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Negotiating Federalism in Higher Education

Context

- Higher education has emerged as a significant arena through which the evolving nature of **Indian federalism** is being negotiated.
- Issues relating to **regulatory authority, language policy, curriculum design, public funding, and digital governance** have transformed higher education from a sectoral concern into a constitutional and political issue.
- As a result, the governance of higher education increasingly reflects broader debates concerning the distribution of power between the Union government and State governments.

Instances of Centre's Growing Influence in Higher Education

- **Regulatory and Institutional Expansion**

- Although education falls under the Concurrent List, the governance framework increasingly favours the Centre.
- Through the Ministry of Education, the University Grants Commission (UGC), accreditation bodies, and other national regulators, the Union government exercises considerable influence over universities and colleges across the country.

- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**

- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a major restructuring of higher education.
- Reforms such as four-year undergraduate programmes, the Academic Bank of Credits, institutional restructuring, multidisciplinary universities, and internationalisation seek to enhance quality and competitiveness.
- However, these measures also extend the Centre's role into areas traditionally shaped by State governments.

- **Financial Centralisation**

- The Centre's influence is reinforced through funding mechanisms.
- Programmes such as the **Institutions of Eminence** initiative and research support under the **Anusandhan National Research Foundation** increasingly connect financial assistance with compliance to nationally designed reforms.
- Consequently, funding has become an important tool of policy coordination and influence.

- **Digital Governance and Standardisation**

- Digital platforms such as the **Academic Bank of Credits** have expanded the Centre's capacity to standardise, coordinate, and monitor educational systems across States.
- While these mechanisms improve efficiency and student mobility, they also strengthen central oversight over higher education governance.

Centre-State Tensions in Higher Education

- **Language and Curriculum Disputes**

- The implementation of the NEP 2020 has generated significant political contestation.
- In Tamil Nadu, opposition to the **three-language formula** and related UGC directives reflects concerns regarding linguistic identity and State autonomy.
- Such disputes demonstrate how educational policy often intersects with regional politics and cultural aspirations.

- **Governance and Vice-Chancellor Appointments**

- Tensions have also emerged regarding the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and the role of Governors in university administration.

- States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and West Bengal have witnessed disputes over the extent of gubernatorial powers and State authority in higher education governance.

• **Concerns Regarding Regulatory Reforms**

- Proposals under the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, aimed at replacing existing regulatory bodies, have generated concerns regarding the gradual erosion of State authority.
- In States with strong regional political identities, such reforms are viewed as constitutional questions concerning autonomy and the balance of power within the Indian Union.

Strategic Adaptation and Negotiated Federalism

• **Selective Adoption of Reforms**

- Centre-State relations in higher education are not purely adversarial.
- Many States have adopted a strategy of selective adaptation, implementing aspects of national reforms that align with local priorities while resisting measures perceived as encroaching upon State authority.
- This reflects a model of negotiated federalism rather than outright confrontation.

• **Internationalisation as a Shared Objective**

- Several States are actively seeking to become regional education hubs by promoting partnerships with foreign institutions.
- Higher education is increasingly viewed as a tool for global visibility, economic growth, and knowledge-driven development.

• **Role of States in Implementation**

- The debate surrounding international branch campuses highlights the interdependence of the Centre and States.
- While the Union government establishes the regulatory framework, implementation depends heavily on States through administrative clearances, infrastructure support, and investment facilitation.
- This ensures that States remain important stakeholders in shaping educational outcomes.

Conclusion

- Higher education has become a key arena through which the changing dynamics of **Indian federalism** are expressed.
- The expansion of national regulatory frameworks, funding mechanisms, and digital governance has strengthened the Centre's influence over higher education.
- At the same time, States continue to assert their role through resistance, negotiation, and selective adaptation.

- The future of higher education governance will depend on **the ability of the Centre and States to balance national objectives** with regional aspirations, ensuring that educational reforms strengthen both institutional excellence and the federal spirit of the Indian Union.

Negotiating Federalism in Higher Education FAQs

Q1. Why has higher education become important in Indian federalism?

Ans. Higher education has become important because it reflects the changing balance of power between the Centre and the States.

Q2. What is the role of the NEP 2020 in higher education governance?

Ans. The NEP 2020 seeks to reform higher education through structural, academic, and regulatory changes across the country.

Q3. Why have some States opposed aspects of the NEP 2020?

Ans. Some States have opposed aspects of the NEP 2020 because they view them as affecting State autonomy and regional identity.

Q4. How does the Centre influence higher education in India?

Ans. The Centre influences higher education through regulatory bodies, funding mechanisms, and digital governance initiatives.

Q5. What is meant by strategic adaptation in higher education governance?

Ans. Strategic adaptation refers to States selectively adopting national reforms according to their local priorities and political contexts.

Source: **The Hindu**

How ICMR is Rewiring The Health Ecosystem

Context

- As India marches toward *Viksit Bharat 2047*, the health sector faces a fundamental question: how to build a system that is not merely reactive, but **anticipatory, equitable, and innovation-driven**.
- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) — India's apex biomedical research body — has responded with a series of structural and strategic reforms, drawing lessons from COVID-19 and aligning science with national public health priorities.
- This article highlights how the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is transforming India's health ecosystem through institutional reforms, technology-driven innovation, interdisciplinary research, and stronger integration with public health systems.

- It examines how ICMR is shifting from a reactive research body to a proactive health intelligence and innovation platform aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Strategic Reorientation: From Silos to Systems

• Institutional Restructuring

- ICMR has expanded the mandates of several of its institutes, repositioning them as interdisciplinary hubs rather than narrowly focused entities.
- Key domains now include digital health and data science, child health, and women's health — areas that reflect India's evolving disease burden and technological capabilities.

• Regional Research Network

- A network of **National Institutes of Health Research** (NIHRs) is being created across the country — from Dibrugarh in the Northeast to Jodhpur in the West.
- These institutes will embed themselves within state and district health systems to conduct operational research that is both locally relevant and practically actionable.

• From Projects to Solutions

- The funding ecosystem is being redesigned to move beyond piecemeal project support toward an integrated research continuum — one that funds solutions, not just studies.
- The **National Health Research Programme** (NHRP) anchors this shift by identifying 13 priority areas including antimicrobial resistance (AMR), tuberculosis, mental health, nutrition, and emergency care.

Technology as a Transformative Force

• AI in Diagnostics and Surveillance

- AI-enabled tools are already supporting frontline health workers — notably in **tuberculosis screening, diabetic retinopathy detection**, and nutritional monitoring.
- This is helping bridge the longstanding urban-rural healthcare divide.

• Innovation at the Frontier

- The **i-Drone initiative** — initially used for vaccine delivery — has expanded to transport critical medical supplies, demonstrating how technology can overcome geographic barriers.
- Advances across **medtech**, from medical devices to next-generation vaccines and therapeutics, are enabling more targeted, patient-centric interventions.

• From Lab to Market

- Platforms like **MedTechMitra** and the **Medical Innovations-Patent Mitra** initiative are accelerating the journey from publicly funded research to affordable, accessible commercial products.
- The integration of traditional knowledge systems with evidence-based models is also gaining international recognition.

Impact on Ground: Towards Universal Access

- Reforms are showing measurable public health outcomes.
- The **India Hypertension Control Initiative** has demonstrated how evidence-based strategies can transform chronic disease management at scale.
- Mission-mode programmes in emergency care — including **mobile stroke units** and **rapid cardiac response systems** — are redefining survival outcomes.
- Expanded diagnostic networks and indigenous technologies are strengthening early detection across diseases from cancer to infectious outbreaks.
- All of this aligns closely with the **National Health Policy 2017**, which emphasises preventive care, universal access, and quality of care.

The Road to 2047

- ICMR's vision is to serve as a catalyst — connecting researchers, clinicians, policymakers, and industry.
- The roadmap to 2047 will be defined by advances in digital health, biomanufacturing, and sustainable development, with strong emphasis on capacity building and global collaboration.

Conclusion

- ICMR's reimagination — from a research body to a **national health intelligence system** — reflects a mature understanding that science must serve society.
- When data meets decisions and innovation meets equity, the aspiration of a healthy, developed India becomes genuinely achievable.

How ICMR is Rewiring The Health Ecosystem FAQs

Q1. Why is ICMR restructuring its research ecosystem?

Ans. ICMR is restructuring its ecosystem to promote interdisciplinary research, address emerging health challenges, and align scientific efforts with national public health priorities.

Q2. How is technology contributing to ICMR's health reforms?

Ans. ICMR is leveraging AI, drone technology, digital health tools, and indigenous innovations to improve diagnostics, surveillance, healthcare delivery, and accessibility.

Q3. What is the purpose of the National Health Research Programme (NHRP)?

Ans. The NHRP focuses research efforts on priority health challenges such as tuberculosis, antimicrobial resistance, mental health, nutrition, and emergency care.

Q4. How are ICMR's reforms improving healthcare delivery on the ground?

Ans. Initiatives such as hypertension control programmes, expanded diagnostics, mobile stroke units, and indigenous technologies are enhancing prevention, treatment, and healthcare access.

Q5. What is ICMR's vision for India's healthcare system by 2047?

Ans. ICMR aims to build an innovation-driven, equitable, and preventive healthcare ecosystem by connecting researchers, policymakers, clinicians, industry, and communities.

Source: TH

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