

SC wants norms fixed for distance education courses

The court chided the UGC for lack of effective oversight on deemed-to-be universities. JA ;THAKUR
AJAY PAL SINGH

Questioning the role of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in checking the commercialisation of education, the Supreme Court on Friday restrained deemed-to-be universities from conducting distance education in any course unless all the courses were approved by the statutory authorities.

“We restrain all deemed-to-be universities to carry on any courses in distance education mode from the academic session 2018-2019 unless it is permissible to conduct such courses in distance education mode and specific permissions are granted by statutory/regulatory authorities in respect of each of those courses and unless the off-campus centres/study centres are individually inspected and found adequate by the statutory authorities,” the Supreme Court ordered in a 118-page judgment.

A Bench of Justices A.K. Goel and U.U. Lalit found that these institutions conducted distance education, including in technical disciplines, without proper inspection or checks.

The court directed that permission for distance education courses should be given only after off-campus centres or study centres of the institutions were individually inspected and found adequate by the statutory authorities. The approvals have to be course specific, the court directed.

The court further directed the UGC to take appropriate steps to restrain the deemed-to-be universities from using the word ‘university’ within one month from Friday.

The present case dealt with certain deemed-to-be universities whose technical education courses conducted through the distance education mode were found to be in “flagrant violation of norms and policies laid down by the authorities for the deemed-to be universities. In fact, the court found that the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) had been “illegally kept out” and their study centres had never been inspected.

The Supreme Court ordered the direct suspension of degrees for students enrolled during academic sessions 2001-2005 in these institutions. It ordered the annulment of degrees of students admitted in these universities after academic sessions of 2001- 2005. The apex court has also ordered a CBI probe.

Expert panel

The court ordered the Centre to constitute a three-member panel in a month to examine and suggest a roadmap for setting up a regulatory mechanism in the relevant field of higher education and allied issues within six months.

The Centre would place the report of the committee before the Supreme Court, which will consider it on September 11, 2018.

END