The Churn in the Higher Education Sector

What is the issue?

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- Multiple court intervensions like in the “IDUs case” have been dictating the scheme of things in the higher education sector.
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- More clarity is needed on the regulatory framework in place, for ensuring hazzle free functioning of institutions.
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What are IDUs?

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- The need for promoting and strengthening institutions that had high standards in specialised academic fields was felt.
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- Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, and Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi was some such institutions.
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- While it was recognized that their expertise made them deserving of university states, their classification as such was not done for historical reasons.
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- Hence, the concept of ‘Institutions Deemed to be Universities” (IDU) was invented and UGC Act empowered the central government to grant this recognition to any deserving higher educational institution.
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What was the problem?

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- IDU clause was for a targeted support for specific high-profile institutions.

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- But this approach was diluted by subsequent liberal conferment of IDU status.
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- The reason was that, this status meant, complete autonomy over admission norms and fees and in starting and closing study programmes.
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- Significantly, their numbers swelled from two in 1958 to 43 by 2000 and to 126 by 2009, which resulted in alarming commercialisation.
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- Consequently, a PIL was filed in 2006 alleging blatant commercialisation of education by IDUs and pleading for an effective regulatory mechanism.
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- Hence, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) constituted the Tadon committee in 2009, to review the status of all the 126 institutions.
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What did the Tandon Committee report say?

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- Tandon report followed a transparent and criterion based approach for its institutional review that focused on the following parameters:\n\n
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  - Broad-based and multi-disciplinary work
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  - Compliance with the UGC Act and guidelines
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  - Institutionalised governance structure
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  - Quality and innovative teaching-learning processes
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  - Meaningful research with a societal impact
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  - Transparency in admissions, course structure and fees
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- In its report, Tandon committee concluded that only 38 out of the 126 universities deserved IDU status and that a remaining 44 had scope for reaching there.

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- For the 3rd category of 44 institutions, the stripping of IDU recognition and reverting them to the status of being affiliate colleges was suggested.
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What were the subsequent judicial interventions?

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- While MHRD accepted the Tandon Committee report and proposed to delist the last 44 institutions in 200, the court had stayed such an action.
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- Subsequently, the court ordered the UGC to freshly evaluate all the institutions independent of the Tandon committee report.
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- This was because, the task of "coordination and maintenance of standards" in higher education was conceived to be rested solely in the UGC Act.
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- The MHRD's argument that since it had the power to approve IDU status, it could also withdraw approval if conditions aren't met wasn't accepted.
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- Currently, only 1 institution of the 126, has been derecognized thus far and there is no clarity on the government's power to crack down on erring IDUs.
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What is the way ahead?

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- The UGC must engage itself with policy formulation alone and base its decisions regarding institutions on the ratings of the accreditation bodies.
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- The National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) or any other body charged with the responsibility must be completely autonomous.
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- There is also a need to regulate state private universities as their numbers are spiralling out of control ever since the tightening of the IDU route.
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- Clarity is needed on who are the primary regulators for distance education, which is currently very ambiguous.
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- While the Tandon Committee Report has been brushed aside on technical

grounds, they have flagged critical issues.
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- This calls for immediate further pondering on the regulatory structure, to weed out underperformers and incentivise good institutions.
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Source: Indian Express

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