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BPSC protest: Student delegation meets chief secretary, gets assurance of meeting CM Nitish Kumar



■ EJ News - Patna

BPSC students are protesting against the alleged irregularities in the 70th CCE exam. On Monday a student delegation met the chief secretary Amritlal Meena and were assured of a meeting with the Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Students are told by the chief secretary as the CM returns from Delhi, a meeting will be scheduled.

Hundreds of candidates have been on agitation in support of their demand since December 18. After meeting the chief secretary Meena, candidates told media persons that they did not get any firm assurance or timeline for addressing their demands, which include re-examination, a probe into the alleged irregularities in the examination

and withdrawal of FIRs against over a dozen students.

Jan Suraaj Party (JSP) founder Prashant Kishor also issued a 48-hour ultimatum to the state government to resolve the matter or else the students would resume protest with more intensity.

Earlier in the day, Kishor alleged that he had come to know that thousands of crores of rupees had changed hands for the vacant posts to be filled up through the examination conducted by the BPSC. He also expressed his surprise over the 'silence' of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar when the candidates were protesting in biting cold, braving baton charges by the police and water cannons.

The preliminary test was held

on December 13 as BPSC cancelled the exam at a Patna centre following allegations that there was a delay in distributing the question papers. A student leader, who was part of the delegation that met Chief Secretary Amrit Lal Meena told newspapers that the chief secretary listened to their demands but did not give any concrete assurance. Later in the day, BPSC chairman Parmar Ravibhai met Bihar governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar and discussed the issue.

Dr. Manmohan Singh's Education: Alumnus of Panjab University, Oxford, and Cambridge

■ EJ News - New Delhi

Renowned for his profound intellect and transformative leadership, former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh passed away at 92, leaving behind an unparalleled legacy as an economist, scholar, and statesman. His remarkable journey from a small town to global recognition is a story



of academic brilliance and dedication to public service.

Born on September 26, 1932, Dr Singh embarked on his academic journey at Panjab University, completing his matriculation and intermediate education with distinction. In 1952, he earned a Bachelor's degree in Economics (Honours) from the same institution, marking the beginning of a distinguished academic career.

Continuing his studies, Dr Singh secured a Master's degree in Economics in 1954, graduating first in his class at Panjab University. His pursuit of knowledge then took him to the University of Cambridge, where he achieved first-class honours in the Economics Tripos in 1957. His academic journey culminated in a Doctor of Philosophy from Nuffield College, University of Oxford, in

1962. His dissertation, titled India's Export Trends and Prospects for Self-Sustained Growth, was later published by Clarendon Press in 1964, establishing him as a thought leader in economic policy.

Dr Singh's scholarly excellence was acknowledged with prestigious accolades, including the Adam Smith Prize from the University of Cambridge in 1956 and Wright's Prize for academic distinction at St John's College, Cambridge, in 1955. These early achievements reflected his exceptional analytical abilities and commitment to addressing complex economic challenges.

Dr Singh's association with esteemed institutions added further prestige to his academic and professional career. Panjab University, where his journey began, currently >> Contd. p.3..

50 percent decline in student suicides in Kota compared to last year, says the city's district magistrate

■ EJ News - Kota

The Kota district administration has claimed that there has been a 50 per cent decline in the number of student suicides this year as compared to 2023 in this coaching hub of Rajasthan known for preparing students for IIT-JEE entrance tests.

However, no specific breakdown of the numbers has been provided by the officials.

Kota witnessed 17 cases of suicides by coaching students in 2024, compared to 26 such cases in 2023, as per reports.

According to Kota Collector Ravindra Goswami, "The decline in suicide cases can be attributed to strict compliance with guidelines for coaching institutes and hostels under the vigilance of the district administration. In comparison to last year, the suicide rate among coaching



students through events like 'Dinner with Collector' and 'Samwad,' as well as the deployment of the Kalika Squad for women's safety and the safety of girl aspirants, have played a role in this change," Goswami added.

The district collector said he interacted with over 25,000 coaching students this year through events like 'Dinner with Collector' and 'Samwad,' where he addressed their concerns.

However, industry stakeholders have pointed out that business has slowed down for coaching centres and hostels in Kota following negative publicity over student suicides, new guidelines regulating coaching centres, and the expansion of coaching brands to other cities.

The number of students in Kota has fallen to 85,000 to 1 lakh this >> Contd. p.3..

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How to create a positive learning environment



Creating a positive learning environment is essential for fostering engagement, motivation, and growth in students. A well-structured and supportive learning space encourages students to feel comfortable, respected, and open to learning. Here's a breakdown of how to create such an environment:

Establish Clear Expectations

Set clear and consistent expectations for behavior, participation, and academic work. This helps students know what is expected of them and fosters a

sense of stability and fairness in the classroom. Be sure to communicate these expectations early and reinforce them throughout the year.

Foster Respect and Inclusivity

Encourage a culture of respect where every student's voice is heard and valued. Make sure to actively promote inclusivity by respecting individual differences, cultures, and learning styles. Ensure that students feel safe and accepted, regardless of their background or abilities.

Promote Positive Relationships

Build strong teacher-student relationships by showing genuine interest in students' well-being and academic progress. When students feel that their teacher cares about them as individuals, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged. Encourage peer relationships as well, promoting collaboration and mutual support.

Create a Comfortable Physical Space

The physical environment plays a significant role in a student's

ability to focus and feel comfortable. Ensure the classroom is organized, with easy access to learning materials, comfortable seating, and plenty of natural light. A clean, uncluttered space with personal touches can make students feel more at ease.

Incorporate Active Learning

Engage students with hands-on, interactive activities that encourage participation and critical thinking. This could include group discussions, projects, games, or problem-solving ex-



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ercises. Active learning fosters creativity, deeper understanding, and collaboration.

Encourage Open Communication

Create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable expressing themselves. Foster an environment where questions, feedback, and discussions are welcomed. This helps students feel like their opinions matter and supports their emotional and academic growth.

Provide Positive Reinforcement

Recognize and celebrate achievements, both big and small. Positive reinforcement motivates students to keep progressing and reinforces desirable behaviors. Praise effort, improvement, and perseverance, not just outcomes. Acknowledge the process of learning as much as the final results.

Set up a Growth

Mindset

Encourage a growth mindset by emphasizing that intelligence and abilities can be developed with effort and practice. Help students understand that mistakes are part of the learning process and should be seen as opportunities for growth, rather than setbacks.

Incorporate Student Autonomy

Allow students to take ownership of their learning by giving them choices in how they approach assignments and tasks. This fosters independence, critical thinking, and a sense of responsibility for their learning.

Maintain a Positive Attitude

As a teacher, your attitude and approach set the tone for the classroom. A positive, enthusiastic, and supportive attitude helps inspire students and makes them more likely to adopt the same mindset. Show your passion for teaching and learning, and students will often follow suit.

Conclusion

Creating a positive learning environment is an ongoing process that involves multiple factors, from setting clear expectations to nurturing relationships. When students feel safe, respected, and empowered, they are more likely to succeed academically and personally. By being intentional about the physical, emotional, and academic aspects of the environment, teachers can create a space where all students can thrive.

Paradox of choices: Productivity Mantra for Management students In the Digital Age



It was so aptly said by Mark Twain, "To change your life you need to change your priorities" but what if it is an everyday debacle to choose the priorities amongst plethora of choices that we have! And so is the case with management students today...

If God asked an MBA student to make a wish to smoothen their MBA journey, what would the student ask for?

Will it be time? Will it be work life balance? Will it be good content? Will it be wisdom to choose and decide? Will it be AI help? Will it be communication skills? Will it be upskilling? Will it be networking? Will it be good internships?

What will it be that will make them have a smooth MBA journey with a good placement offer at the end of 2 years?

"To be or not to be" is the dilemma which every management student is facing in this busy digital age.

Management students are often juggling between academics, extracurriculars, internships, physical and mental wellbeing. To achieve a healthy work-life balance, it is essential to ensure

productivity, mental health, and long-term success.

Some of the challenges which management students face in the digital age are:

Managing Digital Distractions like social media with Platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn which consume most of the time if not managed properly. Even notification overload like constant pings from emails, messaging apps and academic platforms disrupt focus and productivity.

Information Overload takes a toll with volume of online courses, articles, and case studies can make it difficult to focus on relevant and high-quality content. Choosing between multiple opportunities, such as webinars, certifications, and networking events, can lead to decision fatigue.

Balancing Academic and Professional Growth involves Internship Pressure with many management programs emphasizing on internships and live projects which cre-

ates added workload alongside academic requirements.

Skill Development and specially staying updated with digital tools, AI and analytics as well as industry trends demands extra time and effort.

Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction has reduced personal connection and online classes and remote networking impacts quality of relationships.

Collaborative Challenges are becoming more challenging as teamwork is suffering from communication gaps in virtual settings.

Health Impacts involves screen fatigue with prolonged screen exposure leading to eye strain, headaches, and reduced productivity.



Students are moving to sedentary lifestyle with long sitting hours during contributing to physical health issues.

Mental Health Strain involves balancing digital responsibilities leading to stress, anxiety, and burnout.

Financial Strain is also happening because of high-quality devices, software subscriptions, and stable internet which is necessary but expensive also online certifications and premium resources add to educational expenses.

Students are also facing cybersecurity risks and students engaging in internships or applications face risks of falling for fraudulent schemes.

Staying updated with evolving tools like AI, big data, and blockchain is overwhelming but essential and not all students have the same level of familiarity or access to advanced technology.

Now the million-dollar question is how should they overcome these challenges?

Answer is to have a structured approach with mindfulness being the key ingredient. Mindfulness means living in the moment without thinking too much about past and future.

Students need to follow certain basics:

Prioritize key activities: students should manage their time wisely, they may use the famous Pareto principle to prioritize, with 80 percent productivity coming from 20 percent of the key activities. They may use digital tools like calendars and task managers and reminders to structure their day. They should



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set SMART Goals and break tasks into Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound objectives. They should avoid overcommitting and focus on what truly aligns with your career and personal aspirations.

Limit Distractions: Students need to limit distractions and boost productivity by minimizing digital distractions and use browser extensions to block distracting websites during study hours. They should follow Pomodoro Technique and work in focused intervals (25-30 minutes) followed by short breaks. Single tasking should now be preferred over multitasking to complete one task at a time with full attention to ensure higher quality work.

Focus on Well Being: Self investment is the biggest investment, and students should invest in their wellbeing by doing self-care and engage in regular physical activity, like yoga or gym sessions, to maintain physical and mental health. They should practice mindfulness and dedicate time to meditation or journaling to reflect and relax. They should spend quality time with friends and family to nurture emotional well-being and though they can adopt technology but stay human! Using learning platforms, productivity apps, and networking tools to enhance efficiency, however, avoid excessive screen time. Students should follow digital detox and schedule periods of time to disconnect from devices and engage in offline activities.

Hence to deal with this paradox of choices that management students have, they should first recognize that balance is not about equal time for everything but aligning their actions with their priorities and values. They should regularly assess their habits and adjust as needed to thrive academically, personally, and professionally while staying resilient in the digital age.

DST along with AICTE announces UG courses for quantum technologies



■ EJ - New Delhi

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) have announced an undergraduate curriculum for quantum technologies.

The curriculum is designed to provide training for developing a skilled workforce that meets global standards while addressing the multidisciplinary needs of quantum technology development, ranging from basic to applied research.

The course structure encompasses all four key areas of quantum technology: quantum comput-

ing, quantum communications, quantum sensing and metrology, and quantum materials and devices. The proposed curriculum consists of at least 18 credits, including both theory and lab courses, read the release.

Each course is worth 3 credits, with 1 credit corresponding to 1 hour of in-class instruction per week for a theory course or 1 lab session of 3 hours for a lab course. As a result, the minor programme will require at least 6 courses.

In addition to this course, the National Quantum Mission, in collaboration with AICTE,

is planning to support the establishment of laboratories to enhance teaching in quantum technologies. This initiative will also include the development of course materials and programmes aimed at increasing awareness of quantum technologies.

The curriculum is designed to provide training that will help develop a skilled workforce capable of meeting global standards. It will also address the multidisciplinary requirements of quantum technology development, covering both basic and applied research.

‘It is designed for undergraduate students to establish a strong foundational and advanced knowledge base keeping in mind the diversity in the institutions, and will enable all engineering students irrespective of their disciplines to undertake a UG minor in quantum technologies from their third or fourth semester,’ said Professor Abhay Karandikar, secretary Department of Science and Technology.

CBSE Board 2025: Tips to Prepare for the Exam



The board has shared strategies and right approach to help students in overcoming anxiety and stress.

■ EJ - Manpreet Singh

As the CBSE board exams are approaching, students are required to follow certain do's and don'ts for coping with the stress and better preparation. The board has shared the following strategies and right approach that will help students in overcoming anxiety and stress.

Don'ts for parents

Parents should guide their children in planning, organising and setting a time-table. Student can fail to do well if they fail to cope with stress.

To avoid a stress situation for the child, parents must provide right kind of motivation and a conducive environment.

Parents must help their child in maintaining their confidence especially when they seem discouraged by their dropping marks or grades.

Comments

Parents must praise their child when they do well. Encouraging child's performance with posi-

tive statements such as, “well done” “you can do better” rather than saying “that was not enough” helps.

Humour relieves tension. Parents must be light and humorous with the child.

Parents must try to gain child's confidence and discuss their problems. They must also help them to find a solution.

Do's for students

- ◆ Know your concentration span, Study with breaks.

- ◆ Students must work out best time for concentration.

- ◆ They must hold group study for difficult subjects.

- ◆ Students must not be discouraged by previous results. They must try to identify their weak areas from previous exams and work on them.

- ◆ Students must make time management plan for all subjects.

They must repeat their learnt work so the recall in exam is easy. Work not repeated or re-

vised is easily forgotten.

Students must plan their revision time by drawing up a timetable. The timetable should also include activities such as playing, walking, watching TV that help in relaxation.

Dr. Manmohan Singh...

ranks 38th among Indian universities and 7th in pharmacy under the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2024.

His alma mater, the University of Oxford, remains a beacon of academic excellence, ranking first in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025 and third in the QS World University Rankings. Similarly, the University of Cambridge, where Dr Singh honed his economic insights, ranks fifth and second in the same rankings, respectively.

Dr Manmohan Singh's life exemplifies the seamless blend of academic brilliance and impactful leadership, leaving an indelible mark on India's economic and political landscape.

50 percent...

year, down from the usual 2-2.5 lakh, leading to a reduction in annual revenues -- from Rs 6,500-7,000 crore to Rs 3,500 crore, they said.

Goswami also mentioned the launch of a programme called 'Kota Cares', which reaffirms the commitment to the well-being and safety of coaching students.

He emphasised that the 'Kota Cares' programme highlights that the city has offered coaching to over one crore students from across the country, playing a significant role in their lives, regardless of the careers they pursue. “This programme also involves inviting Kota alumni -- former students who have studied in the city -- to interact with the current aspirants and reassure them that the city now offers better facilities and an improved environment,” he added.

DU's proposal to add 4 value addition courses to the Bhagavad Gita draws flak

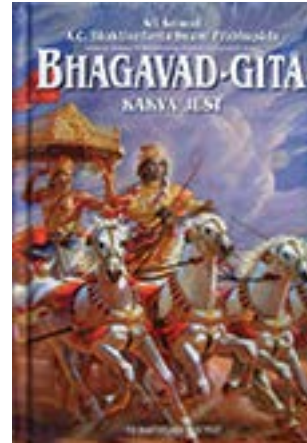
■ EJ News - New Delhi

Delhi University proposal to offer four value-addition courses on the Hindu religious scripture Bhagavad Gita has stirred controversy with some teachers criticising the move. The university's Value Addition Committee has tabled the recommendation for approval.

These courses, designed for all students to choose from a pool of options, aim to offer deeper insights into thematic applications of Gita's teachings in various walks of life. The courses are titled: Gita for Holistic Life, Gita for Sustainable Universe, Leadership Excellence Through Gita, and Gita: Navigating Life Challenges.

Another course tabled for approval titled 'An Introduction to Viksit Bharat', seeks to introduce young people to the concept of a developed India, a BJP-led Central government's flagship campaign programme. The proposed chapters will address key topics such as technology, infrastructure, agriculture, and sustainability. The course will also include practical elements, such as field visits to villages, self-help groups, and farmers' organisations, to provide hands-on experience.

In addition, DU plans to introduce two general elective courses on tribes in India to be offered at



agement with other value systems.”

John further emphasised the complexity of the Gita, citing renowned scholars like Mysore Hiriyanna, who described it as one of the most difficult texts to interpret. “The Gita has been understood and commented on in various ways, from Mahatma Gandhi to Nathuram Godse. The University's proposal fails to account for the diverse interpretations, which is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the text,” John said.

Another teacher criticised the move, suggesting that the University must first focus on improving the quality of the currently offered Value Addition Courses. “Students are currently receiving just two classes, and they are unable to learn anything substantial from them. This is a symbolic step and doesn't serve the purpose of giving students a wider perspective,” said .

In addition to the Bhagavad Gita courses, another contentious issue in the upcoming Academic Council meeting pertains to the final year structure of the Four-Year Undergraduate Program (FYUP). The structure for the final year has not yet been formulated, leading to uncertainty among students. The University is also seeking approval for the syllabi of its one- and two-year postgraduate programmes.

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Year Ender 2024: Exam Paper Leaks, Cancellations and Student Protests



■ **EJ - Yatender Singh**

This year, a series of exam paper leak controversies, ignited widespread debates on exam integrity, security, and the need for reform. What should have been a year of academic achievements and celebration for millions of students turned into a nightmare as several high-stakes exams were allegedly compromised, casting a shadow over India's education ecosystem.

A series of shocking leaks

An alarming leak was alleged

edly reported in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test Undergraduate (NEET UG), one of the most crucial tests for aspiring doctors. Within days of the leak, shocking revelations came to light about the involvement of a well-organised syndicate that had managed to circulate the exam papers among a network of students and coaching centres. This marked the beginning of what would turn into a cascade of alleged leaks across multiple examinations.

In June, the Centre cancelled the University Grants Commission

National Eligibility Test (UGC NET) exam crucial for entry-level teaching jobs and PhD admissions in Indian universities, following inputs from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) that "the integrity of the examination may have been compromised". UGC-NET was cancelled a day after it was held.

The input was a screenshot of a paper circulating on a Telegram channel around 2 pm on the exam day (June 18), with messages and comments suggesting it was leaked before the

first session. However, the CBI probe into the alleged UGC-NET paper leak has found that the "evidence" was doctored.

Two other public exams this year — CSIR-UGC NET, and NEET-PG — were postponed. Also, the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) which was otherwise scheduled to be conducted between May 15 and 29, was also held on July 19. The CUET UG retest was taken by roughly 250 candidates from the Oasis Public School in Hazaribagh, which was under the scanner for NEET UG leak.

All candidates from that centre were directed to take the retest on July 19.

Exam scandals across states

As the year progressed, several state-level exams were also allegedly targeted by criminals. In UP, the Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission (UPPSC) faced massive scrutiny after the leak of papers for the review officer/assistant review officer (RO/ARO) exam. In February, an exam for the recruitment of over 60,000 police constables was cancelled due to an alleged paper leak.

The Uttar Pradesh government in June passed the proposal for promulgation of an Ordinance that provides for jail terms ranging from two years to life imprisonment, and fines of up to Rs 1 crore for those involved in question paper leaks.

Similarly, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra reported significant breaches in their Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs) and police recruitment exams, adding to the growing sense of distrust among students and parents alike. Also, Rajasthan Public Service Commission cancelled the Revenue Officer Grade II and Executive Officer Class IV examinations held in 2023, saying that the question papers for both had been leaked. Both exams were conducted on May 14, 2023, and the commission recently said that a re-examination would be held on March 23, 2025.

Impact on students and the system

For many students, these leaks were not just a matter of academic dishonesty but a severe blow to their hopes and dreams. Several students who had prepared for months, if not years, for these exams found themselves grappling with the uncertainty of whether their efforts would be recognized. In some cases, students were forced to retake exams, only to find themselves again faced with compromised security and allegations of manipulation.

National Testing Agency (NTA) which held a NEET UG 2024 retest for 1,563 candidates on June 23 released revised results. The topper tally in the revised NEET UG result came down from 67 to 17.

The NEET PG exam was cancelled a night before exam. The decision was being heavily criticised by NEET PG candidates,

many of whom had to travel to other cities to appear for the exam.

This cycle of leaks, cancellations and postponements prompted angry protests across the country. Social media platforms were flooded with hashtags demanding accountability, and students voiced their frustrations over the lack of transparency in the system. Many took to the streets, calling for the resignation of senior officials and demanding urgent reforms in how exams are conducted.

Government response and challenges

The Indian government, grappling with mounting criticism, responded with a series of measures aimed at curbing the menace of paper leaks. The introduction of secure online portals for question paper delivery was seen as a step forward, but experts remained skeptical about its effectiveness, citing past failures.

NTA will conduct only entrance exams for higher education institutions from 2025 and not recruitment exams, said Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on December 16 in the Parliament. He further added that the government is looking at moving to computer adaptive test, tech-driven entrance exams in near future.

He said that talks are on with Health Ministry on whether to conduct NEET-UG in pen-paper mode or online.

As the year concludes, there is a growing consensus among educators, students, and policymakers that deeper systemic reforms are needed to restore credibility to India's examination processes. Experts have called for the digitization of all exams to eliminate human intervention, along with more stringent background checks for examiners and staff. Additionally, stronger legal frameworks to punish those involved in paper leaks have become a priority for many.

Furthermore, the question of whether India's obsession with high-stakes exams is contributing to the problem has gained traction. Many have pointed out that the overwhelming focus on exams, often seen as the sole measure of a student's capabilities, has created an environment ripe for exploitation by corrupt elements.

JEE Main 2025: Do I need to prepare separately for NITs and IITs?



■ **EJ - Ravi Arya**

Entry into NITs (National Institutes of Technology) and IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology) requires thorough preparation as both are premier institutes and require high standards of education. However, the approach towards their admission process and entrance exams is quite different in so many ways, affecting a student's preparation strategy.

Understanding the exam pattern in NITs: There is admission based purely on JEE Main that measures the candidate's knowledge of physics, chemistry and mathematics. The emphasis is on precision, time management and core concepts.

In IITs: Admission is through clearing the gateway of JEE Advanced after attaining qualification in JEE Main. JEE Advanced has a higher level of toughness along with more emphasis on having conceptual clarity, the usage of knowledge, and problem-solving capabilities.

The core syllabus is the same for both of these tests, which is mostly based on Classes 11 and 12. However, JEE Advanced

includes many confusing questions or multi-concept questions which require intensive thought and imagination.

Do you need specialised preparation?

Not really; however, the student is required to make changes for JEE Advanced:

◆ **Conceptual Extent:** JEE Advanced requires a deeper understanding of concepts as compared to JEE Main. For instance, topics like mechanics in physics or organic chemistry require an advanced level of understanding.

◆ **Problem Solving Skills:** Unlike JEE Main, wherein problem-solving requires straightforward, JEE Advanced requires solving complicatedly connected problems.

◆ **Question Pattern:** JEE Advanced includes types like matrix match, integer-type answers, and passage-based questions, which are not there in JEE Main. Familiarize yourself with these formats.

◆ **Mock Tests and Time Management:** JEE Advanced tests endurance and time allocation due to its extensive question

paper. Taking mock tests specifically designed for JEE Advanced is important.

For those who are targeting NITs, preparation till JEE Main level is enough. Those aiming at IITs must look after the advanced-level content besides JEE Main.

Things to remember

Curriculum Covered: Stick strictly to the NCERT syllabus for both exams. For JEE Advanced, supplement your reading with other books for Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics.

Practice is Key: Practice with previous years' question papers for both JEE Main and Advanced to get an idea of the patterns and level of difficulty.

Time Management: Acquire the art of time management in preparation and during exams. Manage your time sensibly across the subjects and topics.

Strategic Revision: The strategies of revision vary slightly. For JEE Main, it is more of breadth-based revision. In the case of JEE Advanced, it is depth-based in core areas.

Mock Tests: Keep on attempt-

ing online and offline mock tests for both the exams to acquire accuracy and confidence.

Health and Consistency: Healthy and consistent routine with proper sleep and diet and breaks for working long hours. It doesn't need completely different strategies but rather strategies suited to each. A base for both is essential but the aspiring IITians would need to be much more advanced, so far as the concepts and questions go. If disciplined preparations and appropriate time management along with resources can help a candidate attain success in JEE Main, the same could easily help to gain success in JEE Advanced. Be smart and consistent towards success in these great institutions.

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Rural Schools Continue to Struggle despite 25 Years of Democracy



Despite 25 years of democracy, many rural schools in South Africa remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and underperformance, with quality education still a distant dream for countless learners. Schools like Dithothwaneng Secondary School in the Sekhukhune District of Limpopo face a host of challenges unique to rural environments, hindering effective teaching and learning. These challenges arise from both internal school structures and external forces, including limited support from education authorities and strained local communities. Poor infrastructure, long travel distances to school, and the overall hardships of rural life further intensify the problem.

Poverty remains a major obstacle, with many African communities deeply affected by socio-economic hardships. While South Africa fares slightly better than some of its neighbors, the impact of poverty on education cannot be ignored. In schools like Dithothwaneng Secondary, parental involvement is often

low as many parents grapple with unemployment and focus on survival rather than school participation. Without strong parental support, learners lack the motivation and home environment needed to excel academically.

Adding to this challenge is the chronic issue of insufficient state funding, which leaves schools unable to operate effectively. Many rural schools lack essential resources such as textbooks, science lab equipment, and technology, key tools necessary for quality learning. Teachers often find themselves improvising lessons without the materials they need to deliver proper education.

The situation is further compounded by overcrowded classrooms. In some rural schools, a single teacher may be responsible for educating more than 100 learners at once. This overwhelming burden creates a chaotic learning environment, making it nearly impossible to provide individual attention or maintain academic standards.

Teaching in rural schools comes with a unique set of challenges.

Lack of support, resources, and parental involvement makes it very difficult to achieve good results.

Despite various government policies and interventions over the years, progress in improving educational standards and learner performance in rural areas has been slow. The gap between rural and urban education continues to grow, leaving many rural learners disadvantaged in an increasingly competitive world.

For learners at schools like Dithothwaneng Secondary, the right to quality education remains elusive. Experts believe that addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach, including increased government funding, improved infrastructure, and greater involvement from communities and education stakeholders.

Until such measures are implemented, rural schools will continue to face significant challenges, and the vision of providing equal education for all will remain unfulfilled.

An inspiring journey of the 2023 Global Teacher Prize Top 50 Finalist



Mokolwane Eric Masweneng
2023 Global Teacher Prize Top 50 Finalist South Africa

Born in Mphanama village, Sekhukhune, Limpopo Province South Africa, I am an English teacher at Dithothwaneng Secondary School in the village. After finishing grade 12, I did not have money to go to college or University as my parents were unemployed. I looked after my father's cattle in the hope of one day attending university to study and become a qualified teacher. Achieving a goal takes courage, commitment, dedication, focus, and resilience. These values made me wait for 11 full years after completing grade 12 to register for a bachelor's degree in education at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. I started working at the age of 35 as a qualified educator, 15 years after completing grade 12 at Makelepeng Secondary School in Mphanama Village. It also took me seven full years of applying for the Global Teacher Prize to become a Top 50 finalist. Despite financial challenges, I started a free tutoring program that has since helped many students become qualified professionals.

The journey began when I appreciated the need for development in rural communities in South Africa, and I took it upon myself to become an agent of change, especially in Girl child education, pursuing activities in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 sustainable development agenda, tackling negative attitudes and cultural practices which prevents female participation in education as fit only for domestic chores on the road to becoming wives and mothers. I undertook the preference of girls to overcome social barriers such as patriarchy. In rural communities' girls drop out of school due to issues related to teenage pregnancy and lack of sanitary towels. I have therefore undertaken an initiative of campaigning for the donation of sanitary towels for girls to restore their dignity and confidence. I am also running enrichment classes and tu-

toring at my village and in Mkopane every Saturday to bridge the gap of inequality between a rural learner and urban learners. The subjects and activities I am offering are open for boys and girls, but I am encouraging girls to do activities traditionally meant for boys such as soccer and performing arts where I have managed to produce ladies' soccer national team players and professional soccer players today. I increase the support for women and girls in education, and I strongly believe that we can only achieve quality public education by addressing the importance of Gender Equality in education.

Despite the lack of infrastructure development, and the inequalities that exist within the education fraternity between the "Haves" and "the have-nots". I am using my technology resources in the classroom to teach and to connect with teachers from around the world. I am a passionate teacher who is integrating technology tools and applications in teaching and learning. I have introduced classroom Skype where I engage learners, mostly girls with their counterparts globally. I am inviting guests through Skype to inspire learners to put education first and secure a better future through it. This enables those who are from poor families to be on the same level as those who are from advantaged backgrounds. This also assists us in fighting inequality and thus improves their confidence. I have influenced teachers in my country to use technology and connect with teachers from around the world. I am hosting and organizing educational seminars at the community level, school, national, and international levels to empower educators on several issues that affect us daily and on how to integrate ICT into learning and teaching.

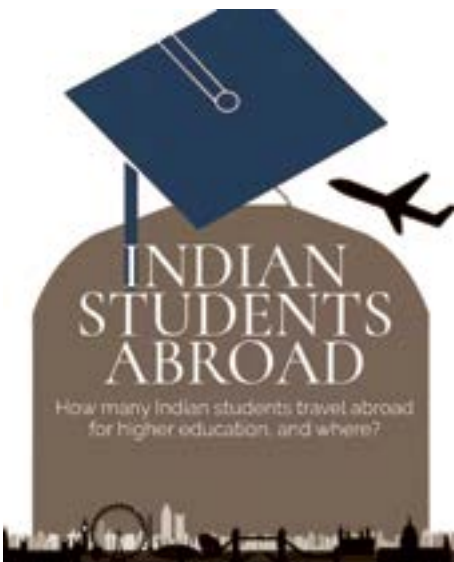
Apart from ICT integration, I am donating sanitary towels, and school uniform to the indigent

learners to restore their dignity and confidence. The idea is to reduce the potential for bullying and create a sense of equality and unity between the learners. I have established a greening project to cultivate empathy wherein girls are at the forefront to augment learners' knowledge of food production and stimulate the desire to create home gardens to dispel hunger and poverty in rural areas.

Concerning the Context and challenges, I am from a rural Village where the majority of community members still see no value in education. Most of the young people are school dropouts and constitute a higher number of the unskilled and unemployed. We are facing several issues that are relative to psychosocio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment and gender stereotypes, and lack of technological resources such as internet cafés, no library, and hospitals. People travel long distances to school and over 30 Km to the nearest hospital.

I have adopted Multi-Sensory Learning and Project Based Learning Approaches since they are cross-disciplinary approaches that allow interclass and international collaboration. These two learning approaches assist my learners in acquiring 21st-century learning skills such as communication, critical thinking, collaboration, technological skills, and knowledge building. I am pioneering a teaching-learning methodology that allows national and international Collaboration.

How policy shifts abroad will impact Indian student



er flexibility by allowing students transitioning from a Postgraduate Diploma to a Master's degree to qualify for Post-Study Work Visas.

Germany plans to increase skilled Indian worker visas to 90,000 annually, reinforcing its position as a key academic hub with nearly 49,000 Indian students and researchers.

UK saw a decline in Indian students, attributed to stricter

and introducing mandatory fingerprinting for long-term visa applicants, respectively.

Canada imposed stricter eligibility rules and proof of language ability for Post-Graduation Work Permits while terminating the Student Direct Stream for Indian students. Despite worsening diplomatic ties, students can now work up to 24 hours weekly during their studies.

USA recorded a surge in Indian students, overtaking Chinese students for the first time since 2009. Fields like computer science and mathematics now surpass engineering in popularity. However, Donald Trump's return as president has raised concerns about stricter visa and employment policies.

Outlook for Indian students

While policy changes present challenges, they also offer new opportunities. Students must adapt by ensuring compliance with new regulations and leveraging programmes aimed at attracting global talent. Countries remain competitive in drawing the best minds, ensuring a promising future for international students.

rules on bringing dependents. However, the graduate visa route remains unchanged, ensuring post-study work opportunities.

Australia announced higher savings requirements for student visas, revised English language criteria, and introduced the MATES visa scheme, benefiting top-tier Indian graduates.

Philippines and Italy have made minor adjustments, such as allowing foreign medical practitioners

EJ - Agency
India witnessed a rise in the number of students pursuing higher education overseas, with figures climbing from 13.18 lakh in 2023 to 13.35 lakh in 2024. Popular destinations like Canada, the US, Australia, and the UK continue to attract the majority of Indian students, despite varying policy changes.
Policy updates across countries
New Zealand introduced great-

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