

Medical colleges: MCI takes on health ministry

In A Written Report, It Accuses Ministry Of Approving Colleges Despite MCI Objections

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Mumbai: In an unprecedented move, the Medical Council of India (MCI) has put in writing several accusations against the Union ministry of health for trampling on its autonomy and granting permission to start medical colleges despite the council recommending otherwise. Incidentally, the government is planning to scrap this autonomous body which was set up in 1956 with a view to drawing a road map for medical education.

In its 60-page report, the MCI notes that "on several occasions" its decision to withhold permission, based on "deficiencies of teach-

ing faculty, clinical material, infrastructure etc" have been overruled by the ministry "without reason". It is this "erosion of autonomy", it avers, that has caused more "damage to medical education" in the country.

When questioned on the charges, former health minister Anbumani Ramadoss claimed that the MCI had become "a law unto itself", and that he had received several complaints of corruption against it. "MCI often refuses to carry out inspections when directed by the ministry," he said. "We were hence forced to set up our own inspection team made up of senior doctors who were sent to colleges and then asked to send their observations to

the ministry." The PM-appointed Yash Pal committee, in its recent assignment to study all regulatory bodies in higher education, recommended the setting up of one umbrella body to oversee the entire higher education space. However, the MCI is against this, and has responded to the committee in its report by observing that all would have been well if "greater and meaningful autonomy" had been granted to it. Hitting out hard at Ramadoss' alleged high-handedness, the MCI report says that each time it questioned the ministry, Ramadoss would remind them that the council existed only because it was "formed by the ministry to assist the ministry".

Another thing which has not gone down well with the MCI is the Yash Pal panel's recommendation to do away with "inspection raj in education" (the council conducts a physical inspection of colleges and their facilities before granting permission to function). Says the MCI report, "Over a plethora of inspections, it has been observed that institutions make tall claims regarding availability of infrastructure, functional hospitals of 300 beds availability of teaching faculty and clinical material...." The report says this happens even with state governments, which blithely certify that managements which wish to start colleges have the necessary infrastructure.