IIT-Kanpur chairman vents ire on engineering colleges

"If I had the authority, I will close down 50 per cent of them"

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: Institutions of higher education have become the playground of corrupt politicians and professors are being kicked around like football, said M. Anandakrishnan, Chairman, Indian Institute of Technology-Kanpur, on Monday.

"If I had the authority, I will close down 50 per cent of the engineering colleges as they have ruined technical education," he said at a book release function at Anna University-Chennai.

Recalling that teacher-student relationship used to be the benchmark of higher learning in the olden days, Mr. Anandakrishnan, who served as Vice-Chancellor of Anna University for two terms, said it was unfortunate that the vast expansion of technical education had been "mindless.

The engineering colleges gave the syllabus to students and functioned like tutorial colleges, he alleged. He got angry whenever he saw advertisements in neighbour-hood newspapers stating they would coach students in thermodynamics, civil engineering and other engineering subjects. "Are we producing robots?" he asked.

Earlier, Mr. Anandakrishnan released a book by former dean of postgraduate studies at Anna University P.C. Chandrasekharan.

In his speech, the author said that his book, 'Understanding the Universe - From the Quantum Word of the Infinite to the Cosmic Realm of the Infinite', dealt with the origin, evolution, composition and structure of the universe. The target audience was university students from diverse disciplines and lay readers with a modest background in science and mathematics.
PROFIT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Pick up any list of the world’s best universities and go through those names. You can go through the top 500—not just top 10 or 20. You will not find a single for-profit university.

It’s useful to remind ourselves of what most of us already know: the Harvard and Yales of the world are all not-for-profit organizations. They won’t survive a year in the absence of their large endowments, and substantial annual grants.

The point is simple, high quality higher education is not and cannot be a for-profit enterprise. This is not an ideological issue; it is merely an economic implication of what is required to have high-quality higher education. Three of these requirements are: deep and broad-based research, a good student faculty ratio and a multidisciplinary faculty ranging from humanities to applied domains. There are other requirements, but these three in themselves are sufficient explanations for the not-for-profit nature of high-quality higher education enterprises.

I wrote about this issue in these columns about a year ago. What has prompted me to write again is the news that I read in Mint and other dailies. The Planning Commission has suggested the country permit establishment of institutes of higher learning that can be run for profit. These reports quoted a Planning Commission approach paper, “The not-for-profit tag in higher education sector should perhaps be re-examined in a more pragmatic manner so as to ensure quality without losing focus on expansion and equity.”

In the related reports, I found two bits of welcome pragmatism from the Planning Commission. The first was the candid admission of the open secret that even now most private educational institutions are out to make a profit, although the current law prohibits them. The second was that private capital will not come to the education sector unless profit-making is allowed, barring the rare bit of philanthropic capital.

That’s where the pragmatism stops. Pragmatism, not ideology, should have also led them to stating that “since private capital, will (largely) not come without profit motive, it cannot solve the problem of quality and equity”. Instead the approach paper seems to be constructing a new delusion that private for-profit capital will help in improving quality and equity in higher education. Admittedly I am drawing only on these reports, and so may have missed the real drift of the commission. Though it doesn’t seem likely, given the statements that I have read, but I would be happy if I am proved wrong. That’s because this serious issue of the abysmal quality of our higher education is being side-stepped by deploying such an artifice.

You cannot fix someone’s cardiac fitness by recommending a hair transplant. That’s what this article amounts to. To address our problems in education, both school and higher education, there are just two ways ahead and both are needed. For cardiac fitness you have to eat right and exercise, there is no other way out. Similarly for our problems of quality and equity in education, the government has to invest more money and improve its performance.

Implementing these two, however, is very very difficult. The Planning Commission has good reasons to look for other paths. Getting more money for education is only possible if wasteful expenditure is controlled and economically distorting subsidies are reduced. Only through slow grinding changes on the ground can improvement happen in the government education system. This will not happen as a result of some policy or plan change.

Both the issues, of more money for education, and improving the government’s performance, face resistance from entrenched political interests, massive execution challenges of scale and complexity and general apathy.

If you were to cut free electricity supply to agriculture, you will have a mass rebellion on your hands. Which political and socially influential group is willing to take up cudgels for education? None; and that is the reality.

Governments and other bodies, have continued to make efforts (with limited effect) to improve the school system. There have been almost no such efforts made in higher education. The only steps being the setting up of new IITs, IIMs, AIIMS, etc.

Creating this additional capacity is important, but even more important is improving the governance and functioning of the 500-odd existing universities and their affiliated colleges. This is not just a practical issue of improving the impact of what is already being spent, it also involves the larger problem that unless we improve the functioning of these institutions, we will continue to churn mediocrity among our graduates by the millions. The problem is severe in the basic undergraduate courses in sciences and humanities, which are almost completely ignored by any initiative for improvement and fresh capacity creation.

The Planning Commission can get all the wise advisers, and can think through this issue far better than most of us can, if only it would not get caught in the blind belief that “for-profit” education can help in improve quality and equity of higher education.

Anurag Behar is chief executive officer of Azim Premji Foundation and also leads sustainability initiatives for Wipro Ltd. He writes every fortnight on issues of ecology and education. Comments are welcome at othersphere@livemint.com

To read Anurag Behar’s previous columns, go to www.livemint.com/othersphere
Berlin researchers test driverless cars on city streets

It's the trend of the future

Since the industrial revolution, tedious human chores have steadily been handed over to machines. Owing to this trend, the advent of fully computerised cars that drive themselves should only be a matter of time. A prototype has already been tested by researchers on Berlin's streets. They equipped a Volkswagen Passat with a range of built-in technology which allows it to see and manoeuvre through traffic on its own.

"Technophobes may shudder at the vision of speedng driverless cars, navigating through heavy traffic. But how can they forget that in the end, it's a driver error that causes most accidents? Accidents can potentially be eliminated if a machine is in charge. Their recognition of and reaction to the environment can be much faster and more accurate than a human being's. Few would dispute that congesting our roads is a colossal waste of time, effort and the environment, and that the quality of life would improve if traffic flowed more smoothly.

"All this noise, traffic jams and road anxieties. Besides avoiding other techo drivers and road rage, we will have more productive time and leisure. If automated cars that drove themselves became the norm, we would no longer have that drunk driver to worry about. Fearsome, who worry about machine malfunction? Cars could be designed to stop themselves at the first sign of suspected error. They could also be equipped with an override function, which would allow people to take over if necessary.

"Technology sceptics shouldn't forget that at present aircraft come equipped with an autopilot function, which in effect allows them to fly themselves. This hasn't made air travel any more unsafe than before. If anything, it is the contrary: it is high time the world recognised the fear of radical technological innovations.

Why cede human control?

Driverless cars— the fruit of Berlin University's research project—are being touted as the future of car mobility. The idea of a completely computer-controlled driverless car should provoke anxiety, not satisfaction. Though technology enthusiasts may point at various road safety cases carried out by the car, the question of human control is still in question.

"Without human control, we will have no need to drive, and we will be in no position to make decisions. This is a dangerous trend that enhances the joy of driving and asks them to better handle traffic, it's too much to assume that the computers will do all the work. Can we really trust our lives to machines?

"We don't need science fiction to convince us of the inherent dangers of trusting machines to the extent of ceding all human control. Computer-driven cars may reduce deaths in accidents caused by human error or inattentive drivers. But what if the computers can't respond to unusual situations the way the far more adaptable human brain can? Machines do malfunction. They can also be manipulated by the tech-savvy enemies of the car owners. In case of accidents by malfunction or design, fixing responsibility will be a tricky issue. Existing traffic rules presume humans are in charge of automobiles on the roads. When driverless cars take over, this whole system will need junking.

"Technology is meant to make life easier: That can't be equated with making humans parasitically dependent on it. While people would opt for car technology that enhances their joy of driving and asks them to better handle traffic, it's too much to assume that the computers will do all the work. Can we really trust our lives to machines?

Hindustan Times

Title: IIT experts' help to reduce noise level near IGI Airport

Author:

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IIT experts' help to reduce noise level near IGI Airport

NEW DELHI: The centre informed the HC that it has sought help from IIT experts to reduce noise level near IGI. ASG AS Chandhiok told this to the division bench of Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justice Sanjiv Khanna.
हवाई आड़े के पास शोर कम करने के लिए आईआईटी की मदद नई दिल्ली (कांस्ट्रेंट). इंदिरा गांधी अंतरराष्ट्रीय (आईआईटी) हवाईअड़े के आसपास हवाई जहाजों का शोर कम करके शांत बातचीत सुनिश्चित करने की कोशिशें जारी है। इसके रहत केंद्र सरकार ने आईआईटी के विशेषज्ञों से सहयोग मागा है।

यह जानकारी बुधवार को एडिनूर हॉटेल सॉलिटरिसट जनरल प्रेस साइंसिक सेंटर ने चीफ डिप्लोमा की विशेष बैठक में बताया गया था। उन्होंने बताया कि अगले चार सप्ताह तक विशेषज्ञों को हवाईअड़े के आसपास ऐसा तंत्र बनाना है जो शांत बातचीत को कहर माना जा सके। विशेषज्ञों ने दर्ज की ये बात को कम करने का प्रयास करेंगे, खासकर नाम के समय।

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एयरपोर्ट पर ध्वनि प्रदूषण कम करने के लिए आईआईटी से मांगी मदद

नई दिल्ली (एसपूर्णी)। केंद्र के मुख्यमंत्री ने हवाईअड़े को कहाँ कि इंदिरा गांधी अंतरराष्ट्रीय हवाई आड़े के निकट ध्वनि प्रदूषण पर अंतर्गत लगाने का तरीका है। उन्होंने कहा कि आईआईटी की मदद मांगी गई है। इंदिरा गांधी अंतरराष्ट्रीय हवाई आड़े के निकट ध्वनि प्रदूषण पर अंतर्गत लगाने का तरीका है।

मुख्य मंत्री के विभिन्न हॉटेल निर्माण और जलवायु परिवर्तन विभाग के प्रमुख सचिव ने कहा कि इंदिरा गांधी अंतरराष्ट्रीय हवाई आड़े के निकट ध्वनि प्रदूषण पर अंतर्गत लगाने का तरीका है।

आईआईटी के साथ यह विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में प्रयोग होगा कि यह ध्वनि प्रदूषण को कम करने के लिए एक स्वास्थ्य विकसित करें।
स्कूल में पिछड़ गए तो आईआईटी में नो चांस!

अमर उजाला ब्यूरो

कानपुर। आईआईटी में दाखिले के लिए अब सिक्फ प्रवेश परीक्षा में बेहतर प्रदर्शन से कम नहीं चलेगा, बल्कि कश्ता एक से बाहर नी तक का पूरा प्रदर्शन। भी परखा जाएगा। आईआईटी की संयुक्त प्रवेश परीक्षा (जेइई) अब अमेरिकी पैटर्न पर कराई जाएगी। इसमें 50 पीसीडी अंक एकेडमिक एक्ससीलेंस (कश्ता में प्रदर्शन) के होंगे, ऐसे में स्कूल का खराब रिपोर्ट कार्ड दाखिले का गणना का बिगाड़ सकता है।

अमेरिकी तकनीकी संस्थान और विश्वविद्यालयों में दाखिले के लिए कोरेटिक एटीट्यूड टेस्ट (एटीट) कराया जाता है। इसमें एकेडमिक एक्ससीलेंस को भी महत्व दिया जाता है। इसे थ्यान में रखकर आईआईटी काउंसिल ने जेइई 2012-13 के बदले प्राप्त पर मुहर लगाई है। बुधवार को पत्रकारों से बातचीत में निदेशक प्रो. संजय गोयनेंद्र थोड़े ने बताया कि देश में दो केंद्रीय और 42 स्टेट बोर्ड है। 42 बोर्ड से हर साल एक करोड़ विद्यार्थी पास होते हैं। इसमें 14 लाख इजीनियरिंग में दाखिला लेते हैं। कुछ साल में यह संख्या बढ़कर 24 लाख हो जाएगी। ऐसे में यह बदलाव किया जा रहा है। निदेशक ने बताया कि इंडियन स्टेट्स कॉलेज फाॅर्मेंट के लिए विभिन्न स्टेट बोर्ड और प्रोफेसर गेट्स और स्टेट बोर्ड के अंकों का बेटेज और मानक तय कर रहे हैं। इसका भोग जन्म के समस्त रखकर एटीट्यूड टेस्ट और अंकों के बेटेज का अंतिम प्राप्त केंद्र होगा।