2. Draft Indian Statistical Institute Bill 2025- Polity

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the draft Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2025 for public consultation. The Bill proposes a major restructuring of the governance and functioning of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI).

Transformation into a Statutory Body

Shift from Society to Statutory Institution

The Bill seeks to repeal the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959, which established ISI as a society under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, thereby dissolving the existing governing society.

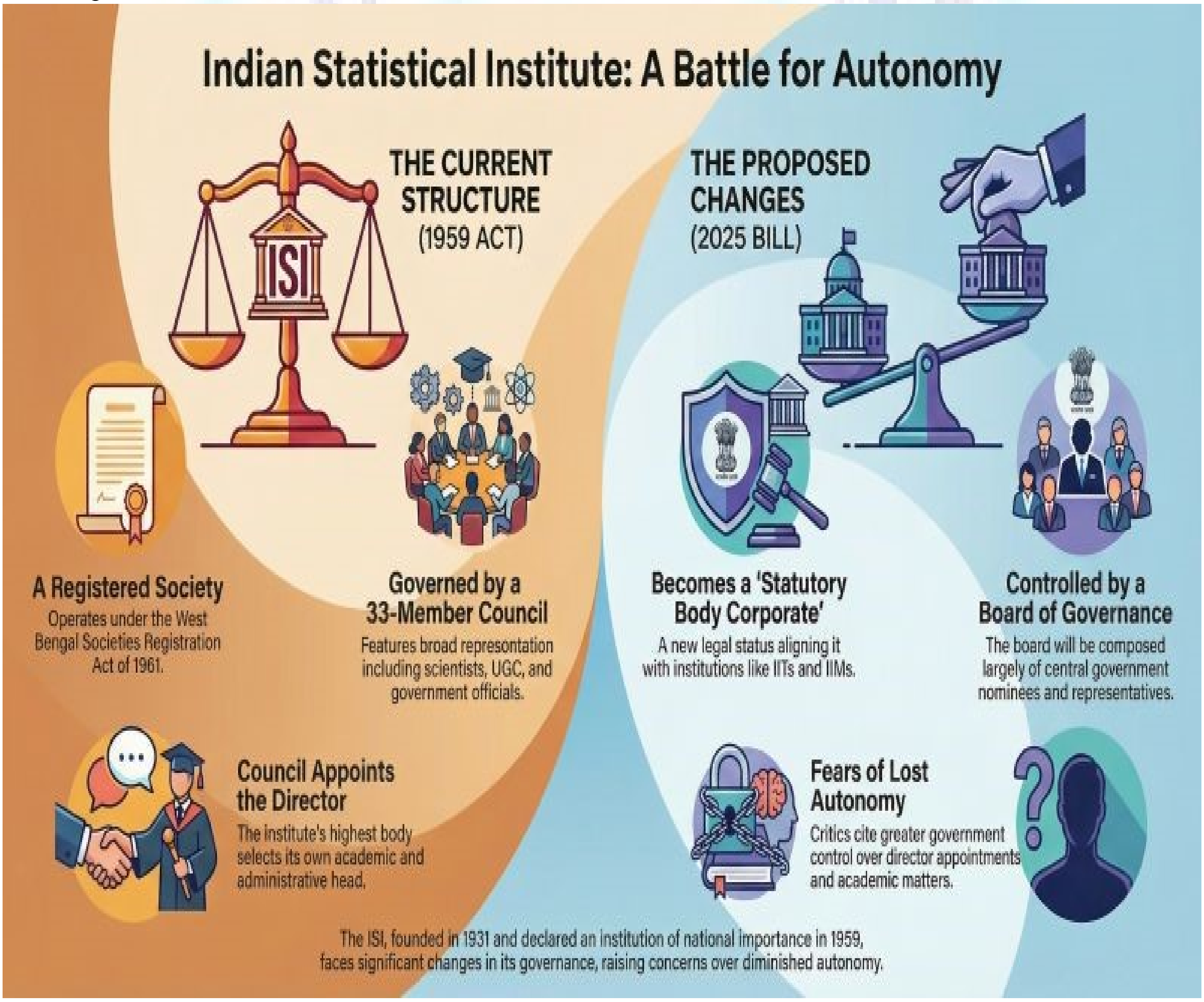
Central Parliamentary Creation

ISI becomes a statutory body created directly by Parliament, giving it the same structural status as institutions like IITs, IIM Act bodies, and AIIMS.

Enhanced Central Supervision

All oversight, including governance, appointments, and financial accountability, moves under the Union Government, providing a uniform national framework rather than reliance on a state-registered society.

Reconfigured Governance Architecture



Board of Governance as Apex Authority

Concentration of Institutional Powers

The Board of Governance (BoG) becomes the highest decision-making body, holding powers previously distributed among the General Body, Council, and Executive Committee under the 1959 Act.

Central Government Majority

Most seats on the BoG are filled by members nominated by the Central Government, significantly altering the earlier governance model where faculty and internal members held a stronger voice.

Reduced Internal Academic Representation

Only three internal academic members are guaranteed representation, reducing academic self-governance and shifting the decision-making weight to external/nominated members.

Academic Council Made Subservient

The Academic Council, previously involved in academic decision-making, becomes purely recommendatory, without statutory binding force on the BoG.

This change may reduce collegial decision-making, especially in curriculum development, research priorities, and academic standards.

Administrative and Academic Controls Centralized

Powers Over Institutional Geography

Authority to Open, Close, Merge, or Relocate Centres

The BoG can establish or shut down any ISI centre—within India or abroad—without needing legislative amendment.

No Statutory Protection for Kolkata Headquarters

While the main campus is historically in Kolkata, the Bill does not guarantee Kolkata as the permanent headquarters, making operational relocation legally permissible.

Centralised Director Appointment and Removal

Appointment by Central Government

The Director—ISI's chief executive—is appointed exclusively by the Union Government.

Performance Review and Removal Powers

The Government can review the Director's performance and remove the Director, centralising authority that earlier required institutional concurrence.

This represents a shift from a shared-governance model to a state-centric administrative framework.

Financial Reforms and Self-Sufficiency Mandate

Revenue Generation Obligations (Section 29)

ISI must pursue **financial self-sufficiency** through

1. Higher student fees
2. Consultancy services to government/private sector
3. Sponsored research projects
4. Patent and IP commercialisation
5. Industry collaborations and technology transfer
6. Investments and endowments

This shifts ISI from a fully grant-based academic institute to a semi-autonomous, revenue-driven model.

Financial Oversight and Fund Management

CAG-Compliant Audits

Annual accounts must align with Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) auditing standards, strengthening financial transparency.

Expanded Authority for BoG

The Board is empowered to independently manage grants, gifts, trusts, endowments, and investments, giving it corporate-style financial autonomy.

Criticisms and Concerns

Autonomy and Academic Freedom

Academicians argue that the Bill erodes institutional autonomy guaranteed under the 1959 Act, where ISI enjoyed significant self-governance.

The dominance of government nominees is perceived to reduce faculty influence, potentially affecting academic independence in research agendas, hiring, and academic standards.

Threat to Cooperative Federalism

Replacing a society registered under a State law (West Bengal) without formal consultation is viewed as

bypassing federal norms.
Scholars emphasize that national research institutions embedded in states should undergo collaborative federal consultation, not unilateral restructuring.

Shift Away from Fundamental Research

A revenue-generation mandate could- Prioritise applied/commercial research over long-term, fundamental statistical research. Reduce investment in areas that are academically essential but commercially unviable (e.g., pure mathematics, theoretical statistics).

Increased Financial Burden

The expected increase in student fees and reliance on externally funded projects may- Limit access for economically weaker students. Reduce researcher flexibility, as projects may be tied to sponsor priorities. Intensify pressure on faculty to secure grants rather than pursue exploratory research

Government's Rationale and Justification

Vision of Modernisation

Government asserts that the reforms will help transform ISI into a world-class scientific and statistical institution by its centenary in 2031.
The new structure is positioned as enabling global competitiveness, faster decision-making, and greater international collaboration.

Basis in the Mashelkar Committee (2020)

A review committee chaired by Dr. R. A. Mashelkar recommended- Overhauling governance to reduce bureaucratic delays and fragmented authority. Academic expansion into contemporary statistical domains such as data science, AI, and computational modelling. Strengthened global partnerships, requiring a flexible governance and funding model. Improved administrative professionalism and strategic institutional planning

Overall Assessment for Policy and Examination Use

Strengths- Streamlined governance, Clearer accountability and audit mechanisms, Potential for faster expansion and modernization, Alignment with global university governance models
Risks- Reduced institutional autonomy, Possible erosion of federal principles, Threats to long-term, fundamental research traditions , Potential increase in financial barriers for students and researchers
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/news/national/what-are-the-concerns-over-the-draft-isi-bill-2025-explained/article70369821.ece