

UGC committee disbanded, whiff of govt 'misgivings' on panel head

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THE UNIVERSITY Grants Commission (UGC) disbanded its first committee to draft qualification regulations for appointment of teachers in higher education because the government had misgivings about the head of the panel, Varun Sahni, who was a professor in Jawaharlal Nehru University, a source, who did not wish to be identified, has said.

On July 21, the UGC set up a seven-member committee, headed by Goa University vice-chancellor Varun Sahni, to draft regulations on the minimum qualifications for appointment of teachers and academic staff in universities and colleges.

Two weeks later, on August 3, the UGC set up another panel with the same terms of reference but with Professor Sunil Kumar Gupta, former vice-chancellor of Himachal Pradesh University, as the chairperson. The circular was silent on the fate of the previous panel headed by Sahni.

A source told *The Indian*

Express: "The government had its misgivings about the political leanings of Professor Sahni," said a source who did not wish to be identified.

Before becoming the Goa University V-C, Sahni was a professor of international politics at JNU, where he had served as chairperson of the Centre for International Politics, Organisation and Disarmament and also as director of the International Collaboration Office. He is currently on deputation leave from JNU.

When contacted by *The Indian Express*, Sahni confirmed that the committee he was appointed to head had been scrapped by the UGC without any reason attributed to the move.

"Regarding your question, the secretary, UGC, spoke to me on August 3 and indicated that I no longer needed to block off a large chunk of my agenda for August 2017. That's all there is to it," Sahni said in an email to *The Indian Express*.

When contacted for comment, the UGC's acting chairman VS Chauhan asked this reporter to speak to Commission secre-

tary Jaspal Singh Sandhu. The latter did not respond to calls made by this reporter.

Although Sandhu is learnt to have communicated the decision of disbanding the first committee to Sahni, most of the remaining members of the panel said they were not informed. "This is unprofessional. To first set up a committee, scrap it and not even inform members of the decision," said one of the panel members.

Former V-C of Maharana Pratap University of Agriculture and Technology Professor SS Chahal, Jadavpur University V-C Suranjan Das and former JNU registrar KPS Unny were among the seven members of the committee. R C Kuhad, the current head of Haryana Central University, is the only member common in the two committees.

Apart from Kuhad and Gupta, Murlidhar Rao, the V-C of Sant Gadge Baba Amaravati University, Professor Battu Satya Narayana of Osmania University in Hyderabad, and Prakash Singh, currently with the department of political science at Delhi University, are the other members of the second committee.