FREE THE CAMPUS
The action against a student group in IIT Madras raises questions about institutional autonomy

The decision of IIT Madras to temporarily derecognise a student group on the basis of an anonymous letter is a case of extreme overreaction. The unsigned letter sent to the HRD ministry had accused the group — the Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle (APSC) — of calling the Narendra Modi government pro-corporate and communal and of fostering caste animosity among students. The derecognition seems to be a panic attack to the HRD ministry’s note, which had sought the IIT’s comments on the letter. The ministry has clarified that it forwarded the letter as a routine administrative matter and that the disciplinary action was the IIT’s choice. The step has divided the student fraternity on campus and outside, and invited the attention of political parties and social outfits. IIT-M has justified its action, claiming that the APSC violated guidelines the institute and student representatives had drawn up for campus activities.

The derecognition would deny the study circle access to IIT-M’s infrastructure for holding its functions, which have in the past included film screenings, seminars on the thought of Ambedkar and Periyar, debates on social, political and cultural issues as well as the social impact of technology. The ideological orientation of the APSC is at variance with that of other groups in the institute. The choice of speakers and subjects in APSC seminars reflect their political preferences, which may have triggered the anonymous complaint. Equally, the emergence of a new stream of thought may have upset a section of the administration. A university campus is sacred space for thought, especially unconventional thought. The IIT administration’s response to the HRD ministry’s query ought to have been in defence of the institute’s responsibility to foster critical thought and the students’ right to question the powerful and challenge conventions. The institution should have stood by its “rebel” students and objected to any attempt by the HRD ministry to intervene in campus affairs. It should have engaged with the students instead of taking disciplinary action. The preservation of campus autonomy, an issue which is often raised by the IITs in the context of appointments, must include protecting free speech on campus and encouraging a diversity of views.

Curiously, one of the violations reportedly cited by the administration was that the APSC used the name of IIT-M. This begs the question: Does the administration hold sole proprietary rights over the campus? Shouldn’t students have a sense of ownership, too? In a truly autonomous campus, which is essential to promoting creative thinking, students must engage with teachers to create knowledge. Universities must not be reduced to mere teaching shops where free speech and association are censored.
IIT ban shows free speech in danger

The ban on the activities of the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle, a students’ group at the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras, is alarming for the sheer intolerance that the action reflects. The group, made up of students studying at the prestigious institute, was critical of the Narendra Modi government’s policies including the proposed amendments to the land acquisition bill, the Maharashtra government’s ban on beef and the general rise in Hinduva politics. The group’s views were neither outlandish nor defamatory. On the contrary, it was a kind of criticism that was perfectly acceptable in a practising democracy like India. The intention behind much of the criticism was to trigger debate, the very reason behind the very formation of the group.

Most higher institutions of learning, especially the well-regarded ones like the various Indian Institutes of Technology, Bengaluru’s Indian Institute of Science and Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University, to name a few, have historically seen students set up various specialised study circles that are meant to be arenas for free flowing thought, including what some could characterise as being even radical. This is the case across the world. Students have played a major role in influencing politics and countless top-ranking leaders have had their initial political exposure in the various institutions of study.

The Ambedkar Periyar group too was one among these groups that debated, argued and fought over several issues of their choice.

For the Human Resource Development Ministry to take cognisance of an anonymous complaint that the group was spreading “hatred against Hindus” and was engaged in “anti-Modi” activities is shameful. As some reports have suggested, the complaint should have been thrown into the dustbin and the matter left there. Instead, for the ministry to have forwarded the complaint to the authorities at IIT-Madras, was despicable. The very act of forwarding the complaint held an unspoken message: take action. The Institute dean in charge of students then conducted himself in the most undemocratic manner – derecognising the group on the grounds that they were “misusing their privileges”. In the process, what should have been a non-issue has today come to occupy headlines across the media. What is alarming is that it sends a signal across the country that criticism of the establishment will not be tolerated. This goes against the fundamental ethos of democracy and the right to free speech. If criticism (even if it is severe, perceived to be unfair and has the potential to influence many people) is not allowed, the right to free speech is as good as dead. Lift the ban, now.

Gagging students

The ban on the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle, a student group of IIT Madras, is an attack on freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution. Freedom of speech and expression includes right to acquire and disseminate information. Right to disseminate includes right to communicate through any media, print, electronic or visual audio. The fundamental right can be limited only by a law made for the purpose according to Article 19 (2). The burden is on the authority to justify restrictions. No restrictions can be placed on the right to freedom of speech and expression on grounds other than those specified in Article 19 (2) according to the Supreme Court’s ruling in Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting v Cricket Association of Bengal (AIR 1998 SC 1236). The Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle was established as an independent student body of IIT, Madras, on 14 April 2014, to promote the thoughts of Ambedkar and Periyar and to initiate debates on socio-economic, political and cultural issues which affect the common man within the academic fraternity. IIT Madras has a long history of being an exclusive platform for right-wing groups. In just one year, the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle has organised hall meetings, screening of movies and distribution of pamphlets and created among students awareness of threats to agriculture, GM crops and their impact on agriculture, the divisive attempt of the HRD ministry to have separate dining halls in IIT-M and IIT-Mumbai for vegetarians and non-vegetarians and the like.

De-recognition of the APSC, albeit temporarily as claimed by the Dean of the IIT, has been condemned by every political party barring the AIADMK and the BJP and conveys its own message. What triggered the present controversy was a speech by R Vivekananda Gopal, a social scientist on the faculty of Dravidian University, on “Contemporary Relevance of Ambedkar” on 18 May in which he criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for programmes like ***ghar waapsi***, ban on cow slaughter and the move to acquire agricultural land compulsorily. It clearly made an impression on the IIT student community. IIT authorities had been uncomfortable with the activities of the APSC even before Gopal’s speech. An anonymous letter was sent to the Union HRD Ministry. Prisca Mathew, an undersecretary in the ministry, sought IIT’s response. No one has taken HRD Minister Smiti Irani’s claim that IIT’s are autonomous institutions which take their own decisions, especially in the light of the recent resignation of Anil Kakodkar, chairman of IIT Bombay’s board of governors. Authorities of IIT Madras may not agree with the views of APSC or academician Gopal but they have a duty to uphold freedom of speech.
Higher abdication

IIT Madras episode shows up an academic leadership that signed the government’s dotted line

Pratap Bhanu Mehta

The controversy over the Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle at IIT Madras displays multiple pathologies of Indian higher education. Rather than addressing problems, the sector compounds every social division, governance failure, and our sheer littleness. It is almost as if this is a sector where all thinking, common sense and plain decency go to die.

Much horror has been expressed at the fact that the HRD ministry seems to have interfered in the functioning of an academic institution, forwarding an anonymous complaint, ostensibly ideologically motivated. But to think this is the root of a problem is to confuse the general pathology of the system with a specific instance. Let us be very clear. The relationship between government and academic institutions has been debased for a long time. So-called progressive education ministers have enthroned practices that make heads of academic institutions supplicants to even director- or under-secretary-level officials. The forwarding of anonymous complaints, sometimes even to the CBI, so that the ministry acquired control over vice-chancellors, was an art perfected by many a previous minister. This history is important. Because two wrongs don’t make a right. But the credibility of many protesting against this HRD ministry’s actions is vitiated by the fact that they were willing to put up with similar practices, even worse, when it was politically convenient. If higher education is to be rescued, it will need interlocutors with greater credibility. The sector will have to move beyond charges of hypocrisy. But for that it will have to find interlocutors less hypocritical.

Second, the real ire should be directed at the academic establishment itself. The leadership of IIT-M has once again proved the suspicion that when the history of Indian higher education is written, academic self-abdication will rank higher than political perfidy. Even if the ministry forwards a letter, there is no reason that the university leadership has to act on it. At least, it need not act on it without giving the students a fair hearing.

The IIT’s claim that the Ambedkar-Periyar group violated rules seems contrived since it comes after the fact. The leadership crisis in higher education is acute. India has some fantastic academics who have braved adverse conditions. But many have either seceded from institutional matters or are willingly compliant with the powers that be. Residual collegial piety still prevents us from naming and shaming many. But if you draw up a list of top academics who have willingly signed on the dotted line presented by government, you will feel almost queasy. The occasions when academics rush to the HRD ministry for intervention in their favourite cause are too numerous to list. We invited the politicians in, and rua it only when the game does not go in our favour.

The third issue is the place of caste in higher education. Caste, as India’s original sin, still casts a shadow on almost every debate. But post OBC reservations, the moral imprimatur of India’s reservation policy has diminished. Instead of placing reservation in an electoral framework centred on discrimination and the need to treat people with decency, the indiscriminate expansion of reservations turned higher education into a virtual power grab. Reservation could no longer be articulated as an ethical requirement; rather, it was seen as a manifestation of organised power. And as the nature of that electoral and organised power shifts, different groups will assert themselves, and use state power whenever they have access. Clearly, in Tamil Nadu, anti-Periyar forces think this is a moment for them. But when identity and interest so deeply colonise reason, every move will be seen, by one party or the other, as threatening war. When identity and interest so deeply colonise reason, every move will be seen, by one party or the other, as threatening war.

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200 protesters detained at IIT-M

STANDOFF Protesters demanding revocation of a ban on a Dalit group held for jamming a busy road near the college

HT Correspondent

CHENNAI: Around 200 protesters were detained on Monday for jamming a busy road near IIT Madras as they demanded immediate revocation of a ban on a Dalit students’ group of the prestigious technical education institute.

The Jayalalithaa government has positioned a large posse of policemen near the institute to prevent violence. Still, traffic has been hit on the Adyar stretch as slogan-shouting protesters worked in teams to block the road and police rushed instantly to detain them.

IIT Madras has been besieged with a vigorous agitation since Friday after it derecognised the Ambedkar-Periyar Student Circle (APSC) on an anonymous complaint forwarded by the Union Human Resource Development Ministry, accusing the group of fomenting hatred against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Hindus.

A rush of support from political parties and Dalit organisations against the controversial decision added fuel to the agitation that reached Delhi, too, as scores of students raised slogans outside Shashtri Bhawan, the HRD ministry headquarters, on Monday.

“Youngsters must get freedom of speech on campuses. Extending bans is like suppressing their voices. This is completely wrong,” said PL Punia, chairman of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) that has sent a notice to IIT Madras for an explanation.

DMK chief M Karunanidhi demanded on Sunday Prime Minister Modi’s “direct intervention” in revoking the order. The DMK students’ wing and the pro-backward class Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) were at the forefront of protests along with APSC members.

The Congress, too, has joined the protest chorus, accusing the Modi government of stifling freedom of expression.
DMK Takes Up IIT Issue, Amma’s Party To Raise it in ‘Proper Manner’

Chennai: IIT Madras is not only attracting political parties that want to speak up for a suspended student body on their campus, but the campus is also becoming a platform that is showcasing the changed in approach to issues by the two Dravidian majors that have ruled Tamil Nadu – the DMK and the AIADMK. While the DMK has jumped into the fray with a double-barrel attack, the AIADMK says it has shunned the idea of agitations and will take the issue in a “systematic manner”.

DMK president M Karunanidhi on Sunday sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “direct intervention” for revocation of the order and to restore “peace” on the (IIT) campus. He indirectly hit out against the Union HRD Minister Smriti Irani for her “authoritarian” interference that allegedly led to de-recognition of a students’ body at IIT Madras.

Rajya Sabha MP and DMK’s women wing leader Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, a face of the generation next of her party, however, decided to write an open letter to the Director of the premier technology institute. “I find the decision of IIT Madras to de-recognise the APSC (Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle) to be objectionable, unfair and unsustainable,” Kanimozhi wrote in her letter. Mean while the other major Dravidian party – the ruling AIADMK – preferred to remain silent on the issue. Although the party officially says it is watching the situation, when an issue like this has erupted in the past and the DMK has taken the lead, the rival has not been far behind.

“We do not want to politicise it. We are for student democracy. We are for freedom of expression. We are for students getting enlightened and empowered. We will raise it only at an appropriate forum,” said Rabi Bernard, spokesperson of the AIADMK.

When asked why the party was quiet when their rivals had picked up the issue on behalf of the students, he said, “We are not quiet. We will take it up and we will take a permanent solution. There must be a systematic approach not an ad hoc one. In our party representatives’ next visit to the capital, we will raise the issue with the Union HRD Minister.” Rabi Bernard added.

Experts do agree that the AIADMK is taking a different approach but add that currently the party does not have many options. “It may be due to political compulsions that the AIADMK is remaining quiet. It could also be because at this time they do not want to get into any sort of controversy,” said N Sathiyamoorthy of Observer Research Foundation.
IIT-M row: Stir continues, Athawale says action unjust

200 members of DMK students’ wing detained in Chennai

MPOST BUREAU

CHENNAI/NEW DELHI: Protests continued on Monday over de-recognition of a students’ body, comprising mostly dalits, by IIT-M as NDA ally RPI joined the chorus against the premier institute’s action, terming it as an “act of injustice” and “attack” on freedom of expression.

Protests were held in Chennai and the national capital against the institute’s decision to temporary de-recognise Ambedkar-Periar Study Circle (APSC) by the IIT-Madras management after an anonymous complaint that it was spreading “hatred” against Prime Minister Narendra Modi was forwarded to it by the Union HRD ministry.

About 200 members of DMK’s students wing led by its secretary Ela. Pugazhenthhi were detained in Chennai while staging a protest to demand revocation of IIT-M’s decision.

The agitators demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi step in to resolve the situation. VCK founder Thirumavalavan, who led a separate demonstration by his supporters, was also detained, police said. Expressing solidarity with APSC, members of left-backed students unions and organisations staged a protest outside Shastri Bhavan in New Delhi where HRD ministry is located.

“The APSC was de-recognized as per the Ministry's diktat. What we feel is that there are other groups too which conduct programmes which politicise campus.

"Why the ministry has objections to the group (APSC) which talks about education system, contemporary issues? So, to express solidarity with them we staged protest," president of Jawaharlal Nehru University Students’ Union Ashutosh Kumar said at the protest venue.

Amid mounting outcry, RPI leader Ramdas Athawale denounced IIT-M’s action as "unjust" and said HRD Minister Smriti Irani should have intervened to thwart the measure taken by the institute against the students body.
Student solidarity: IIT-B gets its version of banned Chennai group

Hindustan Times (Mumbai)

UP IN ARMS Students protest in city, demand action against Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle by IIT-Madras be revoked

MUMBAI: The ban on the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle (APSC) by the Indian Institute of Technology – Madras (IIT) has sparked protests across other institutes, with some starting their own forums modelled around the group as a mark of solidarity.

The group floated by students of IIT-Bombay is called the Ambedkar Periyar Phule Circle (APPC). To show their support, at least 60 students from IIT-Bombay, Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) and other colleges protested outside Dadar station on Monday, demanding that the ban be revoked.
Last week, IIT-Madras ignited a major controversy after it banned the APSC following an anonymous complaint to the ministry of human resources alleging that the group was trying to spread hatred towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi by distributing provocative pamphlets and posters in the campus.

The ministry, however, claimed that it had no role in banning the group and had merely forwarded the complaint letter to the dean of IIT-Madras.

Social activists and author Anand Teltumbde, who teaches at IIT-Kharagpur, commended the students of IIT-Madras for their efforts. “I congratulate you for challenging the undemocratic action by the IIT- Madras authorities at the behest of their political bosses… Needless to say India is with you in your fight against such high-handedness of the spineless authorities of a hallowed institution as IIT- Madras,” he posted on Facebook.

Calling the move undemocratic, students said the APSC was not given a fair hearing before it was derecognised.

“Banning progressive groups such as the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle is another step to crush the voice of truth. We have come together to uphold the thoughts of the likes of Ambedkar, Phule, Periyar, Bhagat Singh and other revolutionaries,” said S Kavita, a TISS student, who participated in the protest.

Social media has played a major role in mobilising students, with several pages on networking sites coming up support of the APSC.

Some academicians are not very pleased with the demonstration.

“Academic institutions are not political platforms. While registering their protest is well within everyone’s rights, nobody is talking about the real problems faced by the backward communities,” said a professor and social activist from Kirti College, requesting anonymity.
Who’s siding with who & why?

GIVEN HOW POLITICS IS PRACTISED IN THIS COUNTRY, THERE’S LITTLE WONDER WHY CAMPUS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE BEING INFUSED WITH A CURRICULUM THAT IS HARMLY CONducIVE TO LEARNING, SAYS DEBAMEETA BHATTACHARYA

It is ironic how we claim that ours is a sovereign democracy and yet turn our faces away when the need arises to actually live the fact. Power corrupts and the crunch— as there always is— lies in determining who is corrupted and who isn’t. On 29 May, the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, found itself at the centre of a row over derecognition of a students group, many of whom are Dalits, following a complaint that it was critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, triggering protests from the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party.

Care to know why? The Ambedkar Periyar Students’ Circle was “derecognised” following an allegation that it was instigating hatred against the Prime Minister. With the Union human resource ministry having nothing to do with it, minister Smriti Irani said IIT Madras took action as per its own guidelines. According to her, IIT Madras, an autonomous institution capable of taking its own decisions, “know people in the Congress are very interested in finding some flaw with the HRD ministry. But I am sure that they understand that autonomous educational institutions have the right to administer their institution as per their own laws,” she said.

All the action her ministry took was forward the complaint received to the director IIT Madras, for comments. Dean Shaktaram M Srinivasan said, “The APCSC violated the code of conduct for student bodies that categorically stated that activities should have the dean’s approval. (The students were insisting they had the right to freedom of expression.) Several student organisations function in the campus, operating on the basis of involvement and initiatives. Student groups who desire to use the institute’s resources are required to be recognised and have to follow the guidelines laid down by the Board of Students that comprise elected student representatives.”

Professor Ramamurthy, acting IIT Madras, director said the action had been taken as the students had “violated” defined guidelines of the institute. “As per the guidelines in force, student bodies cannot use the name of IIT Madras, or its official entities in any capacity to publicise their activities or garner support without official permission. This group has violated the guidelines while conducting their meeting. This was what led to temporary derecognition of the group, he added. A separate statement by the institute said that while IIT Madras did not “curtail” students’ freedom of expression, “it is expected that student groups adhere to these guidelines while conducting their activities”.

Meanwhile, Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi condemned IIT Madras’ move to convene a students’ group for criticising the Narendra Modi government. “IIT student group banned for criticising the Modi government. Free speech is our right. We will fight any attempt to crush dissent and debate,” he tweeted. AAP leader Ashutosh asked whether students from the Dalit community had a right to express their views.

Prime Minister “direct intervention” in revoking the order to ensure that “peace” returned to the premier technical institute. Party chief M Karunanidhi said that based on an “anonymous” letter, the HRD ministry had “side-stepped natural justice” of seeking an explanation from the persons concerned and banned the group, which amounted to “stifling” freedom of expression.

Though it seems that Narendra Modi doesn’t accord any importance to needless issues like banning a democratic group, it is felt that his ministers interfering unilaterally and in an authoritarian manner in such issues will impede youth’s thought process and affect the nation’s growth.

Given how politics is practised in this country, there’s little wonder then that campuses across the country are being infused with a curriculum that is harmlly conducive to learning.
Economic Times ND 02/06/2015  P-10

IITs, IIMs Lend a Voice to LGBT Issues

The Diversity Pitch

WHAT INSTITUTIONS DO

Several IITs, ISM and IIMs have also set up LGBT support groups. Similar groups are also under consideration at BIT, Raipur and IIM Ahmedabad. Our members of campus LGBT communities.

IIITs. IIM-B to start LGBT group later this year, plans to include awareness in orientation, counseling, film screenings and talks are part of process at other institutes

The youth are today for more open about coming out and wear their sexuality on their sleeves," says Pallav Patankar, director, programmes at the Ramdas Trust, a Mumbai-based voluntary organization promoting LGBT.

At IIT Kharagpur, an initiative to launch a group on campus is under way. The initiative will also come for non-residents. It isn't easy starting a movement like this in a town like Kharagpur; says a student who's part of the group. In more open areas like Delhi and Mumbai, people are seen having an IIT does not seem like Kharagpur; says a student who's part of the group. In more open areas like Delhi and Mumbai, people are seen having

Indian students bag €30k award for plane that runs on wing power

HITTING THE JACKPOT

Team leader Sashidhar Barish Kompram from Delhi University of Technology (Netherlands) told TOI after winning the competition, "Our group, in consultation with an Airbus team has invested enormous efforts in acquiring the technical and economic feasibility of our idea based on the current and projected states of the required input technologies, including battery and piezoelectric fibre composites as well as interfacial circuits, structural dynamics and aeroelasticity. We have no doubt that our promising idea will see the light of the day with in the next decade."

The jury declared, "The five dynamic members of the all-Indian team have been able to work 24 hours a day by interacting across physical boundaries from four different locations around the world. The team members met physically for the very first time at the final round of the event this week where they managed to present the most dynamic idea for the future of aviation. Team MultiAzur's winning idea is all about good vibrations." The team used piezoelectric fibres which gather electrical charges from even the smallest movements during flight, storing the energy generated in battery panels integrated in the fuselage and using it to power auxiliary in flight systems. This reduces the energy footprint of the aircraft and could even replace the entire power source for ground operations.

"We also convert the body of the aircraft into a gigantic battery. On an average the plane needs to fly for about 12 hours to have enough energy. So the idea is that the larger wings will carry to long haul flights," Personalised asked.
Higher education: Unanswered questions

SUNANDA GUPTA

ONE of the issues that is least talked about in the discussions on the achievements of the year-old Modi Government is higher education. As far as the Government's policies and initiatives are concerned, the media has focused on schemes like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana, the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the implementation of the National Common Mobility Card. However, the achievements in higher education, which are more subtle and often under the radar, have been largely ignored.

In India, higher education is supposed to fulfill multiple roles. Perhaps that is why only 80 per cent of student graduates from higher education institutions are unemployed. Micro-finance and many other social welfare programmes have also benefited from the high level of education. However, the problem is that the higher education system is not producing the kind of graduates that are needed to meet the demands of the labour market.

In the past, higher education in India was seen as a ticket to a better life. However, the situation has changed. The jobs that are available are not matching the skills of the graduates. The system is not producing graduates who can meet the demands of the labour market. This is largely due to the fact that the education system is not aligned with the needs of the labour market.

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Choice-based credit system will erode higher education standards in India

BY INVITATION
SHOBHIT MAHAJAN

NEW DELHI: Once again, it is the time of the year when admissions to the University of Delhi dominate front pages of newspapers in the Capital. Pictures of teenagers sweating it out for admissions are standard. This is also the time of the year when revolutionary changes are proposed in the way the university functions—whether it is moving on to semester system, four year undergraduate programme (FYUP), meta-universities, BTech in humanities—every new session brings forth new innovations. This year’s flavour is the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), approved by DU’s decision making bodies recently.

A hallmark of all such changes is the undemocratic way in which they are introduced. There is no discussion or debate among stakeholders, or even an effort to take them on board.

Fundamentally, the CBCS proposes to overhaul higher education system in the country in one stroke. The university grants commission (UGC), which is a unique example in the world of a regulator and a funding agency rolled into one, proposed that every university (central, state, private, deemed-to-be etc.) move to this system immediately. Of course, given that the UGC funds most of these universities, the proposal should be read as a diktat.

CBCS links two key concepts in the dynamics of higher education—choice and assessment. The cafeteria approach, a feature of the now abandoned FYUP, is being reincarnated. Courses are to be sliced and diced into categories like foundation, core and elective and a student can opt for courses of her choice from a bouquet of courses.

It is hard to argue against the desirability of more choice for students though one could nitpick about the actual criteria for clubbing particular courses. Unfortunately, the theoretical attractiveness of this scheme is at odds with its practical limitations.

Infrastructure—both physical and human—even in a well-funded institution like the University of Delhi, is woefully inadequate. Cramped classrooms, shortage of faculty, inadequate library and laboratory facilities etc. will make the scheme unworkable in its spirit. It speaks volumes on how mandarins of higher education are far-removed from realities on ground.

Planners of this scheme also seem to be conflating choice with uniformity. The scheme envisages a uniform curriculum, provided on the UGC website, for all universities. The arrogance evident in this riding roughshod over all concepts of academic autonomy is astonishing. Once again, leaving aside the in-principle objections, the practical implications are mind boggling.

Standardising curriculum, such that an undergraduate course is taught in the same way at a small state university with scarce resources and infrastructure as the Delhi University will have disastrous consequences. The differentials in the infrastructure and institutional culture will make any such attempt farcical.

This is not to argue against high academic standards in all institutions of higher education. But for that, we need to empower and equip the faculty in those institutions to formulate and implement those standards.

Finally, the issue of assessment: the UGC claims that “grading system is considered better than conventional marks system and hence is followed by top institutions in India and abroad”. Here, the CBCS seems to be confusing categories. It seems to imply that a simple semantic shift to grades and CGPA is inherently better than the existing system of giving marks. In a system of assessment of absolute performance, grades or marks essentially communicate the same information. It is only when grading is relative, as is the norm in the “top institutions” which the UGC desires to emulate, that grades communicate something more than marks. It is noteworthy that the UGC is not demanding a shift to relative grading.

Systemic changes need to be well thought, discussed and debated among all the stakeholders for them to be efficacious. And what is more, the American adage, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”, needs to be followed in any large and complex system. Unfortunately policy makers in education in India seem too enamoured by novelty especially of readymade solutions instead of thinking out of the box. They don’t realise the unintended consequence of such a drastic, top-down, hurriedly implemented change will be to erode the standards of higher education in the country. And the price will be paid by poor teenagers who are currently braving the scorching heat to queue up for admission to DU.

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Soon, Plan a Rocket Trip to Mars via Moon

Scientists are planning to develop new next-generation rocket engines that will help people travel to Mars and Moon. The University of Texas at El Paso has been awarded a $5-million grant from Nasa to develop rocket engines using liquid methane. The methane-based rocket technology would be used for in-space propulsion and ascent and descent engines for Mars and lunar landers. Chair of Mechanical Engineering Ahsan Choudhuri said that liquid methane was a promising fuel for spacecraft since it's economical. - IANS
Sanjay Gupta new chairman of Engineers India Ltd


NEW DELHI: Sanjay Gupta today took over as chairman and managing director of Engineers India Ltd, the state-owned engineering and consultancy, procurement and construction (EPC) company in hydrocarbons and petrochemicals.

Prior to this, he was Director (Commercial) in EIL, a company statement said here.

Gupta replaced A K Purwaha who superannuated yesterday. An Engineering graduate from IIT Roorkee, Gupta has about 34 years of experience in the company ranging from planning to implementation of mega grassroot projects in the refineries and petrochemical sector.

He took over as Director (Commercial) of EIL in July 2012 and will have a term as head of the company till June 2017 when he superannuate.

IIT shifts to new campus on July 20


BHUBANESWAR: IIT Bhubaneswar (IITBBS) will start functioning from its permanent campus at Argul village, on the outskirts of the city, from July 20, director of the institute Ratnam Varada Rajakumar said here on Sunday.

He said students will move into the hostels on the new campus from the new academic year. Besides, a section of non-teaching staff and a few faculty members will be accommodated on the campus, though classes will continue at Toshali Plaza for the time being.

"We will soon start a medical facility on the new campus. Since the hospital building is not ready, it will function from the guesthouse," the director said.

For seamless transport from the permanent campus to Toshali Plaza, buses will ply every hour on working days.

The director said makeshift sports facility for the students were ready and finishing touches given to the boundary work.

Currently, IITBBS functions from eight disjointed locations.

When the construction started in November 2011, the institute had December 2013 deadline for the first-phase work, creating facility for 2,500 students, 250 faculty members and 275 support staff. Master plan of the campus was designed to accommodate 10,000 students, 1,000 faculty, 1,100 non-teaching employees, besides 1000 outsourced support staff.

The Centre approved construction of 2,21,000 square metre of covered area (63,000 square metre for academic complex and 1,58,000 square metre for residential complex) in the first phase for which it had released Rs 450 crore. Currently, the institute has over 900 students and more than 90 faculty members.