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Collaboration Results In Indigenous Technology, Greater Reach Of Treatment

IIT-M engineers, docs work on DEVICES TO CUT COSTS

Pushpa Narayan | TNN

A group of engineers at Indian Institute of Technology- Madras is writing a new prescription for healthcare — one that reduces cost, increases accessibility and improves quality. For two years, the city's doctors have been brainstorming with engineers at IIT-M's Healthcare Technology Innovation Centre (HTIC), a research and development centre supported by the department of biotechnology of the science and technology ministry. The doctors have been telling researchers what drives healthcare costs up and what machines they wish were cheaper.

Two years and many meetings later, three products are ready to hit the market — a camera with intelligent image processing to screen the retina, a mobile surgical unit for cataract surgery, and a hand-held device to measure the stiffness of carotid arteries, the vessels that supply blood to the brain.

More than 80% of high-end medical equipment used by doctors in India is imported. "Most equipment isn't designed for Indians and is expensive," said Mohanasankar S, an electrical engineering faculty, who heads HTIC.

One imported device that pushed up the cost of eye care was the fundus camera, a screening device for the retina, which costs ₹12 lakh. This means the tests, which are done once a year to rule out eye disease, become expensive for patients. Bangalore-based start-up Forus worked on a device with IIT-M's help and sells it at less than 50% of the price.

"It is one of the best examples of this collaboration," said IIT-M director Bhaskar Ramamurthi. While the company built the basic camera, HTIC researchers helped them improve the image quality. "Together, we have created a device that can be used outside a hospital. It has algorithms to interpret results. So, technicians can screen patients instead of doctors. Patients with ailments are referred to doctors," he said, adding that more people could be checked for diseases.

IITs have vast knowledge that can be put to use to improve healthcare services. Experts from various departments in IIT-M, including electrical engineering, engineering design, physics, chemistry and biotechnology, have been working with doctors. "We have built a platform for high-end, collaborative research," said Ramamurthi.

The collaboration ecosystem is the key to success in med-tech innovation, says Mohanasankar. "We have created an ecosystem that brings together doctors, technologists, engineers, researchers and industry to attack this highly complex area," he said.

Doctors who have used the equipment agree. Ophthalmic surgeon Dr Rashmin Gandhi, who has used the mobile surgery unit for around 500 surgeries, said, "The facilities on the bus are as good as the ones in the operation theatre at Sankara Nethralaya. We were operate on people who would never have come to hospital." The health ministry has approved the mobile surgical unit for cataract surgery.

The device to screen the stiffness of the carotid artery has also found favour in the medical community. Senior cardiologist Dr S Thanikachalam is conducting a clinical study with the device at Sri Ramachandra University.

The IIT-M team collaborated with sonologist Dr S Suresh to make create the device that works on the principle of ultrasound, but can be used by non-experts. "This device can be used for mass screening. We may be able to identify people with heart disease and prevent disease progression," said Dr Suresh.

HTIC has several projects in the pipeline and is working with 20 medical institutions and industry partners. "All of them are focused on devices that are affordable and accessible," said Mohanasankar.

Working In Harmony



Three projects that have reduced health care costs while improving quality and accessibility

RESTORING VISION

Cataract is one of the leading causes of blindness in India. Vision can be restored if patients undergo surgery

PROBLEM

► Patients not willing to travel from rural areas to cities as they lose a day's wage ► Government did not allow surgery to be done outside hospital

SOLUTION

► Doctors and IIT-M researchers built a mobile surgical unit on two buses ► Buses are parked parallel to each other and connected with a vestibule

STATUS

► Doctors have performed over 500 surgeries in rural areas ► Bus approved by the Union health ministry

PEERING INTO THE EYE

Ophthalmologists use fundus photography to capture the interior surface of the eye, including the retina and diagnose or monitor eye disease



IIT-M helped Forus improve the image quality on a camera to screen the retina

PROBLEM

► The equipment is imported and costs ₹12 lakh ► Patients don't agree to screening as eyes have to be dilated and there is temporary blurring of vision

SOLUTION

► A Bangalore-based company, Forus, made an indigenous camera at half the cost. Engineers at IIT-M's innovation centre improved the quality of the output. Eyes don't have to be dilated

STATUS

► The device, 3nethra, is being sold in India and abroad

HEART OF THE MATTER

There are four arteries in the neck that supply blood to the brain. Stiffness of these arteries can indicate risk of heart disease. Preventive measures can be taken if a doctor knows about this

PROBLEM

► No table-top mass screening device

SOLUTION

► IIT-M and Chennai-based sonologist Dr S Suresh developed a device that works on ultrasound principles

STATUS

► Clinical study being done by Dr S Thanikachalam at Sri Ramachandra University



More seats, fewer on-campus jobs at non-IIMs

Ishan Srivastava | TNN

Chennai: The going is getting tougher for B-schools this year as many students remain without job offers. The placement process is taking longer than usual as the effects of economic slowdown is being felt in the prestigious Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) as well as several top and mid tier B-schools. To ensure 100% placement on time, management institutes are inviting more companies to campuses this year.

"It certainly is tougher. I would say that the placement this year is harder than 2008 which many consider to be the toughest period," said S Sriram, executive director of Great Lakes Institute of Management (GLIM). "Around 80 students are yet to be placed though we hope to complete it before the convocation date of April 27," he said. The campus placement is also seeing a lot more companies with 60 companies coming in so far and another 23 expected soon. Last year, only around 70 companies had visited the institute for placements.

GLIM, like many IIMs, expanded its student strength from 300 last year to 360. The larger batch has affected placements, according to some students at the institute. At Loyola Institute of Business Administration (LIBA), 52 companies have come for recruitment this year compared to 32 last year.

"Placements were completed much earlier last year. This year companies are recruiting fewer people. So, we have got more companies on the campus. We are seeing more interest from public sector banks this time," said Susan Thomas, chairperson of placement at LIBA. "About 5% of the students are yet to be placed, which should be completed soon." LIBA has 120 students.

Salaries also don't seem to have gone up. At LIBA, the average salary this year is ₹8 lakh per annum compared to ₹8.3 lakh last year. "Many companies haven't even given increments to their current employees. So the situation is really tough," said Sriram.

At Xavier Labour Relations Institute (XLRI), Jamshedpur, which has 240 students, the median salary this year is ₹16.2 lakh as compared to ₹15.5 lakh last year. Median is the middle entry wherein all the entries, in this case salary, are placed in either ascending or descending order. "In all, 77 companies came to the college this year. Most got placed within the usual time period but four of our students got their desired offers only recently," said Prathish Raj, senior executive member of placement committee at XLRI.

Bhadra International managing director Prem Bajaj, however, denied that there was a strike. "Had there been a strike, I would have been informed. There was no strike on Monday," he said. In October 2012, the AAI suspended six senior officials after a CBI inquiry found they had committed various irregularities to award the ground-handling contract to Bhadra International despite the agency not having adequate experience.

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An air cargo official said tonnes of cargo, including perishable goods and consignments belonging to telecom and automobile companies, would be affected if the issue was not resolved soon. The Chennai air cargo hub handles consignments from at least 50 aircraft a day, including freighters and cargo on passenger flights.

In the second week of January, there was a similar strike by loaders and supervisors of Bhadra who were demanding a wage revision.

TN shuts engg colleges as campus stir spreads

525 Colleges Close, Students Instructed To Vacate Hostels

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: With students of professional colleges and universities too joining what is turning out to be a massive upsurge of students against alleged human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, the Tamil Nadu government on Monday moved quickly to shut down 525 engineering colleges affiliated to Anna University indefinitely. The students have been asked to vacate campuses. All arts and science colleges in the state have already been shut following a similar instruction from the government last week.

While the college authorities are relieved, the students are upset. "We wanted to express solidarity with people who were victimised. But a democratic act like a non-violent protest is being considered wrong," said a student of Guindy College of Engineering. Anna University has asked the boys to vacate the campus by 9pm on Monday, while the girls have been given time till Tuesday evening to leave.

A day after the students of IIT-Madras took out a march, the anti-Lanka chorus was heard on the campuses of other technical institutions, including constituent colleges of Anna University, several private universities and self-financing colleges, on Monday. While around 75 students of Anna University's School of Architecture and Planning and AC Tech in Chennai gathered on the campus for a demonstration, SRM Easwari Engineering College students took out a rally. Forced out of campuses, several students staged a protest near the Raj Bhavan and courted arrest.

Medical students in Trichy and their engineering counterparts in Madurai took out rallies. Police resorted to lathi-charge to disperse students of Madurai's Mannar Thirumalai Naicker College who blocked roads. More than 600 students, including 250 girls, of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University in Coimbatore joined the agitation.

The state's move to shut colleges evoked a reaction from students, who said they wanted to stage protests in a democratic manner. "The students are upset by the state's decision to close colleges in an attempt to prevent students from holding protests. Even after an indefinite closure was declared, some girls' students refused to go away," said a faculty member of Anna University.

For some students this meant taking the demands to cyberspace where #studentthugstrike is trending on Twitter and messages are being posted on Facebook. "The authorities want no politicization in college. That is why they ban elections. They don't want students to voice their dissent, and that is why they close colleges. They have forced us to take the protests to the streets," said a student of Dr Ambedkar Law College. Meanwhile, model and practical exams have been cancelled in all engineering colleges till further notice. If the colleges are not reopened soon, the exams, already delayed by a month, could be postponed and may clash with the joining dates of students who have been selected in campus placements.

CHORUS GETS LOUDER: Law college students protest against alleged Sri Lankan atrocities in front of Raj Bhavan

L R Shankar

Chennai: On Monday morning, Babu waited at Saidapet terminus on Anna Salai for more than an hour to catch a bus home. He finally decided to lug his huge bag of vegetables and walk home. The crowded Saidapet bus stand was unusually empty on Monday. As students of several colleges poured out on to the streets to protest against the Sri Lankan government's alleged war crimes, traffic in several parts of the city came to a halt. Bus services were affected, traffic piled up and many commuters like Babu were left in the lurch.

From Parry's Corner in the north to Guindy in the south, the arterial Anna Salai was barricaded so that police could shift the student protestors from Raj Bhavan to YMCA in Nandanam, about five km away. Police said close to 350 students were picked up from Raj Bhavan and other venues where they held protests. The protestors were detained at YMCA.

To add to the congestion and confusion, curious motorists abandoned their bikes in the middle of the road to find out what was causing the commotion. Angry bikers gathered near the barricades, objecting to the road blocks.

Karuna Sagar, additional commissioner of police (traffic), said they were prepared for traffic snarls near Raj Bhavan, Saidapet and the high court. "There were unexpected traffic jams

Student protests slow down city

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Workers strike hits cargo ops at Chennai airport

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: Cargo operations at Chennai airport came to a halt on Monday after the loading staff of Bhadra International, the firm in charge of ground-handling operations, went on a flash strike. Airport officials said the strike was announced on Monday morning after a leader of the Airport Authority Bhadra Employees Union was dismissed for taking leave.

"He has been active in union activities. The strike has stopped the entire cargo operations and the negotiations between the management and employees are going on," said an official.

An employee at the air cargo terminal said the import cargo operations were stopped by 3pm and that despite customs house agents and Airports Authority of India (AAI) officials pitching in, the absence of loaders and movers made the task difficult. "If the issue is not resolved by Monday night, hundreds of consignments will pile up on Tuesday, delaying flight movements and leading to a huge loss for traders," he added.

Bhadra International managing director Prem Bajaj, however, denied that there was a strike. "Had there been a strike, I would have been informed. There was no strike on Monday," he said. In October 2012, the AAI suspended six senior officials after a CBI inquiry found they had committed various irregularities to award the ground-handling contract to Bhadra International despite the agency not having adequate experience.

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In the second week of January, there was a similar strike by loaders and supervisors of Bhadra who were demanding a wage revision.

Woman fish vendor found murdered

Chennai: A 55-year-old woman was found murdered in the market in Chengelpet on Monday morning.

Police said Shanti used to live and work in the fish market. Other vendors in the market found the body with injuries to the head and informed police. Police suspect that Shanti tried to stop a burglary at the nearby rice mandi. Pieces of brick were strewn around. A sniffer dog was brought in but could not trace the culprits.

Police said a few other people who had been sleeping in the market did not hear any noises. Chengelpet police have registered a case and have moved the body to the government hospital for postmortem. TNN

Mechanic held for stealing jewellery

Chennai: A mechanic, who escaped with 50 sovereigns of gold jewellery from a house at Thiruvanniyur while repairing the air conditioner, was arrested on Sunday.

Police said Sekar stole the jewellery when Priya was alone at home. Priya found the almirah open and lodged a complaint with the Thiruvanniyur police. Police have recovered the jewellery and an investigation is on. TNN