15 yrs after case filed, CBI told to probe IIT-M appointments

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: Appointment of professors at the IIT-Madras between 1995 and 2000 is to be probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Madras high court has said.

The central agency shall commence inquiry into the correctness and legality of the appointments made from 1995 to September 26, 2000, Justice S Nagamuthu ruled.

He said, “If it is found that any illegality has been committed, making out an offence, the CBI will then proceed to prosecute those responsible.”

He asked the HC registry to forward a copy of the judgment to the director of the CBI, New Delhi, for necessary action.

Justice Nagamuthu passed the order on a petition filed 15 years ago by a woman faculty of the IIT-M, alleging caste-based harassment and denial of due promotion due to extraneous reasons.

In her petition, Dr W B Vasantha, who was appointed lecturer in the mathematics department of IIT-M on August 19, 1988, said that despite her higher qualifications and researches, she was denied promotion as an associate professor in 1995 and as professor in 1996.

Assailing denial of promotions to her and questioning the legality of selections made for the posts of associate professors in 1995 and professors in 1996, she first filed the petition in the high court in 1997.

Dr Vasantha said she had been singled out for harassment and discriminatory treatment only because she belonged to a backward community. According to her, despite possessing academic brilliance, intelligence, merit and excellence, she was targeted, and a concerted effort had been made by her colleagues in the department to stall her career development and progress.

Citing the career progress of three professors, she said there was no reason why they should be selected and appointed ahead of her, violating the norms, despite the fact that they were not better qualified. They were not competent or experienced or had more research publications, she said. On her plea for promotion, Justice Nagamuthu held that she should be treated to have been appointed as associate professor with effect from July 27, 1995 and as professor from December 18, 1996 at the IIT-M.
False memory implanted in brain

Experts Trick Mind Into Recalling Things That Never Happened In Mice

Kounteya Sinha | TNN

London: Neuroscientists have done what Hollywood has glorified for years in espionage thrillers. They have planted false memories in the brains, but of mice. They also found that many of the neurological traces of these memories are identical in nature to those of authentic memories.

Researchers have for long sought the location of memory traces also called engrams. The team from MIT confirmed that memories are stored in networks of neurons that form memory traces for each experience we have. In the latest study, the team from MIT’s Picower Institute for Learning and Memory showed that they could identify the cells that make up part of an engram for a specific memory and reactivate it using a technology called optogenetics.

The researchers engineered mouse’s hippocampal cells to express the gene for channelrhodopsin, a protein that activates neurons when stimulated by light. They also modified the gene so that channelrhodopsin would be produced whenever the c-fos gene, necessary for memory formation, was turned on. They then conditioned these mice to fear a particular chamber by delivering a mild electric shock. As this memory was formed, the C-fos gene was turned on, along with the engineered channelrhodopsin gene. This way, cells encoding the memory trace were “labelled” with light-sensitive proteins.

DO YOU REMEMBER ME?

The next day, when the mice were put in a different unknown chamber, they behaved normally. However, when the researchers delivered a pulse of light to the hippocampus, stimulating the memory cells labelled with channelrhodopsin, the mice froze in fear as the previous day’s memory was reactivated. “Compared to most studies that treat the brain as a black box while trying to access it from the outside in, this is like we are trying to study the brain from the inside out,” the researchers said. “The technology we developed for this study allows us to fine-dissect and tinker with the memory process by directly controlling the brain cells.”