Crores wasted as IIT-Madras pays illegal, excessive pensions

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NEW DELHI: India’s fund-strapped treasury is bleeding crores of rupees to unauthorized, excessive pensions doled out by Indian Institute of Technology Madras to retired staff and faculty for over three years.

IIT-Madras made the excessive payments despite repeated concerns raised by the ministries of finance, HRD, the department of personnel and training and the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), a series of documents, letters, emails and audit reports reveal.

But the documents don’t cover the ministry in glory either.

IIT Madras is continuing the exaggerated pensions because the Madras High Court has ordered a stay on a directive from the HRD ministry to recover the excess payments. But the ministry has not yet challenged the stay order, at a time when it is struggling for funds to finance critical education programmes. “We are just following the HC order,” a senior IIT administrator told HT, requesting anonymity.


In 2011, the CAG concluded that 204 retired faculty members were benefiting from excessive pensions worth ₹5.4 cr. The ministry ordered IIT-Madras to stop excessive payments and recover the extra money.

But while IIT Madras did stop excess payments, it set up no mechanism to recover the extra amount already paid. Pensioners approached the HC and obtained a stay on the order.


2011: CAG finds losses worth ₹6 cr, excess payments being made to 204 retired faculty members.


July 1, 2011: IIT-Madras stops excess payments, but does nothing to recover money. Pensioners obtain Madras HC stay on ministry order.
HT Lucknow

HOW IT PLAYED OUT


2011: CAG finds losses worth ₹6 cr, excess payments being made to 204 retired faculty members.


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Mumbai Mirror 12-03-2013 P-4

IIT students waiting to hear Kalam get police thrashing

Dr A P J Abdul Kalam’s visit to IIT-Bombay in Powai left a bitter taste on the campus, where students got a firsthand experience of the Mumbai Police’s rough and ready methods. The former President was chief guest at the 54th Foundation Day of the institute.

Mumbai Mirror learns that the students had been instructed to take their seats inside the Convocation Hall, where Kalam was to speak, by 10.45 am. However, many students were left stranded outside, despite queuing up for more than an hour. They, however, kept on waiting, hoping to be allowed in to listen to the iconic scientist.

Things took a turn for the worse when a security guard ordered them to disperse, resulting in the students shouting slogans. As this face-off was going on, a Mumbai Police officer landed up and reportedly threatened the students with arrests if they didn’t disperse at once. A police van reportedly drew up and lathi-wielding cops got off.

Seeing this, some students left, but others began arguing with police. Sources on the campus told Mumbai Mirror that one officer, alleging that a student had abused police, chased him on a motorbike, and slapped him repeatedly, even as the student pleaded innocence. He was then pushed into a passing auto and slapped some more.

Till late Monday evening, the angry students were discussing the incident. This was their one chance to meet Kalam, said some. “Why could we not have been allowed to stand in the aisles, even if the seats were occupied? Why couldn’t the authorities have kept a session with him after the talk? one of them asked.

Students were angry at the cops being allowed to take control of the situation, instead of their own security guards, or their professors. IIT-Bombay director Devang Khakkar told Mumbai Mirror that he had no knowledge of the incident.

WHAT KALAM WANTS

In his address, Kalam called for an education system that created job providers rather than job seekers. “In the present context, the education system has to be designed to see that we generate a large number of employment generators and not employment seekers,” he said.

“An education system should prepare students to get oriented towards setting up enterprises, which will provide them creativity, freedom and ability to generate wealth,” he said.
सात को आईआईटी-जेडीई की परीक्षा

कॉम्पीटिशन सीबीएसई की वेबसाइट से डाउनलोड कर सकते हैं एडमिट कार्ड, शहर से दस हजार विद्यार्थी देंगे एग्राम

भूत होने पर दें सूचना

सीबीएसई ने सूचना प्रकाशित कर देश के छात्र-छात्राओं के लिए आईआईटी-जेडीई परीक्षा की संपूर्ण जानकारी की है। कृपया अपने एडमिट कार्ड के साथ जोड़ें और इलेक्ट्रॉनिक या फोन द्वारा बुलावू दें।

देशमर में 14 लाख विद्यार्थी देंगे एग्राम

जेडीई-2013 परीक्षा में 14,32,212 छात्रों का अभ्यर्थी जोड़ा गया है। इस जानकारी के अनुसार, छात्र-छात्राओं की संख्या का बढ़ता हुआ है। यह तय है कि 7 अगस्त को परीक्षा का आयोजन किया जाएगा। जानकारी के लिए डाउनलोड करें और एडमिट कार्ड को जीमाइन nic.in पर भेजें।

परीक्षा पर एक नज़र

- ऑफलैन्ड परीक्षा: 7 अगस्त
- ऑनलैन्ड एग्राम: 8 से 25 अगस्त के बीच
- शहर से परीक्षा दें: 10 हजार परीक्षार्थी
- देशमर से शामिल होंगे: 14 लाख से और अधिक परीक्षार्थी
- राज्य में बंटना: जमशेदपुर, रांची, बोस्का द ब्राह्मण का आयोजन किया जाएगा।
- ऑफलैन्ड परीक्षा के लिए वर्तमान में सेंटर: जीमाइन nic.in पर जाकर डाउनलोड करें।
- अगस्त में एडमिट कार्ड को जीमाइन nic.in पर भेजें।
EARLY GATE ‘RESULT’ BAFFLES CANDIDATES

HT Correspondent

BHOPAL: A suspected hacking of the official website of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay, the coordinator for Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE) 2013, caused a big confusion among the candidates as GATE ‘result’ surfaced late on Monday night – four days ahead of the official schedule of the result.

On Tuesday, the IIT-Bombay clarified on its website (www.gate.iitb.ac.in/gate2013) that the result of GATE 2013 has not yet been announced and that it would be announced according to the schedule at 10am on March 15.

Meanwhile, candidates who had appeared for the test grew tensed, searched through the internet and called up the coaching centres to confirm whether the results were actually announced. Candidates who could see their ‘result’ online late on Monday night were foiled to find the IIT-B GATE result link blocked and the clarification flashing instead.

A candidate from Maulana Azad National Institute of Technology was placed second on all India Ranking for the test. But the happiness did not last long.

IIT INDORE’S THREE-DAY FEST FROM MARCH 15

HT Correspondent

INDORE: Fluxus, the three-day annual techno-cultural festival of IIT Indore, would begin on March 15. The event has two areas – technical and cultural.

The technical events are conceptualised on various disciplines like robotics, mechanical and civil modelling, electronics and electrical design and computer science and programming. Logic-building as well as Maths and Physics trivia would form the core of these events. These include Robo-1, Robo Sumo, M-Armada and a plethora of exciting events.

The technical events would be complemented by a cultural fest. The events include Model United Nations, Quizooka and dance and drama competitions along with an essay-writing event for the school students. There would be some professional shows to conclude every day of Fluxus.

The professional shows would have classical performance by percussionist artistes on March 15, a DJ night on March 16 by Dualist Inquiry. The finale of Fluxus would be a live concert on March 17 by contemporary singer Sona Mahapatra.
HT Lucknow

IIT-A bans Facebook access on campus

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ALLAHABAD: The Indian Institute of Information Technology-Allahabad (IIT-A) has barred its students and staff from accessing social networking site Facebook. The action comes after complaints of threat and abuse on the social networking site by three of its students.

“The restriction has been imposed with effect from March 1 and will remain in force for an unspecified period,” said a notice issued by dean (student affairs) Prof RC Tripathi.

The premier institute has also warned its students against maintaining web blogs. Insisting that offensive messages on social networking sites and blogs by students are detrimental to the institute's image, the IIT-A has asked students not to blog and post offensive material as they violate the code of conduct of the institute.

The notice, also sent on e-mails to teachers, students and other staff members, says that it has been a matter of concern due to the offensive postings against students, faculty members and administration by some of IIT-A's own students.

It also listed names and batches of the three students against whom specific complaints had been received in this regard.

While a BTech (IT) 2011 student has been accused of putting up posts threatening a girl student of biomedical engineering, two BTech (IT) 2010 batch students have been charged with using "abusive language".

Meanwhile, the ban on Facebook has not gone down well with both the students as well as faculty members. Though they agree that anyone violating the code of conduct should be punished, majority of them maintain that banning all and sundry for actions of a few was simply unfair.
Cruise missile test aborted mid-flight

Deviates from path

BHUBANESWAR: India’s first indigenous sub-sonic (slower than the speed of sound in air) cruise missile Nirbhay failed to hit the target in its maiden launch after it was terminated mid-flight following deviation from the flight path. Defence Research Development Organisation scientists, however, claimed the test was “a very big achievement”. DRDO spokesperson Ravi Kumar Gupta said the mission’s objective was not reaching the target in the Bay of Bengal, but proving various crucial technologies.

Nirbhay (fearless), with a strike range of 1,000 km, was launched from the DRDO’s integrated test range in Chandipur, about 200 km east of Bhubaneswar, at 11:50 am. The missile was terminated over the Bay of Bengal after it was airborne for about 25 minutes, but the wreckage fell on a cashew plantation in Jagatsinghpur district. There was no loss of life or property. It is unusual for wreckage from aborted missiles to crash on land.

India’s first indigenously developed sub-sonic cruise missile ‘Nirbhay’ being launched at Chandipur in Odisha on Tuesday.
HRD Minister seeks Opp's help to clear edu-reform Bills

PNS • NEW DELHI

HRD Minister MM Pallam Raju on Tuesday reached out to Lok Sabha's Leader of Opposition Sushma Swaraj seeking the BJP's support to early passage of pending educational reforms bills. Some of these proposed legislations are pending before Parliament for more than three years. They could not be brought for discussion during the last Winter Session following objections from the Opposition.

Raju had taken over as the HRD Minister in October 2012 and since then he has been talking about taking the Opposition on board for clearances of the long pending bills.

Tuesday's meeting was significant in view of the fact that Raju's predecessor Kapil Sibal achieved little success in getting the Opposition along on the matter despite several attempts.

Raju had last month received letters from some Opposition members expressing their reservations on the Bills, contending that the Legislations infringe on the rights of the States. Sources said the HRD Minister is likely to reach out to some other parties to develop a consensus as these Bills hold key to expediting reforms in the higher education sector.

Legislations which are listed for passage during the ongoing session include The Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical Educational Institutions, Medical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill, 2010 and The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010.

The contentious Educational Tribunals Bill, 2010 is also listed for consideration. Sibal had to face some embarrassing moments during the 2010 Monsoon Session in Rajya Sabha when members from his own Congress party raised objections about some of the provisions in the bill.

LS had passed the Legislation which seeks at setting up tribunals to address problems related to higher education. The Ministry thereafter amended some provisions in the Bill for its smooth passage. In this session, the Ministry plans to introduce The Indian Institute of Information Technology Bill, 2013. The National Institute of Technology (Amendment) Bill, 2013 for upgrading of BESU in Howrah, West Bengal to the IEST was introduced last week in RS.
GOVERNMENT DATA

Universities fail to utilize allocated funds

BY PRASHANT K. NANDA
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NEW DELHI

A mid a national debate about the insufficient funding of education and poor employability of students passing out of higher educational institutes, government documents show that several central and state universities have failed to utilize a sizable portion of their allocations, by as much as 66% in some instances. Improper communications to universities, uneven flow of funds, lack of ownership and hesitation in decision making are behind the problem, according to authorities and industry experts.

According to official data between 2009-10 and 2011-12, 23 of the older central universities have an unspent balance of ₹554 crore that's nearly 28% of the total allocation.

Others have fared worse. The Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University and Nagaland University have a 40% underutilization record for the above period.

New central universities, which came up in the last four years, have done even more poorly. For instance, the Central University of Himachal Pradesh has only spent around one-third of the funds. In 11th Five-Year Plan ended 31 March, 2012, Delhi University could not spend ₹66 crore while Central University of Tamil Nadu had an unspent balance of ₹89.53 crore.

During the 11th Plan, the University Grants Commission (UGC), the apex regulator of universities, sanctioned just ₹608.76 crore to 131 state universities against an allocation of ₹1,139.63 crore as development grants. The universities were also told about the available funds only in 2009-10, two years after the 11th Plan began. Worse still, these universities utilized only ₹313.35 crore, or less than 28% of the total fund meant for the improvement of universities.

Amit Bhatia, chairman of Aspire India, an education and employability training company, said that "several universities, mainly government ones, don’t take decisions. It's a clear case of lack of ownership and initiative."

Even a parliamentary committee on human resource development last month expressed its displeasure over fund utilization by universities and the response of the UGC. “The committee is not happy with the response. What is required is pro-active action both on parts of the UGC and concerned universities.”

Bhatia said teachers and authorities in many government-controlled universities are “not ready to take up administrative responsibility nor they are trained to do so. They hesitate to partner with the private sector. And those who take decisions often face criticism from their peers leading to cancellation of innovation initiatives.”

Bhatia’s company is currently engaged with 100 universities and colleges to bridge the education-employability mismatch.

He said the underutilization of funds hampers the growth of the institute and employability of students and suggested that a board akin to ones in place for the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) could be a solution.

“Like IIMs, there needs to be an industry-academia council headed by a reputed industrialist. And the unspent money needs to be given to this council to utilize it in a manner that will change the curriculum, improve the quality of education, and boost employability,” he said.

Even the government’s Economic Survey last month pointed to the quality of education and said bottlenecks needed to be removed on a priority basis for better job creation. Raghuram Rajan, chief economic adviser in the finance ministry, echoed this sentiment in an interview with Mint last week.

The UGC chairman couldn’t be reached.

K.B. Powel, a former secretary general of the Association of Indian Universities, said that it may not be fair to blame the universities. “Many private universities have been set up in places where teachers don’t want to go. The infrastructure is not there and students, too, are relatively less. So, how will you spend the funds.”
‘Ancient Mars may have supported life’
Nasa’s Curiosity Mission Finds Chemical Ingredients That Are Key To Sustaining Life

Mumbai: The $2.5 billion dollar Curiosity mission has attained a major breakthrough with the six-wheeled one tonne rover finally establishing that ancient Mars could have supported life in the form living microbes, a Nasa announcement said on Tuesday.

The announcement said that scientists identified sulphur, nitrogen, hydrogen, oxygen, phosphorus and carbon which are some of the key chemical ingredients for life. These were found in the powder Curiosity drilled in February out of a sedimentary rock near an ancient stream bed in Gale Crater of the Red Planet.

It may be recalled that there was considerable speculation that a scientific meeting at San Francisco sometime back would result in an announcement that the environment of Mars had once supported microbial life. But at a media briefing the scientists did not provide any specific answers to this question.

However, on Tuesday lead scientist for Nasa’s Mars Exploration Programme, Michael Meyer was quoted as saying: “A fundamental question for this mission is whether Mars could have supported a habitable environment. From what we know now, the answer is yes.”

According to Nasa, clues to this habitable environment came from the data returned by Curiosity’s Sample Analysis at Mars and Chemistry and Mineralogy Instruments.

The data indicated that the Yellowknife Bent river system or an intermittently wet lake bed that could have provided chemical energy and other favourable conditions for microbes. The rock is made up of a fine-grained mudstone containing clay minerals, sulphate minerals and other chemicals. This ancient wet environment, unlike some others on Mars was not harshly oxidising, acidic or extremely salty, Nasa stated.

Nasa said that scientists were surprised to find a mixture of oxidised, less oxidised, and even non-oxidised chemicals, providing an energy gradient of the sort many microbes on earth exploit to live. “This partial oxidation was first hinted at when the drill cuttings were revealed to be grey rather than red,” said Principal Investigator, Paul Mahaffy has been quoted as saying that “the range of chemical ingredients we have identified in sample is impressive and it suggests pairings such as sulphates and sulphides that indicate a possible chemical energy source of micro-organisms.”

“We have characterised a very ancient, strangely new ‘grey Mars’ where conditions once were favourable for life,” said John Grotzinger, project scientist for the Mars Science Laboratory.