

‘We want students to learn skills that will be useful for rest of their lives’

Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, has been ranked 20th among the top 100 Young Universities globally as per the Nature Index rankings that were released recently. PROF JAYANT UDGAONKAR, director, IISER, Pune, is ANJALI MURARI what makes IISERs feel better in both education and research.

IISER, Pune, was established in 2007 and with its 11th anniversary on its horizon, it has managed to bag top rankings. How do you see the rankings given by Nature Index?

The rankings are a reflection of the hard worked dedication of all our faculty and students, as well as of our support staff. However, we have to work much harder to improve and move further up in the rankings.

We look at rankings not to see how far we have come, but how far we have to go.

What were some of the main challenges that the institute faced during its initial year?

When the IISERs were started, there was a scepticism in the scientific community about whether they would succeed. The IISERs were setup with the

goal of integrating undergraduate teaching and education with state-of-the-art research of nurturing both curiosity and creativity in an intellectually vibrant atmosphere of research. This was a new and untested idea in the

country. Perhaps, the biggest challenge all IISERs faced was in recruiting the best talent, both students and faculty as the institute were new entities. The construction of the main campus



Prof Jayant Udgaonkar

was a mammoth task and until then, all teaching and research related activities had to be managed through its host campuses.

The Nature Index rankings of

2019 also feature IISERs of Mohali, Kolkata, Bhopal and Thiruvananthapuram. What did you think it meant IISERs ahead of other universities, both in India and elsewhere?

The IISERs placed great emphasis on the quality of the faculty that were hired. The faculty too were guided and advised by distinguished scientists. IISER, Pune did well, partly because it adopted the statutes for faculty appointments like that at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore. So, at the beginning, assistant professors were appointed on contractual basis, in what was essentially a tenure tracking system. This led to faculty members performing much better than they themselves believed they were capable of. We have created multiple Centres of Excellence (CoE) that have promoted interdisciplinary sciences and have partnered with a large number of national and international organisations of high repute. This ensured that our students and faculty continued to

challenge themselves and grow into world-class researchers. To support the faculty and all of their scientific endeavours, we have also put in place a structured and modern management team. Though conventionally IISERs focus on basic class of sciences, Anjali Murari has now become a part of the syllabi at IISER, Pune. How do you see this blend of subjects offered to students?

We see training in the humanities as an important component of a holistic education. We want our students to graduate from IISERs as confident young adults, capable of working on any problem or in any career they may choose to work in. We want to educate our students and want them to learn skills that will be useful to them for the rest of their

lives, not just for an immediate job. Learning sciences can be highly focused activity and can often divert students with little time to pursue other subjects of interest. However, in today's fast changing and interrelated primary world a single-minded focus on one subject alone is not sufficient. Studying the subjects that come under the purview of the humanities provided students with a greater breadth of understanding of the world around them, teaches them analytical skills, trains them to link together ideas that may otherwise seem disconnected. Thus, it provides them with the means to communicate their ideas convincingly. It also helps students engage more meaningfully within the culture as well as with the city at large.

Can you enlist some of the

latest initiatives undertaken recently at IISER, Pune?

We have just completed a major overhaul of our undergraduate programmes and their curriculum. Besides, we are setting up a Centre of Data Science and Artificial Intelligence, for which, we have initiated search for faculty members. From next year students will be able to opt for courses in data science. The institute was also co-opted for setting up an incubation centre on campus, under the Atal Innovation Mission of the NITI Aayog. We are ready to set up this centre, wherein a start-up from both the students and the faculty will be incubated along side providing all necessary infrastructure and other kinds of support. We are actively trying to engage with industry, especially for collaborative research.



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Year on, World Bank-funded scheme to save groundwater yet to take off

The scheme to save groundwater, which was launched in 2018, has yet to take off. The scheme to save groundwater, which was launched in 2018, has yet to take off.

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84b5-347cddd38f6b/1206.767488:328.2290788000014/topclips)

Farm lessons from China

Investment in R&D, market-oriented production support, farmer awareness schemes in focus as agricultural productivity than high-MSP and subsidies says experts

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(http://epaper.indianexpress.com/2391714/Pune/October-28-2019#clip/45130233/27afb796-beaa-46de-

said, "The BJP and JJP's alliance will work for the benefit of the state. Congress is unnecessarily trying to make this alliance an issue by saying that people's mandate was

While the BJP won 40 seats, the Congress won 31 seats and the JJP finished with 10 seats in the 90-member Assembly.

Around 1000 guests, includ-

have decade-old ties. Both Khattar and Dushyant touched Parkash Singh Badal's feet on the stage.

After the ceremony, Congress leader and former Haryana Chief

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Hit by storms twice, man drifts from Andaman to Odisha 28 days later

SAMPAD PATNAIK
BHUBANESWAR, OCTOBER 27

A 49-YEAR-OLD man who lost his usual ocean route, survived 28 days adrift before he hit the coast at Odisha's Puri district on Friday.

Amrit Kujur, a resident of

On September 28, Kujur and a friend, Diyyaranjan, set out for from A&N to trade with ships on the Indian Ocean. However, a storm left them stranded

lost all hope, but survived drinking sea water, which I filtered by soaking and then squeezing my towel," said Kujur.

Kushnapasad Station Police Inspector Abhimanyu Nayak told *The Indian Express* that he checked out Amrut's story. "At this point, we have determined that a person by the name of

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