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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# VBSA Bill – Higher Education Reform or Regulatory Overreach?

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24 March 2026

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# VBSA Bill – Higher Education Reform or Regulatory Overreach?

The Indian Express 24 March 2026 **GS2**

**IE** The Indian Express | MAINS RELEVANCE: **GS Paper 2**



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Education is on the Concurrent List. Does creating a single apex higher education regulator under the VBSA Bill violate federal principles?"

## VBSA Bill – Higher Education Reform or Regulatory Overreach?

Indian Express editorial critiques the proposed Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan (VBSA) Bill, 2025, which seeks to create a single apex regulatory body for higher education by consolidating UGC, AICTE, and other regulators. The editorial raises concerns about over-centralisation, erosion of institutional autonomy for IITs and IIMs, and potential encroachment on state powers.

### WHAT THE VBSA BILL PROPOSES

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan (VBSA) Bill aims to overhaul higher education governance by:

FEATURE	CURRENT SYSTEM	VBSA PROPOSAL
Regulatory bodies	Multiple (UGC, AICTE, NCTE, BCI, MCI)	Single apex body – VBSA
University grants	UGC (est. 1956)	VBSA
Technical education	AICTE (est. 1945)	VBSA
Teacher education	NCTE	VBSA
Institutional autonomy	Varying degrees	Standardised framework
State role	Significant (Concurrent List)	Potentially reduced

This is a key plank of the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, which recommended replacing multiple regulators with a single Higher Education Commission of India (HECI).

## THE CENTRALISATION CONCERN

### Education is on the Concurrent List

- **Entry 25, Concurrent List:** Education (including technical, medical, universities)
- Both Centre and states have legislative competence
- States run ~70% of higher education institutions
- Central universities, IITs, IIMs, NITs are centrally funded — but represent a small fraction of total institutions

### What States Fear

- Loss of control over state universities
- VBSA setting curriculum and assessment standards that override state preferences
- Reduced ability to address regional needs (local language instruction, state-specific professional courses)
- **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal** have historically resisted centralisation of education governance

## INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY — IITS AND IIMS AT RISK

The editorial raises particular concern about **IITs and IIMs**:

- These institutions have thrived precisely because of **operational autonomy**
- IIMs gained complete autonomy under the IIM Act, 2017 — freed from UGC and AICTE oversight
- IITs operate under the Institutes of Technology Act, 1961 with significant self-governance
- A single regulator could **re-impose standardised rules** on these diverse institutions

### The Autonomy Track Record

INSTITUTION TYPE	CURRENT AUTONOMY	VBSA RISK
IIMs	Full (IIM Act 2017)	May come under VBSA
IITs	High (IoT Act 1961)	Standards may be imposed
Central Universities	Moderate (UGC)	Unchanged or tighter
State Universities	Low	Further reduced
Private Universities	Moderate (state acts)	Potentially higher oversight

## ARGUMENTS FOR THE VBSA

Despite the concerns, there are legitimate reform arguments:

### Regulatory Fragmentation

- India has 1,100+ universities and 43,000+ colleges regulated by **multiple overlapping bodies**
- UGC, AICTE, NCTE, BCI, MCI/NMC each have different standards, inspection regimes, and compliance requirements
- A college offering both arts and engineering programmes must comply with both UGC and AICTE — creating regulatory burden

### Quality Gaps

- India has no university in the global top 100 (QS/THE rankings)
- Many institutions are “degree mills” with poor learning outcomes
- Accreditation coverage is low — only ~30% of colleges are NAAC accredited
- A single regulator could enforce uniform quality standards

### NEP 2020 Vision

- NEP envisioned a “light but tight” regulatory framework
- HECI/VBSA as the overarching body with four verticals: regulation, accreditation, funding, academic standards
- Outcome-based regulation rather than input-based inspection

## THE WAY FORWARD

The editorial recommends:

- 1 **Preserve IIT/IIM autonomy:** Explicitly exempt institutions with proven governance from VBSA oversight
- 2 **State consultation:** Mandatory consultation with states before notifying VBSA rules (education is Concurrent)
- 3 **Decentralised implementation:** VBSA should set broad standards; states should implement
- 4 **Sunset clause:** Review VBSA’s impact after 5 years before making it permanent
- 5 **Academic freedom safeguards:** VBSA should not control curriculum content or research agendas

**UPSC RELEVANCE**

VBSA Bill, UGC (1956), AICTE (1945), NCTE, NEP 2020, IIM Act 2017, Concurrent List Entry 25, NAAC

**MAINS GS-II:**

Education policy, federalism, Centre-State relations, institutional autonomy, governance reforms

**INTERVIEW:**

Should India have one education regulator or many? What are the risks of centralisation?

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

### VBSA BILL:

Full name: Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan Bill, 2025

Purpose: Single apex higher education regulator

Replaces: UGC, AICTE, NCTE (proposed consolidation)

Based on: NEP 2020 recommendation for HECI

### CURRENT REGULATORS:

UGC: University Grants Commission (est. 1956, under UGC Act)

AICTE: All India Council for Technical Education (est. 1945)

NCTE: National Council for Teacher Education

NMC: National Medical Commission (replaced MCI in 2020)

BCI: Bar Council of India (legal education)

NAAC: National Assessment and Accreditation Council

### INDIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION:

Universities: 1,100+

Colleges: 43,000+

Students enrolled: 4.33 crore (GER: 28.4%)

NEP 2020 GER target: 50% by 2035

NAAC accredited: ~30% of institutions

### CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS:

Entry 25, Concurrent List: Education

Entry 63, 64, 65, 66, Union List: Central institutions, coordination of standards

42nd Amendment (1976): Moved education from State to Concurrent List

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

IIM Act 2017: Granted IIMs degree-granting powers and complete autonomy

IoT Act 1961: Governs IITs as institutions of national importance

NEP 2020: Replaced NPE 1986/92; recommends multidisciplinary education

India's QS top university: IIT Bombay (~149th globally, 2025)

Sources: [Indian Express](#) , [PRS Legislative Research](#)

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