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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ROORKEE

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WATCHOUT

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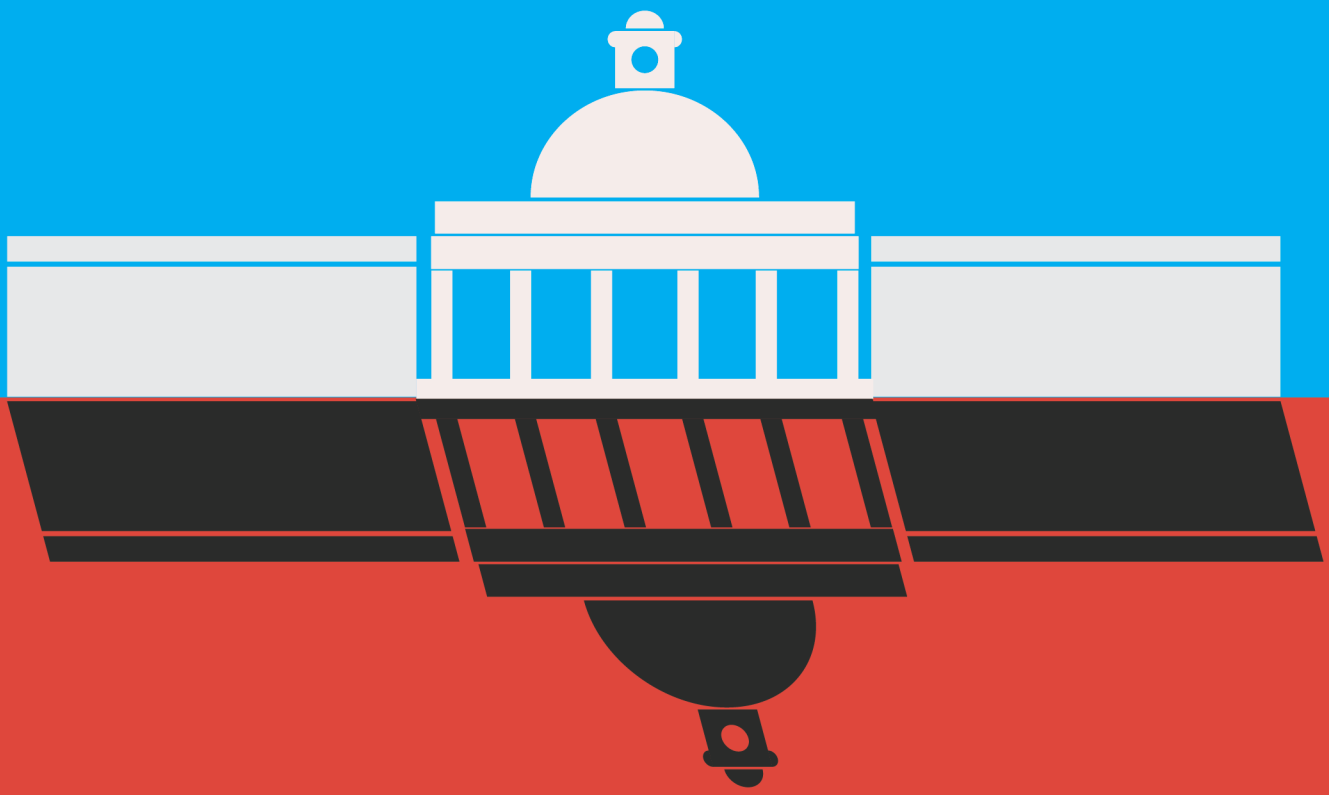
STUDENTS' NEWS MAGAZINE



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Editor's Note

First Contact

Humans love nostalgia. The human need to remember who we were and reminisce on how our lives have changed is one that goes far beyond the necessity of learning lessons from the past. There is no logical reason to remember one's shenanigans during winter trips to the Himalayas 25 years down the line. Unless, of course, you've been taking all those awkward selfies for professional networking purposes.

Past events, trivial as they may be, define who we are and where we aim to go. When extremists in the Middle East destroy Roman temples, they seek to take away more than archaeological artifacts. They wish to erase a cultural memory, of things greater than their present selves, to deny their subjects of the hope that they too would be able to achieve the greatness their ancestors did.

You might wonder what this talk of madmen destroying two-thousand year old temples in a land two-thousand miles away has to do with this magazine. The point I wish to make is that we, as a people, often see ourselves as a product of our past. For all the talk of being one of the nation's oldest institutions, there is astonishingly little, if anything to show when it comes to having a distinctive on-campus culture. While expectations of something à la the Harvard Boat Race on the Ganga Canal may be on the prsposterous side, one certainly does expect the result of 160-odd glorious years of tradition to amount to more than the word "chapo".

The fact of the matter is that at IITR, we seldom get an opportunity to truly create a campus culture worth remembering years later. Stifled by the lack of opportunities to express themselves, from the much-maligned eleven pm deadline to the hefty approvals needed for the most basic of cultural activities, the junta is left with few avenues to pursue their interests. Something is deeply broken when something as fundamental to the campus culture as the Hobbies Club is put outside the hands of students. Instead of being the hub of a rich and vibrant campus, it is saddled with sections like philately and numismatics, which, to put the matter mildly, are "behind the times".

This repressed representation is just another link of the many chains binding the student community. In the cover story, "Fourth Reich", we take a look at several other issues, including the suppression of peaceful protests and the severe restrictions on campaigning during the SAC elections early in the semester. Speaking about elections, this semester also witnessed a massive overhaul of the earlier student body election system, complete with new posts and guidelines. Watch Out! published a 3-article feature series on its website, wona.co.in , taking a look at the strengths, weaknesses and often befuddling rules behind the new system.
Over the past semester, Watch Out! has attempted to expand its online reach. From the occasional news note, the website has progressed to seeing far more regular articles, videos and analyses. We hope to continuethis trend with more diverse and frequent columns, allowing our coverage of the campus to be more expansive than was ever possible with a semesterly magazine.

Our story in this issue is one I hope will resonate with you, dear reader. The culture of a campus is moving reflection of things beyond its technical prowess. For all the success we hope to attain, it will our ideas and traditions which we will remember down the line.

– Akshit Tripathi

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LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT - AN INSIGHT

"But if thought corrupts language, then language can also corrupt thoughts"

-George Orwell, 1984

Thought is the underlying cause of action. What differentiates us from other forms of life is our ability to think rationally and abstractly. But what form do our thoughts take? Seldom do we express them in pictures; our primary medium has always been that of language – the language with which we are most comfortable. Multiple studies have shown that a single person will, in fact approach a situation differently when thinking in different languages.

Does language, therefore, affect thought? Emotions, sans language, would be limited to physical manifestations such as elevated heart rates and general uneasiness. Infants are precluded from most expression beyond wails, and develop consciousness and analytical abilities only around the time they begin to pick up the rudiments of language. We often struggle to establish what we feel until stumbling upon a word that aptly describes our state of mind. While the word "happy" describes a perfectly valid emotion, it would never be able to adequately capture its kaleidoscopic shades, from a new mother's ecstatic exhilaration to the intoxicating bliss of a monk attaining nirvana. The mind determines their very view of the world for a vast majority of people, and in more than a just a figurative sense. Russians are more receptive to different shades of blue because both light and dark blue are listed as primary colours, thus becoming immediately more important. Our awareness of such variations leads to greater consciousness and helps us register emotion better.

The evolution of mankind from hunters and gatherers into the stereotypical technology geeks has been facilitated by language at large. Progress in science is achieved, primarily, in two ways: by discrediting a hypothesis, or by using a pre-existing theory to formulate a new one. Both these processes involve two critical, differentiable steps. The first is comprehending data. The second is to put previously gathered information to use. Typically, gathering information implies its storage, for variable periods of time. How, then, is this information stored? Is it not in the form of language? Newton, without language, would have never been able to convey his ideas; ideas that have helped us greatly in reaching where we are. Other ideas of a similar nature would have to be regenerated repeatedly, only to die with the persons in question. Language therefore is pivotal not only in helping us understand old theories, but

Other ideas of a similar nature would have to be regenerated repeatedly, only to die with the persons in question. Language therefore is pivotal not only in helping us understand old theories, but also generating new ones. Expunging language from science would inhibit the birth of new, original thought, which unsurprisingly, is a 30 foot concrete wall in the face of scientific progress.

It is a fact worth mulling over that language is simply a collection of random sounds, comprehendible only because our minds are programmed to do so. The complexity of language used by different species directly corresponds to their mental capabilities – Orcas, which use 24 different sounds are much smarter predators (as can be seen by their present population) compared to Pandas, which use only 11. The language that the people around us use impacts the way we react to, and feel about the world.

While a definitive relationship exists between thought and language, the question as to which of them forms the basis of the other seems to be a lot cloudier. European philosophers spent much of the eighteenth century in a period known as the Enlightenment poring over this rather chicken-and-egg linkage. Much of human behaviour, like the instances above, eggs one to believe that language limits the extent to which people think about subjects. Revolutionary ideas and golden ages throughout history have generally been underpinned by a blossoming of language and its exchange between civilisations. However, it is impossible with our present knowledge to discount the existence of an inherent language, one encoded in our very genes and minds, that drives all the language and its intentionality that we encounter in life. Unlikely as it may sound, it remains an intriguing possibility, for it raises several perturbing questions on free will and the moral doctrines we hold.

IN CONVERSATION WITH THE DEAN OF ACADEMICS

The administration and the students might not share the same standpoint if it came down to tagging certain campus issues as problems. Chances of seeing eye to eye in the choice of solutions to issues that both parties even agreed on tagging as problems might prove to be bleak. Discussing affairs in a conversation with Professor Pramod Agarwal, the Dean of Academics, Watch Out! tries to find answers to some (often unanswered) questions. An insight into the system's modus operandi:

On feedback forms -

WoNA - The close of every semester requires the filling out of feedback forms by the students. How are these response forms handled and how do they contribute to the constitution of the teaching staff in the semesters that follow?

DoA: The response forms help the teachers learn where improvements can be made in the teaching pattern. Officially the HOD may ask the teacher to do the same if the student feedback reflects high levels of dissatisfaction. In addition to this, the response forms serve as one of the bases while shelling out the Outstanding Teacher Award every year.

WoNA - Little in the system seems to have changed despite the students' feedback being repeatedly negative in several cases. Do we have any other forum through which the students can voice their opinions? Or any other body that addresses pedagogical grievances or academic queries through direct student-professor interaction?

DoA: We have now started the online response forms which are considered to be more authentic. As for the student-teacher interaction, every department is supposed to have a Student Consultative Committee. The Electrical Department has one such functioning committee, with the HOD, chairman DRP, chairman DAPC and student representatives from every year. The committee meets twice a semester and based on the feedback received, a lot of improvements have been made in the system. In most of the other departments, however, this committee has not yet been formed.

On Undergraduate research -

WoNA - Do we have a defined procedure to take projects up at the Undergraduate level? The absence of proper procedural knowledge makes it no picnic to start working on a topic of interest.

DoA: Interested students can approach the faculty members directly. To help the students with this, we have already notified and requested all the departments to maintain displays of the information relevant to projects at the UG as well as the PG level. Deals for purchasing LCD screens for the same are underway. We also aim to start an annual newsletter intended to carry the details regarding B.Tech, M.Tech and consultancy projects for each department.

WoNA - Many students face problems while trying to take up interdisciplinary projects for their BTP. Is there a possibility that they might be denied the permission because grading becomes difficult with the involvement of more than one department?

DoA: No, not at all. In the last few years I have seen students taking up interdisciplinary B.Tech projects. The Committee from the mother department goes to the other department in order to carry out the evaluation of the project. Of course, if the student himself has contacted the faculty members or if they already have a project running in collaboration with each other, it is up to them to decide what the problems in engaging a student under the project can be.

On rules and fines -

WoNA - In order to repeat a course and avoid an year back, how does the payment of Rs.45,000 as penalty by the students justify being a solution ?
DoA: As per the rule, you cannot register for the 3rd year if you haven't cleared the 1st year and if you have not cleared 2nd year, you cannot, similarly, register for the 4th year. I would, in fact, say that it's a Rs.45,000 discount because being unable to register for the 3rd year owing to a hold-up in the 1st sem would demand you to skip that particular sem while paying its fees nonetheless. This means working for an additional sem and thus, an extension in your stay here. Paying the fine lets you complete your degree within the designated time interval.

WoNA - In addition to the 5 CGPA expulsion rule, has any other rule been implemented in this direction ?
DoA: We have completely revamped the grading system for the first year in order to get rid of the anomalies in the 5 CGPA rule. We are now planning to implement a new rule that outlines that if a student fails in 1 or 2 courses in the 1st year, he will be put under "low pace" category, requiring him/her to complete the course in 5 or 6 years, instead of 4 years. The 5 CGPA rule is only for the 1st yearites. The low pace course shall, however, apply to all the students from the first three years in college and so, will not bank on this rule.

WoNA - What sort of assistance do the students put under academic probation get from the system? There was some talk of a Student Mentorship Programme earlier this year.
DoA: Meetings with these students are being conducted and they are being advised to be more regular and careful about their studies. As for the Student Mentorship Programme, I personally feel that we cannot have a system for everything. You are always free to consult the faculty and your seniors whenever you need guidance. In fact, I always ask my students to come to me for clearing doubts in any subject. If I can solve, I will definitely help.

ON TRACK, ON FIELD

IITR's contingent, in the Inter IIT aquatics meet at IIT Madras elicited disappointment, with only a lone silver medal to show for its efforts. The team fared better in Udghosh at IIT Kanpur, where it placed second in the overall tally.

After the conclusion of the Inter-IIT aquatics meet held at IIT Madras and Udghosh 2015 held at IIT Kanpur, Watch Out News Agency, in a talk with Kuber Dutt Sharma, GS Sports, attempted to analyse the performance of IIT-R contingent, the future plans of the Sports Council and probe into some lesser known behind-the-scenes facts about the Sports division.

Addressing the concern about the aquatics team's debacle, he admitted to the ignominy and regarded the graduation of the old, experienced and talented members as the primary concern. He was hopeful of rebuilding a new team which could take us to the helm. The hope also rests with other sports as the inexperienced contingent at Udghosh gave a sterling performance in spite of losing some key seniors and finished as overall runners up. The team structure will be changed to include team hierarchy to address this issue. It is to be noted that the inability of acquiring proper aquatics coaches was another major factor. Needless to say, with the current geographical location and the post not coming under the government pay scale, there are not enough incentives for coaches to head towards R-land. Even if the Sports Council starts thinking of replicating the sports structure of other major IITs, the answers again point to the weather and location of Roorkee which badly limit the practice hours of the aquatics contingent unlike other IITs like Madras and Bombay. A temperature controlled pool has been dismissed as being beyond the budget of the institution, but the Sports Council remains optimistic about broaching the issue again. The proposal is underway to modify the timings of the Sports Complex so as to ensure proper access to every sports enthusiast on campus. Regarding the possibility of training our sportsmen at Noida extension campus under professional and international coaches who would otherwise hesitate to come to Roorkee, the response was rather allusive. "The infrastructure there", says Kuber, "is not very developed and the institute is trying its best to train its sportsmen. For instance, the athletics team was sent to Dehradun to train on synthetic tracks."

There were also some revelations on the future plans of the Sports Council. The participants in Sangram were disadvantaged with a very short prep time last year but that won't be the case this year. Some good infrastructural and structural changes are on a roll. For instance, a new gym is being built which will greatly improve the sporting scenario. Taekwondo has been included under the Sports Council. The wastage of sporting equipments is a sad practice, and those will now be utilised to train students of Anushruti, ABN etc. so as to equip them with better facilities. These equipments will be used to promote sports in nearby villages in association with NSS.

How these changes affect the fortunes of the institute in the upcoming Inter-IIT and Sangram remains to be seen.

THE FOURTH REICH

If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they don't want to hear

Any set of population, to survive in perfect harmony, needs its organizations to follow a democratic framework. Democratic politics, policies and principles form the fulcrums of communal harmony and collective prosperity enabling freedom of thought, expression and action which empowers individual existence and identity. In the context of R-Land, liberty predominantly filters down to the expression of thoughts and opinions of the young students who are in the continuous process imbibing in themselves a distinct sense of identity. Moreover, for a population as big as that our institute, where each activity is done in strict accordance to the books, it is necessary than an active ground is provided for a two way communication between the students and the administrators. Failure in either direction would do insidious damage to the growth of the institute and become a cause of unrest.

In the wake of recent events, Watch Out, with great distress feels the need to throw some light on certain events where freedom of expression was curbed, if not vehemently denied.

UNDER AN IRON FIST

It is an onerous task to swim with the heavy undercurrent at an IIT, and it only got more excruciating with the installment of the "5 CGPA rule".

There have been endless debates about the legitimacy of the mercy pleas of the 73 students, who were to be expelled, that was turned down multiple times before the administration and court of law before it was rescinded. As a result of the failing grip in the proceedings through the court, the students found themselves in the most unfortunate position. This adversity lead to a peaceful protest on 22nd July, 2015 which was then by far the last resort for the students to get their woes heeded by the administration.

Note that, the protest was a peaceful one. The most aggressive atrocity, if at all there is a compulsion to name one, was the crying out of slogans by the students who marched past the main building in a single file. No hostility or loss of property was reported throughout the entire procession. Moved by apathy for their colleagues, many students of the college felt indignant with the expulsion and joined the protest for a cause. As the momentum grew, more followed and till noon the front porch of the LHC was packed with student demonstrators. The administration in an attempt to curb the involvement of the students resorted to a rather despotic move when they issued a notice to take disciplinary action, or even expel the students who bunked the classes in order to join the protests that day.

The threat was not implemented but it does unveil the side of this institute where laws and rules are executed with austerity but the imposition is solely at the discretion of the administrators. Freedom to protest peacefully is indispensable for an institution this huge and this innocuous oppression is a threat to the democratic model on which the institute has based its functionality.

Regarding the protests Associate Dean Prof. Inderdeep Singh commented,"Students have the right to conduct and participate in peaceful protests as long as no official work is disturbed. These measures are to protect the students from being manhandled and forced to participate in the protests by their peers against their will". It is legitimate however, that the registration of the freshmen was affected by the demonstration but that transgression can be condoned in the gravity of the issue as they never bolstered any act of nuisance during the entire event.

The Multi Activity Centre as it is called was supposed to be the center point of all cultural activities once it was up and functional. But just as the performing arts sector was rejoicing over the magnificent facility of the MAC auditorium, things took an unexpected turn of events when the cultural council itself was banned from the MAC auditorium. It all began tumbling down the hill during early September, after the Choreography section went recruiting. After the recruitments in the MAC, the Dean initiated an inquiry regarding the condition of the MAC after the auditions were over. "What was supposed to be a generic comment on students leaving chewing gum and wrappers on the floor was upheld into a reason for banning the whole Cultural Section from the premises of the MAC, indefinitely", says Aditya Ganeshan, Secretary, Music Section.

This exhibits a clear dominance of the admin over any presiding committee (in this case, the Cultural Council) appointed by the administrators themselves. Due to communication gap between the authorities a simple problem evolved into a much larger logjam which ultimately led to the postponement of the event Crescendo, scheduled for mid-September by the Music section, to a much later date after the mid-terms.

Although this issue was followed up in a meeting between the DoSW in order to hear out the difficulties faced by them and the issue was ultimately resolved, these austere measures and the sluggish pace of the administrative machinery led to the disregard of the efforts put in the by the Section.

THE CHAOS IN THE CAMPAIGN

This election, the first of its kind, was unprecedented in terms of numbers. The electorate consisted of a whopping 8000 for the institute level posts. Every candidate was expected to reach out to the entire campus within a span of a single week. That boils down to a 1000 people a day. From a layman's perspective, each of us had 11 posts to vote for. Each post saw a turnout of 3 candidates on an average, and this translated to 33 candidates and manifestos to keep track of.

The code of conduct provided by the institute forbids any form of debate amongst the contestants. Printed posters and campaign rallies are also prohibited. One week before the elections, the candidates were given a specific amount of time when they could go to each bhawan, and address the inmates through the ancient, if not nonexistent, public address systems. Even in the rare few bhawans with fully functional systems, only a handful of candidates showed up to deliver speeches, as they were well aware of the fact that rambling declamations with no provision for interaction with the electorate would not win them too many votes. And indeed, the meetings saw a turnout of hardly 1% of the bhawan inmates.

"It was a request from the students' side to get to know the agenda of the candidates at the central level but if the students themselves do not turn up for the bhawan level addressal, it becomes difficult for the candidates to spread their agenda. A decentralized public addressal was arranged only because a centralised public addressal was difficult. The candidates only got to interact less with the bhawan inmates was because the students did not use this opportunity properly to know the candidates", says M.L. Kansal, Chief Returning Officer for this year.

This makeshift provison was made primarily because all channels of communication between the candidates and the electorate were cut off. The usage of social media and other online means for campaigning was banned. The administration also declined to upload the manifestos of candidates on any common platform where the electorate can read and deliberate upon them in their own time. In addition to this, all campus media was been denied access to the candidates.

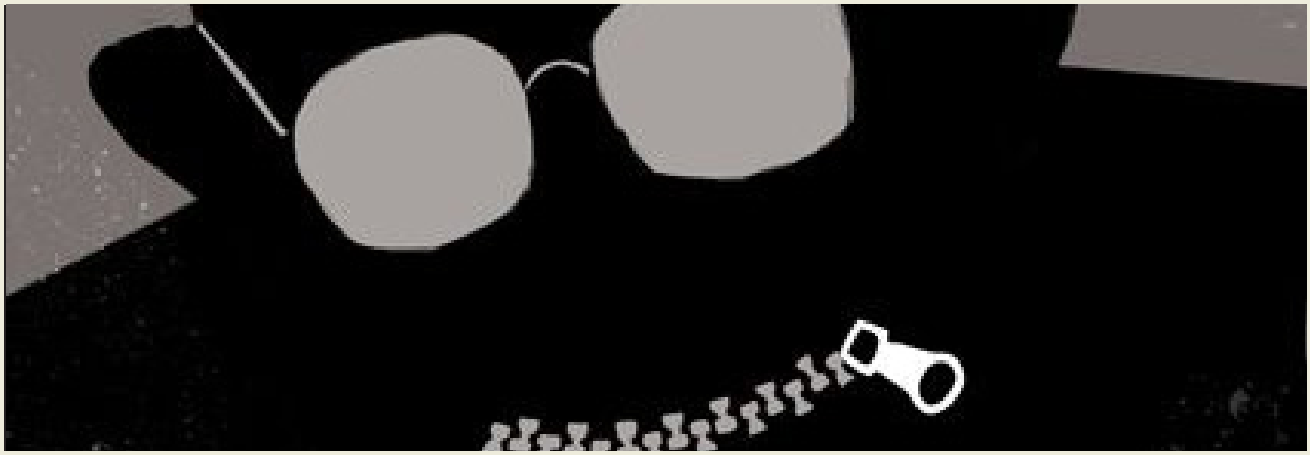
The only other official provision for reaching out to the electorate, apart from word of mouth, was a poster in each bhawan, which, again, most of the candidates did not bother with. The neutral voter who is supposedly the hero of these elections is characterized by his apathy towards the same. A notice board in one corner of the bhawan with 50 posters on it will attract no more than a few stray glances. This also tilts the balance unduly in favour of the boys. With the curfew and restrictions on entry into the bhawans, it is impossible for a female candidate reach out to the electorate and emerge as a contender at the institute level.

In IIT KGP and IITB where similar systems of elections are followed, central debates for every post are conducted right before the elections; a common platform within the span of a single evening where all the candidates are allowed to appear on stage, address the audience and be questioned. In addition to this, student media bodies in other IITs are allowed a fair amount of leeway to function, to fulfill the role of media in a full fledged democracy.

The administration cannot expect to curb regionalism and ask the electorate to make informed choices when it itself denies them of every mean to do so. The admin's paranoia regarding possible misconduct does not come as a surprise, but in course of this the candidates' voices as well as that of the electorate have been stifled.

THE FINAL VERDICT

The Standing Orders of 2008 is a severe blow to individual freedom at IITR. The clause 1-3.8 prohibits any meeting of students other than those organized under the aegis of the various recognized



student activities, without prior permission from the DOSW. This gives the administration absolute right to ban any student group or activity in the campus. The beginning of the academic year witnessed inconceivable orders from the administration including banning of any informal intro talks for freshers. Even though the aim of these rules is to prevent any act of ragging in the institute, one cannot neglect the interaction gap created as a result of these hostile rules.

The standing orders give the administration absolute power over the content in any program in the institute. The DOSW prescribes the terms and conditions for dance shows, theatrical performances. And indeed, as it happens, every performance, every publication on campus passes through the scrutinizing eyes of the administration, giving them perfect right to banish whatever suits their fancies, without being accountable to cogent logic. Challenging these decisions is a hassle no one wants to take on.

"We're still learning and we should be allowed to make mistakes. Authorities should guide us through it instead of stating the obvious ugly truth, and curbing the idea completely. Freedom is a tricky thing. It needs to be earned and given. Giving it is their responsibility and earning it is ours", says Sowmya Mishra, former General Secretary of the Cultural Council.

This takes us to the heart of a much broader debate. One involving censorship in art and media. Censorship strangles creativity. Objectionable content needs to be curbed, but censorship becomes harmful the second it impedes innovation and expression.

EPILOGUE

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights grants everyone the right to hold opinions without interference. It declares that "everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of choice." Additionally, it states that the exercise of these rights carries "special duties and responsibilities and may therefore be subject to certain restrictions when necessary for respect of rights or reputation of others or for the protection of national security or of public order, health or morals."

This covers both sides of the debate. In a closed society like our campus, there exists a need to establish a code of conduct to define the boundaries between method and mayhem. And this is where the administration's right to keep a check on student activity is justified. But it should also be noted that in a society where the balance of power is as lopsided as in IITR, it is quite easy for the lines between surveillance and suppression to be blurred. And there is a broken thread of trust between the administration and the students which has resulted in more than one single instance where they have been. And many a time, the culprits are either the students, implying that they should not be allowed express their opinion, or the administration, which obviously cannot be.

COGNI '31, 2431

Cognizance is indubitably the biggest of IITR's army of fests. It has been fondly described as the 2nd largest technical festival in Asia. The abovementioned fact may be questioned but the writers of this article choose to believe whatever other facts a random freshman working for Cognizance Sponsorship Team would speak out loud on phone. With its ever widening reach, and the rumored ever increasing fixed deposit, Cogni's pockets seem to grow deeper with every passing year. We take a leap ahead across time as WONA's in house time traveler dishes the dirt from 2431.

"This. Is. Not. A. FRAT. HOUSE." Words I heard last whilst hauled out of the conference room.

Ironically, Cognizance has been a fraternity for centuries comprising of over-ambitious Roorkee engineers hosting Tomorrowland beneath the farce of the annual tech-fest. There's the age-old iron-clad hierarchy, hazing deadlines and certain rituals you must go through to advance. Today you're going to learn all about the hierarchy, the workload, the average access range and most importantly, the possible exit opportunities. The Cogni syndicate has traversed a million miles since its inception in 2003. Now in the year 2431, with a consistent state-of-the-art money making machinery established as the Cogni Tower (after the demolition of the unregulated and widely unappreciated ECE Tower), the organization has scaled heights deemed unachievable by any in the subcontinent.

The rumoured 30 lakh deposit at the break of the 21st century coupled with the strategies of the miser mindset of generations, responsible for teching it to yet higher degrees of riches, shows no signs of ebbing. The break of spring '96 (read: 2096) witnessed an exogenous boom in the mildly-incubated domestic trading hub providing the impetus to scale the Cogni Street department up to create ripples in the national economy with every passing edition. Gone are those days when the syndicate just used to gloat as the title sponsor of the poverty-stricken cultural counterpart for the better part of a century.

The core team comprises of members, rolling in on an annual basis from the pool of sophies, juniors & seniors, featuring as the most dedicated players in the organization. This lot is driven to stage the perfect carnival and they make sure the underlings follow the same trend. Not to mention, the drafting of the fresh blood they need to brainwash along the semi-corporate obsequious work culture that dictates the syndicate. People are fenced in, with command and control, to result in a trained herd of sheep. But another option is to understand and to accept that people seek actual purpose, trust and transparency rather than the dosage of control & command – which makes sense and thus, has been immaculately ignored.The managers and executives stand next in line in terms of authority and not always in terms of workability. There are the ambitious ones, willing sycophants at times, gunning for the top notch in successive academic calendar. A certain group belongs to the category who just wants to be engaged on-campus throughout. Then, the silent spectators who love to sit back & relax after they have ensured their customized IDs, t-shirts, certificate and the fat cheque! (yes, cognizance pays; started somewhere in the mid-2200s) Anyhow, these people are expected to be grilled & grill regularly– grilled by the seniors, sponsors, professors, clerk, random guy from the administrative block & grill pretty much everyone else left in the universe. The chain of screaming, aggravated by the overwhelming pressure of retaining MoUs & roping in new patrons, brings everyone together in the evening like a regular, (dys)-functional family.

Verdict: It's not about what you expect or the reality or even the surmounting & overwhelming bank statements, you get programmed into the motto eventually - "There's no nobility in poverty. I have been a poor fest, I have been a rich fest, and I choose rich every effing time."

ACADEMIC SYSTEM REFORMS

INITIAL REFORMS

July 8, 2015

. The institute expelled 73 students for under-perfomance. The students who scored less than 5 CGPA in the first year of their B.Tech were ousted.

. The institute held a meeting to consider 'mercy appeal' of the expelled students. Over 160 senior officials, HODs, professors and the director were present in the meeting, after which it was decided that students will be expelled.

July 10, 2015

. Students filed a second mercy plea, which was also rejected.

. Students take the matter to the High Court.

July 22, 2015

. The Uttarakhand High Court rejected the petition filed by students. The court also directed the administration to reconsider the case of two students who had the required CGPA, but had not completed the minimum number of credits.

THE PROTESTS

On July 22, students staged a dharna in front of lecture hall complex and boycotted all lectures from the morning onwards.The administration threatened to take disciplinary action against all students who skipped classes.The strike also drew public attention with many regional media outlets arriving to report the incident. As the campus buzzed with the slogan 'Take Them Back', around 600 students participated in a rally which went all around the campus. The administration threatened to take disciplinary action against all students who skipped classes. Leaders of student political organizations, and media bodies of Uttarakhand had also come to express solidarity, but were denied entry into the campus for security reasons.

THE VERDICT

The IIT Roorkee administration, on 3rd August, decided to revoke the expulsion of 72 students from the institute. The decision was taken after significant concerns were raised over practicality and the criteria used to suspend such a significant number of students after they had spent just a single year on campus.The students were asked to return to the campus by August 10. They were sentenced to a year back and put on academic probation for a period of one year. Students were asked to agree in writing to the imposed conditions before being re-admitted.

THE AFTERMATH

A new grading system that is applicable to all UG/PG/Ph.D. students admitted from July 2015, came into picture on 23rd October. The 5 CGPA rule is now only applicable for the current first year students. The academic probation system has been tweaked with a provision for students failing to obtain a SGPA of 5 at the end of Autumn Semester to take up fewer courses in the spring semester.

A new system of awarding grade points has been issued wherein the grade A+ (earlier 10) has been removed and the grade D+ (now 5) has been added. This was aimed at broadening the limits of the Gaussian curve for allotment of grades to accommodate more number of students with the grades 5 and 6 in it. Breaking it down to the basics, as per the new system, the number of students achieving the grade 5 and 6 will be substantially more than the number of students with a grade of 8/9. The F grade has been allotted zero points and will be included in the calculation of CGPA. This rectifies the anomaly of a student with multiple backs obtaining a CGPA higher than one passing all courses with low grades.

TRIAL AND ERROR

The transition of the University of Roorkee into an IIT is a slow process, one that has spanned over the decade since its inception. The transition has been pockmarked with multiple ambitious projects that the administration initiates to expedite the change. However, IITR admin being the well oiled machinery that it is, the execution of these plans often leave much to be desired. With each failed plan, the authorities head back to the drawing board with much gusto. After the million meetings that ensue, the plan in its makeshift form is put into action. And the cycle continues. WatchOut! News Agency sets out to analyse two of the most ambitious projects undertaken by the men in the white house over the past half year.

LOST IN TRANSITION

It was a bright cold day in August'12 and the clocks surely would have struck thirteen. Students at the 25-acre Saharanpur campus had long been denied facilities that their peers might take for granted at the Roorkee campus. After grappling with the administration's nonchalance, 150 students – mostly undergraduates - of the Saharanpur campus sat down on a hunger strike demanding that they be shifted to the Roorkee campus. The strike was sternly cut short by issuing an ultimatum -"Either stop protesting or vacate your hostels". The strike, which garnered national media attention, set the stage for the inevitable. From the academic year 2015-16, 2 of the 3 undergraduate programmes at Saharanpur (Paper and Pulp Engineering, Process engineering) were terminated and one (Polymer Science Engineering) was shifted to the main campus.

Saharanpur Campus, formerly known as the School of Paper Technology was established by the Government of India in 1964, with an aid from the Royal Swedish Government. This School was managed by a society created by U.P. Government until its merger with the then University of Roorkee in 1978. The Saharanpur campus has three departments viz. Department of Paper Technology, Department of Polymer and Process engineering and Department of Applied Sciences and Engineering on March 1, 2012.

Year after year, scores of clueless and naïve freshmen have had their expectations from an IIT brutally thrashed upon arriving at the Saharanpur campus. Where one would expect a thriving student community pursuing wide-ranging interests with astonishing levels of competency, freshmen are to make do with a 120-student group.

From this academic year onwards, to the delight of many and the collateral sorrow of many more, the institute has decided to do away with all the undergraduate programmes taught at the Saharanpur campus. A new programme, christened "Polymer Science and Technology" has been initiated at the Roorkee campus. The programme, currently coordinated by the chemical department, is the first of many "multi-disciplinary" programmes to come, which aim to combine the elements of different branches into one. To quote Dr. Pramod Agarwal, Dean of Academics, "It is a multidisciplinary programme. Right now it is coordinated by chemical department and in fact there is one major shift. Earlier we used to call these departmental programmes but now we just call them programmes. Earlier we

used to have some courses as departmental courses. Now we plan to have "Programme core courses" and "programme elective courses". So in future we are thinking about initiating more multidisciplinary programmes. We also plan to start a B.tech aeronautical engineering programme for which the course structure is almost ready. Then we plan to start a programme for High speed railway engineering."

This decision leaves a 100-odd undergraduate students in the Saharanpur campus caught in between the transition. Their population shrinking each year as a batch graduates.

Considering the cruel banality of academics, an active peer group forms the core of a student's learning experience in the institute. As the numbers suggest, there is not much of a choice when it comes to having late night bakar sessions or seeking vital career advice, both being equally important aspects of a successful student life.

Along with the glaring lack of a diverse peer group, the students also face an overwhelming dearth of co-curricular activities to pursue. It was only after the hunger strike of 2012 that the construction of a basketball court, two tennis courts and a covered swimming pool was sanctioned. In recent times, the Saharanpur chapter of IMG was dissolved, leaving budding developers and programmers in Saharanpur devoid of much needed guidance.

The shifting of the remaining students to Roorkee is a debatable issue . The programme is in its nascent stages, and is yet to find its footing. The absence of departments and lab equipment will see them commuting from Roorkee to Saharanpur on a frequent basis. The first batch of undergrads will be denied the guidance of their seniors, which is an inevitable evil. Professors from respective departments will be necessary as courses become increasingly specific in later years. The course structure has been tweaked to accommodate the changing dynamics of the course. The number of departmental courses has been cut down and more courses by the chemical engineering department have been introduced. This tradeoff, in turn, compromises on the integrity of the branch. The planning however seems rather dodgy. What with this being the first batch of students undergoing the new curriculum, the kinks are yet to be identified and ironed out. "In 1st year, we have a lot of common courses. So whatever labs we have will be taken care of. The labs in the chemistry department and the chemical department will be used and in time to come we will develop the labs here. But if required the students will go to Saharanpur and do the practicals . Otherwise also they will visit Saharanpur regularly", says Dr. Pramod Agarwal when questioned on the issue. With about 40 freshmen currently residing in Azad Bhawan, alienated from the rest of their batchmates, accommodating more students with the existing infrastructure might pose a problem.

The shutdown of undergraduate programmes at Saharanpur has been long in the coming and is potentially a mammoth endeavour. The very initiation of the same by the administration is highly commendable.

ALL UNDER A ROOF

The newest addition to the concrete jungle that the gaon is rapidly turning out to be is the towering Multi Activity centre. On the cards for the past decade, it was touted to be the cultural and recreational hub of IITR.
The process of construction for the Multi Activity Centre was initiated in 2011. IITR witnessed a shift in gears with an entirely new administration which had the project stalled for more than a year. Last January, on the 20th the doors of the MAC were finally flung open to the junta of IITR. We made our way in through the labyrinthine structure only to find it unfinished and in shambles, complete with potholes and only a barely functional auditorium to speak for it.

About a year later, the MAC is slowly gaining momentum. The students block now houses all student activities, and the Alaknanda club.

Meanwhile, the air is rife with malcontent. Complaints have been pouring in from the Cultural Council and the fests alike about how around 15 student activities have been crammed into less than 3 floors.
A bit of digging tells us that the centre was originally slated exclusively for the Cultural Council. The decision to extend the administrative blocks led to a drastic change of plans.
This did not bode well for multiple sections of the Cultural Council which were left with no rooms or, if at all, inadequate rooms. These concerns, when raised in an open meeting with the DoSW, were addressed and even though further allotment of space was denied, it was promised that the rooms allotted to various sections would be equipped to meet their needs.

The third floor, now, has the fests and the SAC office packed into it. A vast expanse of land on the fourth floor is left empty. This was originally supposed to house the bowling alley which has now been scrapped due to lack of contractors, but no plans have been made regarding the usage of the space.

The planning for the multi activity centre was haphazard at best. All sections were asked for specifications but in the hustle and bustle that followed, they've been ill heeded. The feasibility and utility of the allotments have been brought into question multiple times. What is alarming, however, is the fact that nothing has been done yet to rectify this.

Prof. UP Singh, the dean of administration, says, when asked about the disruption in planning and construction, "Even I wasn't in the system back then, only the director and the deans of that time can only tell why the plans for the centre spawned".

The only occupant of the public block right now is a not so subsidized Amul outlet. The licensing for the other outlets, CCD and Saatviko to name a few, is underway, albeit at snail's pace. There are also provisions for utility stores and

atm facilities.

Deovrat Aggarwal, the Institute Architect tells us that there are plans for a Student Activity Centre to be built opposite Kasturba Bhawan in the five years to come. The rest of the sections, and the entire Hobbies Club will be shifted here.

Granted it hasn't been long since the MAC has been functional, and it will be interesting to see how it reaches its maximum after an asymptote. As promised, false or otherwise, by the end of this academic year, all the slots will be allotted and about half will start functioning.

Epilogue

There was a time when all looked lost for our brethren at Saharanpur. There was a time when we'd have been tickled pink by the idea of such a centre opening.
Well begun is half done, they say. The sole initiation of these gigantic projects is enough to overlook what could have been copious flaws in execution. No plan can be foolproof. Errors are inevitable in a project of this scale, especially when it is unprecedented. So we trundle along, doing the best we can, inching the administrative machinery on, critiquing and cribbing till the best can be derived of the facilities that the institute offers.

THOMSO

This year's version of Thomso- IIT Roorkee's cultural fest, was held from 9th October to 11th October, 2015. Thomso'15 witnessed an amalgamation of intellect and culture, a confluence of academicians and artists. The theme for Thomso'15 was Odyssey to Paradise. With a behemothic footfall of around ten thousand students this year, R-land witnessed an increase in the number of participations from numerous colleges, the rise being over a hundred students.

Moreover, several new events and trends introduced this year caught a number of eyeballs around the campus and were appreciated by the citizens of Roorkee and other participants. This included the replacement of 'Thahake' by 'Laughter Riots', an outstandingly amusing onset of IITR's cultfest by popular stand up comedians Abhijeet Ganguly and Daniel Fernandes.

As the number of events soared this year, the problem of managing these events grew persistent. As a result of this, there were clashes in the timings of some of the most popular and sought after events of Thomso, which led to a comparatively poor turnout of audience. The cancellation of some events further distressed the IITR junta and other participants.

There were certain technical glitches that proved to be a major flaw in the management. The problems in audio and lights during the pronites like Vogue and Wargasm were mood spoilers.

Adding to the entertainment value of Thomso'15 was the addition of interactive sessions with distinguished personalities from diverse fields. Personalities like Shazia Ilmi, social activist and political leader, and Sreemoy Bhattacharya, direct of award winning film, 'Veil and Shadows', shared their experiences with an eager audience.
The lineup also included Gaurav Tiwari, certified paranormal/UFO investigator and Sachin Paranjpe, senior program manager at Teach for India.

However something that was significantly detrimental to the greatness of this extravaganza was decoration which appeared minimal and artless. The tiny light lamps along the roads merely didn't prove to be enough for the three day extravaganza. Most of all, Thomso 2015 viewed shortfall of promotions and publicity as well. Certain issues regarding hospitality and security also came up leading to a disgrun

ALMOST FAMOUS : AARTI DWIVEDI

For the diminuitive figure that she is, Aarti Dwivedi makes her presence felt around campus. Coder, geophysist, adventurer, a vocal activist - she dons many caps.
Here's what she had to say.

WONA: Obligatory first question. Who was your first crush on campus?

Aarti: Ali Yawar, if I had to pick someone.

WONA: We know you primarily as a prolific coder, even though coding is poles apart from your field of study (Earth Sciences). How did that happen?

Aarti: I got into coding in my first year, when I was recruited into SDSLabs. It was mostly the guidance and help of seniors that kept me going and intrigued me enough to keep on it.

WONA: You participated in 2 editions of Google Summer of Code and also happened to be a Google Code Inventor. How was the experience?

Aarti: Both the experiences were brilliant, since my mentors were really good. One of my mentors worked at NASA. It was amazing to see how devoted they were to their work. I mean whenever you ask them questions, the answer is always at their fingertips.

WONA: If you had to pick one experience that stands out from the rest over the last 5 years, what would it be?

Aarti: In my first year, I managed to get a travel grant for Free Software Foundation's 30th Anniversary Conference at MIT. It was the most humbling experience of my life. The list of speakers was truly impressive. There were visionaries like Richard Stallman. It was followed by a 20 Hour hackathon, which was probably the best part of it all.

WONA: But that was all about Aarti, the Coder. What about Aarti, the Geophysicist? How did that change come about?

Aarti: Well, I thought of giving the subject one last shot before quitting it. I started reading a few books and research papers on Seismology. Those were really inspiring. The way everything was done and the idea of getting to know the Earth better, it intrigued me, and that's how I flipped! I attended this lecture on Tsunami Mitigation, given by the Vice President of INCOIS (Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services). I was fascinated by it. So I wrote to them, asking if I could work with them on this, and they accepted. (That easy, eh?) I spent the summer developing a prototype that would account for the real-time changes in ocean and refine the Tsunami warnings to the submarines.

WONA: Is there an expedition to Antarctica on the cards?

Aarti: Yes. I saw the advertisements calling for people to take part in the expedition in the last week of March. So I thought of doing this for my dissertation. I came up with a proposal, pestered a professor here into being my guide. There were a long series of administrative roadblocks, and tons of paperwork. But I finally found a way to collaborate on a project with the NGRI (National Geophysical Research Institute). I leave for Antarctica on 5th January and will be there for a month.

WONA: You spearheaded the campaign for extension of girls' timings last year. Despite your obvious dissatisfaction with the administration and the elected representatives, what stops you from entering the system yourself and being the change you want to see?

Aarti: I have tried to participate, but I found the administration to be impossibly rigid and primitive. Moreover, I despise the entire political scenario here. The students here don't vote on the basis of the manifestos. And there is a lot of regional politics prevalent here, which I am better left out of.

WONA: What is the one thing about the campus, apart from the girl's curfew, that you'd like to change?

Aarti: The 'Chalta hai' Attitude. I know that all the professors are not up to the mark and as good as you would want them to be, but I feel that dismissing the idea of studying just because the professors are not good is a very detrimental attitude, because in the end, it's the student's responsibility to learn. In one of the lectures I attended at MIT, there was this line that stuck with me, "The College does not owe you an education, what the college owes you is an environment where you can get the knowledge."

WONA: Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?

Aarti: I like the idea of expanding human knowledge. So I want to continue my research in Geophysics. 10 years from now, I see myself as an Assistant Professor at a good university.

WONA: Do you read Watch Out? What are your views on it?

Aarti: I do read it, and it's a good magazine. But it's very obvious that there is some amount of administrative control over it. I would like to see you get out of that space, comment fully and unabashedly on issues and not hold back on your views.

WONA: One last thing you'd like to say to the IITR junta?

Aarti: Don't listen to people who say 'Chill maar'. I have not known anyone who has gotten their way in life, living by this ideology.

SAC MEETING REVIEW - Of security issues and transperancy

This year's first Student Affairs Committee (SAC) meeting on 4th November convened on a 12 point agenda that constituted a range of issues from the removal of the girls' timing restrictions to the problems of commuting regular students from Saharanpur campus. The meeting was chaired by Prof. Vinod Kumar, the Deputy Director of IITR, and attended by the Dean of Student Welfare and other members of his office.

The meeting was attended by 71 out of the 103 total elected representatives in the Student Senate, with 5 out of the 7 members of the SAC executive present.
The SAC proved its worth by successfully bringing the attention of the administration to multiple pertinent issues. A precedent was set by successfully broaching the issue of transparency of funds. However, the meeting was plagued by several instances where the dialogue meandered from policy issues such as the jurisdiction of Bhawan authorities to relatively trivial and Bhawan-specific issues. The meeting also failed to bring the proposal on increasing campus security to a vote. If successful, it had the potential to bring the 11 pm deadline to an end and bring about a sea change in the campus nightlife.

Improvement of campus security and extension of girls' timings

The meeting opened with a request for increased fortification of the institute, one of the last barriers in the way of a 24- hour campus without time restrictions on girls. A comprehensive proposal was submitted, with solutions ranging from scrutiny of vehicles entering the campus to issuance of dependent cards for all residents. From the various points put forth by the SAC, the Chairman and the DoSW weeded out problems such as the imposition of traffic restrictions in the campus and issues related to visitors. The Chairman called for the formation of a committee to frame the specifics. He used the opportunity to announce the invitation of the CISF, with a paycheck of 10 lakhs, to a consultation on issues regarding campus security. While agreeing to increase the awareness and effectiveness of the Harassment Cell, they also agreed to nominate 2 students, a boy and a girl, to the Council for security affairs.

Clarification of the roles of Student Representatives and jurisdiction of Resident Wardens

The SAC demanded clear and definitive roles for Bhawan level representatives and the Assistant Wardens. Although the administration claimed to have defined it beforehand, this is the first iteration of a new system and the precise accountability for some seemingly minor issues has still not been clearly stated. The DoSW promised further clarity relating the issue. At this point, the discourse digressed from policy matters towards a number of internal Bhawan related issues, from the woes of washing rooms to the introduction of non vegetarian food dispute. The Chairman decided to call a meeting with all the Chief Wardens to resolve issues relating to repeated refusal of proposals from the students.

Transparency of funds

A grave issue was raised regarding hefty and unexplained fund allocations for the Student's club. The purchase of a

brand new lawn mower and 2200 tennis balls for the entire academic year were pointed out as gaping anomalies, as was the hustled passage of the budget. The administration could offer no explanation, but promised to look into it.

Objections were then raised on the disparity in Bhawans regarding resources and more or less the power distance from the Bhawan authorities. Disparities were also pointed out in the transparency of funds in different Bhawans and the DoSW promised immediate action on the outright denial of budget transparency in Kasturba Bhawan. A long-pending provision for a cycle stand in Radhakrishna Bhawan was permitted. The Chairman, though, recommended the students to use the Bhawan resources "sustainably". Responding to request of increasing Bhawan funds and technical activities at Bhawan level, the DoSW apprehended the problem by agreeing to increase funds if provided with a proper justification.

Public Transport on campus, Representation of IMG and EDC in Senate

The Chairman had agreed to look into the e-rickshaw issue soon and refused to answer questions regarding the alternatives. The SAC then introduced Mr. Namit, IMG, in an effort to include the group in providing the technical expertise needed to deal with some institute level issues (for instance, an online platform for filing complaints against harassment of any kind). The DoSW was reluctant to go against the Constitution for the inclusion of a new member, but readily agreed to welcome such groups as special invitees.

Miscellaneous issues

The Chairman agreed to expedite the process on the ID cards now that the library has overcome issues with vendors and acquired the machine. The Chairman responded positively to increasing the timings of Nescafe during exams and even suggested the possibility of a coffee vending machine in the Library. The Deans present took the opportunity to highlight the poor lighting of the Café and also asked for improved hygiene from the students.

Finally, the representatives from Saharanpur raised issues regarding problems of commuting from Saharanpur campus and demanded provision of an extra vehicle for the campus. The Chairman agreed that the issue of lack of internet speed in Saharanpur Boys Hostel was a problem, which could only be solved after consulting the Superhighway. The Senate, looking into more specific issues, decided to take immediate action on the unimplemented WiFi in Sarojini Bhawan. The issue of accommodation of three students in a single room in Cautley Bhawan was broached. Dr. Nawani, ADoSW (Bhawans) agreed to look into the prospect of shifting those students to other hostels with vacant rooms.

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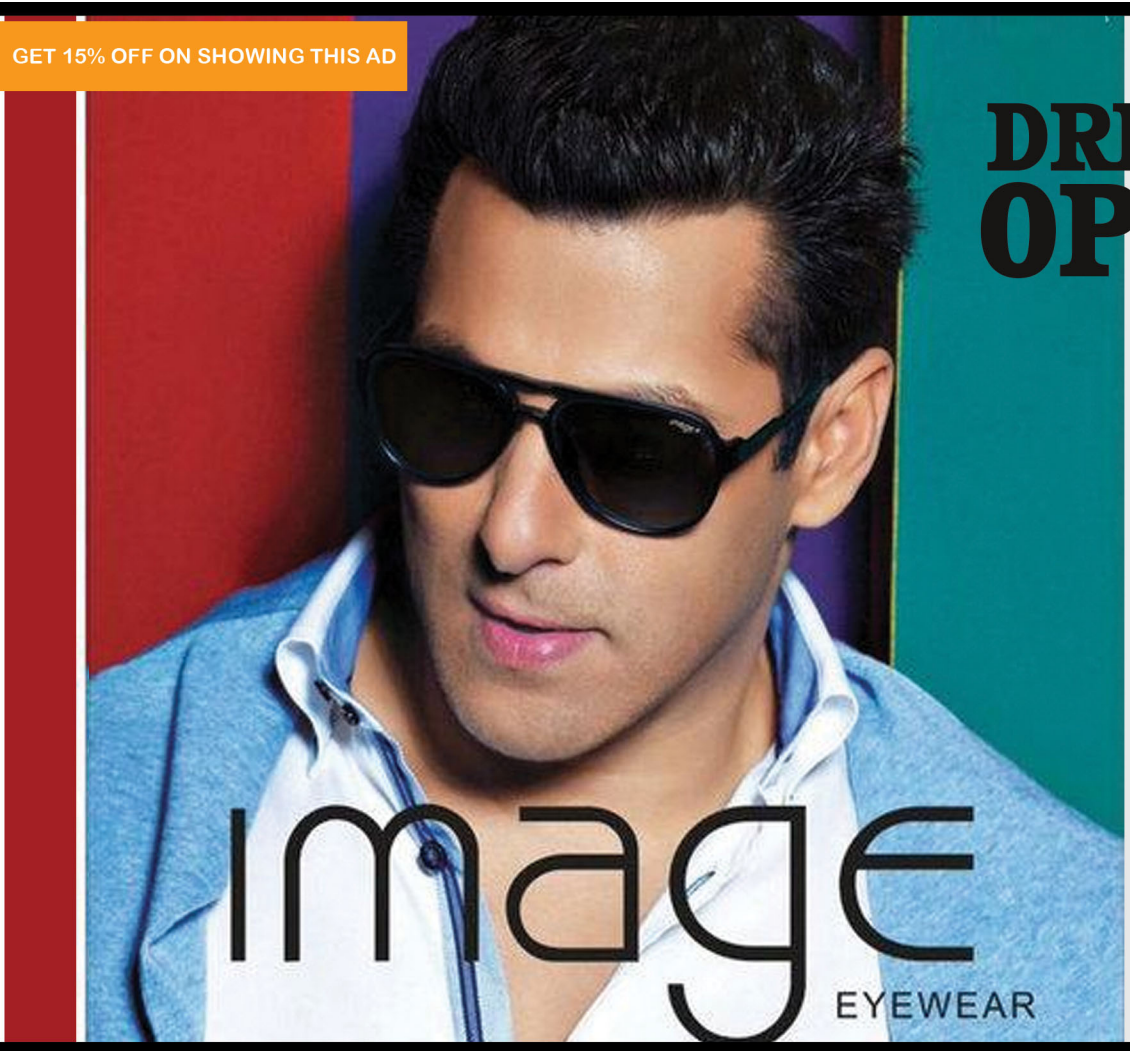

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