

Newspaper Clips

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Will higher education see a sea change?

11 Bills related to education sector are pending in Parliament. The Foreign Universities Bill is expected to improve quality of education



KNOWLEDGE BASE Many are of the opinion that the problem with the current system is that there are too many authorities with too much overlap

SWATI GARG & VINAY UMARIJ
Mumbai, 28 December

From news about abolishment of the Indian Institute of Technology Joint Entrance Exam (IIT-JEE) to the pending Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2011 was touted to be the year of reforms in the education sector. So, when the sector ushers itself into 2012, the stakeholders see the new year as one requiring consolidation in several areas. Partly because most of the proposed reforms in 2011 fell by the wayside even as the Lokpal-Anna Hazare storm racked the Parliament paralysing the houses and

postponing business in the monsoon and the winter sessions.

Business Standard tells you how the new year would look like for the higher education sector in India:

Bill please!

A total of 11 Bills were pending in Parliament, including the Foreign Educational Institutions (regulation of entry and operations) Bill, the Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical Educational Institutional, Medical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill, the Education Tribunals Bill and the Institutes of Technology Amendment Bill. These Bills have been pending for the past

year-an-a-half. According to experts, one of the impact that the Foreign Universities Bill will have once it is passed, would be on the quality of education in the country in 2012.

"Even the lower end institutes in the US, for example, are better than the mid-level institutes in India. As and when foreign universities are allowed to set up campuses in the country, it will improve quality because of competition and give students more options," said Gautam Puri, MD, CareerLauncher.

Just because the reforms have not

come through does not, however, mean that business has stopped, say industry insiders. "Many private universities are now engaging more actively with foreign partners for content creation, for getting faculty and for joint degree programmes, which foreign partners also find more lucrative than setting up independent campuses," said Sandeep Aneja of Kalzen Private Equity.

Many windows, one door!

Many are of the opinion that the problem with the current system is that

there are too many authorities with too much overlap. The Medical Council of India, the All India Council of Technical Education and the University Grants Commission are always getting into turf tussles.

According to Gautam Puri, the regulation of the segment is fragmented and the focus is largely on the development of physical infrastructure in regulation rather than ensuring overall quality. This, say analysts, is where the need for an overall authority comes into the picture.

"Reforms and an overarching authority are essential because as of now the educational authorities have become licensing bodies. This needs to change, and a regulatory body should be put in place," said Narayanan Ramaswamy, head, education practice, KPMG. Ramaswamy also opined that even when these Bills were passed, the effect would not be immediate. The positive would be that the intent would become clear and things would be seen as moving in the right direction.

IIMs: Overseas bound?

Just when it seemed that faculty crunch had cut their wings, the IIMs Ahmedabad, Calcutta and Bangalore hinted at coming together in creating an international campus. On the sidelines of a joint IIM-A and IIM-C conference in October 2011, Samir Barua, director of IIM-A, said that the IIMs were awaiting operational autonomy, which he expects should come through within a year, after adding that overseas campus in Singapore and Dubai could be considered. So if things fructify, the three premier IIMs may as well begin work on their overseas campus in 2012. The HRD ministry had in October 2009 given an in-principle approval for IIMs to set up campuses abroad.

AICTE's maiden management test

Come February, country's technical education regulator, AICTE, will launch its Common Management Admission Test or CMAT. The test, a point of discussion in the academic circle, has made B-schools unhappy much before its launch. Education Promotion Society of India (EPSI), an association of B-schools, is mulling legal action against AICTE.

'Higher education Bills unconstitutional'

K. Venkataraman

CHENNAI: Three proposed Bills pertaining to higher education are unconstitutional, as Parliament lacks the legislative competence to enact them, according to the Association of Self-Financing Universities, New Delhi.

The body has appealed to the Union government to put on hold these legislation and hold talks with higher education institutions and other stakeholders on how to deal with the issues they seek to address.

"We consulted three former Chief Justices of India, and their opinion is that these Bills will go against the provisions of the Constitution and the [doctrine of] separation of powers. They will take away the powers of the State government," Association president G. Viswanathan said in an interview to *The Hindu*.

The Bills are the Educational Tribunals Bill, 2010 that was passed in the Lok Sabha and is pending in the Rajya Sabha, the Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical Educational Institu-

tions, Medical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill, 2010, and the National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010.

The former Chief Justices, A.S. Anand, M.M. Punchhi and K.N. Singh, who were approached by the Association for their opinion on the validity of these Bills, especially in the light of appropriate entries in the Union and State Lists in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, reckoned that "Parliament does not have the legislative competence for matters of universities in view of clear exclusion of universities from Entry 44 in List I (the Union List) and express inclusion in Entry 32 of List II (the State List)."

While Entry 44 in the Union List deals with "Incorporation, regulation and winding up of corporations, whether trading or not, with objects not confined to one State, but not including universities," Entry 32 in the State List refers to "Incorporation, regulation and winding up of corporations, other than those specified in List I,



G. Viswanathan.
— PHOTO: N. SRIDHARAN

and universities, unincorporated trading, literacy; scientific, religious and other societies and associations, cooperative societies."

Mr. Viswanathan, who is also the founder-chancellor of VIT University, said the Educational Tribunals Bill, if enacted, would mean that aggrieved institutions, teachers and students could not go to the High Court for immediate relief, but only to the tribunal. "The State tribunal has no powers to pass interim orders, so we will have to wait till the judgment is pronounced. And even after that, one can go only to the nation-

al tribunal, which also has no powers for granting interim orders."

Noting that prohibiting capitation fees was the original intention of the law, Mr. Viswanathan held corruption as the main reason for institutions collecting capitation fees. "We, as an association, will support the government in abolishing capitation [fees], but unless corruption is eradicated, it cannot be curtailed."

Asked to elaborate on corruption, he said: "There is corruption at various levels — it begins at the panchayat level, and [is there at] the district level, the State level and the national level. Either departments of the government or the regulatory authorities of the State and Central governments — all of them have to be paid now. And it has to be paid in cash." If controls were increased, corruption would also increase, resulting in an increase in capitation fees.

Encourage competition

According to him, the solution lay in encouraging competition among institutions

and creating enough seats for students. Harassment of those running institutions was a major impediment to the expansion of higher education. "Asking the government to fix the fees of institutions will inhibit competition. Only if there is competition, quality will go up and the cost of education will come down."

Mr. Viswanathan said accreditation should not be made mandatory, as envisaged in the proposed law, but only voluntary. It should also be done by professionals and not solely by government agencies. "We want the Prime Minister's liberalisation policy in business and industry to be extended to education."

He also favoured serious steps to attract talent to the teaching profession. And if at all foreign universities should be allowed to set up campuses in the country, they should be allowed to function with a local partner. They could be asked to bring at least 50 per cent of teachers from their own countries, and only reputed universities should be allowed to operate.

Pioneer ND 29/12/2011 p-5

Sibal tables Higher Education & Research Bill in Rajya Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The much-hyped Higher Education and Research Bill, 2011 was introduced by Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

The flagship Bill is for setting up the National Commission on Higher Education and Research (NCHER) as an overarching regulatory body for university education.

With the passage of the Bill, the proposed Commission will subsume University Grants Commission, All India Council for Technical Education and

National Council for Teacher's Education (NCTE). It was conceptualised on the basis of the report submitted by the Yash Pal committee in 2009.

The Bill states that NCHER will facilitate determination, coordination, maintenance and continued enhancement of standards of higher education and research other than agricultural and medical education.

The commission will consist of a chairperson and six other members, to be appointed by the President. The chairperson has to be an eminent person of international standing in the field of

academics and research.

The proposed commission will promote autonomy of higher educational institutions and universities for free pursuit of knowledge and innovation. It will also provide for comprehensive and integrated growth of higher education and research keeping in view the global standard of educational and research practices.

It will frame regulations and promote autonomy for institutional accountability, promote joint and cross-disciplinary programmes between and among institutions of higher education.

GROWING OPPORTUNITIES

More students opting for higher education

BY PRASHANT K. NANDA
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NEW DELHI

Student enrolment in higher education has seen a sharp increase, a development that's expected to hearten policymakers, educationists and industry in a country where companies have for long complained about the lack of a sufficiently deep talent pool.

The national gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education, or the proportion of school graduates aged between 18 and 23 years entering college-level courses, rose from 12.5% in

2007-08 to 17.27% in 2009-10. At the start of the decade, only one in 10 students was opting for higher education after school. In 1980, India's GER was 5%.

GER is computed by the University Grants Commission (UGC), which oversees the functioning of universities and is tasked with maintaining standards in institutes of higher learning in the country.

The increase in GER could mean a rise in the supply of skilled personnel in India, where companies ranging from computer service providers to retailers have been confronting a shortage of skilled and "employ-

able" personnel. Of the total workforce in the country, around 15% is skilled. For private educational institutes, the increased enrolment points to a higher revenue-earning opportunity.

"As per our fresh calculation, the GER of the country is 17.27%. This means access to higher education is improving significantly," said Ved Prakash, chairman of UGC.

The number is also significant because the government had been targeting a GER of 16% only by the end of the 11th Plan (March 2012), a fact the All India Council for Technical Education, another government body, un-

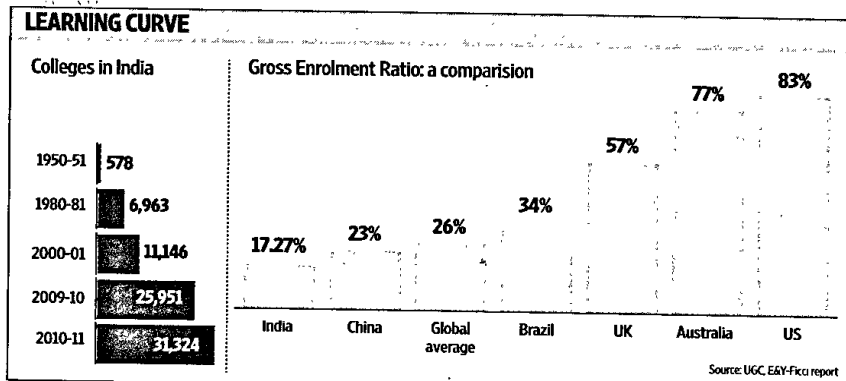
derlines on its official website.

However, the progress may be testing the limitations of a country that has also been struggling to fill teacher vacancies, at present estimated as high as 30-33%. Consequently, the institutes may not be able to absorb the growing number of students opting for higher education.

Prakash said that the fresh calculation is based on the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data published in 2011, which is again two years old.

"If we have the latest data, then the GER, we feel, could be

TURN TO PAGE 2▶



More students opting for higher education

▶ FROM PAGE 1

close to 20% now," the UGC chairman said, forecasting that the enrolment ratio will be 25% by the end of 12th Plan (2012-17).

Though the national number is impressive, the state-level picture is likely to be uneven. While the calculation is yet to be made, a study by Ernst and Young and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci) earlier this year showed Delhi leading the table of best-performing states with a GER of 31.9% in 2009-10, followed by Maharashtra, where the enrolment ratio was 25.9%.

At the bottom were Tripura at 6.6% and Assam at 6.7%; Bihar had a GER of 8.5%, and West Bengal, 7.8%.

Industry executives are cautious about the latest data. Quantity without adequate quality will not serve the purpose, they said, because increased enrolment doesn't necessarily translate into higher proficiency of the emerging workforce.

"When the economy grows, at-

trition increases to the tune of 16-20%. It means, there is a shortage of human resources. Increasing the number is important, but unless there is quality, this shortfall will not be taken care of," said R.C. Bhargava, chairman of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd, the country's largest car maker. "The problem will not be solved unless quality goes up. Other than enrolment figures, it is also important to look at the quality of education."

Prakash of UGC said that the main challenge is to "make education available to all".

As per UGC data, India has some 31,324 higher educational institutes, of which 611 are degree-awarding ones. Of this, 42 are central universities, 284 state universities, 129 deemed universities and 48 are so-called institutes of national importance. In 1950-51, India had 27 universities and just 578 colleges.

Sharda Prasad, director general of employment and training at the Union labour ministry, said the NSSO data shows that many students preferred to pursue higher education instead of en-

tering the job market in 2004-2009.

"Some who dropped out of school wanted to finish schooling, some others pursued higher education. This has certainly helped the GER grow," Prasad said.

M. Damodaran, a former chief of the market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India, said: "Quantity is important, but just talking about quantity without looking at quality is not comforting."

"I keep listening from companies that they don't get quality human resources...many engineers are not employable. While numbers are important, I would like to see what is its quality," said Damodaran, who is chairman of the board of governors at the Indian Institute of Management, Tiruchirappalli.

Still, the numbers show that access to higher education has increased, said Manish Sabharwal, chief executive officer at TeamLease Services Pvt. Ltd, a training and staffing firm.

"Once we take care of the access and quantity, the quality will be taken care of," he said. "Access will create demand for quality institutes and those not providing it will face closure. We have started seeing this as several institutes are now struggling to fill their entire seat capacity."

Indian Express, ND 29/12/2011 P-9

A tablet welcomed, a vaccine questioned

Aakash, the inexpensive tablet, was the high point for education in a year that also saw efforts to revamp entrance tests for engineering and medicine. In health, the key events were the Japanese encephalitis outbreak in several states, besides the controversial launch of an influenza vaccine



Aakash, inexpensive yet effective.

2011

AAKASH: The Android-based, access-cum-search device, backed by the HRD Ministry and launched in October, has generated huge interest not only across the country but across the world. The Rs 2,500-or-so tablet will from next year be available on retail and, as per the government's plans, reach millions of students giving them instant access to educational material.

JAPANESE ENCEPHALITIS: More than 800 people died and many were left with permanent disabilities as the disease broke out in a number of states. The government had to form a group of ministers to look into ways to control the spread and start a vaccination programme in affected districts. There is now talk of a special package in the next budget.

PENTAVALENT VACCINE: 2011 saw the introduction of an influenza vaccine in the Universal Immunisation Programme, through a pilot in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The vaccine, however, saw controversy with questions raised on safety and efficacy. A girl died in Kerala the day after vaccination; the government is awaiting an inquiry report.

NCHER BILL: Pending since 2009, the legislation that promises to change the higher education system, replacing multiple layers of regulatory authorities with a single National Commission for Higher Education & Research, has finally found consen-



Encephalitis, a battle yet to be won.

sus. The much-debated legislation finally earned the Cabinet's nod at the end of the year.

REVIEWING IITS: Committees set up by the Centre have recommended ways to give more autonomy to IITs and revamp entrance examinations to all engineering colleges including IITs. With all IIT directors agreeing that school board exams must have weightage in determining admission to IITs and other engineering courses, the stage is set for a changed Joint Entrance Examination.

COMMON MEDICAL ENTRANCE: The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for MBBS will happen only in 2013 as the Health Ministry chose to go by the objections of the states, many of which sought time for students to get used to the syllabus or that the test be held in local languages as well. It earned it the ire of the Supreme Court, which re-

fused to be a party to the decision and told the government to do what it wanted.

2012

HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS: It could well be the year of a higher education shake-up with nearly a dozen legislations in Parliament, including the Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical, Medical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill, The Educational Tribunal Bill, the National Accreditation Regulatory Authority Bill, 2010, the NCHER Bill and the Foreign Universities Bill, all part of the larger reforms agenda of the UPA.

CMAT: Moving ahead on simplification of the admission process, the AICTE will in February hold the first national-level Common Man-

agement Admission Test for admission to management programmes in AICTE-approved institutions. The All India Engineering Entrance Examination will also go online in a big way.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: The HRD Ministry is putting finishing touches to a vocational education framework with the help of state governments and other stakeholders. To be unveiled soon, this will help develop a curriculum and course design that not only ensures employability for students but also fulfils the need of the industry and in the process arrest the huge dropout rate.

HEALTH MILESTONES: A bachelor's degree in rural medical health may finally see the light of day as the Health Ministry and the Medical Council of India are believed to be in the last stages of discussion. The long-awaited changes in the rules for holding clinical trials may also be finalised. Also, rules are being framed under the Clinical Establishment Act, which would for the first time make it mandatory for all medical establishments, including single-doctor clinics, to be registered.

YEAR WITHOUT POLIO: On January 13, India will complete a year without any fresh polio cases. A cautious Health Ministry has formed rapid response teams for various states, should any fresh case be reported.

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