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Hard lessons

Smriti Irani's tenure as HRD minister has been marred by questionable policy choices

SMRITI IRANI was inducted into the Narendra Modi cabinet as human resource development minister under a cloud of controversy. Her appointment was greeted with sniggers and condescension on account of her past career as a TV soap actor and her failure to have finished college. If that opprobrium was unwarranted, particularly when she had only just taken charge of a notoriously unproductive ministry, critics have been vindicated by her performance in the last five months. Now, the report that Irani appears to have rewarded sycophantic behaviour from a self-proclaimed "RSS person" with the chair of a national institute of technology in Nagpur caps a ministerial tenure characterised by questionable policy choices.

Irani made an inauspicious beginning, assuming office just when a spat between the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Delhi University over the latter's four-year undergraduate programme (FYUP) metastasised into a game of brinkmanship. The UGC's writ prevailed and the country's premier central university for liberal arts and sciences was denied its attempt to head off in a radical direction that could have set a template for other institutions. But this was the same reg-

ulator that, during the UPA years, had tacitly endorsed the FYUP. With the UGC's abrupt reversal came the whiff of suspicion that the HRD ministry was pulling strings, given that the new dispensation had committed to rolling back the FYUP in its party manifesto. An emboldened UGC has directed its attention to the IITs, over whose degrees it now claims jurisdiction. This does not augur well for academic freedom, and concerns over this would only have been exacerbated by Irani's meeting last month with leaders of the RSS and its education wings.

Education reform remained still-born in the UPA years. Legislation to address the quality deficits in higher education gathered dust in Parliament. Independent testing has revealed the dire state of learning among primary schoolchildren. But, instead of grappling with the real and urgent task of overhauling our educational system, the HRD ministry under Irani has suggested, trivially, that the IITs explore the possibility of separating their vegetarian and non-vegetarian canteens. Over half of India's population is under 25, and skilling and educating them is among Modi's primary promises. To keep it, the HRD minister cannot afford to waste time in embarking on reform.

From IIT-B to South Block: The rise of Parrikar's stock

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Political acumen, gambits that paid off, and the ability to set deadlines to promises, albeit not necessarily delivering on the same, IIT-ian Manohar Parrikar has mastered the art of politics to rise from a legislator, to opposition leader, to chief minister, to Union defence minister

Less than a month before he celebrates his 59th birthday on December 13, Goa chief minister Manohar Parrikar has risen to his political zenith yet, by supposedly being hand-picked to be Union defence minister.

Clearly, Parrikar's star is in the ascendant. He single-handedly led BJP to a clear win in Goa with 21 seats out of 40 in March 2012 assembly elections, and then secured both Lok Sabha seats for the party in May 2014 Lok Sabha polls. PM Narendra Modi giving him the defence portfolio should be Parrikar's proudest political feat yet. Parrikar has come a long way since he won his first assembly election from Panaji in 1994. Since then, he has consecutively won from Panaji another four times — a feat never achieved in the constituency before.

Often described as India's first IITian CM, Parrikar engineered his way into the Goa CM's chair first in



POLITICAL GRAPH

1991 | Manohar Parrikar joins BJP. Contests North Goa Parliamentary seat, and loses. But the IIT-Bombay alumnus is noticed by party workers and leaders for his administrative skills and leadership qualities

1994 | BJP starts its innings in the Goa legislative assembly, winning four assembly seats. **Panaji MLA** Parrikar proves his mettle as opposition leader, raising a host of issues. He returns to the position in **2007**.

Parrikar has been Panaji MLA for five consecutive terms

2000-2002-2005, 2012 to date | Parrikar is chief minister of Goa. While the first two times were through a clobbering of support, his present term is a clear mandate from the electorate

Face of Goa BJP | Though four-time MP and minister of state for tourism and culture, Shripad Naik, is considered to have a grassroots connect with the local BJP, Parrikar, today, is the prominent face of

the state BJP

Two of a kind | BJP sources say Parrikar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi are workaholics, share a similar style of working, and appear to gel well

Modi's man | Parrikar has always been supportive of Modi and stood by him when BJP senior leader L K Advani led a group against the then Gujarat CM. This was also evident during national executives held in Goa in 2002 and 2013. In a crucial move last June, Parrikar endorsed Modi's name as chairman of the BJP election campaign committee

RSS connect | An RSS member since childhood, Parrikar, in his over two-decade-old political career, is believed to have developed close ties with some senior RSS leaders, like chief Mohan Bhagwat. During his first two stints as chief minister Parrikar was known to be soft towards the antics of RSS leaders in Goa

2000. His party toppled the Francisco Sardinha-led government by withdrawing support. But midway in his term, on February 27, 2002, he dissolved the assembly amid reports that a disparate band of party MLAs was plotting against him. His gamble paid off in the election in June 2002. BJP became the single largest party and formed the government with support from smaller parties and an independent.

Instability rocked his

government again on January 29, 2005, as five BJP MLAs resigned, reducing his government to a minority. The assembly session in February, called to prove his majority, turned tumultuous with the forced eviction of deputy CM Felipe Neri Rodrigues from the House. Following an observer's report, governor S C Jamir dismissed Parrikar's government.

Congress won power in the bypoll that followed. In the 2007 assembly elections,

Congress retained power defeating BJP.

Parrikar's comeback in March 2012 was spectacular. Just before the elections, he launched a personal mass contact programme through the Jan Sampark Yatra, travelling all over Goa and staying overnight at people's homes. He also unleashed a media blitzkrieg against Congress.

As chairman of the public accounts committee, his report detailed massive illegalities in Goa's mining and claimed huge losses to the exchequer. He promised solutions — with target dates — to all long-festering problems in Goa: mining, regional plan, medium of instruction, casinos and Lokayukta. The result — BJP won 21 out of 40 seats on its own. Alliance partners MGP and GVP won three and two seats, respectively. Plus, there were two supporting independents.

Post-election, he fulfilled the promise of eliminating VAT on petrol. It effectively reduced petrol price in Goa by Rs 11 and won him national acclaim. But with many promises remaining unfulfilled, Congress and local media dubbed him a 'U-turn CM'.

Parrikar's political acumen has been sharp. In June 2013, he became the first senior BJP functionary to openly push for Modi as BJP's "face" for the 2014 LS polls. During BJP's two-day national executive in Goa, Parrikar said people strongly favoured such a move.

When Modi became PM, Goa was the first state he visited in his official capacity.

Purdue varsity for stronger ties with India

Kavita Kishore

CHENNAI: Purdue University, USA, is looking to deepen its relationship with India, by launching a number of new initiatives with institutions and corporates.

As a first step, the university signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IIT Madras (IIT-M) on Friday. They are also creating a country-wide Purdue alumni network, where former students can share their experiences and knowledge.

In an interview to *The Hindu*, Mitchell E. Daniels Jr., President, Purdue University, said, "The MoU is for joint research between the two universities, and will soon lead to a joint degree programme, where students can receive a degree from both Purdue and IIT-M simultaneously." He added that there was already a significant amount of collaborative work taking place between Purdue and IIT-M in various fields.

The two institutions are also exchanging notes on teaching methodologies to improve the quality of students across the board, he said.

"We are putting in a lot of effort into evolving newer teaching methods. All our lectures are now available online, so that students do not have to attend lectures. Instead they can listen to lectures in their own time," he said.

"In future, we are hoping



Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.
- PHOTO: R. RAVINDRAN

that classroom sessions will be more targeted at the needs of the students," Mr. Daniels said.

The university is also focusing on introducing all their students to research at an undergraduate level, he added.

"We are also hoping to share our expertise in dealing with corporates, which will help with future research at IIT-M," Mr. Daniels said.

According to Suresh V. Garimella, Executive Vice-President of research and partnerships at Purdue, close to 1,500 students from India are studying at Purdue. "India, is therefore, one of the countries with which Purdue is looking to build a deep relationship," he said.

Purdue is starting an India-Purdue lecture series in partnership with Purdue alumnus C.N.R. Rao, National Research professor:

Universe is brighter than thought: Nasa

Washington: Nasa scientists have found that the universe is brighter than thought, with a surprising surplus of infrared light in the dark space between galaxies.

The US space agency's sounding rocket experiment detected a surplus of infrared light in the dark space between galaxies, a diffuse cosmic glow as bright as all known galaxies combined. The glow is thought to be from orphaned stars flung out of galaxies, Nasa said.

The findings redefine what scientists think of as galaxies. Galaxies may not have a set boundary of stars, but instead stretch out to great distances, forming a vast, interconnected sea of stars.

Observations from the Cosmic Infrared Background Experiment or CIBER are helping settle debate on whether this background infrared light in the universe comes from these streams of stripped stars too distant to be seen individually, or from the first galaxies to form in the universe. PTI

US unemployment rate falls to 5.8%, payrolls rise

REUTERS

Washington, 7 November

US job growth increased at a fairly brisk clip in October and the unemployment rate fell to a fresh six-year low of 5.8 per cent, underscoring the economy's resilience in the face of slowing global demand.

Despite the strengthening labour market picture, wage growth remained tepid, suggesting the Federal Reserve would be in no hurry to start lifting interest rates.

Employers added 214,000 new jobs to their payrolls last month, the Labor Department said on Friday. The unemployment rate fell from 5.9 per cent, even as more people entered the labour force, a sign of strength in the jobs market.

Data for August and September were revised to show 31,000 more jobs created than previously reported.

"Today's jobs report confirms that the US remains the bright spot in a global economic picture filling with clouds," said Michael Griffin, managing director at CEB in Arlington, Virginia.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 231,000 new jobs last month and for the unemployment rate to hold steady.

US stock index futures edged up on the data. Prices for US Treasury bond prices fell slightly and the dollar was little changed.

Monthly job growth has exceeded 200,000 for nine straight months, the longest stretch since 1994, sufficient strength to keep the economy on a higher growth path after it expanded at a 3.5 per cent pace in the third quarter.

The Fed last month struck a fairly upbeat tune on the jobs picture as it ended its bond buying program, dropping its characterisation of labour market slack as "significant" and replacing it with "gradually diminishing." Sturdy job gains on their own, however, will probably not be enough to convince the US central bank to start raising interest rates before the second half of 2015 given a still low level of inflation.

Wages still sluggish

Wage growth is the missing piece of the jobs recovery and without significant increases, most economists say the Fed will be in no rush to lift benchmark lending rates that it has kept near zero since December 2008.

The employment report showed that average hourly earnings rose only three cents last month, leaving the year-on-year change at 2.0 per cent, the range it's been in for the last few years. But other data have begun to show wage

Fed's Yellen says weak fiscal support has slowed global recovery

US Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen on Friday called on politicians across the globe to get their fiscal houses in order during good times to prop up economies during times of turmoil.

In remarks to a symposium in Paris, Yellen blamed part of the slow global economic recovery on weak government support.

She took aim at both US political gridlock after the 2007-2009 financial crisis and the austere policies across Europe as the region struggles with persistently low inflation.

The crisis led major central banks to deploy unconventional tools to spur recovery. For its part, the Fed cut interest rates to zero and more than quadrupled its balance sheet to \$4.4 trillion through three rounds of bond buying, eliciting howls of protest from some politicians who feared the monetary largesse would spark an unwanted inflation. It announced an end to its latest asset purchase programme just last week.

REUTERS

growth picking up.

Details of the October employment report were fairly upbeat.

The labour force participation rate and the ranks of the long-term unemployed both improved. These metrics are on Fed Chair Janet Yellen's so-called dashboard and are being watched for clues on the timing of the first rate hike.

The participation rate, or the share of working-age Americans who are employed or at least looking for a job, increased by one-tenth of percentage point to 62.8 per cent, bouncing back after two straight months of declines.

The employment-to-population ratio increased to 59.2, the highest level since July 2009. The number of long-term unemployed people was the lowest since January 2009.

A broad measure of joblessness that includes people who want to work but have given up searching and those working part-time because they cannot find full-time employment fell to 11.5 percent, the lowest level since September 2008.

Links to the RSS and Smriti Irani: The new qualifications required for NIT head?

<http://www.firstpost.com/politics/what-is-smriti-iranis-idea-of-a-perfect-nit-head-a-man-with-an-rss-background-1791863.html>

So now it looks as though to make the government hear you above the crowd, all you need to do is to claim association with the RSS -- and apparently Smriti Irani. After the government decided to look into a self-confessed Sangh sympathizer's demand that IITs should have vegetarian canteens, the HRD ministry headed by Smriti Irani has just appointed a man as the chairman of the Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology (VNIT) Nagpur, reportedly because of his RSS background and some kind of personal association with her.

According to a report on [The Indian Express](#), days after Vishram Jamdar filed a job application with the HRD ministry claiming that he is a 'RSS person', he was declared the chairman of VNIT by the ministry. The report suggests that Jamdar's appointment might have been given special importance as the recruitment of chairmen to 12 other NITs were in pipeline and that his application was the one that was fast-tracked.

Also, the ministry, for the purpose of filling up the vacancy had already shortlisted four names and forwarded it to Irani, asking her to add her suggestions. Jamdar's name was not on that list. It was Irani who suggested the name and he was later confirmed as the chairman of the institute.

The report adds that Irani had also briefly stayed at his residence in Nagpur while she was campaigning for elections.



Vishram Jamdar. Image courtesy: VNIT website.

Jamdar is listed as the CEO of the Nagpur based [Kinetic Gears](#), a manufacturing company established in 2001 with an annual turnover of Rs 50 lak to Rs 1 crore, as per its website.

The company manufactures heavy industrial equipment. He is also listed as the former regional president of Laghu Udyog Bharati, a business network aimed at the welfare of MSMEs in India. His association with VNIT will not be Jamdar's first outing in academia either - he is listed as the President of Dharmapeth, a Nagpur-based science college.

The website of VNIT shows that Jamdar is an alumnus of the institution and had graduated from the college in 1972 with a degree in metallurgy.

[The institute](#) website notes: *"His association with the Industry started way back in 1972 and had worked with more than 40 industries till now. To mention the few, he was directly associated with ISO Certified industries namely, M/s. kinetic Gears, M/s. Garuda Yantra Nirmitee Pvt. Ltd., M/s. Mahalasa Enterprises Pvt. Ltd., M/s. HTW Industries, M/s. KG Transmission etc. The industrial exposure broadened the technical horizon which resulted in rolling out the cost effective industrial products."*

The account of his education and experience suggests that Jamdar perhaps is a fitting contender of the post, just like the rest of the people nominated for the job. However, what is disturbing is the fact that Jamdar chose to cite his political affiliation - that ideally should have had nothing to do with leading an educational institution - as one of the reasons that he is perfect for the position. His clearly close affiliation with Irani, also hints at a strong possibility of favouritism.

The *IE* report says that Jamdar explained how despite being a staunch RSS believer, he was allowed to continue as a member of the governing body of the same university in the past when the Congress was in power. One should notice here, how cleverly Jamdar sneaked in the fact that he was a RSS follower while staking his claim to the position of chairman. Jamdar also admits to have met Irani several times too. He tells *IE*, "I met her a few times during any BJP meet."

If indeed Jamdar got the job because of his RSS connections it would mark yet another instance of the organisation seeking to interfere in the Indian education system. While the RSS has cried itself hoarse over the ['distortions'](#) in school and college curriculum, which distances Indian students from knowledge of Hinduism, a report on *Mint* suggests that they might be working out a strategy to rectify that. A report published on 30 October states that several leaders from the education wing of the RSS met HRD minister Smriti Irani. [A BJP leader](#) quoted in the report said, "There is need for a better coordination between the government and the RSS and it was felt that regular meetings should be held so that representatives of the government are made aware of concerns of organizations affiliated to the RSS."

Another report published in July in [Business Standard](#) said, "Given Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Smriti Irani's lack of understanding of the Sangh Parivar's functioning, RSS is adopting a wait-and-watch policy. Irani, meanwhile, has managed to establish a good rapport with some senior RSS leaders, but a section of the organisation still has reservations about her credentials to occupy the important HRD portfolio."

But even if it isn't the cleverly sneaked in RSS affiliation that is in play here, there is still the matter of Smriti Irani's personal relationship with Jamdar.

Given PM Modi's careful efforts to wipe out nepotism and break possible family dynasties - often ensuring in many cases that members of the same family do not get tickets to contest, this move runs contrary to all of that. Will she end up being the weak link in Modi's plan to avoid a repeat of UPA style favouritism?

Credit transfer between institutions coming

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/education/story/the-government-of-india-soon-to-announce-scheme-for-credit-transfer-between-institutions/1/399677.html>

Currently the Indian education system lacks a system wherein credit can be transferred between institutions as it would help the students who switch between the courses of different institutes amidst a going on session. This would reduce the number of students who are forced to take a break in their education due to these kinds of unforeseen circumstances. This is the reason that the government of India is going to announce a scheme for credit transfer among institutes on November 11, 2014. The students from class IX to Post Graduation level would be covered under this scheme and if the response for this scheme is good and positive, it would be further extended to Ph.D courses.

During the India Economic Summit, which was organised by the World Economic Forum and the Confederation of Indian Industry in Delhi, Union Minister of Human Resource Department (MHRD) Smriti Zubin Irani while speaking on the topic "Which Comes First: Employment or Employ-ability?", Conveyed a statement that education is not a challenge but an opportunity.

According to her there is a need to reawaken the teaching profession and bring back the respect that this profession once had.

She also talked about the Prime Minister's initiative that he took on teacher's day to reach out to students which was another step in the same direction. This initiative is thought to be encouraging more and more young people to turn to choose the teaching profession as a career option.

‘Review education policy, Universities have gone dud’ says ex-IISc director P. Balaram



<http://www.deccanchronicle.com/141108/nation-current-affairs/article/%E2%80%98review-education-policy-universities-have-gone-dud%E2%80%99-says-ex>

SRO Former Chairman, G. Madhavan Nair and Dr E D Jemmis (IISC Bangalore) in an interaction with students at Malayalam University Campus in Tirur on Thursday. G.Madhavan Nair inaugurated the 24th Swadeshi Science Congress in a glittering ceremony on Thursday (Photo: Deccan Chronicle)

TIRUR: Former Director of Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore and eminent Professor of molecular biophysics, P Balaram has called upon to review the National education policy which came into existence some 25 years ago. Speaking at the panel discussion on ‘The role of universities in science and technology research’, at the second day of the 24th Swadeshi Science Congress, jointly organized by the Malayalam University and Swadeshi Science Movement at the Varsity’s Tirur campus, he flayed that no innovative programmes are coming out of the universities, which had been bestowed with the autonomous status.

“While pondering over the problems in higher education sector we are talking about language issue and colonial mindset which is irrelevant. There are many fundamental issues in teaching and education which we did not address. No amendment on education laws were passed in the country in the last 25 years. It is unlikely to change the situation in the next 10 years,” he lambasted. Prof Balaram opined that the powerful bureaucratic lobby was always singing a different tune when it comes to the issue of modification of the policy. Talking about the renowned Indian Physicist Prof G.N. Ramachandran, he said that both Kerala and Tamil Nadu governments had forgotten the great scientist.

Malayalam University Vice Chancellor, Dr K. Jayakumar noted that in the name of democracy we have inducted ‘generalists’ in Universities among academicians. “But what happened was generalist is trying to do the work of academician and academician is trying to get into the shoes of generalist,” he said. He rued that now a days, research work is only for obtaining phd certificate.

Dr C Vijayan (IIT Chennai) felt that Universities should be left to academia and not put in public domain. “We should gather information and knowledge from various sources. But internalizing that information is paramount,” he observed. Dr N.B. Narasimha Prasad (Centre for Water Resources Development and Management, Kozhikode) also spoke.

New panel to review AICTE performance

Adarsh Jain,TNN | Nov 7, 2014, 09.45 AM IST

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/coimbatore/New-panel-to-review-AICTE-performance/articleshow/45065549.cms>

COIMBATORE: Union ministry of human resource and development has formed a review committee to analyse and restructure the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). The order states that with increasing number of private technical institutions, AICTE norms are being flouted by many.

"A lot of private institutions have come up in the technical education sector and there is a growing trend of commercialization. The laid down norms and standards of education are not fully implemented," said the order issued by the MHRD on October 22. To address the issue, MHRD has constituted a committee of four members with M K Kaw, former secretary to MHRD, as the chairman and A K Agarwal, vice- chancellor, Gujarat Technological University, U B Desai, director, IIT- Hyderabad and Ashok Jhunjunwala, professor, IIT-Madras, as members of the committee.

The committee will analyse present state of the AICTE and suggest recommendations to improve the status of technical education. "The committee is also allowed to suggest amendments to the AICTE Act, 1987, and rules and regulations made under it," said the order. Any institution that offers courses/programmes in education, research and training in engineering, technology, architecture, town planning, management, pharmacy, applied arts and crafts and other related courses come under technical education.

The four-member committee has been asked to review 15 major aspects of the AICTE. The most important is to audit the present method of monitoring standards of education in technical institutions. The committee will also audit performance of regional offices of the AICTE in monitoring the standards of technical education.

The review committee will also analyse the system of accreditation. It will look into the present norms and suggest ways to strengthen it. The ministry has also asked the committee to submit its views on mandatory accreditation and challenges of implementing its norms.

Research and innovation in technical institutions is another important sector that the ministry has sought the committee to review. The number of research projects in technical institutions and academic performance of students, staff of AICTE, faculty members of technical institutions and their performance are some of the other aspect that the committee will analyse.

The committee has been given six months to submit its report. The committee is expected to submit the report in April 2015.

Australian varsity to partner with Mumbai univ to promote research

Hindustan Times (Mumbai)

MUMBAI: In a bid to develop research initiatives in India and extend its educational reach within the country and the rest of south Asia, Deakin University, Australia, will partner with University of Mumbai.

“We want to create an amicable environment, both educationally and culturally, for students. Our plan is to focus on research in India. We have narrowed down on seven to eight key partners, who can assist us in our goals — one of them is the University of Mumbai,” said professor Jane den Hollander, vice-chancellor, Deakin University.

“Through this partnership, we intend to focus on joint and collaborative research projects that will enable mobility of students,” said Naresh Chandra, vice-chancellor, University of Mumbai.

In the coming months, Deakin University also plans to extend its tie-up with IIT-Bombay to promote research and education in both the countries.

During Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s two-day visit in September this year, the university had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the University of Mumbai.

A New Colombo Plan was also launched to enhance and encourage student mobility between the two countries. They already have eight PhD students working under different projects in the field of biotechnology.