

Newspaper Clips

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May 3

UGC tightens purse strings, JNU V-C says research will suffer

<http://indianexpress.com/article/education/ugc-tightens-purse-strings-jnu-v-c-says-research-will-suffer-4638104/>

The UGC also allegedly said that JNU had incurred “excess expenditure” from its plan grant on electricity and water.

THE TUSSLE over funds between the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) does not seem to be ending. After students last month claimed they had not been getting their non-NET fellowships since January, JNU wrote to the UGC asking them to disburse the “overdue” Rs 11 crore. The UGC is learnt to have replied saying that funds being asked for were “over and above the allocation” under the XIIth plan grant and, therefore, could not be given.

The UGC also allegedly said that JNU had incurred “excess expenditure” from its plan grant on electricity and water. In response, JNU vice-chancellor M Jagadesh Kumar wrote to the UGC acting chairman on April 21, arguing that the money being demanded is part of the allocation and that the expenditure was “unavoidable”. Kumar said if funds are not to be spent from the plan grant, he “would be grateful if UGC could advise him as to how to meet the expenditure”.

UGC sources had told The Indian Express that the university had Rs 16 crore as block grants and fellowships could be paid from that. JNU has started paying fellowships from its balance but the issue seems to be far from over.

In his letter, Kumar refers to a previous letter from UGC joint secretary J K Tripathi. “The letter states that the UGC observed there is an excess expenditure, probably under electricity and water charges, which were supposed to be met from non-plan grant. I would like to state that as mentioned in my previous letters, the non-plan no salary allocation made by UGC is only Rs 25 crore while the expenditure on electricity and water is about Rs 36 crore per year. It is obvious that the charges cannot be met from the meagre non-plan grant allocation. As a result, the university is left with no option but to delve into plan funds,” Kumar said.

“The letter also states the audit does not allow UGC to release Rs 11 crore over and above the allocation under the plan head... XIIth plan allocation for the university was Rs 204 crore (subsequently raised to Rs 242 crore and now Rs 247 crore), of which Rs 231 crore was released. Thus, the demand for Rs 11 crore is not above the plan grant,” Kumar said.

He said JNU had taken “several energy conservation measures and the amount being paid on electricity is the bare minimum”.

Kumar has demanded that the UGC provide adequate funds under non-plan head, arguing that “failure to do so would severely impact ongoing research in the university”. He demanded that JNU gets its “approved allocation” of Rs 247 crore “in full” without being penalised for expenses on water and electricity.

Kumar did not respond to questions on the letter and Registrar Pramod Kumar said he did not know about it. He said the funds being asked for by JNU are due.

May 2

Even the IIT heads are now worried about the quality of India's engineers

<https://qz.com/973435/even-the-iit-heads-are-now-worried-about-the-quality-of-indias-engineers/>

Indian techies are having a tough year.

Engineering graduates from Asia's third-largest economy have received a load of bad press in the past few months, accused on the one hand of stealing jobs from locals in the US, UK, Australia, and Singapore, and on the other of simply lacking even basic coding skills.

But while the first claim can be countered by the evidence of a serious skills shortage abroad, the second one isn't easy to dispute. And now, even people in charge of many of India's elite engineering institutions acknowledge it.

A number of directors of the many Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) are concerned over the employability of the millions of engineers the country churns out every year, according to a report in The Economic Times newspaper. Though they argue that surveys questioning the quality of as much as 95% of the engineers exaggerate the situation, they believe India's education system has worsened the problem.

Gautam Biswas, director at IIT-Guwahati, told the Economic Times that the debate over employability does not apply to the IITs, the National Institutes of Technology (NITs), and some Centrally Funded Technical Institutes (CFTIs).

"Some leading state universities, including Jadavpur University and Anna University colleges, are imparting very high-quality education as are private institutes such as BITS (Pilani), VIT, Amity, and SRM, among others," he added.

The problem, he noted, is that several colleges and universities simply haven't been able to raise their standards. Students, thus, don't have access to the right curricula, essential laboratory infrastructure, or good teachers.

Not surprisingly, all this is the result of India's decades-long, single-minded obsession with engineering.

The rapid growth of India's IT industry in the 1990s and 2000s prompted hundreds of thousands of students, often pushed by their parents, to pursue a profession that often guaranteed wealth, status, and, with some luck, a one-way ticket out of the country. In response, thousands of engineering colleges of often questionable quality mushroomed across India as an alternative to the IITs, which even today remain notoriously hard to get into.

The consequence of this trend quickly became evident: Without proper training, only a quarter of India's engineers are employable. Nevertheless, the clamour for engineering programmes has not abated, even as the IT boom has hit a number of speed bumps over the years.

"The country is producing as many as 10 lakh engineers a year. There needs to be a serious review," Indranil Manna, director, IIT-Kanpur, told The Economic Times. "Do we really need so many engineers? Are there that many jobs?"

Clearly, there aren't.

Over the past few months, IT giants such as Infosys, Wipro, and Cognizant have all announced plans to fire hundreds of employees. Moreover, as the industry evolves and automation increases, thousands, if not millions, of jobs are at risk.

What's needed then is education better suited to the changing times, with a more practical and relevant approach to learning. IIT-Guwahati's Biswas said that soft-skills training and lessons in big-data analytics and the Internet of Things

could all be enhanced, even at the IITs. But outside of the well-funded, well-staffed elite institutions, that seems like a tall order.

A better approach would likely require a radical reimagining of how education is imparted across the country, besides a re-evaluation of what the future holds for India's massive youth population as opportunities dwindle in the technology sector.

IITs reject government plan to make them accrediting agencies

<http://www.livemint.com/Education/obPwyba6SZoVCQqWtmPuUK/IITs-reject-govt-plan-to-make-them-accrediting-agencies.html>

IITs have instead agreed to help strengthen existing government accrediting agencies such as NAAC and National Board of Accreditation

The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) have rejected a government suggestion that they play a larger role by becoming accrediting agencies involved in evaluating colleges and universities in the country.

The IITs have instead agreed to help strengthen existing bodies such as the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NAB), three government officials said.

The human resource development ministry has been advocating making IITs and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) accrediting bodies to maintain a close watch on the quality of the higher education sector.

The ministry discussed the plan at an IIT council meeting held in Mumbai on Friday. "Yes, we spoke about the proposal. IITs will not be full-fledged accrediting body for evaluating institutions," said one of the three officials, a member of the IIT council.

All three officials declined to be named.

"The IITs will spare some faculties and help the existing bodies instead," said the second official.

IITs are expanding their research focus and there is also an increasing demand for expanding student capacity, the second official said, adding that to get involved in full-fledged non-IIT administrative work would add to their stress. As such, the elite schools are facing a teacher shortage in the range of 10% to 30% at various IITs.

NAAC director D.P. Singh said he had suggested asking the IITs to help the accrediting bodies as "that would lend prestige to the accreditation process".

NAAC, the apex accrediting body in India, accredits institutions while NAB accredits individual courses.

Singh said NAAC had communicated with the IITs and IIMs, while keeping the ministry in the loop and about 50 professors had committed to helping the organization. He said he was targeting 100 professors from top institutions to help with the process. While some of them could train NAAC staff, others could be experts in evaluation and yet others could develop methodology in sync with the international standards to be adopted in India, he said.

NAAC seeks to evaluate institutions on 130 parameters from July through a new system.

An HRD ministry spokesperson declined to comment.

HRD minister Prakash Javadekar has spoken against the existing system and was in favour of making IITs and IIMs accrediting bodies. "We are going to float an idea in which IITs and IIMs will be asked to become accreditation bodies so that there will be multiple choices in front of the institutes and accreditation will be completed in limited time and we can go for more quality education," Javadekar said in August 2016.

India has nearly 50,000 colleges and stand-alone institutions, and 789 universities. But less than 25% of them have any kind of accreditation.

Lack Jurisdiction on Plea against IIT Jammu Land Transfer: NGT

<http://www.ndtv.com/education/lack-jurisdiction-on-plea-against-iit-jammu-land-transfer-ngt-1688256>

The National Green Tribunal today junked a plea challenging the transfer of 159 hectares of forest land to establish an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Jammu district, saying it lacked the jurisdiction to hear the matter. A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar said that Jammu & Kashmir Forest Act 1990, which deals with felling of trees in the state, does not fall within the enactments mentioned in Schedule I of the NGT Act 2010 and hence the green panel does not have the jurisdiction to adjudicate the present controversy.

"It is crystal clear that the controversy of transfer of forest land for non-forest purpose on the proposal of the Forest Advisory Committee, and the order dated February 11, 2016 passed by the State of Jammu & Kashmir whereby use of 159 hectares of land has been sanctioned for construction of the institution for Higher Education Department in Jammu Forest Division, cannot be adjudicated by this tribunal on account of lack of statutory jurisdiction," Justice R S Rathore, who wrote the judgement, said.

The NGT'S judgement came on a plea filed by Jammu native, Nigam Priye Saroop, who had challenged the transfer of 159 hectares of forest land to the Higher Education Department of the state government on the ground that it would damage the environment and ecology of the area.

Saroop, a law student, had contended that the transfer of the forest land was not "justified" when other vast stretches of waste and unproductive land was available in abundance in Jammu and other districts like Rajouri, Udhampur and Samba for establishment of IIT.

He claimed that the transfer of forest land will adversely affect the eco-sensitive zone of Ramnagar Wildlife Sanctuary, which is a natural wildlife habitat.

Centre prohibits UGC order to publish PhD scholars' Aadhaar numbers

<http://indianexpress.com/article/education/centre-prohibits-ugc-order-to-publish-phd-scholars-aadhaar-numbers-4636684/>

"It is informed that the Aadhaar Act, 2016 prohibits publishing and displaying the Aadhaar number publicly," UGC Secretary JS Sandhu said.

UGC prohibited the display of the unique identification numbers amid concerns that the data could be misused.

The Centre revoked the University Grants Commission (UGC) directive to universities to make public the Aadhaar details of PhD scholars. It prohibited the display of the unique identification numbers amid concerns that the data could be misused.

“It is informed that the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 prohibits publishing and displaying the Aadhaar number publicly,” UGC Secretary JS Sandhu communicated to the varsities on April 28, asking them not to publish the Aadhaar numbers publicly.

Universities had been asked on March 10 to upload the details of all PhD scholars to their websites, including the PhD registration number, supervisor details, funding agency, research topic and their Aadhaar number to make “economic profiling” of the PhD scholars simpler.

The submission of Aadhaar numbers were deemed mandatory for anyone seeking scholarships, including higher education fellowships. The UGC had directed Vice Chancellors to collect and send to them the Aadhaar numbers of all scholarship/fellowship availing students and to upload this information on their official websites.

IIT Bombay Teams Awarded In 'Transform Maharashtra' Campaign

<http://www.ndtv.com/education/iit-bombay-teams-awarded-in-transform-maharashtra-campaign-1688721>



Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay students are awarded for their solutions on socio-economic challenges for 'Transform Maharashtra' campaign. Students from IIT Bombay won first prize for solution on the theme 'Jai Kisan: Drought-Free Maharashtra' and second prize for their solution on 'Clean Slate: Swachh Maharashtra', said a statement from IIT Bombay.

IIT Bombay students have also won second prize for solution on 'Smart & Smarter: Development of Sustainable & Liveable Cities' and another second prize for their solution on 'By the People: Citizen Engagement In Governance, In the Judges' Category.

'Transform Maharashtra', is an initiative led by Chief Minister Shri Devendra Fadnavis, as a part of his efforts to engage the youth of the state in governance and create a road-map for developed Maharashtra by 2025.

It is a state-wide competition that invited solutions from college students across state to the 11 socio-economic challenges faced by Maharashtra.

The competition was launched by the Chief Minister in December 2016 during Mood Indigo Festival in IIT Bombay and has touched around 4, 00,000 people (including 15,000 participants) so far.

Indian Institute of Management Nagpur (IIM Nagpur) students also joined 'Transform Maharashtra' initiative.

The competition witnessed around 2500 submissions from around 15,000 students across Maharashtra.

Startup News: NIT, Srinagar sets up Innovation Forum of Kashmir

<http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/opinion/startup-news-nit-srinagar-sets-up-innovation-forum-of-kashmir/248115.html>

The forum was officiall launched in a meeting organised by the Innovation, Incubation and Entrepreneur Development Centre (IIEDC) of the NIT, which was chaired by Director, NIT, Prof AR Dar.

With a vision to promote innovation culture in Kashmir, National Institute of Technology, Srinagar has formulated Innovation Forum of Kashmir (IFK).

“The aim of the forum is to promote and boost the culture of innovation in the valley by linking various institutions in order to harbinger innovations in various sectors including the traditional technologies, through the philosophy of RICH (Reach, Identify, Connect and Harness),” Saad Parvez, head IIEDC at NIT said.

The forum was officiall launched in a meeting organised by the Innovation, Incubation and Entrepreneur Development Centre (IIEDC) of the NIT, which was chaired by Director, NIT, Prof AR Dar.

Emphasis was laid to strengthen the Institute-Industry-Innovator linkage in order to promote budding innovators and entrepreneurs of Kashmir and to develop new business opportunities and ventures in diverse sectors aligned with region's unique areas of opportunities.

The meeting was attended by few leading industrialists, acclaimed academia, budding innovators and entrepreneurs, representatives of National Innovation Foundation (NIF) and MSME, civil society members and people from media houses of the valley. The aim of the meet was to bring few stakeholders of the valley on a common platform, so as to recognize the future endeavours to be undertaken.

“This is a necessary step to strengthen the innovations and entrepreneurship front and also to tap the huge potential of innovators in various formal and informal sectors,” Parvez said.

Presentation was given by the head IIED Centre followed by discussions and deliberations on development of new business opportunities, implementation and dissemination of startup promotion schemes and various impediments which current innovators and entrepreneurs are facing both at the societal and financial fronts.

It was emphasised that the budding innovators should approach technical institutions like NIT with incubation facilities and a strong mentorship. It was also decided to increase collaboration between industry-academia by offering exchange programs. Stress was laid down upon skill development from the grass root level. Role of media in disseminating of proper information about the various government schemes related to startups, entrepreneurship and innovations was also emphasised.

A young innovator from a remote village of Budgam expressed his difficulties in meeting about developing his idea. This was a first step taken in this direction by NIT Srinagar and many subsequent meetings and events are on anvil by involving many more stakeholders to strengthen the forum for achieving its holistic goals, he said.

IGNOU chips in for govt project to make books, artefacts

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/ignou-chips-in-for-govt-project-to-make-books-artefacts/1/944063.html>

Now, search the availability of any book, manuscript or journal which you thought is not available in your nearest library or a 3D image of any museum artefact with a click of a mouse.

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is aiding an initiative of the Ministry of Culture under the National Mission of Libraries by way of creating a catalogue of libraries across India which apart from books includes artefacts and other resources from libraries, museums, archives, among others, as per an announcement on its website.

And all this would be done using an open source platform, Koha, making its access free of cost.

The initiative, which would benefit researchers, scientists, artists, students, children, differently-abled persons, the general public and neo and non-literates, would entail an expenditure of Rs 400 crore.

"IGNOU will have to collect bibliographic records of other major libraries across the country, provide training and data migration from other library automation software among other works," said Uma Kanjilal, a professor at IGNOU.

A five-day training on this began on the IGNOU campus here yesterday in which the varsity would provide hands-on training to participants on Koha open source application.

National Mission of Libraries (NML) envisages creation of a National Virtual Library database on digital information about India and on information generated in the country.

The scheme would develop six libraries under the Ministry of Culture, 35 state central libraries and 35 district libraries as model libraries, with particular emphasis on economically-backward districts.

IGNOU, along with IIT-Bombay and CDAC have been entrusted with the responsibility of developing the National Virtual Library of India (NVLII) under NML which will be hosting information of the entire Indian cultural heritage on the digital web world.

Varsities to have wall of heroes to honour war warriors

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/varsities-to-have-wall-of-heroes-to-honour-war-warriors/1/943086.html>

Universities and educational institutions across country will soon have a "wall of heroes" depicting portraits of war warriors who showed extraordinary courage to defend the nation.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) is launching a "Vidya, Veerta Abhiyan" tomorrow to encourage varsities to display portraits of Param Veer Chakra-decorated soldiers.

"HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar will tomorrow launch portraits of Param Veer Chakra decorated-soldiers at an event and these portraits will be put up in various educational institutions," a senior HRD official said.

"To begin with, Vice Chancellors from JNU, DU, Jamia Milia Islamia and IIT Delhi, among others, will receive the portraits from him

"Further, a campaign is being launched to have a Wall of Heroes in various educational institutions depicting the portraits of war warriors decorated with Param Veer Chakra for showing extraordinary courage and bravery to defend the motherland," he added.

The idea of having a wall of martyrs in universities was first proposed by a group of ex-servicemen who had last year approached JNU Vice Chancellor M Jagadesh Kumar, saying portraits of martyrs and tanks used in wars should be put on display in the campus to instill sense of "nationalism" and "patriotism" among the students.

The demand came amid a raging debate on nationalism following a sedition row on campus over an event during which anti-national slogans were allegedly raised.