

Newspaper Clips

August 23, 2013

Mint ND 23/08/2013 P-6

AUTONOMY FACTOR

Government further curtails influence of UGC and AICTE

Regulators will no longer be involved in the selection of IIT directors; move to be approved at 3 Sep meet

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NEW DELHI

The chairmen of University Grant Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) will no longer be involved in the selection of directors for the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) according to two government officials familiar with the matter.

The officials, who asked not to be named, said the IITs and the human resource development (HRD) ministry have reached an agreement on the issue and that it was set to be formally approved at an IIT Council meeting on 3 September. The Council is the top decision-making body of the IITs and is headed by the human resource development minister.

The move is consistent with the recent efforts of the government to reduce the influence of education regulators. Former HRD minister Kapil Sibal had proposed an overarching body called National Commission of Higher Education and Research (NCHER) that would subsume the education regulators. However, a Bill related to this is yet to be approved by Parliament.

Earlier, the Supreme Court ruled in April that AICTE has no authority to enforce sanctions on colleges affiliated to universities even if they are offering MBA or MCA degrees.

The latest action will only



INDRANIL BHOSNIK/MINT

Still pending: Though the government has allowed IITs to increase the tuition fees for undergraduate courses, unresolved issues include allowing scholars to conduct research, consultancy and sponsored research along with private companies.

further reduce the influence of the two regulators.

"Some of the IITs have raised the issue about how UGC and AICTE chairmen can be part of search-cum-selection committee. Since UGC and AICTE chairmen are at the same level, it is unfair to get selected by your peers," said one of the two officials.

However, the official added that "it's not a case of hostility but a fact that the position of an IIT director is on par with the position of a secretary in the Union government and their selection can only be done by higher-level dignitaries in the government set-up or independent scholars".

Gautam Barua, director of IIT-Guwahati, said it's a matter of following the rules.

The issue was discussed at the standing committee of the IITs a few days back and will be taken up again during the IIT Council meeting, said Barua.

Mint was unable to speak to UGC and AICTE chairmen despite several attempts to reach them on their mobile phones.

The IIT Council will also discuss ways to reform the Joint Entrance Exam (JEE). "After the first year of the two-tiered common engineering entrance comprising JEE Main and JEE Advanced, we have to see what are the areas that need to be improved. The minimum cut-off is one of the key areas requiring attention," said Barua.

The government officials cited above said that the IITs are concerned about their poor ranking as none of them feature in the world's top 200 institutes.

"The reality may be IITs are best of the best but somewhere they are falling short. They need to engage themselves with international ranking agencies to see how this can be improved," said the second government official.

Barua said that the IITs had already met some of the international ranking agencies earlier this week and a formal presentation may be made during the council meeting. The HRD ministry and the Planning Commission had already conducted a workshop

with the UK-based Times Higher Education World University Rankings in May. In the The World University Rankings of 2012-13, there were only three Indian institutes in the top 400.

The IITs are also set to discuss financial autonomy issues mentioned in the 2011 Anil Kakodkar Committee Report. Though the government has allowed IITs to increase the tuition fees for undergraduate courses, unresolved issues include allowing scholars to conduct research, consultancy and sponsored research along with private companies. Currently, government funding meets 82% of the IITs' requirements.

"Financial autonomy will allow them to do more research with private partners, link pay-scale with merit of the teachers, thus attract better quality faculty members. They can set up research chairs to do specific R&D works relevant to a chosen sector," said K.R. Sekar, partner at consultancy firm Deloitte Haskins and Sells.

HT Kolkata



■ Students rejoice at Presidency University's first convocation ceremony on Thursday.

PHOTO: ASHOKE NATH DEY/HT

Pitroda sounds education alarm bells

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KOLKATA: Sam Pitroda, on Thursday, highlighted the need to bring teaching and research together and lamented that the best brains were busy solving the problems of the rich — although they really did not have any problems at all. In the process, the problems of the poor were not getting enough attention.

The adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on public information infrastructure and innovations and former chairman of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was addressing the first convocation of Presidency University.

“Universities train students to go out and find jobs. Instead, they should train students to create jobs. We need to cre-



■ Sam Pitroda, Governor MK Narayanan and education minister Bratya Basu at the convocation ceremony.

ASHOKE NATH DEY/HT

ate 50 million jobs every year. This can't come from the government, or from industries. We need to create more entrepreneurs,” Pitroda added.

The education system in India needed total restructuring and the old system should die, Pitroda said. While

lamenting the poor state of higher education in India, Pitroda also called for a change in the mindset of the government, the various ministries and the University Grants Commission (UGC) and rebuked some people working in these sectors for “liv-

ing in the dark age”.

“When we talk of excellence in higher education, other than the top 5% universities in India, the condition of the rest is pretty bad. The NKC gave several suggestions for improving higher education, but, unfortunately, we haven't been able to implement them. We have only 350 universities and the NKC suggested 1,500. We suggested separating colleges from universities to focus on research and development. Eight bills in this regard are languishing in Parliament,” Pitroda said.

It was the duty of the ministry of human resources development and state governments to implement the NKC recommendations, he added, lamenting the fact that teachers were not trained to be mentors. Instead, they focused on content writing.