

Academia divided over Supreme Court ruling on OBC quota

Academic experts in India's silicon hub are divided over the Supreme Court judgement Thursday upholding 27 percent reservation for students of other backward classes (OBCs) in central educational and professional institutions.

Indian Institute of Management-Bangalore (IIM-B) former director P.G. Apte said OBCs do not really need this kind of concession, as they were not economically poor.

'I don't think OBC students have to be favoured with this kind of reservation, as majority of them and their parents are well-to-do and have moved up the social strata over the five-six decades (after independence),' Apte told IANS.

'While there is need to continue with the 15 percent reservation for SCs (scheduled castes) and 7.5 percent for STs (scheduled tribes) for social and historical reasons, extending the same to OBCs will put pressure on faculty, infrastructure and general category students,' he said.

Though the apex court delivered the order with a string of riders for effective implementation, Apte said professional institutes such as Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) and IIMs would face severe faculty shortage, inadequate infrastructure and resource crunch unless the government steps in and expands the capacity in time.

'Teaching quality and faculty availability for enlarging the scope will be a challenge.

'Though the government has assured the top court of implementing the Reservation in Admission Act, 2006 in a phased manner, it will be a tall order to hire and retain the best faculty due to poor compensation and multiple choices in the private sector and overseas,' Apte noted.

As IIM-B director Pankaj Chandra is travelling, officiating director and faculty member in-charge of academics said admissions for the new academic year 2008-09 have already been completed and additional in-take to implement the quota rule would be possible only in the next (2009-10) year.

'We have already completed the admission process for this academic year. We have not made any provision for OBC quota,' the official said but declined to be named.

'Even if the HRD ministry directs us to implement the law in the light of the court's ruling, it would not be possible, as we need to first expand infrastructure in the campus such as class rooms, hostel and course material.

'We have to also hire more faculty members, which is a daunting task due to shortage,' he said.

Former [Bangalore](#) University vice-chancellor M.S. Thimmappa lauded the apex court for a 'balanced' judgement, taking into consideration all stakeholders.

Terming the judgement and the central act pragmatic, Thimmappa said since central universities, IITs and IIMs were part of the government and funded by the exchequer, OBCs should have access to best quality education and other facilities should be given to the community for social inclusive growth.

'It is better late than never. If deprived sections are denied opportunity for higher education, including professional courses, it will lead to inequity and social distance, which might lead to social unrest,' Thimmappa told IANS.

'I hope the law is implemented soon to reduce the gap. The court order will help majority of the OBCs as the creamy layer has been left out.'

Lauding the apex bench for addressing the concerns of the general category, Thimmappa said the directive to the government for a periodic review of the reservation for OBCs every five years, barring children of bureaucrats, members of parliament and legislative assemblies (read elite) and implementation in phased manner would go a long way in assuaging the enraged feelings of other communities, especially the forward classes.

'I hope the government, especially the HRD ministry will comply with its affidavit in the court that the act will be implemented in a phased manner and provide commensurate infrastructure, enhancing capacity to protect general category admissions and sufficient faculty to maintain standards and reputation of institutions, especially IITs and IIMs,' Thimmappa asserted.

Reactions from college and university students are also mixed.

The central government came under flak from general category students for taking away 27 percent of seats from merit quota and increasing the reserved quota to 49.5 percent, including 22.5 per cent to SCs and STs.

'We have no objection for giving equal opportunities to OBC students. But it cannot be at our expense,' said R. Murali, a student preparing for entrance tests to secure a seat in professional colleges under general category.

'Even among OBCs, it is only those living in cities and towns who will corner the quota seats. What about those OBCs living in rural areas and districts? How will they benefit from central universities and premier institutes like IITs and IIMs, as there will be scramble for admission even under the OBC quota,' Murali said.

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