are yet to put in place metrics to determine long-term survival of the business or put in place successful funding efforts.

Apart from Startup Centre, Angel Prime, set up by serial entrepreneurs Bala Parthasarathy, Shripati Acharya and Sanjay Swamy, plans to invest between \$200,000 and \$800,000 in every start-up in its portfolio.

Multinational tech firms are also setting up their accelerators here. In May, Microsoft launched Microsoft Accelerator for Windows Azure, which will incubate 10 technology start-ups for four months. In 2011, Citrix Systems launched its start-up accelerator programme, which aims to invest \$400,000 each in six early-stage start-ups. The Indian Angel Network and the Mumbai Angels have lent their support to VentureNursery, India's first angel-backed start-up accelerator. But all this is still a long way behind incubators in the US.

HUNDREDS OF STARTUPS

Incubators aid and nurture fledgling entrepreneurs in myriad ways. For Labhesh Patel, Co-Founder of CellKnight—which helps enterprises cut wireless expenses—it included random introductions and endless informal chats which resulted in a big client contract with a bank, sales lessons and even a job for his wife in the same building! "Our main reason to move into this incubator was the ecosystem...it is full of like-minded entrepreneurs...during pitches

to VCs, you really are in the nerve of the Valley," says Patel who is based at PnP. "We even pivoted our business model (from creating a software for telecom consultants to selling directly to enterprises) based on conversations with PnP's technology investments head Alireza Masrouf. It was the best move for our startup!"

No wonder incubators like TechStars are opening up in other technology hubs, like Seattle, Boston and New York City as well. Last June, RockHealth, an incubator focused on health startups, opened in San Francisco. Through its partners—like Harvard Medical School, Mayo Clinic, University of California, San Francisco and Genentech—RockHealth helps entrepreneurs understand the complexities of healthcare, including USFDA regulations, legal and finance issues. "The hurdles and barriers to enter healthcare are

otherwise so very difficult because of the nature of the industry. Being here also accelerates, validates and builds our idea," says Ryan Panchadsaram. His RockHealth incubated startup Pipette—a remote app for monitoring medications, symptoms, progress of patients who have been discharged after surgeries—was acquired by an MIT spin-off called Ginger.io.

Over half the startups at Plug and Play are led by Indians. "And I personally know of at least five Bangalore-based start-ups that are applying at YC," says Vivek Ravisankar, co-founder of Interviewstreet. When he made it to YC's three-month summer programme last June he was the first Indian entrepreneur to do so.

Ravisankar wanted to move to the US to hire engineers and get users for his start-up that creates puzzles for engineers, which doubles up as tools for firms to recruit engineers. Not only did he get seed funding from YC and other investors, but also availed of YC's celebrity head Paul Graham's mentoring, clout and connections. Plus, the incubator's culture meant that the 200 start-ups at YC became beta users and Ravisankar got feedback and critique.

Today, an estimated 1,500 programmers spend about an hour-and-a-half to two hours a day on Interviewstreet. The start-up also powers the career pages of Facebook and Amazon with special timed custom built puzzles. "I don't know of a simpler way of getting a non-US person's start-up set up in the Valley," says Ravisankar.

With Inputs from Biswarup Gooptu in Bangalore