

# Sibal's higher education Bill clears big hurdle

Contentious issue of inclusion of medical education resolved, claims HRD Minister



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Union Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal has maintained that the contentious issue of inclusion of medical education under the proposed National Commission of Higher Education and Research (NCHER) has been "resolved" and the draft Bill will now be placed before the Cabinet. "The matter has been resolved with the Health Ministry," he said, but refused to elaborate further.

With the approaching Monsoon Session of Parliament, speculation is rife on the pending fate of 13-14 legislations and most importantly the NCHER Bill, and whether or not medical education would come under the purview of the proposed body.

The tussle between the HRD Ministry and Health Ministry on the jurisdiction of medical education had erupted two years ago, with the Prime Minister's Office later stepping in to resolve the issue.

Sibal had wanted to bring medical education sector under the overarching sway of the NCHER. But the Health Ministry, being not in favour, wriggled out of the HRD proposal. The Health Ministry has been insisting that since medical education was closely

linked with health infrastructure, it should come under the ambit of the proposed National Commission on Human Resource for Health.

Sibal's attempts to include legal education system also did not succeed. However, Sibal maintained that the issue of medical education has been resolved, which would first go to the Cabinet and would then be introduced in Parliament.

With this, all eyes are riveted on the fate of hyped Bill NCHER. Said to revolutionise higher education in India, it continues to languish in the face of differences from State Governments and Ministries, for the past two years.

According to sources in the Ministry, Sibal's dream Bill aimed at ensuring quality and accountability in higher education, is "stuck up" in the stage of inter-ministerial discussions and ensuing cold war between the Health and HRD Ministries.

The Bill is also facing opposition from certain State Governments. The erstwhile Governments of West Bengal and Chhattisgarh among others had also put their foot down the draft for the National Council of Higher Education Research Bill, saying it would lead to "over centralisation" of higher education thereby reducing the authority of State Governments.