

# Twist in IIM-C turf war: Board divests Director of key powers

**RITIKA CHOPRA**

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 28

IN A move that has implications on managing accountability and responsibility in a top Central institution, the Board of Governors (BoG) at the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, has divested the institute's director, Anju Seth, of her powers to make appointments and initiate disciplinary action.

This unprecedented decision, taken at a meeting Saturday,



Director Seth can't make appointments or initiate disciplinary action

comes amid a turf war between the director and the Board, days after the latter passed a resolution against Seth.

As first reported by *The Indian Express* on February 27, the Board, in a special meeting February 20, passed a resolution

against her for writing directly to the government against Board Chairman Shri Krishna Kulkarni and for her alleged inability to collaborate with the faculty, among other charges.

Earlier this month, Seth wrote to the Ministry of Education (MoE) accusing Kulkarni of infringing on her executive powers. She had cited her alleged sidelining in drafting the new regulations under the IIM Act as an example of that.

At Saturday's meeting,

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sources said, the Board also decided to seek legal opinion on Seth's allegation — to ascertain whether the BoG is overstepping its mandate. Sources said a decision to set up an inquiry against the director will hinge on the legal opinion.

The Board's February 20 resolution alleges that Seth has been unable to prioritise work, meet timelines of action, foster an "inclusive and professional environment with faculty" and bolster faculty productivity through consultative and collaborative means. It's not clear if the director was allowed to present her defence before the Board took its decision. It's also unclear under which provisions of the IIM Act or Rules was the decision taken.

For, the Act provides for a director's removal by the Board but not without an inquiry in which she has been informed of the charges against her and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard. The law or the rules do not have a provision for taking away the director's powers.

Both Seth and Kulkarni did not respond to questions sent by email.



The showdown between Seth and the Board is the latest front in a dispute that's roiled the campus since December when over three-quarters of the institute's permanent faculty wrote to the MoE against the Director and the Board. Among the issues flagged by the teachers was faculty shortage. Sources said only one new faculty member had been hired in the last two years despite the institute losing over 10 teachers on account of resignation, superannuation and voluntary retirement. Some of the exits, the teachers alleged, were due to "harassment".

The faculty also claimed that — unlike at their peer institutes IIM-A and IIM-B — their views on the new regulations were disregarded. The Academic Council, the faculty claimed, was given only five days to submit suggestions on the draft regulations, and their feedback on centralisation of powers in the Board and Director was not considered by the Board while finalising the regulations.

Seth, in an email to *The Indian Express* in January, had dismissed the allegations as the work of "a small group of individuals", upset with her efforts to foster a culture of transparency and accountability.

Seth was appointed as the first woman head of IIM-Calcutta in November 2018. An alumna of IIM-Calcutta (1978), she has a doctorate from the University of Michigan (1988). She joined Virginia Tech in 2008 and headed its department of management from 2008 to 2013. She will complete her term as Director at IIM in a year.