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Institute spills beans on NIT admission gaffe
Disowns Normalization, Blames CBSE, Govt

Akshaya Mukul | TNN

New Delhi: Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Kolkata, has blown the lid off the story behind the normalization of class XII and JEE (Main) that was used for admission in prestigious NITs.

Blaming the HRD ministry and the Central Board of Secondary Education for the normalization that was eventually arrived at, ISI has distanced itself from the formula. It has said the suggestions made by the S K Joshi committee — of which the ISI was a vital part — were partially disregarded.

ISI had said last September when the S K Joshi committee held its first meeting, CBSE chairman Vineet Joshi told the panel that he has hired Jim Tognolini and John Twing of Indian Centre for Assessment Evaluation and Research to suggest how to normalize Board score. The report by Tognolini-Twing, ISI says, started with the premise that some Boards have more able students and suggested that the performance of students of different Boards in JEE (Main) be used to differentially adjust the scores of these Boards. ISI said this suggestion would benefit a CBSE student at the expense of a non-CBSE student with identical percentile.

ISI said CBSE chairman set up a core committee to shore up support for differential normalization method. Some data was received from Glenn Rowley of the Australian Council for Educational Research, and some supporting data analysis from IIT-Kanpur teachers. The Joshi panel decided to include the Core Committee formed by the CBSE head in all its subsequent meetings. On October 31, the Core Committee did not support the approach promoted by the CBSE chairman and flaws were pointed out.

For the full report, log on to www.timesofindia.com
Nasa telescope may get new lease of life as asteroid hunter

Nasa is considering re-activating a mothballed space telescope to help find asteroids that could be on a collision course with Earth, according to a senior US space agency official.

Launched in December 2009, the Wide-field Infrared Survey Explorer, or WISE, telescope spent about a year taking pictures for an all-sky map. With its infrared detectors, WISE was able to peer through thick layers of dust and see even relatively dim objects such as cool brown dwarf stars in great detail.

Nasa then put WISE to work on another mission looking for asteroids and comets in the solar system. Of particular interest were objects in orbits that pass relatively close to Earth.

WISE found about 150 near-Earth asteroids, including 20 that were potentially hazardous, before funding for the project ran out. The telescope was put into hibernation in February 2011.

Nasa is now reviewing options for enhancing its asteroid-hunting efforts including bringing WISE out of hibernation, Lindley Johnson, who oversees the agency’s Near-Earth Objects observations programme, said this week. This follows February’s explosion of a small asteroid in the skies above Russia and the near-Earth passage of a larger one the same day. Reuters
New norms to curb conflict of interest in IIT boards on cards

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA  NEW DELHI

With ‘conflict of interest’ plaguing the governing bodies of some of the IITs, the HRD Ministry is considering framing a new set of guidelines for constitution of Board of Governors (BoG).

“Chairman and members should not have any direct or indirect business dealing with their Institutes during their tenure and for a certain period after completion of his or her tenure,” said a top HRD Ministry official. According to the new draft proposal, the Chairman and Members of the BoG would have to first declare their business interest and stakes wherever to check allegation of conflict of Interest.

The matter is likely to be taken up by HRD Minister MM Pallam Raju during the end of this month when he convenes a review meeting on IITs.

On the agenda is the controversial percentile and normalisation system that has invited protests from aspirants across the country and the need to decide whether to continue with the new pattern of IIT-JEE in 2014 also. All the BoG Chairman, Chairman JEE, CBSE Chairman and top officials of HRD will attend the meet.

HCL Chairman Shiv Nadar is currently facing allegations of conflict of interest. The HRD Ministry, CVC and PMO have sought a response on the matter from IIT Kharagpur as Nadar is Chairman of the BoG of the institute. The Pioneer had reported about Nadar’s business dealings with IIT and how his software company is being benefited due to his position. Nadar was nominated Chairman BoG by the then Visitor President Pratibha Patil.

“In cases where business is inevitable because no alternative source of supply is available for the product or the service, an appropriate intimation and proper justification must be sent to the HRD Ministry and Visitor for information and record. Complete details of such dealings should be made public, pointed the official.

The new guidelines would be applicable to the Director (ex-officio Board Member), Institute’s Registrar (who is also Secretary of most of bodies of the Institute like the Finance Committee, Building and Works Committee and the Senate), and other authorities, who are permanent invitees of the Board.

Further, in what may affect the fortunes of many who used to receive honorary degrees from IITs while holding a post in BoG, the Chairman and members of the Board would not have to receive any honorary degrees, fellowships or awards from the Institute during the tenure and for couple of year thereafter.

The Centrally Funded Technical Institutes (CFTI) are managed and governed by a Governing Body made up of educationists, administrators and industrialists from the country. The Chairman of the BoG is nominated by the Visitor while its members are nominated / selected by the respective Council, Central / State Governments and Senates. According to the Institutes of Technology Act, 1961 the Board would be responsible for the general superintendence, direction and control of the affairs of the Institute.
‘New formula helps more girl, rural students crack JEE’

Akshaya Mukul | TNN

New Delhi: Faced with widespread criticism of the normalization method in JEE Mains, the CBSE has now claimed that due to the new pattern, representation of students from rural backgrounds as well as of girl students has shown remarkable improvement.

In 2013, there were 136 students with rural background among the top thousand rankers. In 2012, there were only 90 students from rural India. Urban student representation went down to 864 this year from 910 in 2012. Rural representation also showed gradual growth among the first two, three and four thousand rank holders.

Among the top 5,000 rankers, there were 861, or 17.22%, students from rural background compared to 13.4% last year. As for female students, 136 made it to the top-1,000 this year against 96 last year.

Female students, figures showed, increased their presence among the toppers. This year, among the top thousand rankers, there were 136 female students, and 749 among the top 5,000 rankers. Male representation among the top thousand rankers came down to 864 in 2013 compared to 904 last year and 924 in 2011.

Students from government schools are also beginning to make a slow but steady presence among top rankers. But the rate is slower. Last year, 89 government school students were in the first one thousand. In 2013, it went up to 117. In the top 5,000, there were 624 such students, up from last year’s 545. Private school students, however, continue to dominate. This year, of the top-1,000, 883 students were from private schools, a marginal decline from last year’s 911.
हैदराबाद आईआईटी का जापान के ओडीए से करार

सरकार ने भारतीय प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थान हैदराबाद (आईआईटीएच) को जापान सरकार के आधिकारिक विकास सहायता (ओडीए) के साथ करार करने की परियोजना को शुक्रवार को मंजूरी दी।

आर्थिक मामलों की मंत्रिमंड़लीय समिति (सीसीई) की बैठक में लिए गए निर्णयों की जानकारी देते हुए सूचना एवं प्रसारण मंत्री मनीष तिवारी ने यहाँ बताया कि 1776.50 करोड़ रुपए की इस परियोजना के लिए जापान की ओर से ओडीए के तहत 1501.72 करोड़ रुपए का ऋण मिलेगा। उन्होंने बताया कि इस परियोजना की शेष 274.77 करोड़ रुपए अर्थात 15.5 फीसद हिस्सा केंद्रीय मानव संसाधन विकास मंत्रालय अगले चार वर्षों अर्थात 2013-14 से 2016-17 के दौरान अनुदान के रूप में देगा।

तिवारी ने कहा कि इस परियोजना के तहत शैक्षिक और जापानी उद्योग के सहयोग से मूल्य संवर्धन होगा और दोनों के बीच छात्रों एवं प्राध्यापकों का आदान प्रदान होगा। इससे दोनों देशों के बीच विज्ञान एवं प्रौद्योगिकी तथा मानव संसाधन विकास के क्षेत्र में सहयोग बढ़ेगा।
Common Entrance Test or Multiple Exams?

The govt is thinking of challenging the scrapping of a common National Eligibility and Entrance Test for medical programmes, but students are in two minds.

Nearly 40,000 students compete for about 27,71 medical college seats, of which 138 are public institutions and 133 are privately run. There are more than 4000 Entrance tests, conducted by the many boards of secondary education, state governments and private institutions.

"It is much better to have one exam," says engineering graduate Praveen Singh. "That way fewer focus on doing well in one exam, instead of worrying about scoring high in multiple entrance tests." Singh added that candidates are forced to appear for seven or more entrance exams to secure a fighting chance for a seat.

In contrast, who is in his second year at a medical college in Lucknow, offers the contrary view - that a single exam is a good idea. Students can perform well in it, get in quicker or later, and then take advantage of colleges that will offer them. On the other hand, if there are not enough seats, I may not be the running for a seat. As a classmate and I have to do less tests.

Before the introduction of the NEET, over 900 entrance examinations were conducted in the country, with medical colleges conducting separate entrance tests. The NEET proposed to change this. All students would be given an all-India ranking, and students could be admitted on the basis of the NEET. However, some critics say this will limit the number of seats, and individual colleges could conduct separate entrance tests. The NEET proposed to conduct a common entrance examination for students who meet the domicile criteria.

The NEET addressed the concerns of the state governments by creating the system of separate state-wise rankings and providing for state quotas. However, the system was criticized for not ensuring that all students were tested on the same basis or that the exam was fair.

The biggest objection to the single exam is that those who score high, in all the exams, will automatically get into the best colleges due to this. However, Justice AS Bhopal in his 85-page dissenting note argues that admission on the basis of a single test would mean that "unpaid and underpaid mediocrity" students would be considered to be the cream of the crop.

The NEET addresses the concerns of the state governments by creating the system of separate state-wise rankings and providing for state quotas. Minority institutions would still maintain their quota and private colleges could continue with a system of management quota. The only condition was that all students would have to be tested on the same basis.
Learn anytime, anywhere and largely for free

By Prashant K. Nadha
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Massive online open courses (MOOCs) are revolutionizing the education space, racking up students all over the world in the millions. edX, a joint venture of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University and one of the pioneers of the movement, was set up in May last year with an initial investment of $60 million and has more than a million students for its few courses. India is the second largest group of students after the US.

Courses, founded by computer science professors at Stanford University in April last year, has also been enrolling students all over the world.

In an interview, edX president and MIT professor Anant Agarwal spoke about MOOCs, and how they could become an alternative to on-campus learning. He also spoke about pursuing the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, the International Monetary Fund, and shifting to a paid platform to create a revenue stream. Edited excerpts:

Tell us about MOOCs and how edX happened.

MIT has a long history of open content. When there was Khan Academy in the US (set up by) Salman Khan (in 2006). He was my student. He was interested in the MOOCs movement. edX started as an MIT venture in December 2011. It was called MITx. Then MIT thought, we need to take open courses to the next level. How do we increase the Web which is unidirectional. We want to give the shape of an interactive course and a certificate for who complete it. We wanted to create a student community like an alumni network. In short, we wanted to move from content on the Web to the X-teacher, course, community and certificate. Then Harvard joined and we became edX. The initial investment was $60 million with a view that all courses need to be good quality. Gradually many universities joined from different countries. Since University of Australia will put up courses on Hindi and Sanskrit.

MOOCs empowers learning and a revolution in the education space. Learn anytime, anywhere and largely free. We now have a presence in over 50 countries and top universities from MIT to Berkeley, from the University of Toronto to China’s Peking University and Kyoto University in Japan are part of edX. These courses have received mass acceptance.

What response have you received from Indian students?

If you look at the figures, the US contributes 30% of the students enrolled on our courses. India is significant. Since we launched (May 2012), some 150,000 (13%) are Indian students. This is the second highest contingent, third to the US and fourth Brazil with 40,000 students enrolled with edX.

India is debating how to provide quality access to higher education to a large population. But the gaps are evident. Do you see an opportunity?

As a first step you can take it as multi-eduication. You can get content, teaching and professors online. In India, many students take tuition. Instead, they can take MOOCs for free and ask renowned professors for help.

The quality of our courses is good, but I believe we can improve further. We can teach through blended learning—a mix of both classroom and online—for a better result. Last August, we did an experiment in a university to offer blended courses—the results were stunning. Traditionally, the courses have a 30% pass rate, in the blended class it touched 91%. I think online education with a little bit of campus is a better model than 100%, campus. I think 90% of virtual lab and 10% of physical lab is better. On the virtual lab, the number of experiments one can do is immense and it does not have limitations.

We are not profit, but not loss-making. We have 75 employees and like any other American company with similar scale, our requirement is no different. Every university is spending between $10,000 to half a million dollars to produce a course depending on the quality, efforts and duration. And these courses could be two weeks to a semester long. We hope to break even in the next three years.

Do most professors will either become brands or redundant?

In contrast—our courses are known for their quality. So the most important thing is to have the students learn. I think the quality of a pure online course can be better than the quality of an on-campus course. The pure blended form of education is not working these days. In the online format, it could be more engaging. What we do is replace the lecture with learning sequences, inter-linked videos and interactive lessons. We have produced a game that is like a virtual lab, allowed students to do simulations, virtual labs and we promote use of simulation.

The quality of our courses is largely for free.
New Delhi, Aug 2: The government has finalised specifications of next version of low-cost tablet Aakash which would be ready by January 2014, telecom and IT minister Kapil Sibal said on Friday.

"Yesterday we had meeting on the Aakash. The generation 4 Aakash is ready, all the specifications are frozen," Sibal said while addressing the Telecom Summit here.

The minister also said that around 12 manufacturers from around the world are ready to make the tablet in India.

"There is no problem in terms of manufacture. In fact lines are ready for manufacture, what they need is orders. Now that specifications are frozen, we hope that the Aakash will be available to the people of India by January 2014," he said.

The Directorate General of Supplies and Disposals (DGS&D) will start the process for orders, he added.

Final specifications of the new Aakash tablet, however, could not be ascertained. As per proposed specifications, the latest version of Aakash should be capable of supporting 4G services, phone calling features, 4 GB in built storage and bluetooth connectivity.

Government had sourced previous version of Aakash tablet for $49.98 which translated in to ₹2,276.

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