

A TESTING YEAR FOR STUDENTS, DESPITE REFORMS

From scrapping of Class X boards and setting up of 7 new IIMs to disappointing placements and an unsuccessful computer-based CAT — students saw it all

Although 2009 brought cheer to the education sector with the announcement of a slew of reforms, it would also be a year students and campuses would want to forget in a hurry.

From subdued placements and protest from faculty members over compensation to a chaotic Common Admission Test (CAT), *Business Standard's* Education team captures the year that was.

B-school final placements

The usual headline-making placements at Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), saw a drastic dip in the number of offers and average salary packages during their final placement season in the last week of February this year. While all IIMs had to extend their final placements, there was very little or no increase in salary offered to most students this year. Students at IIM Ahmedabad, known for being offered hefty packages, were offered an average domestic salary of Rs 12.17 lakh, a 31 per cent reduction over last year's Rs 17.85 lakh. The silver lining, however, had been the surge in the visit of public sector units (PSUs) as compared to the private sector every year.

As for the non-IIMs, which witnessed comfortable placements but drop in salaries, PSUs filled the gaps left by private

companies during their placements in April this year. B-schools registered a jump of 20-50 per cent in the registration of PSUs which came to the campuses to recruit students. Most of the non-IIMs accepted average salaries ranging from Rs 6-10 lakhs. For the first time since its inception, the Indian School of Business Hyderabad, extended its placement season indefinitely.

Kapil Sibal takes charge as Union HRD Minister

Kapil Sibal took charge as the Union Minister for Human Resource Development (MHRD) in May this year and categorically stated that pending bills like Foreign Education Bill and Right to Education Bill — drafted by the previous government — would be pushed forward. By finding synergies between the MHRD and the Ministry of Science and Technology — the ministry he previously headed — Sibal said that these would be utilised by his new ministry.

Since Sibal took over, he worked on matters like law to further amend the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act to strengthen the Commission, law to amend the Copyright Act 1957 to address the concerns relating to copyrights of the various stake hold-

ers and launching of a new scheme of interest subsidy on educational loans taken for professional courses by the economically weaker students. He recommended the grading system in place of marks for Class X Boards. He has also given the go-ahead on lifting curbs on the IIMs for setting up campuses abroad. The MHRD is now looking at the possibility of allowing the private sector to set up education institutions under section 25 of the Companies Act.

Yash Pal Committee recommendations

The Yash Pal Committee, headed by scientist Yash Pal, submitted its final report on 'Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education' in June 2009. The committee was formed in 2008 to study and suggest measures to revamp the system of higher education in the country. Some of the recommendations included creation of a regulator called National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) in place of regulatory bodies like University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), scrapping of deemed university status, and university status for the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) and the IIMs. Some academicians criticised the report saying that doing away with existing regulators was not a solution. Further, the recommendation to convert IITs and IIMs into universities also

did not go down with many in these institutes who felt that their system was much superior to that of a central university.

HRD's 100-day plan

The Ministry of Human Resource Development rolled out a 100-day agenda this June with an aim to set up an autonomous overarching authority for higher educa-

tion and research; making the Class 10 board exam optional; review the functioning of deemed universities; give interest subsidy on education loans taken by poor students and public-private partnership in school education, among others.

National Commission for Higher Education and Research is based on the recommendations of the Yash Pal Committee and the National Knowledge Commission and will subsume in it agencies like the UGC, Medical Council of India and the AICTE. It will formulate policies for law and medical schools, engineering colleges and technical institutions, among others.

Among others, the agenda also mentions a law to regulate entry and operation of foreign educational providers that will regulate these and let good foreign universities enter India. The minister had already directed the UGC to review the functioning of all the 'deemed-to-be-universities' and report the deficiencies within the next three months. Operationalising the newly established 12 central universities and 2 new IITs and academic reforms like the semester system and a choice-based credit system will be among the other priorities.

Destination Australia for education takes a beating

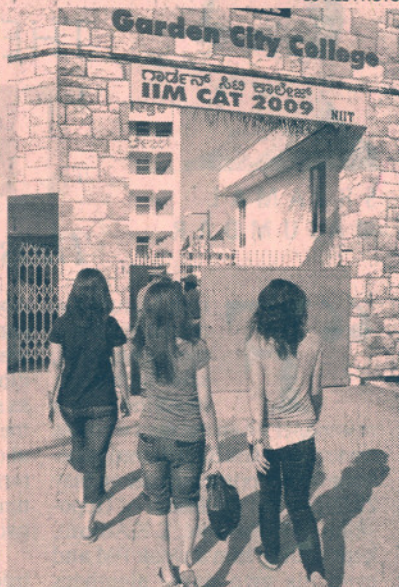
Australia's reputation as an education spot and a welcoming country suffered after a spate of racial attacks on Indians began in June and the closure of a dozen colleges till recently. In November, Overseas Indian Affairs Minister Vayalar Ravi said that 94 cases of attacks on Indians have been reported this year in Australia as against 17 incidents of assault in 2008.

According to Association of Australian Education Representatives in India, the recent attacks on Indian students in Australia has resulted in new enquiries coming down by 60-70 per cent. The country's reputation suffered further when the Victorian government shut down 11 colleges in and around Melbourne because of their failure to comply with the regulations. The closure of the eleven dodgy colleges stranded over 3000 students, most of which were Indians. This made destinations like UK and Canada more attractive to students.

Budget for higher education raised by Rs 2,000 cr

The overall plan budget for higher education for 2009-10 was proposed to be increased by Rs 2000 crore over the interim budget estimate. This was announced by the Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee while presenting the Budget in Parliament in July, 2009. The government proposed a full interest subsidy scheme on education loans for poor students pursuing technical and professional courses in approved institutes. It also allocated Rs 2,113 crore for IITs and NITs pan-India. Mukherjee said the interest subsidy scheme is expected





Students burn effigy of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, protesting the attack on fellow Indians in Australia (left). Students outside one of the computer-based CAT venues in Bangalore.

to benefit nearly 500,000 students. This is also expected to enable students from economically weaker sections to access higher education, and it proposed to introduce a scheme to provide them full interest subsidy during the period of moratorium. The scheme will cover loans taken by such students from scheduled banks to pursue any approved course in technical and professional streams at recognised institutes in the country.

The higher education budget for the current fiscal has been pegged at Rs 15,429 crore, including a planned allocation of Rs 9,600 crore. During the last financial year, the total allocation was Rs 11,340 crore. The UGC has been provided an allocation of Rs 4,374.95 crore which includes expenditure for both central and deemed universities. The provision for the scheme Mission in Education through ICT has been substantially increased to Rs 900 crore. Similarly, the provision for setting up and upgradation of polytechnic under the skill development mission has been increased to Rs 495 crore.

7 new IIMs to be set up

On 27 August this year, the Union Cabinet approved setting up of seven new IIMs in Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan as part of the Eleventh Five Year Plan. The total fund requirement for their establishment was decided to be around Rs 1,057 crore, according to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).

Of the seven new IIMs in the country, the one in Shillong called Rajiv Gandhi Indian Institute of Management has already been established commencing its first academic session from 2008-2009. IIM Rajasthan is to be setup in view of the finance minister's budget announcement in February. At present, there are seven IIMs in the country, including the one at Shillong, Kolkata (Calcutta),

Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Lucknow, Kozhikode (Calicut) and Indore. In the first phase, four IIMs at Tiruchirappalli (Tamil Nadu), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Raipur (Chhattisgarh) and Rohtak (Haryana) will be set up in 2009-10, which would become functional from academic session 2010-11.

IIT/IIM/IISc faculty protest

Revised pay hike norms laid by the MHRD led to several protests and hunger strikes by the representatives of IITs. The representatives of IITs and IIMs held joint meetings with the MHRD in the first week of October in the hope of once and for all resolving the ongoing tussle over faculty pay hike, promotion and appointment issues.

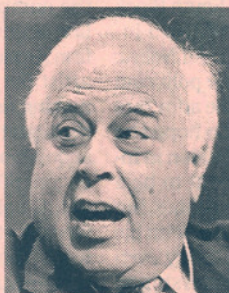
Over 3,000 faculty at all the IITs went on hunger strike on September 24 to protest against the MHRD's stand on faculty pay and appointment. However, the IITs continued to take classes and mentor the new IITs. Till the revised MHRD order was published, the IITs, IIMs, IISc, IISERs and NITIE followed what is known as a flexible cadre system that allowed them to promote faculty based on their performance, irrespective of their age and experience. For instance, a lot of brilliant lecturers and PhDs could become a professor by his early 30s. But the new recruitment rules for professors — articulated in a revised pay notification for faculty at these institutions on September 16 — put an end to this flexibility.

The faculty at these institutes now need 10 years' experience before they become eligible for professor posts — irrespective of how bright they may be. The revised MHRD order also says said that maximum 40 per cent of the

professors can be promoted to senior grade depending on their performance.

CAT & IIT-JEE

A not-so-decent placement season at the IIMs and a computer-based CAT for the first time turned to be deterrents even as the number of applications dropped by 30,000 to 2.46 lakh, from 2.76 lakh aspirants last year. On the contrary, IIT-JEE, the entrance test for the IITs saw the number of applications rise to 3.50 lakh in 2009 from 3.11 lakh in 2008. The rise is attributed to the announcement of new set of IITs, giving rise to chances of aspirants making to the premier engineering colleges.



Union HRD Minister Sibal recommended the grading system in place of marks for Class X Boards

CAT gets chaotic

The IIMs' maiden attempt to make CAT computer-based ran into rough waters with close to 20,000 students not able to take the exam in the first three days due to technical glitches. A virus named 'Conficker' played havoc with the systems and the IIMs along with their partners Prometric and NIT faced a lot of flak. Students faced problems like logging in, searching their names in the database, clicking on options and submitting their biometric details. There was a public outcry to scrap the test and reschedule the exam but the IIMs decided to go ahead with the test and assured students that everyone would get a fair chance. They also announced that an additional date would be announced in mid-January 2010 to complete the testing process.

(Compiled by Archana M Prasanna, Vinay Umarji, Chitra Umithan, Kirtika Suneja, Pradipta Mukherjee and Kalpana Pathak)