

Newspaper Clips

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START IIT-LIKE SCHOOLS IN HUMANITIES ALSO

Intensive coaching by private institutes for the joint entrance exam (JEE) to the IITs is leaving students fatigued even after they get admission to the premier institutes, director of IIT Guwahati, Gautam Barua, tells Naresh Mitra. Excerpts:

FOR THE RECORD

Do you agree with N R Narayana Murthy's comment that the quality of students entering IITs is poor?

■ I don't agree with the comment that IIT students are not good. I don't fully agree with what Narayana Murthy said. The issue really is how the obsession with coaching is affecting the students entering IITs.

How is the coaching culture affecting students?

■ It makes its impact on students after their selection. On entering the IITs after undergoing excessive coaching, the students are almost burnt-out and mentally fatigued. Then the IITs for them become a place to relax. Coaching is the primary reason that affects the performance of students. A mindset has been created that if they (students) do not opt for coaching, they may not have the chance to get admission to the IITs. That is why there is such a big business in coaching.

IIT has a brand value. Parents and students want to enter IIT without thinking what they will do. So after they graduate from the IITs, many of them don't

go for engineering jobs; they rather go for the finance sector, management or do jobs which have no connection with engineering. We have seen that about half of the students from IITs are really not interested in engineering.

Isn't that undermining the excellent engineering education imparted by the institution?

■ It is time for the government to create IIT-like institutions in the field of humanities. Let there be IIT-like institutions in economics, philosophy and other fields of humanities, with IIT-like campuses and branding. Then it will no longer be necessary for students to get admitted to IITs and later join non-engineering jobs.

Does coaching by private institutes make entry into the IITs easier?

■ IIT coaching is an industry now. But it doesn't matter to us when it comes to student admissions.

Even if there

are no coaching centres, the IITs will fill up their seats with students.

Is there a move to make changes in the selection process of IITs?

■ Yes, the government and the IIT council discussed the issues of the entrance examination and coaching institutes in September. It was decided to change the admission process where the current JEE will be replaced by the school board results and results of an aptitude test. Since there are 30 school boards in the country, a common method of standardized board results has to be decided upon.

The method proposed by the council is to use the percentile ranks of students. There is little arithmetic in this. In this method, the absolute marks will be decided as the rank of the student in his/her board along with the size of the board (i.e., number of students taking the examination in the science stream in the board).

Will this method reduce the students' over-dependence on coaching?

■ Once this scheme is in place, the coaching part will be part of the board exams. So, with this method, school education becomes very important. I think it will be fine for schools to prepare students for the IITs.

Has the IIT brand changed or lost its sheen in recent years?

■ Two decades back, the IIT as a brand solely depended on quality B.Tech students. Today, more than half of all the students in the IITs are in post-graduate courses. So in the 21st century, the IIT is in the process of building its brand through research and development, rather than through B.Tech output.



THE ANSWER to whether the standard of IIT students is regressing can be found if you all are prepared to travel 25,000 years in the past. This was the period when we — the *Homo Sapiens* lost our nearest competitor — the Neanderthals.

Arguably, one of the key attributes which distinguished us from Neanderthals is intelligence. But what is intelligence? Most evolutionary biologists agree that it was our cognitive superiority — our ability to question and accomplish complex tasks, our desire to create and our willingness to travel to undiscovered frontiers which led to our survival.

As things stand, humans are the only species to have derived the speed of light, mapped genome and sent fellow beings to the moon. And as Stephen Hawking indicates, colonising the space — our and other species' only hope to continue to survive — is only possible if humans continue to evolve on the path of intelligence.

When India decided to build

Cracking IIT as monkey business



by Ashish Jaiswal

IITs as 'Institutions of national importance', I am assuming it thought of a place where the most intelligent of its citizens enter and most intelligent of its scientists and engineers emerge. But how does India measure that it is sending the most intelligent to the IITs? Or to put it in the words of Gould (1981), does it measure our men justly? Ironically, the gatekeepers of IITs have failed to keep pace with the advancement in our understanding of intelligence. The IIT-JEE which selects 10,000 odd out of the 5, 00,000 interested — seems stuck in the early 20th century when concepts like multiple intelligence

(Gardner, 1983) were absent and the over-reliance on psychometric tests to measure intelligence was rife.

Today we understand intelligence to comprise emotional and social intelligence, abstract thinking, creativity and all those attributes which prevented our extinction. Incidentally, in the purely objective type JEE there is no mechanism to measure multi-dimensional intelligence. This can probably explain why people such as Dr Ramakrishnan, the 2009 Nobel Laureate failed to clear it. One can clear the JEE without ever listening to Mozart, reading Kafka or exploring the connection between Fibonacci and Pingla. The opportunity to do all this at

secondary school is also snatched away by the time one spends to clear the IIT entrance. The JEE's unidimensional nature has given birth to a peculiar beast — IIT coaching centres. A

IIT coaching centres are responsible for promoting rote learning at the expense of thinking

beast which can achieve the unimaginable feat of turning humans back to apes! This is the beast which promotes rote learning as supposed to critical thinking. It works to prevent you from travelling to unknown territories or asking novel questions. The beast doesn't appreciate the importance of carving novel paths. Hence, it never encountered a Steve Jobs. It provides set formulas and trivialises complexity. It is similar to the training of chimpanzees such as Sheba and

Kanzi — who through years of training were able to perform complex tasks. But in reality these were simple tricks which were taught through repetitive learning. This can also explain why more students score higher than their predecessors in the JEE without any difference in intelligence — the Flynn effect.

Beware, as this beast has extended its arms to engulf even 10 year-olds who are now given this regressive mantra — question you perish and ape you thrive — something that has been beautifully highlighted in French playwright Lonesco's *The Lesson*. I can elaborate on the play's theme but following the spirit of this article will make you venture into the unknown.

The writer is associate fellow, Oxford Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies

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Undergraduate students baffled by IIM-I notice

Hemali Chhapla | TNN

Mumbai: The ambitious five-year integrated programme offered by the Indian Institute of Management-Indore has left its takers astonished. After being selected to the first-ever programme that opens doors to an IIM after high school, the institute has said that all those selected will have to pursue a graduation degree on the side.

This has left them all worried about the standing of the IIM-I's course. The letter sent out by the institute director N Ravichandran, to those who've been picked to join the programme, states, "Pursuing a degree in the first three years by distance

education mode while they are on the IIM Indore campus is a reality." This has left candidates and their parents equally rattled. Doing their bit, IIM-I is also in talks with Indian and international universities who would join hands with it to jointly offer this course.

The five-year residential Integrated Programme in Management was initially designed in such a way that students could drop out after the degree course. But the HRD ministry nixed that plan by disallowing the institute to modify its governing Societies Act, which states that the IIMs are postgraduate schools. So, the exit route after three years was closed.

The course was touted to

be a rigorous one, designed to be a mix of essential skill subjects — maths and statistics, history, literature and political science, biological sciences, languages, finance and accounting, economics and information technology.

Now, students will have to pursue a graduation degree on the side too. "The decision was taken after we realised that Indians are obsessed by the idea of a degree," said a faculty. IIM-Indore officials were inundated with queries from parents about the validity of this five-year course that does not give a degree to their wards, forcing the IIM-I director to clarify that the institute "is not empowered to give degree for any academic programme".

IIT Techfest to begin in Pune

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mumbai's annual science and technology festival, Techfest, will kick off from Pune this year on Saturday. The event begins with a national quiz competition. Prize money of Rs1 lakh is at stake. The quiz starts at 11 am at the College of Engineering, Pune. Any student of a registered institute from standard IX onwards can participate.

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CBSE pilot project online

Neha Pushkarna | TNN

New Delhi: After being directed by the HRD ministry to conduct a pilot project to check the feasibility of National Academic Depository (NAD), CBSE is ready with the results. And going by the looks of it, they are positive about it. They have put up the results of this year's Class XII Board exam and Central Teacher Eligibility Test on the NAD portal, which will be functional for three months initially.

NAD is a ministry initiative, intended to serve as an online database of all marks, certificates and degrees awarded by schools, education boards and universities to check forgery during admissions and for the verification of academic qualification during

recruitment. "NAD will enable various agencies (academic institutions, prospective employers, background-checkers) to verify online if any degree has been issued by the institution," stated a CBSE official in a circular sent to all schools and state education departments earlier this week. According to the circular, this project will be functional for three months, after which the ministry will award the final contract for development of NAD.

Once the NAD Bill is passed by the parliament, all educational institutions and universities are likely to be part of it. With many cases of fake certificates emerging during admissions in universities, ministry officials said such an interface shall provide a cure.

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First robotic liver surgery in country

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: For the first time in India, a robot has been used successfully for liver transplant. Doctors at Medanta Medicity Hospital in Gurgaon have performed the robotic surgery to take out a portion of the liver of the donor to be transplanted in a four-year-old child suffering from liver cancer.

The Da-Vinci robot was used by the doctors on Rahmatullah, 36, who donated 20% of his liver to his nephew Ziad, who was suffering from a rare genetic disorder leading to cancer in his liver. According to doctors, it is the third such surgery in the world.

"Robotic surgery is usually performed for other operations like kidney, heart and gynaecological operations. But its use in this liver transplant not only increased the precision but encouraged the donor by reducing surgery-related troubles," said A S Soin, chairman of the Medanta Liver Institute who led the team of surgeons.

The child, who lives in Muscat, the capital of Oman, with his parents, suffered from tyrosinemia, a disease where the liver is unable to digest proteins.

"Even when Ziad developed rickets at the age of two, which is a symptom of this disease, the doctors were not able to diagnose his condition,"

said Neelam Mohan, director of pediatric gastroenterology.

His parents, pharmacist Mohd. Zakir Hussain and Mehe Zabin, originally from Karnataka, could not afford the surgery in Muscat and decided to come to India. An amount of about Rs15 lakh was raised through charity. By then, Ziad had developed cancer in his liver and the whole liver needed to be removed. But the blood group of Ziad's parents differed from his, and so



BONDING: Rahmatullah (right) donated 20% of his liver to his nephew Ziad

his uncle Rahmatullah came forward.

"The donor in a liver transplant undergoes the surgery only for saving some one's life. A robotic surgery encouraged his uncle for the donation as it has greater precision and a mere three-to-four-inch scar," said Soin.

The cost of a robotic surgery for the donor is now nearly Rs 75,000 to 80,000 more than a normal donor surgery.

And for Ziad, it's nothing less than a blessing. "It is another life for Ziad," a relieved Mehe Zabin said.