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NEWS

INDEST Consortium

In a major initiative under the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD), an Indian National Digital Library in Science and Technology (INDEST) has been set up. With the launch of INDEST, in the initial phase, at least 38 major technological institutions in the country such as the IITs, IISc, NITs, RECs and IIITs are slated to benefit. The doors are now open for new consortia members, as the whole concept is open-ended. INDEST serves to benefit members by 'shared subscription' through a consortium of libraries. The sharing of resources at highly discounted rates of subscription hopes to increase access to e-journals, etc. for researchers across the country, while obtaining better terms of agreement with publishers. The consortium's web address is <http://www.library.iitb.ac.in/indest/>. The aim, according to INDEST, is to improve 'quality and quantity of research'.

Presently, science and technology institution libraries bear about Rs 4 crores as expenses for subscription towards journals etc. This costs the Government of India approximately Rs 150 crores annually, to support library acquisitions all over the country for centrally funded institutions. INDEST could provide comparable or even better facilities of information-sharing at Rs 18.6 crores, that is the funding invested by the Government of India per annum in the consortium. The quantum of government support is not likely to vary in future years, according to Pawan Agarwal, MHRD.

Based on the recommendations of the MHRD Task Force, institutions have been

grouped into three categories. Category I comprises IISc, Bangalore and the seven IITs. Category II, all the RECs/NITs; Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad; North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology, Itanagar, and the Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering and Technology, Chandigarh; Category III comprises six IIMs (Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Kolkata, Indore, Kozhikode, Lucknow); the National Institute of Training in Industrial Engineering, Mumbai, and the Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management, Gwalior. Few additional members have recently joined Category III, such as the Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology, Gandhinagar; TIFR Laboratory of Computational Mathematics, Pune; Birla Institute of Technology, Ranchi; Nirma Institute of Technology, Ahmedabad, and SONET, Hyderabad. AICTE has set-up a committee to find out the possibility of AICTE-accredited institutions joining the consortium.

The electronic resources available through INDEST are the following:

Full-text electronic resources:

- IEEE/IEE Electronic Library (<http://ieeexplore.ieee.org>)
- Elsevier: Science Direct (<http://www.sciencedirect.com>)
- Springer Verlag's link (<http://link.springer.de/>)
- ProQuest: Applied Science and Technology Plus (<http://www.il.proquest.com/pqdauto/>)
- ProQuest: ABI/Inform Complete (<http://www.il.proquest.com/pqdauto/>)

- ACM Digital Library (<http://portal.acm.org/portal.cfm>)

Online Databases:

- Ei Compendex Plus and INSPEC (<http://www.engineeringvillage2.org/>)
- SciFinder Scholar (Access through a Z39.50 Windows-based interface)
- MathSciNet (<http://www.ams.org.mathscinet>)
- ISI Web of Science (<http://isiknowledge.com/>)
- J-Gate Custom Content for Consortia (<http://www.informindia.co.in>).

Belonging to a particular category determines type of access, as usability and suitability of various electronic resources have been the criteria for selection to a particular category.

On 4 March 2003, the first annual meeting of INDEST consortium was held at IIT Delhi. According to Pawan Agarwal, the resources of management, civil and mechanical engineering institutions were not adequately covered, although the Task Force had identified such resources. He spoke of the issues involved that confronted INDEST, such as funding, selection of resources, spreading the benefits to all institutions, collaborative working, shifting to an electronic work environment, training of users, copyright issues and lack of networking.

Further, mention must be made of efforts currently on by several agencies to form their own 'Nets', such as UGC, CSIR, ICAR, etc., outside of the INDEST consortium. The MHRD hoped that there would be no duplication of efforts and such dissenting voices would eventually

move into the INDEST-fold. This is easier said than done. A move is on to persuade UGC-affiliated institutions to join hands with INDEST. However, unless the peculiar needs such as the bouquet of journals in type of subjects and other infrastructural requirements for hosting INDEST, of proposed invitees such as universities are met, convincing more members to join would prove an uphill task. In its present structure, INDEST does not cater to the needs of medical professionals, agricultural scientists and many others. The consortium does provide the possibility of raising library access from about 100 e-journals to nearly 4000 from among the selected list of publishers that provide largely for engineering discipli-

nes. Being very much in a fledgling stage, there have been several concerns raised about INDEST from within its own members; for example, the management institutes. There are, of course, several access restrictions that have been negotiated feverishly with publishers for each category of INDEST members. The bargaining chips are still on the table, and more the number of INDEST members, greater is the bargaining power and higher business volumes for publishers. Sustainability of the whole exercise is an important aspect, and then there is the big question of whether 'teamwork', so much lacking in the Indian psyche, would finally jettison the consortium. INDEST, in order to perform its administrative mechanisms

for tackling the needs and issues ahead, has a poorly oiled machinery with its headquarters located at Delhi, while the coordinator behind the effort is located at Mumbai and so on.

Now, a final thought. 'What happens on withdrawal of service – temporary or otherwise, to the state of libraries?' This is anybody's guess. However, INDEST appears confident and does not foresee such a calamity, while sceptics abound on the periphery.

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Mashelkar elected Foreign Associate of US National Academy of Engineering

R. A. Mashelkar, Director-General, CSIR, has been elected Foreign Associate of the National Academy of Engineering, USA, in recognition of his 'outstanding engineering contributions and exceptional leadership and

management of the Indian national laboratories'.

The election to the National Academy of Engineering is among the highest professional distinctions accorded to an engineer. Only 165 Foreign Associates

from around 30 countries have been so honoured in the last 40 years so far. Only three Indian engineers have received this prestigious honour so far, namely late Dr Satish Dhawan, late Dr Jai Krishna and Dr R. Narasimha.

MEETING REPORT

How to live with the Genie: Toward meaningful governance of science and technology^{†,*}

My cousin is a doctoral student of environmental policy at a major research university in the United States. An engineer by training, he has most trouble explaining his research to fellow Indians. In a university where there are no fewer than half a dozen students of Indian origin in each engineering department, he is the sole Indian student in his doctoral programme. Fellow students – typically

engineers from the best of India's colleges – when told that he investigates the role of policy in governing the environment, science and technology, ask with disdain or sympathy, 'Why would anyone do that?' 'Will you get a job after you finish?' and, worse, 'You really wanted to come to America!' Such incomprehension of the motivation to study policy, let alone understand policy, from Indian engineering graduates who otherwise fill classrooms in American universities, write abstruse code in the Silicon Valley, design the next-generation devices, work for Fortune 500 companies, and are celebrated for their intellect¹, is compelling, albeit anecdotal, evidence of the failure of Indian engineering educa-

tion to produce multidimensional individuals.

I was no different four years ago when I arrived in the US to start my Ph D programme at the Pennsylvania State University. Indeed, as I wrote somewhere else, 'Technology, as I knew it from a scientist father and as an undergraduate student of chemistry at the University of Delhi, was an integral and powerful constituent of the Western model of development. Technology, indeed, was a necessary response to the world's myriad². Fate, however, intervened and I took a course whose instructor, Carl Mitcham, then a professor at Penn State's Science, Technology and Studies Program, was influential enough to persuade

[†]Dedicated to my mother, Sujata Venkateswari, who let me, albeit grudgingly, read everything but textbooks.

*A report on the conference 'Living with the Genie' held at Columbia University, New York City in March 2002 and organized by the Centre for Science, Policy and Outcomes.