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Row over IIM-Calcutta draft code that calls for barring public airing of views by teachers

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A draft code of conduct for faculty members of IIM-Calcutta that calls for a bar on public expression of their views on government policies and actions has stirred a row with teachers writing to the Board of Governors, voicing their dissent.

A senior faculty member of the premier B-school told PTI on Friday that around 60 teachers have written to the Board of Governors, stating that it "cannot encroach upon the liberal space" of the staff, which has to be the hallmark of an educational institution of IIM-C's repute.

"The draft code of conduct, which was prepared by the Board of Governors during the tenure of former director Anju Seth, was shared with us in February-end, seeking our feedback, which is customary. We have voiced our misgivings to the contents in the letter," he said.

The faculty is not against any code of conduct, but would oppose any gag order that would force them not to participate in any debate or voice their individual opinion on different issues, he said, not wanting to be named.

"While Central government employees are bound by the service conduct rules, there has to be flexibility for institutions like IIMs. Also, the stated objective of the draft code was to offer that flexibility. However, it rather turned out to be exactly the opposite," he said.

The draft code called for a bar on faculties publicly airing their opinion of any "current or recent policy or action" of the institute, the state and central governments.

Besides, it gagged "any communication to the press, in any public utterance, any statement of fact or opinion:- which has the effect of an adverse criticism of any current or recent policy or action of the institute".

In their letter to the Board of Governors in March, the IIM-C teachers noted the global practices on the liberty of voicing public opinion by faculty members, citing examples of Cambridge University, MIT and the University of Birmingham.

"In complete contrast to this, again, the proposed Code of Conduct in 4.17.2 suggests that no member of the institute 'shall criticise the policy...!' This is a departure from conduct policies at best institutes worldwide that stress that stakeholders in an organisation have the right to speak out against any wrong policies, because otherwise the organisation will never get rid of wrong policies!" they said.

A top IIM-C official said that the final code of conduct will be published, keeping in view the response of the teachers who are important stakeholders of the institute.

A retired faculty member said, "I have been told about the contents of the draft. It will put a question mark on the right of expression of an individual."

Former Director Anju Seth, who stepped down in March, could not be reached for comments.