

NCST notice to IIT-Bombay director over lack of mental health support for SC/ST students

ST panel seeks action-taken report in 3 days, failing which it may exercise powers of civil court to issue summons

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The ST Commission, in the notice issued to Subhasis Chaudhuri, said that if the report was not submitted in the stipulated time, it might go on to exercise its powers as Civil Court. File | Photo Credit: Prashant Waydande

Months after it launched an investigation into the lack of mental health support for SC/ST students within the Indian Institute of Technology in Bombay, the National



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The ST Commission, in the notice issued to Subhasis Chaudhuri, said that if the report was not submitted in the stipulated time, it might go on to exercise its powers as Civil Court to summon any and all officials concerned, with regard to this matter.

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The NCST took up the matter for investigation in June last year, after a complaint from the Ambedkar Periyar Phule Study Circle in IIT Bombay raised issues with the lack of SC/ST counsellors in the Student Wellness Centre of the campus, and the head counsellor publicly holding anti-reservation sentiments.

The students attached a Facebook post of the head counsellor from 2015, where she said she was signing a public petition to remove caste-based reservations, while questioning the merit of the students who entered elite institutes through reservation. According to the complaint, the issue at hand was public and available for viewing until last year.

The complaint added that such posts made students feel intimidated and uncomfortable in seeking mental health counselling from the Student Wellness Centre, because a large chunk of the discrimination they faced on campus was due to anti-reservation sentiments. The students alleged that the administration had “chosen to ignore” their complaints against the head counsellor.

After taking up the case, the NCST had also issued a notice to the Ministry of Education in November last year, seeking a report within 15 days. The Commission has sought an explanation from the IIT-Bombay administration.

Not sensitised



communities, rendering them inadequate to offer support or, at times, aggravating students' troubles".

The Study Circle, in its complaint to the NCST, noted that an additional counselling programme called *Bandhu*, set up by the alumni of the institute, also "deliberately excluded caste-based mental health issues from their website and programmes".

It added that even this programme had not added caste-based mental health issues in its purview, despite multiple complaints.

In the complaint, the students sought that the NCST ensured the termination of the head counsellor concerned; direct IIT Bombay to hire expert mental health professionals who were competent to deal with caste-based issues faced by the students; and issue directions to conduct compulsory caste sensitisation workshops for all employees, students and staffers on campus.

The student outfit also sought that the NCST ensured expert counsellors with SC/ST/OBC representation across all IITs in the country.



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