Higher edu on low priority in Union budget

By Our Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, in his Union budget, presented on February 28, marked a poignant shift giving little priority to higher education.

The surprise shift obviously suggests that the Centre has decided that even postgraduate and NITs will have to tighten their belts and generate their own resources.

Relaying 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 cut fees or levy extra charges on students and pay the salaries of their teachers to maintain their infrastructure.

The Human Resource Development Ministry’s assessment suggests that the Centre and states will together need Rs 13,500 crore over five years to implement the right to education law.

Throughout the first term of the UPA and the first term in its second term, the government focused largely on higher education, giving an annual five per cent hike in the total allocation in higher education from Rs 14,389 crore to Rs 16,754 in the first five years after unrest on the campus erupted.

The allocation has survived several scares, and was almost called off last year after uproar on the campus forced the government to relax the criteria that the human resource development ministry finally plans to take over B-os this year.

The site selection team of the Ministry of Human Resource Development has recommended the allocation for running existing higher educational institutions. The non-plan allocation for the universities and the IITs that even the budget document — for expansion — has failed to prevent a dip in the non-plan allocation for these premier institutions.

“This is worrying. We may have enough money to build hostels or pay teachers but will need to hire fees or charge students for facilities we are subsidising, in order to even pay our teachers,” an HRD official said.

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

The plan 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 of last year after uproar on the campus.

Assistant Secretary Jamshed Ali, departmental spokesperson, said that the government is not only looking at self-financing technical institutions.

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

The MHRD had launched the on-line approval procedure for technical institutions.

The site selection team of the Union Ministry for Human 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 site inspection team, the team visited two sites – the one suggested by the Congress MP from Jodhpur and former Chandrashekhar Dhumal, MLA Chandresh Kumari and the other by the state government.

Chandresh Kumari is lobby- ing for a university land near ‘Jawalamukhi that is close to Dehra Dhumal.

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

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

The sources here said still the state government would lobby for Dehra site.

The site having been proposed by the Union Ministry for HRD, Sunil Kumar, secretary, UGC, Renu Baba, the newly appointed vice-chancellor of the Central university, Dr Pujan Kumar, and professor of Banaras Hindu University, Dr JP Singh.

HC stays AICTE approval procedure

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