Stay up to date with current happenings in the academic world of chemistry, engineering and allied disciplines through ChemAcademia. With the aim of providing a more meaningful interface between academia and industry, ChemAcademia provides a platform to all stakeholders in academia to articulate their views, experiences and profiles.

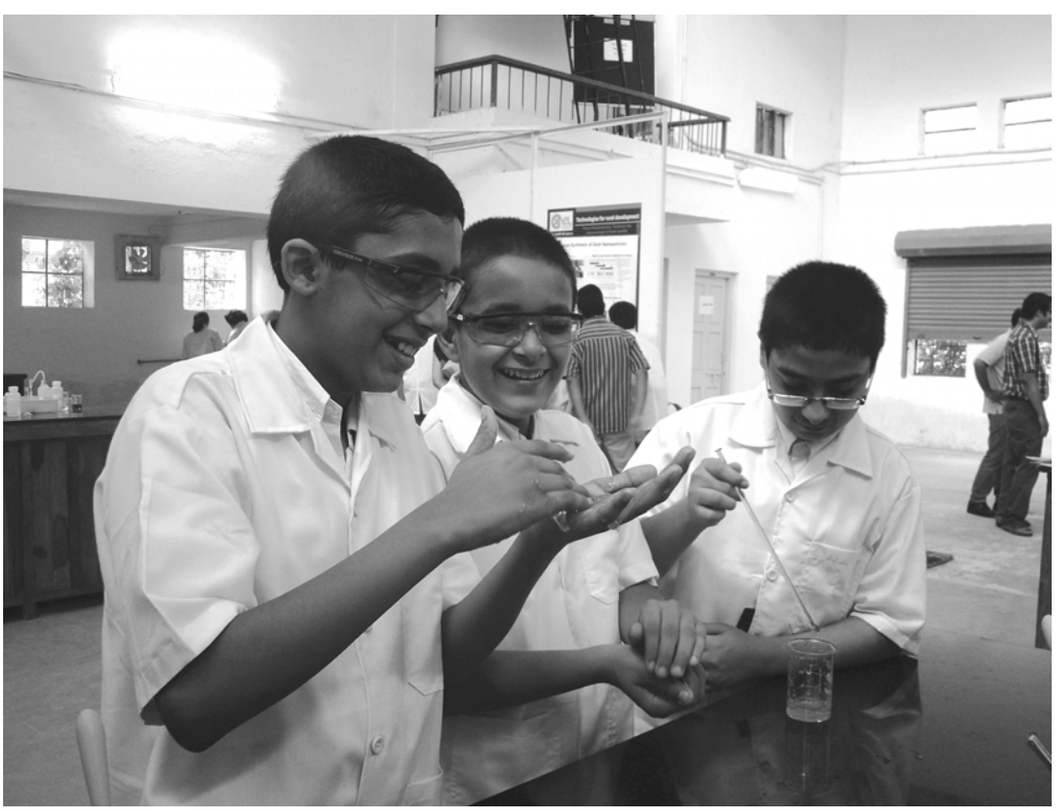
NCL and IISER launch chemistry workshops for school students

To celebrate the International Year of Chemistry, the National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) and Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, along with the Exciting Science Group (ESG) are organizing a six-month long program involving chemistry workshops for school students. Dr Sourav Pal, Director, NCL and Dr K N Ganesh, Director, IISER Pune formally launched the program on 22nd June at the NCL Innovation Park Campus.

As part of the program, school students will visit NCL's laboratories, interact with its scientists and faculty, and perform hands on experiments. These efforts aim to reach out to students and teachers in and around Pune, educate them on the usefulness of chemistry in our daily lives and inspire them to take up science as a career.

Dr Pal and Dr Ganesh also launched the official website for these chemistry workshops (www.excitingscience.org/iyc2011). Schools and students interested in participating in these workshops can register through the website. The 20 workshops, which will be held between June and December 2011, are targeted at students in the 8th and 9th grades.

During the first workshop, held on 2nd July, Dr K N Ganesh, Director, IISER-Pune addressed 60 students from two Pune schools (Delhi Public School – Pune and Abhinav Vidyalaya English Medium School). He spoke about chemistry in everyday life. The students did two sets of experiments at the NCL chemistry lab.



Fun with chemistry: In one of the experiments at NCL, students prepared slime and "bouncy ball" by mixing commonly available synthetic glue and borax solution.

IIT-B sees 77% rise in research funding

Research funding at IIT Bombay has seen a jump of nearly 77% in 2010-11 from ₹102 crore in 2009-'10 to around ₹180 crore.

"This includes ₹153 crore from government agencies, ₹22.2 crore from the industry and remaining from other sources. It includes international funding to the tune of ₹9.5 crore. While the rise in contribution from the industry is not significant (last year it was ₹19 crore), it is nonetheless encouraging. What is further important is that we are getting more number of projects worth over ₹1 crore," said the office of the dean of research and development, IIT Bombay. Around 229 projects were started in 2010-11.

In 2010, the funding at IIT-B rose by 40 % from ₹72.8 crore in 2008-09 to ₹102 crore in 2009-10. This trend shows that research and development is gradually gaining more importance in India. Further, the number of Indian patent applications has also gone up from a little less than 10 in 2006-07 to 56 in 2010-11 at IIT Bombay.

Even at IIT Delhi, research funding has gone up from ₹40 crore in 2006 to ₹120 crore currently, with majority of the funds coming from government agencies and several ministries. However, contribution from industry is still less.

Kapil Sibal, Human Resources Minister recently said that India's annual research funding is $8 billion a year. However, annual research funding in the US stands at $250 billion and in China is $60 billion.

Initiative to attract students towards pure sciences

The National Initiative on Undergraduate Science (NIUS) was started by the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (HBCSE) in 2004 with an aim to draw young students towards pure science and encourage them to pursue it as a career. It is a guidance programme for undergraduate students in the subjects of Physics, Chemistry and Biology. For enrolling in this programme, first year undergraduate students of science (B Sc) and engineering (B Tech, B E) should apply to the Centre.

The students attend 3-4 nurture camps of 2-4 weeks duration and work on proto-research projects during their vacations over a period of two years. The first camp is an exposure and enrichment camp for students. The students selected at the end of the first camp carry out project work with mentors during the subsequent camps.

These projects can qualify as research reports and are published in peer reviewed international and national journals. Till date 67 papers have been published. Until now, 7 batches of undergraduate students from across the country have participated in NIUS.

Addressing the press, Professor Vijay Singh, national coordinator of the NIUS programme said, "A majority of meritorious students opt for professional careers in engineering, medicine, computer science and allied fields as they are considered lucrative. There are very few takers for the basic science streams. Further, with few exceptions, most schools and colleges in India fail to offer any excitement or challenge in science to students. The NIUS was conceived to address these serious issues. It is satisfying to see that students are not only taking an interest in scientific research, but are even leaving sought-after streams like engineering."