

## Autonomy of IIMs is at peril

### Why in news?

Recently, IIM-Ahmedabad and IIM-Calcutta are surrounded by controversies which questions the autonomy they possess.

### What are the controversies surrounding them?

#### 1. IIM-Ahmedabad:

- The Director has approved a PhD thesis of three essays which is based on electoral democracy.
- It is alleged that the thesis described political parties like BJP & BSP as ethnically constituted one and BJP as a pro-Hindu upper caste party.
- Later the Ministry of Education asked the Institute for a copy of the thesis after a MP sent letter to the Prime Minister.
- The MP urged that the thesis should be re-examined by independent professors and the PhD be kept on hold till the review is complete.
- But the director said that government is not an arbiter of complaints regarding PhD thesis and complaints should be raised in appropriate academic forums present in the Institute.

#### 2. IIM Calcutta:

- There is a dispute between the Institute's Director and the Chairman of the Board.
- The Board passed a resolution against the Director and stripped his key powers of making appointments and taking disciplinary action.
- The above instances raise **questions on the autonomy** which IIMs possess.

### How was the autonomy of IIMs earlier?

- Before the enactment of the IIM act in 2017, these IIMs functioned as Societies.
- They had a fair amount of autonomy in academic matters and other issues such as the fixing of fees.
- They were not dependent on the government for funds and were in a better position to assert their autonomy.

- But the appointment of Directors and Chairmen remained in the government's hands and government often used this leverage to influence the IIMs.
- However this autonomy was only a product of convention and it functioned well as long as both sides respected it.
- When this respect was compromised, friction has occurred.

### **What are the other instances of friction between them?**

- IIMs tend to protect their autonomy and opposed government's attempt to curtail their freedom.
- In 2003-04, government issued an order which drastically reduced the admission fees in six IIMs from Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 30,000.
- A face-off existed between the government and the IIMs.
- It got resolved only after the government reversed the order.

### **How does government funding affect their autonomy?**

- All over the world higher education system is supported by the government in one form or the other.
- Normally this should not impact the autonomy of universities.
- But government can interfere in their autonomy irrespective of whether these institutions are funded by the government or not.
- This was the case with IIM-A which is financially independent.

### **What are the implications this turmoil on the IIMs?**

- The new IIM Act has created a dramatic shift in power dynamics in these institutions.
- The government has relinquished control on paper.
- But the implementation of the Act will face issues as the Board assumes greater power in the functioning of the IIMs.

**Source: The Indian Express**



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