

Higher edu on low priority in Union budget

By Our Correspondent

NEW DELHI : Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee's budget, presented on February 26, marks a pungent shift giving little priority to higher education.

The surprise shift obviously suggests that the Central universities, IITs, IIMs and NITs will have to tighten their belts and generate their own resources.

Relying on the view that higher education is a "private good" the Finance Minister has reduced the allocation for running existing higher education programmes and institutions, glaringly reflected in a drop in the non-plan budget from Rs 6,437 crore to Rs 5,694 crore this year.

This means that the country's apex higher educational institutions will almost certainly need to either raise fees or levy extra charges on students in order to pay teachers and maintain their infrastructure.

The Human Resource Development Ministry's assessment suggests that the Centre and states will together need over Rs 170 crore over five years to implement the right to education law.

Throughout the first term of the UPA and the first year in its second term, the government focused largely on higher education, promising new IITs and IIMs. But the 2010-11 budget, while hiking the total allocation in higher education from Rs 14,389 crore to Rs 16,690 crore this

year, has reduced the allocation on existing higher educational institutions. The non-plan allocation for the University Grants Commission has gone down from Rs 3,977 crore to Rs 3,450 crore.

This means that these universities will have less money to use on day-to-day expenditure.

The budget has introduced such a sharp decline in non-plan allocation for the IITs and the IIMs that even the hike in the plan component — for expansion — has failed to prevent a dip in the total allocation for these premier institutions.

"This is worrying. We may have enough money to build new hostels but clearly will need to hike fees or charge students for facilities we are subsidising, in order to even pay our teachers," an IIT director said.

The Centre has allocated Rs 15 crore for the first time in the budget for converting the Shibpur-based Bengal Engineering and Science University (Besu) into an Indian Institute of Engineering, Science and Technology.

The allocation represents the first occasion that the Centre has made a budgetary allocation for the project that has survived several scares, and was almost called off last year after unrest on the campus. The allocation confirms that the human resource development ministry finally plans to take over Besu this year.



Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Agriculture, Mr Sharad Pawar addressing at the inauguration of the Vice Chancellors' Conference of Agricultural Universities, in New Delhi on February 17, 2010.

HC stays AICTE approval procedure

CHENNAI : On February 24 Madras High Court stayed the operation of the revised approval procedure of the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) in respect of existing approved self-financing technical institutions.

The interim stay order was passed by the single judge bench of Justice K. Venkataraman on petitions filed by the Consortium of Self-Financing Professional Arts and Science Colleges in Tamil

Nadu, Association of Management of Coimbatore Anna University Affiliated Colleges and Srinivasa Institute of Engineering and Technology, Parivakkam, Poonamallee.

In its petition filed through counsel R. Natarajan, the consortium, represented by its secretary, P. Selvaraj, stated that the association members received a letter from the AICTE dated February 1 that the council had revised its procedure for

granting of extension of approval for technical institutions.

All institutions were required to upload information about themselves on the AICTE Web portal. Institutions applying for extension of approval should submit two copies of the compliance report by February 28 and mandatory disclosure in the format by that date.

The petitioner submitted that the revised procedure did not appear to be an amendment to the regula-

tions or a fresh set of regulations framed by the council. Such a procedure had not been published in the gazette to make it effective.

It was impossible to comply with the new conditions within the time frame stipulated.

The proceedings, which covered only self-financing technical institutions to follow the revised procedure were clearly discriminatory and violated Article 14 of the Constitution.

Tech colleges get more time

HYDERABAD : Technical glitches in the online approval process has forced the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) to extend the deadline for submission of compliance for existing engineering, MBA and MCA colleges to March 15.

Earlier, February 28 was the due date, but a majority of the colleges could not submit applications online as the Website crashed as it was unable to cope up with the huge rush of applicants.

The MHRD had launched the mandatory on-line submission of applications for technical colleges in January this year to get rid of corruption in the AICTE while granting approvals to colleges.

Central varsity may come up near Dharamsala

NEW DELHI : While the tug-of-war is still on over site selection for the proposed Central university in Himachal Pradesh, the ground realities compulsively suggest Dharamsala to be more suitable than the other sites for the proposed university.

"One of the possibilities could be to start with Dharamsala", and "to have a second campus at other place", said a source close to a member of the visiting team.

"You will not get faculty members for Dehra nor would there be students willing to take admission to a university located in a deserted place", said the source.

The site selection team of the Union Ministry for Hu-

man Resource Development completed its two-day inspection on February 20 and 21 to decide on the location of the proposed university.

According to a member of the inspection team, the team saw two sites -- the one suggested by the Congress MP from Jodhpur and former Dharamsala MLA Chandresh Kumari and the other by the state government. While Chandresh Kumari is lobbying for government land near Indrunag temple, about 7 km uphill from Dharamsala. The state government under the directions of Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhumal wants the university to come up on forest land, just 2 km from Dehra.

Chandresh Kumari came to Dharamsala on February 19 to accompany the visiting team to the site proposed by her. She was also accompanied by other Congress leaders, including former Kangra MP Chander Kumar and HPCC spokesman for Kangra constituency Kewal Singh Pathania.

The district administration, on the other hand, had deputed revenue officials to display the suitability of land near Dehra.

Sources said both sites proposed for setting up the Central university would involve forest land and felling of trees. In both the cases, the state government would have to seek permission from the

Central empowered committee of the Supreme Court for diverting the forest land to bring up the university. The state would also have to deposit the amount for compensatory forestation with the Department of Forest to change the land use.

While taking a final decision, the visiting team would have to consider the cost to bring up the institution and wishes of the state government as it has to chip in the cost of land. Though the site being suggested by the Congress leaders near Dharamsala is environmentally more congenial, the cost of construction here would be almost double.

Chief Minister Prem

Kumar Dhumal in a recent statement maintained that he was open to location of Central university at any place in Kangra district.

However, the sources here said still the state government would lobby for Dehra site. The state has also offered the place for temporary campus of university at Jawalamukhi that is close to Dehra site.

The visiting team members included Joint Secretary in the Union Ministry for HRD, Sunil Kumar, secretary, UGC, Renu Batra, the newly appointed vice-chancellor of the Central university, Dr Fuquan Qamar, and professor of Banaras Hindu University, Dr JP Singh.

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