Govt to persist with IIT-JEE changes

NEW DELHI: The Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) have decided to persist with radical changes to their admissions process from this year, despite concerns voiced by the Andhra Pradesh High Court that a key new selection criterion could disadvantage some students.

The country’s premier engineering schools at a meet of its Joint Admissions Board (JAB) – their top admissions body – have decided to continue with a new rule, which allows only students in the top 20% of their school boards in class 12 examinations eligible for admissions.

The JAB meet was convened after the HC passed an order on a petition by students who pointed out that while the new admission criterion considers only class 12 Board scores, some states (like Andhra) compute an aggregate score of class 11 and 12 scores. They argued that this disadvantaged them compared to students in boards that compute only class 12 scores.

The HC, while dismissing the suggestion of the petitioners that the new admission rules are “unconstitutional,” asked the HRD ministry to examine these concerns.

But the ministry has convinced the Andhra government to provide student scores in only class 12 to the IITs, to allow them to compute the eligibility of candidates for admissions.
Andhra students not at disadvantage in new JEE format, assures IIT Board

The HRD Ministry on Monday said that Andhra Pradesh Board will provide separately the marks of class XII for calculation of top 20 percentile to ensure parity for state’s students.

results using marks secured in class XI and XII, the top 20 percentile calculation will be based on marks of class XII, provided the Board makes this information available to JAB/CBSE, the IIT Joint Admission Board has resolved.

The move comes after JEE 2013 entrance test was challenged in the Andhra Pradesh HC vide writ petition No 32533 of 2012. The petitioners sought suspension of notification of JEE 2013 to the extent of regulation of admission into IITs for 2013-14 on the basis of the norm of “being within the 20 percentile of successful candidates in class XII/ equivalent examination conducted by respective Boards” in the interest of justice. In his judgment, Justice L Narasimha Reddy said “this court is not inclined to agree with the contention that percentile system is unconstitutional”.

However, the court directed respondents to examine the disadvantage which the petitioners may have suffered vis-a-vis their un-preparedness in the present system when they were studying in the first year of intermediate and to clarify the same through a press statement.

The JAB has resolved that as far as students appearing for “Andhra Pradesh class XII examination in 2013 are concerned, their results will be compared only with that of other students who give their examination in 2013. The performance of students of 2012 and the fact that they will be governed by the 60 percent rule will have no bearing on the percentile rank of 2013 students. All students in this batch have given their class XI examination without knowing the new rule and so no one is at any advantage or disadvantage”.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

ADDRESSING concerns regarding the applicability of the new Joint Entrance Examination format in Andhra Pradesh where intermediate course is of two years and percentage of marks secured by a student is the aggregate of those secured in both the years, the IIT Joint Admission Board on Monday assured the state’s students will not be disadvantaged on this count vis-a-vis those from other boards.

The HRD Ministry Monday said that Andhra Pradesh Board will provide separately the marks of class XII for calculation of top 20 percentile to ensure parity for the state’s students. For other Boards, which compute class XII results using marks secured in class XI and XII, the top 20 percentile calculation will be based on marks of class XII, provided the Board makes this information available to JAB/CBSE, the IIT Joint Admission Board has resolved.

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Only Class XII marks matter in IIT-JEE cutoff

Decision not to include Class XI marks in wake of HC remarks

In New Delhi

In a relief to candidates from some of the States appearing for IIT-JEE 2013, the cut-off percentage will be calculated on the basis of just the Class XII marks, instead of the cumulative aggregate of Class XI and XII.

The decision of the Joint Admission Board (JAB) of IIT comes in the wake of a recent observation of the Andhra Pradesh High Court and likely to be a breather for candidates of other States.

The cut-off percentage for the top 20 percentile calculation in case of Andhra Pradesh Board students will be calculated on the basis of Class XII marks provided by their Board. For other Boards also, which compute their Class XII results along with the Class XI results, the AP High Court directed all stakeholders, including HRD Ministry and CBSE, to work on a formula to exempt State Board candidates from taking into account the cumulative aggregate results of Class XI and XII, eligibility criteria for JEE Advanced.

The court observed that the petitioners were not aware of the proposed system when they were studying in the first year.

The AP High Court directed all the stakeholders including the HRD Ministry and CBSE to work on a formula to exempt the AP State Board candidates from taking into account the cumulative aggregate results of class XI and XII, eligibility criteria for JEE Advanced.

According to HRD Ministry, Master of Kishen and other petitioners said that the present system is highly discriminatory.

The court observed that the petitioners were not aware of the proposed system when they were studying in the first year. The court directed the respondents to examine the disadvantage which the petitioners may have suffered due to their misunderstanding in the present system while they were studying in the first year of intermediate examination.

The court’s observations and directions were considered by the JAB of JEE (Advanced)-2013. The JAB resolved: "It is a matter of fact that Andhra Pradesh as well as some other State Boards use only Class XII results while many other State Boards use only Class XII results. This fact is not of consequence to all the students in a State Board as students get percentile ranks based only on how they perform vis-à-vis other students of the same Board giving the examination in the same year."

The performance of the students in 2012 and the fact that they will be governed by the 60 percent rule will have no bearing on the percentile rank of 2013 students. "All students in this batch have given their Class XI examination without knowing of the new rule and so no one is at any advantage or disadvantage. Therefore, JAB resolves that there is no need to change the scheme," said a senior HRD official.
Alumni meet of IIT-K from March 3

**Kanpur:** The Alumni Association of IIT-Kanpur is organising alumni convention of the institute in IIT-Delhi from March 3. Reserve Bank of India governor D Subbarao, an alumnus of IIT Kanpur, will be the chief guest. The aim of holding convention in New Delhi is to ensure maximum participation.

Alumni convention spokesperson Shantanu Srivastava said that the directors of IIT-K Indranil Manna and IIT-D RK Shevgaonkar, four IIT-K alumni who received Padma Bhusan/Padma Shri awards this year, many distinguished alumni, who are leading functionaries in government, public, private and corporate sectors would participate in the function. More than 1,000 participants from both India and abroad are expected to participate. It is likely to be the biggest IIT-K alumni convention.

"The alumni and their families from all over the world will be able to meet, interact with each other and explore how the association can be made more vibrant and useful for the institute and the nation," he said. The convention will have less speeches and more interaction and entertainment programmes for the alumni and their families.
To curb radicalisation, UGC directs universities to prescribe social sciences for all students

This isn’t going to work

Students can draw on subjects such as political science and history to acquire a better understanding of the world they live in. Nonetheless, it doesn’t follow that a pupil of the social sciences will be less inclined to become anti-social or radical. In fact, Sayeed Salahudeen, the chief of the terror outfit Hizbul Mujahideen and the ameer of the Jihad Council, was a student of political science.

If there has been a rise in anti-social elements from technical education backgrounds, it has more to do with the lack of employment opportunities than the subject of study. The antidote lies in boosting the overall quality of education and jobs in the economy. Though advisable as an academic pursuit, the study of humanities itself cannot help us here.

Need antidote to technocracy

Even if accurate predictions can’t be made, changing academic environments could well minimise conditions loaded with the potential to radicalise youth. This is where educational institutions at all levels – primary, secondary and higher – come in. The UGC is correct in believing that universities can play a critical role in stemming the present tendency towards radicalisation of youth, especially in light of growing numbers of terror suspects coming from science and technological backgrounds.

Many of us would agree that science and engineering students do view society and its developments through a narrow and limited prism. Used to working with precise mathematical formulas, this could lead them into thinking that society itself is amenable to such abstract formulism as well as to social engineering agendas which often involve violence. Their lack of familiarity with larger political and social processes and their inability to analyse them ends up making them dangerously one-dimensional. The singular lack of connection with other human beings is often manifest in the casual way terrorist groups destroy civilian locations. Modern society, with all its volatility and contrary tugs and pulls, defies the imagination of a technocrat or engineer, prone to coming up with simplistic solutions for complex problems.

Cross-cultural classroom interactions and lessons of world history can change the radicalisation pathways. Besides they can also create non-violent options for those who can’t have their grievances heard and addressed. Social sciences and humanities, unlike formula-based engineering, open up the mind to different possibilities of negotiating conflict. Political theories can change the way you think and interpret society and the world at large.
ISRO plans 9 more launches this year

PSLV launched successfully

T.E. Raja Simhan
Sriharikota (AP), Feb. 25

The 102nd space mission of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was a grand success. It was yet another ‘flawless’ launch on an auspicious full-moon day, giving a major boost to ISRO’s plans of another nine launches this year, including one to Mars. To thunderous applause from the assembled gathering, the PSLV C-20 blasted off at 6:01 pm from the first launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota carrying the satellites. The launch was also witnessed by President Pranab Mukherjee from the mission control room along with Andhra Pradesh Governor E.S.L. Narasimhan and Chief Minister Kran Kumar Reddy.

DELAY

The launch was delayed by five minutes due to the presence of space debris in the flight path. ISRO’s trusted workhorse, the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), launched the Indo-French satellite SARAL along with six commercial payloads from Austria, Britain, Canada and Denmark into a 785-km polar sun-synchronous orbit.

Within seconds, the rocket roared into the dark blue sky leaving behind a trail of orange-coloured smoke. The rocket followed its exact flight sequence, with separation of the propulsion and satellite at various stages. As the rocket went into the space, a bright full moon popped up to give a visual treat to hundreds of media persons assembled on the terrace of the media centre, 5 km from the launch pad.

It was the 23rd mission of PSLV, which has an impeccable record of 21 consecutive successful flights. This is the ninth time ISRO is using the ‘core alone’ variant of the rocket.

Congratulating ISRO for successfully executing this mission, President Mukherjee said that PSLV had become a household name in the country and this mission would only reaffirm this position through its efficacy, accuracy and reliability of this launch vehicle. The entire nation, he said, is eagerly looking forward to the successful flight of the Geo-Synchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV).

GSLV LAUNCH

The planned experimental mission of GSLV Mark 3 is a huge step forward in the development of heavy-lift space-transport system in the country.

“Our Chandrayaan-1 mission made the country proud. I am also confident of the first Indian inter-planetary venture, The Mars Orbiter Mission, targeted for this year, to be successful and to place India into the ranks of the few nations that have attempted such a feat,” he said.

PSLV-C20 is a dawn-dusk sun-synchronous polar orbit mission carrying Saral (Satellite with Argos and AltiKa), an ISRO and French space agency CNES joint venture, as the primary satellite and six auxiliary satellites.

The Saral mission results from the common interest of both France and CNES in studying the ocean from space. For instance, it can provide information on seasonal forecasting, study on animal migration, locating ‘buoys’ and fishing vessels, collecting environmental data such as ocean temperature profiles and currents.

Besides Saral, the PSLV-C20 has put into orbit two micro-satellites Unibrite and BRITE (both from Austria), AAUSAT3 from Denmark and STRaND from UK. It also carried one micro-satellite (NEOSat) and one mini-satellite (Saphire) from Canada.

With a lift-off mass of 407 kg, Saral is the 56th satellite to be launched by PSLV. The six commercial payloads from abroad together have a lift-off mass of 259.5 km. PSLV-C20 is the ninth PSLV in ‘core alone’ configuration (without solid strap-on motors).

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Pamban bridge is 100 and still going strong

Railways fail to remember India’s first cantilever bridge which is 2.06 km long and the second longest sea link

D. J. Walter Scott

RAMANATHAPURAM: The Pamban rail bridge, an engineering marvel and India’s first cantilever bridge stepped into its centenary year on Sunday.

The 2.06 km long bridge, the second longest sea bridge after Bandra-Worli sea link, was thrown open to traffic this day in 1914 and is still going strong, providing the much needed rail connectivity to the pilgrim centre of Rameswaram.

Located at the world’s second highly corrosive environment, next to Mexico, the bridge was constructed amid challenges. Having survived the devastating 1964 cyclonic storm, the bridge entered the 100th year on Sunday, sans any celebration by the Railways.

The need for rail connectivity between the mainland and the island was felt in the late 1870s when the East India Company, expanding its trade, decided to establish rail link between Danushkodi and Colombo, a Railway Engineer said, giving details of the historic bridge.

After feasibility study, a proposal on “Indo-Ceylon project” was sent to the British Parliament for building a rail bridge from Mannadipam to Pamban and from Danushkodi to Thalaimanar at an estimated cost of Rs. 299 lakh. The British Parliament rejected the project, stating that the cost of the project was too high. It, however, gave its nod for the Pamban rail bridge at a cost Rs. 70 lakh in 1880.

Soon the excavation work began and the South Indian Railway commenced the bridge construction in 1902. The ‘Khural’ families from the Kutch region in Gujarat, who had experience in working with the Himalayan Railways were brought to Pamban for excavation and erection work, while the fabricated structures were brought from Britain, the Engineer said talking to The Hindu. Work was smooth till the construction of 112th pier from Mandapam side. The project faced the first major hurdle when the engineers found movement of ferry service in a 65.25 metre wide ‘Pambur’ in the Palk strait.

“They could have moved ahead with putting up piers, but the engineers, unwilling to obstruct the ferry service and disturb ‘first users’ wanted to have the rail link, while allowing the ferry service as well,” the Railway Engineer said quoting old records.

It was at this stage, the Railways approached Scherzer, a German Engineer, who designed and built the famous 65.25 metre long rolling type lift span, which opens up to pave way for the vessels to pass through like a pair of scissors.

After the erection of rolling lift centre span in 1913, the bridge was thrown open to traffic on February 24, 1914.

The strength of the bridge was put to test for the first time in December 1964, when a severe cyclonic storm hit this part of the area. All the girders, both RCC and steel, were washed away. Two of the 141 piers also damaged, but the Scherzer’s span withstood nature’s fury.

This time, it was the turn of Indian engineers to show case their engineering prowess. A team of engineers, led by the then Assistant Engineer E Sreedharan (Delhi Metro Sreedharan) salvaged the girders and put the bridge back on the rails in just five months.

The rail bridge threatened to become defunct when the Indian Railways announced the “unilateral” policy in 2006. The Railways considered a proposal to construct a new bridge, but gave up the idea as it would cost a whopping Rs 700 crore.

Stepping in, the then President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who hailed from Rameswaram island, suggested that the existing bridge could be strengthened for gauge conversion. After obtaining expert opinions from IIT-Chennai and structural engineers, the bridge was strengthened to broad gauge standard and train services resumed in 2007.

The bridge was further strengthened in 2009 for running of goods traffic. It suffered a jolt, when a barge, being taken through the channel, crashed into the bridge, damaging the 121st pier after anchor failure. After a week, train services were resumed in the bridge.
40% students say no to CSIR, UGC fellowships

NEW DELHI: Nearly 40% of the students qualifying for the CSIR-UGC NET examination have not taken up the fellowship primarily because they prefer to go abroad for higher studies, says a study in the latest issue of the Current Science.

Data pertaining to CSIR-supported Junior Research Fellows (JRFs) indicates that around 41% students who qualified for CSIR-UGC NET — conducted from December 2008 to June 2010 — did not avail the fellowships offered.

The study — 'Are CSIR-UGC NET-qualified Junior Research Fellows going away from science?' — reveals that lack of interest is attributed to awardees' preference to go abroad for higher studies. Employment in academics, R&D institutes and other fellowship offers were some of the other reasons why the students were not availing the fellowship.

But a sizeable percentage of NET-qualified students also took up the fellowship by clearing NET again and only a small percentage of these students opted for a career in non-scientific institutes.

So, the concerns that NET-qualified students are moving away from science are unfounded, the study notes. CSIR director general Dr Samir K Brahmachari said the students were interested in inter-disciplinary research.
Former IIT-M director P.V. Indiresan dead

Aarti Dhar and Vasudha Venugopal

NEW DELHI/CHENNAI: P. V. Indiresan, a former director of IIT-Madras and Padma Bhushan award winner who was a strong critic of reservation in jobs and education, passed away in Pune on Sunday. He was 85.

A critic of not just reservations but also the Common Entrance Examination saying it would dilute the quality of the IITs, Indiresan pioneered several academic reforms including the credit system at IIT-Madras — which came to be known as a “forgiving and flexible system of allowing students to choose their courses and teachers”, according to P. Sriram, a student of Mr. Indiresan and the current dean of administration at IIT-M. Professor Indiresan initiated industry-IIT cooperation as he believed that students should be trained to solve real world problems with industrial help. This paved the way for IIT-Madras to get more sponsored projects from the government and companies, recall his students.

“Before that, we were primarily an institution for undergraduate courses. He increased the intake of postgraduate students to build a strong research community. Now we have more PG and research students than undergraduate,” said Mr. Sriram.

M.S. Anant, former director, IIT Madras, who joined as assistant professor during Prof Indiresan’s tenure, said Professor Indiresan’s entry was like “a breath of fresh air” for the students and teachers. “Before him, let alone students, even teachers could not go talk to the director. He formed committees of deans and arranged weekly meetings, which were reported to him.” It was his decision to revamp academic course content every five years at IIT, a practice the institution continues to this day.

While his outspokenness provoked debate and discussion within the IIT campus, in his later role as a policy maker and columnist including for The Hindu and Business Line, his controversial views often went against conventional wisdom. Professor Indiresan’s opposition to 27 per cent reservation for Other Backward Classes did come as a surprise to many because of his proximity to the then Human Resource Development Minister, Arjun Singh. Professor Indiresan was among the few people to be invited for Singh’s family events.

Even while they were on opposite sides of the fence on the issue of reservation in admissions, he continued to be nominated on various committees on higher education including those of the University Grants Commission.

Many found his bluntness provocative and contentious but for some that quality was welcome. Sandip Deb, an IIT alumnus and a senior journalist, in his column in an English daily newspaper recounted his meeting with Professor Indiresan and wrote: “Years ago, I was sitting with legendary IIT professor and former director of IIT Madras, P. V. Indiresan. ‘Let’s face it,’ he told me bluntly, ‘Most teachers in the IITs are inferior to the students.’”

A graduate from the Indian Institute of Science, Mr. Indiresan began his career as a teacher in IIT Roorkee before rising to become the Director of IIT, Madras (1979-84), for many years. Obtaining his doctorate degree from Birmingham University, Professor Indiresan subsequently moved to IIT Delhi and settled in the city after retirement.

His end came in Pune where he was to chair the Election Commission’s technical committee meet on electronic voting machines.
INDORE: After Indian Institute of Management, Indore remained embroiled in controversies over sexual harassment case, allegations of financial irregularities against its director and cases of drug consumption on campus, a 42-year-old staff member decided to offer prayers at the holy shrine of Vaishno Devi for the ‘wellness’ of the institute.

Shravan Kumar Kaushal, a driver at the institute, travelled 2,900 kilometers on a bicycle and came back in 16 days. He started his journey from IIM, Indore campus on February 4 in the presence of the director of the institute Dr N Ravichandran and other faculty members.

Sharing his experiences Shravan said, “I had to brave the rains, hailstorm and snowfall to reach there. The institute has been doing well in the last few years and I prayed that this should continue. When the institute will progress, it would bring us prosperity.”

Shravan has earlier been to Vaishno Devi four times on bicycle. He reached the temple via Mandsaur, Neemuch, Ajmer, Amritsar and met a large number of villagers from different districts of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

Shravan expressed his gratitude to the staff development committee of the institute for partially funding his trip.
IIT issues advisory for students after 22-year-old drowns

Yogita Rao | TNN

Mumbai: A day after 22-year-old Ankur Abhishek drowned at Vihar Lake, IIT-B officials have decided to issue a general advisory to all students to be cautious.

An institute official said that the advisory would be in two forms. “One would be a general advisory for students to be cautious whenever they are on an outing near water bodies. We keep issuing advisories from time to time to not visit areas near the Vihar lake as there is a leopard scare on the campus,” said the official.

He also added that the Vihar lake was anyway out of bounds for IIT students and that the five students had entered the area illegally. “Our routine advisories anyway include that students should not venture out near the hills or cross the fence, we will issue it again,” added the official.

Meanwhile, Ankur’s father, who came to IIT-B from Patna on Monday, is staying on the campus. An official mentioned that his father is completely devastated after the incident and did not wish to speak. Ankur’s sister and brother-in-law also reached the campus on Sunday night from Rajkot.

All facilities, including the mess at Hostel number 3, where Ankur stayed on the campus, were shut on Monday. The students received a mail from the director informing them about the tragic incident. At the beginning of an interactive session with Ratan Tata, at the convocation hall on Monday, which was attended by more than 1,600 students from the institute, two minutes of silence were observed in Ankur’s memory.

Meanwhile, a post on Facebook is flooded with condolence messages from all IITians. One of the students even mentioned that Ankur was the best carrom player he had known. “His facebook profile had several pictures of him near the beach. He seemed like a water person. It was very unfortunate that he drowned,” said a student.

Ankur drowned in Vihar lake on Sunday afternoon when he went on an outing with four of his friends.