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IIT-M flouts law to appoint dy director

NEPOTISM VG Idichandy's 2009 appointment under lens

htSPECIAL

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NEW DELHI: The Indian Institute of Technology Madras flouted the law and IIT statutes in appointing deputy director VG Idichandy, drawing allegations of nepotism at a time the institute administration is under a cloud for a slew of charges.

Documents accessed by HT show that the specific procedure for appointing deputy directors detailed in the IIT Madras statutes was not followed in appointing Idichandy, the second-in-command at the IIT, on July 4, 2009.

The deviation came at a time when institute director MS Ananth, who nominated Idichandy for the post, was fighting a court case in which his reappointment as the IIT director was challenged.

Had Ananth's second term —

In any case, the appointment is made by the Board, not by me.

MS ANANTH
IIT Madras director

which was upheld by a division bench of the Madras High Court after a single judge bench struck it down — been held illegal, Idichandy may have had to at least temporarily assume charge of the IIT.

On June 3, 2009, Ananth wrote to the then chairman of the IIT's Board of Governors (BoG), veteran scientist R Chidambaram, recommending Idichandy's name for deputy director based on "the procedure formulated by the Board for appointment of Deans, which involves seeking the opinion of all full professors as one of the inputs."

Chidambaram approved the recommendation the next day. Ananth insisted no rule had been violated.

"In any case, the appointment is made by the Board, not

by me," Ananth said, claiming that other IITs also appoint deputy directors similarly.

But Section 18 of the Institutes of Technology Act specifies that the deputy director "shall be appointed on such terms and conditions as may be laid down in the Statutes."

Section 12 of the IIT Madras statutes state that a selection committee consisting of the Director, a nominee of the Visitor (the President of India), two nominees of the Board and one nominee of the Senate — the top academic body of an IIT — is to recommend names for the deputy director's post.

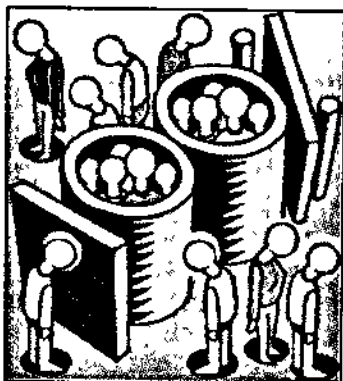
BoG decisions must be consistent with — and cannot override — the Act and statutes, HRD ministry sources said. Ananth too did not cite any rule that would allow the IIT to bypass its law and statutes.

Learn The Lesson

Boost higher education sector by making it more competitive

Some of Delhi University's premier colleges have generated controversy by announcing very steep cut-offs for admission, going as high as 100% for entry into a commerce institution. This indicates a deeper malaise plaguing our higher education system. Over the years, prestigious colleges have used admission cut-offs to advertise brand value. If cut-offs are meant to reflect how sought-after colleges are, they're also used to counter what some educationists call the "trend of inflating results" at board levels. Either way, students are the victims. If they can't afford to get anything short of a perfect score to get into their dream colleges, it points to a severe demand-supply imbalance. That one popular DU college received over 21,000 applications for just 420 seats exemplifies the problem. We have a serious dearth of quality institutions, a situation that'll only worsen without urgent systemic reform.

The problem lies in the government's approach to higher education in general. For far too long the education sector has laboured under the mistaken notion that



government alone can facilitate the creation and running of top quality universities. This has led to an administrative regime marked by rigid rules and regulations stifling the growth of colleges. The crunch for seats combined with irrational admission norms has spawned a capitation fee culture, especially in the south. Universities have little room to innovate and, with academic promotions a matter of loyalty rather than merit, there's little incentive for cutting-edge research. While capacity building has been stymied by official caprice, teaching methodology is largely focussed on churning out degree-holders. No surprises then

that Indian universities fare poorly on most international rankings.

The government does have a huge role to play in expanding education, especially at the primary and secondary school levels. But it needs to encourage the private sector to build capacity at the university level. This requires creating a level playing field for such investors and giving universities and institutes far greater autonomy. Ultimately, it is the market that determines the real value of a college degree. It's when universities have the freedom to structure curriculum, hire teaching staff based on merit and seek independent funding for research that competition will raise overall standards. As also increase access to quality education for greater numbers of aspirants.

There's bound to be resistance to change from vested interests within government and the academic community. Both must realise that the education pie needs to be enlarged by bringing in more private players in the field. There's a case for institutional and private philanthropy in higher education as well. Investments, however, will only be forthcoming if the sector is freed up, giving greater independence to institutions. Policy reform, based on this shift in perspective, is imperative to give higher education the boost it so badly needs.

Why are cutoffs hitting the sky?

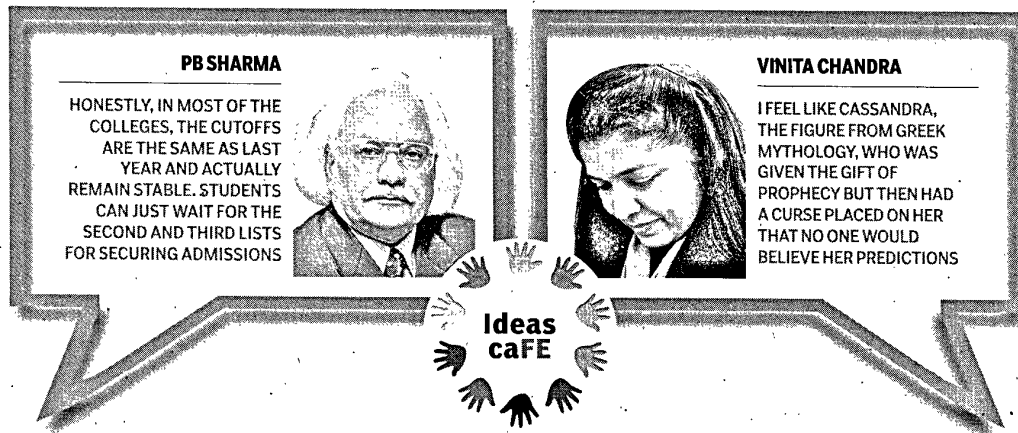
This year's high cutoff lists for Delhi University have raised some eyebrows but surprised hardly anybody. Kapil Sibal has called the development 'unfortunate' but surely he saw it coming

With the growth of the Indian economy, businesses naturally have a growing need for trained professionals to manage them. And the increasing cutoffs are just an indication of a dearth in quality seats in good institutes. Although the Shri Ram College of Commerce (SRCC) has increased the cutoff for BCom (H) to 100%, the first cutoff is not really an indicator of admissions. Moreover, SRCC is one of the premier institutes for commerce education in the country. Hence, admissions here are most sought after and difficult to secure.

The institute has fixed a high cutoff at 100% because not many Indian institutes offer high quality education, which, in turn, is due to a wide gap between supply and demand. The number of aspirants is increasing but the number of quality seats is not increasing at the same pace. Students must wait for the second and third lists for securing admissions. SRCC would have received an overwhelming number of applications, one of the reasons why they would have wanted to discourage some students.

From the students' perspective, colleges should be more sensitive but, honestly, the idea is to include and not to exclude. After all, in most of the colleges, the cutoffs are the same as last year and remain stable. One must understand that one university can't support the entire country. We need more universities.

This also shows that the focus on commerce and non-science stream studies needs to be renewed with a greater emphasis. This is not only because our economy is growing on



technological and scientific fronts but also because economies are propelled by the power of innovation. This requires investments in creating capacity in good institutes. High cutoffs reflect the shortage of seats in quality educational institutes, where there is an urgent need to add seats to enhance opportunities for students.

Good quality colleges must increase their seats. For instance, SRCC must either double its intake or run in two shifts so that more students can have access to quality education. We really need increased investment on the infrastructure side.

What we don't need is a hue and cry over cutoffs touching the 100% mark because other colleges will not follow suit, otherwise many seats

will remain vacant. The solution is to increase the number of seats, maximise the student intake and go for expansion.

On the faculty front, I really don't understand what stops India from attracting foreign faculty? Higher education is becoming globalised and we need more foreign faculty in our institutes. After all, the great universities of the world have attracted the best talent from around the world with the clear objective of getting meritorious faculty for their college, cutting across nationalities.

The author is founder vice-chancellor, Delhi Technological University (formerly Delhi College of Engineering)

As I read newspapers and watch discussions on TV channels expressing outrage over SRCC's 100% cutoff, I feel like Cassandra, the figure from Greek mythology, who was given the gift of prophecy but then had a curse placed on her that no one would believe her predictions. All my colleagues in Delhi University (DU) who have been doing admissions now for years—25 years in my case—are feeling the same helplessness at watching a crisis unfold of which we have been warning the administration. On April 19, the Deputy Registrar sent out a notification changing DU's decades old admission procedure. It read: "There will be no pre-admission

forms either at the university or at the college level. This means that both the centralised OMR form as well as the college pre-admission form will be discontinued." This decision was taken without consulting either college principals or teachers. For some reason, the university officials, who have probably not done admissions for many years, decided that colleges do not use the pre-admission forms in determining cutoffs. How did they think cutoffs are determined then?

Many college teachers argued that with no knowledge of the number of students who have applied to their departments and the kind of marks they have, it will be very difficult to accurately decide on cutoffs. We argued that this move was anti-student be-

cause the first, and probably second, cutoff list would have to be very high in the absence of any material basis on which to take decisions, and that students would have to move from one college to another as cutoffs fell. We also pointed out that there is no university in the world that gives admission without students applying. But our arguments fell on deaf ears.

Why are colleges trying to limit student intake? Four years ago, DU started implementing OBC reservations. This meant that a class of 40 students became a class of 64. In most colleges, classroom capacity of a majority of rooms is about 35-40. Universities were given extra three years to implement the OBC reservation policy fully so that they could build infrastructure. But the previous vice-chancellor admitted he did not take due notice of this flexibility and did not ask for extra time. Now, even a miscalculation of 0.5% will mean having overadmission since anyone from across the country can take admission if s/he is over the cutoff. It is not in the interests of students to be crammed in overcrowded classrooms where teachers can't address their problems individually.

For the HRD minister, who says he feels the pain of the parents and students, and for the vice-chancellor who sits in the Viceregal Lodge, these parents and students are faceless. But for those of us who do admissions, students and parents are people with faces and names, so we have been asking for caution and consultation with the teachers who actually do the admissions and teaching before writing into stone half-baked ideas.

The author is associate professor, English department, Ramjas College

100% cut-off symptom of a disease: Yash Pal

KALPANA PATHAK
Mumbai, 16 June

FOR former head of the University Grants Commission, Yash Pal, students scoring 100 per cent should be given negative marking. For in the race to mug up, they would have learnt nothing and washed out their creativity.

That's obviously an extreme view, but Pal, who two years ago chaired the 24-member Yash Pal Committee on reforming higher education, has reasons to feel disappointed at the decision of Sri Ram College of Commerce's (SRCC) in Delhi to fix 100 per cent cut-off marks for admission.

"We train our students to work for others. Indian colleges teach their students to make nuts and bolts, and the so-called specialisation that institutes talk about is highly unrealistic. Even IITs are nothing but under graduation factories," says Pal.

His report on 'Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education' that he gave to the Ministry of Human Resource Development in June 2009, is nowhere close to implementation.

Among other recommendations, the committee proposed a national testing scheme for university admissions on the lines of Graduate Record Examinations, an admission requirement for many colleges in the United States, open to all aspirants and to be held more than once a year.

Human resource development minister Kapil Sibal promised the same yesterday after SRCC's decision became public, but Pal isn't convinced. "The ministry is so caught up with little things that it does not have the time to look at bigger issues," says Pal.

That hardly means anything for Nitya Batra, a commerce student from DPS, Indirapuram in New Delhi. "SR-

CC's decision is unrealistic. Even colleges like Kamla Nehru have raised the bar and are asking for 98-99 per cent. Students, with such high percentage marks, would rather prefer Hindu or Keshab Mahavidyalaya but not Kamla Nehru. In this process, students like us are left out," says Batra.

Batra says it is also difficult for students to change their streams. For an Arts student to get admission in Khalsa college, the cut-off is way below 90 per cent. But for a commerce student, the cut-off is 92 per cent. "I can't change my interest to get into a good college. My parents are supporting me and I will not choose a college over a course," she says.

Batra is certainly not alone in the country, which ironically has the largest higher education system in the world in terms of number of institutions and the third-largest in terms of student enrollment. While India has 26,000 institutes across varied fields of study, the US has 6,706 higher education institutions and China has 4,000.

Since 1951, the number of universities in India has increased from 28 to 504, while the number of colleges have grown from 578 to 25,951.

A recent report of Ernst & Young estimated spends on higher education in India at nearly Rs 46,200 crore, with 92 per cent of it coming from private institutes. The report projected it to grow over Rs 150,000 crore in 10 years.

The dean of a management institute in Mumbai says the present set-up promotes nepotism. It looks at controlling the educational system by doling out licences to politicians and their kins. Distributing licences in this manner promotes distortions, and there are no transparent mechanism to ensure that information on education institutions are made available to students and their parents. "So, an area where



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the government shouldn't play an active role, it is extremely active. And, where it should play its role, it is either absent or doing little," the dean says.

It was due to the government's over-regulation that M L Srikant, dean of S P Jain Institute of Management and

Research in Mumbai, had to discontinue a successful programme that it entered into with Virginia Tech of the US. "We had a capacity of 80 seats, where as the amount of applications we got, we could have filled 800 seats. With every student landing four job offers,

we could have placed all the students, too. But the government did not allow us to continue the programme beyond two years. It was a similar struggle with the All India Council for Technical Education for four years to increase its class size from 120 to 180 at present," laments Srikant.

Last year, around 60,000, or 30 per cent, of the existing 200,000 management seats remained vacant. This is the highest vacancy ever in management education, with institutions even accepting money and selling seats to students without entrance test scores.

Engineering institutes also faced a similar situation. Nearly 530,000, or 40 per cent, of the 1.32 million seats remained unoccupied.

Sibal last year allowed an additional 200,000 engineering, 80,000 management and 2,200 architecture seats.

Amitabh Jhinghan, partner and education sector leader, Ernst & Young, says extra supply and low demand are a clear case of lack of quality institutions in the country.

"The government needs to quickly focus on expanding the capacity of quality higher education institutions. It can let some quality existing institutions to take over not-so-good institutions and improve their quality and enrollments, too," says Jhinghan.

Capacity constraint in domestic institutes offering quality programmes is one of the main reasons why more and more students are opting to study abroad, making India the second-largest source of international students after China.

For instance, between 2005 and 2009, test takers for Graduate Management Aptitude Test grew from 13,544 to 30,633, reflecting a compounded annual growth rate of 17.7 per cent. Over 50 per cent of Indian students opt to study in the US.

IIM Shillong goes local to groom youth from the NE region

BIKASH SINGH
GUWAHATI

The newest Indian Institute of Management in the country, IIM Shillong, has gone local. In 2009, the coveted B-school in the eastern Himalayas had started the Centre for Development of the North Eastern Region (CEDNER), to pilot ambitious projects that would spearhead development in the region. Now, a part of that, it has taken up the task of organising training programmes for managers, executives and defence personnel who live and work here, besides providing consultancy for local firms.

The centre is involved in organising both short and long-term programmes that would benefit local communities. CEDNER, was formerly known as the Accelerated Learning Centre (ALC), was set up a year after IIM Shillong itself came into existence. There are now plans to have this institute branch out to parts of Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland.

Ashoke K Dutta, director of IIM Shillong, says setting up of the centre provides the 'strategic intervention' the region required, and that the institute itself would not operate merely like an island of excellence. "We were very clear that we needed to do something about the hopes and aspirations of the local people," he says.

"Otherwise, what are they to do with an IIM?" The courses offered include management programmes for local retailers, armed forces personnel (of which there are quite a few here), principal of local colleges and hospital staff. The centre also aims to provide capacity building for local NGOs and sick public sector units in the region. To bring local talent up to speed, the institute also plans to offer courses relating to sports management, entrepreneurship and managing family businesses.

"We have devised courses for Meghalaya tourism and the Meghalaya Cement Corporation," says Dutta. "For courses under CEDNER, our faculty does not charge anything. For instance, the course fee for the short-term retail management programme was Rs 6,000, and the faculty put in extra effort to take classes in the evening. After the course, the students were hired by Pantaloons in Guwahati." For some of the courses, the minimum qualification is a Plus Two or Class XII-level education, and in last two years, the centre has trained at least 275 youngsters through 15 different courses.

Professor Keya Sengupta, who heads the centre, says local people, who may otherwise not have access and exposure to the latest

methods of training for skill development, are provided the same by the institute. The idea, she adds, is to respond to local needs and make the facilities of the institute, available for the training of local talent. Among the challenges faced by the centre was to integrate a complex set of socio-economic and environmental factors typical of the Northeast region, with world-class training facilities that would bring out the hidden talent, skills and capabilities of the local youngsters.

So far, the centre appears to have been somewhat successful, given that its programs are much in demand. For instance, Assam Hospitals, which manages several hospitals in Guwahati, has sought IIM-Shillong's advice and consultancy on the human resources set-up in hospitals.

Ranjit Chaliha, chairman of Assam Hospitals says: "IIM-Shillong had taken up the HR study as a project. What they gave us

was a comprehensive study and recommendations of the HR set-up at our hospitals in relation to the set-up at healthcare institutes elsewhere in the country. It is good to have IIM-Shillong carry out this study for a local outfit like ours, otherwise it would have been very expensive to try and get firms from outside for this." Adds SC Jain, a director at the hospital: "Expertise from IIM-Shillong is really coming in handy for local organisations like ours."

Abhijit Barooah, managing director of Premier Cryogenics (which manufactures industrial gas) and an alumnus of IIT Delhi, echoes the sentiment expressed by Jain. "In (2004) when I was chairman of the local industry body, the Federation of Industries for the Northeast Region, a 12-member team of entrepreneurs visited IIM Ahmedabad for training in the small and medium enterprises sector. It is good that IIM-Shillong has come up with a centre like CEDNER. Local entrepreneurs and a cross-section of people are benefitting from the institute's knowhow."

That's no surprise, since this was a mandate right from the start. When finance minister Pranab Mukherjee visited Shillong last year, he commented on this to when he observed: "This centre seeks to ensure that local communities imbibe the best management practices and become partners in India's economic growth and success story."

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