

## Academia irked by HECI move

There is growing resentment within the academic community over the Centre's decision to scrap the University Grants Commission and replace it with a Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), which is likely to be without the grant-giving powers that the UGC possesses.

Opposition seems to be building up despite the Centre clarifying that the decision to shift the UGC's grant-giving power to the Human Resource Ministry is not final yet.

The grounds of opposition are varied, ranging from a lack of debate before the decision to the government seeking to take upon itself the power to finance universities and the low presence of professional academics in the proposed "bureaucrat-heavy" body.

The All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations (AIFUCTO), which has its presence in 483 State universities, has decided to protest at all State headquarters on July 19, followed by a protest outside Parliament on August 3, when the monsoon session will be on.

"The UGC is a body created by an Act of Parliament. The government should have first called for a debate among academics and also in Parliament on how it should be improved, or to know whether the stakeholders supported its winding up. But instead of setting in motion a debate, they took the decision to scrap it and are now asking for suggestions," AIFUCTO secretary-general Arun Kumar told *The Hindu*. "They want suggestions, not a debate."

### 'Hurried' decision

He questioned the decision to "hurriedly" decide to replace it with a new organisation less than a year before the Lok Sabha elections.

"While the UGC Act mandated the commission 'to inquire into the financial needs of universities' and 'allocate and disburse, out of the fund of the commission' to the universities (under Section 12 of the UGC Act, 1956), now the Ministry has taken over the direct control over the allocations to be made to the universities, which will clearly convert the universities into mere departments of the government," said a release from the Academics for Actions and Development (AAD). "This will bring the universities under the strict and direct financial control of the MHRD. This shift in financial control to the Ministry will be used for regimentation of knowledge."

There is heightened social media activity in academic forums, with a critique of the draft Bill being circulated to help people post their objections to the Centre.

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***All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations***

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