

# Newspaper Clips

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## BAD EDUCATION

Even as Indian varsities rank poorly on a global list, lawmakers leave crucial higher education bills hanging



The latest QS World University Rankings are out and, as has been the case before, India fares poorly. In fact, the country makes an appearance on the list only at the 222nd spot, with the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi (IIT-D). In Asia, IIT-D comes in at the 38th spot while among the BRICS nations, it is placed 13th. The

global top-10, predictably, is a US-UK show, but the fact that India's showing, even in a limited pool such as just the BRICS nations, is rather telling.

Even though India incurs significant expenditure on higher education—at 3% of the GDP, the country's education spend is higher than that of the US—our varsities are far from being world-class. Part of the problem stems from a missing base—with the miserably low levels of school education, especially in government schools (according to the latest Actual Status of Education Report), the critical mass for a demand push for quality in undergraduate and post-graduate education is lacking. But the larger blame must rest with the obsolete policy deck for higher education. One would think that the poor showing of Indian varsities would have spurred India's policy-makers into action. But at least three Bills—the Foreign Educational Institutions Bill 2010, that would have allowed foreign varsities to set up campuses in the country, the Universities for Research and Innovation Bill 2012, and the National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010, to standardise academic quality—that could have improved varsity education are set to lapse with the end of the term of the 15th Lok Sabha, with Parliament having failed to pass them.

## **IITs to launch certification course on March 3**

**NEW DELHI:** After the success of making its YouTube lectures, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are all set to launch an online certification for basic computer science courses from March 3. The institutes are collaborating with NASCOM and other major IT companies for the programme. The certification is an offshoot of the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) which has helped to make IIT courses available online to students and teachers across the country.

# Govt extension for 12 VCs 'illegal'

Akshaya Mukul | TNN

**New Delhi:** The human resource development ministry's decision to grant extension to vice-chancellors of 12 central universities is being seen as 'patently' illegal.

As the process of appointing new VCs is still on, the ministry on Thursday granted incumbent VCs extension till their successors are found.

But sources in the HRD ministry said that extension without seeking the permission of the President, who is the visitor, is illegal. "Instead, the seniormost professors should have been asked to hold the charge till the new VC is appointed," one official said.

Ministry sources point out that when 16 new central



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universities were set up in 2009, the appointment of VCs was transitional in nature. "The first appointment was without following any method. The ministry on its own decided to set up a single search committee under BC Mungekar that chose VCs for 16 new central universities. In fact, later, the VC of Central University of Jammu was appointed without any search committee. Even the appointment

letter from the President, who is the visitor, said the term of the VCs will be for five years. The Statute of the Central University Act was also not prepared when they were appointed."

Another violation of the Central University Act is being pointed out in the context of the central universities of Haryana and Karnataka. VCs of these varsities demitted office without completing their

five-year term. The Act specifically states that a successor can be appointed for only the residual period. But the ministry initially appointed them for a full term. Later, it realized the mistake. But by then, the search committee for 12 central universities was already in place. The ministry has now decided to constitute search panels for the central universities of Haryana and Karnataka.

The appointment process for VCs of central varsities of Bihar, Jharkhand, Srinagar, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Punjab, Odisha, Rajasthan is under way along with the Hari Singh Gour Central University, Sagar; Guru Ghasidas Central University and Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Central University, Garhwal.

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## Indian youth gung ho about the immediate future

Confidence levels of Japanese youth in economic matters almost rock-bottom

RASHEEDA BHAGAT

Chennai, February 28

The general doom and gloom doesn't seem to have affected Indian youth's optimism about the future. In the Asia-Pacific region, their optimism about their prospects on employment and regular income is second only to those of their Myanmar counterparts. This is the finding of the first MasterCard Worldwide Youth Confidence Index, published last fortnight.

### Income, economy

In sharp contrast, the confidence levels of the Japanese youth about their



country's future prospects are near the bottom in the Asia-Pacific region.

Respondents aged 18-30 were quizzed on the six-month outlook for economic factors such as employment prospects, economy, regular income, and anticipated quality of life in the next five years.

While Myanmar, which has had an eventful year with positive political

developments, topped the table with an overall score of 92.4, India came second with 84, and Indonesia third with 82.5. Significantly, China was placed fifth with a score of 77.5. The confidence levels of the youth in developed countries such as Japan (48.6) and Taiwan (42) were lower than even Bangladesh's 55.2. Pakistan is conspicuous by its absence.

### Elephant rules

There is more good news for the Indian elephant, which is often compared unfavourably with the Chinese dragon. On four of the five parameters, Indian youth showed more confidence than their Chinese counterparts — their score for employment prospects in the next five years was higher at 86.9 against China's 72.7.

On economy, it is 86.2 (72.2), present life situation 75.9 (63.4), and regular income 95.3 (94.7). Only on the 'life sit-

uation in 5 years' category do Chinese youth score 84.5 against 75.8 by Indian youth.

Interestingly, in robust economies such as Australia and Hong Kong, the youth's confidence levels have ebbed. On their employment and economy prospects, the Australian youth scored only 58.6 and 62.6 respectively; the figures for Hong Kong were lower at 57.4 and 42.9.

A separate survey, measuring the confidence levels of older respondents (aged 30-64) in these countries had little surprise; the "seniors" were more worried about their future. Perhaps, the additional category that sought their views on the local stock market made the difference.

In India, the gap in the overall confidence index was not too large; 77.9 for the seniors compared to 84 for the youth. But for Australia, the gap — 49.9 against 69 — was significant.



**For \$45** Students try out the Aakash tablet, when it released with much fanfare in 2011  
AFP/PRAKASH SINGH

**Not app-heavy** Datawind CEO and co-founder, Suneet Tuli, says the company has managed to keep the product cheap by focusing on individual costs  
KAMAL NARANG



# Tab on costs

How Datawind leveraged its disruptive technology to enter the hall of fame

**I**t's a company that made waves after introducing the world's cheapest tablets in India in 2011 — a time when tabs were just getting noticed. It introduced a better one a year later, after the first series was panned. And before anyone could anticipate its next move, it rolled out an ultra low-cost five-inch-screen smartphone. For its disruptive technology, Datawind has now made it to 2014's 50 Smartest Companies in MIT *Technology Review's* annual list of the world's most innovative technology companies.

So far, the biggest strength of the Canada-based Datawind, almost synonymous with Aakash tablets, has been its ability to keep costs low. And that has helped it take the number three slot in the Indian tablet market behind Samsung (15 per cent) and Lenovo (13.3 per cent), according to research firm IDC. Datawind had 12.4 per cent of the market (in the September 2013 quarter) excluding sales to the government as part of the Aakash project.

Datawind CEO and co-founder, Suneet Tuli, says the company has managed to keep a tab on cost by focusing on every cost head — hardware, software, marketing and distribution. "Because we manufacture our own screens (in Amritsar and Montreal), we are able to cut a substantial part of hardware costs," he says. A touch screen is about 25 to 30 per cent of the cost of a device (tablet or smartphone) and due to high demand, manufacturers charge a premium. Datawind has eliminated the suppliers' margin, cutting costs to one-fourth of the market price. "We have a number of patents around this technology," Tuli adds.

Another reason behind high prices is what he calls "features overkill". Since most users don't end up using all the features in a smartphone, Datawind is focusing on specific needs for a customer segment. "The most important

feature while making a decision is affordability. Designing products as per the price is a good enough disruption," he says.

Vishal Tripathi, principal analyst at Gartner India, agrees that affordability is a big consideration. "The crux is that India is a price conscious market. That's why you don't see premium tabs resonating well here," he says.

Around 80 per cent of tab users are consumers while 20 per cent are enterprises, which prefer top-end features in tablets. Due to the sheer size of the consumer segment, low-cost tablets will always find buyers.

However, Alok Shende, principal analyst at Ascentius Consulting has a word of caution: "Low price is certainly an advantage in a market like India. But as consumers educate themselves, they will realise the trade-offs on the usability that come with a low price are not worth it."

For now, Tuli continues to believe that customers should not be burdened with profit expectations at the time of purchase. "We realised that a significant amount of revenue comes in after customers have bought the product. We realised that apps, network services and advertising create significant sources of revenues." So he is relying on offsetting lower hardware margins by higher recurring revenues. Datawind has relationships with partners, who provide content for devices and customers pay for that. It also sells ad space on pre-loaded apps on its tabs, where it splits the revenue with app developers.

For long, Datawind managed to keep distribution and marketing expenses negligible by only selling online. It has now partnered with Flipkart and Snapdeal as well. "Even though a

significant part of our sales comes from online and through call centres, we are expanding to other channels," says Tuli.

Datawind is now reaching out to customers through tele-shopping. "We have started selling our products through 200 mobile retailers in Delhi and Mumbai," Tuli says. In the next six months, that number should go up to 2,000 across India.

India apart, Datawind is selling tablets in 15 countries including Mexico, Zambia, Tanzania, Uruguay, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Canada. "Latin America and Africa are a big focus area for us as these are developing economies where affordability is a key requirement. The response has been overwhelming," he adds.

With these strategies in place, Datawind turned profitable in FY13. "We are not heavily profitable but we are definitely not making losses," Tuli says. As Datawind looks to expand beyond India, the country's share in its overall revenues is reducing annually. From 90 per cent of revenues from India in 2012, it went down to 70 per cent in 2013. "In the current year, only about half of our revenues will come from India," he says.

While Tuli is happy with increasing sales, Shende believes the low-cost strategy might change in the near future. "Over time, Datawind will give up its ultra low-cost proposition and move to devices that deliver a good user experience," says Shende. Tuli, for now, disagrees. He says he wants to take this low-cost "India revolution global". Only time will tell who is right.

**Tuli believes that customers should not be burdened with profit expectations at the time of purchase**

RASHMI PRATAP

# Alumnus Bharat Desai donates \$1 million to IIT-B for dynamic entrepreneurship centre

Saturday, 1 March 2014 - 6:00am IST | Place: Mumbai | Agency: DNA

<http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report-alumnus-bharat-desai-donates-1-million-to-iit-b-for-dynamic-entrepreneurship-centre-1965809>

The financial help from US-based Syntel founder Bharat Desai will help produce more entrepreneurs.



- Bharat Desai is a Kenya-born Indian-American entrepreneur, who graduated in electrical engineering from IIT-B in 1975

The Indian Institute of Technology in Powai received quite a windfall recently when billionaire alumnus Bharat Desai, chairman of US-based company Syntel, donated \$1 million to his alma mater. The money will go toward starting a robust entrepreneurship centre so that many more technicians come out as entrepreneurs rather than just as degree-holders.

Prof Ravi Sinha, dean of Alumni and Corporate Relations at IIT-B, told dna, "Mr Desai gave us \$1million to start an entrepreneurship centre; all modalities have been finalised. A robust training programme under the guidance of experts and innovators will start this July. It will be open to all except the first year students." Over 8,000 students are currently studying at the institute in various courses.

Desai, a Kenya-born Indian-American entrepreneur, graduated in electrical engineering from IIT-B in 1975. Syntel, based in Troy, Michigan, is a multinational provider of integrated technology, KPO and business services, with over 23,652 employees across the world, including India.

Desai co-founded the company in 1980 with Neerja Sethi (now his wife) with an initial investment of \$2,000. Originally named Systems International, the company earned \$30,000 in its first year. The net worth of the company at present is said to be \$2 billion.

Anand Kusre, a professor at Shailesh J Mehta School of Management at IIT-B, will head the ambitious project. Ecstatic with the development, Kusre said, "We have designed the programmes to cater to the needs of every student on campus. This will be offered for free."

The institute is currently in the process of hiring experts/trainers for the centre, which will require over \$1.8 million in the first phase. "The remaining funds will be generated from alumni and corporates," said Sinha.

### **Long-term**

A three-year programme for all BTech second year students, which will be optional, will be offered for free. Experts, innovators and businessmen will train students for three-four hours a week. Training will be to identify the need of the society and industry, lab facilities to innovate and test the products, marketing strategy, costing etc. At the end, every candidate will receive a BTech minor degree (entrepreneurship) along with the major degree

### **Short-term**

Several entrepreneurship courses have been designed to cater to the need of all UG, PG, research, management and humanities students on campus.

We have an incubator cell but it's not as robust as it should have been. With the big financial help from Mr Desai, we will be able to streamline the entrepreneurship training, making it dynamic and result-oriented. We hope to see many more entrepreneurs in the next few years

—Prof Ravi Sinha, dean, Alumni and Corporate Relations, IIT-B

## **CBSE bans coaching for JEE, schools look to dodge rule**

[M Ramya](#), TNN | Feb 28, 2014, 03.00AM IST

CHENNAI: Schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will have to stop conducting courses that integrate the regular syllabus and coaching for competitive exams like the Joint Entrance Examination for admission to the IITs, the board has said.

In a circular criticizing schools for commercializing education, CBSE directed principals of all institutions affiliated to the board to immediately stop offering such coaching programmes as part of the regular workday or otherwise.

"It has been reported that some of the schools are running coaching institutions on the school premises under the pretext of providing preparations for entrance examinations. This is not approved by the board and schools need to stop such malpractices immediately," said the CBSE circular from CBSE secretary Joseph Immanuel to principals. It said the board is liable to take "appropriate action" against schools that do not adhere to conditions stipulated in CBSE's affiliation bylaws.