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

IMs (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 contractual basis.

Perhaps the government has cited the Bhargava committee report and retrieved the old suggestion for implementation all over again, the underlying reasons remain 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 super-board, reducing the IIMs’ own boards to a common minimum denominator?

Interestingly, the Bhargava committee had noted that “IMs 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, was far from international standards. But how will the pan-IIM board help enhance fund mobilisation and what criteria will it employ to distribute 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 super-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 phenomena regularly adopted by various committees with respect to Air India and Indian Airlines. So the reason why the government trying to fix something that isn’t broken is beyond comprehension.

True, the established IIMs must hold 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 fret over energy sources 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.

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RAJAN SAXENA
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

T he recent decision of the government to create a governing body for the IIMs, to be called the IIM Council, to coordinate activities across the IIMs, has been met with mixed reactions. While some see it as a step towards greater coordination and collaboration among the IIMs, others are concerned about the potential for dilution of the IIM brand and the need for continued autonomy.

The proposed IIM Bill seeks to create a pan-IIM governing council, which will have the power to oversee the activities of the IIMs and ensure that they align with certain standards. This has led to concerns about the potential for uniformity and the loss of the unique identity of each institution.

The council will have the power to make decisions on a variety of matters, including the appointment of the Directors of the IIMs, the evaluation of performance, and the setting of academic and administrative standards. This has raised concerns about the potential for a centralized decision-making process and the impact on the autonomy of the individual institutions.

Some proponents of the IIM Bill argue that it is necessary to ensure that the IIMs remain competitive on the global stage. They believe that the council will help to coordinate efforts and improve the overall performance of the IIMs.

Others, however, argue that the IIMs should be allowed to continue with their unique approaches and that a governing council could be counterproductive. They believe that the IIMs have a long history of excellence and should be allowed to continue to operate as they see fit.

Ultimately, the debate surrounding the IIM Bill highlights the complex relationship between autonomy and coordination within the Indian educational system. It remains to be seen how the IIM Bill will be implemented and whether it will lead to greater cooperation among the IIMs or whether it will result in a loss of the unique character that defines each institution.
‘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 331 respondents which included chancellor, vice chancellor (VCs), deans, principals and other academicians.

The survey was taken up for two reasons:

President had recently called 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 serious concerns of education and research community of the country, the survey report 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
Now, scientists say no to foreign offers

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

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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 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 Oneteru 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 Bhurdwaj, 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.