

Amrinder Singh

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STATEMENT

At the outset, I would like to apologise for my absence from this crucial meeting of the IIT Council today. I have always taken my duties as a Union Minister seriously and tried to do my best by what the nation and most importantly - its children who are its future require of me. I have always believed that quality education is a collaborative venture requiring the active participation of everyone - the State Governments, the Union Government, its institutions, parents and society. And this venture is above every thing that can divide us - politics or boundaries or egos. We owe this to our children and to the future of our nation.

The IIT Council has amongst its members, the wisest persons from the academic and research community. We also have industry and Government represented in it. All the Chairpersons and Directors of IITs are members. We took a decision on 28th May this year after two years of deliberations and two Committees reporting to it. Why did we take this decision? The Council, way back in February 2010, expressed its concern at the existing system of admission into institutions of higher learning in engineering. Education is a continuous process, but we have perpetuated a complete disconnect between our secondary school system and higher secondary education. Coaching institutions have gradually replaced our secondary schools. If there is no importance given to performance in school for access to our best institutions, then our schooling system will wither. We are creating an army of children adept at cracking examinations but can they think critically? Do we not share the blame for this disconnect? The bar is always set by the best in the land. If they fail to send the right signals, can the withering of the schooling system be stopped? As a Union Minister and Chairman of this Council, I have a responsibility to the entire education system, which I must fulfill.

The other question that has bothered us is the multiplicity of entrance examinations. There are over 100 examinations in this country for

admission to engineering colleges. Our children spend over two months appearing for one examination or another after their Board examinations. Where else in the world do we have multiplicity of entrance examinations? Institutions in U.S trust SAT scores, U.K draws upon its A-levels, China has a national examination in which over 9 million students appear, Japan has a single examination that adds on school performance. Our National Policy on Education calls for a common examination for admission to all technical and professional institutions. The Science Advisory Council to the Prime Minister has recommended it. The Yash Pal Committee which lays a roadmap for autonomy to institutions of higher learning, recommends National Testing. What else do we require? Is it not our bounden duty to relieve our children of the stress of multiple examinations?

Our National aims must be addressed. The onus of addressing these aims is on all of us. Let all members bring their wisdom to this meeting on all these issues. We cannot let our children be held hostage to uncertainty.