Newspaper Clips

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Tribune ND 18-May-11 P-10

The rot deepens

Mass copying now for IIT admissions

MASS copying in state-level examinations is so common in Punjab that it has virtually ceased to surprise. PCS selections have got debased. However, cheating is still rare in UPSC, IIT and IIM examinations. That is why reports of unfair practices adopted in a joint test for admission to the Indian Institutes of Technology have come as a shock. That this has happened at a private engineering college in Bathinda is a pointer to the poor regulation of the mushrooming professional colleges and universities. To cash in on the craze for professional education, engineering, management, nursing and B. Ed. colleges are being set up largely as commercial ventures by persons of questionable qualifications and morals.

When the aim is just to make money, irregularities are inevitable. It does not matter then what kind of teachers and principals are hired. Cheating in an examination can be arranged. Question papers can be made available before an examination for a price. Infrastructure provided may not be adequate but affiliations of reputed institutions and inspections by their teams can be managed. It is true the number of institutes like the IITs, which ensure a bright future for their students, is limited and many talented students fail to get admission despite hard work. In the scramble for limited seats, parents and students tend to use all means, including money power, to achieve success.

It, therefore, comes as a relief that the lure of money could not stop the IITs' team that caught the principal and two teachers of the Bathinda college for helping some favourite examinees. The IITs have given them exemplary punishment and blacklisted their college. It is hard to say if any university or authority in Punjab would have acted that firmly in a similar case. Politicians here immediately jump to the rescue of anyone influential in trouble. Officials not doing their bidding are dumped. A Punjab minister has got transferred an inconvenient but upright IAS officer who tried to stop the rot in Punjab's education.

Hindustan Times ND 18-May-11 P-16

Top Engg students may live IIT dream

PROPOSAL 2,500 seats to be opened for research

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NEW DELHI: Performing well initially at engineering colleges across India may soon offer students a radical incentive — an automatic opportunity to complete their undergraduate programme and earn a PhD from the coveted IITs.

The IITs will cherry-pick 2,500 third-year students at other engineering colleges each year to complete their B.Tech and pursue a PhD at the country's top engineering schools, if a blueprint for the Institutes' future is proposed.

The HRD ministry panel under former atomic energy commission chairman Anil Kakodkar has proposed the initiative as a key component of a strategy to increase the output of PhDs from IITs.

> **It is a win-win situation. Students get to live their IIT dream and IITs get students ready to take up research**
> PANEL MEMBER

"It is a win-win situation, we believe. Selected students get to live their dream of studying at the IITs, and IITs get a cadre of students ready to take up research studies," said a member of the panel. The report was presented to HRD minister Kapil Sibal last week.

Several faculty members, however, expressed reservations about the practicality of the plan. A senior IIT Kanpur professor who was involved in handholding the new IIT in Rajasthan questioned whether the IITs could absorb the additional student population.

"The IIT infrastructure – including the burden on faculty — is already creaking," the professor said.

The panel has argued that IITs should raise fees from ₹50,000 a year to ₹2-2.5 lakh. This is 25-30% of the total education cost for each student estimated at 7.5-8 lakh per year, as was reported by HT on April 23.

The blueprint, however, largely focuses on the shortage of quality research as compared to countries like China.

The IITs have hiked their intake of doctoral students and increased their output of PhDs to about 1,000 a year.

But they must hike the number of PhD graduates a year from 1,000 to 10,000 by 2024-25 if India is to catch up with China or the US, about 10 times ahead at present, the panel has argued.

Hindu ND 18-May-11 P-6

In China, a rediscovery of Sanskrit

Peking University to train more than 60 Chinese students in the language

Ananth Krishnan

BEIJING: Almost two millennia after the language first came to China through Buddhist scriptures, a renewed interest in Buddhist studies and recent discoveries of long-forgotten manuscripts in Tibet have sparked a revival of the study of the ancient language among Chinese scholars.

Beijing's Peking University has now launched an ambitious programme to train more than 60 Chinese students in Sanskrit, with the hope of creating a team of researchers to help translate hundreds of manuscripts containing scriptures that were found in Tibet and other centres of Buddhism, such as Hangzhou in China's east.

AMBITIOUS PROGRAMME: *Renowned Sanskrit scholar Satyavrat Shastri teaching Sanskrit to Chinese students at the Peking University.* – PHOTO: ANANTH KRISHNAN

Manuscript collection

"There is a rich manuscript collection in Tibet, particularly. Many of the originals have not been recovered, and are only available in Chinese and Tibetan, so it is important for us to find a way to render them back into Sanskrit," said Satyavrat Shastri, a renowned New Delhi-based Sanskrit scholar and poet, who is in Beijing this week as a visiting lecturer to meet students and teachers here.

"What they are trying to do here is invaluable, and they are making great progress," Mr. Shastri said, adding that he was pleasantly surprised by the students' technical level. "I was struck by the interest, of both teachers and scholars, in little details, such as getting the pronunciation perfect. They recited the Bhagavad Gita with me, and it was a unique experience. The pronunciation, the metre [of reciting the verses], was remarkable."

The Sanskrit programme at the Peking University has a long history, set up in the 1960s and subsequently expanded by renowned Indologist Ji Xianlin, who translated dozens of works and is seen by many here as single-handedly introducing classical Indian culture to a whole generation of Chinese. Today, the programme hopes to carry forward the legacy of Ji, who died in 2009.

The university's efforts received a boost in 2005, when it was given support by the Ministry of Education to expand admissions, part of an effort to boost the manuscript research. Now, for the first time, the programme has a regular annual intake of students at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels, currently training between 50 and 60 students. "We want to continue what Ji Xianlin started," said Duan Qing, a professor in Sanskrit and Pali, who once trained under Ji. "Our programme is quite mature now, and is the only complete Sanskrit programme in China." She attributed the recent boost in funding to increasing government support for the humanities, ignored during the People's Republic's first three decades, when the country's focus was on development alone. "Sanskrit research is being viewed with importance now," she said. "India and China were culturally connected. I don't think there's another country in the world where so many Sanskrit works were translated into another language, and this has been going on for more 1,000 years."

Ms. Duan heads the Research Institute of Sanskrit Manuscripts and Buddhist Literature at Peking University, which is working with regional governments and hoping to create an archive for lost manuscripts and palm-leaves. Peking University has also begun working with Sanskrit programmes in universities in the West, particularly in Germany, to improve both teaching methods and archiving practices. Indian universities, however, appeared to show little interest in taking forward cooperation.

Mr. Shastri, who is an honorary professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, admitted there was "precious little" cooperation between the two countries. There was room for much more, he said, encouraged by the positive response to his teaching methods this past week. "We want to learn Sanskrit through traditional methods," one teacher told him. "Not from the West."

Times of India ND 18-May-11 P-23

Future human home may be 20 light yrs away

Paris: A rocky world orbiting a nearby star has been confirmed as the first planet outside our solar system to meet key requirements for sustaining life, scientists said on Monday. Modelling of Gliese 581d shows it has the potential to be warm and wet enough to nurture Earth-like life, they said.

It orbits a red dwarf star called Gliese 581, located around 20 light years from Earth, which makes it one of our closest neighbours. Gliese 581d orbits on the outer fringes of the star's "Goldilocks zone", where it is not so hot that water boils away, nor so cold that water is perpetually frozen. Instead, the temperature is just right for water to exist in liquid form.

"With a dense carbon dioxide atmosphere — a likely scenario on such a large planet — the climate of Gliese 581d is not only stable against collapse but warm enough to have oceans, clouds and rainfall," France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) said in a press release.

Gliese 581d has a mass at least seven times that of Earth and is about twice our planet's size, according to the new study, which appears in a British publication, The Astrophysical Journal Letters. The planet, spotted in 2007, had initially been dismissed as a candidate in the hunt for life.

It receives less than a third of the solar radiation Earth gets, and may be "tidally locked", meaning that one side of it always faces the sun, which would give it permanent dayside and nightside. But the new model showed potential.

Its atmosphere would store heat well, thanks to its dense CO_2. And the red light from the star would also penetrate the atmosphere and warm the surface. "In all cases, the temperatures allow for the presence of liquid water on the surface," say the researchers. AFP

Smallest satellite to look for ET

US scientists have developed what they claim is the world's first satellite the size of a loaf of bread which is designed specifically to look for extra terrestrial life. The nanosatellite, called the ExoPlanetSat, will be launched next year with the task of finding exoplanets beyond our solar system having life-supporting environment like like the Earth. The £3 million device measures 10cm wide and 30cm long. PTI

Hindustan Times ND 18-May-11 P-11 HT Horizon

Semester system, a positive change

Such a system of education is hardly new and ensures greater interaction between students and teachers

Aditi Chakrabarti

DU did not have an easy time dealing with the shift from a three-year, annual BA/BSc degree to a semester-based academic term. With the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) and the All India Students' Association (AISA) vehemently opposing the change, about 23 DU courses were finally given the official semester-based syllabi as approved by the Academic Council on April 25, 2011. However, the decision to evolve into the semester-based education system is not unprecedented in the history of academic institutions in Delhi.

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi (IIT-D) are two such premier universities which already follow a full-fledged semester system for all their courses. An academic year in JNU is divided into two semesters with one semester comprising of 90 working days.

According to Prof VK Jain, Dean of Students, JNU, "the continuous evaluation of a student throughout the academic term with an extensive student-teacher interaction are the greatest strengths of the semester system. Moreover, the students are engaged all through the year in a balanced manner and there is no last-minute stress to prepare for a heavy-syllabus based annual exam."

Such a system also ensures the timely delivery of results by teachers taking on additional pressure to finish marking answer sheets before the next term so that the students are ready with their results before registration.

IIT-D, since its inception, has grown steadily both in size as well as in the scope of its activities. An academic year in the institution year from July through June in the next year and is comprised of three semesters. Typically, the first semester starts in the last week of July and ends in the second week of December; the second semester starts in the last week of December/first week of January and ends in the second week of May. The summer semester starts in the third week of May and ends in the second week of July. The semester-based education system has been instrumental in imparting excellent education to the students in the field of applied science and technology for the past four decades.

In Delhi University, courses like BA journalism (Honours) and BSc computer science followed the semester system right from their inception. These professional courses required a regimen which would ensure the continuous development of students. Since there is emphasis both on internal evaluation and external examinations, it leaves no room for laxity on the part of teachers and students. In academic courses like BA Political science (Honours), the course which was previously studied over a year would now be divided in two semesters with additional inter-disciplinary courses which would provide greater knowledge and perspective to students as well as flexibility to the course.

Courses in DU which followed the semester-system even before 2009

- Bachelors in business studies, BA (Honours) Business economics
- Bachelors in financial and investment analysis
- BSc computer science
- BA (Honours) journalism
- Bachelors in mass media and mass communication

Since the semester system is touted as the next step in the evolution of academics in DU, positive aspects of the semester system also include the constant need to be modern; to adapt the syllabus to changes in the trends and patterns of society.

There is a great emphasis on the idea that the education system needs to remain relevant to the existing society.

Professor Jain from JNU also commented on how the change in the system of education in DU is a good move.

"As an outsider, I can say that this shift from an annual to a semester-based system in DU is a positive one. The universities in USA follow the same pattern and have been producing excellent students for decades," he said.

This change offers the country sound progress by helping to nurture globally-aware and responsible citizens with the help of a holistic education with emphasis on both, body and mind.

Times of India ND
18-May-11 P-23

Antarctic ozone hole on the road to recovery

London: Researchers in Australia have claimed that the hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica is on the road to recovery, 22 years after the Montreal Protocol to ban chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and related ozone-destroying chemicals came into force.

The team is the first to detect a recovery in baseline average springtime ozone levels in the region.

"This is the first convincing observationally-derived evidence of the ozone rebound," the Nature quoted Adrian McDonald, an atmospheric scientist at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand, as saying.

The results of Murry Salby, an environmental scientist at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, revealed a fast decline in ozone levels until the late 1990s, then a slow rebound that closely matches what theoretical calculations had predicted.

Salby's data reveals that average springtime Antarctic ozone levels have already recovered by 15% since the late 1990s. ANI

Sunday Guardian 15.05.2011 P-7

Mamata wants her ministers to get IIM training

Even before the election results were declared Mamata Banerjee was working overtime to dispel the notion that she would be an incompetent Chief Minister. She and her men are in touch with Debashish Chatterjee, the director of the Indian Institute of Management in Kozhikode, Kerala. She has worked out an arrangement with the IIM to get her ministers trained in governance, particularly in the sector of education. She has sought the assistance of Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee to help out West Bengal economically. Mukherjee is already working on a bailout and development package for the state with the approval of both Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh. Mamata's finance minister designate Amit Mitra has been taken on board. The state is bankrupt and finding it difficult to pay salaries and allowances to its employees. Both Mamata and the Congress leadership are worried of the possibility of a financial crisis that may hit the state soon after the elections. Mamata, aware of the financial mess being left for her by her predecessors, has been warning her voters about a possible crisis.

A TMC activist flashes a victory sign during a celebration outside Mamata Banerjee's Kalighat residence in Kolkata on Friday. PTI