

## THONEH-NIO Malaysia launches BS Optometry in Collaboration with BITS Pilani India

*Hope is like a road in a country where there was never a road but when many people start walking on it, the road comes into existence.*

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For millions of people around the world, receiving quality eye care is an enormous struggle. Lack of good educational programs in Optometry and poor practitioner-to-patient ratio adds to the woes of developing countries. Every 5 Seconds one person in our world goes blind and a child goes blind every minute. Every year, an additional 1-2 million persons go blind. Refractive errors account for 24% of blindness worldwide. 75% of the global blindness is treatable and / or preventable. 90% of the blind live in the poorest section of the developing world. Without proper interventions, the number of global blindness will increase to 75 million by 2020. Restoration of sight is one of the most cost effective interventions in health care. Blindness prevention needs Optometry and solution to blindness due to refractive error is by Quality Primary Eye Care.

The two decade old Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital (THONEH) in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia is a non-profit, non-governmental comprehensive eye care institution engaged in clinical and surgical services and it also provides eye care delivery in rural areas through its community service projects. Rehabilitation services for visually challenged, basic research into causation management, treatment and cure of eye diseases and the development of eye care products are some of the other activities of THONEH. The National Institute of Ophthalmology (NIO) is the academic arm of THONEH involved in the training of all cadres of eye care professionals.

One of the top ranking universities in India today, the Birla Institute of Technology and Science "BITS", Pilani (Rajasthan) which has pioneered many a Work Integrated Learning Programs to address the Human Resource Development needs of various professions has been offering for the past over a decade BS degree Programs in Optometry in collaboration with the Elite School of Optometry (ESO), Chennai, a constituent institution of the Medical Research Foundation (MRF), Chennai established by Sankara Nethralaya, the Chennai based premier eye care and research centre. For the past 7 years BITS, Pilani has also been offering the BS Optometry program in collaboration with Bausch & Lomb School of Optometry established by the L V Prasad Eye Institute "LVPEI", Hyderabad.

The objective of the Optometry program at BITS, Pilani is to prepare Optometrists who are the primary health care practitioners of the eye and visual system to provide comprehensive eye and vision care which includes refraction and dispensing, detection / diagnosis of management of disease in the eye and the rehabilitation of conditions of the visual system. The eight semester B.S. Optometry program of BITS, Pilani has six semesters of coursework including Clinics spread over the first three years followed by two semesters of mandatory Internship spread over the final and fourth year.

Discussions have been in progress between THONEH-NIO and BITS Pilani for the past four years and a detailed Memorandum of agreement was signed on February 23, 2006 which is in furtherance to the MoU signed on January 19, 2004. The letter of approval from LAN - Lembaga Akreditasi Negara (Malaysian Accreditation Board) was obtained in May 2007 and subsequently the Letter of

Approval from the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia in June 2007.

On January 15th 2008, in a colorful function, the BS Optometry programme was launched by Mr Sanjay Panda, Economic & Educational Counselor of Indian High Commission, Malaysia. The inauguration function took off with a video presentation on the Optometry programme which was followed by a dance performance by THONEH Staff. Dato' S Kulasegaran Chairman NIO welcomed the gathering. After the Videos of the address by Prof L K Maheshwari Vice Chancellor BITS Pilani, by Prof G Raghurama Deputy Director (Academic) BITS , Pilani and Prof BR Natarajan Dean from BITS Pilani, the Guest of Honor Senator Prof Datuk Dr Ismail Md Salleh Chairman Thoneh gave his speech.

This marks yet another milestone in the educational innovations of BITS Pilani Rajasthan.

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Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Pilani Rajasthan which has set a bench mark in industry university collaboration is one among the top ranking universities in India today offering degrees in various branches of Engineering, Management, Economics, Pharmacy, Sciences, Engineering Technology, Information Systems, General Studies, Finance, etc presently at Pilani, Dubai, Goa campuses and in the near future at Hyderabad campus apart from an array of work integrated learning programmes for HRD of a vast spectrum of Indian corporates.

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