

## Anju Seth IIMC director resigns

### Synopsis

"During my tenure as Director of IIM-C, I have become aware of numerous legacy issues related to lack of transparency or accountability, misuse of public funds, cases of abdication of responsibility, a weak financial situation with little provision for future. These governance problems have led to complaints and investigations by MoE, CAG, CVC etc" the letter said.



Being a woman and an "outsider", it is easy to be a target for charges of autocratic or arbitrary behaviour, she had said.

Indian Institute of Management-Calcutta (**IIMC**) director **Anju Seth** has submitted her resignation to the **PMO** and the board citing interference by the chairman, unchecked conflict-of-interest, and open breach of government guidelines in matters of procurement and personnel. She has also accused the chairman with the support of the board of starting a process of maligning and denigrating her publicly.

In her letter addressed to the PMO and the board (ET has a copy) she said "I am deeply anguished at not being able to fulfil this mandate and help turn around IIM-C to a world-class institution with a distinctive Indian heritage. This

situation has arisen because of a breakdown in confidence escalating over the past four months between me as director and CEO, and you as the chairperson of the board. To the best of my ability, I have been conducting my responsibilities as Director and CEO in the best long-run interests of the Institute with a focus on urgent reforms, forward-looking decisions and the interests of all stakeholders".

"The Board chose to draw up various resolutions alleging vague wrongdoings and condemning me without any evidence thereof while denying me the opportunity to defend my actions (which were in the best interests of the Institute)" the letter stated.

"During my tenure as Director of IIM-C, I have become aware of numerous legacy issues related to lack of transparency or accountability, misuse of public funds, cases of abdication of responsibility, a weak financial situation with little provision for future. These governance problems have led to complaints and investigations by MoE, CAG, CVC etc".

"Additionally, serious academic and personnel issues required to be addressed. For example, there was an absence of a coordinated strategy with solid implementation plans for growth, curriculum had not been revised over decades, there existed flawed recruitment and promotion policies, wasteful resource management, weak work norms, and slow decision-making processes. Unlike other IIMs and renowned universities worldwide, no Code of Conduct existed at IIM-C. Commitments to donors were not met. An illustrative list of problems and issues applauded by many stakeholders (including numerous faculty members who were equally concerned about buttressing IIMC's strong foundation for a sustainable future), this came in direct conflict with vested interests that resisted disruption of their legacy comfort levels".


"Since the commencement of the CVC investigation into the College Builder software procurement case in mid-2020, there has been an escalation of resistance from some faculty members who wanted to maintain the status quo, with


anonymous and misleading complaints disseminated via leaks to media, and letters to the MoE. Attempts at reform have been scuttled by obstructing the functioning of Academic Council.

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While you have never taken tough action to address the root cause of the governance problems at IIM-C (as was supported by Boards at other IIMs many years ago to bring about constructive change), when faced with this escalation, you have abdicated your responsibility to support this change despite it being urgently required in the best interests of the Institute. Instead, you have chosen an appeasement policy with some faculty, rolling back reform attempts and attempting to downplay irregularities uncovered during my tenure. Since the start of my tenure, you have assumed executive powers to diminish the role of the Director and of the faculty by persistent intervention, although the post of the Chairman is a non-executive part-time role"

In an earlier interview with ET she had said, "If we do not transform and reform, we will be left behind. We lost the opportunity of a gradual yet consistent change long ago," Seth told ET in an interview.

In December, the faculty sent a letter to Amit Khare, secretary at the Ministry of Education, expressing "grave concerns about the current state of affairs at the institute, accumulated over the current director's tenure, the result of a style of functioning that is arbitrary, discriminatory and having a very narrow vision".

Seth, who was Pamplin Professor of Management at Virginia Tech in the US before she joined IIM-C as its first female head in November 2018, said she is tackling and resolving fundamental issues of good academic governance practices at the institute for transparency, accountability and meritocracy.

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