

IITs Still Struggling With Students Drop-out Problem

27 Sept 2019. The Council for Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) chaired by Human Resource Development Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank had to come up with solutions for the number of perennial problems faced by the IIT management during the past 20 years or so. The Council, headed by the HRD Minister, is the highest decision-making body of all the 23 IITs, the country's premier engineering institutions.

Overview.

It was the 53rd meeting being held in New Delhi. The IIT Council identified such problems as shortcomings :

- there are 'academically weak students' at the IITs who drop out from the IIT system,
- IITs do not have sufficient financial or admin autonomy yet,
- their 'internationalisation' through renewable contracts for foreign faculty and test OCI (Overseas Citizens of India) students directly for JEE Advanced is not being encouraged,
- the system sees overlap and duplication of beneficiaries,
- IITs do little on research. They do not identify thrust areas and do not set up national-level laboratories for the same,
- the IITs do not mentor other nearby engineering colleges.

As per HRD Ministry data, nearly 2,500 undergraduate and postgraduate students dropped out from the 23 IITs across the country in the last two years. (both at the undergraduate and postgraduate level). These include cases of expulsion on account of weak academic performance. For instance, in 2019, IIT-Kanpur expelled 18 students on the grounds of poor grades, of which half were B.Tech students.



IIT students

As per the latest All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), a study by the HRD Ministry, the number of students who enrolled into B.Tech and Bachelor of Engineering (BE) courses fell by 0.05 million: from 4.25 million in 2014-15 to 3.77 million in 2018-19. More than 75 engineering and technical colleges across the country have opted for "progressive closure" in 2019. Such institutions will not take fresh admissions from this year.

The data on the steep fall in engineering admission and drop-out rates at the IITs is thus worrying the HRD ministry.

The Council, in its meeting, thus admits that there are indeed 'weak' students since they have to drop out while they are halfway into their studies in the IIT. As such, the said IITs have not achieved their objectives. They are still struggling with the inherent flaws in the system which were finally revealed in the solution proposed by the Council :

"Academically weak students, who are not able to secure the required credits for promotion to the next semester, maybe allowed an exit option with a degree programme after the second semester, rather than being forced out of the programme."

How did the situation arise

It has been surveyed that most drop-outs from IITs and IIMs are from the reserved category. Nearly 48 per cent of students dropping out of the IITs and over 62.6 per cent from IIMs in the past two years are from the reserved category.

- Quota system allows students with below-par merit being inducted into IITs,
- Due to reservations, fundamentally weak students somehow though manage to get into the IITs, but inside they have a really tough time keeping up with the pace of studies,
- Teachers are not able to cultivate and motivate,
- IITs do not examine the intelligence of the students nor develop their creativity,
- The credibility and reputation of the IITs get gradually eroded.

The HRD minister had brought up this issue in the Parliament

in July 2019. “Dropouts in undergraduate programmes are attributed to withdrawal due to wrong choices filled, poor academic performance of students, personal and medical reasons,” he had said.

The Irony

The Council assumes that this suggestion will be good for the weak student who can't cope up with rigours of IIT study. It said that those who are unable to keep pace with the required academic standards can be allowed an 'honourable' exit after the second semester. Officials say that academically weak students will be able to choose BSc degree after the second semester and leave after three years, provided they have met the minimum academic standards.

However, it becomes logically wrong to label people as 'academically weak' if they are exiting the program early. If such students are labelled as weak, then the BSc solution will be like a loser's option. The student may be reluctant to accept it. Moreover, the industry and the potential recruiters also may not give such students any importance. What's the point in getting into an IIT and getting out of it as a weak student carrying a BSc paper?

Thus the so-called BSc scheme will not be of any use. Being professional, the IITs should not have kid gloves for weak students. It will be prudent if reservation policy is given a rethink and only students with merit are offered seats. The aspirant should be good enough for IITs and avoid getting inside IITs through the reservations route because it defeats the purpose of social justice. If such selected students turn out to be weak, then there is an equal possibility that some

students who did not get selected may have been bright after all.

An estimated 0.9 million students take JEE (main) that's held twice a year. Out of these, about 13,500 get an IIT seat. Since students get into the IITs after clearing a cut-throat competition, they are presumably quality students but are not able to cope up with the academic requirements at times. It was felt they should be given an exit option rather than the entire effort going waste.

The proposal reveals that the HRD ministry does not wish to consider improving the entrance test and admission process that matches the IIT education standards so that the right candidates are selected rather than selecting candidates and later giving degree discounts to weak students.

The Council could not provide any solution to other students who could have continued but failed due to admission of less suitable candidates through the quota system. The Council did not recommend any reforms for the process of JEE selection which urgently needs some tinkering. Let there be a uniform policy for all IITs if the brand has to be saved.

IITs Autonomy

Autonomy on the lines of the IIMs under the new IIM Act still eludes the IITs. The recent Council meeting also proposed a new model of financial autonomy for the IITs in consultation with the NITI Aayog. The institutes will charge tuition fees based on actual costs (nearly Rs 0.07 million a year) from the students. Currently, IIT students pay only Rs 0.02 million per

annum as tuition fee. Moreover, almost half of the BTech students at IITs under the SC/ST category are exempt from paying any tuition fee. The institutes bear the difference between actual cost and income through their internal accruals and block grants received from the government.

The government, while following socialism principles, will provide financial help directly to the students through scholarships or "in any other manner as it deems fit". Formulae like direct fee reimbursement to students through DBT instead of subsidising them are under discussion. The IITs will not receive the block grants from the government. They will be free from government restrictions on using their financial resources.

The Council will also consider empowering the Board of Governors of an IIT to pick its members and chairperson. Currently, the HRD Ministry appoints them. IIT directors, according to the agenda, will continue to be selected by the government. However, apart from the IIT Council's approval, the IIT Act will also have to be amended to finally empower the IITs.

The council has indicated that it was open to all templates on greater financial and administrative autonomy for IITs. The institutes should be affordable for students from all sections of society. Each IIT must review the 'Merit-cum-Means' scheme to ensure that there was no overlap and duplication of beneficiaries. The council also called upon the IITs to concentrate on research. Each IIT should identify 4-5 thrust areas and set up national-level labs. Each IIT should mentor 10 engineering colleges in its vicinity. To 'internationalise' the IITs, the council felt it was necessary to recruit foreign faculty on renewable contracts rather than the current five-

year tenure.

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Thomas Cook Collapsed, Other European Airlines on Brink

A sad story of Thomas Cook: *being reported only for the sake of reporting.*



Its official now. By 23 September 2019, the 178-year-old company, Thomas Cook (TCG.L) along with a trio of subsidiary airlines has collapsed. Its stores across Northamptonshire have shut their doors. Thomas Cook branches in Weston Favell and Northampton's Abington Street have also closed for good. Two travel stores in Kettering in Lower Street and at Asda, stores in Wellingborough's Swansgate Centre and Corporation Street in Corby have also closed.

Hitherto known as a travel giant, its thousands of employees have been rendered jobless. This includes about 1,000 workers at their nearby Peterborough HQ.

Today, the grand old travel firm finds itself being put into compulsory liquidation. A weekend of frantic talks could not save Thomas Cook. Tens of thousands of its holidaymakers have been left in the lurch around the globe.

The closure of Thomas Cook and the subsequent cancellation of all its flights has forced the launch of an operation by the Government and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). It is one of the largest repatriation in recent British history. This has been codenamed Operation Matterhorn.

This repatriation is hugely complex and the CAA and the government are working around the clock to support the Thomas Cook customers. All such passengers currently overseas who are booked to return to the UK over the next two weeks will be brought home as close as possible to their booked return date by providing new flights to return to the UK.

A CAA spokesman clarified:

“The Government and the Civil Aviation Authority are now working together to do everything we can to support passengers due to fly back to the UK with Thomas Cook between September 23 and October 6. Depending on your location, this will be either on CAA-operated flights or by using existing flights with other airlines.

If you are already abroad you will find all the information you need about your arrangements to get home on this website. If you are due to depart from a UK airport with Thomas Cook Airlines, please do not travel to your UK airport as your flight will not be operating and you will not be able to travel.

These repatriation flights will only be operating for the next

two weeks (until October 6). After this date you will have to make your own travel arrangements. From a small number of locations, passengers will have to book their own return flights.”

Also Read : [Jet Airways pushed further to the brink of collapse](#)

Virgin Atlantic is one of the airlines taking part in the CAA scheme. A Virgin Atlantic spokesperson stated: “We’re sorry to learn that Thomas Cook has ceased trading earlier today and recognise the impact on its customers and staff in the UK and abroad. Virgin Atlantic is working closely with the CAA to repatriate Thomas Cook customers impacted in Cuba, Jamaica and the United States, to ensure they will be able to complete their journey as planned. We have allocated available space on our scheduled flights, and are also providing special flights to repatriate Thomas Cook passengers abroad.”

Similarly, a representative for the easyJet airline stated: “We are sorry to see the news about Thomas Cook and appreciate the anxiety that their customers will be facing now. easyJet is working with the CAA to provide a fully crewed A320 aircraft to support the repatriation efforts over the coming days.”

Besides, British Airways is also offering flights for Thomas Cook passengers returning to the UK from destinations like New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas, and Cancun.

Aviation analysts observe that the strains that sank Thomas Cook weigh on other European airlines as well. Several such companies are struggling with similar problems.

Two small operators, Aigle Azur and XL Airways, are before the French bankruptcy courts today. The list of similar bankruptcies is long: Monarch, Air Berlin and Alitalia failed in 2017, Primera and Cobalt in 2018, and Germania, Flybmi and Iceland’s WOW so far in 2019.

Today in aviation sector, there is very little left for cheer. Larger European carriers are not immune from the threat of collapse. Regional operator Flybe's sale to a Virgin Atlantic-led consortium just managed to avoid its closure. Third-ranked low-cost operator Norwegian Air (NWC.OL), which has bled cash while making inroads in the transatlantic market, somehow managed to get a reprieve from creditors last week, postponing repayment on \$380 million in debt for up to two years.

Customers can find out how to book on to the repatriation flights through the CAA website: www.thomascook.caa.co.uk.

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Jet Airways pushed further to the brink of collapse

India's beleaguered Jet Airways said on Thursday 10 more of its planes had been grounded over unpaid dues to leasing companies, pushing it further to the brink of collapse and jeopardising hopes of a new investor rescuing the carrier.

Jet had already been forced by lessors to ground more than 80 percent of its fleet. It said it had cancelled all west-bound overseas long-haul flights until tomorrow morning.

With the fresh groundings on Thursday observers peg the size of Jet's operational fleet at about 12 planes or so. At one time, Jet used to have 120 airplanes at its disposal. That is history now.

Also Read: [Jet Airways cancels flights on international routes](#)

If the size of its operational fleet drops below the 20 mark,

Jet may be forced to halt all international operations, as Indian regulations demand that any domestic carrier has to have at least 20 operational aircraft in order to fly overseas.

Jet's lenders are still trying to seek expressions of interest in the debt-laden carrier from potential investors interested in rescuing the 25-year old airline.

The lenders have so far not put in their own money. Even they doubt the feasibility of such act. Lenders, led by State Bank of India (SBI), want a new investor to acquire a stake of up to 75 percent in the airline. Initial bids were to be submitted by the end of Wednesday, but SBI extended the deadline on Wednesday to Friday. The lenders seem to have received four expressions of interest in the airline. It is not clear though, whether any of these will translate into bids and whether an investor will be identified in time to who could turn around the carrier.

Jet did not get a loan of about \$217 million from its lenders as part of a rescue deal agreed in late March. Many of the lessors first repossessed the planes. Eventually, they have begun to de-register these planes, further eroding value in the airline. All through this processes, the lenders remained mute spectators. They could have prevented it.

Once a plane is de-registered, the lessor can take it out of the country and lease it to other airlines.

Some fuel suppliers have also begun to tighten their fuel supply terms to the embattled carrier, piling additional pressure on Jet.

The airline, once India's leading private carrier, has been forced in recent months to cancel hundreds of flights to dozens of destinations both in India and overseas, leading to a customer backlash and a steady slide in its market share.

India head to the polls with PM Modi the front runner

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses an election campaign rally

NEW DELHI

Tens of millions of Indians will begin voting on Thursday to cast their ballots in the first phase of a mammoth general election at which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seen as the front-runner, campaigning on his national security record.

Voting in the first of seven rounds will be held in 91 constituencies across 20 states and federally-administered regions, amid tightened security, stepped up after violence killed seven people on Tuesday.

Pollsters say Modi's ruling nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been riding high on his tough stance against Pakistan, after aerial clashes between the hostile neighbors followed a February attack by JeM owned the responsibility of killing 40 Indian security personnel in Pulwama.

But the main opposition Congress party, which wrested three major farming states from the BJP in December by promising to waive the outstanding loans of distressed farmers, sought to corner the government on a lack of jobs and weak farm prices.

The election was open but in favor of Modi's coalition, said

most poll observers. "The gap between Congress and the BJP is still enormous, so no one is seriously thinking that Congress is going to fill that gap. The opposition landscape remains heavily fragmented."

The alliance led by Modi's BJP is poised to win a narrow majority of 273 of the 543 seats at stake, an average of four opinion polls showed.

In the 2014 general election, the party won a landslide 282 seats, securing a clear majority for the first time in decades and raising hopes of economic reform after a period of sluggish growth.

In the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, which sends more lawmakers to parliament than any other, Amit Kumar, who runs a auto rikshaw, said he voted for the BJP in 2014, when Hindu-Muslims riots in the area killed at least 65 people, and would do so again.

"But jobs are a problem here," he said, echoing government and private statistics here that show Modi's government has failed to create enough jobs for the burgeoning workforce in a population of 1.3 billion.

More than 142 million Indians are eligible to vote in the first phase, of a total of 898.9 million. Votes in the seven rounds, spread over 39 days, will be counted on May 23.

From sugar farmers in northern India going unpaid for produce, to small businesses in the south shut because they are unable to meet the requirements of a new, unifying national tax, discontent over the economy has brewed for months.

Congress, which won only 44 seats last time around, is betting a promise of monthly handouts of Rs 6,000 for the poorest families will boost its performance now.

It hopes to win enough seats to lure regional parties opposed

to Modi to back it after the election and form the government.

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The Cruel Irony: While One Pilot Gets a Hero's Welcome, the other pilot is not even named!

On the day Pakistan handed back IAF fighter pilot Abhinandan Varthaman to India at Wagah, news has emerged that the Pakistan F-16 pilot Wing Commander Shahaz-ud-Din, whom Abhinandan had downed earlier ended up being lynched by a mob in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) after being mistaken for an Indian.

According to journalist Aditya Raj Kaul, the pilot of the crashed PAF F-16 was Wing Commander Shahzaz-ud-Din of the No 19 Squadron (sherdils). He was the son of a senior officer of the Pakistan Air Force. Russian TV channel RT news also quoted another journalist Ajay Jandyal confirming that the pilot was Shahzaz.

After the Air Strike, carried out by the IAF on Jaish's bases, the use of the F-16 aircraft by Pakistan to attack Indian borders can be a huge embarrassment. According to media reports, the US, which has given F-16 aircraft to Pakistan on certain conditions, has now begun investigations on its use against India, the US would like to determine whether Pakistan has used its F 16 planes and missiles to deal with Indian military bases.

The F-16s were supposed to destroy terrorism emanating from Pakistan. That job was finally done by IAF's Mirage 2000s on Feb 26, 2019. Needless to say, the U.S. has its own ways of investigating such incidents; the FBI, satellite inputs, human intelligence, etc.

Pakistan denies, India gives evidence

After the pressure from the U.S., Pakistan is in denial mode that it used F-16 to attack Indian defense establishments. However, senior officials of the Indian Army have presented evidences of the use of F-16 in this attack. According to media reports, US officials are studying those reports. it has sought answers from Pakistan on the use of F-16 aircraft against India. The unhappy U.S. has considered it a violation of the terms.

This indeed is a cruel irony.

Pakistan has, thus, effectively disowned its own pilot. This act will surely not go very well with the rest of the pilots, soldiers and officers in the Pakistan Military. They, too, are seeing hero's welcome of Abhinandan in India along with ridicule of Wing Commander Shahaz-ud-Din by none other than its own government. This will surely not do any good to their morale.

Home Coming

Indian Air Force Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman has finally returned home. The whole country is overjoyed on his return.

He returned to India after about 60 hours in Pak. At about 9:10 pm Friday, the Pakistani officials handed over Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman to India at the Attari border in Amritsar.



However, under the pressure of Pakistani Army and ISI, the Wing Commander's release was deliberately delayed till night in the guise of the procedures.

As soon as Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman stepped on India's soil, the cries of 'Bharat Mata ki jai' resonated from the Attari border to Kanyakumari. The parents of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman along with the Air Force officers welcomed him. Thousands of people, too, had gathered on the border to welcome him with patriotic songs and beats of drums.



The whole country salutes the zeal of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman's, bravery and fondness. Today, every Indian's chest has swelled with pride, and the country is full of praise for brave soldier.

The country is seeing an atmosphere of celebrations as never seen before.

Following the return of the Wing Commander Abhinandan

Varthaman, many veterans including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, Union Minister VK Singh and Congress President Rahul Gandhi have expressed their happiness.

Many veterans of the sporting world saluted the zeal, bravery and enthusiasm of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman .

These include the BCCI, Team India captain Virat Kohli, VVS Laxman, Anil Kumble who greeted the valor of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman :

Several other celebrities on social media are tweeting the bravery of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman .

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Venezuela calls U.S. comments on Guyana dispute 'interventionist'

From the South: The Venezuelan Foreign Ministry has issued a statement demanding an end to US intervention in the affairs of the Latin American country, after recently intercepting an Exxon oil ship violating its territory.

CARACAS (Reuters) – Venezuela's foreign ministry on Tuesday

described as “interventionist and disrespectful” U.S. comments on a weekend incident in which the country’s navy stopped two ships exploring for oil for Exxon Mobil (XOM.N) off Guyana’s coast.

Each of the neighbouring South American countries says the incident on Saturday occurred within its territorial waters. In response to the event, the U.S. State Department said Venezuela had behaved “aggressively” and called on the country to “respect international law and the rights of its neighbours.”

“It is evident that the U.S. government is interfering in a matter that is not at all incumbent upon it, with the goal of promoting corporate interests closely linked to the Washington ruling elite,” the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Socialist President Nicolas Maduro has accused the United States of plotting to invade Venezuela and overthrow his government, while Washington has placed sanctions on Venezuela’s debt and members of Maduro’s government over accusations of corruption, human rights violations and election-rigging.

A century-long territorial dispute between Venezuela and Guyana has flared up in recent years with Exxon’s discovery of more than 5 billion barrels of oil and gas off Guyana’s coast. In OPEC-member Venezuela, crude output is hovering near 70-year lows amid a severe economic crisis.

Guyana says Caracas gave up its claim to the Essequibo, a sparsely populated jungle area making up two-thirds of Guyana’s territory, after an 1899 ruling by an international tribunal, but Venezuela later backtracked on that decision. The U.N. this year referred the dispute to the International Court of Justice.

Two vessels owned by Norway’s Petroleum Geo-Services (PGS.OL) and under contract by Exxon Mobil were conducting seismic

survey work in the area. The ships stopped their work and turned east after the Venezuelan navy told them Guyana did not have jurisdiction there.

When asked on Monday if there were plans for the vessels to resume their activities, Guyana Foreign Affairs Minister Carl Greenidge said the government was “in discussion” with Exxon. Neither Exxon nor PGS immediately responded to requests for comment on Tuesday, and the U.S. State Department declined to comment.

On Monday, the Caricom group of 15 Caribbean nations including Guyana – many of which have historically received subsidized oil from Venezuela under Caracas’ Petrocaribe programme – said it viewed the “interception” by Venezuela’s navy “with grave concern.”

“Such acts violate the sovereign rights of Guyana under international law,” the group said in a statement.

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