

Is IIM dream turning sour for another director hired from US?

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The Indian Institute of Management Calcutta (IIM-C) is facing a leadership crisis with Anju Seth, the director of the institute, openly airing dissent against faculty members and the board.

Seth was the Pamplin professor of management at Virginia Tech in the US before joining IIM-C.

This is, however, not the first time that a director from a foreign university is struggling at an IIM. Ashish Nanda from Harvard had left IIM-Ahmedabad directorship in the middle of his tenure after differences with the government over the drafting of the IIM Act. He ultimately quit citing "personal

reasons". IIM Bangalore director Sushil Vachani, who had come from Boston University, too, left after three years instead of five, as the government did not extend his term.

Though Nanda and Vachani did not have differences with the faculty, the IIM-C's power struggle started 17 months ago.

"The struggle started way back in November-December 2019. We wrote to the institution board but initially the board thought that faculties may be overstating facts but gradually it came to terms with the reality and have now taken some action against the director," said an IIM-C faculty member, seeking anonymity.

"The academic council was not given importance by the director, it was ignored or overlooked. It grew from there, and



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in recent weeks, she also wrote to the Union government against the board, leading to the board putting two restrictions on her power as the director. It's an issue of incompatibility at the IIM-C. Unless the government intervenes, the oldest IIM may see another

departure," said another person, also requesting anonymity. The IIM-C director's office said she was busy and will call back, but *Mint* did not get any response till press time. An IIM-C board member declined to comment. In New Delhi, a spokesperson of the education

ministry said the Centre was not interfering in the internal matter of IIM-C, and the institution's board is dealing with the situation.

Academics said IIMs, especially the older ones, have strong boards and after getting autonomy through the IIM Act, they are the apex decision-making bodies, and that directors like Seth, who come from abroad, need to take the board and professors into confidence instead of trying to sideline them.

Faculty members had written to the education ministry last year that the "director, as the chairperson of the aca-

demical council, sets the agenda, dictates decisions and controls the minutes, disregarding the views of the majority of the members of the council".

Another faculty member said IIM-C should have "learned from previous experiences with foreign directors" and should have evaluated the admin capabilities.

"We have a faculty shortage but in past two years, IIM-C has hired one or two regular faculties," the person added.

According to media reports, the board has restricted the director on her powers related to appointments and disciplinary actions against staff.

IIMs have strong boards, and foreign directors need to take them into confidence not sideline them, say academicians