IIT-D director sends email: I quit due to ‘unforeseen situations’

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 31

AMID controversy over his resignation as Director of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Delhi, and in his first official communication since he resigned, Raghunath K Shergaonkar has said some “unforeseen situations” towards the end of the year had led him to step down.

In an email addressed to “Colleagues, Staff and Students” on Wednesday evening, Shergaonkar said it was his “last New Year message” as Director of IIT-Delhi. “This is my last New Year Message as the Director of IIT Delhi as I have formally resigned and waiting for my relieving orders,” he said in the email.

“Last year was practically a year of continuation of developmental activities at IIT-Delhi... Towards the end of the year, however, some unforeseen situations developed and I had to decide to step down from my position. Nevertheless, this is a small transient in the long illustrious history of IIT Delhi,” he wrote.

Urging the staff and students to make IIT-Delhi a “model institute for transparency, trust, accountability and academic and research excellence”, Shergaonkar said the institute is “on constant rising path”.

“Last year the institute slipped on the global ranking by few notches and a quick corrective effort on that front needs to be the focus for the new year. Also there is a need to create a positive image about the internal functioning of the institute to the outside world. Disagreement is an essential part of a healthy academic environment. However, care needs to be taken that the internal differences are not exploited by the outsiders to affect our functioning,” he said in the communication.

Shergaonkar’s resignation has sparked a row with reports suggesting that he quit owing to pressure from the Human Resource Development Ministry to release salary dues of nearly Rs 70 lakh to former IIT-Delhi faculty and now BJP functionary Subramanian Swamy for the period between 1972 and 1991. The ministry, however, has denied these reports.

According to ministry officials, Shergaonkar quit after an inquiry was initiated into the IIT-Delhi’s research centre in Mauritius, which the ministry claims, “violates the IIT Act”. The institute had subsequently dismissed the ministry’s allegations and claimed the resignation was due to “personal reasons”.

Indian Express ND 01/01/2015 P-3
News Line
IIT-D Director signs off

By Pheroze L. Vincent

NEW DELHI: R.K. Shevgaonkar, director of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, bid farewell in his customary New Year circular to staff and students.

He resigned last week and the Human Resource Development Ministry denied reports that it was due to government pressure. His resignation is yet to be accepted by President Pranab Mukherjee, who holds the post of Visitor to the institute.

Prof. Shevgaonkar has left for Mumbai and will be there till January 11. “This is my last New Year message as Director of IIT-Delhi as I have formally resigned and am waiting for my relieving orders ... Care needs to be taken that the internal differences are not exploited by the outsiders to affect our functioning,” he said in the e-mailed circular.

Prof. Shevgaonkar listed the year’s achievements which included the setting up of a one megawatt solar plant on the campus and the introduction of the post-doctoral fellowship programme. He added that the focus for 2015 should be on raising the international ranking of the Institute.

IIT-D had fallen from rank 36 to 38 in the Quacquarelli Symonds World Asian Universities Ranking for 2013. It stayed at 38 in 2014 too.

International tie-ups, like the International Institute of Technology Research Association, Mauritius, an IIT professor said, were an attempt to improve the rankings.
IIT-Delhi chief bids farewell to staff, students

NEVERTHELESS, THIS IS A TRANSIENT PHASE IN THE LONG, ILLUSTRIOUS HISTORY OF IIT-DELHI.
IIT-DELHI IS ON CONSTANT RISING PATH AND I AM SURE THE NEW YEAR WILL BRING MANY UNPRECEDENTED ACHIEVEMENTS TO THE INSTITUTE.

Technology Research Academy (IITRA) is not an extension campus of IIT-Delhi but an independent Research Academy named IITRA, Mauritius and that the institute's role is that of advisory only with no financial commitments and stands all legal aspects.

The faculty members on Tuesday had requested Shegaonkar to withdraw his resignation and later in a statement the IIT-Delhi faculty members asked the government to stop interference in the operational autonomy of IIT-Delhi (and IIT system in general).

"Dear Colleagues, Staff and Students, this my last New Year Message as the Director of IIT-Delhi as I have formally resigned and waiting for my relieving orders." He further went on to appreciate the institute stakeholders stating that last year was practically a year of continuation of developmental activities at IIT-Delhi.

He said there is a need to create a positive image about the internal functioning of the institute to the outside world. "Disagreement is an essential part of a healthy academic environment. However, a care needs to be taken that the internal differences are not exploited by the outsiders to affect our functioning. Let us work to make IIT-D a model institute for transparency, trust, accountability and academic and research excellence," Shegaonkar said.

Shegaonkar also talked about major new facilities like the swimming pool and green initiatives commissioned within the premises of elite institute. He also took the opportunity to mention that last year the Institute slipped on the global ranking by few notches and a quick corrective effort on that front needs to be the focus for the new year.
Students back IIT-D chief, launch online campaign

STAFF REPORTER • NEW DELHI

The support for IIT-Delhi director Raghunath K Shevgaonkar seems to be only growing day by day. A day after IIT Delhi faculty and alumni associations came out in support of Shevgaonkar, students have come into the picture by starting an online petition. The students have put forward a plea that they will not accept the director’s resignation in a letter addressed to the president on online forum Change.org.

Siddarth Jain, third year student of electrical engineering, who started this petition said, “I was on a vacation when I heard about his resignation. So I thought there was a need to do something because Sir, Shevgaonkar is one of the best teachers I have ever met. It was important to show him that students are also in full support of him.” The petition was started on December 29 and has been signed by over 700 people.

According to Jain, the director is someone, who has worked relentlessly to improve the educational system. He said that he is coming before the vacation and would request him to complete his full term. Since the chairman of IIT-Delhi has already accepted the director’s resignation, the boy has written a letter to the President. “After consulting with the director through Change.org I will make sure the letter and petition reaches the President. The director had on Wednesday sent a new year mail saying this is the last New Year wishes from him, but I along with other students will convince him,” he said.
IIT Delhi director R Shevgaonkar breaks silence on sudden resignation


IIT Director R Shevgaonkar, whose resignation last week had triggered a controversy, on Wednesday attributed his decision to quit to some "unforeseen situations".

"Towards the end of the year, however, some unforeseen situations developed and I had to decide to step down from my position. Nevertheless, this is a small transient in the long illustrious history of IIT Delhi. "IIT Delhi is on constant rising path and I am sure the New Year will bring many unprecedented achievements to the institute," Shevgaonkar said in his farewell mail sent to the faculty, staff and students.

The Director, however, did not elaborate on the unforeseen events that had led him to resign from his post on Friday last, two years before his terms ends. The resignation has not been accepted till now. A statement issued by IIT-D on Monday cited "personal reasons" for the resignation.

In his mail, Shevgaonkar went on to say that there is also a need to create a positive image about the internal functioning of the institute to the outside world. "Disagreement is an essential part of a healthy academic environment. However, a care needs to be taken that the internal differences are not exploited by the outsiders to affect our functioning. Let us work to make IITD a model institute for transparency, trust, accountability and academic and research excellence," he said.

Shevgaonkar noted this was his last new year message as the Director of IIT Delhi as he had "formally resigned" and was awaiting his relieving orders.

IIT Delhi faculty asks Director R Shevgaonkar to withdraw resignation

By: PTI | New Delhi | December 31, 2014 6:00 am

http://www.financialexpress.com/article/industry/jobs/iit-delhi-faculty-asks-director-r-shevgaonkar-to-withdraw-resignation/24696/

The IIT Delhi faculty forum on Tuesday requested Director R Shevgaonkar to withdraw his resignation over which a controversy had erupted, describing him as a man of “dignity and integrity”.

The request came even as Chairman of the IIT-D’s Board of Governors Vijay Bhatkar met HRD Minister Smriti Irani.

“The faculty of IIT Delhi stands by the decisions that its administration has taken to uphold the autonomy of the Institute. We request the Director, IIT Delhi to withdraw his resignation,” the faculty forum said in a statement. The resignation has not yet been accepted.

Shevgaonkar had last Friday forwarded his resignation to Bhatkar citing “personal reasons” even as a media report suggested that he was under pressure from the HRD Ministry. The Ministry has denied that any pressure was put on Shevgaonkar that may have made him quit.
Sources in the HRD Ministry indicated that faulting the Director on the issue of the setting up of an extension research campus in Mauritius would prove counter productive as it had approval of the Ministry itself and an MoU in this regard was signed in Mauritius last year in the presence of the then HRD Minister M M Pallam Raju.

An enquiry is already underway about the MoU which has been at the centre of the controversy ever since Shevgaonkar quit.

An IIT statement issued by the acting registrar yesterday had, however, said the campus in Mauritius is not an “extension campus of IIT-D” but an independent research academy named ‘International Institute of Technology Research Academy’ (IITRA). “IIT-D’s role is only advisory in nature,” it said.

Sources said that HRD Minister Smriti Irani met President Pranab Mukherjee, who is the visitor of the IITs.

While it remained unclear what transpired at the meeting, HRD Ministry sources maintained that Irani went to Rashtrapati Bhavan to enquire about the President’s health.

IIT Delhi faculty members are of the unanimous view that “interference” in the operational autonomy of IIT Delhi (and IIT system in general) is the beginning of the end to excellence that has been achieved so far, or can be achieved in future, especially in the Indian context.

“For any academician, including all faculty of IIT Delhi and especially Prof Shevgaonkar, dignity and integrity are the sole assets of our lives.

“Thus, direct or indirect communication affecting these parameters is bound to create unrest in an otherwise peaceful mind that truly loves research and teaching. This is the spirit of IIT Delhi,” the statement said.

BJP leader and former IIT-Delhi alumni Subramanian Swamy, whose name has been dragged into the controversy, had yesterday alleged his resignation was not over the alleged demand by him to the Ministry to settle his dues but had to do with setting up IIT-D campus in Mauritius over which an “explanation” has been sought from him.

The IIT statement issued yesterday said the original proposal to start International Institute of Technology Delhi Research Academy was initiated on the recommendation of the IIT Council on January 21, 2011 but its nomenclature was later changed to IITRA on the advice of the HRD Ministry.

“The final MoU was okayed by HRD Ministry and it was signed in the presence of the then HRD Minister on November 19, 2013 in Mauritius,” the IIT statement said.

IIT Delhi Alumni Association has yesterday also come out in support of Shevgaonkar, requesting him to continue in his post.

**Govt. Invites Proposals From IITs & IISc To Undertake Studies On River Basins Of The Country**

To combat the evil effects of climate change and with an endeavor to understand its impact on water systems, the government has urged the educational pioneers of the nation, IITs and IISc to submit proposals for undertaking studies of the 20 major river basins of India. The studies are expected to be commissioned shortly and will take six months to two years for completion, as per the reports given by the Official sources.

The proposal is one of the five adaptation centric goals of the National Water Mission and also an important priority missions of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). National Water Mission has a MoU with the National Institute of Rural Development, for this purpose. Major objectives of the mission are focused on ground water, flood management, aquifer mapping, building embankment, preparedness measures.

Currently, the government has decided to involve six IITs and IISc in the project to provide valuable and high end adaptation schemes and policies. The project is being planned to be undertaken in a large scale using downscaled global climate models.

Important Points

- IITs, IISc to undertake studies on river basins
- The proposal is one of the five goals set by National Water Mission
- Objectives are focused on ground water, flood management, aquifer mapping, building embankment, preparedness measures

IIT-B students raise a stink over Swamy's `hate speech'

http://www.mumbaimirror.com/mumbai/others/IIT-B-students-raise-a-stink-over-Swamy-s-hate-speech/articleshow/45713087.cms

In the wake of the controversial comments made by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy during IIT-B's annual fest Mood Indigo on Monday, including calling Congress president Sonia Gandhi a "vishkanya", a section of students have come out strongly against the organisers' decision to provide a platform to such politicians. The Progressive and Democratic Students Collective, a student group at IIT-B, has also condemned the organisers for inviting the Consulate of Israel as an official "sponsor" for one of the events.

On Monday, Swamy created a stir when he poked fun at the recently resigned Director of IITDelhi, R K Shevgaonkar, who is also a former deputy director of IIT-B. Swamy said that Shevgaonkar had thought that the "best intellectual of India is Rahul Gandhi". Swamy had also compared former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to a circus lion, saying he was "brought up to obey" and was "good at taking orders".

One of the students, Rahul Manganti, said, "They should have taken the care to invite a diverse group representative of different ideologies, rather than one individual known for his hate speeches." However, the organisers insisted that it was incorrect to read political meaning into their invitations. "We invited Swamy to deliver a talk on how youth should get involved in governance and that does not mean we endorse his ideology,"said thirdyear student Gunjan Gupta, spokesperson for the organisers.
आईआईटी कानपुर में पर्यावरण इंजीनियरिंग में भी डिग्री

कोलकाता (प्रे)। आईआईटी कानपुर ने पर्यावरण के क्षेत्र की चुनौतियों से निपटने के लिए पर्यावरण इंजीनियरों की फौज खड़ी करने का निर्णय किया है।

देश में विकास की योजनाओं की पर्यावरण मंजूरी मिलने में कई कठिनाइयों का सामना करना पड़ता है।

2015 से संस्थान में सिविल इंजीनियरिंग के साथ पर्यावरण इंजीनियरिंग में भी दौरी डिग्री मिलेगी।

यह बी टेक और एम टेक दोनों स्तरों पर मिलेगी। कोर्स के तहत संस्था माइनिंग, केमिकल, सीमेंट, फूड प्रोसेसिंग, मेटलर्जिकल में पर्यावरण इंजीनियरिंग से जुड़े मुद्दों का हल सुझाएगी।
IIT-Kharagpur to create new cadre of environmental engineers

M POST BUREAU

KOLKATA: As environment clearance has turned out to be a major roadblock for growth of industry, IIT, Kharagpur has decided to build an army of environmental engineers to help tackle the challenge. The new School of Environmental Science and Technology at the IIT would start offering dual degrees of civil and environmental engineering at both BTech and MTech levels from the 2015 academic session. “Environmental engineers are in high demand now. They are not just a part of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) drive but are also a driver of a company’s growth and increase in profit by means of cost reduction,” the school’s head Prof Jayanta Bhattacharya said. The courses would focus on providing engineering solutions to environmental issues which large-scale industries in mining, chemical, cement, food processing, metallurgical, etc have to deal with.

“Right now delay in environmental clearances is a major roadblock for industries, so we need solutions for effective utilisation of resources, waste management and pollution control,” Bhattacharya said.
HRD ministry questions
DU V-C's conduct

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: The University of Delhi (DU) Vice Chancellor Dinesh Singh, has once again been caught in a fresh controversy. Recently, Ministry of Human Resource Development has forwarded paperwork to President Pranab Mukherjee’s office questioning the conduct of the Vice Chancellor on key allegations against him. Meanwhile, Delhi University teachers alleged that during Dinesh Singh tenure Public Interest Litigations against the varsity have increased as the VC continues to rule the university in an autocratic manner.

“There is no room for dialogue or debate in the university. Teachers and students are compelled to go to court for resolving appointment or admission matters. Even to discuss routine matters of university, the vice chancellor is not available. He has not even met department heads or faculty members for long time,” said Abha Dev Habib, DU executive council member. This year ‘White Paper’ was released by Delhi University Teachers’ Association (DUTA) in which it alleged financial and administrative irregularities in functioning of varsity like diversion of OBC funds for purchase of laptops or flagging off ‘Gyanodaya Express’.

Taking cognisance of same, MHRD has asked Visitor of university Pranab Mukherjee to look into whether the vice chancellor took the President’s approval for the amended ordinance that enabled Four Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP).

“The Vice Chancellor is playing dirty politics to save his chair. During his tenure, he was least interested in university matters like teachers promotions being stopped for years or appointment of permanent teachers and such. At least 40-45 percent seats for post of teachers are lying vacant. VC has culturally destroyed the university by making its functioning undemocratic and implementing a vague code of conduct,” said Abha Dev Habib.

She further added rather than conducting open house sessions to resolve matters, VC has instead barricaded the whole place. “University is a public place and such behaviour is unacceptable. VC should be removed as he has damaged functioning of the university,” said another teacher.
Key science developments to look forward to in 2015

R. PRASAD

The year 2015 is likely to see some key science developments. The one that most people are eagerly looking forward to is the development of an effective and efficacious Ebola vaccine and/or drug. In the early part of 2015, a few vaccine trials are set to begin and the results are expected by June. Several drugs are already being tested. The most promising one appears to be the trial that uses antibody-rich blood of people who have survived Ebola. According to Nature, "The blood treatments could be rolled out quickly and widely if proved effective."

Human clinical trials have already begun in Liberia to test the effectiveness of convalescent plasma therapy (CPT). Similar trials are expected to begin soon in two other places — Guinea and Sierra Leone. These three African countries have faced the brunt of the virus.

"Convalescent plasma was found to effectively treat diphtheria and tetanus at the end of the nineteenth century, and was widely used in the first half of the twentieth century to treat diseases such as measles, mumps and pneumonia," notes Nature. But with the arrival of antibiotics, antivirals and vaccine, convalescent plasma was all but forgotten. According to the WHO, the number of suspected, probable and confirmed Ebola cases in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea has crossed 20,000. The death toll stands at over 7,800. As of December 27, 2014, Sierra Leone has been the hardest hit with over 9,400 cases, which is almost half of all cases in the three African countries. But Liberia has the highest death toll of 3,413.

Reaching Pluto

If Rosetta finally reached a comet in August 2014 after travelling for ten years and covering a distance of 6.4 billion km, in July 2015, NASA’s New Horizons spacecraft will reach Pluto. The New Horizons’ closest approach to Pluto will occur on July 14. By then the craft will have travelled 5 billion km after it was launched in January 2006.

But even before New Horizons reaches Pluto, the craft will begin observing the Pluto system in mid-January. And by mid-May, New Horizons will be able to provide better views of the Pluto system. These views will be far better than the ones that the Hubble Space telescope can provide. "For decades we thought Pluto was this odd little body on the planetary outskirts; now we know it’s really a gateway to an entire region of new worlds in the Kuiper Belt, and New Horizons is going to provide the first close-up look at them," Hal Weaver, New Horizons Project Scientist said in a release.

Meanwhile, in March 2015, NASA’s Dawn probe will arrive at the protoplanet Ceres. Ceres is the “most massive body in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter.” The interest in exploring Ceres is because water ice is believed to be present beneath the crust.

Ancient human’s genome

After the 2013 publication of the mitochondrial genome of the 400,000-year-old Sima de Los Huesos human, in 2015 palaeontologists are hopeful of sequencing the complete genome of the ancient human. The specimen was found in a deep cave in northern Spain.

If extracting the mitochondrial material was a “Herculean task” given the badly deteriorated condition of the bones, sequencing the complete genome will be far tougher. But when completed, the results will prove to greatly useful. “The results could help to clarify the evolutionary relationship between humans, Neanderthals and another ancient group called Denisovans, and to identify episodes of inbreeding between distantly related hominins,” notes Nature.

Large Hadron Collider

Finally, the Large Hadron Collider will reboot in March; it was shutdown two years ago. Once rebooted, LHC will be able to smash particles at 13 trillion electronvolts — almost double the currently achieved one.

The extra power will allow scientists to find the phenomena that “fill the gaps” in the standard model of particle physics. But if LHC with the extra power is unable to find evidence of many heavy particles that supersymmetry theory predicts, that would result in the theory losing “further flavour.”
मोबाइल विकिरण के खतरे से अनजान हैं किशोर
मुंबई में हुए सर्वे में सामने आई महत्वपूर्ण जानकारी

अगर उजाला नेटवर्क

मुंबई। मोबाइल फोन हमारी जिंदगी का अहम हिस्सा बन चुके हैं। मोबाइल और इसके टावर से निकलने वाले विकिरण (रेडिएशन) के स्वास्थ्य पर पड़ने वाले प्रभाव को लेकर कई अध्ययन भी किए जा चुके हैं। इस संबंध में इंटरनेट पर एक रिपोर्ट पढ़ने के बाद मुंबई की झील शाह के मन में ज्यादा जानने की विज्ञापन पैदा हुई और उन्होंने खुद एक अध्ययन करने की ठानी।

पता पलने पर ज्यादातर किशोरों ने मोबाइल के कम इस्तेमाल की बात कही

विस्तृत जानकारी हासिल करने के लिए झील ने आईआईटी मुंबई से संपर्क किया। इस दौरान उन्हें यह पता चला कि मोबाइल विकिरण से कैंसर और ब्रेन ट्यूमर जैसी बीमारियों हो सकती हैं। इस पूरा अध्ययन के बाद यह बात सामने आई कि टेलीकॉम इंडस्ट्री के मानक के अनुसार इस बारे में पुकार सबूत भले ही न हों लेकिन मोबाइल विकिरण से स्वास्थ्य पर पड़ने वाले दुष्प्रभाव से बचाव के समर्थन में पर्याप्त शोध मौजूद हैं। इसके बाद झील ने अपने शहर मुंबई में मोबाइल से होने वाले विकिरण के स्तर को जानने की कोशिश की। उनकी इस कोशिश से पता चला कि शहर के ज्यादातर विकिरण के नजदीक से सुरक्षित हैं लेकिन रेलवे स्टेशन के आसपास और पुलों के नजदीक जैसी कई जगहों पर विकिरण का स्तर खतरनाक रूप से ज्यादा मिला।
Auto, Pharma Top Wealth Creators In 4 Years

Realty, infra cos saw biggest value erosion since 2010 highs as the economy went through a turmoil and the markets stagnated before rebouncing to new peaks in 2014.

Part of India's shadow economy, Realty and Infrastructure cos saw their market capitalizations erode significantly. Realty and infrastructure stocks have been hardest hit, with many of these companies seeing their market values fall by over 50%.

Eicher Motors, a leading player in the automotive sector, has been able to protect its market capitalization better than most other companies in this sector. Other companies in the sector, such as Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, and Hero MotoCorp, have seen their market capitalizations decline significantly.

The performance of these companies has been affected by a number of factors, including the slowdown in the real estate sector, the high levels of inventory, and the tepid demand for automobiles.

However, the best performing companies in this sector have been those that have been able to adapt to the changing market conditions. Eicher Motors, for example, has been able to focus on its core business and has been able to maintain its market capitalization despite the overall market downturn.

Another sector that has been hit hard by the market downturn is the pharma sector. Companies such as Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, and Cipla have seen their market capitalizations decline significantly.

These companies have been affected by a number of factors, including the patent expiry of several key products, the loss of market share to lower-cost alternatives, and the increasing competition in the sector.

In conclusion, the current market conditions have been tough for many companies, but those that have been able to adapt and focus on their core business have been able to protect their market capitalization better than those that have not.

Times of India ND 01/01/2015 p-22
Varsities must name officer to see cleaning: UGC

NEW DELHI, Jan 1, 2015, DHNS:

http://www.deccanherald.com/content/451096/varsities-must-name-officer-see.html

The University Grants Commission has asked the universities to appoint a senior official to supervise cleaning and garbage collection activities in the campus, to ensure that Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Swachh Bharat campaign continues “in a scientific manner and on a sustained basis.”

The higher education regulator has asked the vice chancellors and heads of the universities and colleges to keep it informed about the actions initiated by them on a monthly basis in this regard. The monthly report to be submitted by the varsities will be forwarded to the Human Resources Ministry every month as sought by Education Minister Smriti Irani.

“Since, most of the institutions are spread over large geographical areas and they have different units like hostels, playgrounds, teaching blocks, administrative blocks, etc, it is necessary that collection points for these units may be earmarked and a system created to lift the garbage from these points to the main garbage collection point where the entire garbage of the institution shall be collected,” UGC secretary Jaspal S Sandhu instructed the varsity heads two days back.

The local civic authorities should be informed about the main garbage point from where it could be lifted for “appropriate disposal”, he added.

The commission also directed the universities to share all the activities that they undertake to implement the Swachh Bharat programme on MyGov.in, a platform created by the Modi government for “citizen engagement towards good governance”.

Fix KV-German Row Soon: MEA to HRD Ministry

Ritika.Chopra@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: The ministry of external affairs has asked the HRD ministry to sort out all outstanding issues over the Kendriya Vidyalaya-German language controversy as soon as possible as it could cast a shadow over Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Berlin for the world’s largest industrial fair, Hanover Messe, in April 2015. India is the chief guest at the fair—after the US and China in previous years—and the Prime Minister’s Office considers the event crucial to the Make in India initiative.

In the latest communiqué, a two-page letter dated December 23, foreign secretary Sujatha Singh has asked HRD secretary R Bhattacharyya to resume talks with the “German side” and come good on the assurance given by Modi to German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Brisbane on November 16 and find a way to continue teaching the tongue in Kendriya Vidyalaya schools but not as a third language.

The government’s diktat discontinuing German as a third language in Kendriya Vidyalaya schools and replacing it with Sanskrit came in for much criticism and subsequently assumed a diplomatic colour when Merkel took up the issue with Modi on the sidelines of the G-20 summit. The government, however, stuck to its position and justified the mid-session change on the ground that offering a foreign tongue as the third language is a violation of the three-language policy enshrined in the National Education Policy of 1986. The decision was eventually upheld by the Supreme Court.

As per government sources, talks between the German embassy and the HRD ministry had broken down after minister Smriti Irani lodged her protests over ambassador Michael Steiner speaking to the media on the issue. It has since emerged that MEA summoned Germany’s deputy chief of mission in New Delhi to register its dissatisfaction over this as well as Steiner’s November 11 letter to Irani seeking “clarification”, which the government conveyed is an “internal matter”. ET could not independently verify this with the German embassy.

Singh’s green signal to the HRD ministry to resume talks and finalise “revised arrangements” has come only after the deputy chief of mission conveyed India’s unhappiness to the German foreign office. The nature of the solution that the German and Indian governments are hoping for is not clear at this moment. However, as per sources, the Germans have proposed the language could be taught in classes nine to 12 as it is done in CBSE schools.
A casualty of politics?

The resignation of Raghunath K Shevgaonkar, director of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi, has brought to the fore once again the highly contested issue of autonomy of educational institutions in the country. This comes after the scrapping of Delhi University’s four-year programme, despite stiff opposition from the vice-chancellor, Dinesh Singh. Officially though, Shevgaonkar is said to have resigned due to personal reasons.

Shevgaonkar has had a distinguished academic career. On completing his PhD from IIT Bombay, he pursued his post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Maryland. His research interests were in the fields of optical communication, image processing, antennas, microwaves and radio astronomy, and his work has been widely published in international journals. Prior to becoming the director of IIT Delhi in 2011, he was dean and head of electrical engineering at IIT Bombay. He has also served as vice-chancellor of the University of Pune between 2010 and 2011.

Though the Union human resources development ministry has vehemently denied that Shevgaonkar resigned under government pressure, some allege that this is yet another example of the government exercising its influence over educational institutions. Various issues cropped up which suggest a straining of ties. The first was Shevgaonkar’s alleged refusal to reimburse former faculty member and Bharatiya Janata Party leader Subramanian Swamy of salary arrears and benefits with interest. Swamy, who taught economics there from 1969 to 1972, was dismissed for opposing Indira Gandhi, then prime minister. He was reinstated in 1991 after a court order, subsequent to which he demanded roughly ₹70 lakh as reimbursement. The government has denied having forwarded Swamy’s request to the institute. The other issue concerns Sachin Tendulkar’s proposal to set up a cricket academy inside the institute’s campus, which has also been denied by both the government and Tendulkar.

The more contentious issue concerns the MoU signed by IIT Delhi with Mauritius. While the government has set up a committee to look into the legality of the MoU, especially if it violates the IIT Act which prohibits the institute from going abroad, IIT Delhi insists the pact had the government’s approval. A statement issued by the acting registrar clarifies that the campus in Mauritius is not an “extension campus of IIT Delhi” but an independent research centre named International Institute of Technology Research Academy in which IIT’s limited role was only advisory in nature. The final MoU was supposedly accepted by the HRD ministry by the ministry, only the president can accept the resignation. While the resignation may well be accepted, given how both the alumni association and the faculty have backed him, it is unlikely to go down well, with further questions being raised about the autonomy of institutions.

Illustration: AIYAYA MOHANTY

WIDE SPECTRUM
His research interests are in the field of optical communication, image processing, antennas, microwaves and radio astronomy
Why IIT can’t fly

Latest face-off with HRD ministry shows how tough it is for institutions to take off

M. BALAKRISHNAN

I AM sure that by now even the prime minister has been made aware of the grave “violation” of the Institutes of Technology Act by IIT Delhi, which helped set up the International Institute of Technology Research Academy (IITRA) Mauritius. As the prime architect of IITRA Mauritius, who conceptualised as well as steered the multi-disciplinary understanding in its early days, it would be unfair if I sit on the sidelines while completely baseless allegations are levelled against the director of IIT Delhi.

Here are the facts of the case:

The seeding of the Mauritius institution did not happen at IIT Delhi at all. The then human resource development (HRD) minister, Kapil Sibal, and the Mauritius minister of tertiary education, science, research and technology, Rajesh Jeetah, agreed that India would help Mauritius set up an IIT-like institution in March-April 2011. Both the HRD ministry and the ministry of external affairs were in the know then. As follow-up, the IIT council sought the help of IIT Delhi to set up the institution. Two letters related to this, dated July 11, 2011, and August 26, 2011, reached IIT Delhi even before the current director (Professor R.K. Shyamantkar) took charge in September 2011. After he took over, I was assigned the responsibility of conducting a feasibility study. A delegation of six professors visited Mauritius in February 2012 and formulated the unique approach of establishing a research ecosystem first, before undergraduate teaching commenced. This is the strategy being followed at IITRA now.

The initial draft of the MoU envisaged the establishment of an IIT Delhi research campus (for PhD/MSR programmes) in Mauritius, which could then evolve into an autonomous International Institute of Technology, with full-fledged BTech and MTech programmes. Once it was decided that the MoU would be signed in the presence of the then HRD minister, Pammal Ravis, the ministry took a keen interest in attaining it. After hectic email consultations between the HRD ministry, IIT Delhi and the Mauritius Research Council, the draft MoU was completely changed before the ministry gave its approval. The nature of the institution to be set up as well as its governance structure was completely changed. Now, the revised MoU envisaged the setting up of IITRA Mauritius with assistance from, and not as an extension campus of, IIT Delhi.

Both the MoUs have many commonalities. All the costs of setting up and operating IITRA Mauritius would be borne by the government of Mauritius. The faculty and staff would be on the rolls of IITRA and paid by it under its terms. Research students (PhD/MSR) would be admitted and enrolled at IIT Delhi but would be even before we could attempt to fly. There was around the time that newspapers were full of stories about an amendment to the higher education act, permitting foreign institutions to open campuses in India. In hindsight, I am profoundly thankful that the bureaucrats at the HRD ministry knew the rules — no one is allowed to fly in this country, especially if you are funded by the government.

A key innovation in the setting up of IITRA must be highlighted. Some of us feel it is worth emulating when new IITs are set up. The older IITs differ from other engineering colleges in one key respect. Their faculty, even if they are assigned undergraduate courses, are active researchers and typically teach courses in sub-disciplines in which they are aware of current trends. This is only possible if an institution has a critical mass of faculty members in any given discipline — 10 to 12, at least. In most engineering disciplines, it takes many years to reach this number if one is committed to quality. Once you have a full-fledged undergraduate programme in any discipline, you need to cover the whole range of courses. So either you compromise on quality while recruiting faculty or allot courses outside of their specialisation. With little movement of experienced faculty across institutions within the country due to social factors, most faculty is recruited at a very young age — either freshly out of a PhD programme or with a couple of years of postdoctoral experience. These young people are full of research ideas and would love to pursue them. But instead, they are forced to invest a lot of effort in teaching courses, especially outside their area of specialisation. Many of them either look for opportunities to join older IITs or research institutions in the country and abroad. If they continue in institutions that teach a large range of courses, they quickly become mediocre researchers in their fields.

Based on this experience, we proposed a novel solution for IITRA — first build a research ecosystem and then, once a critical mass of faculty in each discipline has been reached, start with the undergraduate teaching programmes. It took us more than six months to convince the Mauritius government that such an approach would likely help build an “IIT-like institution” much faster. The Mauritius government was keen to start undergraduate programmes from Day One. Our approach was vindicated by the faculty selection at IITRA, where many expatriate Mauritians, active in research in Western countries, applied to it because of its research focus.

I am quite confident that, in the case of IITRA, we did not violate the “no-fly zone” thanks to the “maximum government” in place. The only disappointment is that this country believed in the prime minister’s “minimum government, maximum governance” call and thought that he would devote his energies to enable people to fly and not to try to enforce 60 years of “no-fly” regulation. I hope he can hear the screams of foreign university academics laughing at our plight, knowing that they are not governed by rules drawn in another century, when QS rankings of universities were yet to be born.

The writer is professor IIT Delhi and was deputy director (faculty) when IITRA was initiated express@expressindia.com
New Delhi: The HRD ministry seems to be in no mood to complete the formalities of accepting the resignation of IIT Delhi director RK Shevgaonkar any time soon. Delayed beyond Jan 7, he won't get a course to teach for 6 months at IIT Bombay from where he came to Delhi.

Teachers for the course for the new semester will be decided by January 7.

Meanwhile, the ministry is readying itself by preparing a case against Shevgaonkar on the Mauritius issue. Sources said IIT Delhi has furnished all the details that the ministry wanted.

“An attempt is being made to make Shevgaonkar personally responsible for the memorandum of understanding with the Mauritius institute. The ministry has prepared a note against Shevgaonkar and is debating how to initiate action against him,” an HRD ministry source said.

Within IIT-Delhi, Shevgaonkar enjoys immense support of faculty and students. A senior faculty member said, “Director should be treated with dignity. Keeping his resignation in limbo will harm the institute and further strain the relationship between ministry and IIT. No one believes allegations against him. He has been transparent about the MoU.”

In order to show that it is being fair, the HRD ministry has also started deliberations on possible action against UGC chairperson Ved Prakash who is alleged to have travelled to Mauritius without political clearance and signed an MoU without the ministry’s knowledge.
HRD ministry on collision course with IIMs

Brajesh Kumar
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NEW DELHI: After its row with the director of the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, the human resource development ministry could now be on collision course with the Indian Institutes of Management.

The director’s position in three IIM campuses — Lucknow, Kozhikode and Ranchi — has been lying vacant for over six months now. Despite writing repeatedly to the ministry to fill the vacancy no action has been taken.

IIM Lucknow, exasperated by the ministry’s inability to clear the appointment, has asked HRD minister Smriti Irani to scrap the recommendation of the search-cum-selection committee and start the appointment process afresh.

The committee, formed in January last year, had submitted a list of candidates in June and since then the final approval is pending with the HRD ministry.

“Kindly confirm to us that the procedure followed (by the committee) was not correct so that the new search-cum-selection committee is put in place immediately after discussion with IIM Lucknow board. We request you to act urgently on the matter so that we can put in place a new director for IIM Lucknow expeditiously,” JJ Irani, the chairman of the board of governors, IIM Lucknow wrote to the minister on October 28.

This was the third letter written to the ministry by IIM Lucknow requesting them to ensure the position is filled urgently.

While higher education secretary SN Mohanty could not be contacted for his comments, sources in the ministry indicated that hectic lobbying by groups affiliated to the Sangh Parivar for vacant positions in various educational institutions across the country has been one of the reasons for delay in appointments.

Like IIM Lucknow, IIM Ranchi and IIM Kozhikode have been waiting for their new directors. While the tenure of IIM Kozhikode director Debashis Chatterjee came to an end last April, MJ Xavier resigned as director of IIM Ranchi in September.

Chairman of IIM Kozhikode AC Muthiah told HT he had not heard from the ministry although the search and selection committees sent in its recommendations a while back.
आईआईटी इंदौर के निदेशक बने रहेंगे माधुर

दिल्ली से नियुक्ति में हो रही देरी, एमएचआरडी से आया आदेश

इंदौर (ब्यूरो)। बीते साल के साथ आईआईटी इंदौर के पहले निदेशक प्रो. प्रदीप माधुर का कार्यकाल खत्म हो गया है। कार्यकाल खत्म होने के बावजूद प्रो. माधुर कुर्सी पर बने रहेंगे। एमएचआरडी ने पत्र भेजकर मौजूदा निदेशक को काम करते रहने का निर्देश दिए हैं।

2009 में शुरु हुए आईआईटी इंदौर के पहले निदेशक बने प्रो. माधुर का कार्यकाल 31 दिसंबर को खत्म हो चुका है। उन्हें दीक्षात्मक समारोह में स्थानीय जनप्रतिनिधियों की अनेकदी के कारण आलोचना सहना पड़ी। इसके बाद स्थायी कैंपस निर्माण में हो रही देरी के कारण आईआईटी को दिल्ली से भी फटकार लगी। नो महीने पहले आईआईटी ने तुरंत-कुर्सी खंडवा रोड स्थित किराए के कैंपस को

एक्सटेंशन नहीं

प्रो. माधुर भरे ही अभी पद पर बने रहेंगे, लेकिन उन्हें कार्यकाल का एक्सटेंशन नहीं दिया गया है।

दरअसल निदेशक को आगामी आदेश तक जिम्मेदारी संभालने के लिए कहा गया है। आईआईटी की मीडिया ऑफिसर डॉ. निर्मला मेनन का कहना है कि फिलहाल माधुर पद पर बने रहेंगे ऐसा एमएचआरडी से आदेश आ गया है।

खाली किया। सिमरोल के अधिबने कैंपस में आईआईटी को आदेश-अधूरा शिफ्ट कर डिल्ली जानकारी भेजी गई कि संस्थान अपने कैंपस में पहुँच गया है। इस बीच आईआईटी निदेशक का कार्यकाल खत्म हो गया तेकिं आम चुनाव और फिर नई सरकार-मंत्रालय के गठन के चलते नए निदेशक की नियुक्ति प्रक्रिया समय पर शुरू नहीं हो सकी।
Older IITs to mentor proposed new ones

By Prashant K. Nanda
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NEW DELHI

The government has asked four older Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) to support the five proposed IITs but restricted the new institutes from offering courses other than core engineering subjects to students.

The new IITs will offer courses on mechanical, civil, electrical and computer science from the 2015 academic year from rented premises, said two government officials.

The union budget presented by finance minister Arun Jaitley had proposed to set up five new IITs. India currently has 16.

IIT Madras will mentor two new IITs at Palakkad in Kerala and Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. IIT Delhi will handhold the proposed one in Jammu, IIT Mumbai will be the parent institute for IIT Goa and IIT Hyderabad will support IIT Raipur.

“The HRD (human resource development) ministry has already asked four IITs including IIT Hyderabad which came into existence in 2008 to start work on new ones so that the proposed ones start operation in the next six months,” said one of the two officials, requesting anonymity. The second government official said that looking at the delay in setting up campuses of IITs that came up since 2007-08, the HRD ministry wants to fix a timeframe—may be four years—for building campuses for the proposed new IITs.

The government auditor in a report in December had said that the ministry’s cost requirement for opening eight IITs has escalated by more than 150% due to delays and because it ignored suggestions made by the expenditure finance committee of the finance ministry and the erstwhile planning commission.

“As a result of the delay, the ministry proposed in May 2014 to revise the cost of estimates from ₹6,080 crore to ₹15,664 crore, i.e. an increase of more than 150% over the initial project cost,” the Comptroller and Auditor General of India said.

IIT Madras director Bhaskar Ramamurthi confirmed the development and said both the older IITs and HRD ministry had gotten wiser after opening eight new IITs in last six years. So the first thing that has been decided is that IITs will have to commence operation from rented buildings instead of getting housed in an older one in the first year, and the second is fixing some timeline for building new campuses. “Bringing new students to mentoring IITs will be a mistake. Once you bring them to an existing older IIT and then ask them to go to a rented campus will not do good. States have agreed to provide rented campuses to begin with and ground work has started to finalize the land for permanent campuses,” Ramamurthi said, adding that Andhra Pradesh had already selected land in Tirupati.
LOOKING AHEAD
Opening of more educational institutes, a new higher education policy, likely passage of pending bills in Parliament... there's much to look forward to

Gauri Kohli

It has been an eventful year as far as Indian higher education is concerned. With the new government coming to power, a lot has been promised and proposed.

The new year promises to usher in major transformations in the education sector, thus creating a lot of exciting opportunities for students in the coming year. The Credit Transfer Scheme, introduced this year, would be fully implemented at all Central universities. The state and private universities will also be facilitated to do the same. Adoption of the National Skills Qualifications Framework would also greatly benefit students by providing multiple pathways that allow lateral and vertical mobility across the current education systems,” says Shobha Mishra Ghosh, senior director, education, FICCI.

The proposal to bring all Central universities under one umbrella for the purpose of admissions will help the institutes attract more students.

“However, there shouldn’t be a single entrance test and the government should give them autonomy when it comes to the admissions. Likewise, the complete overhaul of the education policy will lead to more transparency. Streamlining all the activities will ensure more outcome-driven, quality institutions available to students,” says Ghosh. Professor Rajan Saxena, co-chairman, high education, FICCI, agrees.

“The HRD minister talked about a few things at the recent FICCI Higher Education Summit which included the new higher education policy. Today, the youth is far more aspirational than before, there are new technological advancements, multiple institutions and more enrolment. About 62% (investment) is in the private sector and 38% in the private sector. The new policy should take these facts into account and all stakeholders should be consulted,” he says.

There are two review committees currently set up by the government to review the functioning of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the other to review the functioning of the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Thus these committees are looking into how regulations will be made more in line with what is required currently,” says Saxena.

For the last five years, there have been many education-related bills pending in Parliament. These include the National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Private Education Institutions Bill, Foreign Education Institutions Bill (Regulation of Entry and Operations), and Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical Educational Institutions, Medical Educational Institutions and University Bill, 2010, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014.

Then comes the Massive Open and Online Courseware (MOOCs) platform launched this year. “It cannot replace a formal education system, though, as it does not lead to a certification because there is no way of assessment. Having created a platform for MOOCs, the government and private institutions should be allowed to upload courseware and bodies such as a distance education council and the UGC should recognise these and give certifications,” adds Saxena.

The government’s focus will continue to be on improving higher education access by tech-enabled online education and this will ensure that more students get access to information, says Gautam Srivastava, senior manager, education sector, Ernst & Young India.

Management education also may not necessarily remain under the purview of AICTE. The government is likely to propose the creation of an all-India management education board and a global-level test, say experts. For the technical institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology and National Institutes of Technology, there will be common counselling from 2015.

The Union budget 2014 had proposed ITIs in Jammu and Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, and IIIMs in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, Odisha and Maharashtra. Another IIIM will come up in Andhra Pradesh. The budget allocated an initial sum of ₹500 crore for the current fiscal year for these institutes which are likely to become operational by 2015. Four central universities are also on the cards.

WHAT ARE THE CHANGES BEING PLANNED?

CENTRAL VARSITIES TO COME UNDER ONE UMBRELLA

- If the proposal to bring all universities under one umbrella for the purpose of admissions will draw more students to the institutes. Experts, however, say this requires more planning and that the government should give the institutes more autonomy on how they want to admit students. A single entrance test does not seem to be a good idea as each university is different in its own way and would want its own rules.

SKILLING YOUNG PEOPLE

- The adoption of the National Skills Qualifications Framework is likely to greatly benefit students by providing them multiple pathways that allow lateral and vertical mobility across the current education systems.

ROLLOUT OF CREDIT TRANSFER SCHEME

- The Credit Transfer Scheme, introduced this year, would be fully implemented by all Central universities. State as well as private universities will also be facilitated to do the same.

PHOTO: IMAGESBAZAAR, THINKSTOCK

FROM BRINGING ALL CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES UNDER ONE UMBRELLA TO PLANNING MORE IITS AND IIMS IN THE COUNTRY, THE REFORMS IN EDUCATION MAY SEEM FEW BUT ARE PROMISING FOR A LARGELY YOUNG POPULACE.

MAJOR GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN 2014

To walk the talk, government has taken measures to that effect in education:

- The Know Your College portal launched by the government
- The Cabinet passed Indian Institutes of Information and Technology (IIT) Bill, 2014 and School of Planning and Architecture Bills 2014
- The HRD ministry launched a National Repository of Open Educational Resources and a National E-Library
- The Council for Industry-Higher Education Collaboration is being made operational
- The Community College Scheme was implemented by UGC
Missed Ola, Housing.com deals ‘cost’ IIT Bombay ₹ 450 cr

By REKHU MALAKARSHAN

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, mentor to IT start-ups founded by its students, could have been richer by at least ₹ 450 crore had it invested in Ola Cabs and Housing.com. Calculations suggest if the institute had acquired six per cent stake each in Ola and Housing.com (both founded by its alumni) when the companies were set up, as it has in the case of many other start-ups incubated at its Society for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (SINE), IIT Bombay’s stake in these two firms would now be valued at ₹ 450 crore, substantially higher than its last year’s annual budget of about ₹ 440 crore.

The calculation is based on the valuations of Ola and Housing.com at ₹ 6,000 crore and ₹ 11,000 crore, respectively.

“Traditionally, IIT Bombay has invested in technology-based companies. In retrospect, looking at how Housing.com and Ola Cabs have grown, it is evident that the institute missed out on such investments,” said Aleet Khurana, Chief Executive, SINE, IIT Bombay.

None of the top five start-ups launched by IITians — Flipkart, Zomato, Ola Cabs, Housing.com and Inmobi — were incubated at IITs. Students with valid business propositions can incubate their ventures at IITs after they graduate from the institute.

IITs have introduced a deferred placements policy, allowing entrepreneurs to return to the campus for placements after three years in case their ventures fail to take off. IITs have already come a similarity in place.

Ola Cabs and Housing.com founders started these ventures right after graduation — a fit case for incubation at IITs. But others such as Flipkart, Zomato and Inmobi were launched once their founders, after working at other companies, decided to turn entrepreneurs.

Khurana said IIT Bombay did not view itself as an investor. “We see our exit as a source of income, not as investment returns.” IIT Bombay dilutes its third equity in its portfolio when the start-ups raise funds.

Though SINE, which has an annual revenue of ₹ 70 lakh, is in part of IIT Bombay, it is a financially-independent entity. “Our primary interest is to promote entrepreneurship and startup business ideas. We do not look at our start-ups as money-generating tools. We want them to do well, as they benefit the economy at large and generate jobs,” said Devang Khokhar, director of IIT Bombay.

Housing.com was launched in 2012 by a group of graduates from IIT Bombay, including Aditya Sharma. Recently, Japanese giant Softbank, along with other investors, pumped in ₹ 90 million into Housing.com to acquire minority stake. According to reports, the company was valued at ₹ 11,000 crore at the time of the latest funding.

Sharma said, “During my time, the infrastructure and other facilities provided by IIT Bombay, as part of incubation, was at a nascent stage. That is why we decided to go out and set up on our own. The recent success of Ola, Housing.com and other start-ups has brought more maturity in the attitude of IITs towards start-ups.”

Taxi service aggregator Ola Cabs, another IIT Bombay start-up, is valued at ₹ 6,000 crore when it raised ₹ 210 million from Softbank.

In 2011, IIT Bombay alumni launched Ola Cabs, valued at ₹ 6,800 cr.

In 2012, IIT Bombay graduates launched Housing.com, valued at ₹ 11,800 cr.

If institute had acquired 6% stake in each in Ola, Housing, it would be worth ₹ 450 cr.

IIT Bombay incubates 55 start-ups at present.

Ola, Housing.com deals would have got IIT Bombay ₹ 450 cr

The company was founded by Bhavish Aggarwal and Ankur Thakral, alumni of IIT Bombay. Since its launch in 2011, about ₹ 280 million has been deployed in Ola by investors such as Softbank, Tiger Global, Matrix Partners India and Steadview Capital.

In 2009, Sachin Bansal and Binny Bansal, alumni of IIT (Delhi), had founded India’s largest e-tailer, Flipkart. While Deepinder Goyal and Penchit Chaddah, also IIT Delhi alumni, founded popular restaurant-searching portal Zomato in 2009, mobile advertising platform Inmobi was launched by IIT’ Kapur alumni Naveen Tewari and Abhay Singhla.

“ITTs need to be proactive rather than reactive. Nowadays, students in their second and third years at IITs are launching start-ups. So, ITTs need to become faster to catch the bus,” said Housing.com’s Sharma.

Start-ups incubated at SINE include Covaxi Technologies, which raised funds from Reliance Industries’ Venture Capital, along with other partners. Recently, Wedgetail Net Solutions, which provides IT security solutions, raised ₹ 1 crore from a group of investors, including Ravi Gururaj of HIS Alumni Angels, Gaurav Sharma of Yahoo India, and Vishwanath Ramachandran (formerly of GupShup).
Now, IIMs to Award MBA Degree

The Bill empowering 13 IIMs to confer MBA degrees will be introduced in the Parliament during the Budget session.

Ritika Chopra & Sreekrishna D Basu

New Delhi: Years after it was first proposed, the government is finally ready with a legislation empowering the 13 Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) to award degrees to students instead of diplomas. The bill will be introduced in Parliament during the Budget session.

According to HRD ministry officials, the Bill has been vetted by the law ministry and currently needs minor rewriting.

“They’ve (law ministry) mostly suggested changes to the language. The spirit of the Bill is the same,” said a senior ministry official, who did not wish to be identified. “We’re aiming to introduce it during the Budget session.”

Unlike the IITs, which are governed by their own Act of Parliament, the IIMs are run by registered societies and therefore, award postgraduate diplomas at the end of their two-year programmes instead of an MBA.

The proposed legislations will make the IIMs institutes of national importance and confer degree granting powers. The Bill, when passed, will mainly benefit graduates applying abroad for research opportunities. Currently, an IIM alumnus has to request his or her respective institute to provide a certificate saying that the diploma is equivalent to an MBA degree in India. This step will also help IIMs gain global recognition and attract more foreign students. As of now, their international appeal is limited to students of Indian origin.

“It is a welcome move and one that students, in particular, will greatly benefit from. Students of the fellowship programme which is equivalent to a PhD have always faced a problem abroad explaining that the two (fellowship and PhD) carry the same weight. This bill will help them as also the PGPM students for whom, now, a master’s degree will be far more recognised globally than a PGDM,” said IIM Calcutta director Saibal Chattopadhyay.

“Moreover, like in the case of the IITs, getting this Bill passed through an Act of Parliament gives IIMs the legitimacy they deserve,” he added.

“Anything that helps further strengthen the IIM brand globally is a heartening move. Having said that, Indian talent especially from the IITs and IIMs is already globally recognised. The focus should be to ensure a robust and rigorous selection process to continue to maintain the quality of students,” said Saugata Gupta, MD & CEO, Marico and alumnus of IIM Bangalore.

The proposed legislation has been in the making for years. Consultations between the IIMs and the government has had its share of ups and downs with the former zealously guarding their autonomy. Although the government started with the IIT Act as a template for the IIM Bill, but, according to ministry sources, the premier B-Schools have managed to protect their governance structure and autonomy to a great extent.

As per the current draft, apart from degree-granting status, the IIMs will be governed by a coordination forum on the lines of the IIT Council but with greater representation from the institutes instead of politicians and bureaucrats. It also allows the government to remove a director from the post for incompetence.

According to sources, the older IIMs also convinced the government not to dissolve their societies. “The old IIMs have their alumni and donors which have been accommodated in the societies and we did not want to disrupt that and have retained it in the Bill,” the ministry official added.
100 skill centres to come up in varsities

NEW DELHI, DHNS: The government is set to establish 100 centres under various universities, named after Bharatiya Janata Party ideologue Deen Dayal Upadhyay, which will offer short-term certificate courses to full-fledged post graduate degree programmes in vocational subjects.

These centres for Knowledge Acquisition and Upgradation of Skilled Human Abilities and Livelihood (KAUSHAL) will also take up research and development activities in specialised areas.

Initiating the move, the University Grants Commission (UGC) on Thursday invited varsities to submit proposals by the end of this month. The programme was envisaged by the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government for implementation during the 12th Five Year Plan period. “Institutions aspiring to receive financial support under the scheme should have demonstrated competence and sustained commitment in the area of acquisition of knowledge and skill development. They should have adequate space, buildings etc., for establishment of centre,” the commission said in its guidelines.

Preference, however, will be given to the universities and autonomous colleges, institutions already running bachelor in vocational education programme and community colleges. Institutions tagged Grade A by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council as well as those having linkages with industry will also get priority.

For proper implementation and monitoring of the programme, the higher education regulator will set up a national level resource centre.

The resource centre will facilitate various kinds of training, including building leadership for the faculty and other staff members of the proposed KAUSHALs. Financial assistance will be provided by the UGC with a ceiling of Rs 5 crore, in instalments, during the 12th Plan period.
Astronauts ring in New Year from space 16 times

Washington: Astronauts on board the International Space Station (ISS) celebrated the New Year’s eve a whopping 16 times since the space station passed over a part of Earth witnessing midnight sixteen times.

The Expedition 42 crew orbiting Earth on the ISS got the opportunity as it circles the globe at about 28,163 km per hour, Nasa said.

The crew spent New Year’s eve day working on a variety of experiments, ranging from those directed at better understanding changes that occur in the human eye during long-duration spaceflights, and with Earth observations aimed at helping with disaster aid on the Earth’s surface.

The crew also continued preparations for the arrival of the next cargo supply ship, the commercial resupply mission of SpaceX-5 and the Dragon spacecraft.

Launch of Dragon on a Space-X Falcon 9 booster is planned for January 6 and it will rendezvous with the space station on January 8.

Dragon is loaded with more than 3,700 pounds of scientific experiments, technology demonstrations and supplies, including critical materials to support 256 science and research investigations that will take place on the space station during ISS Expeditions 42 and 43. PTI
Spotlight on Oculus Rift as IIT-B’s Techfest kicks off today


The virtual reality, head-mounted set is touted as the next generation gadget in the gaming world, as it takes a gamer into a 6D simulator setup, allowing him to step inside their favourite game and virtual world.

For gamers across the city, a visit to IIT-B’s annual Techfest on Friday will see their avatar moment, with the organisers showcasing Oculus Rift as one of the prime exhibits. The virtual reality, head mounted sets is touted as the next generation in the gaming world, as it takes a gamer into a 6D simulator set up, allowing him to step inside their favourite game and virtual world. IIT-B students claim that this is the first time the head set will be exhibited in the country. “In the US, innovators are already looking at using the Rift for training their police officials, using it during warfare, flight simulators training, advanced surgeries and also learning driving.

This year, the Techfest is scheduled from January 2-5.

The Rift allows you to become a part of literally any virtual reality environment,” said Anuraj Gupta, media coordinator and a second year student at IIT-B. The pre-publicity to Techfest has seen the students take the Oculus Rift to malls in the city. In the city for an entire week, the gamers can experience a roller coaster ride, or opt to hit a sixer at a cricket pitch, or better, hit a penalty win to a cherring football game, all sitting in a chair. The students also are hoping to see a wider audience and some collaborative outcome.

“This exhibition will give also us an opportuunity to present it to people from different institutions and think-tanks in the country, who can make efficient use of the technology for better services,” Gupta added. The Rift was founded by Palmer Luckey, a self-described ‘virtual reality enthusiast’ and hardware geek from the US.

“The Rift uses custom tracking technology to provide ultra-low latency 360° head tracking, allowing you to seamlessly look around the virtual world just as you would in real life. Every subtle movement of your head is tracked in real time creating a natural and intuitive experience.” “We have been planning the fest since nine months, it was quite difficult to get the Rift because it is still in the development process. We also had to make sure that we had the required sponsors in place to get the Rift,” said Ayush Bandil, a third year student at IIT-B, who is also in-charge of managing the event.

Techfest is IIT-B’s annual science and technology festival to promote technology, scientific thinking and innovation. The even sees a footfall of more than 135,000 people comprising mainly of the youth from across the nation and an outreach of over 2,500 colleges across India and over 500 overseas universities. The event will see a lecture series by former President APJ Abdul Kalam. The exhibitions will also comprise scaled down models of ships and submarines, artillery gun and BMP-2 tanks.

Gesture-controlled ‘hand’, robots that play football other attractions

Even as the world’s first autonomous robot, ‘Beach bot’, capable of creating large-scale sand art, a technology which has been developed by Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, ETH Zurich, soccer playing robots from Germany and a gesture-controlled hand from France will be the primary attractions during exhibitions at Techfest, IIT Bombay’s annual science and technology festival. It is launching a public exhibition this year, where faculty, students and corporate personnel will get a chance to exhibit their work. Accordingly, for this segment, exhibits were invited across various categories, including robotics, electronics, engineering, fine art, architecture, automobiles, design, pure science and energy.
While Sanket Panchal, an engineering student from Parul Institute of Engineering and Technology at Limda in Waghodla, Vadodara, is showing a manual paddy translator, a machine for Indian farmers who having labour and health problems during farming of paddy crops, Sonam Kumari and her team from MIT, Manipal, will display a solar electric car, a car that runs on solar energy and is capable of reaching 120 kmph and 30 kmph cruising speeds when powered only from the solar panels. In all, there will be five IIT Bombay exhibits, 15 other Indian exhibits and 16 international exhibits.

Yet another attraction at the festival will be ‘technoholix’, which is, according to the organisers, “a perfect blend of science and technology filled with pure entertainment, providing a visual feast for the audience”.

- See more at: http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/spotlight-on-oculus-rift-as-iit-bs-techfest-kicks-off-today/#sthash.HTxzPsX0.dpuf