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IIT-D director asks for reprieve again

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RK Shevgaonkar

NEW DELHI: Nearly five months after he sent his resignation letter, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi director RK Shevgaonkar has once again asked the human resource development (HRD) ministry to relieve him so that he can join IIT Mumbai as faculty at the earliest.

In his third letter to the governing body of the premier technical institution, Shevgaonkar said that this be considered his second three month notice at the end of which (mid-June) he should be relieved.

The IIT director had written a similar letter on March 12, asking the ministry to consider his resignation letter dated December 22 as three months notice.

Shevgaonkar argued that since his December resignation letter was not considered as a notice, his March letter be considered the same.

The IIT governing body forwarded Shevgaonkar's letter to the HRD ministry on Monday, asking it to relieve the director, appoint a temporary director and to begin the process of a fresh appointment soon.

Shevgaonkar's letter, along with IIT Delhi governing body's recommendations, sent to higher education secretary S Mohanty will be placed before HRD minister Smriti Irani who will take the final call, sources said.

The HRD ministry has been changing its position on Shevgaonkar's resignation which some reports claim came after a tiff with the ministry over payment of ₹70 lakh to BJP leader Subramanium Swamy, a former IIT Delhi faculty, as his "salary dues" between 1972 and 1981.

Refuting the charge that there was any pressure on Shevgaonkar to pay Swamy his dues, the ministry had at first hinted at irregularities on part of Shevgaonkar in setting an offshore campus in Mauritius.

Later, after no charges were found against the IIT director, the ministry softened its stand with hints of resolving the stalemate by relieving Shevgaonkar and allowing him to join IIT Mumbai where he is a faculty.

However, it slept on the matter forcing Shevgaonkar to write again.

Hindu ND 14.05.2015 P-1

IIT-D head waits for nod to be relieved

Anuradha Raman

NEW DELHI: Raghunath K. Shevgaonkar, who resigned as Director of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, on December 22, is waiting for the Human Resource Development Ministry to relieve him even after he has completed the stipulated three-month notice period.

He is being made to wait as the HRD Ministry appears to be in no mood to relieve him. Prof. Shevgaonkar communicated his concern to the IIT chairman and the matter was taken up by the IIT Board on March 12. The Board gave its nod to relieve him and conveyed its decision to the Ministry. But Prof. Shevgaonkar continues to attend office, though he is keen to move on and devote time to research.

Such is the level of distrust between Prof. Shevgaonkar and HRD Minister Smriti Irani, sources said, that the Ministry will perhaps relieve him on June 12, three months after the Board communicated its decision to the Ministry.

Ms Irani's silence on the issue has been the subject of much speculation. It is learnt that whenever the subject cropped up, the Minister's response was to remind everyone that Prof. Shevgaonkar remained the director of IIT-D, which was proof of her non-interference.

Last month four MPs cutting across party lines had complained about the interference of Ms Irani in prestigious institutes such as the IITs.

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R. K. Shevgaonkar has already served out his notice period.

Shevgaonkar saga raises questions on IITs' autonomy

Anuradha Raman

NEW DELHI: The Shevgaonkar saga perhaps nails the lie on the much-vaunted autonomy of IITs. From all accounts, Prof. Shevgaonkar is a competent administrator and academic. Described as a gentleman by his contemporaries, he had a cordial relationship with his faculty as the Director of IIT-Delhi.

Yet, after completing three-and-a-half years of his five-year tenure, Prof. Shevgaonkar dramatically offered to resign on December 22, the decision coming a mere 17 days after his meeting with the HRD Minister on December 5.

Sources close to Prof. Shevgaonkar described the closed-door meeting as extremely unpleasant. The meeting, according to sources, left Prof. Shevgaonkar quite bruised, after which he made up his mind to quit.

Even before that, it is learnt that Prof. Shevgaonkar was under considerable pressure over Delhi Ranji Trophy coach Vijay Dahiya's request for running an academy on the playground of IIT-Delhi for cricket aspirants. It is learnt that the request had come straight from the Minister's office and was verbally communicated to Prof. Shevgaonkar.

Sources revealed that all procedures were ignored when the order came from Ms. Irani's office. Normally, tenders are invited and the playground is offered when students and faculty do not need it. This is a common practice and maintenance of the ground is outsourced. In the case of Dahiya, he wanted it according to his terms and conditions which IIT-Delhi was not willing to give.

IIT Delhi and Roorkee projects win Ericsson Innovation Awards 2015

The two winning teams will be supported by Ericsson India financially to the extent of Rs 10 lakhs each towards incubating their projects.

http://indianexpress.com/article/technology/technology-others/iit-delhi-and-roorkee-projects-win-ericsson-innovation-awards-2015/

Ericsson in association with the Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer (FITT) has announced the winners of 'Ericsson Innovation Awards 2015' at IIT Delhi. The two winning projects were: Guardian from IIT Delhi and Smart Earphone from IIT Roorkee. The two winning teams will be supported by Ericsson India financially to the extent of Rs 10 lakhs each towards incubating the winning projects at any IIT approved technology business incubators.

Ericsson Innovation Awards were initiated last year to promote the spirit of innovation within engineering students at select IITs. A total of 67 projects were submitted by IIT students from Chennai, Delhi, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Mumbai, Roorkee and Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

The winning projects:

Guardian: Guardian device is a complete stand-alone personalized human security device which can use any type of communication system such as internet, SMS, or Near Field Communication to alert loved ones when in a distress situation. It also uses multiple cellular phone towers to transmit data and triangulate a victim's position.

Smart Earphone: A new wearable device for everyone that can amplify and attenuate selective sounds. The user can decide whom/what he/she wants to selectively hear and at what volume. The device will be integrated to smartphone via an App. All the audio signal processing will be done by the App only.

"The winning projects score high in terms of parameters like innovativeness, commercial feasibility , scalability and will be supported by Ericsson through the incubation period," said Chris Houghton, Head of Region India, Ericsson.

The projects submitted were in the areas such as web design, cloud computing, storage and networking, human-machine interface, embedded and hardware system design, MIMO (multiple-input, multiple-output), machine-to-machine/Internet of Things, software-defined networking, open source, signal processing, graphics and visualization.

10 proposals were shortlisted in the month of March 2015 on criteria such as degree of innovation, feasibility, scalability and the overall impact on masses. Each shortlisted proposal was given an incentive by Ericsson to complete the initial prototype within two months. The winning projects were selected by the jury in front of an audience comprising of students, faculty, innovators and industry leaders .

Foreign faculty to be paid hefty sum

All grade A institutes to benefit from this

Prakash Kumar

NEW DELHI: India has offered to pay $8,000 for 12 to 14 hours and $12,000 for 20 to 28 hours of teaching to foreign faculty under Global Initiative for Academic Networks (GIAN) programme designed to meet the shortage of quality teachers in higher education institutions.

The "lumpsum amount" offered to the foreign faculty will cover travel expense and honorarium.

"Local hospitality will be arranged by the host institution," says the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry's guidelines recently finalised for implementation of the ambitious programme.

As of now, only centrally-funded higher education institutions, which have been given grade 'A' certificate by a government accreditation agency including National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC), will be benefited by the GIAN.

The foreign faculty to be roped in under the programme would "initially" be made available to the Central Universities, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs), National Institutes of Technology (NITs) and Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs) only.

Subsequently, state universities, which have been given "A" grade certificate by the accreditation agencies of the government, will also be included in the list of beneficiaries under the GIAN. Other state universities and colleges, a majority of which lack quality because of shortage of qualified faculty, will have to wait for the Centre's decision for their inclusion in GIAN.

The ministry has already constituted a GIAN Implementation Committee headed by the Union Higher Education Secretary to identify and approve a pool of international faculty in coordination with Indian missions abroad and various other committees to be set up here under the programme.

The GIAN implementation committee will approve foreign faculty for teaching in India after a through examination of the proposals from Indian Missions abroad as well as foreign embassies and high commissions in New Delhi.

DH News Service

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What ails science in India?

Most universities have poor-quality teaching labs let alone research labs

R. PRASAD

Unlike other countries, India successfully sent a spacecraft (Mangalyaan) to Mars in its first attempt. But the country has failed to produce any path-breaking research or Nobel Laureates for the last several decades. And in all likelihood, India may not produce one in the near future unless some dramatic changes are brought about.

What stares Indian science in the face is the government's shocking decision to dissolve the scientific advisory council to the Prime Minister, thereby cutting a crucial link that has served science and the scientific community well. Another jolt has been the cut in research budget, which has been static for about a decade at a paltry 0.9 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Compare this with that of China's — almost 2 per cent; it was about 0.8 per cent in 2000.

Science is the engine of growth of a country and is crucial to revitalise the economy. So any squeeze on research and development funding will be at the country's own peril.

Nodal agencies like the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) have been headless for over a year. The same is the case in several national laboratories and central universities. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) got its secretary only in January this year, eight long months after the earlier incumbent retired.

"Indian science suffers, today more than ever, from government apathy," writes Raghavendra Gadagkar, Professor of ecology at IISc, Bengaluru in *Nature*'s special issue published today (May 14). The special issue paints a sorry picture of the state of science in India.

India has only 200,000 full time researchers — four researchers per 10,000 labour force. That is way too low compared with China (18 researchers per 10,000 labour force) and Brazil (seven researchers per 10,000 labour force). With six researchers per 10,000 labour force, even Kenya has a higher proportion than India.

SILVER LINING: *According to DST, more women are winning funding from government grant schemes.* – PHOTO: S. MAHINSHA

The number of research papers published by researchers based in the country has nearly quadrupled since 2000 but it is way too low compared with China. If there were around 25,000 papers published from India in 2000, it was nearly 90,000 in 2013. In the case of China, the numbers have risen phenomenally from about 50,000 in 2000 to over 310,000 papers in 2013.

Besides the 40 CSIR laboratories, a few premier research institutions like the IISc, Bengaluru, TIFR, Mumbai, 16 IITs and five Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), there are over 600 universities in the country. But hardly any of the international-level research is done in the universities.

"Facilities and teaching at the universities that serve more than 29 million students are alarming. Most are 'chalk and talk' classrooms with poor-quality teaching laboratories, let alone research laboratories," writes Hiriyakkanavar Ila, Professor of chemistry at the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bengaluru in a Comment piece.

There are several critical issues that need to be immediately addressed for universities to become centres of excellence. The first and foremost change that necessarily has to be undertaken is a complete "overhauling" of the University Grants Commission (UGC). "Archaic ordinances and rules set by the University Grants Commission have stifled the spirit of academic excellence and hampered institutions' flexibility," writes Prof. Vinod Singh, Director of IISER, Bhopal.

Though India produces 9,000 PhD graduates a year in science and technology, the number pales in comparison with the country's population. The U.S. produces four times more number of PhDs despite having one-fourth of India's population. Number is just one of the indicators. "The variation in quality of Indian PhD graduates and faculty members is a prime concern," says Prof. Singh. "Quality-control mechanisms must be established for the national accreditation and assessment of Indian PhDs and to improve research and educational training."

"I have noticed a fundamental difference in the attitude of young U.S. scientists from that of their Indian counterparts: their appetite for big problems. 'Going for great' is a skill acquired very early on in the West," writes Yamuna Krishnan, professor of chemistry at the University of Chicago, Illinois. She was earlier with the Bengaluru-based National Centre for Biological Sciences before moving over to the U.S.

Unlike in the West where talent is spotted at the graduate level and nurtured, researchers in India are mentored way too late.

"Is there a dearth of talent in India? Certainly not. Is there a dearth of unstoppable achievers and innovators? Yes; because making talent shine takes a culture that is proud of its scientists and a charged intellectual environment that nurtures, mentors and drives them.," writes Prof. Umesh Varshney of the Department of Microbiology and Cell Biology, IISc.

HT.COM ND 14.05.2015 P-6

INTERVIEW ASHOK KUMAR

'I informed UGC about MoUs about a year ago

Jeevan Prakash Sharma

Ashok Kumar Gadiya, chairperson of Mewar University, , claims to have informed UGC about the MoUs it has signed with various skill-training institutes, but he has yet to get its consent.

The MoUs you have signed with institutes are in violation of UGC's 2003 regulation. What do you have to say about this?

I have read the 2003 regulation and it says that a private university cannot open any off-campus or study centre without UGC's permission, but I have not opened any such centre. I have signed MoUs with other institutes.

But there is no provision in the 2003 regulation to collaborate with other institutes in the form of MoUs to grant degrees.

That's what I am saying. So it means that I can do this because there is no mention of this kind of provision so it cannott be illegal.

How does this prove that everything not mentioned in the regulation is legal? You are circumventing the ban on opening off-campus though the MoU

I have written to Sunita Siwach, deputy secretary, UGC, and informed her that I have signed MoUs with these institutes but I have not got any response from them. So I am not doing it secretly. I have left it to the Commission to examine these MoUs. It's a new concept. Work will not stop even if the UGC does not respond.

When did you inform the UGC?

About a year ago.

But you signed MoUs with these institutes back in 2012.

When questions were raised about the validity of these MoUs, I wrote to the UGC. If it is illegal, the Commission should have written back to me but I haven't got any objections from them. So I don't think I am doing anything wrong.

If the UGC says that this collaboration is illegal, will you scrap the programme?

Yes, I will do that.

I have spoken to a senior UGC official who told me that such MoUs are illegal.

Let the Commission write to me about it.

MP writes to PM on IIT

Mysuru, May 14, 2015, dhns:

http://www.deccanherald.com/content/477447/mp-writes-pm-iit.html

MP Prathap Simha, recently, has written sererate letters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Human Resources Development Minister Smriti Zubin Irani, seeking establishment of the proposed Indian Institute of Technology in Mysuru.

Pointing out that the Centre has sanctioned an IIT for Karnataka in the current Budget, the MP has stated that Mysuru is best suited for the premier institution due to its location, infrastructure and mainly its famed educational and health institutions.

Mysuru is well-connected by both road and railways and has a sophisticated airport. Besides, it is just 140 km from the capital city of Bengaluru and near to a major harbour in Mangaluru. If the IIT is established in Mysuru, it will be a fitting tribute to the University of Mysore, which is celebrating its centenary this year, Simha has explained.

Apart from the premier engineering institutions, Mysuru is famous for Yoga and Ayurveda and attracts people from across the world. If the city gets an IIT, it will complete the picture of the cultural and academic capital of the State, he has pointed out.

Two quakes in 17 days a rarity: IIT expert

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kanpur/Two-quakes-in-17-days-a-rarity-IIT-expert/articleshow/47272050.cms

Kanpur: Tuesday's earthquake with its epicentre in Kodari in Sindhupalchok district in Nepal within 17 days of the first one on April 25 is a rare activity to happen. The latest earthquake of 7.3 magnitude on Richter scale has almost followed the earlier one which was of 7.9 magnitude, said an IIT-Kanpur expert who also warned of more tremors.

Noted earthquake engineer Prof Durgesh Rai of the civil engineering department of IIT-Kanpur said, "Though the occurrence of an earthquake of 7.3 magnitude is not unnatural, it is a rare phenomenon to happen as the duration between the two is not much. Tuesday's tremor also had its epicentre in the same region where the first one originated in Nepal."

He said that the fresh earthquake was almost as strong as the previous one which had struck on April 25.

Analysing the April 25 and May 12 earthquakes, Prof Rai said, "the fresh earthquake indicates that the full energy amassed under the Earth's surface did not get released after the first quake and, therefore, chances of more quakes in coming days cannot be ruled out."

"After April 25 quake, two main aftershocks were reported. Several aftershocks of low intensity have also been reported. Now once again a fresh earthquake has occurred. This means that the entire energy has not been released. Therefore, more quakes can come in future but the aftershocks will not be as powerful as the main quake itself," said Prof Rai.

Talking about Tuesday's earthquake, Prof Rai said, "Indian plates (earth crust) are getting subducted under the Eurasian plates and are stuck now. Indian plates are not moving further. It is due to coercing that the plates are liberating energy."

He said although earthquake experts and engineers were expecting a major earthquake of 8-8.5 magnitude on Richter scale, April 25 quake was of 7.9 magnitude which was less than expected.

"The 2,800 km region of Himalayas is vulnerable to earthquakes and in this region some eight major earthquakes have occurred in past 100-120 years which is more than the world average of earthquakes in the same duration," he informed.

The intensity of Tuesday's earthquake noted in central and eastern UP was at level 'IV' and strong tremors were felt leading to panic in UP districts.

Mumbai is gradually becoming seismically active, says former IIT professor

http://www.iamin.in/en/mumbai-north-east/news/mumbai-gradually-becoming-seismically-active-says-former-iit-professor-59654

After the recent earthquakes that struck Nepal and several parts of India, *iamin* spoke to Dr V Subramanyan, retired professor of geology at IIT Bombay, to get a clear view of the probable risks faced by the island city of Mumbai

Dr V Subramanyan was also a part of BMC's disaster management department.

With around 60% of land area in India vulnerable to earthquakes, which seismic zone does Mumbai come under?
Mumbai is only in Zone 3 with the likelihood of being affected by quake of the magnitude 6.2 to 6.5 on the Richter scale. However, the stretch between Alibagh and Srivardhan on the Konkan coast, to the south of Mumbai, falls in Zone 4 where an earthquake of M 7.0 can possibly occur.

With Mumbai being located on the coastal line, tell us about the risk of facing tsunami-like disasters?
There is no danger of tsunamis striking Mumbai because only a submarine quake in the Arabian Sea can give rise to tsunamis on our coast. Luckily there is no record of any such event. At the most, the Makaran area off Karachi in Pakistan can have a quake which may generate tsunamis that can affect our city.

In your earlier statements you had spoken about tracking the tremors felt near Thane Creek, years ago. Are there chances that tremors will increase or get stronger in future?
I have been monitoring the minor tremors of up to magnitude 4, felt in the east of Thane Creek since 1998. There have been tremors to the east and west of Taloja, at Kalyan and more recently at Thane in April 2011. These are indications enough that Mumbai is becoming seismically active slowly, but may not mean that a quake of larger intensity is imminent.

With Mumbai being a city of high-rises, what are the precautions we can keep in mind?
I have always advocated for caution in building our high-rises too tall because of the uncertainty regarding their seismic stability, although our architects and structural engineers assure us that they are quake proof. My nervousness stems from recent research in Pennsylvania University which has shown that tall multi-storey buildings, even if they are erected on 'raft foundations', may sway during earthquakes. They also stand the chances of getting tilted permanently and may not resume their verticality after the quake. Then you have the phenomenon of 'liquefaction' especially in the soil in reclaimed areas which will affect the stability of the high-rises. I would recommend that multi-storeyed buildings must not exceed 70m to 80m and usage of earthquake-resistant designs for all buildings on a mandatory basis.

Does Mumbai also face the risk of landslides?
I had always pointed out that when the hill-slopes are cut into vertical faces during quarrying, the blocks of rocks which have a natural westerly slant in Mumbai get destabilized and heavy rains bring them down in the form of landslides. Earthquake vibrations can also trigger landslides.

After the devastating earthquakes in Nepal, how do you think Mumbaikars can brace themselves for natural disasters?
The earthquakes in Nepal which falls in Zone 5, were due to the Indian 'Plate' hitting the Eurasian Plate while trying to get tucked below the Tibetan Plataeu. This is what we call the 'subduction zone'. Seeing what happens during an earthquake, Mumbaikars will do well to build their houses adopting the standard specifications for building design and strengthen their existing buildings also using 'retrofitting' methods. It will also be necessary for a team of geologists, seismologists and structural engineers to inspect the proposed high-rises in the city, to be well-prepared ahead of any earthquake.