

“Life is short. Focus on what really matters most; you should change your priorities over time.” Roy T. Bennett

NATIONAL

INSTITUTIONS OF EMINENCE

Government declares 6 educational ‘Institutions of Eminence’; 3 Institutions from Public Sector and 3 from Private Sector shortlisted.

The institutions selected are:

Public Sector: (i) Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, Karnataka; (ii) Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, Maharashtra; and (iii) Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

Private Sector: (i) Jio Institute (Reliance Foundation), Pune under Green Field Category; (ii) Birla Institute of Technology & Sciences, Pilani, Rajasthan; and (iii) Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, Karnataka.

Each ‘Public Institution’ selected as ‘Institution of Eminence’ will get financial assistance up to Rs. 1000 Crore over a period of five years.

These Institutions shall be provided with greater autonomy to admit foreign students up to 30% of admitted students; to recruit foreign faculty up to 25% of faculty strength; to offer online courses up to 20% of its programmes.

They will also be allowed to enter into academic collaboration with top 500 in the world ranking Institutions without permission of UGC; free to fix and charge fees from foreign students without restriction; complete flexibility in fixing of curriculum and syllabus, among others.

At the same time, they will get more opportunity to scale up their operations with more skills and quality improvement so that they become World Class Institutions in the field of education.

Need for world-class institutes:

India lacks world-class universities according to international rankings, and Indian academics, compared internationally, are rather poorly paid. Students also suffer an

immense shortage of places in top academic institutions and throughout the higher education system. India today educates only half as many young people from the university age group as China and ranks well behind most Latin American and other middle-income countries.

If India is to succeed as a great technological power with a knowledge-based economy, world-class universities are required. The first step, however, is to examine the problems and create realistic solutions. Spending large sums scattershot will not work. Nor will copying the American academic model succeed.

N Gopalaswami committee was constituted to select 20 institutes of higher education in India that will be developed into “world-class” institutes.

Institutions of Eminence scheme:

The institutes of eminence scheme under the Union human resource development (HRD) ministry aims to project Indian institutes to global recognition.

The 20 selected institutes will enjoy complete academic and administrative autonomy.

The government will run 10 of these and they will receive special funding.

The selection shall be made through challenge method mode by the Empowered Expert Committee constituted for the purpose.

Only higher education institutions currently placed in the top 500 of global rankings or top 50 of the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) are eligible to apply for the eminence tag.

The private Institutions of Eminence can also come up as Greenfield ventures provided the sponsoring organization submits a convincing perspective plan for 15 years.

SC SAYS IT IS READY TO GO LIVE, CENTRE MOOTS A TV CHANNEL

Recently, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court has favoured live-streaming of court proceedings. Further, the government has

mooted for a separate TV channel for live-streaming court proceedings

Petitioners have advocated that citizens have the right to information and matters of national importance should be live-streamed. In case live-streaming is not possible, there should be provision for video-recording

Benefits of live-streaming court proceedings:

Easy Access: Would help litigants follow the proceedings in their case. People from distant places do not have to travel to Delhi for the hearings

Would help litigant address their lawyer's performance

Would keep a check on lawyer's conduct inside the courtroom

Help in ensuring transparency in the administration of the justice

Precautions to be taken:

Cases related to national security concerns; matrimonial disputes and rapes should not be live-streamed. Public-viewing of cases of matrimonial disputes and rapes is a violation to the fundamental right to privacy and it might also affect justice.

Agreements with the broadcaster should be on a non-commercial basis so as to discourage profit-making from the arrangement.

Further, there should not be any unauthorized reproduction of the video of the court proceedings.

GLOBAL HOUSING CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGE

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs is set to launch the Global Housing Construction Technology Challenge as part of the technology sub-mission of PMAY-U.

The challenge aims to provide more dynamism to the scheme.

It will invite ideas from across the globe for alternative technologies that go beyond the brick-and-mortar building model used widely in Indian construction.

The four parameters in the global challenge would be time, cost, quality, and sustainability. The technology will have to be better than the existing ones on all these four fronts.

It will be tested in geographically different urban areas across the country with varying terrains such as say hilly, plain, or earthquake-prone.

The winning technologies would be used to build mass houses, in a tie-up with the states, for the economically weaker sections and low-income groups under the affordable housing project vertical of PMAY-U.

PMAY- Urban:

The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) Programme launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA), in Mission mode envisions provision of Housing for All by 2022.

Under the scheme, the government is providing an interest subsidy of 6.5% on housing loans which can be availed by beneficiaries for 15 years from start of loan date.

The Mission seeks to address the housing requirement of urban poor including slum dwellers through following programme verticals:

- Slum rehabilitation of Slum Dwellers with participation of private developers using land as a resource.
- Promotion of Affordable Housing for weaker section through credit linked subsidy.
- Affordable Housing in Partnership with Public & Private sectors.
- Subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction /enhancement.

NATIONAL TESTING AGENCY (NTA) WILL CONDUCT JEE AND NEET EXAMS TWICE A YEAR FROM 2019

Recently, the government announced that the National Testing Agency (NTA) will conduct JEE and NEET exams twice a year from 2019

The Ashok Mishra committee set up by the HRD Ministry in 2015 to review the JEE had recommended that an online aptitude test be offered two or more times a year.

The recent decision conduct both JEE (Main) and NEET twice a year is consistent with the advice.

It is an important step towards achieving a transparent, accessible and fair testing process based on aptitude and suitability of the student.

Challenges:

Computer-Based test might turn into a barrier for rural students-

Shortcomings due to poor school education system in rural areas

Might create an additional financial burden on students for taking preparations

Cost of travelling to testing centre

Measures to be taken:

Proper planning and allocation of adequate funds

Regulation of coaching institutes to curb exploitation of students

Improving school education for better learning outcomes

SC QUESTIONS FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Recently, the Supreme Court has questioned the practice of female genital mutilation in the Dawoodi Bohra community saying that it violates the bodily integrity and privacy of a girl child

The Supreme Court has condemned the practice of female genital mutilation performed by some communities as a religious practice

The Chief Justice of India has observed that the practice of genital mutilation is an offence under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenders (POSCO) Act

Attorney General K.K Venugopal advocated that the practice of female genital mutilation

should be punished with 7 years of imprisonment.

However, advocate appearing for the Dawoodi Bohra Women's Association for Religious Freedom stated that circumcision as practiced in the community is not genital mutilation. Further it was an essential part of their religion and protected under the Constitution

NEITHER THE STATE NOR ONE'S PARENTS CAN INFLUENCE AN ADULT'S CHOICE OF PARTNER: SC

During the hearing on section 377 of IPC SC said that a person's choice of a partner is a fundamental right, and it can include same-sex partner .

The observation came on the first day of hearing by a Constitution Bench of petitions challenging the constitutionality of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, a colonial era provision that criminalizes private consensual sex between adults.

Justice Chandrachud, who is part of the five-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra, was reacting to a submission by senior advocate Arvind Datar, for hotelier Keshav Suri, that the right to sexual orientation was meaningless without the right to choose a partner.

SC drew his observation from the March 2018 judgment in the Hadiya case, which held that neither the State nor one's parents can influence an adult's choice of partner. That would be a violation of the fundamental right to privacy.

The Constitution Bench, also comprising Justices R.F. Nariman, A.M. Khanwilkar and Indu Malhotra, is re-visiting the December 2013 verdict of the Supreme Court in the Suresh Koushal case, which had upheld Section 377. It had dismissed the LGBT community as a negligible part of the population, while denying them the right of choice and sexual orientation.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, for renowned choreographer Navtej Singh Johar, submitted that being gay or lesbian was not a matter of

choice. "It is innate, inborn. Actually has something to do with the genes."

Mr. Rohatgi said Section 377 described such sexual acts as against the order of nature. "But this [being LGBT] is also an order of nature... because it is nature which gave them this," he said. "Everything changes with the passage of time... Laws made 50 years ago can become invalid over time".

The biggest reason for this judgment can be how people's view of homosexuality changed from pathological prejudice to acceptance as a normal and benign variation of human sexuality.

The court should not confine itself to a declaration on whether Section 377 was constitutional or not. It should go beyond the topic of sexual orientation and examine the wider concept of "sexuality" to include co-habitation, etc.

The 172nd Law Commission Report had recommended the deletion of Section 377 But nothing had been done all these years.

SCIENCE AND TECH

GRACE-FO MISSION

About three weeks after their launch, the twin climate-monitoring satellites- GRACE-FO satellites (short for Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow-On)- that NASA deployed in Earth's orbit have switched on their powerful lasers for the first time, showing that their systems are shipshape.

GRACE- FO mission:

The Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow-on (GRACE-FO) mission is a partnership between NASA and the German Research Centre for Geosciences (GFZ).

GRACE-FO is a successor to the original GRACE mission, which began orbiting Earth on March 17, 2002. The GRACE missions measure variations in gravity over Earth's surface, producing a new map of the gravity field every 30 days.

GRACE-FO will carry on the extremely successful work of its predecessor while

testing a new technology designed to dramatically improve the already remarkable precision of its measurement system.

GRACE-FO will continue the work of tracking Earth's water movement to monitor changes in underground water storage, the amount of water in large lakes and rivers, soil moisture, ice sheets and glaciers, and sea level caused by the addition of water to the ocean. These discoveries provide a unique view of Earth's climate and have far-reaching benefits to society and the world's population.
