

Engg seat assured for all eligible aspirants in TN

CHENNAI: May 07 (TSIT BUREAU): In the wee hours of Wednesday more than 150 parents and students descended on the campus of the Anna University (Chennai) eager to buy the application form for the 2009 season of the Tamil Nadu Engineering Admissions (TNEA). By 9 am, more than 6,000 applications were sold on the opening day indicating that parents and students are anxious to get a BE/B.Tech seat this year too.

Over the past few years, it has been observed that the general trend among anxious parents is that many of them do not wait for the Single Window Counselling for filling up government quota seats to end, before knocking at the doors of administrative offices of self-financing engineering colleges for a seat. In their anxiety they do not attend their turn at the counselling session and instead end up booking a seat under the management quota by paying a few lakh rupees as donation and higher fees.

However, going by the number of seats that are likely to be on offer this year

it would be better for parents and students to join an engineering college through the counselling conducted by the Anna University (Chennai). In the current admission season, approximately one lakh BE/B.Tech seats are expected to be available under the government quota alone as more than 140 applications for establishing new engineering colleges are pending before the All India Council for Technical Education.

Also, this year many parents may not opt for the circuit branches like Computer Science and Engineering and Information Technology under the assumption that the prevailing slump in the IT industry would last forever. Educationists have, nonetheless, been advising students not to ignore the circuit branches on this ground alone as four years hence when they graduate from colleges the industry could be on a rebound and job prospects too would be fairly good. If the parents are willing to wait, they can get a seat for their children in a college by paying less than Rs 50,000 per annum. Ana-

lysts say that in this context, it would be worthwhile to look at the admission statistics of 2008-09. Last year, cumulatively 1,31,680 BE/B.Tech seats were available in the 344 engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu. These included both government quota and management quota seats in self-financing engineering colleges.

However, figures sourced from the Directorate of Technical Education (DoTE) revealed that eventually when admissions had drawn to a close as many as 13,115 seats remained unfilled in the government, government-aided and private unaided engineering colleges. Significantly, 13,100 of these vacant seats were in the self-financing colleges alone. Against such a backdrop, this year the number of vacancies in private colleges is bound to be higher as a result of which a seat is assured for every aspirant under the government quota itself. Therefore, a wait and watch policy on the part of parents and especially below average students will turn out to be a prudent decision.

Infant gets new life after rare surgery

CHENNAI: May 07 (TSIT BUREAU):

When two-and-a-half month old Sriya was rushed to the emergency ward at Malar Hospitals, doctors could not feel the pulse on her arms or legs. The blood pressure was extremely low. She was hardly breathing. Her parents, Balaji and Lavanya, were distraught as they thought they had ignored the heart murmur detected by a doctor in their neighbourhood a couple of days ago. Just as the couple had almost lost hope, doctors resuscitated the baby and put her on a ventilator for 48 hours to stabilize her heart. And then, a rare surgery blending a synthetic substance with heart tissues to repair a valve gave Sriya a new lease of life.

"The acidity of her blood was so high that it damaged the mitral valve of the heart. She was hardly breathing and her lung pressure was very high," said interventional cardiologist Dr R Ravikumar, who first attended on her. While the normal Ph level in blood 7.36 - 7.4, Sriya's blood showed a ph level of 6.9. Her lung pressure, which should have been 30 mmHg, was 85 mmHg. She was given drugs intravenously and put on a ventilator. Medical experts then met to strategise her treatment plan. "It was a rare condition. I browsed the

internet to see if I can get some inputs from the medical literature. I did not find any," said chief cardiac surgeon Dr K R Balakrishnan. "That's when we decided to be a little innovative," he said.

Dr Balakrishnan performed a 3-hour surgery to repair the leaking mitral valve. "We couldn't replace the valve with an artificial one since those available in the market are meant for adults. Even if we tailored one, it would not grow with the child," he said. Therefore, the doctors used an improvised ring of a synthetic material (gore-tex) along with heart tissues to replace the heart valve. Sriya showed remarkable improvement after the surgery. "Her valve is completely normal now and will grow with the child," the surgeon said. Declaring Sriya fit to go home, Dr Ravi Kumar underscored the importance of early diagnosis of such cases. "An early emergency doppler echocardiogram would have helped early detection if the early murmur was not ignored. It should be widely available and pediatricians should be encouraged to make use of it in a positive and proactive manner to save lives of young children." Sriya's parents were smiling. "Sriya had been coughing and struggled to breath for a week. She had difficulty in taking food. We are indebted to the hospital for saving our daughter," said her mother Lavanya.

Anur villagers want 200-year-old chawidi' to be made health centre

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A Subramanian, a village elder in Anur, about 70 km south of Chennai, near Chengalpattu, remembers on how 40 years ago a row of cattle would be tied in the backyard of the chawidi' (a public office or administrative hub in a village) after they were caught grazing in another farmland. The owner of the cattle would be asked to pay a fine of four annas (25 paise) by the village headman, and only then was he allowed to take his cattle away. It was a time when almost all activity in the village was centred around the chawidi, where officials in the village would sit and transact business. It was the administrative hub really, replaced today by the panchayat. From the chawidi, the village watchman would call individuals to come forward to be considered for civic work contracts in the village. Today, the 200-year-old chawidi presents a picture of neglect. Located near the panchayat-run middle school at the village centre, the chawidi looks like a

relic, with rusted, window grills and thorny bushes surrounding it. Thanks to a few pillars, the entire structure stands; most pillars have crumbled.

Broken tiles make up the roof of the dilapidated structure. Children are not allowed to come near; elders warn that the tiles could fall and hurt them. "Most of the chawidis in neighbouring villages such as Ponvilaintha Kalathur and Vallipuram have already fallen apart and there is only debris. The chawidi here should not come to such a pass. It should be renovated and converted into a maternity health centre," says 65-year-old Subramanian, a resident. Others agree with him. English officers serving the East India Company had developed the concept of the village chawidi with a twin objective - to provide a central point for carrying out administrative work such as revenue collection and record-keeping by the village headman, and for doubling up as a police outpost where criminals charged with petty offences

could be locked up in one of its rooms.

Indeed, the Anur chawidi has a small prison-like room, an indication perhaps that petty criminals were imprisoned here. In the backyard is a separate place to tie cattle and goats. The animals were brought to the chawidi after they were found grazing on other land and the owner was summoned to for a fine to be imposed. Today, public health centres in Anur and Ponvilaintha Kalathur, an adjoining village, do not function regularly. They remain locked most of the time. Residents from Anur, Ponvilaintha Kalathur, Othivakkam, Pennapattu, Vallipuram and Korrapattu villages have to go to the Chengalpattu Medical College 15 km away during emergencies, such as accidents or deliveries. A maternity centre in Anur, located in the centre, would be a boon for more than 1,000 families in the villages, residents feel. It would also bring the chawidi back to the centre of activity in the village.

Pvt colleges pull out all stops to woo students

CHENNAI: May 07 (TSIT BUREAU):

Self-financing engineering colleges have begun wooing students and parents using different means ahead of the official admission season for professional courses in Tamil Nadu. While the single window counselling for admission into government quota seats in engineering colleges will officially begin at the Anna University (Chennai) only in July, many private colleges are desperately luring students to enroll for a BE/B.Tech seat under the management quota.

Some colleges are sending bulk SMSes (Short Messaging Service) to mobile phone users offering a BE/B.Tech seat and promising the students that no capitation fee will be collected. "Pay only tuition fees and get a seat under a Anna University college in Chennai," read one such SMS sent by a not so popular college in neighbouring Kancheepuram district. Another institution located in the suburbs has put up a stall at a consumer

exhibition that is underway in the city. The stall managers are distributing pamphlets to visitors promising them good infrastructure and faculty in the institution. Quite surprisingly, the representatives at the stall are openly quoting a higher fee structure for certain courses than what has been fixed by the Justice N V Balasubramanian Fee Committee that was appointed under directions from the Supreme Court.

While the committee had fixed only Rs 62,500 as annual fees for students admitted under the management quota, the college representatives quoted Rs 85,000 as fees for the BE Mechanical Engineering and Electronic and Communication Engineering course. "You can pay Rs 62,500 for Civil Engineering, Information Technology and Computer Science and Engineering courses," the stall representative said matter of fact. Likewise, a college which sent bulk SMS claiming that it would charge only Government-fixed fees

is actually demanding a higher sum. When a parent who received the SMS called on a mobile phone number of the college representative and wanted a seat in Mechanical Engineering or Civil Engineering, he was bluntly told that the fees for the course will be Rs 1 lakh per annum. "All seats in Mechanical and Civil Engineering have been filled up in our college. We have applied to the All India Council for Technical Education for increasing the intake of students in the two courses. We are hopeful that the AICTE will sanction an additional intake of 60 students in each of the courses. You can contact us in June but the fees will be Rs 1 lakh since the demand for the two courses are high," the college representative told the parent. Observers of the higher education scene in Tamil Nadu, however, feel parents are being unduly in a hurry to book a seat for their ward when they can actually wait for the counselling session to begin.

Basic amenities elude home for blind

CHENNAI: May 07 (TSIT BUREAU):

A three-foot-wide trench runs from the road into Nethrodaya's hostel for blind students dug and abandoned three days ago by workers from the Nolumbur panchayat, where the shelter for the disabled is located. It is the only development they have to show for their two-month long struggle to get water and drainage connection to their home. On Saturday, the Nolumbur panchayat finally sent its workers to lay the connection. "But they abandoned the work halfway when the local residents' association protested against the laying of the line and even roughed up some of our students," says Nethrodaya founder trustee C Govindakrishnan, better known as Gopi. "The open trench now also poses a danger to our students as the electricity cables are exposed," says Gopi. "I heard the sound of digging and was happy that we were finally getting our drainage connection," says Ramesh, a visually impaired first year student at Nandanam Arts College. "Then the sound stopped, so I went down with some boys to find out what was happening. We heard shouting people shouting at the panchayat workers to stop laying the connection. They threatened us when we tried to reason with them, and they pushed me down," he alleges. The police were finally called in, and the work stopped. Gopi says they filed a complaint at the Nolumbur police station though no FIR was registered. Nethrodaya's battle to move into its own home has been a long one. In November 2006, the state government allotted 6.5

grounds of land to Nethrodaya to construct a permanent home for its visually-challenged students but the local residents' association, Mogappair West Garden Association, and a Nolumbur panchayat ward member filed writ petitions challenging the allotment. Though Nethrodaya eventually won the case in 2008, Gopi says they continue to face threats from the association, which does not want them there. The home, providing free accommodation for disabled students from rural areas who come to the city to study, was inaugurated on March 7, 2009, by information minister Parithi Ellamvazhuthi and social welfare minister Geetha Jeevan, but the students were unable to move in as they lacked the water and drainage connection. The students finally moved in on April 14. They have to buy the water and have constructed a septic tank to take care of the sewage. "The residents' association got an injunction from the Ambattur court saying no new connections could be given in the area," says Nethrodaya's advocate P N Prakash. "But on April 24, a high court judge suspended the Ambattur court order, thereby removing the legal bottleneck for Nethrodaya to get the connection," he says. Gopi says that on Saturday, the residents' association showed a letter from a lawyer saying that the HC has granted an injunction against any new sewage connections in Nolumbur area. Prakash says the order cannot be an official one. "I am surprised such an order can exist. It appears that Nethrodaya is not a party to the injunction. We are waiting to see exactly what it is and then we can fight it legally," he says. J Govindarajan.

Man found dead in Neelankarai

CHENNAI: May 07 (TSIT BUREAU):

A 25-year-old man was found murdered near the Cyclone Protection Centre in Neelankarai on Wednesday morning. Police said that passersby had noticed the dead body, which was covered by a cloth. The man's throat was slit and there were assault injuries on his body as well. Police identified the person as B Kannan, a resident of Ichambakkam Kuppam in Gowry Amman Koil Street, Neelankarai. According to them, Kannan, a construction worker, had

returned home after work on Tuesday. His wife had allegedly some problem with him and her in-laws, and had gone to her house. When Kannan returned, his parents had not cooked food and he left home again, saying that he would have food outside. But he never returned. On Wednesday morning when people saw the body, they informed the police. Neelankarai police, after examination, found assault marks on the body. The injuries appeared as if he had been hit by wooden logs and the throat was slit

with a sharp weapon, police said. Police shifted Kannan's body to the Royapettah government hospital for postmortem. According to police, an extramarital affair could have been the reason for Kannan's murder. Police have registered a case and are investigating. A few people were picked up from the area for questioning. The investigation is focussed on why Kannan, who had gone out for food, had ventured elsewhere, a place that was not safe at night.

Ash as symbol doesn't amuse EC

CHENNAI: May 07 (TSIT BUREAU):

When her sizzling presence on screen can set the box office on fire, can't her alluring image script success at the ballot box? Bollywood diva Aishwarya Rai is yet to work her charm on the political stage, but a candidate wanting to contest as an independent in Vellore was confident of bagging votes — if he had the picture of the beauty queen as his election symbol. However, Manithan's bizarre request for the picture

of Aishwarya as his election symbol did not go down well with the returning officer and Vellore district collector C Rajendran. "You better ask Abhishek Bachchan," quipped the officer, before rejecting his nomination papers on technical grounds. Squeezed into the list of candidates along with bigger names and representatives of registered and recognised parties, independents, most of them unknown to the public, seek to resolve their identity crisis through popu-

lar symbols or, at least, those that could strike a chord with the common man. JS Mahalingam, an independent from Chennai South, is disappointed that he has been allotted the almirah symbol instead of ice cream, candle or balloon symbol he had requested. "I can popularise symbols like candle or balloon among voters by displaying the objects. As this is summer, the ice cream symbol would also have been a hit. Since there was great demand.