

Recognition of universities will be revoked if they flout discrimination rules: Centre

In case of non-compliance, an institution can be debarred from participating in UGC schemes or from offering degrees; UGC can also take additional punitive measures on a case-to-case basis

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The Union government informed the Supreme Court on Friday that a new set of Regulations to wipe out discrimination, especially on the basis of religion or caste, will give the University Grants Commission (UGC) "teeth and power" to derecognise non-compliant higher education institutions.

"Recognition will be cancelled if they do not comply," Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, informed a Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant.

The top law officer said the draft UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations of 2025 have already been published in the UGC website for inviting public comments and suggestions. Thereafter, it would be notified in accordance with law.

The court was hearing a petition filed by the mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, represented by senior advocate Indira Jaising and advocates Prasanna S. and Disha Wadekar, who had appealed to the Supreme Court to act



Seeking strict action: The court was hearing a petition filed by the mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

against the "rampant" caste discrimination in universities. Rohith Vemula, a Ph.D. scholar at Hyderabad Central University, and Payal Tadvi, a tribal student of Topiwala National Medical College, died by suicide in January 2016 and May 2019, respectively, after being subject to on-campus caste bias.

The draft Regulations describe its objective as the eradication of discrimination on the basis of religion, race, sex, place of birth, or caste, particularly against the members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, socially and educationally backward classes, economically weaker sections, or any of them, and to promote full equity and inclusion

amongst the stakeholders in higher education institutions (HEI).

If non-compliance is established, an HEI can be debarred from participating in UGC schemes or from offering degrees, open and distance learning and online programmes. The draft Regulations also give the UGC power to remove errant HEIs from the list of recognised universities maintained under Section 2(f) of the UGC Act, 1956. It has proposed the imposition of Section 12B (prohibition on the grant of funds to universities) on HEIs found unfit under the draft Regulations.

The Regulations also allow the UGC to take "additional punitive actions" on a case-to-case basis.

Ms. Jaising said there have been at least 18 deaths by suicides in HEIs in the past 14 months.

Mr. Mehta said the draft Regulations of 2025 takes care of the lacuna by proposing 'Equity Committees' in HEIs with members drawn from civil society, students and faculty. The draft legislation showed one member to be a woman and one member each from the SC and ST category. Justice Kant assured that the top court was dedicated to facilitating the creation of a robust mechanism to prevent and stop discrimination.

"There have been violations. The compliance is low. Probably it may have been due to the lack of sufficient teeth and power for the UGC. Once UGC's hands are strengthened, especially to cancel the recognition of HEIs, things will start moving in the right direction," Justice Kant addressed Ms. Jaising.

Ms. Jaising said the IITs and the IIMs and some of the national law schools had not even responded to a communication by the UGC, on the basis of January 3 order of the court, seeking data on the Equal Opportunity Cells set up by the HEIs.