Pitreoda barb hits home, HRD ministry retaliates

Charu Sudan Kasturi  
charu.kasturi@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The human resource development ministry has hit back at criticisms from Prime Ministerial advisor Sam Pitroda over the need for a national higher education survey the government is planning picking the same platform used by Pitroda.

A day after Pitroda accused the government of wasting time on a higher education survey instead of pursuing reforms, the HRD ministry countered that skipping the survey would force policy planning based on conjecture rather than robust statistics.

Pitreoda delivered his scathing remarks on Friday at a conference of over 200 Vice Chancellors of central and state universities organised by the University Grants Commission and the HRD ministry. The HRD ministry delivered its counter punch at the same conference later — but away from the glare of the media.

In a presentation to the VCs, the ministry argued that the national higher education survey — that Pitroda cited as an example of the government wasting time — is critical for the country to prepare its higher education strategy. The survey, the ministry said, was necessary to build a detailed statistical baseline that would show up areas in which the government needs to focus.

"The other option available is to go by perception instead of robust statistics. Policy inter-
Opt for higher studies in IITs

The Indian Institutes of Technology at Chennai, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Roorkee, and Guwahati have invited applications for admission to their respective full-time M.Tech. programmes in various branches and specializations.


Candidates with BE or B.Tech. degree in the relevant branches of engineering, mathematics, physics, and life sciences and having a valid GATE score are eligible to apply.

Candidates can submit online applications from April 4 through the web site http://gate.iitm.ac.in/mtech/admissions.

Last date: April 7. Detailed information on M.Tech. degree courses in various specializations can be obtained from the web site http://www.iitm.ac.in/home. IIT Kanpur offers its M.Tech. degree courses in Aerospace, Biological Sciences, Civil, Computer Science and Engineering, Electrical, Electronics and Communication, Mechanical, Metallurgical, and Materials Engineering. IIT Bombay offers M.Tech. degree courses in various branches of engineering.

Applications can be downloaded from March 24 to March 31. The last date for online application is April 8.

For details on M.Tech. admissions to various departments in IIT Roorkee, visit the institute's web site www.iitr-ru.ac.in from March 1 to April 14.

IIT Guwahati has invited applications for its M.Tech. programme in various disciplines and specializations.

Applicants are required to submit five copies of the completed application form. Information brochure and other details on M.Tech. degrees in various specializations can be obtained from the web site www.iitg.ernet.in.

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Last date: April 13.

GOPALRAMAN KARAKADAN

The enigma of IIT-JEE

Experts and students share their perspectives on approaches that will help you succeed in this examination.

VASUDHA VENUGOPAL

A world of billion-dollar possibilities, near parental sacrifices, and conceptual learning, not to forget the hard work dedication and assumptions of luck that go with it. Come this April 10, nearly 5 lakh students would attempt the much talked-about IIT Joint Entrance Examination. The famed world of the IITs is a tale told and retold every year, as a land of limitless aspirations.

The competition, the peer pressure, and the way you think, change when you start preparing," says Nagaraja Chellappa, a Class XII student from Chennai, who has been attending coaching classes for four years.

"I was not serious initially, but the fever grips you eventually," he says. The reasons for the IIT dream vary. "It opens unimaginable doors of opportunities, be it admissions in globally reputed research schools and research organisations, or attractive company offers," says Aarthi Selvakumar, a student.

A peek into the grid that lands the students in favouable positions reveals the work needed.

"The preparation makes you aware of your strengths, and many times of your limitations," says A. Nithya, an IIT aspirant, talking about how at last 50 per cent of the people who start preparing for the much coveted exam give up midway.

While children who learn by rote stand no chance, those who grasp ideas quickly and use them have a headstart, says A.R. Venkataraman, mathematics tutor.

The IIT-JEE 2011 consists of two question papers with objective type questions, both of three hours' duration. Both the question papers will consist of three separate sections on Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics. The paper over the years has undoubtedly become simpler, says experts. While coaching classes work on different strategies to refine their result, the committee too comes up with its share of twists and turns to ensure only the best get into the most reputed 20 institutes. "The student is not expected to conquer the question paper, but rather show his competence in a stipulated time," says K. Ravi, general manager (classroom teaching), Brilliant Patricks.

Answering questions in the test involves a set of logical steps in sequence, but getting the students tuned to such a regime is difficult, says Balaji Sampath, a trainer. A student says, however, depends on the training and testing patterns of institutes. "Students have to stop looking for patterns," he adds.

The paper now lays stress on statement assertion question and matrix matching questions which expect a student to approach the questions carefully. The student is supposed to very cleverly eliminate the impossible options in the first set of 20 questions, and then work on the remaining two options," adds Mr. Ravi.

While three years back, the questions consumed at least 8-10 minutes, the present ones are expected to be solved in two-three minutes each. "The key is to abandon the question if it is taking more time," says Prof. Venkateswaran.

The problem many students face is in the case of probability or permutation where there are a set of possibilities to be devised, and even leaving out the ones gives a wrong answer, he adds.

The paragraph questions, a recent addition to IIT-JEE entrance, says experts, is an excellent way to test the conceptual grasp of the students. Another concern is the fact that many schools and coaching institutes fail to give impetus to Class XI portions. "Almost 90 per cent comprises questions on chemical equilibrium and atomic structure," says R. Guruswamy, chairman (petd.), Anna University, who trains IIT aspirants in chemistry now. It is about identifying the 'knot' in every IIT-JEE question, once you do it, it becomes a simple problem, he adds.

National mock tests help students decide the extent of preparation, says Mr. Ravi. "Students such as Andhra Pradesh and Bihar produce students with better chances of clearing the exam, while Rajasthan and many parts of north India have students who don't even understand the basics and optimising solving methods. "The assumption now is to assume what you know all the methods to solve a problem, you strategise and decide which should take the least time, and give you all the values required," he says.

The exam, say experts, is evident that most of those who have put in months of preparation. "It's true that a student with clarity of concepts can do a lot more, but would he do that in the stipulated time," asks Prof. Venkateswaran. Approximately two percent of the people who take the exam get into approximately 2,000 seats in the coveted Institutes. While many have their back-ups ready — from exams of deemed universities to national wide engineering entrances for a committed few, there is just one concern.

"It's four years at stake. Three hours decide everything," says Kishore Balaji R., a Class XII student from J.A.V. Matriculation School. Making a choice, for many of them, is not really an option.
AntiGravity Yoga: Hanging around for fun and fitness

New York: An AntiGravity Yoga class looks more like circus play than an ancient practice, as people dangle head-first like bats or flip weightlessly through the air.

But if the anti-gravity component stands yoga on its head, as an exhilarating group fitness experience, it has legs. “AntiGravity Yoga involves a mix of yoga, Pilates, calisthenics, aerial arts, dance,” said Illaria Cutolo, AntiGravity Yoga coordinator for Crunch, the national chain of fitness centers. “People come for the flying effect, and the playground aspect.”

The concept grew out of AntiGravity, an acrobatic performance troupe founded in 1990 by Christopher Harrison, an aficionado of yoga, who designed the fitness regimen around hammocks. Suspended about 1 meter off the floor and attached at two overhead points, the fabric hammocks act like a swing or soft trapeze. “Christopher wanted the spirit of yoga to shine through,” Cutolo said. “We remind students to come to place of presence in their breath, bodies and mind. A lot of the moves we do come from yoga.”

Gentle warm-ups, sun salutations, breath awareness techniques and strength training comprise the pre-flight protocol of most classes. Unlike traditional yoga the inversions, going upside in an AntiGravity class is weightless. “There’s zero compression of cervical spine, so it’s very therapeutic,” Cutolo said.

Floating through the air, said Cutolo, has informed her own yoga practice. “I’ve gained a lot more balance in my handstand and in general. It’s also a way for me to crosstrain by using muscles I don’t normally use.”

Jessica Matthews, spokesperson for the American Council of Exercise, sees AntiGravity Yoga differently. She said the class can build core strength and improve flexibility, and is enthusiastic about the rewards of being upside down. “Headstands, handstands, any inversion changes the way the blood flows through the body,” she said, adding that Anti Gravity might be just what the yogi ordered for the reluctant, the fearful and the averse.

As dedicated yogi, Cutolo, is candid about the difference between these classes and her yoga. “I take yoga practice,” she said. “Yoga is a discipline. AntiGravity Yoga is playtime.”
Future course of Web is difficult to predict, say researchers

Our Bureau
Hyderabad, March 28
What direction is the World Wide Web going to take? “It is very difficult to predict,” Prof Kirthi Ramanathan, Chair in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at IIT Bombay, said.

“It was not like this two years ago. Sites like Wikipedia are changing the Web landscape significantly,” he said, talking to reporters on the inaugural day of the five-day World Wide Web conference on Monday.

“Several people at different levels are working to enrich the Web. For one, IIT Bombay has incubated Aapka, the Web-based social networking forum for farmers. Using this, farmers can post queries on the problems they face. Their peers, who might have solved these problems, could refine their solutions,” he said.

“Aapka would also send SMS alerts to farmers on various issues connected with farming.”

Prof Ramanathan is not alone in failing to hazard a guess on the future of the Web. Researchers from 50 countries gathered here at the 20th International WWW conference were also at a loss in predicting its future.

“The participants will focus on the regional and global impact of expanding Open Web platforms for application development,” Prof Sadagopan, Director of IIT (Bangalore), said.

The theme for this year’s conference is ‘Web for All’ that aims at promoting inclusive aspects of the Web. Mr Tim Berners-Lee, founder of the Web, would deliver a keynote address on ‘Designing the Web for an open society’. Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, former President, and Prof. Christos H. Papadimitriou of UC Berkeley would also address the conference.

Mr Kris Gopalakrishnan, Chief Executive Officer of Infosys, and Mr N. Chandrasekaran, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of TCS, would take part in an industry panel discussion on Tuesday.

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P-7

Sadagopan
Directos
IIT Bangalore

Shortage of quality regional content is a big challenge for India internet-space. We expect that academic research for internet will get some good funding during this round of the global conference on internet
Why Indian Geeks In US Are Home-Sourced

Indian entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley are finding their dreams impinged in an immigration warp.

The Startup Bill

According to a new bill, startup visas will be available to some groups, subject to conditions:

- Entrepreneurs living outside the US if a US investor agrees to financially sponsor their entrepreneurial venture with a minimum of $100,000.
- Two years later, the startup must have created five new American jobs, and be paying $50,000, or 10% of the funds raised, in annual salary.
- Women on an H-1B visa, or graduates from US universities in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, or computer science if they have an annual income of at least $100,000, or $10,000 over the median in their field, and have had a US investor commit investment of at least $200,000 in their venture.
- Two years later, the startup must have created three new American jobs and either have raised over $100,000 in financing or be generating more than $100,000 in yearly revenue.
- Foreign entrepreneurs whose business has generated at least $100,000 in sales from the US two years later, the startup must have created three new American jobs, and either have raised over $100,000 in financing or be generating more than $100,000 in yearly revenue.

The investor must be a qualified government entity or a qualified venture capital or an angel investor who is a US citizen or it should have made at least two equity investments of at least $50,000 each year for the past three years.

SITAPRA CHATTERJEE
SAN FRANCISCO

"What do you do when you're a web entrepreneur?" asked Sharat Nadkarni, himself. In fact, the massive amounts of cash with which he has raised money is in the billions, the ability to take on a company and say, 'If I can't find venture capital, I'm going to find you.' He's building an ecosystem of startups that he can't find anywhere else.

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H-1B VISA: HOW IT STIFLES VALLEY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant employer-sponsored visa for professionals to work in the US for a maximum of six years.

The US issues around 85,000 H-1B visas each year, and the demand to get one is intense. Dependents spouses on H-1B visas are not allowed to work. They don't qualify for a social security number. Consequently they can't get a credit card, a phone connection, or even a check cashing service. The social and psychological effects are immense.

H-1B visa holders are granted to their employer. They can’t change jobs, leave store open the same year of their employment. And if they lose their job, they have to leave the US immediately, with no notice.

Offshoring of software has declined in terms of not only H-1B visas but also innovation. An emerging power in offshoring is China, which offers a cheaper labor pool, and a stronger presence in the hardware market.

The bill also allows for temporary visas for scientists and engineers visiting the US who are inventing or developing new technologies. It includes provisions for spouses of H-1B visa holders, and children of H-1B visa holders who are attending college in the US.

The bill, if passed, will help the US retain its position as a leader in technology.

Surendra Chatterjee
San Francisco

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