Higher Education, Low Regulation

What is the issue?

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- The University Grants Commission (UGC) notification, that higher educational institutions once selected for being developed into world-class universities, shall be freed of regulatory clutches.
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- This is a public admission that **regulation is a major stumbling block in promoting excellence in education.**
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What are the different phases of regulations in India?

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- The first three universities in modern India were established in 1857, whereas the first regulator of higher education, the UGC, came about only in 1956, though a loose coordination mechanism.
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- The **Inter University Board (IUB),** a precursor to the present Association of Indian Universities (AIU), had come into existence in 1925.
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- Thus, **in the first phase (1925 or prior) spanning over seven decades, higher education in India grew on its own,** in a self-regulatory environment.
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- This period saw the establishment of 23 universities, all of these regarded as better institutions, so much so that 13 of them (or 57%) are listed in the top 100 universities in the MHRD-led **National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) listing.**
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- **The second phase (1926-1956)** that commenced with the formation of the IUB lasted for three decades, during which universities continued to function as autonomous bodies, with a loose coordination and consultation mechanism to guide them.

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- **The third phase** (1957-1992) began with Parliament enacting a law to establish the **University Grants Commission (UGC)** as an autonomous body, to aid and advise the government on higher education policy and financing, and to coordinate and maintain standards in higher education.
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- It used its financing function as a mighty lever to curtail the powers of universities to take their own decisions.
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- During this 36 year-period, the number of universities grew rapidly to 150 — but only a fourth of them today find place in the NIRF list of the top 100 universities.
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- The current and **fourth phase began in 1992,** with the establishment of a series of new regulators like the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), etc., and with the empowerment of existing professional bodies like the Medical Council of India (MCI), the Council of Architecture (CoA), the Bar Council of India (BCI), etc., to regulate higher education falling under their professional domains.
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- The phase is characterised by an **intense regulation of higher education by multiple regulators.**
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- This period also witnessed galloping growth in public and private universities.
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- 589 universities have been established since 1992 a mere 6% were good enough to find a place in the top 100 list.
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What is the flaw in regulation?

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- The elaborate regulatory mechanism working to set standards in higher education, and to inspect to ensure adherence by higher educational institutions, **has only proven counter-productive.**
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- It has not only manifestly failed to promote excellence; it has even failed to check the rapid and unabated growth of a large number of grossly unequipped, mediocre higher educational institutions.

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- The **absence of regulators did not necessarily destroy the universities,** but too close a monitoring and micro-management system by one or many regulators has not necessarily helped universities improve their performance.
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- The fact that a significantly larger proportion of the IIMs (45%), IITs (69%) find place in the top 100 list. This is when compared to the low proportion in the case of Central (24%), Deemed (20%), State (6%) and Private (2%) universities, clearly proves that institutions outside the purview of prominent regulators are better off than those under their direct command.
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- Such proof is more than a wake-up call for regulators in higher education, facing urgent existential challenges.
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- The regulators need reform and these reforms need to come from within.
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Source: Indian Express

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