

Newspaper Clips

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HT Indore

LIGHTING UP

IIT-Indore may power entire state

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INDORE: If everything goes according to plan, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Indore, may soon be generating electricity not only for itself but also for the power-starved state.

Under an ambitious plan, the institute has proposed to produce nearly six megawatts of solar power on its sprawling Simrol campus. As per a current estimate, the institute would need only one megawatt of power, so the rest could be supplied to the state.

“We are confident that the human resource development ministry would provide us with the requisite funds,” IIT-Indore director Pradeep Mathur said.

“This fund would be separate from the one to be provided for construction. An expert who has worked on solar projects in the state would help us with the design and implementa-

IIT-INDORE PROPOSES TO PRODUCE SIX MEGAWATTS OF SOLAR POWER, OF WHICH FIVE MEGAWATTS WILL BE GIVEN TO MP

tion,” he added.

Dean (academics) N Jain said: “We have realised that there is a huge potential to generate solar power in Indore as the sky is clear for nearly 11 months in a year. This would help us become self-sufficient.”

However, Mathur said that at present there was “status quo” as the institute had been allotted nearly 500 acres of

which 70 acres was awaiting forest clearance.

“Until that happens, construction and formal transfer of land cannot take place,” he added.

IIT Indore was one of the seven new IITs that were set up during the 11th five-year plan period (2007-12).



HT Mumbai

IIT students protest Lankan war crimes

HT Correspondent

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MUMBAI: A group of students staged a daylong hunger strike and peaceful protest at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (IIT-B) on Wednesday in support of the agitation against alleged Sri Lankan war crimes.

The students said they were expressing their solidarity with their counterparts who were protesting at various Chennai campuses, including the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras.

The students have called for a resolution, stressing an independent enquiry into the war crimes, a referendum for an independent Tamil Eelam and mechanisms under the UN for preventing human rights abuses.

On March 22 the UN Human Rights Council will be voting on a resolution for Sri Lanka to

accept and independent probe. The UN has estimated that at least 40,000 people died in the war.

“We did this one-day hunger strike as a solidarity gesture,” said one protesting student at IIT-B. He claimed around 100 students had participated in Wednesday’s protests, with students boycotting meals, wearing black badges and marching through campus with banners.

The IITB students will also be participating in a pan-IIT hunger strike with students from all the institutes, at a later date, yet to be announced.

A signature campaign in the IIT-B campus has also gathered more than 400 signatures so far. “The IIT Bombay students are showing our solidarity protest against the human rights violation, genocide and war crimes happening in Sri Lanka,” said the student organisers of the protest in a press release.



SANJAY G. DHANDE

A 360 degree education

Why an NCC course will be a welcome addition to physics, chemistry, math

A RECENT announcement from the HRD minister to the effect that the National Cadet Corps will be made an elective course is welcome. I remember my college days of 1962-65, when the NCC was compulsory for all students. I served in the NCC Corps of Signals for the first year, Infantry for the second, and Engineers for the third. That was immediately after the conflict with China, and hence all of us had to serve in the NCC. Even though it was compulsory, we enjoyed the weekly parades and the milk and snack supplements afterwards. We also enjoyed the yearly week-long camps. It added spice to our college life and we grew up as conscientious citizens, with some familiarity with military life and national security. I was sad when I heard that one of the IITs had scrapped the NCC.

The Indian education system in general, and the higher education system in particular, has evolved from an egalitarian system to a competitive one. In the process, education has shrunk from 360 degrees to 120. Unitary systems like the IITs, IIMs, IISERs and IIITs are most sought after as students and parents consider these places where one

gets not simply degrees but an assurance of better jobs and careers. Unfortunately, knowledge is not unidimensional. Besides formal education inside the classroom, which is only 120 degrees, there are two important elements. First, the development of personality through activities like sport, culture and schemes like the NCC and the National Social Service. Second, the development of communication skills and social involvement through the activities of hostels, gymkhanas, festivals, clubs etc.

Unless importance is given to sports, culture, values and societal awareness, technical education alone will not equip students sufficiently. Credits must be given for such activities.

India, as a society, is passing through a period of stress. Economic prosperity has brought social and familial ambitions to the fore. Young boys and girls are subjected to a rigorous coaching culture when they should be developing capabilities as per their aptitudes. The stress of a career is taking its toll on families as well as young individuals. What matters is the total marks in PCM. It is difficult to understand why only physics, chemistry and mathematics should matter. Such a skewed value system has

produced many maladies in our higher education.

While arguing about the NCC's importance, one would like to point out some other issues as well. Whenever a new NCC commanding officer came to IIT, I used to invite him for a cup of tea. The discussions were always cordial. However, I tried to emphasise that, with the times, the NCC needed to change its approach to training. The brute-force training imparted to cadets creates lot of dissatisfaction. College authorities have to some-

times arm-twist students to enrol. That should not happen. What is needed is a platform for educationists, NCC officers and students to debate such issues and evolve a new model of training. The NCC has some unique attractions even today. The para-gliding event attracts a lot of students and even nearby residents. The treks in the Himalayas are a big draw. The rock-climbing training is very popular. So much so that one IIT has built a wall for rock-climbing. Students are hungry for learning life

skills and the NCC is a suitable platform for imparting such skills. It should, however, be done with a modern approach.

Academic boards of universities and institutes need to take note of the concept of 360-degree education. Unless importance is given to sports, culture, values and societal awareness, technical education alone will not equip students sufficiently. Credits must be given for such activities. In case one does not want to put it on the academic grade sheet, such activities can appear on an additional grade sheet. I am sure prospective recruiters will look at this other grade card very carefully. There should be quality norms for providing credits for these activities. It is also recommended that quality teachers be made available. It is essential that better infrastructure be available on campus for such activities. When a university in western India decided to refurbish its two tennis courts, it became front-page news in local dailies. That it happens so rarely is a tragedy, not news.

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IGNOU's new Vice Chancellor

The President of India has appointed Professor Mohd Aslam, professor School of Continuing Education, IGNOU as the Vice-Chancellor of the university for the period of five years.

The other major contender for the post of Vice-Chancellor was Prof Sanjay G Dhande, former Director IIT Kanpur.

Aslam functioned as Vice Chancellor, IGNOU from October 2011 to July 2012. Earlier he was Director, SOCE, at IGNOU since January, 2009. He is Professor of Rural Development, School of Continuing Education (SOCE), IGNOU since May 1992 and served as Director, National Centre for Innovations in Distance Education, IGNOU from December, 2006-February 2009 and also earlier as Director, SOCE, IGNOU from May 1998-May 2001. He served as Director (Trg) at the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia & the Pacific based in Dhaka for eight years.

Aslam has rich and varied experience both at national and international levels in University Administration; Distance & Continuing Education; ICT, Communication and Extension; Multi-Media in distance education; training



methodology; rural development; training skills; monitoring and evaluation; Panchayati Raj and social change since his 35 years of career in the field, out of

which he spent about 21 years as a Professor at IGNOU.

He served as visiting faculty to as many as 16 institutions in India and abroad. He is fellow of the Economic Development Institute of the World Bank, Washington D.C. 1986. He has also authored/jointly seven books and three book chapters.

He has been consultant to various international/ UN bodies including the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, UNDP.

Aslam has worked as a project director for Panchayati Raj Project, developed a multi-media distance education package for Panchayati Raj functionaries elected throughout the country.

The package was introduced among 58,000 elected functionaries of Panchayats in four selected districts of Madhya Pradesh and was conferred COL President's Award of Excellence at PAN Commonwealth Forum in March 1999.

Dr Aslam has MA in Sociology with first division and second position (1973). He got his MPhil in 1975 and PhD (Sociology) in 1978.

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DU task force clears air on 4-year degree

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NEW DELHI: Delhi University task force members, who made the plan for the new four-year undergraduate honours degree, met students on Wednesday at a student parliament to give them information about how the new system will work.

The system overhaul has aspirants, parents, teachers and counsellors in a fix about the new admission process. With most class 12 board exams already behind them, students are getting anxious because of the uncertainty that has come to surround DU admissions this year.

“We will not change the admission process. Admission will be on the basis of class 12 marks. For the courses that used to have admission tests, the same format will continue,” said DU south campus director, Umesh Rai.

Students who attended the student parliament asked questions about the course structure, increased cost of education due

to the addition of one extra year and status of Hindi medium students.

Explaining the rationale behind the academic reforms, Vice Chancellor Dinesh Singh said that the new system would give students the freedom to pick a subject of their choice with their main subject.

“There are subjects which a student has no interest in studying. The new system will not impose anything on the student. The programme will also equip students with skills that will help them in getting jobs later. Communication skills in both Hindi and English will be enhanced and students will be given hands-on experience,” he said.

The members of the task force also told students how in the new system, sports and co curricular activities, will be given special credit and they will not be forced to choose between academics and co curricular activities. The university starts selling admission forms by the first week of June every year.

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Australian scientists clone extinct frog in landmark moment for new science of de-extinction

A potent conservation tool

Something that would have been deemed the stuff of science fiction not too long ago – the revival of extinct species using biotechnology – has all but become reality. Scientists in Australia have revived the genome of a species of frog – *Rheobatrachus silus* – that became extinct in 1983. Using cloning technology, they obtained tissue from samples of a frog frozen since the 1970s and used it to implant a ‘dead’ cell nucleus into the eggs of a related species. The result? Embryos of the extinct species. While we are still some distance from having extinct frogs hopping around – none of the embryos survived more than a few days – it is a massive step forward.

And that is good news for us and the biosphere we have done so much to harm over the past century. One of the reasons for this species of frog going extinct was the destruction of its natural habitat in the rainforests of Queensland, Australia. There are hundreds of other creatures that have shared its

fate – and thousands more that could do so in the near future. To a large extent, we are responsible for this. The explosion of the human population and the resultant exploitation

■ TIMES VIEW ■

of natural resources have severely impacted natural habitats around the world. This is a chance to undo some of that harm.

This, after all, is not a group of Hollywood mad scientist villains; the entire issue is one that is being considered from all angles with a conference held in Washington DC last week to consider the ethical and moral questions. With appropriate guidelines, further exploring this technology and utilising it could not just bring back extinct species and restore some part of the natural balance, it is also likely to open up new frontiers in medical science.



Focus on saving dying species

Spending time and money on pursuing ‘de-extinction’ seems really wasteful at a time when there is an urgent need to conserve the many species facing imminent extinction. Char-

■ COUNTERVIEW ■

Rudrani Jalan

les Darwin correctly drew our attention to the processes of evolution and natural selection, but mistakenly thought that they took place too slowly to be observed within a human lifetime. After all he didn't live to see the industrial revolution spread to affect all corners of the planet. His calculations didn't factor in global warming, or species going extinct at an unprecedented pace.

Today, biologists see an anthropogenic mass extinction taking place faster than anything Darwin conjectured. Between ocean acidification, the thinning of the ozone layer, deforestation et al, climate change is threatening as many as half of the earth's species with extinction by this

century's end. To speak of frogs specifically, these creatures have been living on this planet for more than 250 million years but herpetologists (who study reptiles and amphibians) say that their pace of extinction has now acquired the same magnitude as the extinction of the dinosaurs! In this context the expenditure of mammoth scientific resources on bringing just one frog genome ‘back to life’ seems quite improvident.

It is telling that the project for reviving the frog has been titled Lazarus, the subject of a prominent religious miracle in which Jesus restored a dead man to life, to illustrate his divine authority. Project leaders are clearly suffering from a God complex. Like Frankenstein, they will end up being horrified by the result of their experiment. Anyone remember Michael Crichton's Jurassic Park? There, the computer program for counting the dinosaurs stops counting when it reaches the ‘correct’ answer; and we all know how cataclysmic that proved. Facts can be scarier than fiction.

HT New Delhi

Google's global executive chairman meets Sibal

NEW DELHI: Google's global executive chairman Eric Schmidt met telecom minister Kapil Sibal on Wednesday morning on the second day of his India visit. Sibal will be inaugurating Google Big Tent Activate Summit in Delhi on Thursday.