

Coolies of the 21st century

The editorial by Gangan Prathap¹ is a well-written commentary on the state of affairs regarding the so-called IT boom in India. The Government, media, industry, educationists, political leaders and intellectuals are upbeat and euphoric over crossing the US \$50 billion mark. Service sector constitutes more than 52% GDP, followed by agriculture 25% and the remaining 23% is contributed by industry. Public and parents at large are celebrating the employment of their wards in IT/BPO sector in India or abroad, more and more students are opting for IT/computer courses. Since late 90s, a large number of seats in non-IT/computer disciplines in engineering colleges remain vacant for want of students. Even civil, mechanical, metallurgical and mining engineering graduates are looking for employment in the IT industry.

Students are under tremendous pressure and are experiencing mental agony on this account. Coaching centres are also doing good business to the tune of about Rs 5000 crore per year. Incidentally, majority of IIT graduates join IIMs. The remaining join IT companies abroad. Only a few opt for academics as a career and go abroad for higher studies, though till a few years ago, some used to opt for IAS/TAS services. IIT graduates, after seeking diplomas from the IIMs also pre-

fer the IT sector and join as executives. Some join other MNCs in India and look for a career in human resource, finance and marketing.

IIT graduates are considered to be the most intelligent and the best brains of India. However, they are performing menial jobs abroad and in India. They are engaged in 'overnight cleaning and plumbing jobs'. IITs/IIMs are centres of excellence, and parents by and large desire to see their children join these institutions. However, graduates from those institutions also become coolies of the 21st century. Also, prevalence of cheap scientific labour in India has brought in MNCs for similar assignments. In this respect, contributions of IITs, IIMs and national premiere science institutions in nation-building are nil. A nation of more than a billion people cannot survive on service sector. Poverty alleviation, education, health and infrastructure development are fundamental to nation-building. Infrastructure development and growth in core sectors determine the economy of a nation. IT is merely a tool to accelerate the growth and it works as a catalyst. Bill Gates had once remarked, 'A nation having less than US \$ 1 per capita income, shall shun IT education'. The Union Government has upgraded four NITs to IITs. A few more colleges are in the offing.

It is a welcome decision. It is proposed to rename all NITs as IITs. Unfortunately these institutions do not figure in the top 300 list in the world, whereas several institutes in China, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore figure in such a list. All existing IITs/IIMs have excellent infrastructure. Teaching graduate students takes away much of the energy and time of the learned faculty at the IITs. The IITs could discontinue graduate courses and confine themselves to postgraduate and research activities. The model of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore may be adopted with minor modifications. IIMs shall also confine themselves to R&D activities. The faculty at IITs/IIMs are known all over the world for research, hard work and dedication. The changes proposed above in the IITs/IIMs will bring them into the mainstream of the Indian economy and transform India into a superpower by 2025.

1. Prathap, G., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **89**, 1063–1064.

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Science and faith

An interesting article on 'Social values and the Governance of Science' by George Gaskell *et al.*¹ has appeared in *Science*. It communicated the findings of the social surveys about the thinking of the public on who should make decisions on *science policy* and the criteria that need be guided for such decisions. Two-thirds of the survey respondents were for a scientific basis while making decision in science policy. This has been read as a vote of confidence in *sound science*. However, there are also people in certain other quarters who have preferred moral and ethical aspects over scientific evidence.

The scenario that creeps under such a condition is that while an elite scientist like Abdul Kalam¹ can be a moralist, elitist and populist, not all other elitists and populists may have that wisdom of understanding the results of scientific research nor the consequences of their application. Eventually, the decision of such elitists and populists may lack real understanding of moral and ethical considerations. This category may rely more on faith. But, science and faith are different entities. Science is for truth. Faith may not track the path of reality and decisions by mere faith often prove devastating.

1. Gaskell, G., Einsiedal, E., Hallman, W., Priest, S. H., Jackson, J. and Olsthoorn, J., *Science*, 2005, **310**, 1908–1909.

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