UGC Circular on Conduct Rules

Why in news?

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The University Grants Commission, in a recent circular, directed central universities to follow Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules 1964 on the conduct of faculty.

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What does it imply?

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- The Conduct Rules forbid civil service officers from expressing any view critical of the government or its policies.
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- The circular means that university teachers will also now not be able to express their views freely.
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- E.g. Prominent economists at central universities must be silent on the Food Security Act being economically unsound.
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- Historians may not question the official version of history even if it is riddled with problems and falsehoods.
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- Environmental scientists questioning environmental/forest policy would risk being in violation of the Rules.
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- No professor can raise her voice against a government overlooking growing vigilantism.
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- They cannot get involved in any political activity, strike work or even publish without the permission of the government.
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- The Rules will prohibit university teachers from speaking to the media, even anonymously or pseudonymously.
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- Implementing Conduct Rules in central universities will thus rob universities

of free exchange of ideas and critical analysis which are, in fact, critical to an intellectual arena.
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Why is the decision contentious?

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- **Roles** - The civil services and academia at the universities vary greatly in essence, function and their respective roles.
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- The civil service's cooperation (loyalty) is crucial to the implementation of the government's executive decisions.
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- But this is not really the case when it comes to university professors' cooperation.
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- **Autonomy** - The central universities are guided by their respective Acts of Parliament and their own statutes and ordinances.
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- The Acts are diverse precisely because they are meant to preserve the institutional and functional autonomy.
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- The UGC plays a regulatory role, but it is also tasked with protecting and furthering the autonomy of central universities.
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- **Legal** - University professors "are neither members of a service nor do they hold a civil post under the Union nor they are in the service of local or other authority".
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- This was clearly stated by the Allahabad High Court in its ruling in 2015.
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- All these roles and legalities stand in contradiction to the recent circular of UGC which seems to be behaving more as the Centre's messenger.
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Source: Financial Express

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