Centre defers plan to upgrade Cusat as IIEST

Ministry move part of budgetary allocation cuts

G. Krishnakumar

KOCHI: The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has deferred the proposal to convert Cochin University of Science and Technology (Cusat) into an Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology (IIEST).

The move comes close on the heels of a recent MHRD decision not to set up new central universities and IITs under the 12th Plan Period.

Reliable sources tracking the development told The Hindu on Monday that the UPA government’s plan to introduce budgetary cuts in schemes proposed by various ministries especially aimed at rolling out its ambitious programmes like the food security law was also a major reason for putting on hold Cusat’s upgradation proposal.

The Finance Ministry had asked various Ministries to prioritise its proposals considering the tough fiscal situation. The initial budgetary estimate for the IIEST plan was about Rs. 500 crore and the HRD ministry seems to be in no mood in implementing such schemes in the near future, sources said.

The HRD Minister M. M. Pallam Raju had earlier given a hint that the State will have to wait for realising its demand for an IIT under the 12th Plan. The Minister had also pointed out that his Ministry’s effort would be on consolidating the existing central universities and IITs.

A senior official in the Higher Education Department told The Hindu that the government would not push for the IIEST plan immediately, as the priority was to get an IIT. “Even though the HRD Minister’s announcement had cast shadows on the IIT project for the State, we are hopeful that things might take a positive turn,” he said.

The Ministry had delayed the approval of the Cusat upgradation proposal after the previous LDF government conveyed its desire that the university should be converted into an IIT and not an IIEST. A section of the teachers and employees had also opposed the Ministry’s move to provide the framework of a National Institute of Technology for the proposed IIEST.

Cusat Vice-Chancellor Ramachandran Thekkedath said that he had not received any official information from the HRD ministry on whether the upgradation plan has been put on hold. The Vice-Chancellor had earlier pointed out that the Syndicate had passed a resolution stating that the Union government should convert the university into a Central Institute.
Israel gives grants to Indians

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As many as 66 Indian postdoctoral scholars will travel to Israel in the coming months on three-year scholarships granted by Israeli government to pursue research at top universities.

Fellows from IIT Delhi, Osmania University, universities in Delhi, Lucknow, Kolkata, Mumbai and other leading academic institutions in India will conduct research in a variety of fields, including immunology, genetics, neurobiology, bioinformatics, law and economics. The research will be undertaken at leading universities in Israel, namely, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology, Tel Aviv University, Haifa University, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, the Weizmann Institute of Science and the Open University of Israel.

“The annual amount per scholar is 100,000 shekel (NIS) that is equivalent to about ₹14.7 lakh a year, for three years. Of this sum, two thirds are given directly by the government and one third by the university (which is also government supported). The criteria for selection are academic excellence of the candidate, academic value of the research proposal and interest of the concerned university department in the subject matter,” officials from the Israeli Embassy said.

A call for research proposals for yet another round of this postdoctoral scholarship programme has already been announced. Applications can be submitted through Israeli universities.

“The second round means that in addition to those who have already received the scholarships, Indian researchers can apply for another round of scholarships (potentially up to 100 in number),” the officials said.
UGC relents: Teachers in colleges won’t be judged on performance

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NEW DELHI: The University Grants Commission (UGC) has dumped a mandatory requirement for varsities to only select and promote faculty members based on a performance index score, bringing relief to the more than 10-lakh college and university teachers across the nation.

The decision, taken on Monday, is the direct outcome of fears that the strict, but inflexible, parameters of the UGC’s Academic Performance Index (API) were holding up appointments and exacerbating the widespread teacher vacancies that already plague India’s higher education system.

Instead of the UGC’s API, universities will now have the flexibility to evolve their own mechanisms to screen teacher performance, under a decision that tries to bridge the gap between ensuring the autonomy of varsities and improving faculty accountability.

“We want teachers to meet certain standards in order to be eligible for selection or promotion, but what we’ve seen with the API is that it’s best to let universities decide those standards for themselves,” UGC chairman Professor Ved Prakash told HT.

The API is India’s first attempt at ensuring that teacher selections and promotions are directly linked to their academic performances.

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UGC relents: Teachers in colleges won’t be judged on performance

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Started along with the unprecedented salary hike teachers benefited from under the Sixth Pay Commission in 2010, the performance-linked promotions system is aimed at increasing the accountability of the country’s teachers to improve the standard of India’s universities. Repeated global rankings place no Indian university among the top 200 in the world — in stark contrast not only to the West, but also to China.

But teachers unions have strongly protested against the API from the very beginning, pointing out what they argued were flaws with the index that allowed favouritism and benefited a select few.

In several universities, confusion over the parameters of the index has also placed several appointments in limbo, at a time when the country’s central varsities face teacher shortages of up to 30% and many state varsities have more than 50% teacher vacancies.

Under the UGC’s fresh decision, varsities will need to rate teachers, but can set the parameters themselves. To encourage transparency, the UGC will insist that teachers are given a point-based score.

The university-developed index will only be used to screen applicants and not to make final selections, which will be made on the basis of recommendations of an expert panel.

For details of the report, log on to: www.hindustantimes.com/teacherpromotion
Ranks of Indian students in Germany grow by 70%

One of the factors is the EU Blue Card, which gives foreign graduates unrestricted access to the job market.

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An increase of 70% has been witnessed in enrolment of Indian students at German education institutions since the academic year 2008, according to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). There were a total of 5998 Indians studying in the country last year, up from 5038 in 2010-11. The number of total international students as a whole went up from 244,776 in 2009-2010 to 252,032 in 2010-2011.

Christiane Schlottmann, director, DAAD, regional office in New Delhi, confirms that there has been a change in student mobility worldwide in recent years. Besides the conventional destinations of higher education, students are seeking newer ones in Europe as well as in Asia.

According to Schlottmann, “Stringent visa regulations, limited or non-existent employment opportunities in the host country after graduation and social threats in the traditionally popular destinations are some of the factors behind the changing trend.”

The implementation of the EU Blue Card is believed to be a key determinant. Besides opening up unlimited job opportunities, the EU Blue Card provides residence permit to grant foreign graduates of German universities unrestricted access to the job market. Other reasons that make Germany the most popular destination for international students in Europe include, over 1000 international degree programmes (IDP) taught in English, highly subsidised tuition fees, quality of education, scholarships and above all, social security.

Germany bags the first position beating Australia, the United Kingdom and China, as reported by a recent British Council survey. “Even during the recent world economic recession, Germany has sustained as the economic superpower, thereby providing easy access to international job market. The adoption of the EU Blue Card as a new work and residence permit has already started showing positive results and I believe it will further bolster this trend,” said Schlottmann.
HE late 1970s marked the beginning of the educational technology revolution. Apple Computer released the highly successful Apple II computer, MIT’s Seymour Papert introduced the programming language LOGO for young children, and educators talked about the power of technology to expand and enhance teaching and learning. Yet, over the past four decades, though technology has gotten more powerful and sophisticated, very little has changed, particularly in the field of higher education. In fact, the structure and methodology of today’s universities still follow a model established nearly a thousand years ago in Bologna, Italy, with the founding of University of Bologna, the world’s oldest university.

According to many education experts, however, this historic model of education is finally about to change. “Never before has there been such an eruption of education innovation from institutions and companies of all sizes,” says Stephen Gillus, president and CEO of a research and advisory group focused on global education innovation. “It is interesting to observe that two independent information sources almost talk on the same lines when it comes to the impact of technology on education.

The Pew Research Centre, which is a nonpartisan “fact tank” that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the US and the world, found in their study, that 60 per cent of the large number of respondents — experts and stakeholders in higher education, including research scientists, higher education leaders, technology developers, futurists and consultants — felt that by 2020, higher education will witness substantial change, including mass adoption of teleconferencing and distance learning, more individualized, just-in-time learning approaches, and a transition to blended learning environments that combine online learning with less-frequent in-class meetings. In a 2012 US senate briefing on education and technology, a group of education experts concurred, noting that, “...we are finally at a time where many factors are converging to overcome historic barriers: increasingly ubiquitous broadband, cheaper devices, digital content, cloud computing, big data, and generally higher levels of comfort with technology among the general population.” Even several academic experts in European universities and industries also express that online education is making a big change particularly because of increasing cost of education. In fact, it is seen that both in the US and Europe, more than 30 per cent of higher education students now take at least one online course during their college career. As a result, many colleges and universities are experimenting with hybrid learning environments that include both online and offline instruction, realizing that the transmission of knowledge need no longer be tethered to a college or university campus.

The proliferation of emerging communication technologies has led to new education paradigms, including blended learning, flipped classrooms, distance learning and the growing use of technology to deliver supplemental material. The idea of blended learning is not new. Also called "hybrid" or "mixed-mode" learning, blended learning is a pedagogical approach that combines face-to-face (F2F) teaching and learning with technology-based activities. In 2000, Wesley Baker, professor of communication arts at Cedarville University, introduced the concept of the flipped classroom. In the past decade, it has gained enormous popularity among both students and teachers across Canada, the US and Europe. In its essence, the flipped classroom is a pedagogical model that switches class work with homework and vice versa. In a flipped classroom, teachers record their lecture material for students to view or listen outside of class, as homework. Class time is then used for discussion, working through problems, developing team projects or other collaborative activities.

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Technology transforming education
Business students from states to learn from foreign faculty

Manash Pratim Gohain | TNN

New Delhi: In a first-of-its-kind opportunity, management students from 11 state government universities and National Institutes of Technology from remote corners of India will learn from international faculty alongside their counterparts from Erasmus University Rotterdam, McGill University and Richard Ivey School of Business of Canada or Grenoble Ecole de Management.

Management Development Institute Gurgaon will host International Summer University 2013 in April in which students from University of Kashmir, NIT Hamirpur and Kottayam will do 8 management elective courses and get the credits transferred to their MBA.

The concept of “summer university” is common in the West but it’s the first such initiative in India. Restricting the initiative only to government institutions from remote places, MDI director Mukul P Gupta said: “An urban student gets opportunities to integrate and exchange. A student from a remote location is deprived of that despite having higher calibre. Not only will these students learn with their international peers but we are also pooling teachers from overseas B-schools which are part of our 47 international collaborations. There will be no MDI faculty during course interactions,” Gupta said.

University of Kashmir was the first to sign an MoU with MDI to become part of the programme on Tuesday. Praising the initiative, Prof Talat Ahmad, VC of University of Kashmir said: “Though our students are of comparable qualities with those from top management institutions, they lack exposure to international practices.”

GLOBAL LINK

WHO WILL TAKE PART IN INTERNATIONAL SUMMER UNIVERSITY

- Students from 11 state universities and NITs from remote areas of India who have completed first year of MBA course

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

8 courses on offer

- Students will pursue courses like international accounting, CSR; ethics, corporate governance, cross-cultural management

- Students will get credit for each course

9 faculty members from management institutes of US, UK, Denmark, France and Mexico to conduct courses

50 overseas students from top management institutes of Europe and the US