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We Don't Need a Pan-IIM Board

The reasons against a pan-IIM board, a layer between the government and IIMs, are valid even now



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Over decades, the government did well to set up IITs and IIMs and gave them support and autonomy, enabling them to grow into vibrant, strong and successful institutions. Unfortunately, the government does not always seem to know when the institutions promoted by it are functioning optimally.

When the R C Bhargava committee submitted its report in 2008, the idea of a supra-IIM board was the most significant and far-reaching of its recommendations. This author had said then that the idea was unpalatable (*Supra-IIM board: A retrograde idea*, ET, January 31, 2009), and the idea remains unpalatable even today.

According to the report, "To assist the government in playing its role, it is proposed to create a pan-IIM board... This board should not be involved in any day-to-day management matters of an IIM but would approve vision-and-mission statements, give guidelines for framing policy, and approve two-year business plans..."

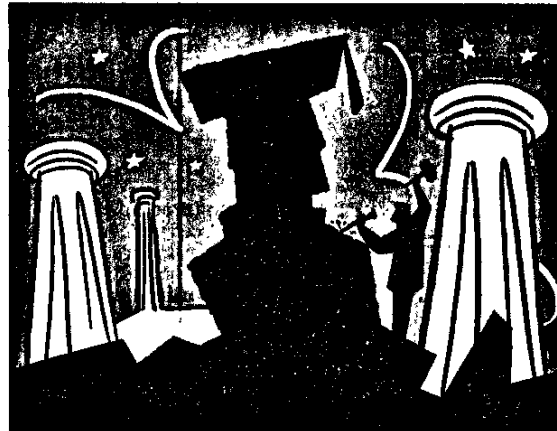
The role envisaged for this pan-IIM board was "to bring about coordination between all the IIMs in all areas where this would be beneficial. The establishment of the six new

IIMs (today, the number is 21) should be coordinated by the board. This board should also help in raising private funds for the IIMs." The report added that the board will "have full powers" for "raising funds, determining fees for all courses, creating or abolishing posts, and determining conditions of service of all those appointed on a contract basis."

Perhaps the government has dusted the Bhargava committee report and retrieved the old suggestion for implementation all over again, the underlying reasons remains the same as before. So, let us put this idea under the scanner.

How is "not being involved with day-to-day activity" consistent with "full powers for raising funds, determining fees for all courses, creating and abolishing posts and determining service conditions" *et al*? What will then be the role of the individual boards? Why will high-profile professionals agree to be on the individual boards, when even the posts, service conditions and fee levels are to be handed out by a supra-board, reducing the IIMs' own boards to a common minimum denominator?

Interestingly, the Bhargava committee had noted that "IIMs have emerged as great teaching institutions and their products are in high demand in India and abroad" even though their research record, the committee had lamented rightly, was far from international standards. But how will the pan-IIM board help enhance fund mobilisation and what criteria will it employ to distri-



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bute the funds across IIMs? Isn't it better for the IIMs to mobilise funds for themselves, based on their respective work, strengths and expertise?

One more tier between the government and the IIMs is hardly likely to "assist the government" either. The government, in fact, will never get to hear the views of the different IIMs first hand, being limited to the sanitised singular version of the pan-IIM board.

Besides, why should the number of posts and service conditions be identical across IIMs? The productivity, manpower and skill levels across Gujarat and Karnataka and West Bengal, for example, are hardly alike, and any standardisation is bound to force unnatural organisational arrangements upon the institutions, making the arrangement necessarily suboptimal.

In short, the idea of a supra-IIM board is retrograde and

not consistent with betterment of IIMs. The boards of old and new IIMs are bound to have very different concerns and it is best that they be allowed to function their own ways. Large systems in India have hardly ever worked. Trying to bind all the IIMs into a single huge system is entirely unnecessary, if not altogether dysfunctional. In fact, such a board is bound to inhibit competition across the different IIMs.

As we know, consulting houses are known to recommend diversification when one is focused on core competence and vice versa if only to justify their fancy fees. One had thought at the time that the Bhargava committee had been driven by a similar underlying motive, because to say that the status quo is fine and needs no change does not appear to be a recommendation "worth the money" and effort. If so, it is only a matter of time before the

next such committee recommends disbanding of the pan-IIM board. We have seen such phenomenon regularly adopted by various committees with respect to Air India and Indian Airlines. So the reason why the government trying to fix something that ain't broke is beyond comprehension.

True, the established IIMs must handhold the new IIMs; but this hardly needs a pan-IIM board. The Bhargava committee had noted, "The brand image of IIMs would be tarnished if these [new] IIMs do not attain the same degree of excellence as the existing IIMs." If one accepts this logic, it might have been much better for the government to have allowed IIMs to expand their footprint outside their original locations — which, in fact, the government had actively discouraged — rather than allow a rapid rise in the number of IIMs with a severe paucity of quality faculty available to man these new IIMs. It is difficult to see why an IIM-Ahmedabad campus in Mumbai or an IIM-Lucknow campus in Delhi will tarnish the IIM brand any more than starting new IIMs.

Doesn't the government have enough on its plate to improve basic education in the country? Why fritter away energy on areas that are doing fine?

Is the IIM Bill a good idea?

The proposed IIM Bill, seeking to create a pan-IIM governing council among other things, has evoked stark reactions. Some argue that the council will foster greater cooperation. Others say such a body is not needed and that awarding degrees alone will not ensure global competitiveness

There has been a lot of resistance voiced about the proposed Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bill; and when I scanned through the news and reviews, I found myself among the minority that supports the Bill. For the uninitiated, the IIM Bill seeks to empower the IIMs to award degrees for their post graduate programmes instead of the diplomas currently offered by these institutions, and introduce an overarching pan-IIM council that will hold all IIMs together. It is the latter that the IIMs—especially the older IIMs and its supporters—are critical of.

As of now, the IIMs function independently with no or little interference from the government, and only come together during the common admission entrance test (CAT) each year. The provisions of the Bill suggest creating this IIM council, which as an advisory body for the IIMs and the senate will be the principal academic body in each IIM. Some of the established IIMs fear that this is going to encroach upon their autonomy and flexibility to function.

I am not saying that this is totally unfounded, but are we seeing only ghosts? It is a fact that synergies between IIMs were never leveraged. Earlier attempts to do so outside the formal system (like the IIM net, etc), did not yield results. Perhaps an umbrella body like the council can harmonise and enhance the alliance among the IIMs. Collaboration more than competition (as it exists now), should be the buzzword.

According to Debashis Chatterjee, director of IIM-Kozhikode—one of the five members on a committee appointed to discuss the issue of empowering the institutes to grant degrees and enacting a new law—the IIMs may also set up centres for management studies and help support and collaborate with management institutions within the country and abroad, with the approval from the competent authorities. Hence, the council could be instrumental in organising entrance examinations, fostering research and sharing of resources between students and faculty, and credit transfers

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TO SAY THAT JUST BECAUSE AN INSTITUTION AWARDS AN MBA DEGREE IT WILL BE ABLE TO MEET GLOBAL COMPETITION IS FAR FROM REALITY. WERE THIS TO BE TRUE, INDIAN UNIVERSITIES THAT AWARD MBA DEGREES SHOULD BE IN A HAPPY POSITION. BUT THIS IS NOT SO



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from one institute to another.

But the government has to take care in not homogenising the institutes with one-size-fits-all regulations, since each of the 13 business schools are at different stages of their growth. The distinctive characteristics, positioning and courses of each IIMs need to be nurtured, not compromised—so that it can help them complement each other and accentuate their advantages with this pan-IIM approach. The new IIMs especially will find this a great systemic support to rapidly come to the centre stage.

Aspirants should choose an IIM for its uniqueness. A pan-IIM structure could give the necessary flexibility and space for students and faculty to specialise. I feel that the proposed advisory body should have a loose federal structure where the individual constituents (read business schools) are invested with more power and the council acts as a facilitator and for upholding governance. For example, the financial and academic independence of the business schools should be maintained.

Besides this, another provision of the Bill states that the institutions will

have to undergo a periodic review every five years, and they would be evaluated on innovation, entrepreneurship, research, impact on trade and society, quality of teaching and governance, achieving a global standing, and achieving social equality through education and innovation. In my view, the parameters and goals for the performance of each IIM should be set by themselves and published. The reviews will be more like holding up a mirror to know where they stand against their own aspirations. Such reviews will help strengthen the teaching-learning process.

Overall, if the pan-IIM structure can get a university status for the IIMs—this will enhance the competitiveness of the constituents in the global arena, with a governance norm that will protect and enhance the uniqueness of IIMs and foster collaboration and knowledge sharing—we all stand to gain.

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The recent decision of the government to create an overarching body, an IIM council, for coordination among all IIMs and the HRD ministry appears to be yet another initiative to influence decision-making in the IIMs. This initiative is not new. From time to time, the government has tried to influence the decision-making process of the IIMs either through direct intervention or through its nominees on the IIM Boards. The government is able to carry its way through in those IIM Boards, which have weaker leadership. The first version of the Bill is reported to have the provision of degree-granting status to the IIMs. The argument in favour of this provision is the global portability of the degree against the threat of foreign competition. A little closer scrutiny of this argument will show this does not hold much water.

Multiple nomenclature of certificates in management exists in the global setting. Diplomas, post-graduate diplomas, MS, MBA, MMS, Master in Management are all used in the mar-

ket. Whether it is Europe or the US or even Asia-Pacific, these nomenclatures are widely used and accepted for employment and higher studies. Closer home, IIMs, XLRI and many other top business schools have been awarding PGDMs, which has equivalence to an MBA from the Association of Indian Universities. ISB does not award any diploma. Its programme is only a one-year Post Graduate Programme in Management and yet its certificate is globally recognised. In fact, it has even earned AACSB accreditation.

Hence, to say that just because an institution awards an MBA degree it will be able to meet global competition is far from reality. Were this to be true, Indian universities that have management departments and award an MBA degree should be in a happy position. But this is not so. Many of them today don't have the faculty, neither do they have the students. Their curriculum is outdated and they don't have any industry support. Hence, to fight global competition, one does not require a change in the nomenclature of the certificate. What is required is an invest-

ment in developing an academic and professional environment in the IIMs and the top business schools in the country. This would obviously require investments in attracting good quality faculty in the world market and developing faculty within the system, acquiring e-resources and journals, industry reports from global sources and bringing the industry and others economic segments on board to make the programme curriculum and pedagogy relevant. Many a time, the government evaluates IIM proposals from an immediate-need perspective. This does not help. It is akin to missing the wood for the trees.

Another argument advanced is the need for coordination among all IIMs. For coordination purposes one does not need the ministry. It is like two warring nations asking the super power to mediate and create a coordinating mechanism so that the issues among them can be resolved. The best coordination mechanism is always voluntary and cannot be created by force.

Issues between the HRD ministry and the IIMs need to be resolved in a one-on-one meeting. While there are issues that are common, in many cases, these issues are unique to the institution. In the past, the secretary to the HRD ministry has regularly convened meetings between the IIM directors to discuss issues that are common or where the government wanted to have an opinion. The system has worked well. Hence, for coordination purposes, one does not have to come with the statute.

Education grows only when the institutions are autonomous and have the freedom to innovate, express their opinions in a free and frank environment devoid of any fear. It is time that the government creates an enabling environment for institutions to raise their bar of performance and emerge as outstanding institutions not only within the country but at the global level.

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'Higher education sector faces leadership crunch'

Academics not seen as viable career option: Survey

NEW DELHI: The higher education sector is facing shortage of capable leaders, says a survey on 'The Leadership Challenges Faced by the Indian Higher Education System'. According to 92 per cent of respondents, this trend is expected to continue till 2020.

Lack of adequate mentoring, academic leadership, guidance and training (60 per cent), low salary (50 per cent) and the general impression about academics not as a popular career choice, are the reasons cited for the shortage.

Education Promotion Society for India — a national body of over 500 higher education institutions in collaboration with a management portal took up the survey. The sample size was 111 respondents which included chancellors, vice chancellors (VCs), deans, principals and other academicians.

The survey was taken up for two reasons.

President had recently called



Lack of adequate mentoring, guidance and training are reasons for shortage of leaders in higher education field. FILE

a meeting of ministry of human resource development and VCs of 40 central universities and urged them to fill the leadership and faculty positions on priority.

Secondly, the knowledge commission had proposed a mechanism for developing educational leader, which is yet to be implemented, to meet se-

rious concerns of education and research community of the country, the survey reports stated.

Almost 80 per cent of the respondents said there is a serious gap between the existing pool and the future needs.

The survey also examined the reasons due to which Indian higher education institutes

are unable to attract Indian academicians abroad with proven academic background and leadership skills.

"Three-fourths of the respondents blamed the highly bureaucratic Indian system while more than half felt that a siloed approach — an attitude where a department or a group do not want to share information and knowledge with the other department of the same company — of stakeholders to be another key reason," stated the report.

Other reasons cited by the respondents were low brand values of India as a potential destination for well known academicians, low or superficial orientation to research and development, poor compensation and incentives, high levels of corruption are the other reasons cited by the respondents.

"It is safe to assume that the respondents have expressed their perceptions based on developments in last one decade," said the report.

DH News Service

HT Chandigarh

Now, scientists say no to foreign offers

REVERSE TREND Changing work culture, better avenues for research are reasons

Vishal Joshi

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KARNAL: A recent surge in recruitments at Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) institutes suggests that reverse brain may be taking place in India.

Since May last year, the Agricultural Scientists Recruitment Board (ASRB) has appointed 10 such scientists, who chucked offers abroad to work in their native country.

These scientists admitted that the changing working culture where research activities were given ample attention had made them consider working in their home country. All scientists, this reporter spoke to, said salary structure and environment were encouraging reverse brain drain.

Milind B Ratanparkhe, 46, who worked in the US and France on soyabean and groundnut genome mapping for 12 years, had planned to work in India later when he left the



country for his PhD.

Ratanparkhe, who joined the directorate of soyabean research in Indore on May 5, 2012, said he turned down offers to join several institutes and industries to continue research on legumes in India.

“Soyabean is a one of the major crops of India, but no major research is being done here,” Ratanparkhe said. “During my stint at University of Georgia, I did research under one of the world’s top genome scientists Andrew Paterson and that inspired me to do my bit for Indian farmers.”

Similarly, P Natrajan Ananth, 38, the programme coordinator of Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Kaushalyaganga under the Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture (CIFA), Bhubaneswar, wanted to share his rich experience for India’s progress.

“After my PhD in agriculture extension from Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, I wanted to gain experience with some of the best institutes,” he said. “After being a faculty member at Ambo University in Ethiopia for seven years, I joined the industry and got exposed to

a rich experience.”

Similarly, Suneel Kumar Onteru joined his alma mater, National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI), Karnal, on December 20 last year. “On the completion of my fellowship from the US, my friends in India suggested me to come-back. Initially, I was not sure but now I feel encouraged, considering the salary structure and tremendous improvement in the work culture in laboratories,” he said.

An entomologist and a native of Jammu, Poonam Jasrotia, and her husband, Ajay Kumar Bhardwaj, a soil scientist at the ICAR, said joining work in India had proved to be beneficial.

“We had little hesitation in coming back to India to work. We feel proud on our choice. India has made progress in sciences and a lot of emphasis is now being given to the research activities,” said Jasrotia, working at directorate of groundnut, Junagarh, since August last year.