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IIM-Calcutta director quits, second in 2 years

Differences with board chairperson, say sources; predecessor cited same reason

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THE DIRECTOR of the Indian Institute of Management-Calcutta (IIM-C), Uttam Kumar Sarkar, is learnt to have resigned over differences with the Board chairperson, making him the second institute head in two years to leave before completing a five-year term.

Sarkar is learnt to have resigned on August 23, and his resignation letter was circulated among all members of the Board of Governors (BoG) last week. Sources told *The Indian Express* that the resignation hasn't been accepted yet and is likely to be discussed at the next Board meeting scheduled for this week, on September 8.

Sarkar was appointed director on August 18, 2021, and still had



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Although Sarkar, in his resignation letter, cited personal reasons for his decision, sources in the institute pointed to Sarkar's

unhappiness with Chairman Srikrishna Kulkarni's "interference" in the institute's affairs and in the implementation of key projects.

"There are projects that are stalled, and it can be frustrating for an institution head (to see them making no headway). For instance, the hostel expansion (project) has been stalled, which has come in the way of

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increasing the institute's student capacity," a source said.

It's not clear what the exact points of differences were between the two. When reached for a comment, Kulkarni said he was currently "out of the country" and did not wish to say anything more. Sarkar did not respond to calls or text messages.

Incidentally, Sarkar's predecessor, Anju Seth, who was the first woman director of IIM-C, quit in March 2021, citing a "breakdown of confidence" between her and Kulkarni. She had more than a year left of her term.

In her resignation letter, Seth had accused Kulkarni of running a smear campaign against her and of "maligning and denigrating" her publicly with the support of the board. She also wrote that he had 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".

At that time, many in the IIM community had seen the confrontation between Seth and the Board as stemming from the shift in power dynamics brought by the new IIM Act of 2018. The 2018 law granted unbridled powers and autonomy to the Board of Governors of all 20 IIMs, and the government relinquished complete control.

Recently, during the monsoon session of Parliament, the education ministry introduced an amendment to the IIM Act, which takes back many of the

powers from the Board, giving the government a greater say in auditing the functioning of IIMs, ordering probes, and appointing as well as removing directors.

Although the amendment was passed in both Houses during the monsoon session, and the changes have been notified in a gazette notification, the education ministry hasn't framed new rules (under the amended Act) to make the changes effective. Until then, for practical purposes, the Board still remains powerful.

Sarkar, who specialises in information management systems, is an alumnus of IIT-Kharagpur. He did his B.Tech (1987), M.Tech (1989), and PhD (1994) from IIT-Kharagpur's computer science and engineering department. He's been teaching at IIM-C since 1997 and also served as dean of new initiatives and external relations, from April 2015 to April 2018, at the institute.

Kulkarni has been the IIM-C Chairman since 2017. Although his term finished in November last year, he's currently on a one-year extension approved by the Board of Governors, on the instruction of the education ministry. The latter's instruction had come amidst deliberations within the government on changes in the IIM Act, mainly on how the director and chairperson of IIMs should be appointed. He earlier served as a director at Cybernetic Research Labs Pvt Ltd in Bengaluru.