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'IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT'

CEOs Tell Govt to Stay Out of IIMs' Business

Proposal for HRD minister-led council to oversee 13 IIMs draws alumni fire

TEAMNET
A battery of powerful CEOs, many of whose careers were born at IIM Ahmedabad, are rallying in protest against a government proposal seeking greater control over the 13 IIMs in the country.

"Any move to control IIMA now run autonomously will bring down the standards of the institution as well as dilute a global brand," said A M Naik, executive chairman of engineering giant L&T and also the chairman of IIM Ahmedabad. "It will be like driving in reverse gear."

"It ain't broke, don't fix it," said Phaneesh Murthy, chief executive officer of Infosys, who graduated from the institute in 1987. "It is amazing how with so many problems in education, the government wants to diversify its efforts to the one thing that is already working well."

An ET report on Tuesday outlined a government proposal to make IIMs accountable to an umbrella council headed by the Union HRD minister. The proposed law also mandated a council that seeks to convert IIMs from registered societies into national institutions empowered to award degrees, not just diplomas as is the current practice.

While newer IIMs are happy to trade autonomy for the greater credibility that a degree bestows, older institutions, led vociferously by IIMA, didn't fancy the deal, ET had reported.

"I do not believe that issuing a degree is any great incentive for an IIM to lose its autonomy," said Maninder Singh Rana, senior partner at the private-equity fund Clayton Dubilier & Rice, and a former member of Unilever's global top management team. He is an IIMA gold medallist (1979).

"A degree is most welcome but without curtailing the freedom of (IIMs)," echoed Kiran Karnik, former president of Nasscom, who also happens to be an IIMA alumnus.

Most view the new proposal as a noise around IIMs' necks.

"Why Take Away IIMs' Autonomy?"

"It's a bad move," said Jerry Rao, founder and former CEO of Mphasis, entrepreneur and a 1973 IIMA graduate. "IIMs are working well, it's difficult to understand why the government would want to take away their autonomy."

"Our government has done enough damage to great universities such as the Mumbal University and Madras University. Any government interference will dilute IIM autonomy and their ability to compete," Rao added. The move to bring all IIMs under a central council will do more harm than good, CEOs argued. "This council will be counter-productive as IIMA will lose the autonomy it enjoyed to create educational excellence," said Narendra Modhawala, Mumbal and Karnik.

"A council to control the Centre will be unproductive for both the talent and faculty," he added. An IIMA graduate, Mumbal teaches entrepreneurship at the institute. Naik, who has been trying to carve out a global role for the IIMAs, feels newer government controls could hamper this. "With government regulations, international faculty may lose interest in joining the board," he said. Naik gave an alternative. "The government should give management institutes an option: merits that do not want to give degrees should be allowed to remain autonomous."

"I am unhappy. While it is well intentioned and looks at putting in place an IIT kind of council, I believe IIMs were already a step ahead," Karnik said.
Stemming the rot in higher education

B.S. RAGHAVAN
OFFHAND

Going by the widely prevalent perceptions of discerning observers, there has been a sharp fall in the quality of higher education in India. Already, there is a cry among industry associations and business firms about the abysmally low percentage of graduates, post-graduates and professional degree holders measuring up to the performance expected of them as employees. Figures about the employability of notionally-educated candidates have not been more than 10-15 per cent of the lakhs of candidates churned out on the assembly line mode by the various universities in India.

Some recent media reports reveal a really scary scenario. In a recent teachers' eligibility test, conducted by the Tamil Nadu Recruitment Board, it was found that as many as 42,000 out of 6.5 lakh teachers who took the test did not know how to fill the application forms and committed a variety of mistakes, including omission to fill their names in the allotted column. Even if this could be excused, when the answer sheets were evaluated, only 2,448 could be declared to have passed.

I am sure that the situation in other States is equally disturbing, if not even more so. This is the quality of teachers who act as feeders for institutions of higher learning, one shudders to imagine the snowballing effect of the extensive damage being done to the minds of young students who are taught by them and the potential danger it poses to the future of the country in terms of the quality of citizens, standard of governance and conduct of public affairs.

At the other end of the spectrum, the procedures, topics for research, and credentials of guides/advisors, with respect to conferment of Ph.Ds have become a cause of concern among many for anyone with a modicum of awareness of what is going on. At one time, a member of some University/Collage bodies to select faculties, I have found a Ph.D. on a subject pertaining to English literature not knowing who the Lake Poets were and a Ph.D. in Law being not able to recall the writs mentioned in the Constitution and the purposes they were intended to serve.

SEVERE INDICTMENT

Per Srilata A. Zabeer who has become the first Indian woman to head the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota, “in the past 35 years...we have seen a decline in the numbers of high-quality applicants from India into US business Ph.D programmes. This does not bode well either for more Indian-origin deans in the future or, of greater concern, to meet a growing need for research-trained faculty both in India and worldwide.”

Another write-up by Careers360 published on November 11, 2012, is more severe in its indictment: “...Ph.D should be the easiest degree to earn in India. No screening tests and interviews, no coursework, and no rigorous assessment of research work. Just a Master’s degree in hand and a pre-determined waiting period will lead you to a doctorate.”

GREETING PALMS

It quotes Sushil Upadhyay, Assistant Professor at Uttarakhand Sanskrit University, as saying: “...anyone can virtually buy a Ph.D. degree. You just need to pay two or three lakhs to the right person.”

The general purport of his remarks is that in many universities, registration, coursework, thesis and viva-voce can all be “effectively” managed by greasing the palms.

Things will head downhill with Ph.Ds now being offered through distance education mode also, without any guidelines being set by the University Grants Commission, And finally, the incubus of failing standards seem to be slowly spreading to IIMs and IITs, thanks to the cumulative effect of the malaise affecting higher education.

(Here in industrial countries, as an article, ‘The University’s Dilemma’ published on November 27, 2012 in the strategybusiness Web site points out: “Today, many academicians invest their efforts in relatively narrow research, writing papers read only by other academics, with relatively little time spent teaching and training students...the research simply offers alternative perspectives on longstanding, foundational knowledge such as the writings of Aristotle.”)

All the hopes built around the legislation to give effect to the Right to Education Incorporated in the Constitution will come to nothing without remediating the ills of commercialisation, quotas, constant lowering of bars such as pass marks, grades and the like, and the poor quality of the faculty and infrastructure in higher educational institutions.
INITIATIVE

ELIGIBLE: Central, State and deemed-to-be universities can be tagged as Innovation Universities. PHOTO: RAJEEV BHATT

Out-of-the-box ideas

Aarti Dhar

Even as the Universities for Research and Innovation Bill, 2012 awaits Parliamentary approval, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued guidelines for a new scheme "Innovation Universities" with an aim to promote innovative ways of learning, teaching and research.

The scheme is meant to support "bold and big ideas" that require substantial support and flexibility; ideas that usually do not fit into any of the existing patterns of funding and do not, therefore, see the light of the day.

Central universities, State universities and deemed-to-be-universities — classified under Category A by the Tandon Committee — are eligible to be tagged as Innovation Universities. The universities should be NAAC 'A' accredited and having at least having 10 years of standing at the time of application.

The Universities for Research and Innovation Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on May 21, 2012 by the then Minister of Human Resource Development Kapil Sibal. The Bill seeks to allow the Centre to set up universities for research and innovation through notifications. These universities shall be enabled to emerge as hubs of education, research and innovation. They may also establish campuses in foreign countries.

Under the new scheme, universities can submit proposals on innovative teaching, educational and research programmes for grants from the UGC under the XII Plan.

Both localised and generalised innovations will be recognised and supported. Innovation will include, but will not be limited to, innovative teaching/educational programmes including new types of degrees and courses, evaluation and creation of teaching and learning material.

The Human Resource Development Ministry had earlier planned to create 15 Innovation Universities but then drastically reduced the number and instead decided to grant funds to the existing universities, if found worthy.

The innovative research programme can include inter-disciplinary and cross-border challenges, creation of research facility that may be shared by a number of universities and research institutions, research that connects academic knowledge to 'traditional' and 'practical' knowledge or innovations that take place outside the academia.

Innovations in admission process and expanding access; innovative ways of improving diversity profile and deepening equity, of involving students in the decision making can form part of organisational innovation.

The proposed scheme is not intended to cover up-gradation of the overall infrastructure of the university, creation of new departments and centres in the established disciplines or those covered by existing schemes.

Financial grant will be given under three categories: 'Innovative Project' would involve a one-time grant of up to Rs. 25 crore and would typically relate to one or two specific objectives. An 'Innovative Programme' would involve a grant from Rs. 25 crore to Rs. 100 crore while 'Innovation University' shall be eligible to receive a grant from Rs. 100 crore up to Rs. 300 crore for a period of five years.

A Standing Committee on "Innovation Universities" shall evaluate the proposals submitted by the universities while the Detailed Project Reports would be studied by an Expert Committee. The recommendations would be placed before the UGC for a final decision.

KNOWLEDGE HUBS: Only if worthy. PHOTO: M. SRINATH
New Delhi: Universities can now introduce one-year master’s degree in law (LLM) from 2013-14 academic session. The University Grants Commission (UGC), the regulatory authority of higher education in the country, had issued the guidelines for introduction of the one-year LLM programme. According to the guidelines, the universities will have to conduct an all India admission test. Universities are also asked to make the course more rigorous as the duration has been reduced to one year.

Universities interested in introducing the programme must have a centre for Post-Graduate Legal Studies (CPGLS) as well and the one year programme will be divided into trimesters of 12 weeks each.
Communication skills, consistency key to IIM-I PGP

AGENDA Letters sent to shortlisted candidates; interview and written ability test after April 6

Amrita U Kadam

INDORE: Consistent performance, confidence and communication skills are the few parameters that Indian Institute of Management, Indore (IIM-I) would be stressing on for admitting students to the postgraduate programme 2013-15 batch.

The institute released the list of the shortlisted candidates on Monday and has also sent the call letters to them, informed admission chair Rohit Kapoor.

Call getters this time are the students who have scored above 90 percentile (for general category) in the Common Admission Test and also based on their scores of the higher secondary, senior secondary and graduation examination.

“We released the list yesterday and the candidates can check it on the website. The second phase of admission process, which would be personal interview (PI) and written ability test (WAT), of these candidates would begin after April 6 and would go on till mid-May,”

This time, PI and WAT will have 35% and 15% weightage and the remaining 50% weightage would be given to the academic performance in the higher secondary, senior secondary and graduation examination divided as 17, 17 and 16% respectively.

“The CAT score would be counted twice so that we would get consistent performers. We would check their communication skills and their ability to write. They would be given topics to write on their logical reasoning and articulation would help them score,” said Kapoor.

He added that there isn’t any change in the format for the WAT and PI and it would be the same as last year.

He said the students will have to perform well in WAT/PI as 50% weightage would matter a lot to make way for them into the IIM-I. Kapoor said the composite score of WAT/PI and past academic record will be considered for the final selection.

The students of IIM-I have also shared information about their iMentor programme where the current PGP students would guide the newcomers by solving their queries online to clear their doubts about WAT/PI and to seek their guidance about how to give their best and make a mark in this stage of admission process.