Bangalore Times
MONDAY, JUNE 17, 2024
ADVERTORIAL, ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY
PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

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BACK BEAT
HEARTBROKEN: BADSHAH ISSUES APOLOGY AFTER DALLAS SHOW WAS CUT SHORT
P4

Tejas Kudtarkar

Eid Mubarak

I've so many childhood memories of Eid: Aly Goni

Riya Sharma

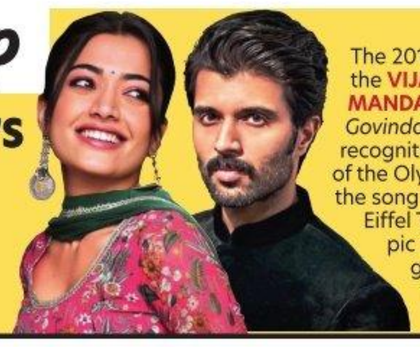
Dressed in a Pathani, Aly Goni welcomes us to his beautifully decorated Mumbai home for Eid. This year marks the first time in many years that Aly is not returning to Jammu to celebrate Eid with his family. "I have a shoot the day after, so I won't be able to go home this time. *Mummy, papa aur baaki sab* upset *hain ki main* Eid *pe unke saath nahi hoon*. Jasmine (Bhasin) Uttrakhand *mein thi toh woh ek din jaldi apna* trek *karke aa rahi hai* because she wants to spend Eid with me. My brother and sister are here, so we are celebrating Eid in Mumbai with some of our close friends," says the *Yeh Hai Mohabbatein* actor.

CONTINUED ON 4

The Eid we celebrated as kids is so different from the Eid we celebrate now. I recall waiting for my *Eidi* as a kid

Buzzstop

VIJAY- RASHMIKA'S SONG SHARED BY PARIS OLYMPICS' INSTA HANDLE IN A MASHUP



The 2018 song *Inkem Inkem Kavale* from the **VIJAY DEVARAKONDA-RASHMIKA MANDANNA** starrer Telugu film *Geetha Govindam* recently received a surprising recognition. The official Instagram handle of the Olympics surprised fans by featuring the song in a mashup video showcasing the Eiffel Tower adorned with the Olympic rings in anticipation of the Paris games. Since then #InkemInkemKavale has been trending on social media platforms. TNN

'Adding Rajkumar to my name is my way of honouring my legacy'

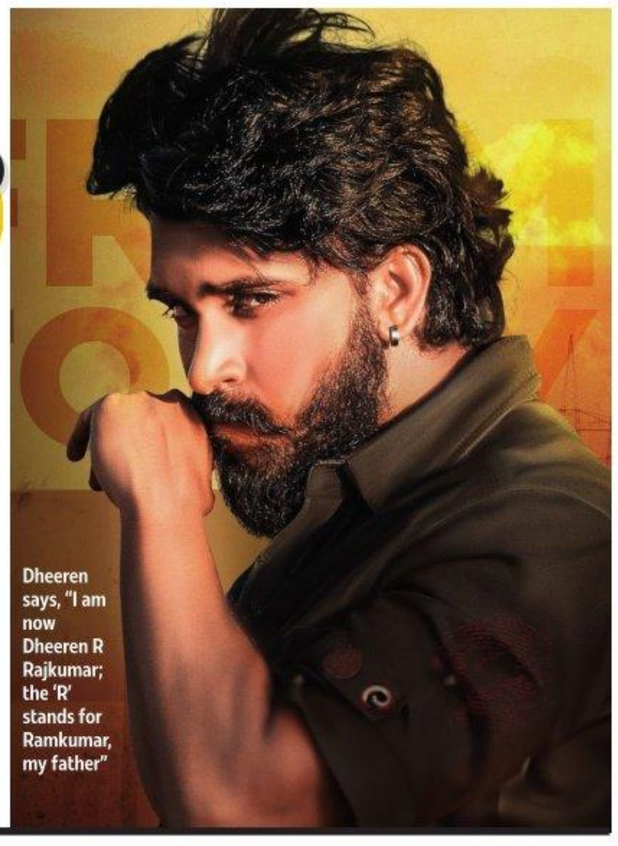
Sridevi S

Dheeren Ramkumar is now Dheeren R Rajkumar. One of the three grandsons of legendary Kannada actor Dr Rajkumar, and son of actor Ramkumar, Dheeren says it was a conscious decision to add his grandfather's name to his own. "In February, I visited Kateel, Udupi and Koragajja temples. The priests there, after blessing me, suggested that I add my grandfather's name, because it is not just a name but a legacy. When I met filmmakers Karthik Gowda and Yogi G Raj, they were excited about this new name, which resulted in collaboration and thus, relaunch. As one of his grandsons, I feel responsible to carry forward that name and legacy. I am now Dheeren R Rajkumar; the R stands for Ramkumar, my father," says the actor who is currently gearing up for his relaunch in the Kannada film industry with renewed zest. Excerpts from a chat:

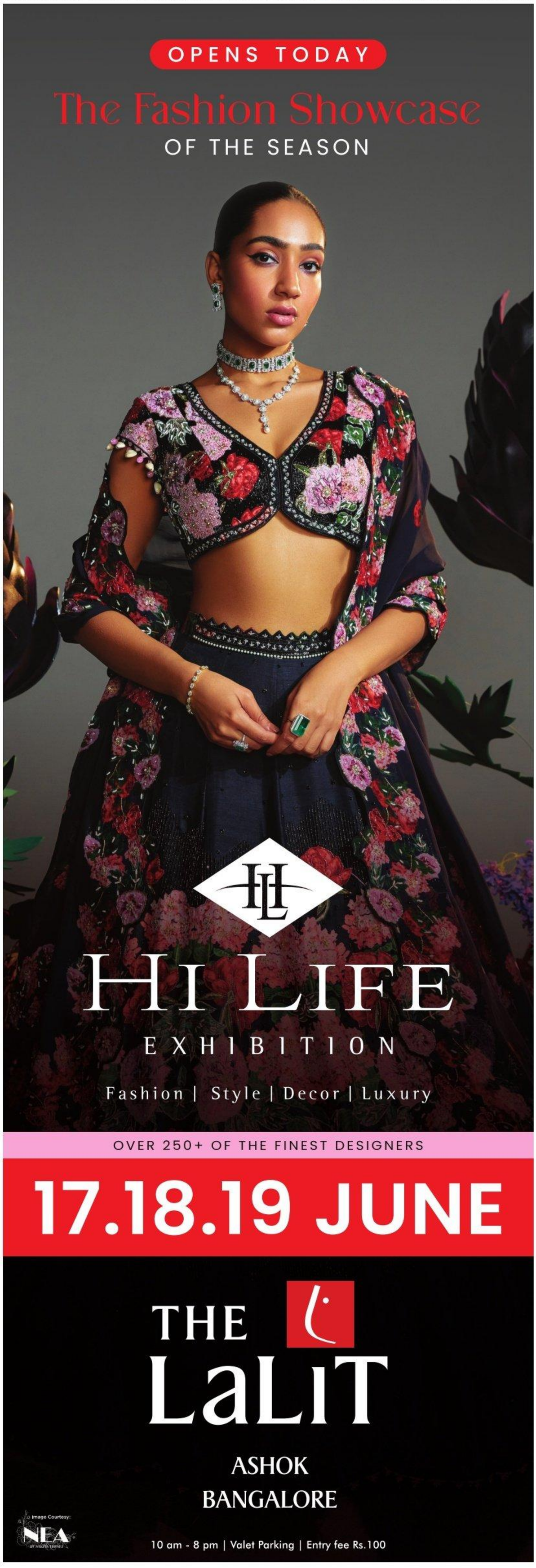
CONTINUED ON 4

'As a star kid, your name can only get you so far, ultimately, it is talent that matters more'

Dheeren recognises that while his name may open doors, talent is the key to keeping it open. "On Friday, people may come to see my film because I am so-and-so's grandson. But, by Monday, people will go watch my film purely because of my talent and not the name I come with. If one cannot perform, there is no way the audience will accept you both on screen and off screen, irrespective of legacy," says the actor.



Dheeren says, "I am now Dheeren R Rajkumar; the 'R' stands for Ramkumar, my father"



Focusing on environmental sustainability

Teachers of Ryan International School, Vasant Kunj

Ryan International School, Vasant Kunj, has been named one of the top 10 finalists for the prestigious World's Best School Prize for Environmental Action 2024 by T4 Education, in collaboration with Accenture, American Express and the Lemann Foundation. This recognition highlights the school's dedication to environmental sustainability.

Ryan Pinto (CEO, Ryan Group) says, "Committed to fostering eco-consciousness, Ryan International integrates environmental education across all grades. The school has pioneered projects such as hydroponics units, biogas plants and the DABAT project, promoting agricultural efficiency and sustainability. Notably, our project Mitigating the Effects of Water Scarcity secured a top-five position at the Climate Change Challenge at COP 28 in Dubai, competing against 43 countries."

Ryan Pinto with students during the Each One Plant One campaign

Students are encouraged to be mindful about the environment

Further emphasising its environmental commitment, the school received recognition from the Ministry of Environment for planting over 5,000 saplings in Delhi through its Each One Plant One campaign.

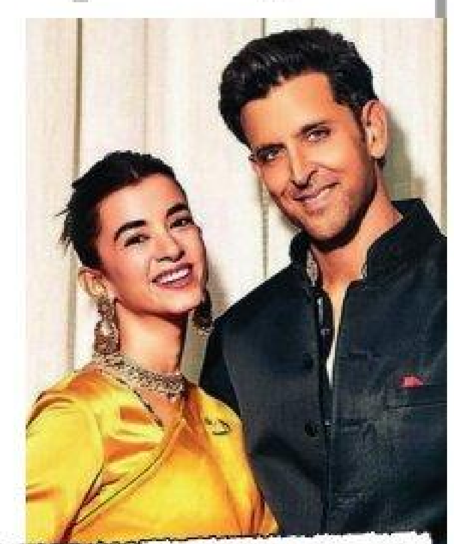
Dr Grace Pinto (MD, Ryan Group of Schools) shares, "We are delighted with this honour, which recognises our commitment to environmental stewardship. It acknowledges the significant strides we've made in safeguarding our planet's future. I hope educators everywhere will be inspired by the example set by our school. I congratulate our students and teachers for their dedication and commitment. Beyond academics, we instil in students a sense of social responsibility, empowering them to make a positive difference in society." She further adds, "We are also proud that Ryan International School, Vasant Kunj, has been nominated for the World's Best School Community Choice Award."

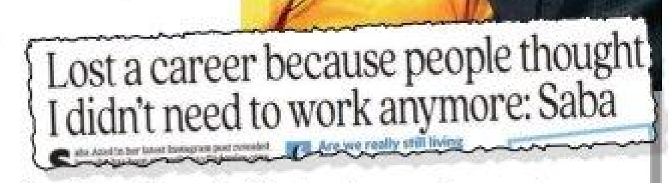
> Our school is committed to fostering eco-consciousness and integrates environmental education across all grades
> – Ryan Pinto

For more details, scan the QR code

POV

Why do women work? The answer may just surprise you





Unless you are a woman who identifies herself as your family's sole breadwinner, society assumes you work because you 'like' to do so, or worse, are looking for a partner. And once in a relationship with someone who's 'well established', you are happy to give it all up.

Singer, performer and voice-over artiste Saba Azad, who also happens to be Hrithik Roshan's girlfriend, turned the spotlight on this reality in a series of posts that spoke about how she lost out on assignments once it became public that she was dating one of the biggest Bollywood stars. It was assumed, as she found out later, that she no longer needed to 'work'.

Saba's long post raises some serious questions on how we view single women. Why is it that once a woman gets into a relationship her identity is subsumed by that of her partner's? Or does the professional currency she has accumulated amount to nothing, as she is denied opportunities she has proven herself worthy of? In fact, Dia Mirza was one of the actors who came out in support of the artiste, saying this is sadly the story of "every woman in the industry."

Saba calling out this "regressive and patriarchal" mindset resonates – not because it is about Bollywood – an industry we love to follow, discuss and occasionally diss. But because it is something many single, successful women have faced in various stages of their lives and relationships. While some have soldiered on, despite the hurdles, others have learned to compromise and eventually allowed their career ambitions to take a backseat.

Indra Nooyi, one of the most influential CEOs in the world, has been vocal about the need for a complete overhaul in our work culture, to bring back and retain the best talents across industries. And they often happen to be women. Women who are walking extra hard to achieve more and are hungry for success and economic freedom, she says, adding: "It is a loss to any country if they cannot capitalise on this."

Saba's posts are thus vital and need to be referenced. Her speaking up is a small step towards creating workspaces that are free, fair and equal.

Agree? Disagree? Got a POV idea? Write to us at: pov@timesgroup.com

LEISURE

EVENTS

MEETING
Recovery from drug addiction, an online meeting, is held every day, from 7 pm to 8 pm. Zoom meeting ID is 8421668628. For login password, call: 9880590059

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TIMES HITORI

3	2	2	5	6	7	7	2
3	6	4	1	9	7	2	8
2	2	8	2	5	6	7	3
3	3	4	2	6	8	1	8
8	9	6	3	7	2	8	5
3	7	7	8	7	1	5	2
6	5	7	9	2	4	7	1
1	1	4	7	4	1	3	6

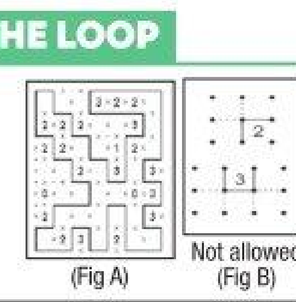
HOW TO PLAY
1. A number may appear just once in each row or column. Eliminate repeat numbers by darkening cells. (see example)
2. Darkened cells must never be adjacent in a row or column.
3. Unmarked cells must create a single continuous area, undivided by darkened cells.
4. Every time you darken a cell, you can automatically circle its vertical and horizontal neighbours, which means they cannot be eliminated.
5. Any cell "sandwiched" between neighbours of the same value can be circled. (e.g. 646)
6. A "triple" is a special case of sandwich. Circle the centre cells, and darken the ends. (e.g. 666)

8	5	5	7	3	5	4	6
4	5	1	6	7	6	5	2
2	5	7	1	5	4	6	8
5	6	2	4	3	7	6	3
2	7	5	5	1	7	2	7
1	6	6	6	4	3	5	7
7	8	4	6	2	3	3	7
8	4	5	2	3	5	7	1

Example

LOOP THE LOOP

RULES
- Connect adjacent dots with vertical or horizontal lines, creating a single loop (Fig A).
- Crossovers or branches are not allowed (As shown by dotted lines in Fig B).
- Numbers in the puzzle indicate the number of lines that should surround it, while empty cells may be surrounded by any number of lines.
- You can't draw lines around zeroes.
- Each puzzle has just one unique solution.


(Fig A) Not allowed (Fig B)

		2	1	3	2	
	2	3				
		3	0	2	2	1
3		2		3		2
2	2	1				3
2				2	2	
					2	

HOW TO BEGIN:
Example (Fig A) - Begin with the zero next to 3. Since no lines can be drawn around zero, mark crosses around it, as shown. Now there is a cross in one space around 3. So we know the three lines of 3 can only be drawn in the remaining three spaces. Next, these lines can only be extended in one direction each. Continue, using the same logic.

Hints: Keep eliminating possibilities by marking crosses in spaces between dots where a line isn't possible, i.e., if you have already completed required lines or where a line extension may create a branch or cause a deadend (Fig B).

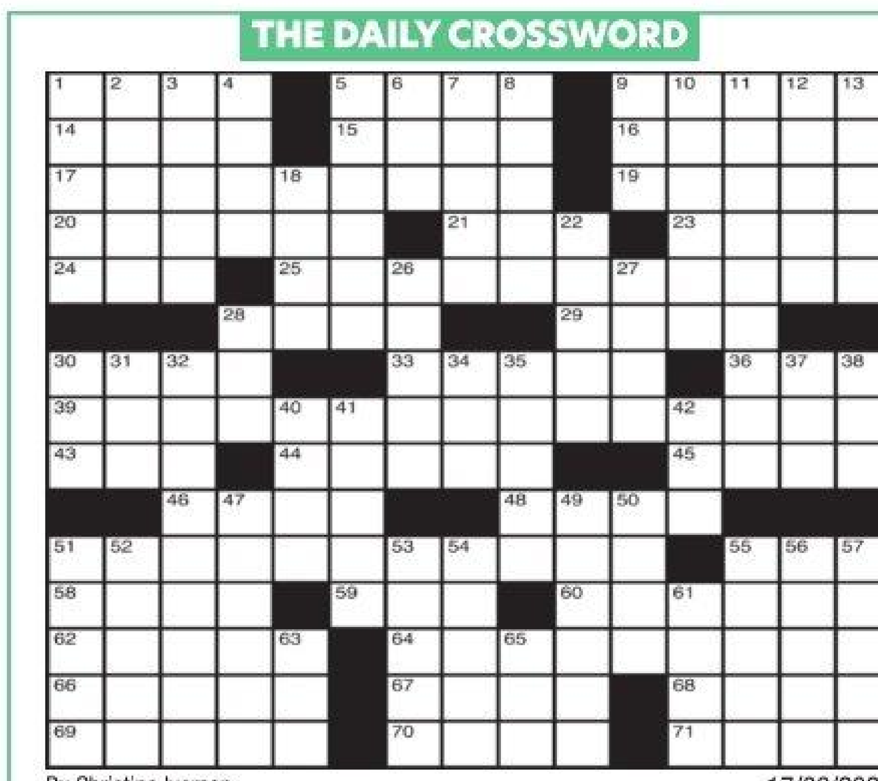
SUDOKU CHALLENGE

Level: Medium

	2			8	6			
						9	2	7
					3	1	6	
6			5					
9	7						5	4
					2			9
	8	6	2					
3	5	1						
			8	1			4	

HOW TO PLAY
Fill in the grid so that every horizontal row, every vertical column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9, without repeating the numbers in the same row, column or box. You can't change the digits already given in the grid. Every puzzle has one solution.

THE DAILY CROSSWORD



By Christina Iverson 17/06/2024

ACROSS
1 Have an ugly cry
5 Fly through the air
9 Barked
14 Eight, in Spanish
15 Give a darn
16 "__!" ... "Polo!"
17 Curtain holder in a bathroom
19 Situation with a player at first, say
20 Peaceful
21 Commercial lead-in to "bnb"
23 Gaelic speaker
24 French fashion initials
25 Purple flower with a fuzzy patch
28 Country singer Loretta
29 Scotch's partner
30 Naked
33 Stomp on the gas
36 Govt. intel org.
39 "We're almost there!," and what can be said about 17-, 25-, 51-, and 64-Across?
43 Unnaturally pale
44 Construct
45 Film spool
46 Root vegetable in Nigerian cuisine
48 Lawn tool
51 Orange marker in a construction zone
55 Work on a quilt
58 Wild canine
59 "Dance the Night" singer __ Lipa
60 Like some albums
62 Show host
64 Student at the top of the honor roll
66 Jump back, say
67 Sheet of paper
68 Hatchling's home
69 Cities with harbors
70 Post-blizzard blanket
71 __ and crafts

DOWN
1 Like an overbearing older sibling
2 Is sore
3 Pattern of spirals on a fingerprint
4 Actor Rob of "Parks and Recreation"
5 Bug keeper-outer on a window
6 Rowboat rower
7 Noisy, as a crowd
8 Fixed up again
9 "Yo te __"
10 Putrid
11 Allowed to roam, as chickens
12 Gut bacteria
13 Heading on a list of actions to avoid
18 Phonetic term often associated with they/them pronouns
22 Sticky tree secretion
26 "The Hate U Give" writer Thomas
27 Connect the __
28 Big name in jeans
30 Short "While I'm thinking of it ... "
31 Exclamation of understanding
32 Vehicle picked up at an airport, maybe
34 Golden State sch.
35 The "N" of TNT
37 "__ Persisted": children's book by Chelsea Clinton
38 Ga. capital
40 Maker of squishy darts
41 Humanlike robot
42 Anger
47 Move emotionally
49 Composer Lloyd Webber
50 Save
51 Little troublemaker
52 Juliet's partner
53 Zodiac transition points
54 Board game that dropped "The Settlers of" from its name
55 "Terrific!"
56 Are
57 Swollen marks
61 Name that means "moon"
63 UFO pilots
65 Back in time

Saturday's Puzzle Solved

M	E	T	S	■	A	G	E	D	■	B	L	I	N	K
A	X	E	L	■	D	U	T	Y	■	R	A	M	E	N
S	T	A	Y	W	H	E	R	E	Y	O	U	A	R	E
A	R	M	■	H	O	S	E	■	E	N	D	N	O	W
■	A	S	P	E	C	T	■	P	S	T	■	■	■	■
C	S	P	A	N	■	■	T	E	L	E	V	I	S	A
L	A	I	R	■	C	A	R	N	E	■	I	N	E	S
E	U	R	O	■	A	G	E	N	T	■	O	H	N	O
A	C	I	D	■	V	I	N	E	S	■	L	O	A	N
N	E	T	Y	I	E	L	D	■	■	M	A	T	T	E
■	■	■	■	B	A	E	■	W	H	O	S	W	E	■
E	C	L	A	I	R	■	N	O	E	L	■	A	A	A
T	H	A	T	S	T	H	E	W	A	Y	I	T	I	S
D	A	N	T	E	■	B	E	E	R	■	P	E	D	I
S	I	G	N	S	■	O	D	D	S	■	A	R	E	A

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GARFIELD

ARCHIE

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See what the stars have in store for you - according to your moon sign.

ARIES: You'll do anything to distinguish yourself from the competition, including challenging traditional methods. Invite your circle of friends to join you this day. The quality of your life is based on the quality of the questions you ask yourself and not what happens to you.
TAURUS: Now is the best time to bring matters to the surface, and plan an evening out. Direct the energy you are receiving now towards a worthwhile project. If you are in a relationship, you will have a hard time waiting.
GEMINI: You are faced with a challenge in life, you have two choices to react negatively or positively. Don't feel embarrassed. Let yourself say what you have been dying to say. Your crush needs to find a better way to communicate with you. Your creativity is transformed into success.
CANCER: If you have positive thoughts, more positive things will occur to you. You need to change how you think and act in order to attract all the riches that you want.
LEO: Start thinking about what you want to do. Your thoughts are like magnets. Others value you for your ability to make practical decisions concerning group issues. Take care of your big financial deals.
VIRGO: It isn't the challenge itself that matters, but how you respond to it. You are a great doer and others respect your abilities to take control of difficult situations. You are in a good position to take out loans, pay down debt and make major purchases.
LIBRA: You can be motivated to reconcile with someone, with whom you previously had certain tension. Watch out for stresses at home or with a significant other. Your future still may not look clear to you, but you have some great ideas stirring.
SCORPIO: It is preferable to have an affectionate or relatively quiet, all embracing and evolutionary relationship rather than continually arousing susceptibility. In love, avoid at all cost unpredictable, capricious behaviour or sharp, harsh tones. Keep a curb on your spending or you could easily over-stretch your budget.
SAGITTARIUS: You realise that by emitting noble energies, the energies returned to you are high and protective. If you are already in a relationship, use this chance to reaffirm your love. Your mind might be uneasy today as you are thinking of a new venture.
CAPRICORN: It is how you perceive events, respond to situations, and adapt to change that truly matters. You are overcome by the fact because you think you are. You are the product of positive thoughts.
AQUARIUS: You have a powerful strength today and it is advisable to become aware of it and to understand that energy in reality is a specific manifestation. Your rash attitude creates instability in work relationships.
PISCES: Don't think that by simply maintaining an apparently harmonious, fun and happy keynote at this time. You have got something important to communicate to others. If you are not currently involved with anyone, there is a possibility of a sudden and fleeting romance.

SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters in the four word jumbles, one letter to each square/circle, to make four ordinary words

IREEE
SOPOR
EGLINT
AHWYMM

HOW TO PLAY
Now arrange the letters in the circles to form the answer to the riddle or to fill in the missing word as indicated

Success consists of getting up just __ __ __ than you fall. - Oliver Goldsmith (3,4,4)

SPELLATHON

Today's Ratings:
06-average | 07-good | 09-outstanding

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, a letter can be used as many times as it appears in the puzzle. Each word must contain the central letter. There should be at least one seven letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed. British English Dictionary is used as reference.

DENNIS THE MENACE

TIMES interact
travel
PACKAGE TOURS
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Epic Xperience in Stockholm !
4 Day Retreat for Leaders & Founders
2-5th October
Leadership Training
Scaling-Up Tips
Investor Pitching
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SHOPPING MART

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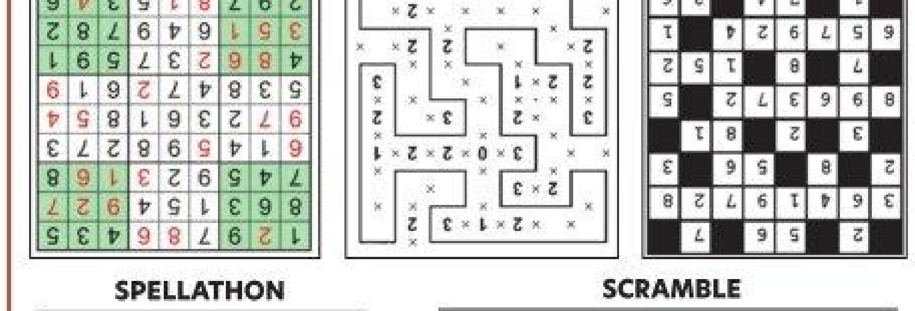
SOLUTIONS TO GAMES/PUZZLES

TIMES SUDOKU | LOOP THE LOOP | TIMES HITORI



SPELLATHON
gnus, gush, GUSHING, hung, shun, snug, suing, sung, using

SCRAMBLE
Words: Eerie, spoor, tingle, whammy
Answer: Success consists of getting up just one more time than you fall. - Oliver Goldsmith

BENGALURU HAS THE MOST NUMBER OF LAUGHTER CLUBS IN THE COUNTRY

With 220 functioning laughter clubs, Bengalureans surely do understand the benefits of laughing

COMMUNITY CONNECT

Devika V Menon & Neha Krishna

People say that laughter is the language of the soul, which is probably why Bengaluru has the most number of laughter clubs in the country- around 220 of them. "Most laughter club meetings take place in a public setting, like a park, and the majority of the members there are seniors," explains Dr Madan Kataria, a medical doctor from Mumbai popularly known as the 'Guru of Giggling'. "What amuses me is that about 70-80 per cent of the members of the club are women. There's no doubt about it, women like to laugh more," he exclaims.

A typical session lasts for an hour, says Madan. "The first 15-20 minutes consist of stretching and some yoga-based movements, along with clapping and chanting to stimulate acupressure points. Then, the laughter starts, along with deep breathing," he explains, adding that it is now more like a community in itself, with people celebrating life.

'Laughter is for everyone'

Archana, who conducts sessions on laughter yoga in the city said that she remembers two of her sessions. One, where she interacted with grave diggers and another, a participant who had just lost her husband. "The sessions for the grave diggers was to be held at a graveyard, but I requested for it to be moved and we saw 150 people join us. Then, at a session at a Bengaluru park, we were joined by a woman who had just lost her husband. She made sure to attend the laughter club regularly, despite dealing with the loss." she says, adding, "These experiences made me realise that laughter is for every one of us!"

> In the morning, we usually see business enthusiasts and homemakers joining us, prepping for the long day ahead. In the evenings, we see mostly IT professionals and students who are looking for something to relax and rejuvenate with
> – Parvathi J, professional wellness coach

Did You Know?

Nage Mane: A hub for laughter clubs

Called *Nage Mane* (laughter house) this is a park situated in Jnana Ganga Nagar in Bengaluru. Along with being a regular park, it is also a place where laughter clubs conduct laughter yoga sessions.

'These clubs teach you how to face life, head on'

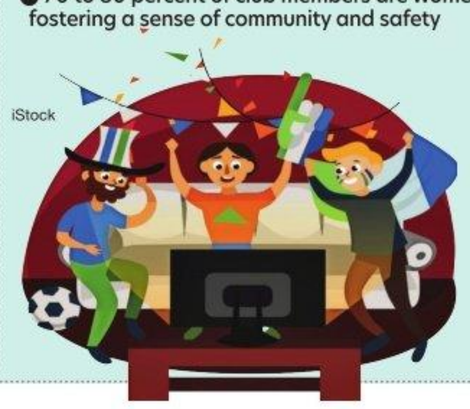
Though said to cater more to senior citizens, people who have a rigorous day can also just join in and laugh. "The session begins with deep breathing exercises, gradually moving to spontaneous acts to begin laughing hysterically. A hack that I'd like to share is to lock yourself up in the bathroom and laugh your guts out before a stressful meeting. It doesn't necessarily have to be loud, but it should hurt your gut. That way you will instantly feel better, and you also go do absolutely well in your meeting," shares Jyoti, a regular at her laughter club nearby.

HOW LAUGHTER CLUBS IN BENGALURU BEGAN:

Madan had started this concept in Mumbai, in 1995. Around that time, the late engineer B K Satyanarayan was in Mumbai, at his son's place, resting a broken leg. That's when he saw the concept. "He reached out to me and told me that he wanted to recreate this in Bengaluru, and in 1998, Bengaluru had its first laughter club! Called ROMEO (Retired Old Men Eating Outside), it found a place in Madhavan Park in Jayanagar. "From there, the concept spread like wildfire," shares Madan.

How being part of a laughter club can benefit you:

- Laughter club activities include a basic amount of breathing and yoga exercises
- Regular participation at laughter clubs leads to health benefits like a stronger immune system. It also reduces stress
- 70 to 80 percent of club members are women, fostering a sense of community and safety



iStock

> Laughter clubs now exist in 120 countries, and people are keen to be a part of it since there are health benefits to it, like a stronger immune system and reduced stress. It also changes your mood in less than a minute and also keeps your mind positive during challenging times – Madan Kataria

We supported India, but wanted Dada to do well. Both happened: Sister on Saurabh Netravalkar

The US cricketer's father and sister in Mumbai talk about his journey to the US, his love for home food and Bollywood, and how love has been pouring in for him

Aakanksha Ahire

His star turn for the US cricket team in the T20 World Cup may have grabbed headlines, but when Saurabh Netravalkar moved to America, he used to play cricket as a hobby over the weekends. "This happened after one his coaches recommended that he join a recreational club," says his sister Nidhi, who's busy planning a trip to visit her 'Dada' in the US to celebrate his success.

As friends and family stream into their Mumbai home to congratulate the Netravalkars, Saurabh's proud father Naresh – himself a cricketer in his youth – remembers how Saurabh showed great potential at the young age of nine, when he was selected to play an academy from among 300 kids. "Saurabh is enjoying playing in the World Cup. He had called after the India match, and we discussed how he got Virat Kohli's wicket by aiming for the off stump," says Naresh, one of whose proudest moments was when Saurabh was selected to play for India in the Under-19 World Cup in 2010.

Saurabh Netravalkar in the T20 World Cup and during his playing days in India

Saurabh and his sister Nidhi with their parents

'He's vegan, and loves the food our mom makes at home'

Nidhi, who works in an advertising firm, says that before Saurabh moved to the US, weekends at home would be spent relishing good food. "My mother is a great cook, and while dada is a vegan and I am a non-vegetarian, we would gorge on the stuff mom cooked for us, especially sandwiches," remembers Nidhi. Earlier, the Netravalkars used to stay in a 1BHK apartment in Mumbai. "There were six of us, including our grandparents. We always had guests, which is why we enjoy spending time with friends and family even today."

Nidhi says that Saurabh teases her a lot, but as a big brother, he's very caring and protective. "He ensures I am doing well and respects my choices in life. While dad and I have been supporting the Indian team, we also wanted *dada* to perform well - and both have happened!" she says, smiling.

> *Dada* and I can watch shows like *Sarabhai vs Sarabhai* and *Khichdi* for hours. The two of us bond over movies like *Welcome*, *Dhamaal*, *Bhagam Bhag* and *Hera Pheri*. He's always funny and goofy around me – Nidhi Netravalkar, sister

Saurabh and Nidhi with their maternal grandparents

Eid is about cherishing your family, friends and well-wishers, says Aly

Tejas Kudtarkar

During the shoot, Aly Goni shared that this will be the first time in many years that he wouldn't be spending Eid at his home in Jammu

CONTINUED FROM 1

'MAIN EIDI SE APNE FAVOURITE TOYS, SHOES LETA THA BACHPAN MEIN, WOH MERI BEST MEMORY HAI'

For Aly, Eid is all about spending quality time with loved ones, eating good food and dressing up. "*Bachpan mein khushi hoti thi jab Eidi milti thi, ab deni padhti hai*. But I have so many fond memories of Eid. Growing up, I would wake up really early and get ready for the festivities. *Pehle toh raat ko neend nahi aati thi khushi se ki kal* Eid *hai, phir uske baad sab* relatives *ke ghar jaana*. Best part *tha jab Eidi milti thi*. I would wait the entire year for things like shoes, toys or anything else that I wanted to buy. *Tab gharwale itna leke dete bhi nahi thay, aur tab* financial situation *aisi nahi thi*. So, *jo bhi cheez pasand aati thi, main wait karta tha aur* Eid *ke din rishtedaron se jo Eidi milti thi woh jodta tha. Jab kuch paise kam padh jaate thay toh aise logon ke ghar jaata tha jinke saath mera utna achcha uthna baithna bhi nahi tha par main unke ghar jaake baith jaata tha jab tak woh Eidi nahi dete thay (laughs). Phir Eidi leke main jaake woh cheez lete tha. Woh meri* best memory *hai* Eid *ki*," shares the *Bigg Boss 14* contestant.

'MERE SAB FRIENDS MERE GHAR AATE HAIN EID KE DIN'

While Aly will be missing his home this Eid, he says that the day is about love, so people spend time with their friends and family if they are around. "*Sabke saath* Eid *manao, jo aapke* friends *hai unko ghar pe bulao aur achcha khana khilao. Mere ghar pe jab bhi* Eid *hoti hain mere saare dost aate hain*. They wait for Eid. And *mere* young fans *ko yahi kahunga ki jo bachpan mein* Eid *banti hai na woh bade hoke nahi milti hai. Bachpan ki* Eid is the best Eid, *jitna uss mein ji sakte ho, utna jiyo*. Eid Mubarak," the actor wishes his fans.

> I would wait the entire year for things like shoes, toys or anything else that I wanted to buy. *Tab gharwale itna leke dete bhi nahi thay, aur tab* financial situation *aisi nahi thi*

> Growing up, I would wake up really early and get ready for the Eid festivities. *Pehle toh raat ko neend nahi aati thi khushi se ki kal* Eid hai, *phir sab* relatives *ke ghar jaana*

Sapthami files defamation case after being named in Yuva-Sridevi divorce petition

JUNE 12, 2024

Yuva Rajkumar & Sridevi divorce: Co-star named in legal notice

Sapthami Gowda

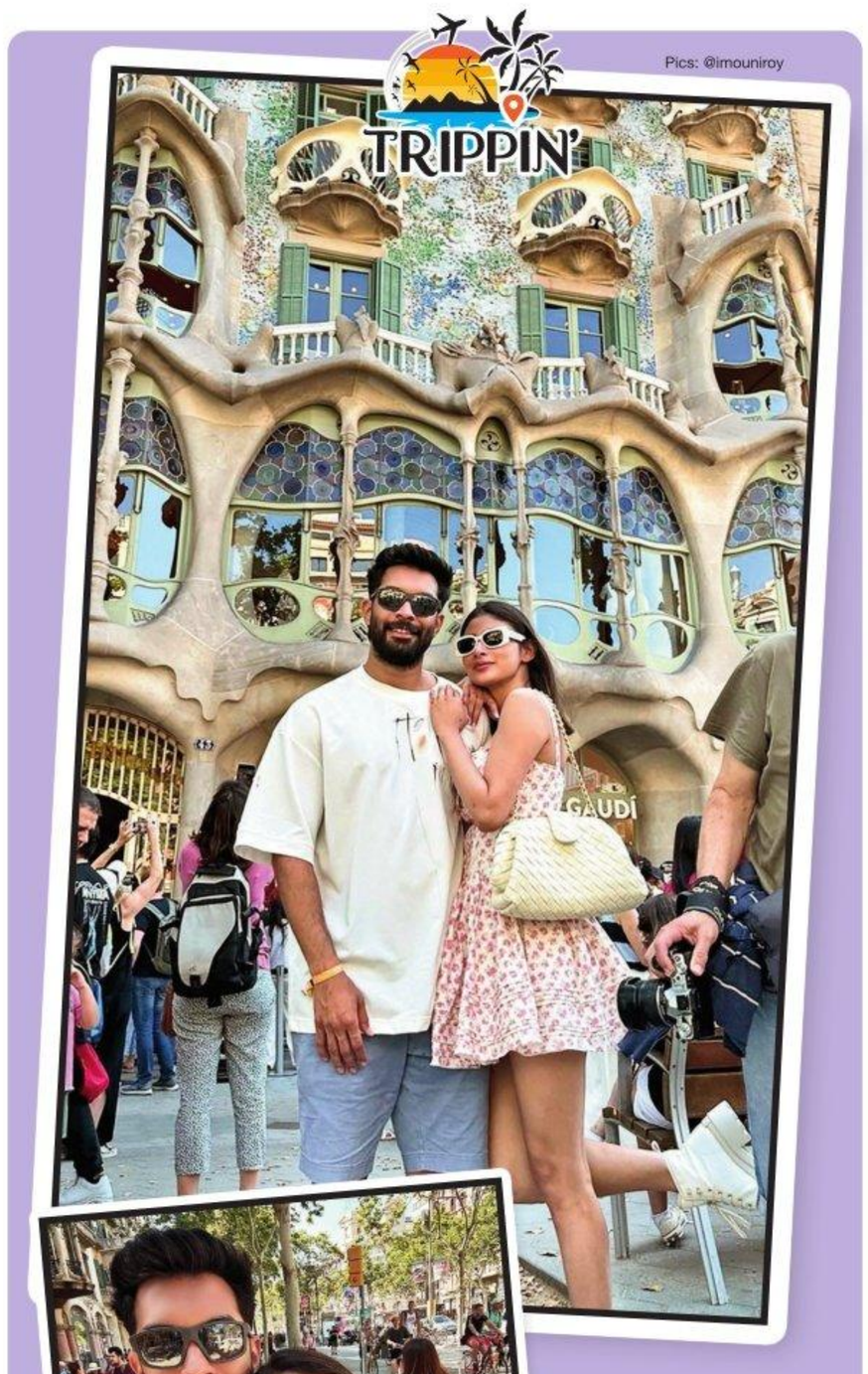
There has been a twist in the case surrounding the divorce spat between Kannada actor Yuva Rajkumar and his wife Sridevi Byrappa. In a lengthy petition, Sridevi had accused Yuva of being in a relationship with his co-star Sapthami Gowda. In her reaction, Sapthami has now moved court against her with a defamation case for mentioning her name in the petition, seeking Rs 10 crore in damages. She has also sought a public apology from Sridevi. Submitting the plea, Sapthami is said to have told the Court that she has nothing to do with Yuva besides being his co-star in his film, and that her name was dragged into the case for no fault of hers. The City Civil court has now sent notice to Sridevi, taking cognisance of Sapthami's petition. TNN

Heartbroken: Badshah issues apology after cutting short Dallas show midway

Badshah is currently on a tour to the US and Canada

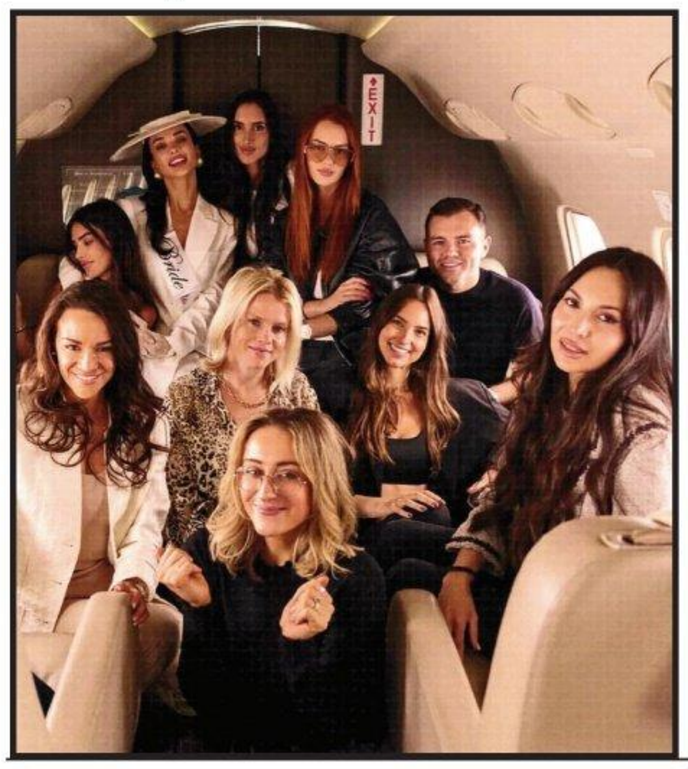
Badshah on Saturday apologised to fans after he had to cut short his concert in Dallas, US, due to a "discrepancy" between local promoters and the production company".

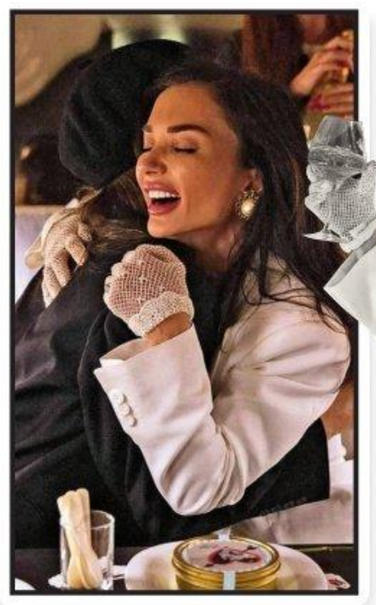
In an Instagram post, the singer-rapper wrote, "Dallas, I'm so heartbroken and bummed about what happened today. You guys are incredible and deserve better. I was really looking forward to performing in your city but due to a discrepancy between the local promoters and the production company I was forced to cut short the set," he said. The 38-year-old musician said promoters need to be better equipped, especially for large-format shows, as it takes a big amount of energy to put together. PTI



MOUNI ROY and her husband SURAJ NAMBIAR posing in front of the colourful Casa Batlio and enjoying a sunny day in BARCELONA, SPAIN

Amy Jackson's bachelorette bash





Actress Amy Jackson had a fun-filled bachelorette party with her girl squad on a private jet in France recently. The actress got engaged to *Gossip Girl* actor Ed Westwick in January, and the two celebrated their engagement party in March

To revive the Kannada film industry, stars should champion fresh talent, says Dheeren

CONTINUED FROM 1

'IT'S THE PERFECT TIME FOR A RELAUNCH AND FRESH START FOR ME'

My debut film *Shiva* did not release at the right time. We were supposed to release that film in 2019, but because of multiple delays and Covid, it was pushed to 2022. Amid all this, I lost my biggest strength, Appu *maama* (uncle Puneeth Rajkumar), in October 2021. *Shiva 143* did not fare well at the box-office for multiple reasons, and now it's been almost two years since its release. Appu *maama* was even planning a movie for me. He said he was finalising a story and told me to get ready. Sadly, that never happened. It would've been a completely different path if things had worked out. Two years later, I feel this is the perfect time for a fresh start. I'm back with renewed energy and, of course, a new name.

'STARS SHOULD PRODUCE MORE FILMS, INTRODUCE NEW, YOUNG TALENT'

Kannada cinema is facing a challenge with a massive decline in footfall at theatres. I think there's no single culprit, but several contributing factors. Sure, stars taking a year or more per project can limit the number of films released. And this, in turn, can lead to a lack of fresh content for audiences. Today, a project needs a lot of effort and time than before because the competition is tough. As stars, they need to deliver what is expected of them. In order to revive the Kannada film industry, I believe stars should open up more production houses and introduce new and young talent through them. When a film comes with a star's stamp-of-approval, a lot more people can become invested in it. Also, that way, more cinemas will be made, which will keep the mechanism running.

Dheeren R Rajkumar; (inset) with his uncle, the late Puneeth Rajkumar

> Kannada cinema has a 90-year legacy of entertaining the audience, and we have to carry it forward more responsibly. We must make sure we also work hard
>
> – Dheeren R Rajkumar

Bizarre

A mom left a newborn baby out of Dolly Parton's home

Those Were The Days singer Dolly Parton once shared a scary fan moment. She said she opened her door to find a newborn baby, named Jolene, addressed to her with a note saying the baby had been given away by her "momma" to be looked after by Parton. The country star called the Department of Health and Human Services and cared for the baby until they arrived.

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Will proposed NRI quota in K'taka govt med colleges boost students' interest

NRI seat quota beyond the existing student intake may dilute the quality of education

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Recently, the Karnataka government has requested the National Medical Commission (NMC) for at least 5% NRI supernumerary seats for its government medical colleges with a view to utilising the funds for students' development and research. Unlike regular MBBS seats in government medical colleges, education in NRI seats is unsubsidised. The private medical colleges in the state, on the other hand, already have 15% reservation for NRI seats to help run their institutions. If the NMC gives its nod, Karnataka will join states such as Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and the Union Territories of Chandigarh and Puducherry, in having NRI quota seats in their government medical colleges, though questions persist as to whether an increase in such seats will help maintain the standards of medical education.

Talking to *Education Times*, Dr BL Sujatha Rathod, director, Directorate of Medical Education, Karnataka, says, "Should the proposal be granted, it will give better international exposure to our students in government medical colleges. Additionally, these colleges will have better funding for medical research and development processes." "We are proposing the NRI quota as supernumerary seats so that the general merit-based sanctioned seats do not get affected," she adds.

Karnataka has 24 government medical colleges including two run by central govt

There are 22 medical colleges under the Department of Medical Education, Government of Karnataka which has an intake capacity of 3450 seats for the year 2023-24. The proposal suggests the need to create 163 supernumerary seats as against the intake capacity of 3,450 seats for which the annual fee in the range of $25000 to $30000 may be considered.

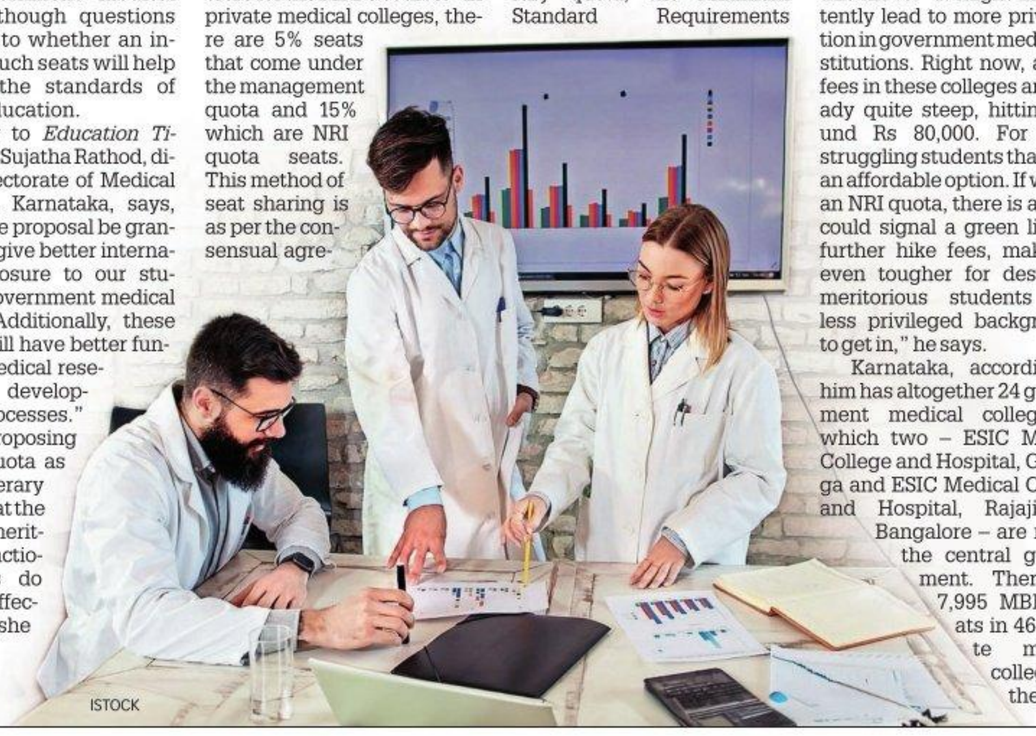
Time-tested system

In Karnataka, since only private medical colleges are allowed to take NRI students, it is reported that students pay between Rs 1 crore to Rs 2.5 crore for the MBBS course. "In private medical colleges, there are 5% seats that come under the management quota and 15% which are NRI quota seats. This method of seat sharing is as per the consensual agreement between the government, consortium of colleges and the universities, and this is a time-tested system which has existed for the last five-six years. No student, including the NRIs, is considered eligible to seek admission without passing NEET and taking part in the Karnataka Examination Authority (KEA) counselling which is an online and transparent process. What we are asking for is a small number of supernumerary seats, so that it does not impact the meritorious students, especially from the underserved areas," Dr Rathod says.

Discussing the seat matrix and its wider implications in the context of medical education in the state, Dr B Srinivas, secretary, NMC, says, "They can have 5% NRI seats within the existing student intake. By introducing the supernumerary quota, the Minimum Standard Requirements (MSR) will change. An increase in the number of seats will involve increasing the faculty numbers to maintain the required faculty-student ratio in addition to increasing the college infrastructure to maintain the standards of quality medical education. As a contrast, in private medical colleges, the NRI quota is not supernumerary, hence the teacher-student ratio is not impacted due to the seat reservation."

Introducing an NRI quota in government medical colleges in Karnataka, especially with unsubsidised seats, could boost the colleges financially, helping them upgrade infrastructure, invest in research, and offer modern facilities, says Dr Somashekhar SP, chairman - Medical Advisory Board, Aster DM Healthcare - GCC & India, but he claims there is a worry looming over this move. "It might inadvertently lead to more privatisation in government medical institutions. Right now, annual fees in these colleges are already quite steep, hitting around Rs 80,000. For many struggling students that is not an affordable option. If we add an NRI quota, there is a fear it could signal a green light to further hike fees, making it even tougher for deserving meritorious students from less privileged backgrounds to get in," he says.

Karnataka, according to him has altogether 24 government medical colleges of which two – ESIC Medical College and Hospital, Gulbarga and ESIC Medical College and Hospital, Rajajinagar, Bangalore – are run by the central government. There are 7,995 MBBS seats in 46 private medical colleges of the state.



ISTOCK

NMC may have a policy to help FMGs with shortened internships

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The National Medical Commission (NMC) is working on finalising a policy under which Foreign Medical Graduates (FMGs) can take biannual medical practical skill examination. The aim is to test the clinical skills of the FMGs through a practical examination, and once it is cleared by the student, the NMC will waive off the remaining internship tenure of their Compulsory Rotatory Medical Internship (CRMI), according to an official source.

The proposed policy can help in finding a middle ground for FMGs who were disappointed after the NMC released a circular on June 7, 2024, suggesting an increase in the existing internship tenure by 12 months. "The NMC has a responsibility to keep up with the interest of patients as well as medical professionals. Concerned about the inefficiency and zero practical exposure of the FMGs, a period of two to three years of internship was announced earlier by the NMC. However, there are certain challenges at the grassroots level that FMGs are reportedly facing regarding internship seats and stipends. To counter such issues, a policy of biannual practical examination was proposed, however, it is just a suggestion and not a full-fledged policy," says the source.

Equal stipend

FMGs are facing difficulty in finding internships after clearing the Foreign Medical Graduates Examination (FMGE). Their demand to get equal stipend as Indian Medical Graduates has led to the unwillingness of medical colleges to provide them seats and train them, as it is straining the resources and funds of the medical colleges and other medical institutions. "The demand of FMGs to get stipend has backfired as the number of seats that can provide them internship along with a decent stipend are low, causing FMGs loss of time ," says an official source.

Waiting game

As per the eligibility criteria of NEET PG, candidates must complete their internship on or before a specific date. Due to the delay in internship seat allotment, FMGs will waste another year before they could apply for the NEET PG exam, says a Tamil Nadu FMG, member, AFA. "I pursued MBBS from Kyrgyzstan in 2023 and cleared the FMGE January 2024 session. I have been waiting since February as the seat allotment process in Tamil Nadu is very different from other states. Everywhere else, medical councils verify documents after FMGs have already initiated their internships. In Tamil Nadu, the verification process has three major steps which take around 3-4 months," says the member.

There are around 600 students who have been waiting to start their internship in Tamil Nadu; some have moved out to Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and other states after getting frustrated with the system here, Tamil Nadu FMG adds. Denying the claims of delay, Dr Muruganathan, ad hoc committee convener of the Tamil Nadu Medical Council, says, "Some students have submitted their details to the embassy and have their verification process pending. It has nothing to do with the state medical council. Once they get the No Objection Certificate (NOC) and verification certificate from the embassy, the Tamil Nadu Directorate of Medical Education (DME) will begin the process of assigning seats to the FMGs."

The Undergraduate Medical Education Board (UGMEB) under the NMC had released a circular asking the FMGs to continue their internship for another year. The circular stated that FMGs are obtaining the compensatory certificates "maliciously".

SC not in favour of changes in NEET UG counselling schedule

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The NTA recently informed the Supreme Court (SC) that after the recommendations of the high-powered committee, it has decided to cancel the grace marks from the scorecards of 1,563 candidates. NTA has provided two options — first, to accept the revised scores without the grace marks. Second, to appear for a re-exam on June 23, 2024. Meanwhile, SC has not put a halt on the counselling process, candidates can actively take part in it. The bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta heard the petition filed by a NEET educator Alakh Pandey. Talking to *Education Times*, Rohit Jain, counsel on record for Pandey, says, "The SC does not want any major change in the counselling schedule. It will take necessary action if any discrepancies are found."

"Many students are not mentally and financially prepared for the re-exam. Their families have put in 100% of their resources which assured them a good score, so why will they take the exam once again? The past few days have been distressing for students," says an aspirant from Gurugram, who scored 710 out of 720 marks in NEET UG 2024.

The SC will hear the case on July 8, once the court resumes after break.

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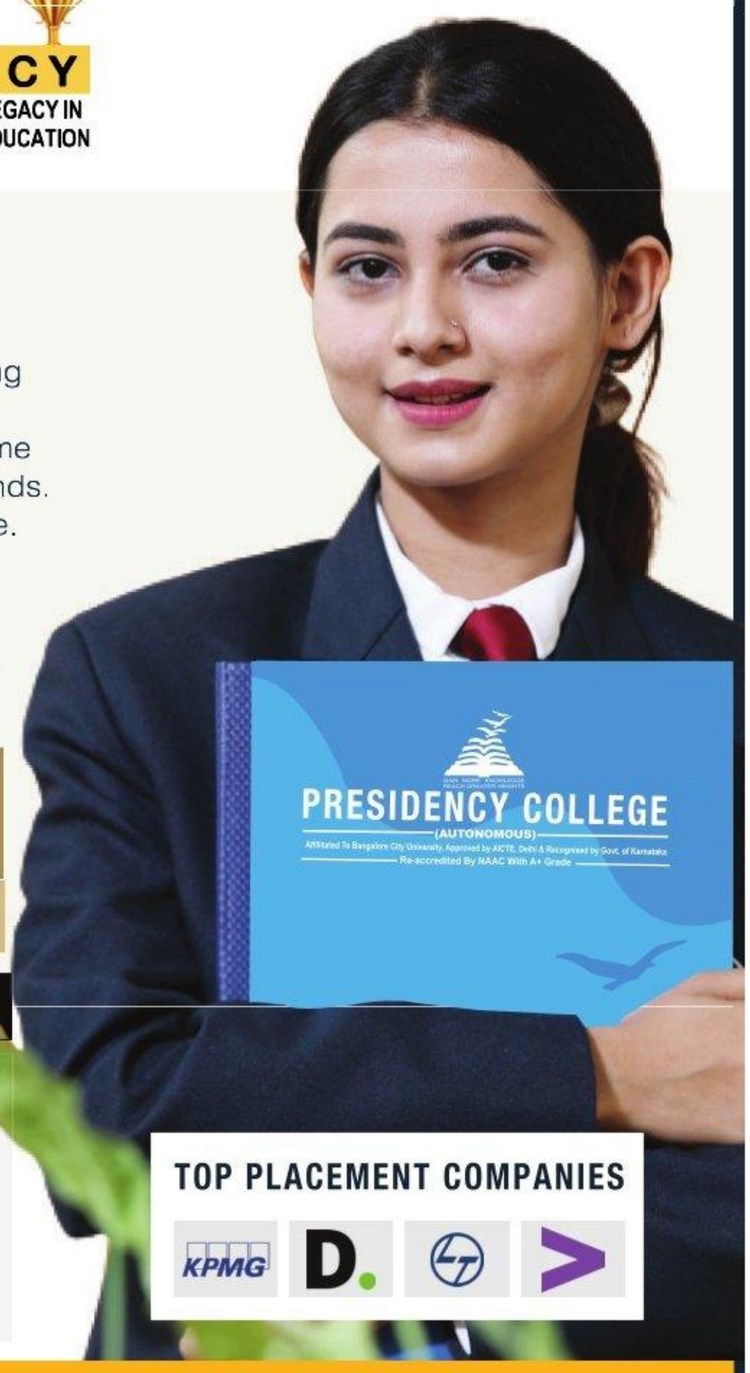

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Thanks to supernumerary quota, girl power rules

In the past five years, there has been a notable rise in the number of female candidates successfully cracking JEE Advanced

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A supernumerary quota for women in IIT undergraduate courses, parental support and encouragement, and better availability of online preparatory resources have increased the number of female candidates cracking the JEE Advanced exam and entering the IIT system.

For the JEE Advanced 2024 exam, 42,947 female candidates registered; 41,020 appeared and 7964 cleared the exam. The number of females who cleared the exam in 2024 is higher than in 2023, when 7,509 women cleared the exam. In 2022, at least 35,124 females registered for the JEE exams, 33,608 appeared, and 6,516 qualified for the exam. In 2021, at least 6,452 females qualified the exam; 35,121 females registered for JEE Advanced 2020, of which 32,851 appeared and 6,707 qualified. Of the total qualified candidates in 2019, 5,356 were females.

There are several reasons for the increase in women cracking the JEE Advanced exam foremost among them is the supernumerary quota. "IITs introduced a 20% supernumerary quota in 2018. Over the past five years, it has made it easier for girls to get a branch of their choice in an IIT closer to their hometowns. Earlier, both of these were major concerns. Many girls clearing the JEE Advanced did not join IITs because they wanted to be closer to their homes, and second, they were more particular than boys in the choice of branch. Today, there are enough role models in schools for girls to emulate. They can see how girls from their schools have cracked the exam and think it is within their reach," says Professor Ramgopal Rao, former director, IIT Delhi and Group vice-chancellor of BITS Pilani.

Earlier, many girls clearing the exam did not join IITs because they wanted to be closer to their hometowns

"A study conducted by IIT Delhi's faculty members found that 20% of girls qualified for the JEE Advanced examination before the introduction of the supernumerary quota, but only 8% joined the IITs, and the rest 12% preferred to join NITs and IIITs. It was mainly for two reasons: they wanted to be close to their homes and were more particular about their choice of branch than boys," adds Rao.

Besides the supernumerary quota, the availability of high-quality online preparatory materials enabled female candidates to prepare for one of the toughest exams in the world. "IIT Delhi introduced the IIT-Professor Assisted Learning (IIT-PAL) programme, which was subsequently matched with the SWAYAM portal. Now, several preparatory materials by IIT faculty are available free of cost online. This has also played a major role," adds Rao. IIT-PAL video lectures for classes XI and XII students are prepared by IIT professors/subject experts to help students better understand the subjects and prepare for competitive exams. The videos are telecast on the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry's Swayam Prabha Channel and can be accessed on Doordarshan DTH Channel 22.

Surging figures show a promising future

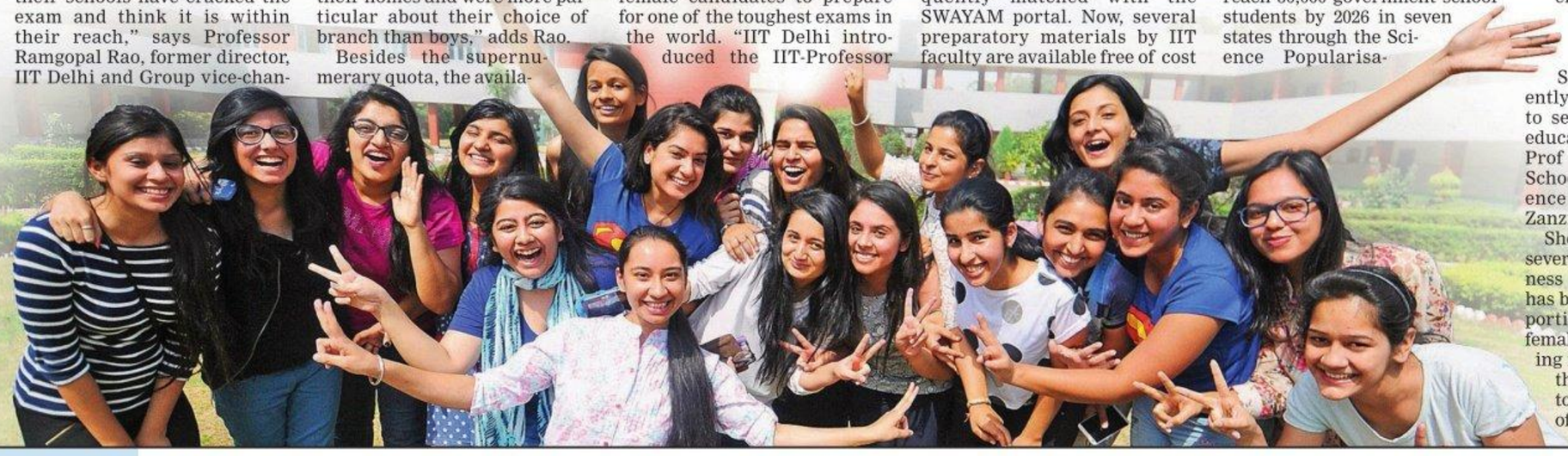
For the JEE Advanced 2024, at least 42,947 female candidates registered; 41,020 appeared and 7,964 cleared the exam. The number of females who cleared the exam in 2024 is higher than in 2023, when 7,509 women cleared the exam. In 2022, at least 35,124 females registered for the exams, 33,608 appeared, and 6,516 qualified for the exam. In 2021, at least 6,452 females qualified the exam; 35,121 females registered for JEE Advanced 2020, at least 32,851 appeared and 6,707 qualified. Of the total qualified candidates in 2019, over 5,356 were females.

Pushing the envelope

Several IITs are running outreach programmes to popularise STEM among school students. For example, IIT Madras aims to reach 50,000 government school students by 2026 in seven states through the Science Popularisation Program in Vernacular Languages to popularise science and provide career guidance in regional languages. Recently, IIT Guwahati organised sessions for 3,311 school students in 12 batches to promote STEM. Over 2,000 participants were girls, representing approximately 65% of total student strength. IIT Dharwad is translating STEM-related resources and career guidance-materials-related resources into Kannada so that students can better understand complex concepts and career options.

"Higher education in Science is an attractive proposition due to the worldwide focus on Women in STEM. In India, the performance of women students at the school level in Mathematics and Science has been consistently good, and it is heartening to see the numbers in higher education pick up as well," says Prof Preeti Aghalayam, dean, School of Engineering and Science and director-in-charge, Zanzibar campus, IIT Madras.

She adds that the impact of several measures to raise awareness about women's education has been positive, including supporting top performers among female students and the increasing number of women pushing the boundaries and striving to carve an educational path of their choice.



Autorickshaw driver's son cracks exam, eyes admission into IIT-B

Parth is determined to support his family, aspires to build a full-fledged career in research

Ayushi.Gupta1@timesgroup

Having witnessed his mother work as a domestic help and father as an autorickshaw driver, propelled Parth Vaity to work hard and secure AIR 367 in JEE Advanced 2024. He plans to get a high-paying job after graduating from IIT Bombay and move to a decent house from their modest single-room dwelling in the suburbs of Mulund, Mumbai.

"I want to help my parents financially after graduation, I am hoping to get admission to Computer Science Engineering (CSE) at IIT Bombay or IIT Delhi. According to the last year's cut-off, my rank and marks can secure a seat at IIT Delhi. I have chosen the CSE branch as I know it can help me get a high-paying job. My priority is to help my family financially," says Parth. "My parents have worked hard all their lives to support my education," he adds.

Parth scored AIR 367 and OBC rank 50 with 267 marks in JEE Advanced 2024. Earlier, in JEE Main, he scored AIR 3092 with an OBC Rank 591. Talking about the high fees at coaching centres and how he managed to get a scholarship, he says, "I appeared for a scholarship exam conducted by a coaching institute, where I secured above 90%. Seeing my marks and potential, the coaching centre provided me with a full scholarship and study material. It was in class X when I started preparing for the JEE."

Taking to *Education Times* about his preparation journey, he says, "I used to attend coaching classes after school, and after completing the classes, I would focus on finishing the assigned homework, followed by practising additional study material. The preparation journey was rigorous and full of enthusiasm for me. I was just an average scorer in school but worked hard for JEE."

Parth has a particular inclination towards science, especially Physics. In class IX, he realised he wanted a career in science. He says, "I decided to pursue a career in science because I liked Physics the most. After conducting detailed research, I learned about the IITs and their excellence in science education. Since then, I have aimed to join one of the IITs. Whenever I had time besides my JEE preparations, I read books on Physics and explored new concepts discussed at various seminars, and research papers. I want to move abroad to establish a full-fledged career in the field of research," Parth adds.

Never repeat mistakes, says Ved who sets new record with 98.61%

Top ranker's journey, marked by exceptional performance in Chemistry, highlights his strategic emphasis on conceptual understanding and the support of his family

Sonal.Srivastava
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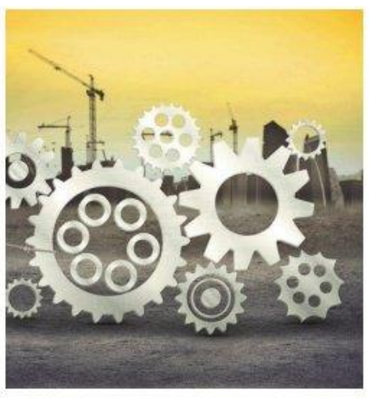
Ved Lahoti from Indore has broken all previous records in the JEE Advanced exam, achieving the highest marks ever with a score of 355 out of 360, an impressive 98.61%. Securing AIR 1, the 17-year-old now aims to pursue Computer Science at IIT Bombay. His exceptional performance, particularly in Chemistry and Physics, reflects his strategic focus on conceptual understanding over rote learning.

He scored the maximum marks in Chemistry. "The JEE Advanced papers were moderate to tough as usual, but it was relatively easier compared to the past two years. In Physics, I focused more on the conceptual part rather than rote learning because if concepts are not clear, you will not be able to solve the problems," says Ved.

He started preparing for the exam two years ago. Hailing from Indore, he studied at SICA Senior Secondary School and Rankers International before moving to Kota to prepare for the JEE. "I moved to Kota because the competition available here is not available in other places. The best students from across the country come to Kota to prepare for JEE Advanced," says Ved.



"I did not take any pressure on myself, and even if I did not do well in the tests, my parents supported me. I did not entertain any negative thoughts, and that helped in the long run," adds Ved.

"I did not have any fixed hours of study. I studied according to my interest and devoted 11-12 hours of study every day, giving equal attention to all three subjects: Maths, Physics, and Chemistry initially. Towards the end, when I realised my strengths and weaknesses, I started giving more time to my weak areas," says Ved.

He believes in taking short breaks during intense study sessions. "The 10-12 hours were not in one go. I studied for three to four hours, then took 30-minute breaks in between. I would talk to friends and family during these breaks, which helped me relax," says Ved. He feels that students must stay away from social media as it takes up a lot of time, which is detrimental to those preparing for entrance exams. His advice to those preparing for the JEE Advanced is to, "Listen to your teachers. They have more experience, so it is very important to follow their advice. Practice a lot and take mock tests, and never repeat your mistakes, because if you repeat your mistakes, the entire purpose of preparing for the JEE is defeated," Ved advises.

He says that his real inspiration is his love for Mathematics, and since childhood, he enjoyed solving Maths problems and taking on new challenges at varying levels of difficulty. Talking about how he prepared for JEE in two years, Ved says that two years are sufficient to prepare for JEE if students get sound advice from teachers and follow that advice.

Tracking progress, identifying areas for improvement are key

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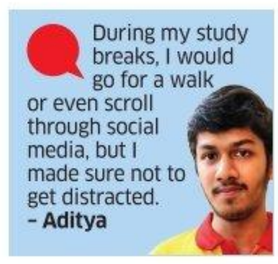
For Aditya, who secured an AIR 2 in the JEE Advanced with 346 marks out of 360, this achievement is just one among many remarkable accomplishments. Currently in Malaysia representing India at the Asian Physics Olympiad 2024, Aditya attributes his success to hard work, consistency, and timely preparation. He wishes to pursue Computer Science at either IIT Bombay or IIT Delhi.

Hailing from Delhi's Pitampura, Aditya started preparing for JEE exams in class IX. He scored 285 marks out of 300 in JEE Main. "In class IX and X, I focused on building a solid foundation to prepare for the exam," says the 17-year-old, adding, "Once I reached class XI, my preparation became rigorous, and I ensured I completed the syllabus on time so I could revise all the subjects."



Aditya studied at DAV Public School in Pitampura and joined coaching to prepare for the exam. "During my preparation, I concentrated on clearing the basic concepts of each topic. Whenever I had doubts, I reached out to my teachers and mentors to clarify them. After that, I practised those topics regularly and solved problems so that I was confident about my preparation," he says.

He woke up as early as 8 am and studied until midnight. "The first thing I did in the morning was analyse how well I had prepared the previous day and planned my schedule accordingly. This activity helped me keep track of my preparation and identify areas where I needed improvement," he says. Aditya adds, "Taking breaks is as important as sticking to a schedule. During my study breaks, I would go for a walk or even scroll through social media, but I made sure not to be distracted by it."

Among all the subjects, Aditya was most confident about scoring well in Physics. However, he faced challenges in Chemistry, especially with topics like Organic Chemistry. "I took mock tests and solved problems regularly to improve my performance in Chemistry." In his free time, Aditya loves to code on his computer. He believes in healthy competition and has participated in various science contests, including Olympiads. "The preparation for JEE Advanced covered all the syllabus for these competitions. However, there were some additional topics that I prepared specifically for my Olympiad competitions," adds Aditya.

Students maintaining a balance between all subjects is crucial

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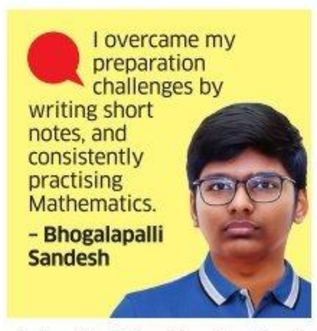
Bhogalapalli Sandesh, 17, hailing from Hyderabad, who secured AIR 3 in open category in the JEE Advanced 2024, says recognising the need to allocate time and focus based on individual strengths and weaknesses is key to cracking the exam.

Sandesh who now aims to pursue Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) at IIT Bombay, started preparing for JEE when he was in class VIII. He says that initially he had no knowledge about the IIT entrance exams, and developed an interest only after seeing his elder brother take coaching for JEE. The influence of his parents, who are government schoolteachers, coupled with his elder brother's pursuit of studying at IIT, fuelled Sandesh's aspiration.



"I joined Narayana CO in class VIII and studied there till class X. After that, I joined Narayana's junior college in Hyderabad. As my interest lay in Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry, I enjoyed preparing for the JEE entrance exams," he says, adding, "After completing my graduation, I would like to work for a couple of years. My ultimate dream is to crack the UPSC examination and serve the nation as a civil servant."

Frequent practice tests

It was fun preparing for the exams, says Sandesh, while adding that he also faced several challenges, such as difficulty in memorising Chemistry concepts, basic facts in Physics, and solving Maths questions quickly. "I overcame these challenges by writing short notes for Chemistry, reading Physics theory, and consistently practicing Maths. My parents and teachers kept me motivated and helped me navigate this process with ease," says Sandesh.

Olympiads are an excellent means to reinforce concepts

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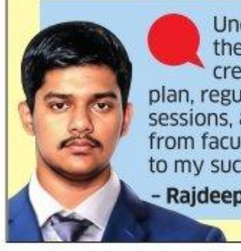
@timesgroup.com

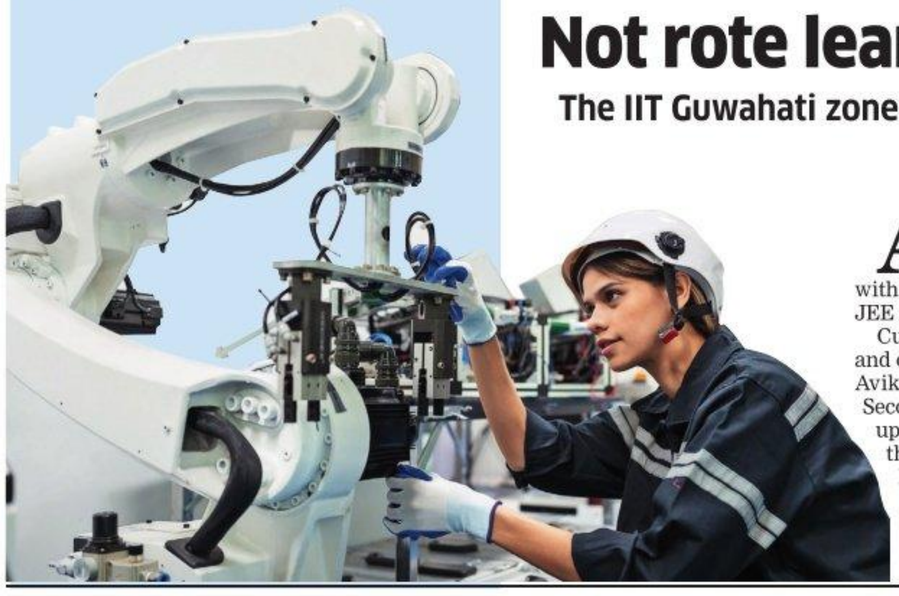
Jamnagar's 17-year-old Rajdeep Mishra secured AIR 6 in the JEE Advanced exam by participating in various national-level Olympiads, practising time management strategies, solving 50 questions in four hours, and through his tenacity to achieve his goal of gaining admission into one of the older IITs.

Born to an Air Force officer, Rajesh Kumar Mishra, and mother Namitha Mishra, Rajdeep has dreamt of being an IITian since childhood. "I began JEE preparation early, diving into topics typically covered in classes XI and XII. I also focused on participating in various Olympiads, which helped me a lot. The early preparation gave me a head start on topics that are often considered difficult," he says.



"I used to study for over 14 hours a day, allotting time slots for Mathematics, Chemistry, and Physics. I dedicated two hours in the morning to revising theory and the rest of the time to pen-paper practice. I divided my practice time into slots, with a target to solve at least 50 questions in each slot," Rajdeep adds. He followed a strategy of practising model question papers from previous years. "Using the online platform and having already covered most of the theory during my JEE Mains preparation became my strength during the Advanced preparation. My exam strategy emphasised time management and a deep analysis of the test format," he says.

Rajdeep relied completely on his online coaching platform for last-minute tips.



Not rote learning, but conceptual clarity is essential for success

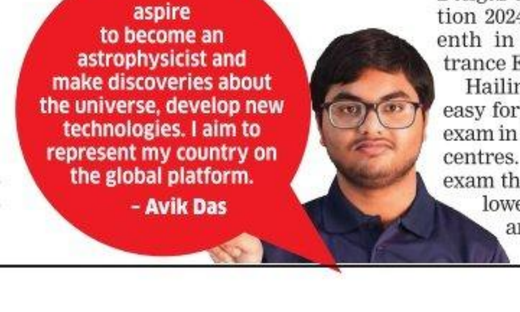
The IIT Guwahati zone topper who sees future in Astrophysics says thorough analysis of mistakes helped him crack exam

Shuddhanta.Patra
@timesgroup.com

Avik Das from West Bengal, has emerged as the overall topper from the IIT Guwahati zone with a Common Rank List (CRL) 69 in JEE Advanced.

Curious about how stars, planets, and other things in the universe work, Avik, a student of Mc William Higher Secondary School, Alipurduar, made up his mind to study Astrophysics at the age of 10. Based on his JEE Mains results (99.98 percentile), he had enrolled at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore in Astrophysics.

An ardent admirer of Stephen Hawking, the world-famous theoretical physicist and cosmologist, Avik says, "I aspire to become an astrophysicist and make discoveries about the universe, develop new technologies, and also play a role in space exploration. I aim to represent my country on the global platform in the world of astrophysics."



Besides JEE, he has also cleared the NEET UG exam this year scoring 705 out of 720. He stood first in the West Bengal Higher Secondary Examination 2024 scoring 496 points and seventh in the West Bengal Joint Entrance Exam (WBJEE).

Hailing from Alipurduar, it was not easy for him to clear the Engineering exam in the absence of decent coaching centres. Avik prepared for the JEE exam through online coaching. He followed the study materials and guidance provided by his coaching institute. "Online personalised classes have bridged the rural-urban educational divide providing quality learning and doubt-clearing sessions," he says.

Besides coaching classes, Avik gave sufficient hours to self-study. "I studied for about 10 hours every day. Regular practice tests and thorough analysis of mistakes have been the strategy behind cracking the exam. A thorough preparation in Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics is necessary for a good score." He believes in conceptual clarity over rote learning. Avik's father, Pradip Kumar Das, a Science and Maths teacher at a government school, has tutored him since childhood.

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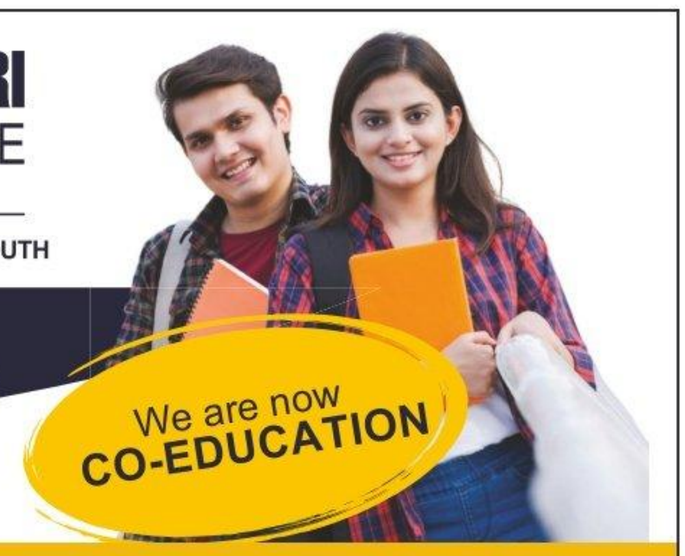

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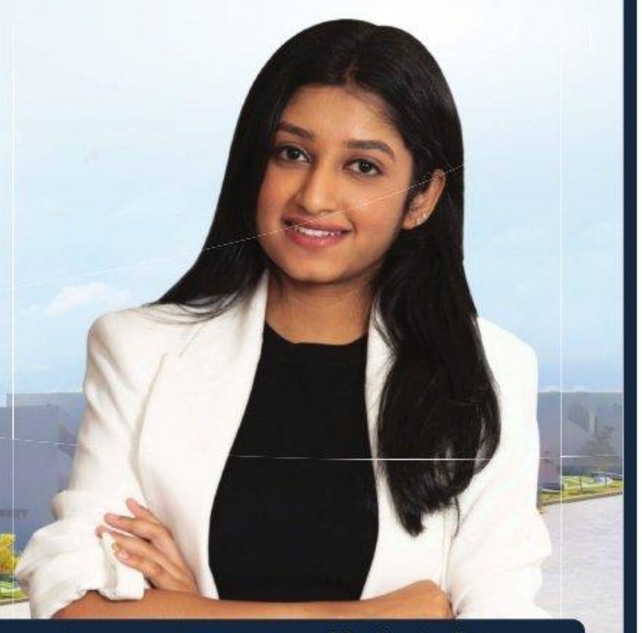

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Skilling can enhance job prospects

States need to introduce impact-focused initiatives to promote skill development, writes Chandrakant Patil

India has the largest youth population in the world – accounting for around 40% of our total population. Estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggest that the Indian labour force is set to grow by over 8 million per annum over the coming decade, most of which will be driven by youth entering the labour market. As a country, we have immense potential to leverage this demographic dividend – for good.

However, today, as the world continues to evolve and hurtles towards a digital future, as a country, we must ensure that our young people remain adaptive to such change. In this context, the imperative of continuing to upskill remains of utmost importance. Against this backdrop, and in the pursuit of building a bright and empowered future, our government has undertaken a series of impact-focused initiatives to promote skill development across the country.

Government policies

Complementing Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), the central government launched the Skill India Mission in 2015 to upskill and reskill the youth to meet the demands of a dynamic job market. As many as 1.4 crore young individuals have received training under PMKVY. Out of these, 24 lakh individuals have successfully secured placements, while 54 lakh have undergone upskilling and reskilling programs.

Atal Incubation Centers have played a pivotal role by generating over 32,000 job opportunities

The impact of the government's efforts is reflected in the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) findings, showcasing a significant decline in youth unemployment rates from 17.8% in 2017-18 to 10% in 2022-23, with the youth LFPR (Labour Force Participatzion Rate) expanding from 38.2% to 44.5% over the same period.

Furthermore, a monumental stride was taken towards fulfilling the promise of creating 10 lakh government jobs through Rozgar Mela, with over 8 lakh positions already filled across 12 editions. The Atal Incubation Centers (AIC) have also played a pivotal role by generating over 32,000 job opportunities, contributing significantly to our employment landscape.

Networking matters

In Maharashtra, a state that has a network of 75 universities and more than 6,000 colleges and institutions, the government has placed immense focus on the skilling and upskilling of students and young graduates. By aligning the state's educational framework with the central government's National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 to drive impact at scale and change the way learning happens in our colleges and universities at present, we have also established robust collaborations with several stakeholders to enhance employability.

To increase opportunities, we have forged strategic partnerships with industry leaders such as Infosys and NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) to enable the students to gain access to skill development courses, ensuring that they are equipped for the professional world.

State partnership with Infosys allows students to gain access to an extensive range of skill development courses and resources offered through the Infosys springboard portal. Similarly, with our government having joined forces with NASSCOM, the premier trade body for the IT and IT-enabled services industry in India, our students are constantly being able to access a diverse set of skill development programs and vocational courses. These courses, offered by Infosys and NASSCOM, are specifically designed to meet the demands of the rapidly evolving job market, ensuring that students can emulate/imbibe the necessary skills and competencies to excel in their chosen careers.

For this, we have also seen the impact of having established such focused collaborations, which have indeed, led our students to leverage from these gains. As per the recent India Skills Report 2023, Maharashtra has the highest concentration of highly employable candidates from the BE/BTech, Engineering domain with 69.03% scoring above 60% on the WNET (Wheebox National Employability Test).

Financial knowledge

Focussing on the importance of financial literacy, the student are acquiring essential knowledge of personal finance, budgeting, savings, and investment strategies – enabling them to make informed decisions about their financial well-being. To this end, we have collaborated with the Moneybee Institute and the National Stock Exchange (NSE) to enhance financial literacy and securities market awareness among students.

Additionally, our government's focus remains on our students' holistic growth and development. A crucial aspect of this endeavour is facilitating academic exchanges, joint research projects, cultural exchange programs, and various other initiatives that enrich the global exposure and international perspective of our students. To this end, we have joined hands with esteemed institutions and organisations, including the British Council. Our department, in particular, is dedicated to working closely with the British Council to bolster Maharashtra's higher education ecosystem through capacity building, leadership development, and faculty training – all aimed at supporting our internationalisation agenda.

(The author is Minister, Higher and Technical Education, Government of Maharashtra)

Environment-friendly system

The Maharashtra government is aware of the impact of climate change on our communities, infrastructure, and the economy. With each year consistently breaking the record on several climate-focused indicators, we realise that now it is more important than ever to promote and encourage climate empowerment and action, especially among our students. As a step in this direction, we have partnered with UNICEF Mumbai – extending our efforts to 3000 colleges and engaging with 2 million youths across 13 districts of Maharashtra – promoting localised youth action for climate empowerment.

Thus, as we look towards the future, it remains imperative that we continue to prioritise and invest in skill development initiatives that empower our youth. By cultivating/fostering a culture of lifelong learning, equipping graduates with pertinent skills, and creating pathways for continuous professional development, can our country truly leverage the full potential of its youth dividend and emerge as a global leader in talent and innovation. In Maharashtra, our focus will always be on building a future where every student has the opportunity to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society and the economy.

Tech stacks powering seamless telemedicine consultation service

Telemedicine should be on the radar of education policy specialists at national level, writes **Prof Nisheeth Srivastava**

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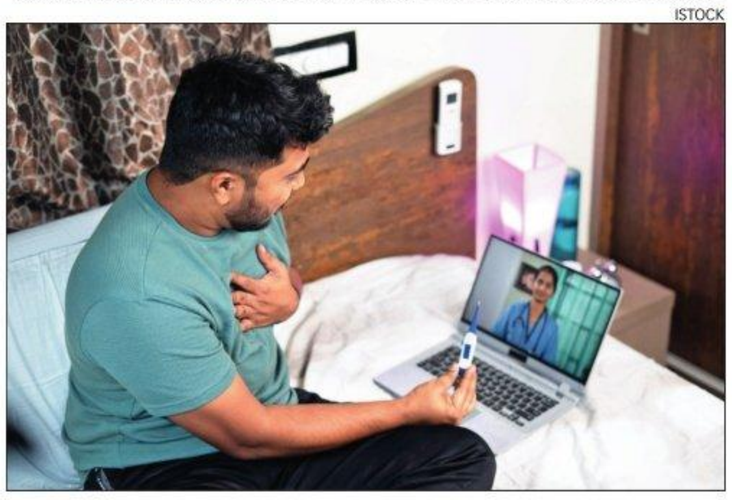


The word telemedicine is likely to conjure a vision of talking to your doctor over a video call on your smartphone these days. However, telemedicine covers a wide spectrum of medical services, from simple phone-based consultations to exotic telerobotic surgeries. Remote monitoring of an ICU patient's vital signs, remote examination of someone's X-ray films, and even therapy sessions with a counsellor on the phone, all fall within the gamut of telemedicine. Telemedicine, in its varied forms, has been with us for decades but has risen to prominence since the COVID-19 pandemic, when it became the primary mode of healthcare consultation around the world due to lockdowns.

Internet-driven

We frequently take network connectivity for granted in civilian life, but telemedicine acquires particular significance specifically in many extreme real-world settings wherein communication bandwidth is precarious. Creating and maintaining ad hoc networks on oil drilling platforms in the middle of the ocean, at high-altitude military camps, and during disaster management is a prerequisite for telemedicine in such high-stakes situations. Even in more quotidian environments, telemedicine increases in significance, precisely as locations become more remote and hence, less likely to be served well by communication networks. Maintaining call fidelity under such low-resource conditions requires expertise in signal processing, computer networks, and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies.

A particular challenge for doctors in teleconsultation settings is how they can assess a patient's well-being. Tacit knowledge about patients' health is accessible much more easily through physical interactions than via a digital interface. Telemedicine providers seek to make up for the deficit in tacit understanding by presenting a comprehensive view of the patient's prior interactions with the healthcare system. India's National Health Stack, maintained by the National Health Authority, enables health record interoperability by design. However, proper utilisation of health records requires skill in health informatics, fundamentals of medical science, and comfort in working with complex data schemes.

Finally, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that a person's decision to visit a doctor is not the same as taking a laptop to the shop for repairs. Illness is accompanied by vulnerability and a desire for reassurance, which good doctors can address with a human touch.

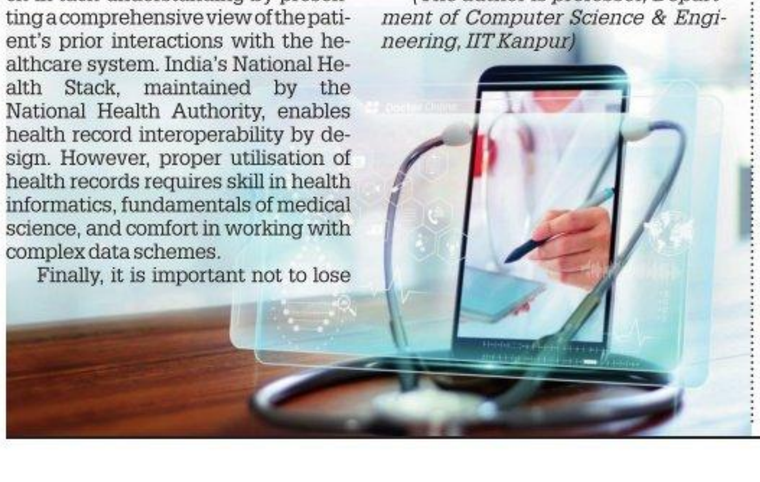
Proper utilisation of health records requires health informatics skills and comfort in working with complex data schemes

Search for accurate design

Telemedicine can bridge the physical distance between the doctor and the patient, but not the psychic distance between two people who are encountering each other serendipitously online. Introducing an element of familiarity and reassurance to the patient's experience is a billion-dollar design problem in telemedicine, for which there do not yet exist particularly satisfactory solutions. Insights from psychology, UX design, and communications studies are likely to be the prime drivers of successful solutions to this problem.

In addition to young people looking to acquire skills, telemedicine should also be on the radar of education policy specialists at the national level. The rapid greying of First World populations, and India's simultaneous English-speaking demographic surplus, together mean that remote delivery of healthcare services could be a very valuable component of our export slate, rivaling the IT and BPO boom of the early 21st century in scale and impact. Integrated skilling programs for telemedicine, such as the ones currently being piloted at IIT Kanpur's Gangwal School of Medical Sciences and Technology (GSMST), may hold the potential for unlocking these opportunities.

(The author is professor, Department of Computer Science & Engineering, IIT Kanpur)



Board games fostering critical thinking in design classrooms

By immersing themselves in games, students can sharpen their analytical abilities and learn to approach design problems with a strategic mindset, writes **Anjan Chakravorty**

Design education has traditionally been grounded in theoretical knowledge, technical skills, and practical applications. However, as the landscape of education evolves, educators are increasingly seeking innovative methods to enhance learning outcomes and prepare students for the dynamic challenges of the design industry. One such method gaining traction is integrating board games into design curricula. Board games offer a unique blend of entertainment and education, providing a platform for students to develop essential skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and iterative thinking. Here are the key areas where board games can be used in classrooms:

Enhancing creativity

Creativity lies at the heart of design. Board games catalyze creative thinking by presenting players with diverse challenges and scenarios. Games such as "Codenames" or "Dixit" encourage abstract thinking and associative skills, pushing students to explore unconventional ideas and solutions. By engaging with these games, students can expand their creative horizons, breaking free from conventional design paradigms and cultivating a more versatile approach to problem-solving.

Developing critical thinking

Critical thinking is a fundamental skill in design, enabling students to analyse, evaluate, and synthesise information effectively. Board games require players to make strategic decisions, anticipate outcomes, and adapt to changing circumstances. Games like "Settlers of Catan" or "Risk" challenge students to manage resources, formulate long-term strategies, and consider the consequences of their actions. By immersing themselves in these games, students sharpen their analytical abilities.

Promoting collaboration

Collaboration is essential in design, where projects often require teamwork and cooperation. Board games offer a platform for students to hone their collaborative skills. Cooperative games like "Pandemic" foster communication, teamwork, and collective problem-solving. By playing these games, students learn to appreciate diverse perspectives, leverage each other's strengths, and work towards a common goal.

Encouraging iterative thinking

The iterative design process is a cornerstone of design methodology, involving constant refinement and iteration. Board games mirror this iterative approach, requiring players to adapt their strategies based on feedback and evolving circumstances. Games like "Scrabble" or "Ticket to Ride" challenge students to refine their tactics and adjust their approach in real time. By engaging with these games, students internalise this creative mindset, understanding that logical reasoning is essential for innovation in design.

Encouraging creativity

Board games offer a multifaceted approach to enhancing design education, providing a dynamic platform for students to develop essential skills and mindsets. By encouraging creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and iterative thinking, board games prepare students to tackle the complex challenges of the design industry with confidence and innovation. As design education evolves, it becomes more important to integrate board games into the curriculum.

Providing a safe space for failure

Failure is an inevitable part of the design process, offering valuable learning opportunities. Board games provide a low-stakes environment where students can experiment, take risks, and learn from their mistakes. By embracing failure as a natural part of the learning process, students develop resilience, perseverance, and a willingness to push creative boundaries in their work.

Hence, incorporating board games into the design curriculum can take various forms, from structured activities to design projects. Educators can use games as icebreakers to foster rapport among students or as tools for teaching specific concepts and skills.

(The author is dean, School of Communication, World University of Design)

Low-code platforms make institutes digitally efficient

Low code is used to automate tasks such as course registration, faculty selection, writes **Bharath Kumar B**

Imagine a high school teacher, with no coding expertise, building an online app for scheduling classes, setting reminders for tests, and drawing out an entire timetable that can be accessed at all times by both students and parents. With low-code application development platforms, this is possible.

What is low-code

Low-code tools empower users with little or no coding experience to build applications with the help of drag-and-drop visual builders. Professionals in any field can learn how to use low-code and build specific apps as per requirements.

Hurdles

Low-code reduces the burden on the existing IT teams as it leverages the flexibility and always-on nature of cloud computing. It needs no additional technical infrastructure. For the teachers and administrative staff, it becomes an easier method to learn and adopt. Low-code platforms help users build end-to-end and scalable solutions across devices for varied needs like admissions management, assessment management, grading, attendance management, course planning, and communications.

Usage in educational institutes

Several institutes use low code to automate various tasks such as course registration, faculty selection, and timetable generation. Students can register for courses online, select optional subjects, and receive complete timetables via email. This transition to digital processes has significantly improved efficiency, while also making their system more convenient and accessible. The new modes of learning focus on ease of access and provide an abundance of options and flexibility.

(The writer is the head of marketing and customer experience for Zoho Creator)

Allowing FYUP students to pursue doctoral programmes will expand their academic horizon

The decision will promote academic inclusivity, foster a culture of innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration, writes **Rohit Gupta**

In a recent announcement by the University Grants Commission (UGC) a significant change has been introduced in the academic landscape. This change brings good news for students holding a four-year undergraduate programme (FYUP) who aspire to pursue a PhD programme.

Breaking barriers

Traditionally, the path to a PhD involved obtaining a master's degree before being eligible to take the UGC-NET exam. However, with this recent development, students holding an FYUP can now directly pursue a PhD without the necessity of a master's degree. This opens up new avenues for students to delve deeper into their academic interests and pursue advanced research in their chosen field.

Flexibility across disciplines

One of the most notable aspects of this change is the flexibility it offers in terms of academic disciplines. Previously, students were often confined to pursuing a PhD in the same field as their undergraduate or master's degree. However, with the ability to take the UGC-NET exam in their chosen subject, students now have the freedom to explore diverse fields and expand their academic horizons.

The new guidelines will open up new avenues for students to delve deeper into their academic interests

This not only enriches their educational experience but also enhances their skill set.

Eligibility criteria

While the opportunity to pursue a PhD with FYUP is exciting, it comes with certain eligibility criteria. To be eligible for the UGC-NET exam, students must obtain a minimum of 75% marks in their bachelor's degree. However, there is a relaxation for candidates belonging to reserved categories (SC, ST, OBC (non-creamy layer), differently-abled, economically weaker sections and other categories of candidates as per the decision of the UGC from time to time). It is essential to fulfil these criteria to proceed with the application process for the NET exam.

Alternative pathways

For students who do not meet the 75% mark requirement, there is another route to pursue their PhD aspirations. They can opt to enrol in a one-year Postgraduate program, following which they become eligible to apply for the UGC-NET exam. This option opens research avenues for more students aspiring to do a PhD.

Overall, the decision to directly allow students with 4-year undergraduate degrees to pursue a PhD is a significant step towards empowering future scholars. It not only promotes academic inclusivity but also fosters a culture of innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration. By breaking down barriers and expanding access to higher education, this change paves the way for a more diverse and dynamic academic community.

(The author is co-founder and COO, College Vidya)

Amid infrastructure and fund shortage, UGC allows admissions twice a year

Experts are concerned that this will create a rat race culture and the execution will be taxing for most institutes and universities

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Focusing on increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), the University Grants Commission (UGC) has decided to allow Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country to admit students twice a year as opposed to the earlier regulations that permitted students to be admitted only in the July-August admission session.

With the new regulations, students can now be admitted in January/February and in July/August academic sessions in UG, PG, and PhD programmes. The UGC's decision now leaves it to the institutions to decide if they want to offer admissions in both cycles or just one, and this will depend on their infrastructure and faculty.

In 2023, UGC permitted biannual admissions under Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online modes in January and July during an academic year. The decision to admit students twice a year was taken after the Commission saw a record increase in the number of students taking admission to colleges in recent years. As per the Commission, this will also help students who miss the first admission deadline save the academic year by taking admission in the next session.

Faculty requirement

While the purpose of the directive is to increase the GER, academia is worried about the additional burden of two academic cycles. Prof Furqan Qamar, Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), says, "UGC has now enabled universities to admit students twice a year but the saving grace is it has not made it mandatory. Universities in India are already admitting PhD students twice a year but running two admission cycles is a different ball game. The new system calls for adequate facilities and a large number of teachers. It is good to learn from the best practices of the world but we must recognise that these best practices are dependent on certain necessary conditions such as availability of resources, infrastructure and teachers."

Indian universities opting for the new system will have to ensure that both the sessions are academically synchronised

Prof BJ Rao, vice chancellor, University of Hyderabad (UoH), says, "The recent decision will increase the GER and also position India as a major educational destination globally. Presently, Indian universities do not train enough students in comparison to other countries. Smaller countries with two or three sessions are generating more qualified students than us. With the new proposed system, India too will train and educate more number of students."

"But, the HEIs opting for the new system will have to ensure that both the sessions are academically well synchronised. The major challenge will be to counter the problem of teacher shortage to cater to students in both sessions. The country, at present, does not have enough faculty to meet the demand. Currently, the UoH is not in a position to conduct admissions twice a year," adds Rao.

Calling it a student-friendly directive, Prof M Jagadesh Kumar, chairman, UGC, says, "If Indian universities can offer admission twice a year, it will benefit many students who missed admission in the July/August session due to a delay in the announcement of board results, health issues, or personal reasons. Biannual university admissions will help students maintain motivation since they do not have to wait one full year to be admitted if they miss admission in the current cycle."

Need for good planning

To be able to admit students twice a year, HEIs have been advised to make suitable amendments to their institutional regulations. "If HEIs adopt biannual admissions, they need to work on administrative intricacies, good planning for increased use of available resources, and providing seamless support systems for the smooth transition of students admitted at dissimilar times of the year. HEIs can maximise in the usefulness of biannual admissions only when they sufficiently prepare the faculty members, staff and students for the transition," says Prof Manish Ratnakar Joshi, secretary, UGC.

Prof BB Tiwari, director, School of Economics and Commerce, CMR University, Bangalore, says, "Although this movement will save the time of students and will allow the industry to have a recruitment drive twice a year, the education industry will face a challenge of faculty engagement or recruitment for maintaining a high level of quality education. In comparison to the private sector, the government sector will face a bigger challenge. The main worry is UGC's recent decision should not become a rat race to make money by compromising the quality," says Tiwari.

Ceramic engineering is bridging gaps in innovation across industries

The broad application of ceramics in all sectors keeps the relevance of the course intact

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As long as oxidation persists due to moisture in the air, the value of ceramic and glass material in factories will continue to be important. This sums up the importance of ceramic engineering, which is often perceived to be an obsolete stream.

Pursuing a course in ceramic engineering opens the gates to many opportunities in several sectors for students. Being interdisciplinary, ceramics can be exploited in all branches such as civil engineering, metallurgical, chemical, biomedical, mechanical, electrical, electronics, and computer engineering. This enables ceramic engineers to be in great demand across a range of sectors, including electronics, aerospace, automotive, healthcare, and energy. The course remains highly relevant in today's age due to its broad application across various advanced technologies and industries.

Shantanu K Behera, professor, Department of Ceramic Engineering, NIT Rourkela, says, "The relevance of ceramic engineering and the development of ceramic material technologies has risen in recent years due to an increased thrust in sustainable development areas such as water decontamination, hydrogen technologies, storage technologies, where many forms of advanced ceramic materials are being used. Further, India is experiencing increased footprints in its defence programmes and space technologies that require the development of materials for aggressive environments. Therefore, the importance of ceramic engineering has shifted to modern materials along with the existing traditional ceramics."

Ceramics are essential in the production of dielectric materials used in capacitors and other electronic components. Ceramic substrates provide a stable platform for mounting semiconductor devices, enhancing performance and reliability. "Ceramic engineering is the science and technology of creating objects from inorganic, non-metallic materials. This field involves designing and manufacturing ceramic products, which are typically hardened by baking at high temperatures," says Behara.

Unlike IT jobs

Being engaged in the processing of these materials as an engineer is a completely different thing as compared to an IT professional. The work often involves manufacturing or processing materials following scientific and engineering methods in the lab. The new materials are then characterised with regards to its phase, morphology, microstructure, etc. This may be entirely different from the nature of jobs IT professionals do.

Research and applications

Major advances are happening in the ceramic world. Carbon nanotubes and graphene, which are different forms of carbon, have recently influenced ceramics like no other materials in the past. Incorporating nanoparticles into ceramic matrices enhances properties like toughness, wear resistance, and thermal stability. Applications include cutting tools, medical implants, and coatings. Advanced thermal barrier coatings are being currently developed that can allow operation of aeroengines at a much higher temperature making them more energy efficient. Further, engine components are being made from ceramics that allow hypersonic travel of aircraft and projectiles.

"Many modern applications are also being researched that include energy storage devices, such as batteries, fuel cells, and supercapacitors. Due to the compatibility of some ceramics with human body, they are progressively being used for bone-tissue engineering, wound healing, agents for drug delivery etc," says Behera.

Pursuing a course in ceramic engineering opens the gates to many opportunities in several sectors

Ashutosh Suresh Gandhi, professor, Department of Metallurgical Engineering and Materials Science, IIT Bombay, says, "The earth's crust is essentially made of ceramics - silica sand, various minerals, and ores are all naturally occurring ceramic materials. The smartphone display has a very hard and tough glass (a ceramic material) as a crucial component. Electronic devices have electro ceramics making up a large fraction of components. Next-generation semiconductors such as III-V semiconductors, silicon carbide, are ceramics. Solid-state lithium-ion batteries are made of ceramics. Thin films and coatings are used in a wide range of structural and functional applications, and most of these are ceramics. Prosthetics (artificial body parts) like dental implants, artificial bone and joints are made of ceramic materials. New safe, energy efficient buildings that can be made by 3D printing use ceramic building materials."

Institutes that offer course

Degrees of BTech, MTech, and even PhD are typically offered in many universities. Ceramic technology programme is offered at IIT BHU, Varanasi; IIT Bombay; NIT Rourkela; Calcutta University, Kolkata; Government College of Engineering and Ceramic Technology, Kolkata; Andhra University College of Engineering, Visakhapatnam; Alagappa College of Technology, AU, Chennai; College of Engineering and Technology, Bikaner; PDA College of Engineering, Gulbarga, and PES College of Engineering, Karnataka.

Curriculum on offer

Gandhi says, "IIT Bombay offers a degree in metallurgical engineering and materials science. Ceramic engineering topics are subsumed in this curriculum. The curriculum of ceramic engineering branch includes science of ceramic materials, their properties, extraction from ores, processing into shapes by particulate processing techniques, their mechanical, electrical, magnetic, optical, and thermal properties."

Sreevats Pandey, a former PhD student, from IIT-BHU says, "A typical ceramic engineering curriculum includes core courses: introduction to Materials Science, Ceramic Materials and Processing, Thermodynamics of Materials, Mechanical Properties of Ceramics, Electronic Ceramics. The laboratories and practical training consist of materials characterisation, sintering and processing techniques, computational materials science; electives and specialisations have biomaterials, advanced ceramic coatings, nanotechnology, ceramic composites; while research projects and internships consist of industry-based internships, research projects in collaboration with faculty."

Positive hiring trends

Graduates can take their chosen career path. Many join PSUs like SAIL, Nalco, EIL, BHEL and other corporations. The typical industrial jobs are available as refractory engineers or glass engineers. Graduates with BTech in ceramic engineering also get into career in IT much like other engineering graduates. "NIT Rourkela claimed 100% placement in 2023. Tata Steel offered 13 lakh per annum for core roles in 2023. The branch also opens doors to non-core roles like analytics and software positions. Average non-core roles can fetch freshers over 10 lakh per annum. Many go for higher studies and research in IITs and IISc and to specialised institutions in the US, UK and Japan," says PV Navaneethakrishnan, former professor and director, Entrance Exams and Admission, Anna University, Chennai.

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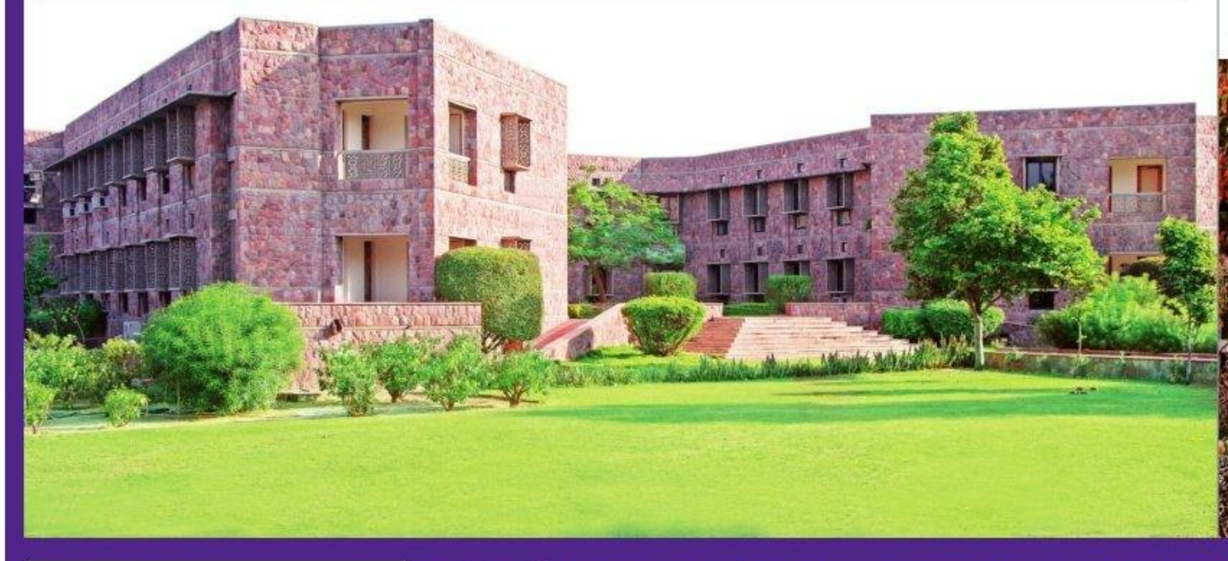

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Central government PENs a new system to check school dropouts, streamline migration

The Permanent Education Number will serve as a common thread across diverse learning stages, from pre-primary to postgraduate education

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To modernise the education system, the Ministry of Education has initiated the implementation 11-digit unique identification number for students, known as the Permanent Education Number (PEN), starting from the current academic year. The PEN project, announced in 2023, will be assigned to every student provided through the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) portal that covers over 14.89 lakh schools, 95 lakh teachers, and 25 crore children nationwide.

In an interview with the *Education Times*, IAS Sanjay Kumar, secretary, Ministry of Education, Department of School Education and Literacy, says, "PEN was conceptualised to identify every student through the UDISE+ portal, as outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. From regular administrative processes to major issues concerning students like transferring schools, the PEN will be a necessary document. The implementation of PEN would streamline and simplify the process of the student's transition from one school to the other across the country, a process often complicated, particularly at the pre-primary, primary, and upper-primary levels."

Smooth transitions

"Earlier, when parents changed their child's school, especially in classes such as II, V, or VII, their transition to the new school was not smooth, as the school administration insisted on procuring documents such as transfer certificate, caste, birth certificates, and class records, among others, which caused immense trouble to the parents. Several students have also dropped out of school or taken a gap year owing to the cumbersome process of migrating their data in the absence of a nationwide portal to ease the procedure," he adds.

Besides efficiency, PEN would bring about transparency in the education system. "PEN is a tracking mechanism for students across all government and private schools across the country. It will help monitor the student's progress throughout their academic journey and also help implement government schemes based on their academic performance, which was not possible earlier. This not only streamlines administrative processes but also ensures that students' records remain consistently updated and accessible," says Kumar.

It was conceptualised to identify every student through the UDISE+ portal, as outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

Parental consent

However, registering for the PEN is voluntary for schools and is to be undertaken only with parents' consent. "The PEN will not just be confined to school databases but also will be linked with other platforms including DigiLocker. It will serve as a common thread across diverse learning stages, from pre-primary to postgraduate education," says Kumar, who confirms most states have decided to implement the PEN system in their educational institutes.

The PEN, which is different from the Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR), will function as a filter against duplication of data such as marksheets and also verify or authenticate the certificates. It can also be used for scholarships, examinations and employment.

Meanwhile, the Education Department in Andhra Pradesh has made PEN mandatory from the academic year 2024-25.

Srinivas Singh, state IT Coordinator, Commissioner of School Education, Government of Andhra Pradesh, says, "As many as 86 lakh PEN have been generated till now in Andhra Pradesh, and 40,000 are under process for the 2023-24 academic year. The registration for PEN generation for the academic year 2024-25 began this week after the schools reopened post-summer vacation. Just as the Aadhaar card is mandatory to avail government schemes, the PEN in the absence of the Aadhaar Card, tracks the students' progress and academic movement and also executes the centre-state educational schemes."

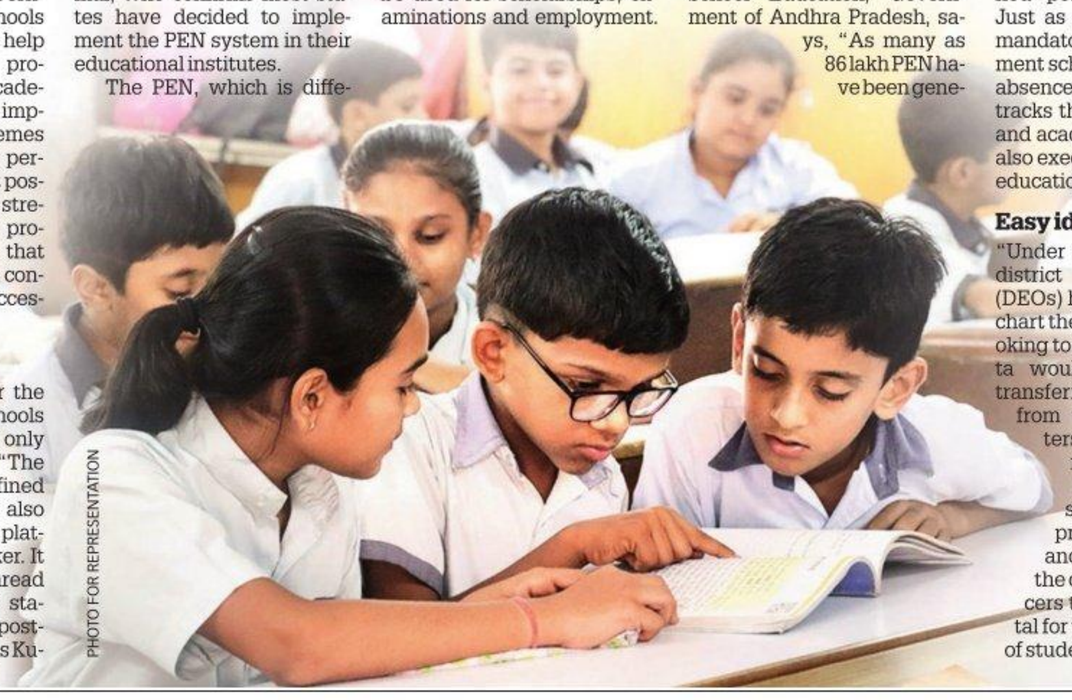


PHOTO FOR REPRESENTATION

Easy identification

"Under the new system, the district education officers (DEOs) have been directed to chart the students who are looking to migrate and their data would automatically be transferred to the new school from the state headquarters. Apart from this, in remote areas, where high schools are absent, a report will be prepared on schools and students and sent to the district education officers through the PEN portal for the smooth transition of students," adds Singh.

The West Bengal School Education Department has decided to make the use of PEN compulsory this academic year. According to state officials, linking PEN with the Banglar Shiksha portal, a system of unique IDs for students in vocational undergraduate, Anganwadi, and engineering courses, will enable schools and teachers in the state to seamlessly access student information.

"Identifying students who relocated outside West Bengal through the Banglar Shiksha portal was challenging. With the implementation of PEN, the issue is likely to be resolved, allowing for easy identification and record access nationwide," an official stated on the condition of anonymity.

Telangana, from academic year 2023-24, has made student PEN compulsory to identify the dropouts and bring them back into schools. The state education secretary, Vakati Karuna, has directed the school education department to print PEN on Secondary School Certificate (SSC) hall tickets this year.

Should there be a uniform bond policy in med colleges

A uniform policy presents an opportunity for reform to alleviate the financial and mental health concerns of doctors

TALKING POINT

PG seats lie vacant

There is no provision of a bond under the NMC Act 2019 or the erstwhile Medical Council Act 1956 and regulations made thereafter. There is a consensus

in the NMC meeting that there should be mandatory rural service to increase available doctors, but the bond could be non-financial and implemented through an administrative mechanism. Due to the bond systems, many PG seats in medical colleges lie vacant.

We advocate for the abolition of the bonds to alleviate the burden on medical professionals. The NMC's initiative to consider a uniform bond policy presents an opportunity for reform. Any new policy must consider the well-being of not only the country's citizens but also the young doctors who are the backbone of healthcare in the country.

DR KM ABUL HASAN,
CHAIRMAN, IMA JUNIOR DOCTORS NETWORK

Why not for engineers

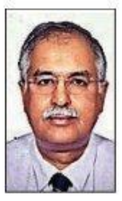
There is a bond after MBBS, MD/MS, and then after super specialisation courses, that is, DM/MCh. There is no common duration for bond service across the country. In some institutes governed by the central government, for example, AIIMS, IMS-BHU, AMU, there is no bond policy.

Medical students from these colleges will not be required to serve any mandatory bond service nor would they have to pay any money as penalty. Since health in India is a state subject, it is up to the state authorities to decide on the duration and the amount of the bond. But one fails to understand why there is a strict bond policy for only doctors and not for engineers and other professionals. The idea of the bond policy was to remove the disparity in the number of doctors in the underserved areas, but it is creating stress among medical students.

DR AMIT GUPTA,
PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY, AIIMS RISHIKESH

Ensure accountability

Only a few states have implemented service bonds, which is because the seats are not getting filled. The salaries too are much lower in those states.



There is no service bond in Delhi. Uniformity in fines for leaving medical PG seats in India is crucial to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability in the medical education system. Currently, varying fines lead to perceptions of injustice and inequality among students, eroding trust. Clear guidelines empower students to make informed decisions about their educational paths and promote accountability. Uniform fines prevent abuse by institutions and ensure that penalties are proportionate. They also discourage attrition.

DR MANOJ ANDLEY,
DIRECTOR PROFESSOR & HOD SURGERY, LHMC, NEW DELHI

Will bring in fairness

In medical education, the varied bond policies across states and institutions create a labyrinth of challenges for aspiring doctors. A uniform bond policy is

imperative, spanning both government and private medical colleges, to ensure fairness and equitable distribution of healthcare professionals. This policy would facilitate workforce planning, enabling targeted initiatives to address healthcare disparities and incentivise service in underserved areas. Harmonising bond regulations is not merely about bureaucratic efficiency; it is about fostering a healthcare system that prioritises the well-being of medical professionals and the communities they serve.

DR VIVEK PANDEY,
RTI ACTIVIST

–As told to **Rajlakshmi Ghosh**

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