IITs go global, NRIs apply for top post

A FIRST Eight applicants are from US, New Zealand, Malaysia and Thailand

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NEW DELHI: For the first time, eight NRIs have applied for the post of IIT directors.

According to official sources, of the total 71 applications received for the post of IIT Kanpur and IIT Kharagpur directors, eight are from outside India.

Countries outside India from which applications have been received are US, New Zealand, Malaysia and Thailand.

Of the eight foreign applicants, five are from US including one from Tuft University.

A selection committee had met last week to shortlist the candidates.

The tenure of the two directors gets over this June.

The IIT council, the top decision-making body of the premier tech schools, had last year agreed on a proposal to advertise “globally” to get the best persons for the post of director.

The HRD ministry had put out the first international advertisement to fill the posts.

The recruitment will be done on a contractual period of 5 years or till the date of superannuation, whichever is earlier.

Earlier, nominations used to be invited from eminent institutions and personalities.

But the IITs decided to issue ads after the system was challenged in the Madras HC.

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NEW DELHI: In a bid to tackle the problem of faculty shortage, IIT Kanpur is looking westward and plans to open its office in the US. If the plan works out, it will be perhaps the first initiative by an IIT to have a global presence.

The new office, which will be either in New York or Washington, will help the institute hire faculty and garner donations.

The institute will put forward the proposal at its board meeting on June 1 and if approved, the office may start functioning in two months.

Initially, there will only be two or three people in the office, including a person who will coordinate with the Indian students pursuing PhD in the US. At present, the institute has been able to fill only two third of its faculty positions.

"So many US and European universities have their offices in India. We strongly feel that there is a need to have our presence at a location that provides us with lots of resources. The US will be an excellent platform for getting faculty and donations," Manindra Agarwal, dean resource, planning and generation said.

Acknowledging that faculty shortage was a major problem, he added, "This shortage has arisen because we cannot compromise on quality. Owing to faculty shortage, we are not able to offer many courses too. This has also prevented us from offering flexibility to the faculty besides hampering us from being able to form big research groups."

Since more than 50% of the faculty comes from the US, Agarwal said the US-based office would help tap prospective candidates.

"It will also act as a catalyst for raising funds and increasing research collaboration with varsities and industry in the US."
RECRUITMENT ON CONTRACT BASIS FOR 5 YEARS

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- The recruitment will to be done on a contractual period of 5 years or till the date of superannuation, whichever is earlier.

- Till now, the selection for IIT director was done from the applicants residing in the country only.

The post of IIT director in Delhi was filled after issuing ads.

HT FILE PHOTO
IITs ‘spoil’ Sibal’s egg test dream

By Ritika Chopra in Delhi

A CLOUD of uncertainty has descended on the fate of the proposed common engineering entrance test.

HRD Minister Kapil Sibal's target to introduce the examination in 2013 now seems unachievable as six out of seven IIT senates have out rightly rejected the idea. This sentiment was conveyed to the HRD ministry on May 12 during a meeting with the IIT directors.

But what's even more unsettling for his ministry is the fact that the IIT faculty hasn't given an absolute assurance to come on board even in 2014. "Introducing the test next year is not acceptable to them. But what, unfortunately, still isn't clear if they want to join the test at least in 2014," said a ministry official, who did not wish to be identified.

According to sources, the government now has two options. The first is to implement the test next year without the IITs and treat it as a dry-run (with the NITs and IITs on board) for the proper launch in 2014. As per the original plan, the single entrance test in its first edition was to be valid for all centrally-funded engineering institutes including 15 IITs, 30 NITs, 4 IITs, IISERs and a few deemed universities.

The second option would be to defer the test completely until 2014. Both options, however, don't seem too appetizing as conducting the exam without the IITs in the first year would be a big blow to a project that has been dubbed as Sibal's dream.

Six out of seven IIT senates have rejected Kapil Sibal's idea to introduce a common entrance for engineering.

IIT senate and faculty federation displeased at not being consulted before the IIT Council (highest decision making body) accepted the common entrance test proposal on February 18, 2012

The HRD ministry gave the IIT senates time to discuss the matter and submit their recommendations.

To convince the senates and the faculty federa tion, a central committee made by Sibal visited IITs. The committee faced tough arguments & the faculty of IIT Kanpur staged a walk out

Different senates met and their feedback (read opposition) to the entrance test was communicated by the IIT directors to the ministry on May 12, 2012

The second alternative is not viable either as the minister is skeptical of launching the test in the election year. Sibal had made his skepticism clear during a meeting of the state chief ministers in January this year as he felt that a change of power at the centre in 2014 might not augur well for the future of this test.

While a final decision on this matter will only be taken on May 28 after a meeting of the IIT and NIT Council, the government, as a last ditch effort, will try and meet the IIT faculty representatives once before the Council meeting.

The rationale behind the common entrance exam for engineering is to reduce psychological and financial stress on students because of multiple entrance tests and give more importance to Class 12 results than private coaching.

The IIT faculty has expressed their objection against the use of Board marks. All IITs have said board exam performance "will not be used for the preparation of the final merit list in respect of admission to IITs."
एविजेट पोस्टली बनाकर खाली सीटों को भरने के लिए संस्थान ने कसी कमार
आईआईटी में खाली रहती है सीटें
States may get direct central funding for higher education

Kirtika Suneja

New Delhi, May 20: With bulk of enrolment in higher and technical education taking place in universities and colleges supported by the states, the government is planning to fund the states directly, instead of allocating money to individual institutes.

Both the ministry of human resource development (HRD) and the Planning Commission are mulling new ways of funding the state-run institutes — which often complain of paucity of funds. Currently, the Centre funds the state-run institutes individually through the University Grants Commission (UGC) in stages, but under the new system, states would be funded as a whole.

The new system aims to increase the funding to state universities and colleges from ₹7,600 crore in the 11th Plan to more than ₹25,000 crore in the 12th Plan (2012-17) period.

"There is a consensus that state universities and colleges get little support from the Centre. We are mulling a model wherein states will be looked at as a collection of institutions — both state universities and colleges — compared with the present system, wherein UGC gives piecemeal funding to institutions case by case. We are also thinking that allocation for each university should be specified at once," said a Planning Commission official. In fact, the HRD ministry has proposed norms-based funding of UGC schemes so that there is better coordination between the commission and states.

At present, the higher education system in India comprises more than 556 universities, including 43 central, 289 state, 73 private, 130 deemed-to-be universities and close to 31,324 colleges. Around 14.6 million students are enrolled in the higher education sector and an additional capacity of about 25 million seats would be required over the next decade to cater to the increased demand.

Till sometime back, of the total colleges under the UGC purview, only about 6,000 (less than half) were recognised, making them eligible for development grants from the UGC. The rest were not recognised as they did not meet the criteria of permanent affiliation. In 2007, only 167 out of 224 state universities were recognised while the rest are not able to qualify for recognition under this section for they fail to meet the minimum prescribed academic requirements and, thus, are deprived of the development assistance from the UGC.

"More than 80% of the enrolments in higher educa-
Cloudy outlook for Aakash

The government’s plan to develop and supply an inexpensive tablet computer to schoolchildren is in a mess.

Ashok Parthasarathi

In September 2010, the Minister of Human Resource Development & Communications and Information Technology, Kapil Sibal, showcased a tablet computer called “Aakash” which the Ministry was to distribute to higher secondary school students. He said the tablet would be launched in January 2011. However, the company, ICL Info Systems, which, through a tender floated by the Ministry, had won the contract to source and distribute the computers initially, backed out.

So the Ministry floated a subsequent tender in February 2011, which the Canada-based DataWind Ltd. (DWL) bagged. This tablet, named “Aakash” by the Ministry, was to be designed and developed by IIT Rajasthan, manufactured by a local company selected by DWL, and marketed and sold by DWL.

Tests show poor performance

The Ministry then ordered one lakh “Aakash” tablets from DWL, which chose a small Hyderabad company, Quad Electronics Ltd. (Quad), through an unknown methodology, to undertake its manufacture. DWL then placed an order for 50,000 tablets with Quad. Quad produced only 20,000 in the first lot and DWL, lifted only 10,000. Of the 10,000, DWL-HRD provided 2,000 to IIT Rajasthan for detailed testing a week before the formal launch of “Aakash” by Mr. Sibal on October 6, 2011. That evaluation revealed severe poor performance. Therefore, DWL immediately ceased lifting anymore “Aakash” tablets from Quad.

Despite this, Mr. Sibal went ahead with his pre-determined launch – that is, despite knowing the severe poor performance of “Aakash” as evaluated by the very institution that designed and developed it, viz. IIT Rajasthan – and 600 schoolchildren were made to buy dual “Aakash” tablets at a subsidised price. At a per computer subsidy of Rs. 750, indicated in several public documents, the total wastage of public money on the Aakash is Rs. 45,000.

But this is not all. There is also a serious “material accounting” aspect. Five hundred tablets were given to students and 2,000 to IIT Rajasthan for testing. What happened to the remaining 7,500?

Were they also sold to more schoolchildren at the subsidised price by the Ministry? If so, how many? If not, are they lying in some godown of the Ministry or stockroom?

Case filed

There are other complex issues to be settled. Quad has filed a suit against DWL that DWL has not paid Quad even for the first 10,000 Tablets which DWL

SYSTEM ERROR: Union Minister Kapil Sibal displays an ‘Aakash’ tablet during its launch in 2010 in New Delhi. — PHOTO: PTI

lifted from it. No payment has been made for the balance 40,000 of DWL’s 50,000 order with Quad.

Then, ‘Aakash’ version 2

In its legal response, DWL has said that: (a) the supply contract of DWL on Quad was an indivisible contract for a total number of 50,000 “Aakash” Tablets, all for sale by Quad to DWL, and not involving any sale by Quad directly in the open market; and (b) it (DWL) owns the copyright of the tablet; though merely a contract manufacturer to DWL, Quad was violating DWL’s right to collaborate directly with IIT Rajasthan for development of the device.

Moreover, the CEO of DWL, Sunmeet Singh Tuli, told the media on April 23, 2012, that DWL is working on a second generation “Aakash” tablet on its own. This messy dispute has brought the supply of “Aakash” to schoolchildren — its stated objective — to a complete halt.

For his part, Mr. Sibal announced in Parliament recently that DWL had, since ceased its collaboration with IIT Rajasthan and will now be supplying the one lakh “Aakash” Tablets in collaboration with IIT Bombay! This appears to be in total contradiction of what he told the media on the sidelines of the inauguration of the World IT Forum 2012 on April 17. He said, “We have invited companies from across the world for manufacturing and many are ready to manufacture it here. Currently we are looking at the design and other parameters. After we freeze the design and technology, manufacturing will take place.” More astonishingly, despite the huge work agenda listed by Mr. Sibal, he has concluded in Parliament that “the second version of ‘Aakash’ will be launched in May!”

Questions and violations

His confused and inconsistent statements apart, key questions, issues and anomalies arise in this case.

Irrespective of the type of tendering process adopted by the Ministry for the second version of “Aakash,” DWL will get an order of 50,000 tablets per Mr. Sibal’s announcement in Parliament. This, despite DWL’s failure to meet its commitments on “Aakash”.

How much money was paid by the Ministry to DWL for the supply of “Aakash” tablets, or 50,000 or 10,000 devices? Or was it for a totally different figure?

If neither the specifications nor the vendor of “Aakash” have been decided by the Ministry as late as April 17, 2012, how can the device be available in the market just four to six weeks later, in May?

Furthermore, has DWL leveraged its knowledge of “Aakash” technology to develop the “Ultimate,” its own tablet device, now being sold online to the general public? If true, was this permitted in its contract with the Ministry? Who, in fact, owns the international patent for “Aakash”?

Delays in the launch of “Aakash” have no doubt put off millions of interested people from buying this affordable tablet. But the Ministry projected “Aakash” as a tablet for all students and school students, and this is why public monies went into providing large subsidies for the project.

Many more inconsistencies and contradictions surround this project, and space constraints prevent a full discussion here. However, from the few facts and analysis that I have presented, it ought to be clear that what we have here is a monumental mess perpetrated at considerable public financial cost in the name of a project that could have been a genuinely exciting and useful one. If it is not a mess, the Ministry, which is the policymaker and manager of the “Aakash” programme should come out immediately with a public statement clarifying this matter before Parliament and the people.

(The author is former Science Adviser to late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and secretary of several major scientific departments.)
"Dramatic" dip in Indian students opting for U.K. varsities

Hasan Suroor

LONDON: British universities have reported a "dramatic slump" in applications from Indian students as a result of stringent visa rules and other restrictions imposed on non-European foreign students.

There has been a more than 30 per cent drop in the number of Indian students who applied this year, compared with last year, confirming the worst fears of Britain's cash-strapped universities which rely heavily on fee-paying foreign students.

The Universities U.K., which describes itself as the "definitive voice" of British higher education, has protested against the changes to visa rules which it says are "putting off" foreign students coming to Britain.

Its president Eric Thomas, who is also vice-chancellor of Bristol University, has written to Prime Minister David Cameron, pointing out that new rules, such as restrictions on post-study work visas, have not gone down well with foreign students who are now turning to more student-friendly countries.

"The U.K. seems to be telling the world it doesn't welcome international students," he wrote, calling for foreign students to be excluded from his government's crackdown on wider immigration as part of the Conservative Party's election pledge.

Julia King, vice-chancellor of Aston University in Birmingham, said her university had seen applications from Indian students fall from about 1,000 a year to 650 this year. "They believe the situation is much friendlier in Australia, the U.S. and Canada," she told The Sunday Times.

The paper said other universities which reported a sharp fall in applications from India included Middlesex and Sunderland, traditionally popular with Indian students.

Visa rules have become so difficult since the Conservative-led coalition came to power two years ago that foreign students find them "humiliating," given that they often pay three to four times more fee for the same course than their British peers.