

NOTE

CENTRALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION

Manas Joardar writes :

A draft Bill “National Commission for Higher Education and Research Bill, 2010” is being discussed on at various quarters. The Bill appears to be a follow-up action of the recommendations made, one by the National Knowledge Commission and the other by the Yash Pal Committee, both of which suggested replacement of all of the existing central higher education regulatory bodies such as UGC, AICTE, NCTE etc. The present draft, however, does not propose to scrap them all, probably on technical grounds.

The NCHER – a 7-member body including the Chairperson – will be constituted by a selection committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the opposition leader and two central ministers, one in charge of higher education and the other of medical education.

There would be, the Bill suggests, a “Collegium” consisting of core-Fellows and co-opted Fellows. The core-Fellows will pick up one co-opted Fellow from each State and Union Territory.

The Collegium shall meet at least once in a year and advise the Commission on promotion of higher education and research.

The Commission shall maintain a National Registry of persons—out of the names recommended by the Collegium or governments or institutions of higher learning—eligible and qualified for appointment as Vice Chancellor or head of institutions of national importance and forward a list of five names from the Registry whenever called upon to do so. The respective government may send the list back if none of the names is acceptable to them.

All the members of the Commission and the Collegium must have an outstanding contribution in their respective field of knowledge and the responsibility of carrying forward higher education and research would be vested upon them.

A committee constituted by the President on recommendation of the Collegium, shall review the performance of the Commission during each of its 5-year term. The report of the committee shall be placed before both the houses of Parliament.

The Commission will have too much of centralized power and the composition of its selection committee does not foretell much about its neutrality.

For the State universities, power of appointment of Vice Chancellors has been taken away. This is a great shock for the State ruling elites. Most of Indian

universities are gripped under party political tentacles and a 'Yes man' Vice Chancellor plays a big role there.

The Bill does not speak much on privatization, which has caused corruption at various levels of the education system. 'Capitation-fee' culture is on the rise. Privatization of professional education has been strongly endorsed in the National Knowledge Commission and the Yash Pal Committee reports.

Other efforts such as creation of Educational Tribunal, prohibition of unfair practices, entry of foreign educational institutions etc are being made through promulgation of Acts.

To rescue the entire education system from the abysmal state of distress it is in, what is needed most is a strong political will of those who run the show. □□□