Your right to know

The 'Right to Information' act has more relevance to us than you would have thought. Used well, it can give you access to important information.
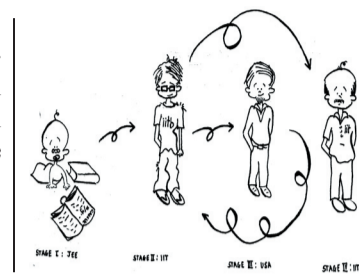**Page 8**

The lake we all love

Ever wondered during those occasional strolls if all is not well with our beloved lake Powai?
Page 4

Back to school

The number of professors in the institute, who are graduates from an IIT, is on the rise.
Page 3

Splendid performances, bold scripts mark PAF 2006

Judges suggest budget increase as incentive ■ IITB as setting in a PAF for the first time

- a report by P Prashant Pawan and Nishant Patni

THREE WEEKS of planning, fourteen participating hostels, about four thousand spectators and four days of fun. Throw in the spirit of the event and you have the pride of the IITB cult scene, the Performing Arts Festival. This year, with the number of PAFs reducing, more hostels came together per PAF. And did they live up to the expectations of the crowd!

History was challenged, communal conflicts were denounced, sensitive issues were portrayed and for the first time ever, PAF reflected on itself and on life at IIT.

PAF 2006 started off with a certain amount of uncertainty. The freshmen allocation policy was unclear. Atleast three hostels were to work together for the first time. While this meant that each group had a larger work force, it also made coordination that much more difficult.

But in the end everything worked just fine and the IITB crowd was treated to some highly entertaining stuff.

DAY ONE

Asraar: Performed by hostels 2, 7 and 8. The PAF took a step back in time to the era of the Mughal Empire and the reign of Emperor Shahjahan.

The chess board choreo in this PAF was highly appreciated and even finished among the gems of PAF. Not many people guessed the context in which the Taj Mahal would be shown. The prod itself was beautifully made and received instant applause. The plot finally revealed a conspiracy theory which suggested that the real reasons behind the Taj were quite the opposite to what is normally accepted. While some people frowned at this, it was generally felt that in the end it was a PAF script and the authenticity of the claim was not an issue.

Review

Most people felt the PAF was flat for most of the time and peaked in the end. Most things went right and a just above average rating was suggested. While some people had problems with the heavy use of urdu, others hailed it as a successful attempt.

Trivia

It was 9:45 PM. People had started pouring in when one of the huge bamboo-paper-backdrops began to fall. It was the one on the left extreme and had to be balanced upright using long bamboo sticks which had started giving in because of the excessive weight they had to support. Then someone came up with a solution; they made a hole through the middle of the backdrop and passed a rope through it. An H2 inmate, who had a knack for mountaineering, acted as the savior. He dexterously climbed up the steel structure of the OAT in near complete darkness. He was then given a rope from people down below, which he caught hold of in the 3rd attempt, and used to straighten the backdrop, all the while clinging to the structure using his legs.

The much appreciated chess choreo was performed on an erroneous board which had a black square in the left extreme position instead of a white one! While this may have gone unnoticed, almost everyone caught the emperor playing his move twice during a game of chess!

Results: Best costumes. Over-all position 3rd.

DAY TWO

Kharaashein: Performed by hostels 6, 10, 13 and Tansa, this PAF made an impression in the very first scene. The three storeyed *Aman Baag* was the first of its kind in prod, with a little professional help going into building it. The imposing *chaal* left everyone spellbound. Thereafter, lively performances by most of the characters ensured that the attention of the audience remained captured. The use of an autorickshaw drew cheers from the crowd and the *matki phod* was appreciated by one and all.

Review

The execution was near perfect. The acting and voice-over were given a thumbs up as were the choreo, lights, music and prod. Though the plot received mixed responses, most people were already willing to bet on it as the winning PAF.

Trivia

The chaal was originally christened 'Aish Baag' (and not 'Aman Baag'), and was mistakenly referred to by this name by the lead voice-over during the PAF (Freudian slip?).
The documentary that was played at the end was supposed to be played for a much longer period. It didn't happen because of an accidental short circuit that turned off the computer!

Results: Best voice-over. Over-all position 2nd.

DAY THREE

Camouflages: Performed by hostels 3, 5 and 12. The excitement started even before the PAF did. Word was out that the PAF was to deal with a sensitive issue and people were curious to see how well the performing hostels would handle it. While the PAF started off pretty well and managed to win an attentive audience, serious execution lapses followed and the lack of practice was evident. The songs with their unique lyrics were, at times, laughter inducing. The costumes of some of the dancers were alarming to put it lightly. The 'hand art' was well executed during a choreo piece but that happiness was short lived as well. The performers began to pop out onto the stage half-way through a scene much to the amusement of the crowd.

Review

The PAF left most people disappointed. While everybody appreciated the brave effort at carrying off a sensitive theme, not many were happy with the execution. Some objected to the use of foul language, which they felt was unnecessary, if not inappropriate.

Trivia

Probably the first PAF to use the F-word. The lights in the hotel were supposedly programmed to follow a pattern. Hostel 3 had performed a play on the same lines during an inter hostel dramatics event. That probably explains the large number of actors from this hostel. The lead voice-over referred to a female character as 'Miss India', which unfortunately was noticed by most people.

Results: Position 4 over-all.

DAY FOUR

Deja Vu: Performed by hostels 1, 4, 9 and 11. When people came to know that the PAF was to depict life at IIT, the popular opinion was that amazing execution and direction would be a must. And did the PAF deliver! It started off with a variant of the street play, where the story of a candidate who fails at the JEE was depicted. The story then moved on to portray the life of an IITian, who is unhappy about the way things have been going for him. At one point he chooses to end his life but refrains from doing so on learning that a friend of his had taken the shocking step, almost at the same time. He realises that problems are a part of everyone's life. The scene where everyone reveals their unhappiness under the 'red light' received thunderous applause. And when the light was thrown onto the OAT crowd, they decided that this required nothing short of a standing ovation. Instead of ending the PAF here, the script team moved the story on to bring the system and the students face to face and point out the flaws present in the working of either parties. The concluding dialogue called for a student to be a *vidyarthi,* a professor to be a *shikshak* and the institute to be a *mandir* for learning. There was pindrop silence among the crowd even as the performing hostels invaded the OAT quadrangle. Yet another standing ovation. Other aspects of the PAF were equally good. The Coffee Shack prod was built masterfully and was incredibly similar to the actual Shack. The incredibly good portrayal of the theme stood out in all aspects including music, choreo and amazing screenplay.

Review

Most students who were passing out had only one thing to say "Thank you 1,4, 9 and 11." A lot of people gave the PAF a perfect 10 and comparisons were made with the best PAFs ever. The manner in which the sensitive issue was dealt with was greatly appreciated. The Coffee Shack prod was loved by everyone, as was the mini-OAT. The attention given to detail, for instance, the missing 'f' in 'of' on the main gate prod, was remarkable. The choreo received instant admiration and the music gelled with the theme perfectly.

People felt that it wasn't necessary to wait for the results.

Trivia

The PAF was initially titled "Red Light Area". The idea was later rejected, probably because of a related story line in the previous PAF. The first run through supposedly went on for more than 2 hours and a lot of filtering had to be done.

One of the choreo pieces was not performed because of lack of synchronisation between the sound box and the dancers. This, however, was handled well by the actors and the voice-over team and left the impression that the lapse was intentional.

The scene depicting a discussion among hostels regarding the storyline for their PAF, was reportedly inspired by the actual meetings held between the participating hostels.

Results

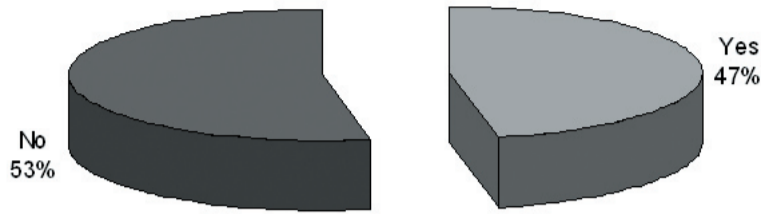The PAF won 7 trophies out of 9 and as expected won the over-all trophy.

PAF 2006 was considered a huge success overall. The judges appreciated the fact that challenging scripts were tried and lot of effort was put in. The only negative aspect was the behaviour of sections of the crowd, who jeered at the slightest opportunity. PAFs symbolise the spirit of the cult scene at IITB and the spirit of team work in general. It is the responsibility of the student community to appreciate the attempt and refrain from hooting, which only shows them in poor light.

It is amazing how each year, PAF manages to increase our hunger for more and leaves everyone waiting for their next attempt at winning it. Three cheers to PAF. Three cheers to IITB.
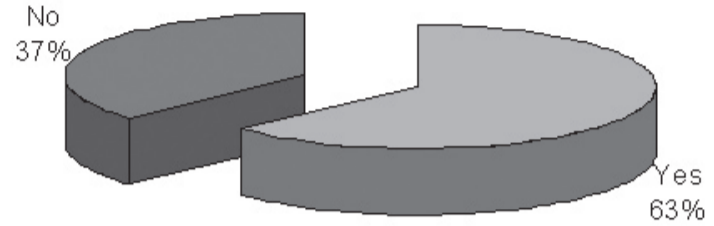
InsIghT Survey: The Student Mentorship Programme

How effective was the student mentorship programme this year? Did it achieve what it set out to? InsIghT finds out from the freshmen.
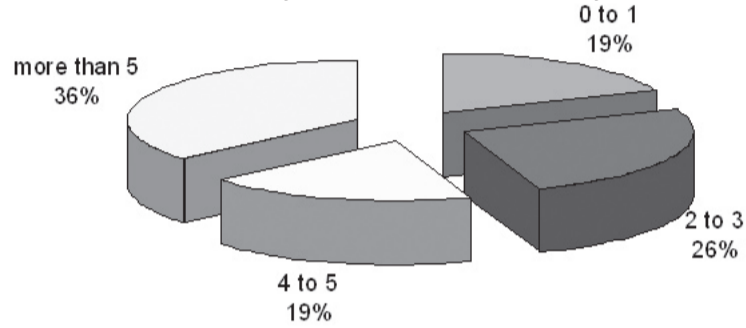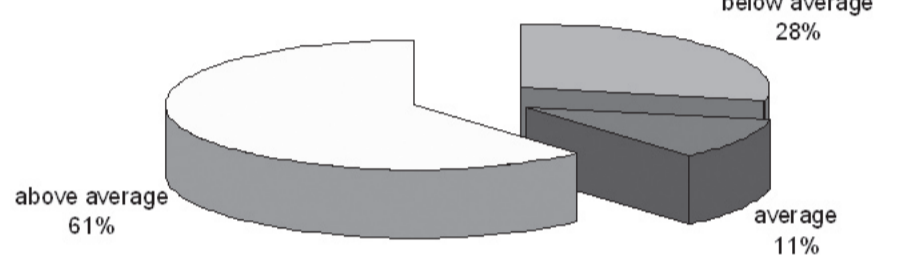
Does your mentor know you well personally?

Yes 47%
No 53%

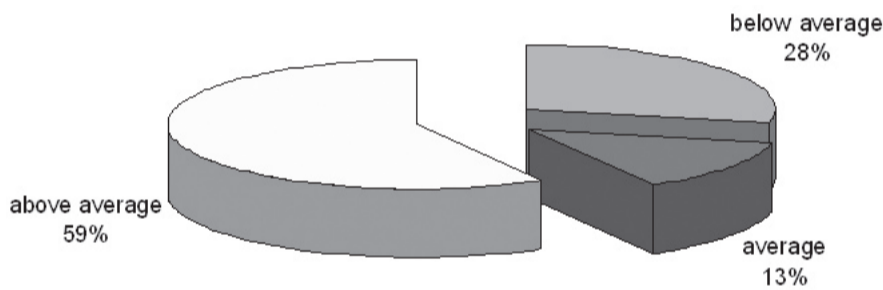**Do you have his/her cell no.?**

No 37%
Yes 63%

How many times did he/she meet you?

0 to 1 19%
more than 5 36%
2 to 3 26%
4 to 5 19%

How approachable/affable was your mentor?

below average 28%
above average 61%
average 11%

Do you think your mentor did his/her job responsibly?

below average 28%
above average 59%
average 13%

Did you ever discuss a personal problem with him?

Yes 32%
No 68%

Did you get a viable solution(for those who sought a solution)?

No 21%
Yes 79%
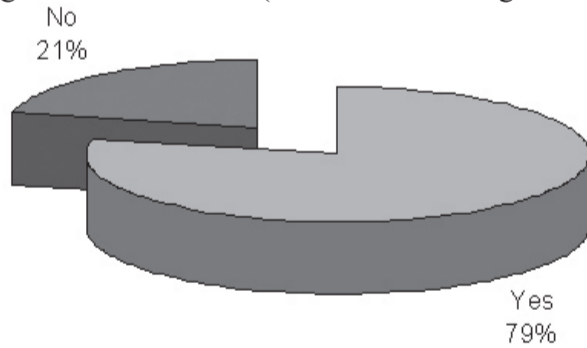
Do you look upto your mentor in life?

Dont'know 5%
No 35%
Yes 60%
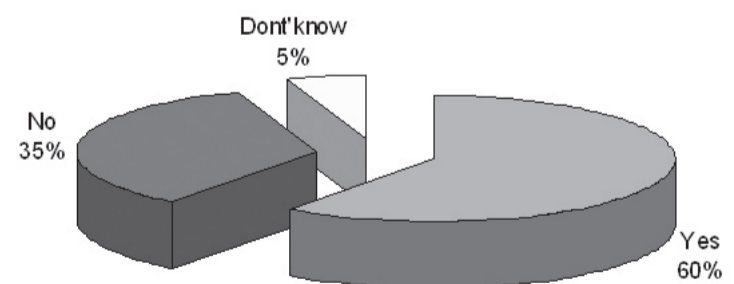
Did you find the mentorship program of any use to you?

16%
3%
45%
36%

- No, it was simply a waste of time
- Yes it was a good initiative, but wasn't carried out too well
- Yes, it was somewhat useful
- It was very useful to me.My interaction with my mentor helped me a lot
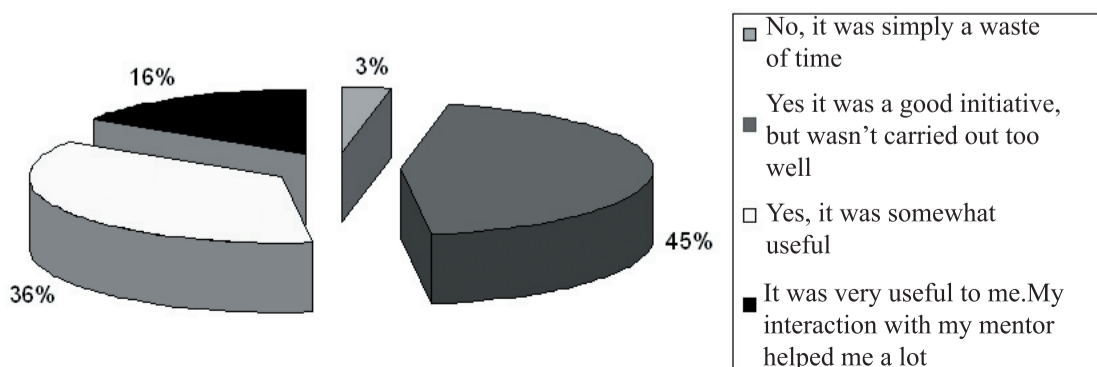
Survey conducted by:
Abhinav Dhall,
Devasheesh Mathur

EVERY YEAR a little more than one lakh students appear for the IIT JEE and about 4000 finally make it to the hallowed portals of IIT. The coveted IIT degree is rightly considered a passport to the best possible career ambitions in the field of engineering. For some, it is the lure of lucre that becomes the guiding force while for others it is the fact that IIT opens the doors to the most promising and potentially rewarding research arenas. A huge chunk migrates to different universities scattered mainly over America to further their education. Lately, there has been a sudden change with a sizeable fraction now returning to India to take up teaching jobs in one of the IITs. So the question that arises is "What makes Indian graduates with a foreign PhD (or otherwise) quit their high profile jobs, be they in the academic or private sector, to return to India and take up a desi teaching assignment?"

The two most compelling reasons for their return to India seem to be the freedom of research that IITs afford coupled with the sheer joy that comes out of pursuing a teaching career. Prof. Madhu Vinjamur (Department of Chemical Engineering) says, "After doing a Ph.D., we primarily have three options: a) to stay and teach in foreign institutes, b) teach in an Indian institute or c) join a private or national lab. My decision to join IIT is totally due to my love for teaching. I have always found teaching enjoyable and challenging and have really liked the experience so far."

Prof. Preeti Aghalayam (Department of Chemical Engineering) termed teaching as her passion and the real driving force behind her return. She says, "When it comes to teaching there can be no greater challenge than teaching IITians." Dr. Sushanta Mitra (Department of Mechanical

Homeward Bound

IIT Bombay has witnessed an increase in the number of young professors over the last few years. Freshly out of their PhDs and Post Docs, they have chosen the path less traveled. Palak and Arunabh try to find out the reasons behind this trend.

Engineering) said, "Things were running well for us, drawing a 100 k salary with all benefits and having a plush condo in Toronto. However, India was always in the back of our (my wife and I) minds. In such cases, the challenge of doing something different and innovative has always scored over the greens. Moreover, the flexibility and command offered by a teaching assignment is unparalleled. And this is where the IITs score heavily bringing some of the best minds under one roof."

Another reason that draws these young faculty members to the IITs is the freedom to work on the topic of their interest. Prof. A. Pradeep (who joined the Department of Aerospace Engineering this year) said, "I wanted to be in a job that would give me the flexibility of doing what I am good at (at least in my opinion) and not doing what I'm instructed to do." Some other 'fresh' faculty felt that the best thing about pursuing research in an academic institute like the IIT is that you manage a sponsor for any topic close to your heart. But the new faculty members, while taking a course for the first time, need to spend a lot of time preparing for lectures and other course material like assignments. They experiment with their teaching methods before relying on a single method to get a course across.

Based on their interaction with students, they have all observed a general disinterest towards

academics in undergraduate students. Prof. Madhu, who has also taught at a foreign university (before joining IITB) said, "The students here are academically good but not very responsible or committed to their studies. M.Techs, in general are more sincere. Students in US were more professional with regard to their work, simply because in the West, students take the onus on themselves to take the most out of the lecture as they pay hefty tuition fees. In India, it is different, as the student's education is mainly funded by their parents." Prof. Preeti says she is more inclined to devoting her time to her graduate students as they are more innovative and never short on perseverance and hard work. Although she does say that the undergraduates also come with brief spurts of real good work.

Comparing the current state of affairs to their own days, most of the new faculty believes that there has been a significant decline in the number of students opting for research. They do not blame the students entirely for this but believe it is the product of a rapidly changing economic scenario. By taking up a teaching assignment with the IITs they want to help the students to rework their priorities and realize the true worth of a research oriented job. The emphasis should be on providing students a proper platform, motivation and direction to help them decide what they want to pursue later in their lives. Keeping these objectives in mind, some of

them have tried to incorporate real life problems in class to keep students glued. In Prof. Pradeep's words, "Students by and large are quite receptive, but I am not so sure about how innovative they are. Of course there are exceptions. However, there are lots of distractions in campus and moreover, the job scenario these days are such that irrespective of the branch a student graduates in, the job demands skills unrelated to the area in which she/he was trained at IIT. This perhaps dampens the motivation in the student to a large extent."

The greatest challenge that the faculty face is that many of the students are in the class because of attendance rules and not because of interest in the subject. Some of them believe in sticking to the tried and tested methods of teaching till they get used to teaching. However, in the long run, they have all expressed the desire to break from conventional methods and adopt more interactive and innovative teaching styles.

With certain faculty either leaving or retiring from the institute, the arrival of this new breed of young faculty members can be considered as a harbinger of positive changes that are visible on the campus. With a fresh batch of students about to join in a few months time, we can only wait and watch how a combination of these help the Institute push harder towards being counted among the best in the world.

Palak Ambwani and Arunabh Sinha are in the Department of Metallurgical Engineering and Materials Sciences in the second and third years respectively. They can be contacted at palak_a@iitb.ac.in and arunabhsinha@iitb.ac.in.

EVEN THOSE among us who rarely ever take a look at the notice board, would not have overlooked the A3 sized color posters featuring an 'advertisement' for talks on research at IITB, in the hostels, in typical Hollywood style.

FLASHBACK

The founders of the Indian Institutes of Technology had envisioned them as centers of excellence which would produce world class graduates. These graduates would be the torchbearers of the future and put India on the world map. Owing to sustained efforts, their dream fructified some 30 years down the line. It was then, to answer the changing call of the day, that the focus shifted to a wider panorama to include research as an integral part of the system; since all major international universities have research as their lifeline.

This is the very end that the "Research is not Dead" lecture series aimed to promote. In this context, we approached many professors who were involved with the series, like Prof. H. Narayan (EE), Prof. P. Seshu (Mech), Prof. Amarnath (Mech), Prof. U.A. Yajnik (Phy), Prof. Mahajan (Phy) and Prof. R. Bannerjee (Assoc. Dean R&D).

Why Research?

Research certainly isn't the best paying option around. If you do it, you do it for the 'kick' you get out of cracking a problem; the sheer thrill of discovery. In the words of Prof. Amarnath, "One begins to notice the world around, to see it in a different light". It certainly was not for everyone, but the lecture series aimed at nosing out those coy few who have the will, yet are unsure of how to begin.

Gone are the days when jobs were mundane and inevitably pampered stagnation. Today, you have to stay at the cutting edge no matter what your field is; else, you are out on your ear. Through

JEE I JOES to the Rescue!

The recent talks in the hostels regarding research at IITB, together with their attention grabbing posters have caught the interest of most poeple. What prompted the talks? Or was it on the cards for some time now? Vivek Upadhyay and Nithya Subramaniam find out.

research you get to see what it's like, to cut that edge, because research "sharpens" your skills; and then once you've reached there it is a lot easier to stay there than it is to wade back and forth.

Why this lecture series now?

Prof. Seshu asks us not to read too much into the sudden inception of this series, since it is a part of a larger picture. IIT Bombay had started an IITB Research Fellowship Scheme to attract PhD students across the nation. Through this scheme, the faculty reached out to many students over the last 3 years. Analyzing the positive feedback, they decided to start something similar back home. Hence this series.

Why here? Or as the profs would like to ask, Why not?

The IITs are arguably the best in the country. Lot of research happens here, we just do not get to hear about it. After all, as Prof. Seshu points out, we have more than 400 profs, who teach for only about 4 hrs a week. "They must be doing something in all that free time. Now we are getting this excellent opportunity to see and to learn exactly what that includes. There is no other place in the world where you will get such academic freedom coupled with the concentrated attention of the Professors of your choice in the field of your choice." 'Research' is a broad, all encompassing word. There is no necessity for one to do research solely in topics concerning one's own department. In fact, cross fertilization between departments has always been encouraged.

In India, the research scene is quite promising,

which is apparent in the high rate of success of funding of proposals. One might argue that this is because so few proposals are received that the ones that do come in are welcomed with tears of joy. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in the US funding for research is almost impossible to get, unless it is for defense purposes.

Also, one must observe the recent trends in the field of research and consultancy. Some of the best companies in the world like GE Global Research, USA, General Motors, USA, Intel Corporation, USA, Sun Micro System, USA, etc have research centers in India. India is poised for a lot of unprecedented growth with these companies looking for specialization. In fact, there have been instances of companies looking for PhDs and not finding enough requisite candidates. In this context, Prof. Rangan Bannerjee (Assoc Dean, R & D) points out that pursuing a doctoral degree still keeps all possibilities open, like going into industry, entrepreneurship or going into academics.

Admittedly, the current infrastructure does not facilitate large-scale research, but we are moving towards that, albeit slowly. Moreover, funds for large-scale one-time investments are short; there is no dearth of money for the research work itself. In addition, there are certain areas where we have world-class facilities, but the students remain ignorant about them.

Several of the professors we spoke to made it quite clear that they have nothing against UGs deciding to take the beaten path to "greener pastures". What they do request is that they come back after seeing the world outside, to do their bit. However, they pointed out one strong reason

why one should stay back. If a student develops a good mutual understanding and respect with his/her BTP/DDP Guide, that should be a strong enough reason for him/her to stay back. Students are advised against breaking such a relationship, which is the sacrosanct requisite of good research, and start from scratch after going abroad.

What's next?

The professors voice out in unison that a UG student would get a warm welcome if he simply offers his help to any professor who is doing research in his area of interest. Besides this, there is also the UROP (Undergraduate Research Orientation Program). UROP began two years ago and is a copy of a similar program at MIT. Aimed at providing a structured approach to UG research, it has received mixed responses.

Every student is encouraged to follow even the remotest interest he has in any field, in any possible way. Prof. Bannerjee encourages all to understand that a high fellowship in the US has no correlation with the quality of the university. One must not go by the herd mentality and jump onto the bandwagon. There have been many instances of students choosing to pursue research here but these remain exceptions so far. We need more role models. The teaching methodology also warrants a restructuring, feels Prof. Yajnik and problems that are more challenging must be posed to the students. But all said and done, students need to think that India is a good place for research. It's easy to be cynical but one has to think positively and it must begin now. Even 30-40 out of 500 would be a good start.

As Prof. Sharat puts it, "Why should you do research here? There is one final reason... we need you."

Vivek Upadhyay is a second year student in the Dept. of CSE and Nithya Subramaniam is a first year student in the Engineering Physics Dual Degree programme. They may be contacted at vivek_u@iitb.ac.in and nithya@iitb.ac.in respectively.

insight
the third eye
www.iitb.ac.in/~insight

april 15, 2006

4

.leisure

Once upon a time during the elections...

Disclaimer: This article has been placed under the leisure head. No offence is meant to any individual or group. If some of you still go ahead and get offended, all demands for apologies may be directed to the author.

The week before the elections

The day was March 7, the year unknown. There was exactly a week to go before the big day arrived. The day when Bizarre Bazaar would be up again! That was when someone ran in to the TV room yelling, "Elections in a week!" And all hell broke loose. The guy had tripped on the cable and now no one could watch the match. But Alfalfa wasn't bothered. Not about the match; much less about the elections. Alfalfa was the regular IIT chap who cared about nothing and had everything to worry about. The elections were his biggest dilemma. "I'd love to contest. If only I could be spared of that wretched campaigning process", was his constant lament. "That's a reasonable request. I can't see why anyone would think I am a dope."

Campaigning

"Don't be such a dope", suggested Theta, his friend and wingie. "Campaigning is fun. It's a test of your ability to con an entire electorate into believing that you will make an efficient leader. And the best part is that if you are unopposed, all you have to do is put up posters", he continued.

"That's another thing I can't digest", retorted Alfalfa, "why do you need elections for someone who is unopposed?"

"Of course you do! You can't let some numbskull become GSAA simply because no one else bothered to stand. We should always have a Yes-No vote. Junta is pretty serious about who gets

elected as GS."

Alfalfa was quick to ask, "So does the junta cast a 'No' if some numbskull does stand unopposed?"

"Of course not! Junta doesn't give a damn to who gets elected as GS."

But it seemed that junta did give a damn that particular year. There were about 5 people standing for GSAA, 3 for TT secy and 2 for 100m-sprint secy. The rest were unopposed. And Kappa wasn't very happy.

Kappa

"I hate this! There are 4 others standing for GS", he wailed.

"Don't worry man! You write your manifesto well and I will take care of the rest", assured Lambda. "I'm pretty popular in the institute you know. Look at where I got Theta!"

"You made him CR. In a class of 15."

"Well, I made him something!"

"Never mind. Just put in a word to every group you know. The ghatis, gultis, Bansalites, Ferrari fans, coffee shackers...and put up posters at every conceivable point. Mess, wings, toilets."

"Sure. And our strategy is very simple. We'll get all the votes from our hostel. There are three people standing for institute secretary posts and each belongs to three different hostels. We've struck a deal with them. We scratch their noses, they scratch ours. Get it?"

"Yes. And what about the two hostels my four opponents belong to?"

"Oh, they'll lose to internal competition. Also, we have MI and TF on our side."

"How did you manage that?"

"Was simple. There's this chap Vega, who wants to stand for placement nom. He's an MI guy. We get MI votes by supporting him and TF votes by

opposing him. And since your elections happen earlier anyway…"

"Yeah I get it."

Kappa believed that hard work was the key to success. He made sure his entire wing worked hard to help him attain the success that he deserved. "Hey Kappa! Soap box is in 3 days. You done with the manifesto?"

The Soap Box

A manifesto was something everybody looked at. Those people who had none of their friends standing for any of the posts made a decision based on the manifestos, which were usually faithful and sincere copies of the previous years'. And credentials were an important part of the manifesto. GS Sports should've been to Inter-IIT. GS Cult should've won at Malhar. GSAA didn't need a good CPI. Everyone finally gathered for the soap box. The election officers announced the start, inviting questions from the crowd that gathered.

"Will you cancel the FR grade?"

"We want more music & dance clubs."

"Why do we have to eat in the mess?"

"Who framed Roger Rabbit?"

"Scope."

"Daya."

All came out in quick succession. And the festival heads were left wondering why the crowd thought this was the GS soap box.

The festival heads

"It is everybody's festival. We should all have a say in the election of the heads", Alfalfa decided. "Heck no! Are you crazy? I am glad that is not how it works", Theta shot back. "And I am sure it will stay that way. Unless some muddle-head

decides to mail the Dean asking for hostel representation. You don't think anyone would be dumb enough to do that, do you?"

That night Alfalfa decided he was dumb enough and mailed the Dean asking for a larger electorate. And from that year hostel GSecs started voting in the festival and media heads elections. Every year they arrived in time on the day of elections, cast a 'Yes' for everyone and went back pleased that they represented the opinion of thousands of students.

The Elections

The day finally arrived. Bizarre Bazaar was up again. And just when Alfalfa was utilizing the LAN to the maximum extent after a long time, he was violently disturbed. "Come to vote! Only 20 minutes left!", Pi begged. And outside the computer room, there stood all the GS candidates, with so much affection and sincerity in their eyes that it reminded Alfalfa of home. So he went in with blurred eyes, thought about home, sang 'Inki Pinki Ponki' and clicked on the screen wherever his hand stopped. He came out proud that his would be among the hundreds of votes, which would decide the student body for the following year.

Many more elections happened after that and continue to happen to this day. Each one of them always came up with new issues, interesting incidents and innovative politics. But that's another story.

(P. Prashant Pawan is a fourth year student in the Dept. of Metallurgical Engineering and Material Sciences, and may be contacted at p.pawan@iitb.ac.in.)

A lake named Powai

The episodic breeze did nothing to assuage the sweltering heat of the soon-to-turn-into-summer twilight. It was a clear night and the moon shone brightly, illuminating the grounds from its empyrean station. I convinced a friend of mine that it was the perfect time for a walk across the campus, which incidentally was long overdue. We set off from the hostel and made our slow way inadvertently towards the lake. If there was a zephyr that propelled us inexorably to the mass of water that is Lake Powai, I must have failed to register it.

The friendly banter got us all the way to the precincts of Hostel 8 beside which runs the passage that hugs the banks of the lake and follows it all the way up to the Devi temple. Tenebrious arches and gloomy hollows greeted us and effectively put an end to the constant raillery, if only momentarily. Not easily daunted and quite determined not to let our efforts be doomed to wastage, we drew closer together and plunged ahead. However, we soon were to be distracted by the advent of a rather dilapidated cement outcrop – the sad remains of a once illustrious, now kaput boat club. The riparian flora seemed to be a fitting background to it all. We trudged on, a little less cheerily.

Having seen the lake pregnant with rain water during the monsoons it was a rude shock to realize the extent to which the water-level has reduced. Though the air smelt clean for a good part of the saunter, there were times when we felt the need to force the pace. That a lake should be polluted in our times, especially one that is in an

urban environment is something to be expected. With a growing sense of certitude that all is not well, we finally reached what was to be the denouement of our short but enlightening walk.

The Save Powai Lake Campaign

Ever since my instructive perambulation, I have been trying to find out if any concerned denizens have taken initiatives to try and put into successful operation a system that might counter the increasingly visible egregious after-effects of years of negligence and exploitation. The most recent and newsworthy among such drives is the Save Powai Lake Team, started in July 2000 by a few enthusiastic IIT Bombay residents and students with the eponymous primary purpose. The Spider & Web Club was also formed at around the same time but with a much larger objective- that of ensuring an environment friendly IIT Campus.

The Save Powai Lake Team has an appreciable number of accomplishments to its credit. Besides organizing a number of children's nature-walks and post-card competitions (cards which emulated the dismal scenario best were sent to the Environment Ministry in New Delhi as well as to the concerned state-level officials) it coordinated the formation of a human chain around Powai Lake on 26th January 2001, with the active participation of 8 schools involving over 1000 children. It has also played a pivotal role in getting the Ministry of Environment & Forests to release Rs. 6.5 crores which will be utilized for bio-remedial measures for water quality im-

provement. The team has also worked with Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation officials to press for measures to prevent further pollution.

Powai Lake was created in 1891 to supplement Mumbai's drinking water supply and restitute the ground water resources. It once was reasonably clean and was an out-and-out great place for swimming, fishing and watching wild birds. Some of the current problems that the lake is facing are siltation, shallowness, pollution, reclamation, weed-infestation, quarrying and blasting in the catchments area, industrial activities within the catchment's area, ecosystem degradation, encroachments along the lake, vehicular pollution, and loss of aesthetic and recreational value. Due to the deplorable inflow of pollutants over time, the lakebed of the bay area is silted up with the effect that it holds little water and dries up soon after the monsoons depart. The desilting of the entire IIT bay has to be orchestrated and it is the immediate future concern of the team. It is imperative that the reversal process be set in place, for the recent floods have pointed the finger of suspicion at the blockages in the Mithi River (the result of some of the activities mentioned already) which starts from Powai Lake and runs along the Andheri-Kurla Road.

The Class of 1980's 'Legacy Project'

'Rejuvenation of Powai Lake', chosen by the batch of 1980 as their Legacy Project, is seen as a continuation of the work undertaken by the Save Powai Lake Team. One month's salary or one per cent of net worth is the guideline that the class

has established to encourage donations. Their munificent donation amounts to not less than Rs 10 million, which was handed over to IIT Bombay during the time of the Class Reunion.

"We will not stop by just handing over the money, we will also participate in the further progress of the project," said Salil Donde. The fund shall be used for the improvement and beautification of the Powai Lake fringe areas on the campus. Various activities such as removal of weeds from the lake, desilting of the lake bed, starting an awareness programme in the area, building embankments, and walkways along the lake, constructing a large gazebo by the lake, planting trees, setting up docks, deploying boats and canoes for a boat club, and allocating funds for annual maintenance of the lake related activities are planned.

What can we do?

What, indeed, when so much yet so little has been done! It makes no sense for me to jot here all the oft-repeated instructions that seem to demand assiduous efforts on our part but are nevertheless the result of sagacious contemplation. However, for the sake of consummation, I am obliged to mention a few. To employ a bromide, droplets of water do constitute an ocean. It becomes important then to start minimizing the damage that each of you personally inflict upon the environment – conserve water, energy, and yes, fuel; don't disperse trash (clay Ganeshas, anyone?) and look askance at the person who does it, or go a step further based on the severity

Knowledge knows no boundaries: The SEP

Are you fully aware of the opportunities that the Student Exchange Programme throws open for you? Read on to find out.

AMRITA MAHALE, SRIRAM EMANI

Most IITians have come across just three kinds of exchanges, that of mass, momentum and energy. However, a fourth kind of exchange is set to pervade IIT, and this one surely promises more cheer than the first three. Every year universities exchange their most valuable resources, their students, with top class foreign universities to expose their students to a whole new world of knowledge and learning and also strengthen relations with centers of learning abroad. IIT Bombay joins the legion of these universities with its Student Exchange Programme (SEP). Who are the foreign students we happen to spot occasionally on campus? How can we be part of a student exchange programme?

Shedding light on these questions, the Dean Alumni and International Relations (Dean AIR), Prof. Pradipta Banerji spoke to InsIghT about the work done by his office in this regard. IITB collaborates with various foreign universities through the Dean AIR's office under which we play host to a large number of students either wishing to pursue a degree course here or as part of their curriculum requirement to spend a se-mester/year outside their country of education. However, the fact is (albeit a less known one) that this is a two-way process!

Students from IIT Bombay can also avail of such student exchange programmes. The targeted students are mostly those pursuing their Masters' Degree, doctoral degree (Research Scholars) and in some cases, Dual Degree 5th Year students. B.Tech students are currently not a part of this SEP. The reason cited for this is that B.Tech students already have a very rigid, demanding curriculum and putting this as an additional requirement would be asking for way too much.

While we have had foreign students on campus for a long time, IITians are just about to make their debut on the SEP scene. The Department of Mechanical Engineering has collaborated with Purdue University for the exchange of students for one semester. An industrial internship following a semester at the university will enable two students to partially finance themselves. Two third year students have already been chosen to be IIT's first student ambassadors abroad. The Department of Chemical Engineering is also set to follow suit.

Exchange programs are bridges that bring together students of different cultures and provide exposure to an alternate student life. Also notable is the existence of very different curricula in IIT and universities abroad. A second year Purdue student, for example, gets to choose from a vast number of options – any five technical courses and any five non-technical courses over one year. This gives the student the responsibility to make a well-informed choice and explore new areas and combinations. This would, however, raise quite a few eyebrows in IIT. Purdue also has a system of continuous evaluation through assignments (which are strictly NOT to be copied!). A semester at such a university is bound to be quite an eye-opener for an IITian.

IIT, of course, looks at the SEP in a more holistic light. Student exchange is just one component of lasting ties with top-class foreign universities. In addition, IIT Bombay also plays host to a large number of faculty coming in to spend time with research-related activities for durations varying from 2 weeks to over a semester. In the past we have had 2 Nobel laureates in Chemistry visiting us: Prof. Alan MacDiarmid and Prof. Hartmut Michel. As Distinguished Guest Professors at IIT Bombay, they shall be spending at least 2 weeks every year at IIT Bombay interacting with our faculty and research groups.

Prof Banerji adds, "The primary aim of IIT Bombay collaborating with foreign universities is to increase the visibility of our research work on the world scene. We undoubtedly have amongst the best brains in the world and the synergistic relationships of these brains with the research facilities available in foreign institutions would enhance our research capabilities and culminate in IIT Bombay being recognized as a premier research institute as well."

IIT Bombay's Student Exchange Programme could be one of the first steps towards an overhaul of the IIT system. Though it would be slightly quixotic to expect the SEP to revolutionize the education system, no one can deny that it's a welcome break from the monotony of IIT education. Three cheers for the SEP!

The Institute Bodies: A deeper scrutiny   .freelance

Is the structure of the institute bodies an efficient one? Does it ensure accountability? A closer look throws open a lot of questions.

AMIT GHORAWAT, RISHABH GOEL

Independent Bodies – Unaccountability in the guise of independence!

Dependent Bodies – Inefficiency in the name of accountability!

The "independent" bodies of the institute (Mood Indigo (MI), Techfest, E-Cell, Insight, Awaaz, Unnati) supposedly have a free license to do whatever they wish to, without any sort of accountability to the students of the institute. Is that the reason why they were made "independent", so that they cannot be questioned?

And are the "dependent" bodies totally accountable? Except the elections there are no checks on the General Secretaries (GSs). Unfulfilled promises, repeated election manifestoes – are these not signs of an inefficient and unaccountable system? Claiming accountability on the basis of elections has led to the propagation of an inefficient system which doesn't always ensure that the best people are selected.

The team selection of these "independent" bodies has no officially recognized procedure as opposed to the Institute "dependent" bodies (which are deemed to be accountable because the entire student body elects them). This is often used as an argument by the Overall Coordinators's (OC's) of the "independent" bodies to justify that their Core Group Members (CGs)/Managers etc are not accountable to the students. As a result, students are not supposed to question whether any CG/Manager is doing his work in the right manner. "That is an internal team matter". Insight too has had a lot of team problems in this last year. But can anyone question the actions of their editorial board or even the chief editors?? Of course not. After all, the people didn't elect them, did they?

However, it mus be noted that there are proper and set guidelines for the selection of Independent Body (IB) Heads (closed electorate and open candidature). As far as CGs and Managers are concerned, the outgoing team has a major role to play and this certainly ensures a better system of checks than what happens in the "dependent bodies". The outgoing team closely follows the work of the new OCs and CGs/Managers and also intervenes when needed. For instance, on two occasions in the last few years, particular CGs were temporarily sacked with intervention from old teams. In another IB, ex-heads pulled up the slacking current heads. Who checks the GSs? How are they any more accountable to the student community than the IB heads?

This brings us to the issue of restricted electorate elections that have been set up for electing the heads of these "independent" bodies. This supposedly gives them the legality of having been elected by students. If that was the case, why aren't the GSs elected in a similar fashion? But that is a different case, isn't it? The GSs are leading "dependent" bodies not "independent" ones.

A restricted electorate ensures less politicization of the election procedure. Do you hear of 'dirty politics' even half as often in the IB selection as you do during the GS elections? The candidature is however open. There have even been cases where more than one person from the outgoing team has contested these IB elections. If we look at say the institute cultural council, hasn't the outgoing council seen the work of potential candidates (for secretary posts) more closely than anyone else? One of the reasons that Institute secretary post has lost some of its gleam is the selection procedure by open elections which doesn't give due importance to one's contributions in the past and doesn't always ensure the selection of the most able candidate.

These "independent" bodies don't have any kind of regulation on where they spend their money. There might be arguments that since they get their money from sponsorships, they should have the "independence" to choose where they want to spend it. But is this concept being exploited by these bodies to get away with whatever they wish to? If everything was so hunky-dory, why do CGs/Managers need to get coordinators to fill in fake petty cash forms? Now, this is not to suggest that they are up to mischief, but only to point out that they get away with such stuff year after year because they are not accountable to anyone.

There is a substantial amount of financial accountability in the IBs. While all IBs have restricted hard earned budgets (out of which they pay 30% to IIT), dependent bodies get money on a case by case basis with no cap on the total funds. There is a natural tendency in most IB teams to be more sensitive and thrifty about budgets. Due to an absence of scarcity of funds, "dependent" bodies may not always make the most judicious use of their resources.

These are just a few of the many pertinent questions that have been debated over but no solutions have been proposed so far. Some of the solutions that we think can work are:

Selection Procedures
·Institute Secretaries/ CGs/ Managers: All should be selected by the outgoing team (+ some other relevant people if needed).
·IB Heads: The current restricted electorate needs to be amended to make it more relevant to the position and to have a structure such that there is an equal opportunity for deserving candidates from outside the team.
·GSs: A sensitive issue! A restricted electorate (essentially, more informed people voting) will ensure fairer selections.

Accountability
·GSs and IB Heads: Will be accountable to a board comprising of ex- and current GSs and IB heads. This board will not infringe upon the executive powers of the bodies but can give strong recommendations/suggest course of action to the DoSA when needed.
·Vision: What is the purpose of these bodies? To conduct bigger fests/ more inter-hostel events? Or to develop and spread cult, tech, entrepreneurship, social work among students (both within and outside the institute). There needs to be a mission statement for each body which should be made public by the above mentioned board.
·Plan of action: A comprehensive plan of action (including details of budgets) to be submitted for review to the board by each of these bodies. Any non-adherence should be questioned and appropriate action should be taken.

The entire purpose of this article is not to question the motivation of the students involved in these student bodies. We fully respect their efforts and are sure that most of them work because they are passionate about it. These differences between "dependent" and "independent" bodies need to be resolved for better organization and smoother functioning. An unbiased system of checks is essential to ensure accountability and greater efficiency. Unnecessary politicization needs to be curbed and people should have faith in the selection procedures. IIT Bombay has built a rich tradition of extra-curricular activities which is envied by colleges all across the nation. The kind of passion that people have for their work should ensure that they also put their best efforts to pass the responsibility to the best hands possible.

This article stemmed out of several informal debates between 2 wing mates with different backgrounds. One of them being an ex-Institute Debating Secretary and GC Nominee. The other being an ex-Mood Indigo CG and OC.

Amit Ghorawat and Rishabh Goel have held the posts of OC, Mood Indigo and Institute Debating Secretary respectively. They may be contacted at ghorawat@ee.iitb.ac.in, rishabhgoel@iitb.ac.in.

From the invigilator's desk...

MOST IIT students are at an IIT because of some exam or the other. JMET, GATE, JEE, CEED, JAM. These exams are larger than life and have become monsters, which have started to consume the establishment that created them.

Most students have great faith in these exams. Ever wonder why? One reason could be that there is not too much that they challenge themselves with after getting into IIT that they can feel too good about, so they keep on and on about how great the exam was which justifies their position. It's the same with faculty. Since there is not too much we are able to do with students and academics at IIT, all we are left with is to defend the great exams that we set and conduct (very, very professionally, I must admit).

Now I'm not saying anything negative about one who makes it through, say, a JEE. I'm one of those who scraped through all those many years ago, and as anyone who's had an upma or even a fried alu sabji knows, those scrapings at the bottom have that special flavour and texture that the main thing lacks. But it is true that students at IIT are more 'exam oriented' than is good for them. So are faculty, but more about that later.

About the way these great national exams affect the young psyche of the nation, I leave more able thinkers to analyse.

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On observing the exam scene here at IIT,

even considering exams qua exams, here are a few thoughts. It is common to hear the cream ask invigilators (who they know are the same individuals who have set these papers and who are responsible for grading them), questions like "What do you

NR eye
by
Prof. Narayan Rangaraj

mean by …", "Am I supposed to …", "Is it enough to …". In any university exam, or JEE or GRE or any other exam, such queries would be unthinkable and the candidate would be told to leave the hall immediately. Why do they happen at IIT?

An application of game theory in this context is how much information the instructor should give away in the pre-exam time (the tutorials, the class notes, the discussions on syllabus and 'important' questions) and during the exam, without making the exam itself a futile one. Other optimization problems an instructor faces are on how to conduct an exam. Closed book, open book, open notes, take home, group evaluation? All these have nuances of pedagogy which are almost meaningless in some sense, but which we faculty worry a lot about.

A depressing sign of exam mentality is photocopied notes read on the way to the exam hall by bleary eyed students and cheerfully

left behind after the exam. You can almost hear the mental eraser go swish-swish over the student's mind, wiping it clean of all this unnecessary junk that he/she was forced to put in there for the sake of the exam. Puts instructors in their places, let me tell you, to see the signs of years of development in a field of study so casually discarded when the immediate purpose is over. I still have some undergraduate notes and almost all of my graduate study notes, because they were hard earned. Even if we are not half as good as our teachers, let us say, I think there is something wrong with a system, which casualizes knowledge to this extent. What is even more sad is that even this is actually available to only a few in the country, in institutions where there are some faculty (even if not half as good as they ought to be), to teach students.

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Some other reflections on exams from an exam invigilator's viewpoint. Over the years, I have spotted at least six different ways of twirling pencils or pens on the wrist, palms and fingers. This is what many do while thinking about something, but there is such artistry in it that I am often mesmerized for minutes on end, and surreptitiously try it later, only to fail. Do they teach these things somewhere in JEE classes somewhere? I want to enrol.

From staring at students' faces while invigilating exams over the years, I can confidently vouch for one social trend in one species, the Great Indian Male, at least the

subspecies the Great Indian IITian Male. Which is that the pure moustache is more or less extinct, by a process of natural selection or otherwise. The moustache used to be almost an Indian uniform in my days, and if not of twirlable length, people would take pains to at least develop a decent one. Now, there are a few bearded guys, a few unshaven guys, and a majority of clean shaven men. No pure moustache. What happened? Liberalization post 1991 and shaving cream ads? That must be it.

Lastly, it is mentally taxing to invigilate for three hours or even two. The bright spot in our dull little lives in those hours is the appearance of the tea man and looking to see whether you get one meduvada and one batatavada that day or two batatavadas. I must admit to a faint feeling of guilt that we get to eat while tens of students are sweating it out (or not). I see that they are otherwise engaged and all that, but I do admit to gulping down the tea and chomping down the vadas a little furtively. Although it may disturb the peace, I sometimes feel that there is a good business opportunity here. If I were to take a canister of tea and go down the aisles whispering 'chai', sales would be brisk in the exam halls. But the authorities would blow a fuse for sure, so let's not even think about it.

Good luck to all in the coming exams and be kind to your invigilator.

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"The amount of policing a professor can do is limited"

The article by Rishi Jajoo in the previous issue, caught the attention of professors and students alike. A few professors had important observations to make.

Responses to the article: IIT Bombay, An Outsider's Perspective (InsIghT issue dated 05/02/06)

PROF. C AMARNATH
Mechanical Engineering Department

"I wonder whether there is anything new in his (Rishi Jajoo's) observations. We may take exception to some of the statements of Sri Jajoo but his observations - though based on a small sample size and gathered during a short stay – do reflect to a certain extent the gradual degradation one (students inclusive) witnesses. This is how things have been for quite a large number of years since as somebody put it 'in our country a degree is sought for employment'. All the stake holders at IIT are responsible for this state of affairs. All of us at IITB have found our 'comfort zones' and so a status quo prevails and will prevail as we do not seem to possess the will to effect changes."

PROF. U.A. YAJNIK
Physics Department

"As an instructor who taught Rishi Jajoo, I am puzzled by his opinion of the way courses are taught. The course I taught was an advanced Physics elective and he seems to be unaware that anywhere in the world he will encounter the same abstract approach. The evaluation did include self-study projects and oral presentations so he cannot complain on that count. I think he is

voicing not only his own opinion but the perception of the typical IIT student as well. Otherwise one semester and exposure to one Department would not be enough to make such sweeping statements about teaching at IIT as a whole.

JEE was meant to select out students with clear and original thinking, capability for abstraction and generalisation even when they may be slow. Now with extended JEE question banks it has become a game of memory and speed. The kind of students we get although capable of hard work do not always match the profile required for an advanced training in higher engineering and sciences which necessarily have abstraction in teaching. Also the training is not aimed entirely at the industry job market as the original name 'Western India Higher Technological Institute' may suggest. Thus the training at IIT is also meant to lead to academic careers. The category of students ready for the latter option has reduced greatly due to intense pressure on JEE.

The faculty has a continued internal discussion, often blaming students of insincerity, but sometimes emphasising the need for change in teaching methods and contents. There are attempts time and again to bridge the gap between faculty and students by direct discussion. Hopefully small continuous changes will keep the system from going completely off track.

The observation that students resort to dishonest means and professors do not care about it is

more serious. But it should be realised that the amount of policing a professor can do is limited. To be safe I have stopped giving the same assignment to the whole class. It is bound to result in copying. As for students the dishonesty may point to the fact that they do not have the profile for whom the higher technology course curriculum is designed. So they look for easy ways out. The discussion 'why I am at IIT' started by Profs. Agashe and Dhandhere may help in bridging the gap in perception of what the IIT education is supposed to achieve."

**PROF. NARAYAN RANGARAJ**
Mechanical Engineering Department

"The picture Rishi Jajoo paints is quite a grim one, of uncaring faculty who do not challenge students, of professors who are too lazy to police students and who dish out mediocre lectures, and of students who are too lazy to follow basic principles of academic integrity and who are taking the easy way out.

Based on my experience in four universities that I have spent at least some time at, apart from IIT-B, I feel that basic integrity in general cannot be achieved through the stick alone. It just takes too much out of one emotionally and physically, if I have to suspect each assignment and each submission. A code of honour that students agree to follow and self regulation is what works. Even with this, if there is an error of judgment

and there is wrong-doing, such as plagiarism in an assignment (a minor crime compared to outright copying), students in other places accept reasonable punishment and get back to studying after a semester of suspension or whatever the university rules are. Here, things seem to be different and we would rather pretend that the problem does not exist. Despite that, the students in Rishi's opinion, are complex humans with potential, who are worth nurturing and encouraging to higher levels of achievement.

On the other hand, Rishi has obviously not given faculty the credit for being similarly aspirational, complex individuals who are trying to work in a system. All professors were students once and the younger ones, not that long ago. All students are also adults and there is actually a mutual role that each plays in encouraging the other. If a young faculty member comes in and faces the type of student class that he has described, unless that person is (a) thick skinned (b) energetic (c) brilliant in the subject and (d) very good in communication, he or she will hardly make a dent in the scene. In a couple of years, the edge is dulled. Faculty do ponder quite a bit on their strengths and failings as teachers and I agree that there is plenty of room for improvement. I was looking for some evidence that students are similarly questioning their role in this whole enterprise. I didn't get that feeling from the article."

InsIghT's Crossword
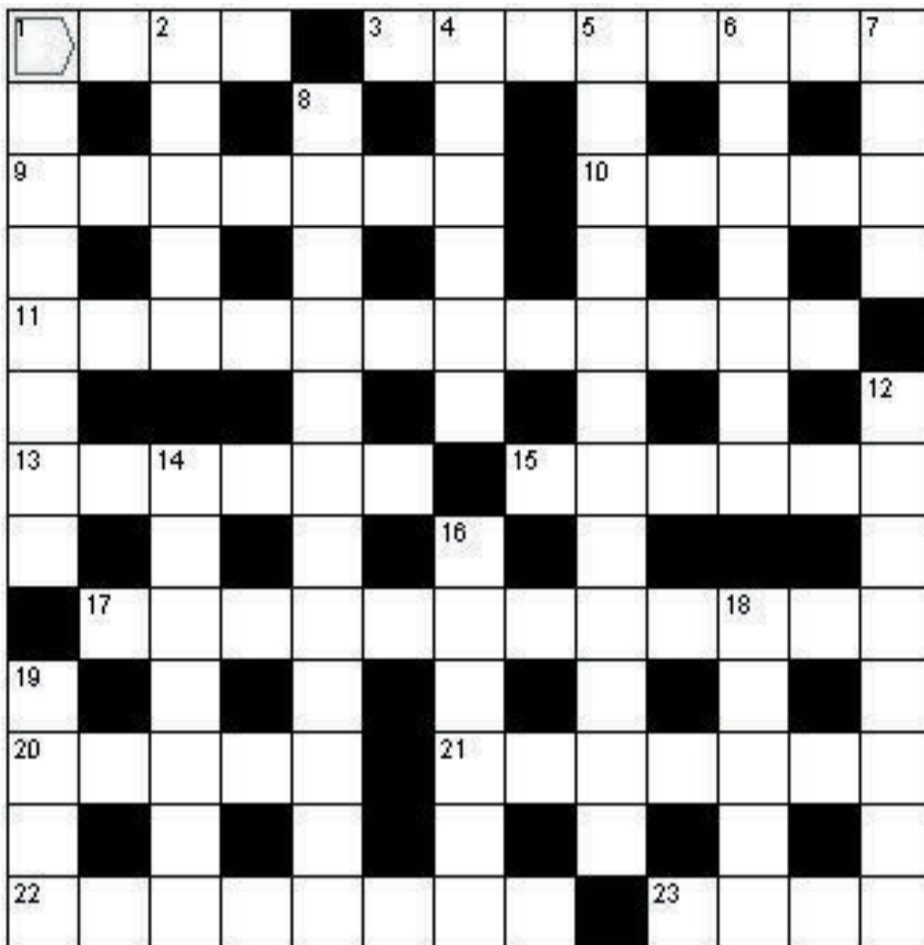
EVER SINCE a particular issue of InsIghT two years back, came out with a 'Craptic' crossword, we've constantly received suggestions to start off a regular crossword column. We finally decided to give it a try. Unlike the earlier crossword where all the clues led to words within and related to the institute lingo, this one's a good ol' cryptic crossword. What we need now is your feedback. Should we stick to this serious(?) version or would you rather find *junta*, *dayamax* and *scope* in those boxes? Do write to us. Before we bore you anymore, go ahead and crack those clues!

ACROSS

1) Sweetheart went back in nonsense babble (4)
3) Confused the Asian leading to abnormal loss of strength (8)
9) In a can, these are rather crowded (7)
10) Beautiful woman in pseudonym phase (5)
11) Breaking that split is awe-inspiring (12)
13) Slender comedian at an aromatic evergreen tree (6)
15) Gentle wind in macabre Ezekiel scenario (6)
17) Thread hypothesis describing elementary particles as 1-d objects (6,6)
20) Fibbing stretched out (5)
21) Dye Neil strangely, impoverished (7)
22) In sad surroundings, I rode thundering down the alley (4,4)
23) Surrounded by the heart of diamides (4)

DOWN

1) Station social dancing played on a diamond (8)
2) Gave birth to the Royal Navy in the Bank of England (5)
4) Swelters in gym suit (6)
5) Ah, freed Chink made a cloth to sneeze into (12)
6) I, imbued by omen in the North-East, am a candidate (7)
7) Pain sounding like a Hindi one (4)
8) Filing letter turned into a part of the hand (6,6)
12) Misty glanced, showing childlike simplicity (4,4)
14) Intrude tastelessly into something unattempted (7)
16) Ana dug dishevelled in African country (6)
18) First off an elevated platform leading to aversion (5)
19) Add to a positive quantity (4)

Down: 1.Baseball 2.Borne 4.sweats 5.handker-chief 6.nominee 7.ache 8.littlefinger 12.dewyeyed 14.untried 16.uganda 18.odium 19.plus

Across: 1.babe 3.asthenia 9.sardine 10.nymph 11.breathtaking 13.laurel 15. breeze 17.stringtheory 20.lying 21.needily 22.sideroad 23.amid

Solutions:

07

Questech
- by Varun Kanade and Shweta Shah

Another Questech. Another round of fun and food for thought.
Waste no time and start off with this issue's questions. As usual early bird entries will be mentioned in the next issue. And the real early ones might get coffee shack treats ;)
Mail all entries to shweta@iitb.ac.in and varun@cse.iitb.ac.in.

The cheating group

In an examination hall, 'n' students are sitting as per their roll numbers, in a row. Each time a pair of neighbouring students try to cheat, their positions are interchanged. Is it possible to reach the original arrangement of students after a set of '2n+1' cheatings?

Candy problem

There are two piles of candy, one with 15 pieces and another with 30 pieces. The deal is to eat all the pieces of candy in one pile and divide the other pile into 2 piles, as per the player's choice. The player who makes the last move wins. Is it possible to have a winning strategy for this game? If yes, outline the strategy. If not, prove it is not possible.

The game of money

Alice and Bob are playing a game of coins. There is a pile of 2006 coins. Alice and Bob play alternately. In each move they can pick up 1 or a prime number of coins. The person finishing the stack of coins wins. They toss a coin to decide who should play first. Alice wins the toss. Should she break the pile, or pass over to Bob?

Intergral lattice

Can you label a three-dimensional infinite lattice with positive integers so that each point has an integer which is the mean of its neighbours? In how many ways can you do this?

A sitter (only for fun)

The son of a professor's father is talking to the father of the professor's son, and the professor does not take part in the conversation. How is this possible?

Understanding Deja Vu

Each one of us without exception has experienced the feeling atleast once. But how does it work? P. Pawan tries to find out.

There are times when you could swear that you knew a particular sequence of events would happen the way they did. You had no clue how at that time, but you always dismissed it as 'Deja Vu'. But what is this thing anyway? There are more than 40 theories as to what déjà vu is and what causes it, and they range from reincarnation to glitches in our memory processes. In this article, we'll explore a few of those theories to shed some light on this little understood phenomenon.

Divided Attention (Cell-phone Theory)
When we're on a cell phone and driving, our attention is divided. We subliminally take in what's around us but may not truly register it consciously. Then, when we are able to focus on what we are doing, those surroundings appear to already be familiar to us even when they shouldn't be.
With this in mind, it is reasonable to see how we might walk into a room for the first time, perhaps while talking to a friend, and experience déjà vu. It would work like this: before we've actually looked at the room, our brains have processed it visually and/or by smell or sound, so that when we actually look at it we get a feeling that we've been there before.

Hologram Theory
Dutch psychiatrist Hermon Sno proposed the idea that memories are like holograms, meaning that you can recreate the entire three-dimensional image from any fragment of the whole. The smaller the fragment, however, the fuzzier the ultimate picture. Déjà vu, he says, happens when some detail in the environment we are currently in (a sight, sound, smell, etc.) is similar to some remnant of a memory of our past and our brain recreates an entire scene from that fragment.

Dual Processing (or Delayed Vision)
Another theory is based on the way our brain processes new information and how it stores long-term and short-term memories. Robert Efron tested an idea at the Veterans Hospital in Boston in 1963 that stands as a valid theory today. He proposed that a delayed neurological response causes déjà vu. Because information enters the processing centers of the brain via more than one path, it is possible that occasionally blending of information might not synchronize correctly.

Efron found that the temporal lobe of the brain's left hemisphere is responsible for sorting incoming information. He also found that the temporal lobe receives this incoming information twice with a slight (milliseconds-long) delay between transmissions - once directly and once again after its detour through the right hemisphere of the brain. If that second transmission is delayed slightly longer, then the brain might put the wrong time-stamp on that bit of information and register it as a previous memory because it had already been processed. That could explain the sudden sense of familiarity.

There are many more theories like precognitive dreams and memories from other sources. It was found in many cases that a certain number of people had dreams which bore resemblance to events that happened later in their life. Although déjà vu has been studied as a phenomenon for over a hundred years and researchers have advanced tens of theories about its cause, there is no simple explanation for what it means or why it happens. Perhaps as technology advances and we learn more about how the brain works, we will also learn more about why we experience this strange phenomenon.

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april 15, 2006

The Right to Information Act

Vinod Bolini gives an insight into the relevance of the act to IIT Bombay.

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."
-- Edmund Burke

HAVE YOU ever wondered how much money was spent on renovating the mess in your hostel? Or how much a Professor gets paid? Or how many dustbins there are on campus?
Thanks to the "Right to Information Act, 2005", you can now find out.

For a democracy to function, the people need to know about the workings of the government. This need is enshrined in the Constitution, in Article 19; stating clearly the right to access information about the workings of the Government and Public Institutions. Then what has changed, all of a sudden? The act gives you a the power to excercise that right. The act gives the Citizen a fair chance to excercise his intelligence in evaluating his representatives. The landmark act laysout clear guidelines for the dispensation of information in a time bound manner.

So what's in it for you? Firstly, this means that you can find out or verify matters that were hitherto

are, you can employ the provisions of the act, and find out. And make your case clear.

But what the RTI gives you is more than merely the power to find out. It gives you the power to invoke action. If you think that an important matter is being neglected, then you can very well incite the authorities into action, by asking for a report on the status of the matter. For example, if a leaking roof in your hostel isn't getting fixed, you can find out about the status of the complaint, and the queue of complaints, and in fact how many days the complaint has gathered dust on each desk. And the authorities are obliged to own up to the truth.

Why is this relevant to IIT Bombay? Well, firstly, we are government organisation; and inspite of it not being a democracy per se, there is no doubt that the authorities and administration are accountable. And this is the tool, by which can excercise our vigilante spirits. This is how we can make our opinions intelligent and informed. This is how we can ensure that justice is done to the Institution that is IIT Bombay.

To,
The Public information Officer,
The Registrar, IIT Bombay,
Mumbai - 400076
(1) Full name of applicant:
(2) Address:
(3) Particulars of the information required
 (i) Subject matter of Information:
(ii) The period to which the information relates:
(iii) Description of the information required:
(iv) Whether the information is required by post or in person: (the actual postal charges shall be included in additional fees)
(v) In case by post: (Ordinary, Registered or Speed)
(4) Whether the applicant is below the poverty line: (if yes, attach the photocopy of the proof thereof)

Place:
Date: Signature of applicant

The fees for such an application are Rs. 10, which may be paid either in cash or by a pay order. Other fees may be demanded as per the nature of the information being dispensed, as stipulated by the act. The adminstrative machinery, has to respond to this request, within a period of 30 days. The act also imposes monetary penalties of the offenders in the administration who hinder this process, thus ensuring that your efforts are not lost in "red-tape".
One must keep in mind that there are certain kinds of information, especially that which pertains to the privacy of an individual, are protected under the provisions of the act. But the act is broad enough to cover information of public utility, and makes a clear case for such issues.

All in all, this is a valuable tool. And if excercised with diligence, it can lead us to some much sought after answers.

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hidden, if only artificially. For example, if you believe that too much, or too little is being done about a particular case, you can find out; by directly questioning the relevant authority. For example, if you wanted to know, what the budgets allocated to footpaths and to hostel renovation

As regards the process itself, the act lays out clear guidelines as to who is to be approached and how. The Public Information Officer, in this case the Registrar, is the designated authority for dispensation of information. One can request information, with a simple application, as follows:

A lake named Powai

of the breach – that's it and that's all. A person would have done his part. This is the least that can be asked of anyone. There was an instant message that was being passed around the campus on the messenger a few days ago –about saving the amount of power consumed by the display monitors by dedicating just a few seconds a day to switch them off when not in use. A medley of such apparently insignificant details when put together assumes unimaginable importance. Before I sign off, I'd like to quote Robert Southey. This extract, from the ballad 'Donica', never seemed more appropriate than in this context.
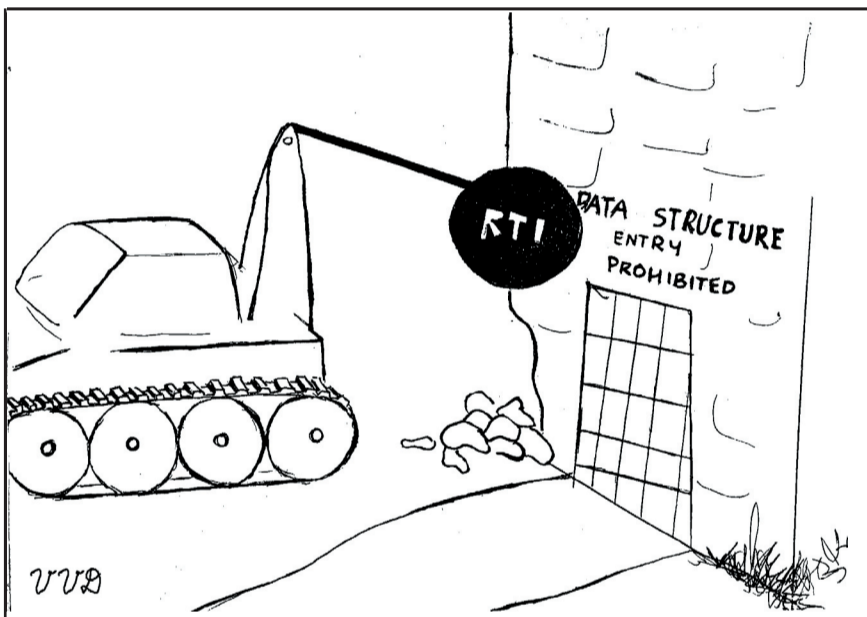
The fisher in the lake below
 Durst never cast his net,
Nor ever swallow in its waves
 Her passing wings would wet.

 The cattle from its ominous banks
 In wild alarm would run,
Tho' parched with thirst and faint beneath
 The summer's scorching sun.

A moral obligation on the part of each of us to take care of Mother Nature, in return for the multitude of good that it has already done us and can be expected from it for posterity, is all that would suffice to prevent such a situation from coming to pass, to deliver us from the cardinal sin, namely, the most outrageous ingratitude the face of Earth has ever seen.

(Shouri Kamtala is a third year student in the Department of Mechanical Engineering and may be contacted at shouri_85@yahoo.co.in.)

Adios!

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."
With the tenure of yet another InsIghT team coming to an end, the oft-quoted line from '*A Tale of Two Cities*' probably sums up our association with the newsletter for the last one year, the best. InsIghT has always had its highs and lows and in retrospect we would have preferred a much smaller number of lows than we finally had.
A lot of new things have been incorporated and a few old ones have been done away with, in the issues. In particular, we are extremely glad that we could get Prof. Narayan Rangaraj to share his views with us in his column *NReye*.
A section on the achievements of some alumni has been introduced and the articles on Shri Narendra Karmarkar and Dr. Mahant Shetti received positive feedback.
The next year will see a new team and newer ideas. As always we look forward to you, the readers, to keep the spirit of the newsletter alive and continue sending in suggestions. Cheers!

- The Editorial Board