HRD min moots more state funds for varsities

THE CENTRE
ALLOCATION TOWARDS STATE AND CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES HAD INCREASED BY 23 TO 24%, ON THE CONTRARY THE FUNDS OUTFLOW FROM THE RESPECTIVE STATES IS DWINDLING

Chennai, Mar 13: While central government is increasing its annual fund allocation to various state and central government institutions, universities in the country, to the contrary a similar kind of allocation from state governments towards state-owned universities is decreasing, said Purandeswari, minister of state, HRD ministry at CII conference.

"There are 30 central universities and manifold state universities. The government of India allocation towards state and central universities had increased by 23 to 24%, on the contrary the funds outflow from the respective state government is dwindling. Many state promoted universities are languishing due to non-allocation of requisite funds by the respective local governments. The regional government should release the set apart funds to enable the varsities to deliver goods on a par with central varsities", she said.

Reiterating that proliferation of central universities would not be a solution to the demand-supply scenario in the higher education sector, she added: "To bridge the demand-supply gap in higher education, we need proactive participation of private sector in setting up colleges, universities and other specialty institutions. Government intervention would be in addressing the issues of accessibility and affordability. With most of engineering colleges situated in urbanised localities, how to enable students from different demographic locations gain access. Secondly extending loan programmes to assist students to finance the tuition fee and other fee costs at private run colleges." Speaking on the issue of attracting private funding in higher education, Purandeswari said steps like granting of infrastructures status to educational sector and viability funding in some way would boost the investment flow in the growth of higher education.

Earlier S Gopalakrishnan, chairman, CII Southern Region and Managing Director, Infosys Technologies Ltd sounded a note of caution on experimenting with privatisation of higher education. He underscored how ineptly run engineering colleges and management schools crashed out of existence with disastrous consequences due to poor or no proper regulatory oversight. He called for setting up industry institute cluster by according of industry status to higher education.

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‘States don’t allocate enough for education’

S Shyamala
Chennai

THE mums of imparting education should be equally shared by the Centre and states. While the Central government has been consistently increasing its fund allocations for the education sector, states do not spend on par, explained D Purandeswari, minister of state for human resource development (higher education), on Sunday.

"In its 11th five-year plan underway now, the Central government has allocated 19 per cent of the budget for education. The Centre’s target is to achieve six per cent of the gross domestic product from the education sector. Both the states and Centre are supposed to spend to achieve the target. There has been an apprehension that state governments have not been making the required fund allocations. They have put in only about 3.8 per cent overall. States should make education their top priority and allocate funds at least on par with the Centre," she said at the Confederation of Indian Industry’s (CII) conference on education for sustainable development.

"THE Centre’s target is to achieve 6% of the GDP from the education sector”

D Purandeswari
Minister of state for human resource development

Moreover, the Union government has conferred infrastructure status to education in this year’s budget announcement. This will encourage private players to actively participate in the segment. Annual allocation to the sector has been raised by 24 per cent over last year to about Rs 52,000 crore. While the Centre has been increasing its spend over the years, states have been found to lower their allocations. State universities are suffering due to scarcity of funds and unless governments come forward, national goals for education cannot be met, she added.

The minister also sought the cooperation of the states to bring in a common curriculum for core subjects such as science, math and commerce in schools. The scope of the ministry of human resource development’s responsibilities is restricted to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) schools. Forty four state boards have to agree to implement the common curriculum across the country, she said. The proposal has been placed before the boards and they should arrive at a consensus soon.

shyamalaseetharaman
mydigitalife.com
Scuplting success in engineering

After growing into a conglomerate with interests in hydrocarbons, infrastructure, power & finance, and defeating hostile takeover bids, L&T is now restructuring to leverage its strengths to create more value.

"We have realised that along with the core focus on infrastructure and the requirement of delivery within the stipulated time, the company has to focus on technology and innovation of non-core business, which they have been doing over the past few years. Reengineering of the company would allow them to leverage their strengths and develop into formidable companies," Chauhan said.

While announcing the restructuring plan, P Nataraj, L&T's whole-time director and president of machinery and industrial products, had said that each unit would have a separate board chairman, a chief executive officer designated as business head, three executive members and nine non-executive directors. "In addition, a member of the L&T board of directors will also be the board of each company," he said.

The process of selecting external directors with substantial domain expertise for all the nine companies is expected to be completed in two months. Since these companies have not been registered and they are not legal entities, the power to hire and fire a business head will rest with the L&T board.

A professionally managed company like L&T has challenges that are different from those faced by years of similar task led by an independent promoter. Over the years, it has been the target of bogging businesses like Mazarron Infrastructures and Aditya Birla Group who wanted to take control of the company in 1984. Asturian aluminum, chairman of the L&T board, became the chairman of L&T on the strength of a deal approximated 10 per cent stake in the company. But the attempt was thwarted by L&T, the largest shareholder, and GIC, culminating in the dispute from the board in 1990.

The current change came as soon as L&T's cement giant, Grasim, the Aditya Birla group, abolished the entire L&T stake suffered by the group. The Aditya Birla group, which was the second-largest shareholder, then sold its entire stake in L&T.

Despite threats of hostile takeovers, investors were upbeat on the company's growth. Many of them, like LIC, UTI and GIC, which entered the company at an initial stage, have seen their investment grow around 700 per cent. A top LIC official said that the company was "definitely" growing. LIC, UTI and GIC, which owned the company's shares, have been the largest shareholders, and their shareholding in the company is around 70 per cent.

L&T's net profit for the year stood at Rs 1,500 crore in 2010-11, up from Rs 1,200 crore in 2010, before dipping down to Rs 500 crore in 2011. This is a phenomenal growth and we would continue to retain our stake in the company," he said.

L&T had grown into a multi-divi
dional company over the past 73 years and considering its order book and project execution capabilities it has shifted focus on big nuclear power, defence and metro projects.

"The focus has definitely shifted towards higher margins and higher profits," said S Pitha, an analyst.

L&T has ambitious plans. In the plan to acquire Siyam Consulting was a successful carve and it received bids by selling the stake. "Through the deal, we can put the whole industry to L&T's core management," Pitha said.

The demerger of L&T Consulting into UTech Consulting was also on L&T's terms and not the way AV Birla group desired. They wanted the company to be divested and also forced Birla to follow their terms on L&T Corporate, "Pitha said.

Over the long term, Pitha said, the company will continue to follow its strategy of focusing on high-margin projects, and the company will have "an unparalleled, experienced team, which is also its biggest strength because most of them would retire in a few years."

Nick will retire next year, while Nayar, the latest executive on the board, will retire at the end of this year. Both have been associated with L&T for over 20 years. "I don't think we need to do the biggest proving any- thing. We need to do it among the best in the world in what we do," said Nayar.

Experts believe that L&T units will grow at a share of the company and, as per the flow of orders and demands in their sectors, they are poised to grow into billion-dollar-plus companies in a few years. That is why L&T is restructuring, splitting itself into nine verticals within five subsidiaries. It plans to list these companies in a few years.

Deven Choksey, managing director of KR Choksey, said L&T's strength lies in its ability to deliver engineering projects on time. "In the last 5-6 years, the company has moved into different streams of finance, infrastructure, defence, with special focus on power and infrastructure. The company has also moved out of two operations like cement, glass and power pots jumps over the last few years."

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Euthanasia: Mercy or murder?

Tushar Gandhi

The Supreme Court has stirred up a heated debate on euthanasia in the wake of its judgement on Pinki Virani’s application to allow her friend Aruna Shanbag, who has been in an irreversible coma for the past decade to be euthanised. The Supreme Court has refused permission to allow Shanbag to be euthanised but has said that passive euthanasia is permissible under the “rarest of rare circumstances.” The court’s ruling in a way equates euthanasia with capital punishment, both to be applied in the rarest of rare cases.

I personally believe euthanasia or the right to end life is a very personal matter and the person concerned and people close to him/her must be allowed to exercise that option with certain checks and balances. Every person has the ability to make a will, the ability to donate organs and even their bodies after death. Families of people, who are declared brain dead, have the option of donating their organs and to take their loved ones off life support. Why can’t a person in all their senses make a declaration that if they ever go into an irreversible coma or become such that they lose all ability to live on their own be allowed to end their lives?

A person having made such a declaration should have to nominate at least two people and empower them to process their application to its logical conclusion. There could be a special court that could rule on such cases. The court could then hear objections to the application for a fixed period of time and then pass an order. This would ensure that there is no malpractice because the loudest objections to euthanasia are from people voicing concerns about its misuse, which include ending the life of unwanted elders and to usurp property.

Life is all about dignity. Shanbag is alive but there is no dignity in her life; she is dependent on others. What is the worth of a life where one has no control over bodily functions? Before she was assaulted and raped, Shanbag was a promising and vibrant young woman. Technically, her rapist and assailter murdered the real Shanbag. I was acquainted with the case from day one, because one of the doctors in KEM Hospital in Mumbai was a very close family friend. It was well known right from day one that she was never going to recover. I remember the doctor and my parents talking at length about the tragedy. The doctor would many a times talk of the desire to switch off all the support machines and let her slip away. No one had the courage to do it.

When we speak of euthanasia, there is a lot of horror expressed in our society. But, we have always worshiped people who voluntarily embraced death. In the age-old tradition of samadhi and sati. But, there is so much horror when euthanasia is mentioned and shock expressed?

India has legalised abortions. It opened the doors to infanticide too. Abortion is legalised to save a woman from unwanted pregnancy. Here a mother is given the right to terminate a life. I don’t know when life is recognised before its first breath or before its conception or before birth? Both the times when my wife was expecting, I started treating the foetus as my child the day I saw the blue dot confirming her pregnancy, from the pregnancy test kit. I formed a relationship with my child the day the gynaecologist put a microphone on my wife’s belly and I heard the heartbeat of my child. From that instant, there was a life growing in my wife’s womb. Yet, she had the ability to terminate the life if she so desired and it would have been perfectly legal. Some time ago, there was a case of a couple who were refused permission to terminate pregnancy at a very advanced stage after the doctor had confirmed that the baby she was carrying had a severe disability and would only survive on life support.

I am faced with a dilemma. A couple can get a gender test done on a foetus illegally and terminate the pregnancy legally. A young girl or a woman can indulge in unprotected intercourse and if she becomes pregnant, she can get an abortion to terminate a life, and then continue with a legal life. But someone who has no dignity in life, who for 30 years has not shown any intelligent signs of life, cannot have the dignity of ending that worthless existence. I do not oppose abortion, I also want the right to a dignified death.

CLOSING A CHAPTER: We have always worshiped people who voluntarily embraced death, in the age-old tradition of samadhi. Those who achieved samadhi have been elevated to the level of saints. In Jainism, there is the practice of santhara, which is revered. Hinduism practiced the tradition of sati, which was in most cases not voluntary, and revered it. The countless ‘Rani Sati’ temples all over India are a testimony to it. So the tradition of ending life voluntarily or by force is deep-rooted in our society. I am perplexed why whenever the topic euthanasia is revolved, there is so much horror.

(The writer is founder president, Mahatma Gandhi Foundation)
IS INTERNET EXPLORER WARY OF CHROME?

Even as Microsoft’s browser rules the roost when it comes to the number of users, Google Chrome users displayed loyalty with only 35 per cent switch-outs

PRINNAA JOSHI
Mumbai

With no clear preference when it comes to browsers, Microsoft and Google are targeting Indian internet users to have greater share of the market. A study estimates the average Indian internet subscriber uses 2.3 browsers and the duplication user base in browser usage stands at 31 per cent.

A StatCounter study says Microsoft’s Internet Explorer (IE) leads with 44.26 per cent share in India, followed by Firefox at 32.52 per cent and Chrome at the third position, with a 19.61 per cent share.

USP of Google Chrome

What is it about Chrome that people like? Is it because it is a lightweight browser or because it is secure? Or the minimalist look and feel? Is it the easy updates option or because of Google’s marketing strategy? According to Joz, users’ loyalty with Chrome is the highest, at 64 per cent, followed by Firefox, at 36 per cent, and IE at 29 per cent. This can be attributed to the steady growth of Chrome, which has had only 35 per cent switch-outs and 61 per cent switch-in over the last one year, the report says.

An engineering student, Nikhil Pandey, says “The blue ‘e’ icon on the computer is the most common association users have with the Internet. But when I told friends talking about Google’s browser, I wanted to have a go and downloaded it.”

Last week, Pandey upgraded to the latest version of Chrome 10 browser and claims the new preference page makes it easy to sync bookmarks, passwords and other settings between each computer you run Chrome on. “You can also import data from other browsers like Firefox and Internet Explorer with just one click.”

This year, the number of people using Chrome had tripled from 80 million to 150 million, went Google Vice-President and Vice President of Software Engineering, Louis Pouzin and Vice President of Product Management Sundar Pichai, on the company’s official blog. “Speed is what people love most about Chrome and we’re always working to make the browser even faster,” said the post.

Nidhi Rangta, country marketing head, Google India, echoes the sentiments. “Chrome was the last browser to enter the market in 2008 and, since then, it has seen tremendous growth. Today, Chrome’s market share is 35 per cent and is the fastest growing browser amongst the top three browsers. What has led to this growth is the constant innovation on Chrome and user feedback,” said Google.

Chrome’s latest version can be downloaded for free and current users will be automatically updated to the new version soon, Google said. Describing the built-in security features, Tim Steele, software engineer, wrote on Google’s official blog: “For security, Google added sandboxing for each web page you open. This keeps all your tabs in a separate sandbox in case one of them crashes or contains a virus. True way, everything is isolated and the risk of crashing your entire browser or infecting your computer.”

Availability of apps from the Chrome web store is another factor propelling the growth of the Chrome browser among young users. “The Chrome Web Store hosts several apps (paid and free), which can be downloaded according to one’s choice,” says Anami Bhagai, a computer science student at the University of Mumbai.

Talking about the new features, the users about the background WebApps that allows web applications from the Google Chrome store to run in the background, even when Chrome itself is not running (visible). “This allows web apps to behave more like native applications, as they can be launched at startup without launching a Google Chrome window and can continue to run even when you are doing other work,”

Microsoft pins hope on IE9

With 41 per cent of internet users using all three browsers (Chrome, IE and Firefox/Mozilla) from home, Senthilkumar Sundaram, director (Internet Explorer, Consumer & Online), Microsoft India says: “Internet Explorer 8 remained the world’s most popular, and fastest growing web browser. IE9 now runs on nearly 40 per cent of all Windows PCs worldwide.”

Sundaram says Microsoft has received very positive responses from consumers for IE9 beta, which has become “our fastest adopted browser beta with over 30 million downloads”. The Redmond-based software giant adds a humble approach with IE9: “we know that people don’t go online to use a browser, they go online to access their favourite sites and web applications,” he says. Claiming it is this thought that influenced the design of IE9, delivering user experience that treats websites almost like applications, innovations like Pinited Sites allow customers to pin their favourite sites to the toolbar and access features like Dynamic JumpLabs to get to their favourite content. “We have also launched an IE9 experience site, www.beauty-ofie9.com, that showcases the websites that consumers can visit today to experience faster, safer and cleaner web experiences with Internet Explorer 9,” says Sundaram.

Microsoft is leaving no stone unturned to make IE9’s launch smooth in emerging countries like India. “We have partnered with some of the most popular websites like Rediff India, Zapatka Games, Indiatimes.com and NDTV.com, among others, to bring alive the IE9 capabilities,” Internationa, with the introduction of the IE9 beta, we have partnered with over 300 top sites and global brands which have created new experiences demonstrating the capabilities of IE9 and whose collective reach is more than two billion monthly visitors.”

Partners like Deepak Abbot, vice-president for Zapak.com at Zapak Digital Entertainment says, “With the beta availability of IE9, Zapak will take on a new mould and sleek avatar. With HTML5 for gaming, www.Zapak.com can now deliver rich user experience to consumers. Zapak.com can now be directly installed on PCs just like any standard Windows application, making it quick and easy for users.”
Indian scientists: missing in action

I suspect Indian scientists have retired hurt to the pavilion. They were exposed to some nasty public scrutiny on a deal made by a premier science research establishment, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), with Devas, a private company, on the allocation of spectrum. The public verdict was that the arrangement was a scandal; public resources had been given away for a song. The government, already scarred, hastily scrapped the contract.

Since then there has been dead silence among the powerful scientific leaders of the country, with one exception. Kiran Karnik, a former employee of ISRO and board member of Devas, spoke out and explained it is wrong to equate this deal with the scam of mobile telephony. The cost calculations done for terrestrial spectrum cannot be used to estimate the loss to the exchequer in the ISRO-Devas contract, which involves S-band spectrum.

Clearly, there is much more to this story. But when the scientists who understand the issue are not prepared to engage with the public, there can be little informed discussion. The cynical public, which sees scams tumble out each day, believes easily that everybody is a crook. But, as I said, the country’s top scientists have withdrawn further into their comfort holes, their opinion frozen in contempt that Indian society is scientifically illiterate. I can assure you in the future there will be even less conversation between scientists and all of us in the public sphere.

This is not good. Science is about everyday policy. It needs to be understood and for this it needs to be discussed and deliberated openly and strenuously. But how will this happen if one side — the one with information, knowledge and power — will not engage in public discourse?

Take the issue of genetically-modified (GM) crops. For long this matter has been decided inside closed-door committee rooms, where scientists are comforted by the fact that their decisions will not be challenged. Their defence is “sound science” and “superior knowledge”. It is interesting that the same scientists will accept data produced by private companies pushing the product. Issues of conflict of interest will be brushed aside as integrity cannot be questioned behind closed doors. Silence is the best insurance. This is what happened inside a stuffy committee room, where scientists sat to give permission to Mahyco-Monsanto to grow genetically-modified brinjal.

This case involved a vegetable we all eat. This was a matter of science we had the right to know about and to decide upon. The issue made headlines. The reaction of the scientific fraternity was predictable and obnoxious. They resented the questions. They did not want a public debate.

As the controversy raged and more people got involved, the scientists ran for cover. They wanted none of this messy street fight. They were meant to advise prime ministers and the likes, not to answer simple questions of people. Finally, when environment minister Jairam Ramesh took the decision on the side of the ordinary vegetable eater, unconvinced by the validity of the scientific data to justify no-harm, scientists were missing in their public reactions. Instead, they whispered about lack of “sound science” in the decision inside committees.

The matter did not end there. The minister commissioned an inter-academy inquiry — six top scientific institutions looked into GM crops and Brinjal — expecting a rigorous examination of the technical issues and data gaps. The report released by this committee was shoddy to say the least. It contained no references or attributions and not a single citation. It made sweeping statements and lifted passages from a government newsletter and even from global biotech industry. The report was thrashed. Scientists again withdrew into offended silence.

The final report of this apex-science group is marginally better in that it includes citations but it reeks of scientific arrogance cloaked in jargon. The committee did not find it fit to review the matter, which had reached public scrutiny. The report is only a cover for their established opinion about the ‘truth’ of Brinjal. Science for them is certainly not a matter of enquiry, critique or even dissent.

But the world has changed. No longer is this report meant only for top political and policy leaders, who would be overwhelmed by the weight of the matter, the language and the expert knowledge of the writer. The report will be subjected to public scrutiny. Its lack of rigour will be deliberated, its unquestioned assertion challenged.

This is the difference between the manufactured comfortable world of science behind closed doors and the noisy messy world outside. It is clear to me that Indian scientists need confidence to creatively engage in public concerns. The task to build scientific literacy will not happen without their engagement and their tolerance for dissent. The role of science in Indian democracy is being revisited with a new intensity. The only problem is that the key players are missing in action.
TAX BENEFITS TO AID RESEARCH IN IITs

Provision of a weighted tax deduction to organisations donating for research to IITs may boost scientific research

VINAY GAURAV & KALPANA PATHAK

The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are delightful. Budget announcement of a weighted tax deduction on payments for scientific research from 175 per cent to 200 per cent, they say will help them generate more funds for scientific research in the institutes.

The Finance Minister proposed this tax exemption on donations made to national laboratories, universities and the IITs.

"This is a welcome move," said a senior faculty member from IIT Bombay.

IIT Bombay says of 1105 crores that it spent on research, 1055 crores came from the industry. Research revenue has grown at the rate of 60 per cent over the past year with the institute clocking revenue of 1105 crores in 2010 against 710 crores in 2008.

IIT Bombay has been running around 20 patent applications per year, but the number has gone up to 50 patent applications per year now.

IIT Guwahati IT (EE) director Sudhir Jain too feels the move will encourage the faculty and another 15 labs will be set up. "We are already spending around 185 crores on research and administration, as compared to 150 crores, which is a lot to catch up on, and that can be done through the collaboration of companies and academic institutions. The tax benefit will only enhance this area and provide a much-needed boost to more projects being worked upon in tandem, both in the research and the corporate field," he says.

IITs have been working with national and international companies which approach them to control on various projects. IIT Bombay for instance, has worked with over 100 companies on various research projects.

IITs do not get separate funding for research. Of the plan allocation that goes to the institutes it is only a small proportion of the funds that make up the research facilities. It also generates funds from sponsored research which largely means sponsored projects for government agencies like the departments of science and technology, aerospace research and development board, council of scientific and industrial research, etc. The projects usually span over three to five years.

IITs have suggested that the ministry for human resource development provide special grants for creation of research infrastructure. Also, IITs do not have a dedicated staff to help with research. At present, these institutes engage staff in the sponsored projects but their service term is limited with completion of the project.

According to Bharti Gaur, senior mananger—education sector, Ernest & Young, the score is an effort to bring in more funds for R&D in line with the 200 per cent deduction already available for income tax.

"With 200 per cent wage tax deduction now available for both in-house and outsourced R&D, this could boost research work by corporates in the long run. Although, it could be seen more in the newer sectors like telecom, technology and automobiles," says Gaur.

Auto companies Renault-Nissan are already working with IIT Madras on technology for automobiles and as the company scales up its presence in India, R&D would be an important part of its strategy. It is Japan's third largest automobile manufacturer, Nissan Motor Company had last October signed a memorandum of understandings (MoU) with the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, for collaborative research in automobile technology.

Renault-Nissan have a plant in Chennai. At the Auto Expo 2010 (in New Delhi), Renault announced its will to introduce a full range in India in a 4 years timeframe.

Hyderabad-based Vasant Chemicals which invests around four per cent of its sales into research, is now working on several research projects with Hyderabad-based Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IIT).

"The industry is recognising academic research through increased outscouring of projects. The overall research climate has been improving. At such a time, the proposal for tax benefits adds to a cut down to the phenomenal," Venka Ramana, executive director, Vasant Chemicals.

Though the deduction would come into effect from April 2012, Mahendra Sayam, chief executive officer, CPG Sandhu, in the view that this tax deduction will not be the only game changer "Incentives like paying higher grants, payments per patent and better infrastructure are also equally needed to boost scientific research in the country," adds Gaurani.
IIT Mandi to lay stress on Green Energy Technology

VK THUKRAL
SHIMLA, MARCH 13

INDIAN Institute of Technologies (IIT) would lay stress on research relating to the development of Green Energy Technology.

The issue was discussed between the Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhumal and the Director of the Institute Professor Gonsalaves, who called on him in Shimla today to discuss the construction of the infrastructure and buildings of the IIT.

Chief Minister assured Gonsalaves that all possible support required from the state administration for the ongoing project would be forthcoming to ensure speedy completion.

Dhumal said since the classes have begun in the prestigious IIT in the state looking into the local conditions and priorities solar, geothermal and bio-mass besides mountain development and roads construction techniques need to get due attention in the studies and research to be undertaken.

Gonsalaves assured that the institute would become fully operational by 2012 and all such studies which benefit the hill environment would get preference.

Chief Minister said it is the endeavour of the state to build the state as a main hub for higher education.

He said the peaceful atmosphere of the state is ideal for the young minds to work and research on all subjects which come under the scope of the IIT.

Dhumal said hydro power rail and road transport besides other sectors are the key areas where lot of efforts are required.

He expressed the hope that the dream institute which has finally come under the sun of the state would make the state shine and accomplish further dreams.
RESEARCH OPTIONS IN GERMANY

Tina Ray/TTN

WHEN it comes to funding, traditionally, arts and humanities have always been a step behind. However, with the German Research Foundation (DFG) investing heavily, Indian research scholars working in these fields have a reason to celebrate.

Toresten Fischer, director of the German Research Foundation (DFG) India office, points out, “We fund basic research in all the scientific disciplines including arts and humanities.”

Sciences may be a favourite with Indians. But, he says, there is a big difference between the philosophy of the Indian funding institutions and the German system, which give arts and humanities equal weightage. He adds, “If you compare the number of projects submitted to the number of projects approved, it is between 25 and 28%.”

HOW TO GO ABOUT IT

DFG’s focus lies in promoting young researchers. It has two standalone programmes for post-doctorate students. The first programme, One’s Own Position, allows an Indian scholar to go to Germany and work under the guidance of a supervisor on a specific topic for two years.

SCIENTIFICS

- Molecular Biology
- Theoretical Chemistry
- Computer Science

ARTS AND HUMANITIES

- Economics
- Social Anthropology
- Indology
- History
- Dance Performing Theory

DO AND DON'TS

- IN YOUR APPLICATION, STATE YOUR PURPOSE SPECIFICALLY
- DO NOT ADDRESS INFORMALLY AS “HI PROF”

Applications need to submit the same thesis that they have submitted as their doctoral thesis. Substantiated by a written confirmation from the concerned university. Also, scholars need a written confirmation from a German institute stating that it is willing to take over the employer’s responsibility. The programme allows scholars total independence. Depending on the particular discipline, one can even travel outside Germany for research purposes.

The second funding includes a research fellowship. In this case, the university—with the help of the DFG funding—pays the fellow. The fellow does not necessarily have to stay on in Germany and may even come back to India to complete his or her project.

BOLOGNA BOOST

With education blurring geographical contours, research is no longer restricted to countries. Hence, Fischer points out, German universities are realising that if they want international cooperation they not only need to standardise the system through the Bologna process, but also open up in terms of curricula research and training curricula.

He adds that though English has been introduced in arts and humanities, it is yet to catch up with the hard sciences. “To address these concerns, we are funding research training groups.”

Such groups are established by universities to promote young researchers. Their key emphasis is on the qualification of doctoral researchers within the framework of a focused research programme and a structured training strategy. “The aim is to prepare doctoral researchers for a complex job market and simultaneously encourage early scientific independence. Indian students should certainly consider applying to such programmes,” he says.

Take your pick

- Individual grants programme: Any researcher can apply for financial assistance for an individual research project

- Priority programmes: These allow researchers from various research institutions and laboratories to co-operate within the framework of a set topic or project for a period of time, each working at his or her research institution

- Collaborative research centres: Long-term university research centres in which scientists and academics pursue joint interdisciplinary research undertakings

- Excellence initiative: Promotes top level research in German universities and research institutes. Funding provided for graduate schools, clusters of excellence and institutional strategies

- Starting point: Any Indian researcher interested in one of DFG’s programmes first needs to identify a German counterpart who will formally submit the application to the DFG head office in Bonn, Germany

www.dfg.de/en
MBBS students to visit wards from 2nd year

They Will Not Treat Patients While Visiting

Kousteya Sinha | TNN

New Delhi: Undergraduate medical students will now get the feel of being a real doctor — ward visits, patient interaction and evening rounds — from the second year of MBBS onwards.

The Medical Council of India (MCI), as part of its new curriculum for undergraduate medical education, has decided to introduce a new training or "clerkship" under which medical students will be attached to resident doctors to accompany them during rounds, help in managing patients and talk to them, thereby improving their communication skills and help patients cope better with their illnesses. They however, will not treat patients.

Speaking to TOI, member of MCI's governing body Dr Sita Naik said, "The current medical training is boring and classroom oriented. We are therefore reviving a practice that used to exist 20 years back in India - assign undergraduate students to wards. They will then help resident doctors with managing patients. They will, however, not prescribe treatment but just assist residents."

84 applications for new med colleges

The Medical Council of India has received 84 applications across India seeking permission to start medical colleges offering MBBS courses from the coming academic year. In 2010, there were just 19 applications for starting new colleges. The four-fold increase in the number of applications could be attributed to the rise in demand for MBBS and postgraduate courses in medicine, said MCI board of governors head Dr Shiv Kumar Sarin. Medical education, he said, was fast becoming a popular option. The council received 3,000 applications for increasing postgraduate seats. "There is a huge shortage of doctors in the country. For this, existing colleges must also expand. We are in the process of reviewing all the applications that we have received," he said. TNN

Dr Naik added, "This will give them early clinical exposure and excite them. Right from the second year, students will have access to wards and clinics. This will make them feel they are part of clinical practice. At present, students don't go to wards. Instead, they are taught anatomy and physiology in class." According to MCI, medical science "attracts the brightest minds but does not challenge their brains."

"This practice of students assisting resident doctors fell through in the last 20 years as medical training became more classroom oriented. Maybe it was because too many students were attached to a single resident who found it an additional headache. Now, we will reintroduce the system to make medical education more clinical based," Dr Naik said.

MCI governing body member Prof Ranjit Roychoudhury told TOI that the crucial meeting to finalise the UG and PG curriculum will take place on March 29. Union health secretary K Chandramouli will chair the meeting which will be attended by top academicians and vice-chancellors.

Speaking to TOI, health secretary K Chandramouli said, "Experts will meet on March 29 and talk about the latest developments in medicine and go through various subjects. Curriculum always need to be finetuned to move with the times. We will see what important things are not there in the curriculum at present. After reaching a consensus, we will implement whatever can be incorporated into the curriculum immediately while the rest will be put later."

At the end of the undergraduate medical training, MCI says, the students should be able to perform a thorough and systematic physical examination of any organ system of the body, performing core clinical tasks.
‘Technology wars are fought by proxy’

B Rajaram designed and developed the Anti-Collision Device (ACD) as managing director, Konkan Railway. He spoke to Sudip Talukdar about how it would deliver passenger safety in the light of the decision to implement it in eight railway zones:

- What were the circumstances under which you came to design and develop the ACD?

The recurring loss of lives in collisions prompts a few words of shock and solace, besides some compensation, followed by some old routine of inquiries and announcements of massive investments in safety. Shamed by this charade as a railway engineer, I visualised and configured a safety network of decentralised units that is much more effective than the centralised European system. The ACDs can see far ahead of loco drivers, respond faster to exigencies and chat with their counterparts.

- How does a product like the ACD mark the successful example of public-private partnership?

A patent is as good as a piece of paper unless it is produced and commercialised. I consider the MOUs between the Konkan Railway and Konkan Microsystems, a deemed public-private initiative, unique in our country. This experiment has produced a very sophisticated knowledge embedded in the next-generation ACD. Kernex took all the risk for raising the capital, both human and financial and developing the manufacturing technology as required. In return for manufacturing rights, while Konkan Railway retained marketing rights. The arrangement has survived a decade of trials and tribulations. The cost of development is the lowest in the world for this type of functional product.

- Given your long stint with the Railways, do you see any technical problems likely to arise in ACDs’ implementation and how can they be overcome?

Really there are few technical problems now in implementation. What can foresee are ownership problems. Who will take over and maintain the sophisticated microprocessor-based system? The Railways should nominate competent persons, trained to maintain the system at the manufacturing facility. I feel that a centralised version of ACD should be permanently fixed to the guard’s cabin at the tail end of a train. Instead of having it carried daily into each cabin or van, which is open to human error.

- Why do you think it took the Railways so long to accept the ACDs, despite certification by Lloyds Research, Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) and Electronics Test and Development Centre (ETDC)?

The experts in signals did find it very difficult to accept the ACDs, influenced more by the high-pressure sales pitch of multinationals. Besides, repeated testing of the safety device, when the Railway Board shifted mutually agreed goal posts from time to time, delayed the ACDs. Like ants, ACDs are weak individually but phenomenally powerful when networked. They function like the fuzzy logic of our brains to prevent collision on all stretches, delivering much more than the

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Rajasthan Patrika ND 14/03/2011 P-2

nazir Ali, Kumaon @ नजीर दिल्ली

देश के बीस राज्यों में सर्वाधिक निजी मार्गदर्शक (पीपीएम) के अधिकार पर प्रस्तावित नई आईआईआईटी की स्थापना सर्वप्रथम कतार में जुटी के दस सत्रों के समाप्ति के समाचार को प्रशिक्षित राज्यों के प्रशिक्षितों के साथ अन्य बैठक करने जा रही है।

- आयोग 18 मार्च को आईआईआईटी की रिपोर्ट में जोड़े जा रहे बैठक के लिए सभी राज्यों के मुख्य सचिवों, औद्योगिक संगठनों, नैतिक व स्थापना को लेकर केंद्र के सत्र पर रहित उपस्थित होंगे। स्थापना के संबंध में समिति स्थापना सम्बन्धी मानदंड को लेकर अपना प्रस्ताव देंगे।

- इसमें निजी मार्गदर्शकों के लिए चर्चा का अध्यादेश और नई आईआईआईटी के लिए आधार मानदंड का उल्लेख मुख्य रूप से होगा। इसके बाद राज्यों की इस पर संबंधित भाषण करने का स्वतंत्रता विवरण है। विवादित ने बताया कि राज्य बनाने और अन्तर्भावित निजी मार्गदर्शकों को भी लाभार्ज होंगे।

उत्तराखंड के काम के कुल 128 करोड़ की अपनी निवेश लागत से स्थापित होने वाले प्रक्रिया आईआईआईटी के केंद्र, राज्य और निजी मार्गदर्शकों को लाभदायक करेगी।

50:35:15 प्रतिलाभ होगा। राज्य सत्रों की इसके लिए 50 से 100 प्रतिशत नियुक्त भूमिका देंगे।

इसके अलावा केंद्र फेडरेटिव बैंकिंग को मुख्य सेंट्रल के लिए 50 करोड़ और स्थापना के पहले चरण के दौरान प्रतिशत संयुक्त अधिकार 10 करोड़ की राशि प्रदान करेगा।

नई आईआईआईटी पर 18 को बैठक
Performed through wrist, heart surgery gets safer, simpler

**London:** Believe it or not, you can now get your heart surgery done through an incision in your wrist — all thanks to British cardiac surgeons who have embarked on this unique technique to carry out angioplasty, a media report said on Sunday.

Angioplasty involves clearing blocked arteries in patients, who usually suffer heart attacks, by inflating a tiny balloon inserted through a tube thorough a major blood vessel.

Angioplasty widens the blocked artery, restoring blood flow. And, to retain the improved size, a hollow metal tube or stent is inserted. Traditionally, the surgery is performed via the femoral artery in the groin.

But, a team of cardiologists in Britain is now using the radial artery in the wrist to carry out the life-saving operations after a major heart attack.

“This is the future of angioplasty. It is safer and more comfortable with the chances of complications much reduced. The patient, in most routine cases, can also go home much sooner,” said cardiologist Dr Rod Stables of the Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital.

According to the cardiac surgeons, radial angioplasty involves a small incision being made in the wrist under local anaesthetic, the Daily Mail reported.

Dr Rod Stables, who now performs 95% of his angioplasties through the wrist, said: “Too few cardiologists are trained in this breakthrough technique.”

“They have preferred the femoral artery because it provides a larger blood vessel, making it easier to guide their instruments through, and some patients require bulkier catheters which can’t fit through the radial artery,” Stables explained.

A 63-year-old patient, Paul Hope, who recently underwent the heart operation through the wrist, said it was only slightly more taxing than a visit to the dentist.

“It was painless and relaxed. I lay on the operating table and rolled up my sleeve,” Hope said. Bình