IIT, UGC Standoff Reaches Council

Meeting tentatively scheduled on Oct 1

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New Delhi: The standoff between IITs and the University Grants Commission (UGC) is now set to reach the IIT Council, the highest decision-making body of the 16 elite engineering schools headed by the Union HRD minister.

Miffed with the higher education regulator for its attempt to regulate their course structures, IITs had proposed that the matter should be taken up by the Council of which the UGC Chairman is also a member. It is learnt that HRD minister has agreed to the idea and the meeting of the council is tentatively scheduled for October 1.

Confirming this development, IIT Kharagpur Director Partha Chakrabarti, who first wrote to the ministry against the UGC circular asking IITs to offer courses as per established nomenclature, told ET in an SMS, “I am given to understand the minister has decided that the issue will be discussed in the IIT Council where all IITs participate and also UGC. I think this is the right decision and I would like to thank the HRM (Smriti Irani) for deciding on a proper approach. I have not received a formal notification yet, but it should be clear soon, when we get the agenda.”

The matter will be first taken up by the standing committee (read sub-group) of the IIT Council in the next two weeks. Renowned nuclear scientist Anil Kakodkar, who is the head of the standing committee, has already expressed his displeasure over the UGC’s move.

The controversy is rooted in an UGC circular which was sent to all institutions of higher education, including IITs, in the aftermath of the Delhi University’s Four-Year Undergraduate Programme row, asking them to ensure that their degrees conform to UGC specifications. The circular raised a storm with the IISc Bangalore locking horns with the UGC over this, and now IITs. If IITs were to implement UGC direction, then IIT Kanpur and IIT Kharagpur would have to tweak their four-year Bachelor of Science degrees.
5 new IITs to start functioning from next session: HRD Ministry

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 28

THE five new IITs announced by the BJP-led government in the Union Budget are likely to start functioning from the next academic session, the HRD Ministry has said.

“We have already written to the states to identify two sites before the site selection committee of the Ministry visits the states and submits the reports. However, we plan to start the new IITs from temporary campuses from the next academic session as has been the case with the earlier IITs,” a ministry official said Thursday.

The five new IITs would be set up in J&K, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Currently, there are 16 IITs across the country.

As per estimates, each of the new IITs would entail an investment of roughly Rs 1,800 crore.

Officials said as per the plan, the older IITs would initially mentor the new ones.

IIIT Hyderabad will conduct year-long winter workshops and on-campus courses on Python, Java, C++, database, cloud computing, data structures, algorithms, and technical tests.

IIIT Indore will focus on more hands-on software training for freshmen and body language

IIIT Guwahati will conduct year-long workshops and on-campus courses on Python, Java, C++, database, cloud computing, data structures, algorithms, and technical tests.

IIIT Kharagpur will conduct year-long workshops and on-campus courses on Python, Java, C++, database, cloud computing, data structures, algorithms, and technical tests.

IIIT Mandi will conduct year-long workshops and on-campus courses on Python, Java, C++, database, cloud computing, data structures, algorithms, and technical tests.

IIIT Dharwad will conduct year-long workshops and on-campus courses on Python, Java, C++, database, cloud computing, data structures, algorithms, and technical tests.
5 NEW IITs MAY START FROM NEXT SESSION
AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 28

The five new IITs, proposed in Narendra Modi government’s first budget, are likely to start functioning from the next academic session.

Sources stated that the Union human resource development ministry has written to each of the five states to identify two sites for setting up these prestigious institutions. The institutions are likely to begin operations from temporary campuses by 2015, sources stated.

“We have written to state governments to identify two sites before the site selection committee of the ministry visits respective states,” officials said.
As UGC seeks to align undergraduate courses in IITs and private and autonomous institutes, the clamour for its reform rises

The University Grants Commission, or UGC, which funds half of - and regulates most of-college education in India, has had a busy summer. With Smriti Irani at the helm of the ministry of human resource development, which oversees education, UGC has taken on the venerable Indian Institutes of Technology, Bangalore's Indian Institute of Science and Delhi University in what seems to be an attempt to align all undergraduate courses in the country to a three-year duration.

The IITs are fighting back, even as UGC is facing flak for a somnolent period when it allowed Delhi University to run a four-year undergraduate programme, or FYUP, for a year before scrapping it in June. Those who were closely involved with the scrapping of FYUP, such as Nandita Narain, professor at St Stephen's College and president of Delhi University Teachers' Association, says all UGC wants is to discuss the undergraduate programmes with the colleges and universities. "One of the criticisms that UGC faced when it rolled back Delhi University's FYUP was that it was being inconsistent," says Narain. "UGC does not want to curtail the four-year programme everywhere, it only wants universities to justify their position."

However, those on the other side of the fence feel the regulatory body is not in the habit of holding dialogues. "Though UGC's notification on the undergraduate programme is not wrong, it should have consulted the IITs on this matter," says Gautam Barua, former director of IIT Guwahati who headed the institute for a decade. "Academically, UGC and IITs can sit across the table and discuss this issue."

India's 10+2+3 policy mandates an undergraduate course of three years, but many science programmes have run four-year courses for a long time. The IITs, for instance, offer four-year programmes in engineering as well as five-year dual degree programmes. The four-year science undergraduate programme at the century-old Indian Institute of Science, or IISc, in Bangalore had 15,000 aspirants fighting for 114 seats this year.

UGC's reversal to a three-year regime has evinced mixed reactions. The new, privately-funded Ashoka University in Sonepat, perhaps lacking the experience to deal with regulators, complied. It has reduced its FYUP to three years, making the last year optional, and terming it a year of research. Similarly, IISc had decided to add a bracketed addition to the name of its undergraduate course after the face-off. Instead of it being called a BSc, or Bachelor of Science, programme, it will be referred to as BSc (Research).

"The matter is settled now," Anurag Kumar, who took over as director of the institute the day the UGC order challenging
the four-year course landed on his desk, told Business Standard from Bangalore.

Kumar refused to comment on UGC's way of functioning, saying, "It is a government organisation. It has a job to do." But others are not so reticent. The regulator's missives have resulted in a sharp clamour for a re-examination of its role, especially since it combines regulation, approval and funding of higher education in India. "As it stands, UGC plays the roles of advising, regulating and funding agency of nearly all universities, and the government in power has huge control over it. This must change," wrote Vishwesha Guttal, professor at IISc, in independent website, The Conversation.

Much of UGC's clout comes from its financial powers. It controls and disburses grants given by the ministry of human resource development to institutes such as IISc and Delhi University. In 2011-12, UGC was the disbursing agency for half of funds marked for higher education. In 2014-15, the sum it has for disbursals is around Rs 9,000 crore, or 33 per cent of the total.

Given its financial power, state-run universities are often beholden to UGC. It also awards private universities the sought-after "UGC-recognised" label. The sort of influence the body can exert in higher education can be gauged from the fact that India has 178 private universities, 165 deemed-to-be universities, 45 central and 317 state universities, besides numerous private colleges.

And UGC is not averse to using its power. The experience of Meera Ramachandran, who was principal of Delhi University's Gargi College from 2005 to 2013, shows UGC's money-disbursing power hung like a Damocles' sword over the heads of colleges. "For anything you wanted to put across, they tended to be a bit threatening," says Ramachandran, and it was only once in a while the head of UGC "saw your point of view".

Currently, UGC is headed by Ved Prakash who has served the government in various capacities, including as director of the Staff Selection Commission, the panel that recruits people for government posts. He offered no replies to the questions sent by Business Standard on e-mail. His office repeatedly said he was out of station and would respond to the numerous phone calls made to him, but he did not.

However, in an interview to The Indian Express on August 25, he said, "Where is the question of encroaching on the authority of IITs? It is a question of ensuring uniformity in nomenclature of degrees."

Branding powers
Giving institutions its stamp of approval also gives UGC undue power. C Raj Kumar, vice-chancellor of O P Jindal University, set up with a corpus of Rs 400 crore by industrialist Naveen Jindal, says even though UGC recognition is not mandatory and his university had not sought funds from the regulator, it helps to have UGC's approval. As things stand, he says, "people in India are generally comfortable when something is approved or recognised by somebody."

UGC regulates colleges through a system of inspections, in which teams of assorted experts go and tick off boxes on infrastructure, faculty and student numbers. It then apprises the university or the college of compliance or non-compliance with the norms set by UGC. This recognition process can take up to two years.
"I think that while UGC has, in general, the statutory power to do the job of regulating education, the problem has been implementation and vision," says Philip G Altbach, director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, US, who has worked in India and researched regulation in higher education in other countries as well. "I think that in large part, UGC has failed to effectively regulate Indian higher education."

In the United States, Altbach points out, universities are accredited by regional accreditors that function somewhat like NGOs. They demand a careful self-study from every university in a decade and then visit the institution to evaluate the data. Each institute makes the cut based on its own goals and performance - there is no standard metric. The colleges are not ranked, one either passes muster or doesn't. A university can also be put on probation for a short time to fix its shortcomings.

All of this does not have legal standing, but if an institution is not accredited, it is not eligible for any funding from the government for student loan programme, research and so on. In other words, without accreditation, no institution can work. A small number of institutions do fail to get accreditation and often go out of business.

In India, accreditation, self-regulation and raised entry barriers to higher education can provide a solution. A 2008 committee to review the working of UGC, headed by scientist Yash Pal, expressed concern at the mushrooming of engineering and management colleges of low quality. While stressing the need for private investment, it raised doubts about the funding for such institutions. It felt the money was mostly "unaccounted wealth from business and political enterprises or from capitation fees."

The landscape has changed since then, with a number of high-investment universities being established through the backing of industrial houses and bodies like the Azim Premji Foundation and Shiv Nadar Foundation. The number of students enrolling in low-quality institutes has fallen, indicating that market forces are indeed creating a churn. However, this does not obviate the need for a good regulator. As Kumar of O P Jindal University says, a regulator can "create checks and balances to see that those with a strong philanthropic commitment" get into higher education. Far too many institutes are allowed entry, he says.

Irani's ministry, it seems, is trying to solve the demand for regulatory reform through yet another committee. It will be headed by Hari Gautam, former UGC chairman and advisor to the chairman of a private medical university in Rajasthan. He declined to comment on how he hopes to restructure UGC. The committee has two other members. The lack of equitable representation - it has no members from the southern states - is not the only reason why it is being criticised. "Every time they carry out the same exercise (of forming a committee)," says H Chaturvedi, director of Birla Institute of Management Technology. "A regulator should be like a gardener, it should be supportive. It should promote higher education and focus on how to raise standards."

Instead, many point to how UGC has wasted time locking horns with another educational regulator, the All India Council for Technical Education, or AICTE, over who should oversee business-education courses. While the regulators fight it out, it is perhaps not a coincidence that few Indian universities find themselves making it to global listings of excellence in education.
IIT-Indore to host industry academia conclave in Sept

Hindustan Times (Indore)

INDORE: In a bid to ensure better placements and internships, the Indore branch of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) will organise an Industry Academia Conclave-2014 on September 12 and 13.

This is the third time that an interactive session will be held at the institute for which companies from all over the country have been invited.

“We usually invite companies to come over and meet the students so that new horizons can open up to them,” said Nirmala Menon, the PRO of IIT-Indore.

The conclave will be helpful for students who wish to undergo internships at these premium institutions. Varad Vyapari, the student in-charge of the education cell of IIT-Indore, said, “This year that we are coming up with something, which has companies coming for all the fields and branches of the institute.”
Deferred Placements Buoy Student-Bizmen

Clutch of IITs working on allowing Plan-B for graduating students who choose entrepreneurship over a career

Sreradha.Basu
itimesgroup.com

Mumbai: Giving in to popular demand from graduating students smitten with entrepreneurship, a clutch of IITs across the country has decided to offer "deferred placements" to students who would rather first set up a new business than sit for a job interview now.

As many as 13 students from the Class of 2015 at IIT-Bombay have applied for deferred placements this year to pursue new ventures. Of these, eight are planning for-profit ventures and five are going for social ventures. The Institute is likely to choose 10 from among the 13. It had toyed with the idea of offering deferred placements last year when only one student applied, but the idea has found takers only this year.

IIT-Madras, also encouraged by student demand, is rolling out deferred placements for the first time this year. IIT-Kanpur has also been considering the same. IIT-Guwahati, General Secretary (placement cell) Manish Arora expects at least 10 students to opt for deferred placements this year compared with 2 last year.

Deferred placements, as the name suggests, enable students to defer placements for a year or two to start their own ventures. They can come back and seek campus placement if their ventures fail.

They are quite popular at top IIMs, but are gaining traction in IITs only this year. Such initiatives help spur the appetite for entrepreneurship and risk-taking among young graduates in the country's premier engineering institutions.

Students are excited about entrepreneurship even though the job market is picking up once again. This year, companies such as Goldman Sachs, Amazon and eBay are offering salaries that are 20% to 40% higher than last year.

"The number of students interested in pursuing entrepreneurial activities post graduation has gone up tremendously," says Mohit Mehta, placement manager at IIT-Bombay. "By opting for deferred placement, a student is assured of a Plan B which acts as a safety net in case he fails to succeed in his venture."

Majestaan boy Abhiit Patil needed the deferred placement option to convince his parents to let him give entrepreneurship a shot. IIT-Bombay's Patil and his two friends ran a 3D printing and scanning business.

"Fall-back Option gave Courage" >> 19

‘Fall-back Option gave Courage’

Economic Times ND 29/08/2014

IIT बॉम्बे के 13 स्टूडेंट्स ने इस साल डेरर्ड प्लेसमेंट के लिए प्रेमिका दिया

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Beyond Nehru-Gandhis: UGC to Name Chairs after ‘Unsung’ Heroes

Varsity watchdog on mission to draw up list of 50 names that could include Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, Madan Mohan Malviya and Zakir Hussain

Deccan Herald ND 29/08/2014 P-12

New model to keep women from fleeing IT profession

WASHINGTON: An Indian-origin researcher’s 12-year-old model may help reverse the exodus of women from information technology (IT) profession by creating a more diversified work environment, scientists say.

Studies show women are significantly underrepresented in the IT field, and the number of women who have graduated with degrees in computer and information science have plummeted from 37 per cent in 1985 to 18 per cent in 2011.

The failure to “stop the bleeding” stems, in part, from the industry’s reliance on an oft-cited, outdated and under-studied research model, said Cindy Riemenschneider, from Baylor University’s Hankamer School of Business.

“We have to look deeper into the areas that really need to be addressed,” Riemenschneider said, explaining that employers and experts have been focusing on the wrong challenges facing women in the IT profession.

For example, there have been numerous studies and efforts focused on work-family conflict and organisational structures.

But a new study shows that those areas are less significant than challenges found in occupational culture and informal inter-office social networks.

These areas emerged as more integral in a recent study by Riemenschneider and colleague Deborah Armstrong, associate professor in Florida State University’s entrepreneurship, strategy and information systems department.

They started with a 12-year-old model developed by researcher Manju Ahuja, which, they contend, included popular assumptions that had not been thoroughly tested.

Riemenschneider and Armstrong tested those findings by surveying IT professionals from a Fortune 500 company over a period of three years.

Using the results of their research, they were able to build upon Ahuja’s model and propose a new model they hope will “re-energise the dialogue regarding creating a more diversified IT work environment,” according to the study.

Riemenschneider said women who advance within a company often find few female mentors. She suggested allowing women to utilise peer networking and mentoring via professional organisations.

“The further women move up, the fewer female mentors they have. Women might be mentored by a male, and the lens he looks through might not be the same one she looks through,” Riemenschneider said.

“Employers need to be proactive to help employees at whatever stage, to keep them within the company, so they can move up the corporate ladder,” she said.

PTI
NASA deep-space rocket, SLS, set for blast off in 2018

Once finished, it will propel spacecraft beyond Earth’s orbit

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
Washington, August 28

The US space agency’s powerful deep-space rocket, known as the Space Launch System (SLS), aims to blast off for the first time in 2018, NASA said Wednesday.

The SLS has been in development for three years already, and when finished it should propel spacecraft beyond Earth’s orbit and eventually launch crew vehicles to Mars by the 2030s.

NASA has now completed a thorough review of the project, signifying formal space agency commitment to the 70 tonne version of the SLS at a cost of $7 billion from 2014 to 2018. “The programme is making real, significant progress,” said William Gerstenmaier, associate administrator for the Human Explorations and Operations Mission Directorate at NASA.

“We will keep the teams working toward a more ambitious readiness date, but will be ready no later than November 2018.”

The Government Accountability Office (GAO), however issued a report last month that called into question the space agency’s current funding plan for SLS, saying it “may be $400 million short of what the program needs.”

The GAO also raised concerns about the development schedule and how engineers will integrate hardware that was designed to fly on a cancelled NASA programme known as Constellation that would have returned humans to the Moon.

Gerstenmaier said NASA was taking those concerns into account and is seeking to address the GAO’s recommendations.

The SLS is NASA’s first heavy-lift launch vehicle in over 40 years, and the space agency has estimated total costs in developing the first of three SLS variants at $12 billion.

The SLS will “provide an unprecedented lift capability of 130 tonnes, which will enable missions even farther into our solar system, including such destinations as an asteroid and Mars,” NASA said.