IIT aspirants say CBSE didn’t give fair chance

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NEW DELHI: Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) aspirants from the Capital who scored lower than expected in the Joint Engineering Examination (JEE) Main are feeling shortchanged because the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has not extended the registration deadline for the JEE advanced exam.

After a CBSE notification on Monday evening that effectively allowed students to review their scores by providing them answer keys, those seeking admission to National Institute of Technology (NIT) and other centrally-funded institutes heaved a sigh of relief.

However, it was too little too late for those low scorers who were aiming for Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)s since the last day to register for the second round JEE advanced exam was Monday.

The uproar over the scores came to the fore on May 7 when the JEE main results were announced and many students in the city were “shocked” with their scores, which were about 25-30 marks below expectations. However, the most affected were those students who missed out on the eligibility for JEE advanced exam by just a few marks.

CBSE RELEASED THE ANSWER KEYS ON MONDAY BUT IT WAS TOO LATE FOR THOSE HOPING TO GET INTO IIT

“My son's official score is 104, which is very close to the cut-off mark of 118 for general category. He was shocked to see his marks and is very depressed because based on expert solutions, he should get at least 124 which would make him eligible,” said Rajandriv Dayal from Noida, parent of an aspirant.

Some students have even missed out on the exam by one mark. Similar complaints were registered from a large number of students from across the country.

Monday’s notification does not mention anything about the extension of deadline for JEE Advanced registration.

CBSE spokesperson Rama Sharma declined to comment on the matter and CBSE Chairman Vineet Joshi did not respond to calls or text messages.

The JEE Main exam replaced the All India Engineering Entrance Examination for admission to NITs, IITs and other centrally-funded institutes this year. Also, for the first time, the entrance for admission to IITs is being conducted in two stages: JEE Main and JEE Advanced.
New Delhi: For the first time in the history of the elite civil services examination, the UPSC on Thursday made public the final marks of all successful candidates who were recently recommended for appointment to IAS, IFS, IPS and other key central services. Interestingly, only four of them, including two women, obtained more than 50% marks in the exam, which is considered one of the toughest in the country. Three of the four are from Kerala.

The move to display final marks on the UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) website came following a direction from the Central Information Commission (CIC). Earlier, UPSC used to send the marks to all candidates individually. The absence of final marks of successful candidates in the public domain had seen a number of people moving the CIC, seeking a direction to the UPSC.

The list for this year shows that the topper, Haritha V Kumar, a woman engineer from Kerala, scored 53% marks (1193 out of 2250). It also shows that ‘general’ category candidates who scored between 48% and 50% got selected for the top three services — IAS, IFS and IPS — indicating that it is tough to score high marks for even those who opt for science or engineering subjects.

In the ‘general’ category, the cut-off was 42%, while in other categories it went as low as 35%. However, a number of SC, ST and OBC candidates scored much higher marks, which put them in the bracket of toppers along with ‘general’ category candidates.

The marks of successful candidates, which were a closely guarded secret for long, also brought into the open the scores in the interview (personality test), which carried 250 marks and which used to play a key role in deciding the future of aspirants.

An official said making marks of all successful candidates public would not only spare the panel of thousands of RTI requests every year, it would also bring transparency to the examination which is conducted in three stages — preliminary test, mains examination and personality test.

Though there has been a long pending demand to make answer sheets of all candidates who appear in the mains examination public, UPSC is not in favour of this. The matter is currently pending in courts where the commission has vehemently opposed the move to share answer sheets with either the candidates or third parties.

CRACKING THE CIVILS

General category candidates who got between 48% and 50% marks got selected for top three services, indicating that it is tough to score high marks in civil services exam.

42% is the minimum cut-off in the general category.

In other categories, it went as low as 35%.

- Move to display final marks on UPSC website comes after a CIC directive.
Visually-impaired Indian student joins Stanford

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MUMBAI: A visually challenged student, who was nearly deprived of the chance to pursue his passion for science in India, is now set to go to the University of Stanford for undergraduate studies in computers.

Kartik Sawhney, 18, a student of Delhi Public School, RK Puram, loved science, but CBSE rules before 2010 forbade visually-challenged students from pursuing the subject in Class 12.

While he managed to get the board to change its rule, he encountered his next hurdle while applying for the entrance exam to the Indian Institutes of Technology, which, too, was not blind-friendly. For three years, he struggled to find a way to write the test, and moved court this year. Sawhney, in the meanwhile, applied to universities abroad and was accepted by Stanford in March. “The journey was discouraging at times,” said Sawhney, “But it’s satisfying to have gotten into Stanford, which has a support system for visually-challenged students. The IITs don’t have such a facility.” Stanford has assigned people to assist Sawhney when he joins.

“People believe the blind can’t do maths and science,” said Neha Trivedi, project consultant, Xavier’s Resource Centre for the Visually-Challenged, which helped Sawhney with the battle. “Sawhney’s story might change this.”
Creating another entry barrier

UCG regulations make it difficult for private universities to function.

HISTORICALLY, political leadership in our country has always connected education with economic development as reflected in the various national documents like the Radhakrishnan Commission Report on University Education (1948-49), the Report of the Education Commission (1964-66), the National Knowledge Commission Reports (2006-09) and the National Skill Development Initiative (2009). The main objective always being to meet the needs and aspirations of a self-reliant nation committed to democracy.

Since Independence, the private sector has played a critical role in meeting the aspirations of the society and industry demands. Particularly in the last two decades, the private sector participation has increased dramatically, accounting for 64% of the total number of institutions and 59% of the enrolment in the country. Although it is established that the government alone will not be able to meet the growing demand for higher education in the country and achieve 30% gross enrolment rate (GER) by 2020, the entry barriers for private sector remain as stringent as ever.

Today, the only way a private entity can set up universities at the national level is through the deemed-to-be-university route under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1966. The basic idea behind deemed-to-be-universities was to promote, strengthen and bring those institutions that were doing exemplary work in specialised academic field comparable to a university under the purview of University Grants Commission. In the last one decade, a few states recognising the need for private sector participation in higher education have introduced the State Private University Bill, which opens another entry route at state level but has its own issues and challenges.

It’s interesting to note that in 1970 the number of deemed universities were only seven, which rose to 130 by 2000. According to 2011-12 data, almost 6 lakh students—3%—were enrolled in 130 deemed-to-be-universities. Most deemed-to-be-universities are rated by independent accreditation bodies and qualify as centres of excellence in specific fields and have contributed immensely in making our youth employable. However, it cannot be ignored that the rapid approvals of the deemed to be universities has lowered the quality parameters in some institutions. The responsibility for such quality dilution lies both with the government and the private sector and there is no argument against the need for bringing appropriate regulations to rectify the scenario.

The question remains, should the regulations encourage centres of excellence to perform better and provide adequate support to those that are not up to mark to improve their performance or put all institutions in one basket and regulate in same parameters irrespective of performance? The industry consensus is that the regulator must differentiate between reputed institutions from those that do not meet minimum (or basic) standards. Accreditation of institutions and of programmes should be the basis for such differentiation. Further, regulations should facilitate appropriate governance structure in the institutions that would allow them to effectively offer new academic programmes as per the industry and society’s needs.

Unfortunately, UGC Regulations on Deemed Universities 2010 impinges on the autonomy and defeats the very purpose and idea behind the provision in the UGC Act 1966. Not surprisingly, these regulations have been challenged by several private deemed-to-be-universities in various courts and are under review by the ministry of human resource development. There are several stringent provisions that deter a private not-for-profit entity to invest in the sector. According to a Ficci analysis, the following modifications in regulations 2010 are needed to improve the environment and re-establish the faith of private sector in the system:

(a) Retrospective application of the regulation has caused immense difficulties and hardships for the established deemed universities that have started off-campus centres or programmes prior to May 2010. More importantly, the future of the innocent students is at stake due to the uncertainties caused in the minds of employers owing to such regulations.

(b) UGC should accord approval to those off-campus centres that were set up before regulations became effective, viz. May 2010, and meet the quality standards for higher education.

(c) The regulations require all deemed-to-be-universities to seek prior approval of AICTE before offering a new programme, or starting an existing programme in a new centre impinging on their academic autonomy.

(d) Assets transfer of a deemed-to-be-university to UGC in the event of serious and continued default is indeed irrational. Instead, it should mandate such institution to ensure successful transfer of their students to another UGC-approved institution at their own cost.

The new regulations prohibiting distance education by deemed-to-be-universities is against the government’s own policy of ‘education to everyone’. Given the potential for distance education is enormous, participation by deemed-to-be-universities should be encouraged with appropriate regulations to effectively monitor the outcome.

It is our good fortune that India, at present, is one of the youngest countries in the world with over 50% of the population in the age group of 18-30 years. It is estimated that by about 2025, India will have 25% of the world’s total workforce. However, India’s public spending on higher education is just 1.2% of GDP, while the private sector spending is 1.8% of GDP, totalling 3% of GDP.