

CONCERNS RAISED IN CABINET ON THE LEVELS OF AUTONOMY PROMISED & THE POSSIBLE FALLOUT OF SUCH A MOVE

World-class Institutes Plan Faces Autonomy Hurdle

Anubhuti.Vishnoi@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Prime minister's office (PMO) and Union human resource development (HRD) ministry may have finally ironed out their differences over the extent of autonomy for 20 chosen 'world-class' institutes or 'institutes of eminence', but the debate seems to have spilled onto the cabinet now.

Concerns have been raised in the cabinet on the considerable levels of autonomy promised to these institutes and the possible fallout or negative implications of such a move.

The HRD ministry's proposed UGC (Institutions of Eminence Deemed to be Universities) regulations, 2017, which were moved for cabinet approval nearly three weeks back, have now been 'deferred', ET has learnt.

During a cabinet discussion, a concern was also raised on how it would be ensured that such autonomous institutes will not end up creating more JNU like 'Kanhaiyas', sources said. The proposal to catapult Indian institutes to global recognition - first announced in the 2016 Union budget and said to be the brainchild of the PMO - had caused considerable friction between the HRD ministry then led by Smriti Irani and the PMO, with the latter pushing for greater levels of autonomy for the institutes while the ministry called for caution and some governmental role. The ministry and PMO were at that point at loggerheads on the autonomy framework for IIMs under the new IIM Bill with similar positions on the debate.

After Irani's sudden exit mid-2016, the HRD ministry under Prakash Javadekar was mostly in agreement with the PMO to draft a set of significantly liberalised regulations. The regulations now bear a distinct PMO mark and assure complete academic, administrative and financial auto-



A Quick Relook

Proposal to launch these institutes first raised in Union budget 2016

PMO SOUGHT for more autonomy while Smriti Irani-led HRD ministry called for some governmental role

Regulations clearly indicate UGC regulations will not be applicable in most parts for these 20 institutes

AFTER IRANI'S exit, the new draft under Prakash Javadekar assured complete academic, administrative and financial autonomy

PMO-MINISTRY ALSO IRONED OUT THEIR DIFFERENCES

my to the select 20.

The regulations aim to create a group of degree granting 'world class institutes' as a special category under deemed universities, but governed by a separate set of regulations. As was envisaged by the PMO, the regulations clearly indicate that UGC regulations will not be applicable in most part to these 20 institutes.

This required considerable heavy lifting after the Solicitor General of India advised that it is not legally feasible to create a separate regulatory

FUND NORMS



It was proposed that a pvt institute must have a corpus of ₹500 crore to get world-class tag

structure for them in the form of the proposed Empowered Expert Committee (EEC). EEC was originally proposed as a body that can function independent and autonomous of the UGC. After the SG's legal opinion, provisions had to be incorporated to get a UGC seal of approval on the EEC decision.

One of the key changes made was in the corpus fund requirement. It was originally proposed that a private institute must have a corpus of ₹500 crore to be eligible to be declared a world class institute. However, after the PMO's intervention, this was said to be reworked to keep it at ₹200 crore instead. Later, the HRD ministry has brought this down to just 60 crore - to be raised to ₹150 crore in ten years' time. It was argued that corpus fund is also read as locked up money, so there may not be enough rationale for prescribing such a high amount being kept locked up.

The draft regulations had said the institutions must ensure a 1:10 faculty-student ratio, enroll 20,000 students in

IN AGREEMENT



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15 years. These criteria finally stand revised and now to start with the faculty student ratio will be 1:20 that may be improved to 1:10 in five years' times and a total enrolment of 15,000 students in 15 years.

There was also difference of opinion over transfer for letter of Intent from one sponsoring body to another for the qualifying institute - the PMO finally conceded to the ministry's point of view on this.