

Special grants, autonomy for top stand-alone institutes

Prashant K. Nanda

letters@hindustantimes.com

New Delhi: The government panel scouting for institutes of eminence (IoE) came across several worthy stand-alone candidates which did not win the coveted tag, but impressed it enough to earn its recommendation for government support.

Management, public health schools, rural institutes, science and mathematics schools were spotted by the committee comprising among others former chief election commissioner N. Gopalswami and Harvard Business School professor Tarun Khanna. They recommended that such institutes be provided with special grants, research facilities and functional autonomy even if they were not full-fledged multi-disciplinary universities that the committee was looking for.

"EEC (empowered expert committee) would like to recognize...institutions who hold great potential to reach national and global prominence in a singular field of study, e.g. management, agriculture, technology, medicine etc," the committee said in its report to the human resource development (HRD) ministry.

"In fact, many (stand-alone institutions) have already reached global prominence, albeit in their chosen field. The EEC believes that these institutions can benefit by recognition and investment by the government to reach even greater prominence," it added.

Among institutions which earned the committee's admiration were Indian Statistical Institute (Kolkata), Institute of Chemical Technology (Mumbai), Gan-

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dhigram Rural Institute of Higher Education (Tamil Nadu), Indian Institute of Human Settlement (IIHS), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (Delhi) Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (both Mumbai) and Indian Institute of Public Health-Gandhinagar (IIPHG). Besides, it has named institutes like Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) at Kolkata and Ahmedabad.

The committee said it applauds such institutions, acknowledges their achievements and unique contributions and recommends that the government consider establishing a separate programme to invest in them with a different set of defined goals and expectations.

Terming such institutions as "vital for the country's economy and progress", the committee has recommended that the "government establish a special programme for stand-alone universities/institutions, invest in them and allow them to excel on the world stage in their own chosen field".

"Gandhian thought and philosophy is still relevant to India and the world. Many institutions had started to work on those principles and with a strong rural focus. One of them, the Gandhigram Rural Institute of

Higher Education, district Dindigul, Tamil Nadu seems to be thriving. It is grounded in Gandhian ethos and is doing significant service to the rural population especially the women and the underprivileged. In the 150th anniversary year of Mahatma Gandhi, it would be only appropriate that this institution's work is appreciated, and it is helped with additional funds and such other dispensation that can put it on sound footing and sustain it," said the report, a copy of which was seen by Mint.

The committee has underlined that the work of IIHS and IIPHG—urbanization and public health can be "truly called unique and important for the strategic needs" of the country and EEC recommends that "these two institutions be encouraged and given necessary flexibility in regulatory framework (similar to Category-1 autonomy given to some institutions in March this year), funds and other such dispensation as deemed fit with an inbuilt accountability mechanism.

An HRD ministry official, who declined to be named, said that "though the committee was entrusted with naming institutes of eminence, it has given specific recommendations on quality stand-alone institutions too. They have found gems in education sector and the ministry has noted them. Appropriate action will be taken in due course".

The committee had suggested at least 11 names—three in private sector including the proposed Jio Institute from Reliance Foundation, and eight in public sector for the IoE status, but government announced only six names—three private and three public universities.