WEARING THE IIT TAG

BRAND INEQUITY Three years after they began admitting students, the eight new IITs still function from temporary campuses, face several problems

Bhavya Dore
✉ bhavya.dore@hindustantimes.com

Classes operating out of makeshift campuses, faculty shortages, unfilled seats: the slew of new Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are still struggling to match the conditions and reputations of their flagship predecessors. In 2008, the union human resources development ministry announced eight new IITs in a bid to set up institutes of excellence throughout the country, taking the number of total IITs to 15. Two weeks ago, the government said it would focus on quality, not quantity, in higher education and set up just four more IITs as laid out in the 12th five-year plan.

However, even as the new ones are announced, the second generation of IITs — in Hyderabad, Ropar, Patna, Gandhinagar, Indore, Bhubhaneshwar, Mandi and Jodhpur — are still struggling to get on their feet.

"Five or six IITs is the best the country can handle," said PV Indiresan, former director of IIT-Madras, who criticised the expansion when it was first announced. "I don't think any other country has expanded institutes of this kind at this rate; no one has multiplied — Harvard or Stanford. I doubt it is advisable."

His most trenchant criticism was about the inadequate staffing and the dipping student-teacher ratios at the new IITs. "Where is the faculty? Teachers used to know most students. Now there is decreased student-teacher contact," he said.

But it's not all bleak, and all the new IITs need is time, say former and present IIT directors. IIT-Guwahati, which was set up in 1995, and is among the newer of the old IITs, has seen its share of similar problems and scepticism. "There are issues when any new IIT starts," said Gautam Barua, director of IIT-Guwahati. "We had the experience of starting out 15 years ago. When we moved to the campus in 2000, within time everything had become smooth."

The problems have multiplied though, with a rash of new IITs all being set up together. They began admitting students three years ago, but not even one is operating f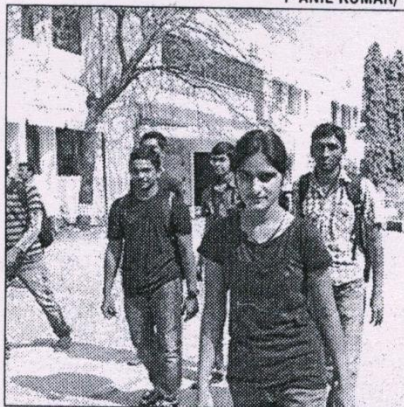rom its own campus. *(See accompanying reports from each IIT).* "More were required but they probably shouldn't have started together," said Barua. "But four more won't matter."

Also, adding seats hasn't blunted the competition, which means the demand for an IIT education is as high as ever, despite an array of other options now available in India's growing economy. This year, for instance, 4.85 lakh students competed for 7,563 seats, which means that only 1 exam taker out of every 64 got in.

"The rationale was that some parts of the country don't have an IIT," said Bhaskar Ramamurthi, director of IIT-Madras. "There are so many good candidates who don't get through the JEE (Joint Entrance Exam), so 25,000 more students could do quite well at the IITs."

Hyderabad

P ANIL KUMAR/ H

Students: 761; 100 girls	
Student-teacher ratio: 9 to 1	
Seats this year: 140 seats, one vacanc	
Highest rank in the general category: 1,500	
Lowest rank in the general category: 3,506	
Placements: Placements for the first b 140 students start this month. Fifty co including Microsoft, Amazon, IBM, Phi GE will be visiting the campus.	

IT Hyderabad's temporary 40-acre campus is located next to the Ordnance Factory, a gigantic defence department workshop responsible for rolling out tanks for the Indian army. The campus abounds in greenery thanks to the factory, which has planted thousands of trees over the years. The boys are housed in 270 rooms, and the girls in 60, all in spacious bungalow-like quarters that have five rooms each.

"The hostel is better than any of the old or new IITs. Only two students share a room," says Swasthi Rai, an MSc student. The new, permanent campus that will be spread over 580 acres is coming up in Kandhi, in the same district, by mid-2013. "We have focused on research and development and we have 35 sponsored research projects with a total budget of Rs 45 crores," said UB Desai, the director, "We have also started a liberal arts department and will be inviting eminent people from creative arts fields to teach classes."

– Ashok Das

"I stay in a big room in a bungalow surrounded by a garden. However, connectivity to the city is poor and we are cut off from the outside world."
— V NAMRATHA REDDY, final-year electrical engineering student

---

Indore

Students: : 410 students; 56 girls	
Student-teacher ratio: 9 to 1	
Seats this year: 120 seats, two seats are vacant	
Highest rank in the general category: 1,500	
Lowest rank in the general category: 2,400	
Placements: The institute has a training and placement cell. The college has contacted several companies including IBM, Aisha Motors, Force Motors and Microsoft.	

IT Indore's campus is nothing more than a three-storey building with 'Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Institute of Engineering and Technology' painted in bold letters on the façade.

In 2009, the Centre identified 525 acres of land at Simrol, 25 km from the city, for a permanent campus. However, in February 2011, the forest advisory committee rejected its proposal for diverting 80 acres of 'good' forest land for building the institute. Since then students have been housed in rented two-bedroom flats, a 30-minute bus ride away from the campus, and often have to depend on shuttle buses to get to the college. "We're running from pillar to post to get the land promised to us," said Pradeep Mathur, director. "We have recruited the top brains and have been able to attract a great deal of funding from the industry," he added.

– Karan Deep Singh

"We spend around 100 minutes in buses daily travelling to college. But the accommodation is better than other IITs. I stay in a furnished flat with other classmates. There is nothing like a campus either."
—JAYANT KUMAR, general secretary of the students' council

Gandhinagar

Students of this IIT have been waiting to move into the promised 400-acre campus on the banks of the river Sabarmati in Palej village near Gandhinagar, but there has been no sign of construction activity on the proposed site since 2008, when the college was first set up.

The college currently functions from Vishwakarma Government Engineering College on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, a temporary set-up with a hostel facility but no faculty residence. Students live in private apartments at walking distance from the college, and seem to be happy with its facilities. Classrooms are air-conditioned, the mess provides food recommended by a nutritionist and formal sports are compulsory for first-year BTech students. IIT Gandhinagar had its flagship inter-college cultural festival, Blithchron, this year, which saw a footfall of more than 15,000 students.

— Mahesh Langa

"The campus is good. The college also has courses in the humanities and languages such as Urdu and French."
—AKSHAY JAIN, member of the students' body

Students: 490; 51 girls	
Student-teacher ratio: 8 to 1	
Seats this year: 120 seats; 4 vacant	
Highest rank in the general category: 2,122	
Lowest rank in the general category: 4,076	

Placements: The first batch of BTech students will graduate in May 2012. The institute has invited nearly 100 companies, including Flipkart, Larsen & Toubro and Siemens.

Jodhpur

Though IIT Jodhpur officially opened in 2008, classes were held in the campus of its mentor institute, IIT Kanpur. Last year, the students were moved to a transit campus in Mugniram Bangur Memorial Engineering College of Jodhpur. The campus does not have hostels and the residential faculty and students have been housed in private apartments about 12 km from the college. The institute has organised buses for students to travel to and from the college.

"Around 800 acres of land has been allotted a few kilometres from Jodhpur for the campus. The construction will start in a few months," said Vivek Vijay, assistant professor, "One of our aims is to make sure that there is no wastage of energy on our new campus. The institute has also installed solar panels on the roof of the temporary campus."

— HT Correspondent

Students: 557; 60 girls	
Student-teacher ratio: 9 to 1	
Seats this year: 160 seats, no vacancies	
Highest rank in the general category: 2,000	
Lowest rank in the general category: 3,500	

Placements: The first batch of students is now in the fourth year. The recruitment process has begun, with over 20 companies including Microsoft and Infosys visiting the campus.

"Though our college is 12 km from the campus we have buses that ply every fifteen minutes. Our campus is also spacious and hostel facilities are good."
—RISHI AIYYER, third-year mechanical engineering student

Mandi

When it first opened in 2009, IIT Mandi had no campus of its own. The classes were conducted from the IIT Roorkee campus. In 2010 the students were moved to a transit campus in Mandi, a small town about 150 km north of Shimla in Himachal Pradesh.

The academic section of the institute is now housed in one of the buildings of Vallabh Government College and the administrative section is housed in a building that was once a hotel run by the state tourism department. The other buildings, including the hostels, have been leased from state government departments.

The authorities say that by 2013, the institute will have its own 538-acre campus at Kamand, 15 km from Mandi. The students, however, aren't complaining as the institute provides air-conditioned classrooms and most of the other required facilities.

— Naresh Kumar

"We are able to interact with the professors on a one-to-one basis as the student strength is very low. Also, despite teething problems, we have been provided with adequate facilities at the academic block as well as in the hostels. Sports facilities, too, are on a par with those available at other IIT campuses."
—SOURAV JAIN, head of students' representative body

Students: 340; 25 girls	
Student-teacher ratio: 9 to 1	
Seats this year: 120 seats; no vacant seats	
Highest rank in the general category: 3,218	
Lowest rank in the general category: 4,648	

Placements: IIT Mandi has no placement cell as of now. The first batch will graduate in May 2013. The institute hasn't contacted companies for placements yet.

Ropar

KESHAV SINGH/HT PHOTO

Located on a dusty lane, a few hundred meters off the busy national highway 21, IIT Ropar is a three-storey building that looks like an ordinary engineering college. The 25-acre campus that houses four hostels and a sports field is surrounded by upcoming residential localities on three sides, with houses and buildings rising around the boundary wall.

IIT Ropar offers degree courses only in three disciplines — computer sciences, electrical and mechanical engineering. It also offers a research facility for doctoral programmes.

The students are waiting to shift into a bigger campus of more than 525 acres about five kilometres from the current location. Though the campus is not as vibrant as the rest of the IITs, few students complain. "We have everything a good institute should have except a history," said Akshat from Ghaziabad in UP, a first year student of mechanical engineering.

— Gurpreet Singh Nibber

Students: 490; 40 girls	
Student-teacher ratio: 9 to 1	
Seats this year: 120 seats; 7 vacant	
Highest rank in the general category: 1,339	
Lowest rank in the general category: 4,092	

Placements: Companies have started visiting the campus for placements. Software company Microsoft recently offered three students an annual salary of Rs 10 lakh each.

"Our campus is very small as compared with other IITs. However, I think small is good. We all like it here. It is a quiet place and you get ample time to study."
—ARBAAZ SINGH, first-year student, computer engineering

Bhubaneswar

Students: 471; 46 girls

Student-teacher ratio: 10 to 1

Seats this year: 120 seats; 7 vacant

Highest rank in the general category: 3,000

Lowest rank in the general category: 4,000

Placements: IIT Bhubaneswar has a placement cell and companies such as Tata Consultancy Services and Wipro have already visited the campus.

This was the first of the eight new institutes to start functioning, in July 2008, with seats for 40 students each in the civil, mechanical and electrical engineering departments. Classes started from the main IIT Kharagpur campus. The next year, the institute shifted to IIT Kharagpur's Bhubaneswar extension centre, from which it still operates. By 2014 it will move to the permanent campus in Aragul, 20 km from the state capital, says the institute's registrar.

This institute is the first IIT to have set up a separate marine campus to do research on rising sea levels, ecology, disaster management and fisheries. Located near Chilika Lake, about 200 km from Bhubaneswar, and called the School of Earth, Ocean and Environment Sciences, it began operating this year.

– Priyaranjan Sahu

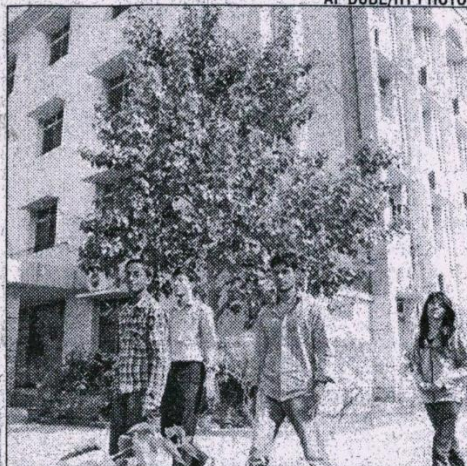"My batch, which was the first, is at a disadvantage because we don't have a full-fledged campus and laboratories. Also, we did not have seniors to guide us. But these [problems] have hardened us into finding our own way and making the most of what we have."

—KOUSTAV BANDYOPADHAY, vice president of the students' gymkhana

Patna

Students: 495; 39 girls

Student-teacher ratio: 9 to 1

Seats this year: 120 seats, 5 vacant

Highest rank in the general category: 3,324

Lowest rank in the general category: 4,586

Placements: With the first batch of students now in the fourth year, campus recruitment has begun, with 25 companies visiting, of which Microsoft, Hero MotoCop and Tata Motors have already extended offers to six students.

Housed in buildings resembling army barracks on the New Government Polytechnic's premises in Patna, this institute does not have the feel of a college campus. It has been given 500 acres at Bihta, 25 km from the state capital by the Bihar government, but is waiting for the ministry of human resources and development to release the funds it needs to start constructing facilities there.

The temporary campus has four boys' hostels but the girls' hostel is located 2 km away, and the campus has virtually no sports facilities.

– Ruchir Kumar

"The best part is the good faculty and the high teacher-student ratio. But our sports activities are restricted because we do not have proper areas for indoor and outdoor games. As a student of the first batch, I did not get the feel of being on a college campus because everything was being set up from scratch."

– KUMAR SHILADITYA, vice-president of the students' gymkhana