Newspaper Clips
March 12, 2015

Deccan Herald ND 12/03/2015 P-7

Filling IIT chief positions: Govt to interview all candidates

NEW DELHI, DHNS: The HRD ministry will invite all the 37 applicants for the director positions in IIT Patna, Bhubaneswar and Ropar for interview.

Sources said a decision on the matter was taken with the approval of HRD Minister Smriti Irani, days after she tore up the list of 13 candidates finalised by the search-cum-selection committees to fill the three positions, and asked officials to begin the process afresh.

She asked the officials to invite all the candidates since some of the applicants who the committees had rejected in the preliminary stages could have been better examined. Upset over the way the selection was handled, Irani also transferred additional secretary Amerjeet Sinha from the charge of the technical institutes to the ministry's statistics department.

Sinha was on the firing line as he had recently approached Cabinet Secretary Ajit Seth with a request to shift him from the HRD Ministry following his differences with Irani "over a range of issues which included selection of the IIT directors", sources added. "The Minister wants to appoint suitable candidates for the posts. All 37 candidates will be interviewed in front of her this time," official sources told Deccan Herald, adding the interview will be held later this month.

Times Of India ND 12/03/2015 P-11

On threshold of IIT club, ISM fails to mine talent

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New Delhi: Indian School of Mines (ISM), set to be converted into an IIT come next academic year, seems to be losing appeal among students, with the institute failing to find takers for several seats.

Though admission to the IITs as well as ISM is conducted through joint counseling on the basis of one's rank in the Joint Entrance Examination (advanced), it has been found that students no longer find the Dhanbad-based school a promising option.

The number of students getting admission through counseling has been falling steadily: from 931 in 2012 to 815 in 2013 and approximately 750 in 2014. However, unlike the IITs, ISM also has a system of spot admissions. Simply put, spot admissions take place after the joint counseling session concludes. To this end, ISM issues notices in local newspapers stating the number of vacant seats and inviting students who have cleared the JEE (advanced) but failed to get through any IIT. But even so, the institute has been struggling to fill seats over the past few years.

In 2012, for instance, even though 121 students were taken in through spot admission, at least 23 seats remained vacant. In 2013, ISM found no takers for eight seats even as it admitted 169 students through the exercise.

It is interesting to note that all spot admissions at ISM are for the BTech, MTEch or dual (BTech & MTech) degree courses, and not one for either BSc or MSc.

For the full report, log on to www.timesofindia.com

Economic Times ND 12/03/2015 P-7

TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION RANKINGS

No Indian Varsity in 'Top 100' List

Eight US varsities among top 10; IISc ranked first among Indian institutes

Our Bureau

FILE PHOTO

Mumbai: India failed to find a mention in the top 100 list of universities as none of the country's premier institutions could make the grade, according to the 2015 World Reputation Rankings by Times Higher Education (THE) magazine.

Indian Institute of Science (IISc) is the highest-ranked institution in the country, though it doesn't figure in the world's top 100. As many as 21 countries made it to the list, with the US' Harvard University grabbing the top slot. UK's University of Cambridge coming second, and the University of Oxford moving up to the third position.

The US universities continue to dominate the charts, bagging 8 of the top 10 positions and 43 of the top 100 (down from 46 last year). The UK comes in next with 12 of the world's top university brands (up from 10 in 2014), while Germany takes the third position with six spots among the top-100 universities.

"These surveys have certain limitations. They are essentially good for global universities which have a broad international student clientele and alumni across the globe," says Bhaskar Ramamurthi, director, IIT Madras.

The World Reputation ranking is based on a worldwide survey of expert academic opinion, and denotes a university's global standing when it comes to academic reputation. The 2015 rankings are based on 10,507 responses. Around 3% of all survey responses came from southern and central Asia, including India.

"There's no way of knowing why these academics are not nominating enough Indian institutions," says Phil Baty, editor, Times Higher Education rankings, in a written response to **ET**.

"However, many of the institutions, which don't feature in the World Reputation Rankings, also receive poor scores for international outlook in the Times Higher Education's main World University Rankings, (which are based on 13 performance parameters).

"This means that they are not attracting enough international students or staff, collaborating with overseas universities enough, or publishing enough research papers in English," he said.

Baty added that all these factors can influence a university's reputation, so it is likely that by improving their international outlook, Indian institutions can not only improve by sharing best practices globally and drawing from the global talent pool, they can also do better when it comes to their perceived by the global academic community.

Baty says THE has been working with the Indian government, and seeing increased engagement from India's universities.

"At this stage, the best-performing Indian institutions in the reputation rankings are the IITs — they have a strong reputation across the world, so they tend to perform best in this particular analysis. However, they are still not receiving enough nominations to make it into the top 100," Baty added.

Times Of India ND 12/03/2015 P-15

No Indian university in Times rankings

43 US Univs In Top 100 List; Harvard Ranks 1st

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London: Not a single Indian university is regarded by academics internationally as being among the world's most prestigious, according to the Times Higher Education rankings released on Thursday.

The annual list is based on the world's largest invitation-only survey of academics. Times Higher Education distributes the survey in 15 languages to over 10,500 academics in 142 countries.

According to the 2015 list, Harvard in the US is the world's top university followed by UK's University of Cambridge (2nd) and the University of Oxford (3rd), which displaces the Massachusetts Institute of Technology by one rank (4th).

The rest of the top 10 is made up of US institutions: Princeton University (7th), Yale University (8th), California Institute of Technology (9th) and Columbia University (10th).

POOR SHOW

THE TOP 5 UNIVERSITIES

- Harvard University (US)
- University of Cambridge (UK)
- University of Oxford (UK)
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (US)
- Stanford University (US)

- Most BRIC nations make their mark, with only India failing to launch
- UK's University of Cambridge (2nd) and University of Oxford (3rd) displace the US's MIT (4th) and Stanford University (5th)
- London and Paris tie for top spot as world cities with highest number of top-ranked universities
- Japan's University of Tokyo (12th) tops Asian list in the global reputation league
- US takes eight of top 10 positions and 43 of top 100

London and Paris are tied for top spot as the world cities with the highest number of top-ranked universities.

Brazil, Russia and China — the other BRIC nations — have at least one top 100 university in the list.

The US dominated the list with 43 universities in the top 100. The UK has the second highest number of representatives in the top 100: 12 (up from 10 last year and nine in 2013).

"It is a matter of concern that a country of India's intellectual history does not have a single university that is regarded by academics globally as being among the world's most prestigious," Phil Baty, editor of Times Higher Education Rankings, told **TOI** in an interview.

For the full report, log on to www.timesofindia.com

India is only BRIC nation to not find place in Times ranking

Hindustan Times (Indore)

NEW DELHI: Even as the government is making announcements to improve the standard of higher education and charting out ways to improve its global visibility, a new international ranking list announced on Wednesday shows that 'acche din' of the country in higher education is still a distant dream.

The World Reputatio n Rankings 2015 released by the Times Higher Education which lists the 100 most prestigious global universities, has no mention of India. This is even more embarrassing as the other three BRIC nations have found space. There is one institution from Brazil, two from Russia and as many from China.

The results are based on a global invitation-only opinion poll carried out in partnership with Elsevier, the provider of scientific, technical and medical information products and services. The poll has attracted almost 70,000 responses from more than 150 countries in five annual rounds since the first survey in 2010. The 2015 results were drawn from 10,507 survey responses from published senior academics who on average had worked in higher education for 15 years.

Phil Baty, editor of the Times Higher Education Rankings, said, "It is really a matter of concern that a country of India's great intellectual history and its huge and growing economic power does not have a single university that is regarded by academics globally as being among the world's most prestigious.

"Highly regarded global universities act as a magnet for international talent, and can draw in funding and investment and strategic partnerships, so they can really help power future economic and intellectual growth. Brazil, Russia and China, the other great "BRIC" nations, all have at least one top 100 university in this prestigious list. It is time India gave more support to its leading universities to ensure that they can compete on a world stage."

Acknowledging that this was a cause of concern IIT Kanpur director Indranil Manna said. "We are aware of it and have even taken it very seriously. Our efforts will bear fruits after some time. We are constantly changing our pattern from that of technical institutions to research universities."

Millennium Post ND 12/03/2015 P-8

Outreach missing in Indian higher education

Outreach programmes could be designed in a way that they become integral to the education system in India, says **G. Palanithurai**

In the absence of a well defined, contextualised policy and actionable framework, higher education in India is now passing through a difficult phase. Globalisation has accelerated the growth of institutions of higher learning. Yet, several crises have beset the higher education system. A combination of factors is responsible for the present state of affairs in higher education, of which globalisation-led manpower production is a major one. This factor drives the whole process of higher education to achieve profit and prosperity. At the same time, it totally neglects the humanising function. As a result, an exploitative culture is nurtured and perpetuated in the education system from elementary education to higher learning, which, ultimately, has changed the thought process of students.

In the formative years post Independence India, teachers advocated "serve-and-sacrifice" to students. Contextually, it can be modified to "serve-and-prosper". But in reality, students are impressed by the practice of "serve to exploit". Knowledge gained in the educational process is to serve human society without exploiting its people. The reality, however, is different. A dominant thought and discourse has been set in motion in the functioning of regulatory and funding bodies to focus on employability, skill, quality, ranking, accreditation, academic accountability and auditing, standardisation, and internationalisation. Many of the above attributes are drawn from the West to drive the higher education system to produce quality manpower for the labour market in India and the world. It is a known fact that disparities and differences in the Indian society are reflected in institutions of higher learning in terms of infrastructural facilities and quality of teachers. Like the graded social structure, we find graded higher learning institutions.

Representative Image

The conditions have further worsened with perpetuation of corrupt practices in these institutions by the political class, which is co-opted by the intellectual middle class without any resistance whatsoever. In this market-driven approach, the crony business class, along with crooked politicians, have started to capitalise on the weaknesses of governance mechanisms by investing huge money in higher education as new opportunities arise as a result of globalisation. Creation of education factories for manpower production pays rich dividends to the investors and a select few students, leaving large segments in the unemployable category, despite repeated warning signs from prospective employers to higher educational institutions. In the process, one can see the marginalisation of public funded institutions, especially those located in rural areas and difficult to access terrains. As a result, one can see the dominance of the profit-driven business approach in the thinking of teachers and students. Concern for nature, the poor, the marginalised and oppressed people, and pressing social issues is absent from both students and teachers, as they are increasingly driven by the blind pull of consumerism.

The task in higher education before any government is onerous. The condition of higher education and consequently the nature of its problems have worsened since Independence. Higher education in India is undergoing a transformation of sorts with many resultant complications. More problems are added to existing ones as deeper issues remain unresolved. The outcome does not seem positive for a majority of people. Hence, we have to explicitly discuss and decisively act on these complex issues. Even in difficult times, one can find opportunities to achieve better things. The difficulties in higher education can be turned into opportunities, through which human resource transformation could be achieved in a country that has more than 745 universities, 39000 colleges and 11000 research institutions with 80,00,000 students. It is not a small number. It is a huge number which can transform India in many significant aspects of life.

For a meaningful engagement, we need to have a comprehensive and exhaustive policy for higher education. The new policy should integrate outreach activities involving institutions of higher learning. In essence, these institutions have to perform three functions - research, academic (teaching) and outreach (extension). In India, only a fraction of higher learning institutions are performing the aforementioned two major functions of research and teaching and a substantial majority are only performing the bare minimum function of teaching. Very rarely, if ever, institutions of higher learning perform all three functions synchronously. A high level of quality can be achieved in higher education by interlinking these functions. Further, they would do well to go into learning mode.

The Government of India is contemplating a revamped higher education policy as of now. Conventionally, intellectuals and bureaucrats concentrate more on teaching and research but tend to ignore the extension dimension, which has rich potential to transform our society without adding much cost to higher education. Each department or academic discipline in such institutions can contribute directly to transform society. It needs only a policy, an approach, a system, and a framework of action. In India, beyond NSS and agriculture, no institution has consistently developed perspectives, approaches, tools and technologies of extension in higher learning institutions. The regulatory bodies of higher education have not paid much attention to this subject and hence in the evaluation process of institutions and teachers rigorous attributes of extension have not been evolved and incorporated. As a result, extension becomes a discretionary function and not an obligatory one for teachers and institutions. All academic institutions can offer their available extendables to the community. It requires only a coordinating agency in each institution to carry out extension activities. It may be a centre or department exclusively for outreach activities. Communities can be transformed even if minimal awareness is created of the importance of cleanliness, sanitation, water supply, skill, utilizing opportunities in government schemes for poverty reduction and prosperity. The extendables in higher learning institutions may be in the form of mere ideas, information, skill, knowledge and technology. They could be shared with the community systematically and followed up on a sustainable basis.

Business Standard ND 12/03/2015 P-10

What's gone wrong at Nalanda University?

Resurrected in November 2010, the revered institution has been in the news for all the wrong reasons

OUT OF THE BLUE

ANJULI BHARGAVA

Located in Rajgir in Bihar's Nalanda district, Nalanda University was resurrected in November 2010 by a special Act of Parliament. It has been designated an "institution of national importance". It is envisaged as an icon of the "new Asian renaissance" — a creative space that will be for new generations a centre of "inter-civilisational dialogue". The team that was formed to oversee this project in June 2007 was termed the Nalanda Mentor Group and was chaired by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. In July 2012, the United Progressive Alliance-II appointed him the first chancellor of the university.

Of late, the revered institution has been in the news for none of the right reasons. Sen has, rather prematurely, withdrawn his candidature as chancellor for a second term on the assumption that it is unlikely to be renewed. Sen claims that for him the project has been a "labour of love" but there are some questions that spring to mind.

The biggest question that arises is what kind of international university is built by pumping in a couple of crores a year. In a recent media interview, Sen claimed that "the total expenses of Nalanda University over four years, from its founding in 2010 to the end of the last financial year (2013-14), has been under ₹25 crore." Even building toilets – as we have learned of late as a nation – would cost more. If that's the total fund the government is willing or able to commit to this project, it may be another 100 years before it gets anywhere at all. And if this is the kind of money it is willing to commit to "institutions of national importance", one shudders to think what happens to the rest.

Ask any private university that has come up in the last few years and they will tell you what kind of costs are associated with building something of this ambition and scale. In Shiv Nadar University in Greater Noida, which has a total of 1,500-odd students, the investment so far has been ₹1,000 crore. Over the next five years, another ₹2,100 crore is expected to be invested and even then, its ambition to be a world-class global university could be far from met. Surely, with his experience of American and global universities, Sen could have brought home this point to the government.

Institutions of global repute are also not built on massive, empty tracts of land. Four hundred and fifty five acres of emptiness is not the goal. To build an institution of this stature, size and ambition, you need an army of academicians, professors, assistant professors, staffers and at least four to five years of back-breaking work. You need a committed team of people leading from the front. You need to create a buzz so that you have a long line of students queuing up for admission. So little has Nalanda been in the news – till this needless controversy was stirred up by the chancellor himself – that you could have been forgiven for having forgotten its very existence. We – those who read and are exposed to the business and general press – may still have heard its name, but ask a bunch of students and they will draw a blank. Nalanda University is not making the rounds at schools to try and attract students (unlike many private universities who do so regularly by holding workshops) and very few parents or students are even aware of its existence. It's practically a state secret.

This is, of course, evident in the numbers it has managed to attract. Currently, Nalanda University has a total of 13 students after two dropped out (15 were apparently chosen out of 1,000 applicants in 2014) and 11 faculty members. The chancellor and the vice-chancellor – if newspaper reports are anything to go by – do not reside in Rajgir, leaving the daily functioning of the university to its own devices and these 11 faculty members, with presumably some skeletal staff to manage.

It may be early days yet but Sen can certainly not rest on the strength of what he has built in Rajgir till now. It may be known in Rajgir or even in Bihar but on a national scale, it looks like Nalanda University will remain another expensive government experiment in the field of education.

Navbharat Times ND 12/03/2015 P-18

सर्वे हर साल विदेशी डिग्री पर बहा रहे अरबों डॉलर

कमाई के लिए कटाते जेब

■ बेंगलुरु मिरर

एक तरफ सरकार मेक इन इंडिया की बात कर रही है और वहीं दूसरी ओर एसोचैम का यह सर्वे आया है जिसमें भारतीयों के हर साल हजारों अरब विदेश में खर्च होने की बात पता लगी है। टाटा इंस्टिट्यूट ऑफ सोशल साइंसेज के साथ मिलकर किए गए इस सर्वे से पता लगता है कि भारतीय स्टूडेंट्स हर साल विदेशी यूनिवर्सिटीज में 6 से 7 अरब डॉलर खर्च कर रहे हैं। देश में हायर एजुकेशन के इंस्टीट्यूशनों की क्वॉलिटी अच्छी न होने के कारण ऐसा हो रहा है।

रीअलाइनिंग स्किलिंग टुवर्ड्स मेक इन इंडिया नाम से तैयार इस सर्वे रिपोर्ट में पता लगता है कि क्वॉलिटी हायर एजुकेशन की कमी और आईआईटी जैसे नामी संस्थानों के भी दुनिया के टॉप रिसर्च संस्थानों में जगह न बना पाने के कारण ज्यादा से ज्यादा भारतीय स्टूडेंट्स विदेश का रुख कर रहे हैं। यही नहीं, विदेश पढ़ने जाने वालों में से बहुत कम ही देश वापस लौटते हैं। एसोचैम के सेक्रेटरी डीएस रावत के मुताबिक, भारतीय हर साल अपने बच्चे को विदेश हायर एजुकेशन के लिए भेजने पर 6 से

- हर साल 6 से 7 अरब डॉलर खर्च करते हैं
- देश में हायर एजुकेशन की क्वॉलिटी अच्छी नहीं
- आईआईटी जैसे संस्थान भी दुनिया के टॉप रिसर्च इंस्टिट्यूट्स में शामिल नहीं

7 अरब डॉलर खर्च करते हैं। ऐसा सिर्फ इलीट नहीं करते बल्कि मिडिल क्लास फैमिलीज भी ऐसा कर रही हैं। आईआईटी का बड़ा नाम बेशक हो और हर साल यहां देश के सबसे होनहार 10 से 15 हजार स्टूडेंट्स दाखिला पाते हों पर आज तक उन्होंने एक भी ग्लोबल पेटेंट या नोबेल विजेता तैयार नहीं किया है। सर्वे कहता है कि हमारे पास गूगल, फेसबुक, माइक्रोसॉफ्ट, वॉलमार्ट या नाइकी की बराबरी करने वाला एक भी उदाहरण नहीं है।

Millennium Post ND 12/03/2015 P-9

Prejudice knows no religion

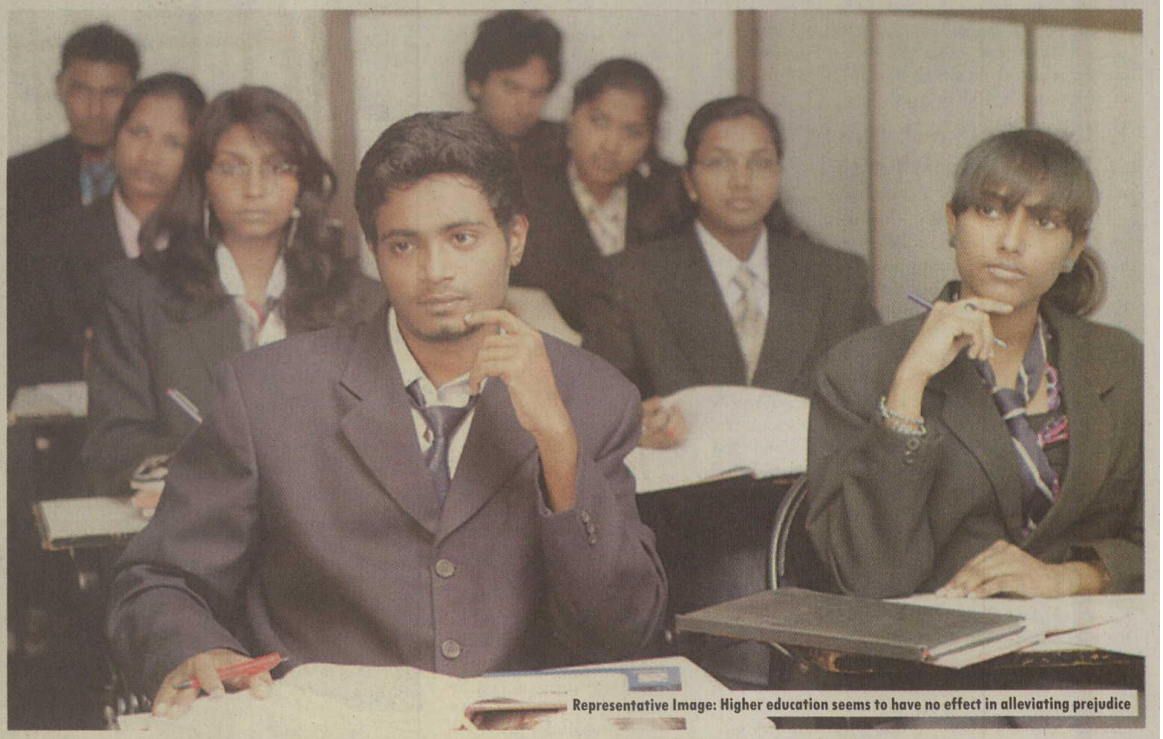
Education is no guarantee for the prevention of prejudice, argues **Ipshita Chakraborty**

Indian society seems to be witnessing a peculiar juxtaposition of progress and prejudice. A friend refuses to employ a certain lady because she is a Muslim. He has graduated from one of the premier academic institutions of the country and is employed with a globally reputed multi-national company. A relative bars girls of the family from entering places of worship during 'those days of the month'; her daughter, who conforms to it, is a doctor in the making. A friend's boss is vehemently opposed to women pursuing careers; his only daughter is in the final term of her MBA.

Variously termed prejudice, bias, bigotry, such behaviour belie all possible forms of logical explanation. The perpetrators are, however, not the unlettered, unrefined, unsophisticated lot. They are very much a part of the well-heeled, private school educated, English speaking and globetrotting gentry.

Research on cognitive capabilities points to a inverse correlation between intellectual development and prejudice. The internet is awash with scholarly articles, one of which concludes that "higher levels of prejudice are more likely to be found in individuals who evidence lower levels of intellectual development". However, most of this research is on the Western world and conclusive evidence on the Indian society is scanty. In any case, people in India are different in far too many ways to ever be viewed as a cohesive, homogeneous populace. Hence it is difficult to say whether a more educated India is also a more progressive one. Circumstantial evidence, at least, does not point in that direction.

Religion, caste and gender have existed, since time immemorial, as convenient devices for manifestations of prejudice. There is precious little that has changed despite the proliferation of higher education in the country. The young and ambitious corporate executive is still happy with his parents hunting for a tall, fair, convent educated bride for himself. He is, however, willing to strike a compromise with a wheatish complexioned girl in exchange for an enviable line-up of consumer durables. The sight of a woman wearing her hair short, a woman sporting a tattoo or a woman sharing drinks with her male friends is enough to trigger vigilante groups to enforce 'code of morality'. And the sight of a woman behind the wheel is enough to trigger primitive instincts in men.



Representative Image: Higher education seems to have no effect in alleviating prejudice

Religion, caste and gender have existed, since time immemorial, as convenient devices for manifestations of prejudice. There is precious little that has changed despite the proliferation of higher education in the country

Moving on to religion, the Muslim's place in the world of prejudice is indisputable. Sikhs are, at best, objects of innoxious Sardar jokes and Christians, with their dwindling numbers, are perhaps inconsequential to be seriously tabooed. The Jains and Buddhists are also a seemingly docile lot; though calling one a 'practising Buddhist' is becoming increasingly fashionable. That leaves the Muslims, whom our society, read as Hindu, loves to pigeonhole – Hindu being that majoritarian socio-cultural-religious basket. The skull cap, when worn by the Muslim, attracts unwarranted attention; when made by Nike or Levis, it becomes a fashion statement. The Muslim, when he consumes liquor, is scoffed at though the Hindu relishing his beef steak is conveniently discounted.

The unceasing perpetration of taboos and biases calls into question the efficacy of the education system in our society. The academic curriculum, with its disproportionate emphasis on grades and scores, is at best a medium for literacy and not education. There is substantial mettle in our academic system to churn out doctors, engineers and business professionals. There exists, however, a huge void when it comes to instilling empathy, compassion and tolerance in the minds of the young during their formative years.

The friend who refuses to eat from the hands of a Muslim is a habitué of the kebab shops of old Delhi; when asked about the religion of the hand that makes the kebabs, he's only able to dish out blank stares. The relative who attaches taboos with menstruation feels an exuberance of reverence at the mere mention of the Kamakhya temple of Guwahati; a menstruating goddess is an object of devotion while a menstruating mortal is an object of disdain. Nobody has asked the family friend's boss about his plans for his daughter's future; it is being hoped that he will be radicalized by the daughter herself.

Why IITs Have Failed to Produce Nobel Laureates

http://profit.ndtv.com/budget/why-iits-have-failed-to-produce-nobel-laureates-745528

The Indian Institute of Technology, the country's most famous and prestigious engineering school, has failed to produce a single Nobel laureate despite the government pouring "thousands of millions of rupees", noted a joint study of industry body Assocham and Mumbai-based Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

"While the much touted IITs have an annual enrollment of 10,000-15,000, focused only on the brightest of the bright, not a single great worldwide patent has emerged, nor have they produced a single Nobel Laureate," the study says.

IITs have failed to create a mark when it comes to research and innovation because 90 per cent of funding earmarked for the education sector is used for payment of salaries and creating physical infrastructure, the study found.

"We still do not have a single equivalent of a Google, Facebook, Microsoft or Walmart or a Nike. Even a small country like Italy or Finland does better!" said DS Rawat of Assocham.

The skewed funding plagues not only the IITs, but the entire higher education sector, resulting in "sub-standard" quality, the study revealed. As a result, Indian students spend $7 billion or around Rs. 45,000 crore per year on foreign education, the study found.

"Indians spend about $6-7 billion every year in sending their children abroad for higher education. It is not just the elite who spend generously on a good education and credentials but the middle class families also spend their life time savings to educating their children abroad," the study noted with concern.

Interestingly, the money spent on foreign education is nearly 60 per cent of the funds Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has allocated to the education sector for next fiscal.

Indian universities have little money for research and innovation, the biggest reason why India ranks lowly when it comes to new patents and start-ups in technology and innovation, the study says.

Brain drain is another factor that hampers world class innovation in the country. According to the study, many IITians who go abroad for research do not return home after obtaining their doctoral programmes.

Rabindranath Tagore, CV Raman, Mother Teresa, Amartya Sen and Kailash Satyarthi are the five Indians who have won a Nobel.

This IISc researcher makes books accessible to visually challenged

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/This-IISc-researcher-makes-books-accessible-to-visually-challenged/articleshow/46533755.cms

Bengaluru: Sridhar S (22), a visually challenged degree student from Shivamogga, was good at academics. But he couldn't study for his final year BA or take the exam simply because no textbooks were available in Braille.
As books were part of old literature, they were not available in digitalized version either. His father Srinath would read out from the printed textbooks whenever he had time. But that didn't help Sridhar much as he found it tough to memorize and recall the portions.
Now, an innovation by Shiva Kumar H R, a student at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), has made life easier for the likes of Sridhar. His innovation helps scan printed books and instantly converts them into text compliant for the visually challenged.
Shiva has deservedly bagged the Gandhian Young Technological Innovation Award for 2015. The young scientist, who is pursuing his PhD under the guidance of Prof AG Ramakrishnan at the Medical Intelligence and Language Engineering (MILE) Laboratory, Department of Electrical Engineering, IISc, has developed high accuracy Optical Character Recognizers (OCR) for Kannada and Tamil languages. This converts scanned pages of a printed document/book into e-text.
By using the OCR along with the Print to Braille tool, it is easy to scan any printed book/document and convert it into Unicode text in a short span of time. The visually challenged person can listen to that e-text through any text to speech (TTS) synthesis software. The e-text can also be converted into Braille codes and printed using a Braille embosser.
Shiva said the study substance for English and European languages were available in digital and Braille versions for visually challenged. "But not so with Indic languages (classical literature, novels and even school and college books). Here, much of the printed material e-text is not available and hence inaccessible to visually challenged. Converting such books into Unicode text by manual typing is time-consuming and costly," he added.

It reduces time, cost

Shiva said the high accuracy OCR cuts down on time and cost. "We have demonstrated it already and found it is possible to convert more books in a short span of time and make them accessible to the visually challenged. The WORTH trust in Chennai has opened a facility using our product. Family members or friends of visually challenged students come and get digitalized or Braille versions of printed textbooks in minutes. The number of blind persons in India is over 18 million and the product goes a long way in helping them," he added.

Boxes

Applications are plenty

Shiva and team have also developed an intuitive graphical user interface (GUI) called Print-to-Braille tool that enables even non-technical people to quickly use their OCR and make corrections to the mistakes, if any, in the text output by the OCR. Hundreds of Tamil books, including textbooks, story and general books, have been converted into Braille format, and distributed to the needy. A Kannada version of the software has been given to some voluntary organisations and individuals in Karnataka associated with blind students. Apart from pursuing PhD, Shiva is a staff software engineer at IBM Software Labs.

Awarded for its social relevance

The award to Shiva has been given by Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions (SRISTI) and aims to recognise student projects that have strong social relevance. Shiva's work, Gift of New Abilities, was chosen for the award in the Computer science, Information Technology and Related Fields category. The award was given at a function held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on March 8.

PMO rejects TIFR director's appointment

Hindustan Times (Mumbai

MUMBAI: In a first, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has rejected the appointment of the new director at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) on technical grounds.

While scientists have termed this government interference, sources said this is the first time in the history of TIFR, the country's premier scientific research institution, that a director's appointment has been vetoed by the PMO.

"It has happened," scientist CNR Rao, chair man of the search committee and Bharat Ratna, told the Hindustan Times over the phone from Bangalore.

There was no response from the PMO despite repeated messages sent by HT and officials at TIFR refused to comment.

I n January, theoretical physicist Sandip Trivedi, 52, took over as the institute's new director after professor Mustansir Barma, the previous director, completed his tenure in December. Trivedi is the recipient of prestigious awards, including the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award in The Physical Sciences, CSIR, Government of India, 2005, and Infosys Prize in Physical Sciences, 2010.

"Never has it happened that the PMO has rejected a name. In fact, the PMO in the past has even accepted the appointment of Barma's predecessor — professor Sabyasachi (Shobo) Bhattacharya — who had worked in the US for three decades and therefore was a complete outsider," said a TIFR scientist, requesting anonymity.

Rao said a similar episode happened with the appointment of a head at the Bangalore-based Jawaharlal Nehru for Advanced Scientific Research (JNASR) that he founded. "There has been no director [at JNASR] for more than a year. They [PMO] want us to repeat the whole process in terms of advertising the vacancy and taking permissions from the government. The same thing is happening with TIFR," said Rao.

He said it was a "good" search committee that also comprised K Kasturirangan, member (science) planning commission, and Srikumar Banerjee, former chairperson of Atomic Energy Commission. "But the PMO has not accepted the appointment. We have ourownrules [referringto TIFR and JNASR]. Restarting the whole selection process [at TIFR] will take six to eight months," said Rao.

The appointment of a new director is a well-oiled process. The TIFR Council of Management chaired by industrialist Ratan Tata sets up a search committee to select a new head. The committee comprises eminent scientists, who shortlist candidates not necessarily from the institute or the atomic energy establishment. As per TIFR bye-laws, a director is appointed by invitation by the Council with the approval of the central government, Maharashtra government and the trustees. After selecting the candidate, the name is sent to the PMO for its approval.

“This week, I will write to the Prime Minister about many things, including new rules and practices that are coming in the way. I hope the PM will look into the matter,” said Rao.

Human activity main culprit in Ganga pollution: IIT report

http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-human-activity-main-culprit-in-ganga-pollution-iit-report-2068006

The management of solid and liquid waste generated from domestic and industrial sources, preparation of water resources plan for Ganga river basin with wetlands, distributed ground and surface water storage and management of polluted agricultural runoff were the suggestions of the IIT consortium to Centre for its projects to clean the holy river.

In its report for Ganga River Basin Management Plan (GRBMP), which dna has access to, it was observed that over-drawl of fresh water from surface and ground water sources for domestic and public activities, discharge of urban waste, dumping of industrial wastes and leakage of industrial pollutants are the human activities "affecting" the aquatic environment.

Filing a copy of report, which was submitted to the water resources ministry in January this year, before the Supreme Court, the government has said that the consortium of IITs suggested actions in eight missions -- for Aviral Dhara (continuous flow), Nirmal Dhara (unpolluted flow) of the river water, ecological restoration, sustainable agriculture, geological safeguarding, basin protection against disasters, river hazards management and environmental knowledge building and sensitisation.

As per the report, preparation of water resources plan for Ganga river basin with emphasis on wetlands, forests and distributed ground water and surface water storages rather than large reservoirs storage, reuse and recycling of water, control of water withdrawls in water – depleting regions are some recommended actions for Aviral Dhara (mission 1).

Riverfront development, floodplain management and rejuvination of water bodies, management of solid and liquid waste generated from industrial sources are the actions recommended by the consortium for Nirmal Dhara (mission 2).

For ecological restoration, restrictions on river bed farming and gravel and sand mining, restoration of unpolluted river flows, control of alien species invasions, over fishing and fishing during spawning seasons are suggested by the IITs.

Promotion of organic farming where essential and economically feasible and adoption of conservation of agriculture especially in degrading lands, to enhance long-term soil fertility are the action suggested for sustainable agriculture.

Similarly, improving drainage congestion caused by unplanned rail/road network by providing additional culverts and pathways in some parts of UP and Bihar, designing canals to drain water from permanently waterlogged areas, initiation of flood awareness programme and educating people to move away from flood prone areas are suggested for river hazards management.

The Supreme Court, which has pulled up the Central government for delays in cleaning Ganga earlier, is to take up the PIL next week.

IIT alumnus makes green sanitary pads

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/IIT-alumnus-makes-green-sanitary-pads/articleshow/46533376.cms

KOLKATA: Spurthi Gummadala, an IIT Kharagpur alumnus who is now working with National Innovation Foundation and Honeybee Network, has developed low-cost, "semi-reusable" and "bio-friendly" sanitary napkins.

"The napkins available in the market have three parts - the top dry feel layer, the middle absorbent polymer layer mixed with wood pulp to soak in the liquid and the bottom polypropelene layer that helps avoid leakage. Once used, the entire napkin is discarded adding to landfills. I have tried to tweak this in my product," Spurthi said.

"I have made my napkin a semi-reusable one. Here you have a holder made of polyurethin coated polyester for repeated use. The absorbent layer can be disposed and refilled with a fresh layer which doesn't pose biohazard. So, it will help arrest biohazard to an extent," she added.